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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MODERN THEATER OF AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract

During the last four decades of Afghanistan, appearing the women's face and broadcasting the voice of them was prohibited in public. Especially in visuals media like Theater, Cinema, TV and Radio just men were in focus points. Still the presence of women in public in some provinces is considered a disgrace. Only in some large provinces and cities of Afghanistan, women freely can appears in public and do their daily and artistic activities. In this article you can briefly read about the history of Afghan Theater and the first pioneer women and the current situation of theater for women in Afghanistan.

Key words: Theater, Maddahan, modern theater, Sados, arts, culture.

Introduction

Theater arose Thousands of years ago in ancient Greece. Since heroines and Goddesses were the pinnacles of Greek society, they were often the stars of drama productions. Early in Greek theater, women were not appear on stage.

Women were strictly prohibited from being on stage, because it was considered "too dangerous". Even the most renowned characters, like the tragic heroine, Antigone, were portrayed exclusively by male actors. During the following centuries, there were few women participating in

Greek theater and day by day the number of women participant changed.

In early performances, like the other countries, that men played the roles of women and Afghanistan was no exception. Afghanistan's society is a traditional one, and women's role in social activities was diminished and limited from the past. In early Afghan performances, men played the role of women. «If we ignore the aggression of Alexander Macedonian in Afghanistan in (4th century BC), the theatrical history in Afghanistan begins with the era of Shah Amanullah Khan (1919). At that time, many theatrical show have been performed on the scene» [1, p. 22-23]. There were brave women to break the borders and come on the stage and play different rolls and sing songs beside the men. The number of these women are not more than number of our two hands fingers. Today they are the first pioneer of modern theater in Afghanistan.

Methods

The Western tradition of theatre has its origins all the way back in ancient Greece and Rome. The Greeks started their theatre practice with tragic plays, which started around 532 BC. The problem was that Greek culture put women in a position of being inferior to men. So in this case women's role in society was very restricted in many ways. Women were not allowed to be on the stage because it was considered «dangerous». Men played male characters as well as female characters! The Greeks believed that allowing women to perform in public it would be too dangerous and that having men portray them neutralized the danger (NCTheater.2015). Afghanistan was no exception. Afghanistan's society is a traditional society and women's role in social activities has been diminished in the beginning. In early Afghan theaters

men were playing the role of women too. In this article i tried to collect all information about origin of Afghan theater and the role of women in theater. Unfortunately we don't have much historical and scientific resources in the field of Afghanistan Theater. But I tried my best to collect credible scientific sources. The methodology of this research is includes the method of qualitative and descriptive–analytic, and data collection will be done using library and interactive resources. In this research, we can use limited sources of literature, such as books about the history of Afghan Theater and artistic journals and interview with artists.

Results

Finding the role and position of women in the country's theater. Does the Afghan theater has an artistic value without an actress? Theater without female actors cannot be counted a basic one. Why men were played roles instead of women in the past? Is it a gender differences in contemporary theatrical performances of Afghanistan?

Discussion

Though much of women's history has been distorted or forgotten, we can be sure that women have always had a powerful presence within the history of Performing Arts. Amid controversy, triumph, and occasional public backlash, the women have continued to shine throughout the arts.

The first theatrical performances which were held in Afghanistan was the 11th century, in the heyday of the Ghaznavi state. Since old days, for the audience, the great popular or amusing performances were the stray comedians – tamers animals, puppeteers and others. Development of theatre in Afghanistan,

like the most of countries is rooted in myth and religion. The presence of Maddahan in Afghanistan is considered to be the initiator of acting art in Afghanistan especially in Kabul. All the Maddahan were men.

Dr. Muhammad Naim Farhan has written about the history of the theater: Theatrical arts in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul, begins with the storytellers and the Saen-e-Qanat's performances. In ancient city of Kabul, storytellers national poets and Sados were in the city and markets, gardens and taverns, the tales of the heroes of Islam and the stories of love, Lily and Majnun, Shahzada mumtaz, Wamaq and Uzra, Najmae Khaki etc... And with a dazzling expression, and with their heads and gestures they portrayed the scenes. The local poets, with their own bands, read legends and war letters with special songs and they showed the emotional scenes and dragged people into the imagination. The Sados set up parties and gathering the people. During the Ramadan nights, Muharram months and Nowrooz days, the events of Karbala, the courage and masculinity of the warriors of Islam, showed dramatic and terrible scary and disturbing scenes, affecting each spectator and listener. The listeners enjoyed hours of their story and narratives and tears appear in their eyes and the sense of zeal and courage awakened and learned from their advices. [2, p. 119]

