

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Pultizer Prize Breaking News Photo

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Last December 6, 30-year-old photographer Massoud Hossaini, a native Afghan, was just a few meters from a Shiite sanctuary hit by an explosion causing 80 deaths and injuring 150 people.

“Along the road, not far from the Mosque, there was a place where women and children had gathered to watch the procession. I saw many wounded children who were not moving”, Hossaini said. “I saw one girl about 12 years old, Tarana, covered with blood.”

His photograph just won the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news.

Hossaini, who is based in Kabul, said he was “so happy and excited” to win the prize that he was unable to sleep. “I’m humbled to be an Afghan who can be a voice for the painful life and moments which people have here,” he said. “I know that whoever sees this photo will think about the photographer but I hope they don’t forget the pain Afghanistan’s people have in their life.”



The following interview with Hossaini was originally published by AFP (for whom Hossaini works) on December 12, 2011.

Q: Tell us what happened on the day following

A: “I was just looking at my camera when suddenly there was a big explosion. For a moment I didn’t know anything, I just felt the wave of the explosion as a pain inside my body. I fell down on the ground.

“I saw everybody running away from the smoke. I sat up and saw my hand was bleeding but I didn’t feel any pain.

“It’s my job to know what is going on so I ran in the opposite direction to everybody else.

“When the smoke went away I saw I was standing in the centre of a circle of dead bodies. They were all together on top of each other. I was standing exactly where the suicide attacker had been.”

Q: How did you react?

A: “I was in shock. I didn’t know what to do. I just started clicking. I know that I was crying. It was really weird crying, I’ve never reacted like that before.

“I didn’t help anybody, because I couldn’t, I was really in shock. I knew I should cover this, record everything, all the pain, the people running, crying, shouting, beating their chests, shouting: ‘Death to Al-Qaeda, death to the Taliban!’”

Q: How did you get the picture of Tarana, the young girl?

A: “I turned a bit to the right and I saw the girl. When Tarana saw what had happened to her brother, her cousins, uncles, mother, grandmother, the people around her, she was just shouting.

“She did a lot of things, but if you see my pictures she was just shouting. This shocked reaction was the main thing I wanted to capture.”

Q: How has this incident affected you?

A: “I felt everything 100 percent. I was there before, at the same time, and after, and I was injured. It was a really big experience.

“The first and second night I had trouble sleeping. Whenever I was closing my eyes I was going to the scene, asking myself what else could I have done for those people, why didn’t I help anybody?

“The third day all this emotion I had in my mind came down because I found out this photo was published everywhere. I saw there was really major coverage and a big effect.

Thank God I was there and successfully able to take that picture and send it as soon as I could.”

Q: What’s it like to be an Afghan photographer in Afghanistan?

A: “I feel like I was born in the wrong place — Afghanistan — and then I grew up in the wrong place — Iran — and now I’m living in the wrong place again — Kabul. My family left Afghanistan because of war when I was a baby and left for Iran, which was a really difficult life.

“I came back from peace but a difficult economy where we were so poor to a better situation in the economy but war.

“I see Afghanistan as an outsider because I didn’t grow up here. Most people see war in their normal lives but I never had that in Iran. Here, everything is war. I never saw that in my childhood.

“I feel people. I cry with them. I feel pain with them. I move with them. I’m part of them. Before, I was just a photographer and they were people, they were my subjects. Now I say they are my subject but also I’m with them and I’m from them. Whatever pains them pains me also.”

Q: Would you ever leave Afghanistan?

A: “Like everybody else I want to leave the country and live in a better situation with a better quality of life. But it’s complicated. If I go out of Afghanistan, what will I do?

“I want to do what I can for Afghanistan, showing the truth of the situation as much as possible. It can be a hard and bitter truth but I really want to show it.

“But this part of my life is really hard for me. The truth here which I really want to show in my photos is something I feel in my life too. Sometimes I wish I could cover somewhere else. I would be able to use my professionalism, but I wouldn’t hurt.”

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