



Good Lord

Lord Snowdon photographs India's big shots

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IN the 1960s, Lord Snowdon visited India on an assignment to record those turbulent years and then, in 2004, the photographer returned, this time to capture the hugely successful in India — from politicians to film stars, industrialists and artists. “That is someone from the army,” says Snowdon, 80, pointing to a photograph of Sam Manekshaw on the wall of Photoink gallery in Jhandewalan, where an exhibition of his work will begin on December 12.

Snowdon is now confined to a wheelchair and might seem unfamiliar with some of his subjects, yet the 100-odd photographs in the exhibition convey an intimacy. The British photographer, after all, is most well-known for portraits, including the photographs of the British royalty. The Queen turned to him — her former brother-in-law, who once married her sister Princess Margaret — to take pictures for her 80th birthday and her diamond wedding anniversary, when Snowdon photographed her and Prince Philip gazing at each other in the balcony of Buckingham Palace.

In India, Snowdon travelled to locations chosen by his subjects, from Naseeruddin Shah in his Mumbai home to Narayan Murthy in Bangalore. “We always asked people where they would like to be photographed,”



POLITICALLY CORRECT: George Fernandes at home with his dog (above); Lord Snowdon

says Devika Daulet-Singh of Photoink gallery who is also the project director and accompanied Snowdon across the country and coordinated some of the appointments. “Medha Patkar was one of the most difficult to photograph because she travels so much,” says Daulet-Singh. A photograph of the social activist was eventually taken in Delhi. Also photographed in the Capital were politicians Digvijay Singh in Lodhi Garden and Mani Shankar Aiyar against a wall in his office that has portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore, and artist Arpita Singh in her Chittaranjan Park studio.

There is also politician George Fernandes sleeping on a bed piled with books with his dog right beside him. “I found him sleeping,” recalls Snowdon, who uses a Hasselblad camera. Daulet-Singh adds, “George was tired and was taking a nap when we were setting things.”

The gallerist notes that it was photographs of theatre personalities that excited Snowdon the most, which is no surprise as his photographs of theatre and fashion personalities are highly celebrated. Flipping through his retrospective book, looking at a photograph of German-born singer and actress Marlene Dietrich, with a cloud of smoke in the corner of the frame, Snowdon recalls, “She said she wanted it like this.”

While the photographs in the exhibition are not on sale, they are part of the book titled *India By Snowdon*, which also has essays by Teesta Setalvad, Romila Thapar and Dr Karan Singh among others. Brief biographies of each subject have been contributed by Malvika Singh. Priced at Rs 5,000, it is published by The Nand & Jeet Khemka Foundation, who also commissioned the project. “No one could have done it better than Snowdon,” says Don Mohanlal, president and CEO of the foundation. The photograph has each person speaking.

The exhibition at Photoink, Jhandewalan, is on till January 30. Contact: 28755940