At the beginning most of the theater's performances in Afghanistan were educational productions and teachers of schools were the first people to start promoting the art of theater. At that time theatrical performances were held in Kabul and since 1926 – in Paghman (a suburb of the capital Kabul), where it was built a special building for theatre. In the late 20–century, because of the worsening

domestic situation and interior wars the theater was closed.

The purpose of encouraging the people to developing the national drama, Afghan Arts Association organized a competition in 1939 for best play. In 1941 the Department of Press (Kabul) was created in Kabul which was supposed to help the development of theatrical art and the national drama. The plays and the playwrights were popularized by Afghan national press and radio Kabul. [3, p. 20-21.]

In the late 1940s, based mobile amateur troupes emerged to permanent drama groups. A group of employees of the Office of Kabul folk spectacles became part of the theater «Pohani Nindare», which initially led by well-known Afghan writer and playwright R.Latifi. Since 1950 this theater is a permanent building with auditorium with 300 seats. In 1947, at the initiative of the Kabul Municipality opened the theater «Kabul Nyndare», the head of which was one of the most prominent contemporary Afghan artist M. Ali Raunaq who were tried to follow the methods of work of Stanislavsky. Since 1959, the theater provided a special building (800 seats) in the area of Chaman Huzoori. On that theater they performed the show from Afghanistan and other countries. Those plays were translated from the classical drama like Moliere, Shakespeare, Hugo, Chekhov and others. In the intervals between the acts performed folk songs and dances. Among the works of the Afghan drama stage plays by A. Karimi, A. Kohzada, Mohammed Haidar, A. Breshna, G. Muhayuddina Ayoubi, A. Benawa, Ikhlas A., R. Latifi, A. Pazhwak and others.

In 1958 there was a big change in the Afghan theater. This change resulted from a strong management and strong ideas of Engineer Ali Raynaq Regarding the theater.

These changes occurred in spheres of the selection play, implementation and play, the right words to express their tribute, the Interior and clothing, in makeup, space in the building, the light and power technique Which had never been used in the theatres in Afghanistan.

In 1960 (Shams Qyamov) the first foreigner director from Tajikistan came in Kabul and started his work with (Pohany Nendari) on theory as well as practical theater with artists and helped with several plays performed on stage.

During the period of the Democratic People's Party (1965–1992), because of the Soviet Union, a transformation happened that could positively or negatively impact the Theater arts. It could be positive because of the establishment and performances of standard theater shows in the country on stage, which was absolutely indicative of the ability of the Afghan artists and these plays were from Anton Chekhov, Gogol, Pushkin, Astrofsky, and other writers. From my point of view, it was a good job that afghan artists could perform such great pieces on stage, but this resulted transformation made the artists slightly away from interior subjects of our social issues. However, afghan shows were also performed in this period, but not as much as those plays which were brought from the Democratic People's Party

In the Mojahedin's period, in our country, we had artistic performances just those performances were occasionally, although a kind of censorship was imposed on theater performances by the government rulers, but our country was not without theater performance during this period and theater play were also performed in this period and presented to the people. [4]

From 1992–2001 the beginning

of the Civil War, the building of Kabul National Theater was destroyed and with no reconstructions until today. When the national culture of a country dies, that country would become deprived of it's the spiritual roots. There was such a circumstance in the country. This was primarily due to the political situation – the Taliban, the militant Islamists led the country to the fact that lots of population were illiterate. Until 2001 in Afghanistan, there weren't open any schools for girls. After coming to power the Taliban in 1995, imposed a severe prohibition of any creative activity. Theater and cinema, which are an integral part of culture of any nation, were razed to the ground, and any kind of art works come to be considered a crime.

Since 1995–2001, all artistic and cultural infrastructure destroyed. On the other hand, during the Taliban regime, as all art fields were confronted with stagnation, the theater arts were also in a situation of recession. But in this period the department of theater Fine Arts Faculty of Kabul University was open and just one or two plays have been performed in a year that the theme of that performance focused on the topics of the same period for the Taliban and there was no significant artistic activity on that period. [5, p. 274]

In 2001, Afghanistan finally freed from the yoke of religious extremists. Like other aspects of social life in Afghanistan, theater stood up on new feed with the Ministry of Information and Culture on the first days of the interim government after a break of several years.

