

# This Land is your Land, This Land is my Land

Photographer Max Kandhola returns to the Punjab to complete his father's journey

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IN 1996, when his father was diagnosed with cancer, British-Indian photographer Max Kandhola began documenting his father's battle with the disease. "I'd been photographing him for some years before but when the cancer set in, I'd go to the nurses at the hospital and give them little plastic bags to collect hair that was falling off, blood and tissue and the other debris from his ailing body," says Kandhola who had always been fascinated by the distortion and destruction of the human body. But when the tragedy hit home, he had no other way to deal with it apart from looking at it through his lens, and capturing it in a series of photographs titled *Illustration of Life* (Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2002). "That series ended with images of my father's ashes. Punjabi tradition requires the ashes to be immersed in running water, signifying a re-union of the body

with the earth. From that point on, I returned to the Punjab to complete a journey that my father had set off in the 1950s, when he left his land to settle in the United Kingdom," says Kandhola who is showing in India for the first time. *FlatLand: A Landscape of Punjab* is on display at Photoink in Jhandewalan.

Soon after the publication of *Illustration of Life*, Kandhola pored over a map of Punjab and decided the travel to India. "The second-generation in my family are successful in all forms of business. There are lawyers, ac-



Kandhola (below) and his work

countants, doctors, but for my parents and people of their generation, identity and the notion of home are still firmly imbedded in the motherland," says Kandhola. *Flat-Land* is a series of 42 photographs capturing his travels across the Punjab: from Jalandhar to Patiala to Gurdaspur. District by district was mapped and traversed through to form Kandhola's photographic journey. "I followed all the stories I'd grown up listening to, looking for the land that my parents felt they belonged to. But I'm a British-Indian, my treatment of the land I was photographing has been influenced by British pastoral art and impressionist paintings by Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro. The Punjab that I have photographed could belong anywhere," says Kandhola who has now begun work on the last part of the trilogy that began with his father's illness. Titled *Roti, Kapra aur Makaan*, the final series will document new family portraits from the 1950s. "The term is a metaphor for new beginnings as I complete mapping geographical roots and the topography of change from first to third generation Sikhs from Punjab," says Kandhola.

*The exhibition is on till November 20. Contact: 28755940*

