

Breaching the Wall of Civilization

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The world of man has never been free from grief and torment, in any age or era. And, perhaps, no other time in history has there been an era which has seen them spread so widely and deeply than our purportedly globalized 21st Century. This is my impression upon first seeing the photographs submitted to the Days Japan Photojournalism Awards. Our age, supposedly the destination of Civilization, the age which employs “force” with all available technology to proliferate the benefits of Civilization, has seen the greatest proliferation of misery as if Civilization is augmented by misery pro rata; as if Civilization, in its expansion, necessarily creates chaos along its periphery and hides them at the same time.

The miseries are always concealed by those who perpetrate them. Confined inside the Civilization, we are constantly bombarded with seemingly infinite expendable information; only by seeing images like these can we begin to recognize the gulf of grief in our world. They eliminate the “separation wall” that stands tall between our “ignorance” and the invisible reality of the world beyond.

Documentary photographers unremittingly produce images of grief. Start a competition of documentary photographs; it turns into a contest of representations of suffering. But documentary photography is not art form content with simply being a mere image: its expression is meant to be dispatched to another place, to reveal the

Photo by Prakash SINGH



invisible scenery by exposing it to the outside world.

The photographer not only sees, but shows us what he sees. His physical presence connects the actual scene of an event with the outside world. He is not merely expressing, but functioning as a medium. In such context, to be considered an exceptional photograph, an image must connect the viewer directly with the event the photograph reveals. The

photographer records the scene, often immersed and confronting violence and grief at the scene of an event. However, the photographer’s intrusion is annihilated in the recorded image and the viewer comes in direct contact with the event in the photograph. Only such a photograph has the power to affect us strongly. Yet the photograph has indelibly recorded the stance of the photographer who has stepped in to tell us the truth, putting his life at risk. In that moment, the photographer breaches the thick wall that had separated the scene of event from the world. He becomes the lone medium, a window to the world.

The world is inundated with grief, catastrophe, injustice, maniacal violence, and desolation of humanity. Still, in its midst, there is life, moments that make up people’s lives. And photography immortalizes them in powerful images. Their lives make their way into our mundane life. ...I hear the echo of the clicking camera shutter, reverberating like a faint prayer from the quietude of photographic images, trying to superimpose our moment with theirs.