The broken and burned seats of that theater halls were the hostess hundreds of local and expat audiences. Those shows were hopeful for artists, resulting in large numbers of afghan artists returned back to Afghanistan. In 2003 three private

theater groups under the names of (Farohk Theater, Asemai Theater and Assad Theatre) by fine artists in the country. Qader Farohk, Asad Tajzai and Muhammad Sediq Daraie created and established and also the Ghorbat Theater was active in Pakistan during migration and immigrate in to the country within the Department of Theatre and cinema Faculty of Fine Arts began its activities. [6, p. 32]

The presence of women in the Afghan theater spend many steps. On those times, women were under specific environmental condition such facilities were not available for them to go to the theatre and play roles on stage. Going out without a veil was a big problem for a woman on that time.

Women didn't participate in the theatre plays and the female roles were performed by the men. This was a big problem for director and theater staff because, the actor couldn't play the Women's roles that the director wanted and also they didn't want to play the women's roles. They would say that it's shameful for me to play the Woman's roles. These problems were at the beginning of formation of Afghan theatre in 1919. Later women appear on the scenes of theatre besides the men and began to play the roles.

In 1958 the first woman was Zainab Saraj that created a theater for women in Kabul under the name of Zainab Nindare. Women were working for their purposes by themselves in this theatre. The first actresses were Habiba Ackar, Zolaikha Ngah and Najiba Dina that they played the performance on stage of Zainab Nindare [3, p. 276].

Afghan Immigration Theater

After the migration of the artists out of Afghanistan, scattered activities took place in Pakistan, Iran and European countries. Most of these activities took place in

Pakistan. Later, a number of these artists performed radio shows called New Home and New Life for BBC Radio.

In recent years, a number of young artists have performed in Pakistan. There were performances in Iran as well. In the early years, most artists collaborated with political parties that were active in Iran. Gholam Mohammad Farhat Heravi, Barry Javad Mohajer, Ali Javadi, Hossein Ebrahimi, Abdolhakim Vafa, Ghaffar Hosseini Murid were among the artists who played a major role in performing the first two decades of migration in Mashhad. Most of the plays performed in Pakistan and Iran over the first two decades has all been ideological in support of the Mojahedin and against Soviet forces and their domestic supporters. But in the following years, a new generation of young Afghans in Iran began to work in the theater and formed art groups, most of which were based in Mashhad and Tehran. Most of these works have been about the migration and personal experiences of the authors of these plays. Swallows, Flying, Standing, Dandelion and Afghan Theater are the names of some of the show's bands that have worked in Mashhad in recent years. Theatrical groups were formed in Tehran during the same period, most notably the Cultural Association of Afghanistan under the leadership of Hamira Qaderi, the bitter and sweet group led by Wahid Negah and Goli Akbari, and the Blue Canopy group led by Abdullah Bektash.

After 2001 and the interim government, the art was revived in Afghanistan. Cooperation with foreign countries and domestic institutions, especially Kabul University Faculty of Fine Arts Theatre Festival was held. In fact the festival spirit brought back the body of dead Afghan theater. Fortunately in present time we

have servile theater group that all the members of them are girls. Also the women and the girls are working actively in artistic group beside the men however there is lots of challenges. We are optimist for the future of Afghan theater. Because there is a faculty of fine arts in Kabul University that taught by academics. This means that the future of theatrical art is in the safe hands of a new young generation of Afghanistan.

The first pioneer women in theater in Afghanistan

Women who played in the theater include Habiba Askar, Parvin Sanatgar, Sharifa Danesh, Makhfi Kabuli, Zarghona Aram, Zulikha Nourani, Norton Nourani, Mazida Sarwar, Zakia Kohzad, Eqlima Makhfi, Jamilah Iman, Zulikha Nigah, Hma Mustamandi, Najeba Dina, Maemona Ghazal, Fatema Paya and some other figures.

