



NO CHILD'S PLAY: A kid gestures near a ravaged Afghan building.

Conflict and contrast in photos from strife-torn countries



WE SHALL REAP OUR HARVEST: A farmer standing in his poppy field in Afghanistan. The US forces in the strife-torn country continue to damage poppy cultivations while soaring opium prices lead farmers to plant more poppies.

By Archana in New Delhi

NOT EVERYONE'S work takes him to three war zones in quick succession, so Ryan Lobo is in a very special league.

The 37-year-old filmmaker and photographer from Bangalore has been to Afghanistan, Iraq and Liberia, shooting documentary features, taking photographs and gathering extraordinary stories to tell.

Now he's in the city to share the pictures and the stories that have defined his unusual career. They'll be on display at the photography show, *War and Forgiveness*, which begins at Art Motif gallery in Lado Sarai on Friday.

Lobo does have incredible stories in his kitty. Most recently, he won the best cinematography award at Sundance 2011 (Robert Redford's cult film festival; January 20-30) for *The Redemption of General Butt Naked*, a documentary he shot and co-produced to tell the story of Joshua Milton Blahyi, a feared warlord who claims to have

'I feel work comes looking for me'

murdered 20,000 people during Liberia's two civil wars (1989-2003), but is now an evangelist preaching forgiveness and peace.

"I don't look for war stories," insists Lobo. "This might sound strange but I sometimes feel the work comes looking for me." Lobo first visited Afghanistan in 2007 as part of a crew making a documentary film on the country's booming heroin trade for the National Geographic Channel.

The same year, Lobo went to Iraq as the cinematographer for an independent documentary film on the lives of women in the war-ravaged country. The documentary never got



A soldier of the Afghan National Army (left) sitting in a poppy field and a captured insurgent (right) in Baghdad.



completed because of the many obstacles that the team faced. But the images shot by Lobo have survived the fruitless recce.

Liberia, too, happened between 2005 and 2010 when one of his filmmaking partners, Eric Strauss, pursued the story of Joshua Milton Blahyi, which eventually turned into a film that involved Lobo as well. In Liberia, he was "intimately involved" with the lives of the

people, which was more rewarding than being embedded with the US Army in Afghanistan and Iraq — it meant the crew was cut off from ground reality.

But wherever Lobo went, acts of forgiveness somehow left a stronger impression on him than the grim reminders of war. He cites the instance of a woman he photographed in Liberia forgiving a man (an army general) who had murdered her brother. "It seemed

strange to me that people who have suffered terribly find it easier to forgive," Lobo says. "They find personal healing in being open to peaceful resolutions than those who have ostensibly not suffered. Or maybe, they are just very tired and incapable of other actions," he adds.

War and Forgiveness therefore is Lobo's theme, so when he talks about his show being centered around "intangibles", it's the theme of per-

sonal closure that he draws our attention to. "It's as much about my own perceptions and evolution from these experiences as it is about the subjects I've photographed," he says. Which makes the show as much an intense personal statement as a riveting photographic narrative.

— *War and Forgiveness* is on view at Art Motif gallery, F-213/C, Lado Sarai, from April 22 to May 6; 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

archana.khare@mailtoday.in

War and peace through the lens