

And I also always wanted to have an exposure in this part of the world because, you know, when it comes to contemporary art and photography, it is totally different from Afghanistan or from my region compared with Europe. And I also thought it would be interesting to show my work here, and also the message which I have with my work, [my] photography, the message of peace, tolerance, non-violence and everything. And this voice, which I founded in a very strong way from that region which is a battlefield. In a place under conflict since 40 years. And then someone is taking a camera and working for peace, you know, with the power of art and using this as a medium. So I thought it will be interesting for these people also.

And also I am on a mission to remake the image of Afghans in the world, you know? There is a negative stereotype or propaganda against Afghans or Pashtuns especially, like the Pashtun tribe, to which I belong. I always wanted to remake the image of Afghans in the whole world. After the fall of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, then the Mujahideen came into power and most of them were Pashtuns from Pashtun and also from the Tajik tribe. And then after the fall of Mujahideen, even they were also being supported by Pakistan and Americans to hit Russia at that time. And after that, there was the Taliban, which was totally a creation of Pakistan and also America again. And then there were more Pashtuns and that regime.

And the problem was, of course, we were sharing the same culture in everything; the same dress, the same footwear, and the turbans and the beards, it is normal. It's not only about the religion, it's also a cultural thing. When normally someone sees me wearing my Kamees, we say Kamees partoog. And for example, turban, which is totally a normal thing, like every Pashtun is wearing this, even they were very secular at that time, like not so religious or something. But they were wearing this, and it was part of the culture. And when the Taliban came into power, they had long beards and these turbans, this was the biggest image of that. And then I'm also, for example, wearing the same thing, but I'm not Talib or I'm not their supporter, I'm against them. And then the destruction of image started from here.

I'm an artist, I'm a humanist, and I really never fight something like that. And I'm standing somewhere, of course, there will be 99% people who will think this is a Talib, or this is an extremist, but it doesn't have anything to do with my mind, or with my mentality and mindset which I have. And I intentionally started to wear my turban and beard and cultural dress in my exhibitions. It's not about this race, but still, it is my, you know, identity. For example, if I lived here 100 years, still I'm Afghan. And if I'm living there but no one will accept me, I don't want to also lose something, you know? I have an identity. So that's why. Remaking the image started from there. So I wanted to show people that Pashtuns are these people who have beards or turbans, they are not terrorists. And we are the same people as you.