Neqib Arvin, Afghan writer and journalist says that, one of the challenges in the history of Afghan theatre is the lack of access of women to the theater scene. During the theater's career in Afghanistan, they were the men who took on the burden of the lack of presence or presence of women on the stage, and even worked instead of women instead of women by performing grim and changing voice.

The national and international theater festivals in Afghanistan:

Since 2004 – 2018 *National Theatre Festival* were held for eight times and student's theater festival was held for five times. In these festivals of theater many groups participated from the provinces and the center of the country and even from foreign countries.

First National Theater Festival was held in 2004. In that theater festival, eight theatre groups participated from provinces

and 16 theatre groups from center of Kabul province and in that festival, they performed about 22 theatre shows from provinces and center of Kabul.

The Second National Theatre Festival was held in 2005. The second National Theatre Festival was nominated as the Summer of Theater, because on 2005 a lot of artists came back from different countries and gathered in Kabul and training workshops were held for youth. Aryan Mnvshkyn the French director with the group came back to Afghanistan and held a workshop for two months for the youth Afghan artists.

The third National Theatre Festival was held on 2006. In that year the participants also came from different provinces and in the center, more were people interested to participate to that festival.

Fourth National Theatre Festival opened at the University of Kabul in 2007. These festivals represented the development, promotion of the theater and the number of enthusiasts was increasing day by day.

Fifth National Theatre Festival was held in 2008.

Sixth National Theatre Festival was held in 2009.

In these festivals presence of women and girls were sensible. The theater groups came from many provinces which girls and women actively participated. In addition, the Theatre Department in Fine Arts of Kabul University between 2013 to 2018 held five *Afghan Student's theatre festivals* in Kabul.

The future of the Afghan theater looks bright and hopeful because to date the Theatre Department of Fine Arts Faculty in Kabul University had extensive activities and great achievements.

Women theatre group in Afghanistan:

1. *White Star Theater Company* was formed in February of 2008 by an

educated young generation of Afghanistan. The White Star Theatre Coalition is a non-profit company, by the gathering of the girls' and boys' who are students of Theatre Department of fine Arts Faculty of Kabul University. They create innovative theatre works that are relevant and accessible to diverse audiences by using a physical performance. To manifest

the artists' ability to illuminate social, political, and environmental themes with wit and eloquence to further intercultural understanding by participating in and initiating arts projects in a wide range of communities. This company has two separate group of girls and boys and also, they both work together too (Figures 1&2).



Figure – 1. Performances of (Rights are Not Given; They Are Taken) in fall 2011.

Figure – 2. Performances of (Rights are Not Given; They A

Afghan Girls' Theater Group performing since 2016 in Kabul. All of them are school girl (Figure 3).



Figure – 3. (Afghan Girls group Theater)

The biggest challenge for the Afghan Girls' Theater Group at the beginning was the community's deterrent exposure to theater. People and their families believed that theater is an absurd phenomenon and doesn't have any connection with art. Members of the group believe they want to change the view point of their friends and relatives in the theater over time. Shmila one of the group member says, «Most people don't agree that theater is an art». The Afghan Girls' Theater Group has been on stage at least twenty times a year. Shmila says subjects such as domestic violence, immigration, insecurity and life expectancy have been the focus of their performances: «We have performed on different occasions and places. We have performed at the Marble Palace, the Presidential Palace, the University of Kabul, the French Cultural Center in Kabul and in some private and public schools» [4, p. 119].

The Challenges of Artist Girls in Afghan society (interview)

Female Artists in today's Afghan society sometimes encountered by parents, family, social, and cultural problems because of their artistic activities. Mahdieh Aziz is a 10th grade student at Chaharqala–e–Chahardihi high school. She is 16 years old and an active member of the Afghan Girls' Theater Group. She believes from this perspective that can clearly explain the suffering, needs and concerns of society, especially women. When she was still a young child, watching theatrical performances at school occasions and celebrations, she desired to be a member of a theater group, just like other girls. When the «Afghan Girls' Theater Group" started performances in Mahdia's friends house, she was determined to be a member of the group. Her family were opposed of her joining to a theater

group. She got her mother's consent and through her mother got family consent for her official membership in the Afghan Girls' Theater Group. Mahdieh says that her family was mocked at the first talks about her working with a girl theater group. Her family believed that performance of a girl was a source of frustration for them, but now Mahdia enjoys the support and encouragement of her mother and father, but her sisters still disagree.

