

Exhibit pictures Young 'Faces of Tomorrow'

By Jeet Thayil

Diana Barnett, a photographer who is now in her mid-30s, went through a classic, if early, midlife crisis. She had been a chef for 15 years when she realized that she was deeply unsatisfied with her life. She knew she wanted to work with children, but she did not know how.

"My heart was not full anymore," she told *India in New York*. "I was numb and I needed to find whatever it was I was meant to do with my life."

The photo exhibition, 'Faces of Tomorrow: Children of India,' is a direct result of Barnett's crisis of the heart. They are pictures of Indian children, residents of Rajasthan and Gujarat, many of whom were affected by the series of devastating earthquakes that afflicted the latter state.

The most recent earthquake occurred early this year, in January. Barnett managed to visit the state only five months later. It took that long to get the necessary permits and funds. She came back with the images that were displayed at the Sundaram Tagore gallery in Manhattan from Sept. 6 to Sept. 8, in an exhibition presented by the Indo-American Arts Council. Funds raised went to Save the Children, India, an independent non-governmental organization that works with women and children in distress. The Tagore gallery donated its space for free. Some 400 people saw the exhibition, said organizers.

In 1988 Barnett began to put together a portfolio of children's pictures. Her first collection was of children who had been affected by the earthquake in Turkey. "I wanted to document the voices of children," she said. "I wanted to raise funds and awareness."

Barnett was born in Florence and lived in Italy until the age of 15, when she came to the United States. Her father was an executive with several international companies, which kept her family moving for many years. In the United States she went to school in New Orleans and New York to learn the culinary arts. "Food is still a huge part of my life," she said. "It is a healing tool for me."

In India she was struck by the vegetable markets of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Many of the pictures at the 'Faces of Tomorrow' exhibition were to do with foodstuffs and markets. "I found the markets beautiful," she said. "They were no different from the Chelsea Market. I took those pictures to educate Americans about Indian culinary culture." She said that Floyd Cardoz of the Tabla restaurant in Manhattan wanted to put up her pictures in the kitchen so the establishment's chefs, who had never been to the country, could see what an Indian market was like.

Barnett said that in India she ate local food mornings and nights. It was too hot in the day. "I never got sick," she said. "The graciousness and warmth that the local people gave me through the food was incredible." Before she went to India she was told repeatedly — by "negative" people — "Oh, India, watch out, there are cows walking in the streets." Some of the pictures at her exhibition were of donkeys, cows, camels and an elephant. She said the Indian attitude to animals was "intensely educational" for her. "I realized how much animals are honored in India," she said. "I don't think Americans respect animals, unless they are dogs in New York." Her new career of photography, said Barnett, particularly the interaction with children, gave her an invaluable reward. "These children teach me a phenomenal amount, I get so much from them," she said. "In return I help them. It is a win-win situation."



Chef turned photographer Diane Barnett arranging photographs at her Sept. 6-8 show, titled 'Faces of Tomorrow: Children of India,' at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in lower Manhattan. (Photo: Paresh Gandhi)