Shmila Bayat, a 12th grade student at Chahaqala –e– Chahardihi high school, is another member of the Afghan Girls' Theater Group. Shmila remember the time when she with only two people, formed their own theater group. The Afghan Girls' Theater Group had 5 members in the first year of formation, and now has 16 members. Shmila and her companion says that the secret of their success was motivation and effort: «In the beginning, we even had to keep our workouts secret. If we didn't try and keep our motivation, it wouldn't be a step up». Shmila says that because of being in the context of society, they have more tangible understanding of social problems, especially violence against women. She believes that women cannot remove the challenges and violence that they face from their home. «The Afghan Girls' Theater Group wants to show and reconstruct the widespread violence against women in families. We are the voices of women who can't get out of their homes and talk» [6].

Conclusion

Not only in Afghanistan, women were the most vulnerable part of society, but women throughout the history of humanity have suffered a lot of troubles. They were not allowed to attend on the scene early, but over time, they found their place in the theater and completed this fine art with

their presence.[7] The absence of women makes the art of theater meaningless. With the presence of various countries around the world in Afghanistan to bring reform, from 2001 to 2019, billions of dollars aided to Afghanistan, but it can be said that less than one percent of it has been consumed in the growth of women's culture and art. That one percent was in the form of projects that did not effect too much. Therefore, with such an attitude of art and culture, we cannot see the artistic and cultural advancements in Afghanistan, especially for women. But in today's society of Afghanistan, especially in villages and in some provinces, the presence of women in the public is considered a disgrace. Only in several large provinces and cities of Afghanistan, women can freely appear in public and do artistic activities. For the growth of the intuition and culture of the people who

are illiterate, we must strengthen their art and it is only possible way by mass media, visual media, audiovisual media and print media to boost the arts and culture of a society.

One of the biggest reasons of women problems in Afghan society is that, most of the women are illiterate, which can overcome this problem by raising the level of education of women. In this section, the Department of Theater of Fine Arts Faculty of Kabul University is already provided a platform for improving of girls and boys who have an interest in the arts. They provide artistic opportunity for them and graduate more than a tens boys and girls annually in order to join the art community of Afghanistan. These girls mostly work in visual media and artistic groups. Only in Kabul Lots of large and small artistic groups are mostly graduates of the Faculty of Arts of Kabul University.

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АУҒАНСТАННЫҢ БҮГІНГІ КҮНГІ ТЕАТРЫНДАҒЫ ӘЙЕЛДЕРДІҢ РӨЛІ

Аңдатпа

Соңғы төрт онжылдықта Ауғанстанда әйелдердің халық алдына шығуына және олардың дауыстарын радио арқылы таратуға тыйым салынған. Әсіресе, театр, кино, телевидение, тіпті радио сынды бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарында да басты рол тек ер адамдарда болды. Және елдің кейбір провинцияларында әйелдердің халық алдына шығуына әлі де рұқсат берілмейді. Тек елдің үлкен провинциялары мен қалаларында ғана әйел адамдар халық алдына еркін шығып, күнделікті және шығармашылық қызметпен айналыса алады. Аталмыш мақалада Ауған театрының тарихы қысқаша баяндалып, өнер саласындағы алғашқы жол салған әйелдер мен жалпы қазіргі таңдағы Ауғанстан театрындағы әйел адамдардың жағдайы баяндалады.

Трек сөздер: Театр, Маддахан, замануи театр, Садо, өнер, мәдениет.

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РОЛЬ ЖЕНЩИН В СОВРЕМЕННОМ ТЕАТРЕ АФГАНИСТАНА

Аннотация

В течение последних четырех десятилетий в Афганистане появление женских лиц и вещание их голосов было запрещено на публике. В особенности в зрительных средствах информации, таких как театр, кино, телевидение, а также радио главная роль отводилась только мужчинам. До сих пор присутствие женщин на публике в некоторых провинциях считается порочащим. Только в некоторых больших провинциях и городах Афганистана женщины свободно появляются на публике и занимаются повседневной и творческой деятельностью. В данной статье кратко изложена история Афганского театра, рассказывается о женщинах «первопроходцах» и о текущей ситуации с женщинами в театре Афганистана.

Ключевые слова: Театр, Маддахан, современный театр, Садо, искусство, культура.

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