

How did you personally learn filmmaking?

The answer to this question was always difficult for me. I started with writing and directing theatre plays at school and wrote my first scenario in 2001 during the Taleban regime. I really wanted to make a film out of this scenario but it was something impossible under the rule of the Taleban. I managed to turn this scenario into the film *Se Noqta* (Three Dots) in 2003. There was truly an internal attracting force inside me and at that time I did not realise what this interest and attraction was about. I had only read few books about cinema and did not even watch films. Despite this, I managed to make two mid-length feature films named *Se Noqta* and *Ta roz johma* (Until Friday) and two long TV series named *Razhaie en Khaneh* (The Secrets of this House) and *Beheshte Khamush* (Silent Paradise).

Where and how does one learn to make films?

In Afghanistan, professional filmmaking at a high level is very difficult and sometimes it is impossible. There is only one department dedicated to this in the faculty of Fine Arts but with very poor facilities and only in the capital of Afghanistan.

What role do organisations such as the aid organisation AINA or the initiative of the Varan projects play in training?

Unfortunately, I am not aware of their activities and it may be because of the low profile of their activities. At the very beginning, AINA was doing some work regarding filmmaking such as teaching some girls how to make film and later these girls made some films. But in my opinion, AINA does not carry out many eye-catching activities in regard to cinema.

What opportunities do women have?

As a matter of fact, all filmmakers in Afghanistan encounter quite a few difficulties. It is because of the fact that there is no producer, there are not enough facilities and opportunities to make films, and female filmmakers are consequently affected more than their male counterparts. Additionally, it is impossible for women to invest in films on their own. Therefore, beside the lack of protection and security, the absence of suitable facilities is one of the reasons that have made filmmaking more difficult for women and sometimes even impossible. Despite this, some young girls are trying to become active in the area of cinema in order to rehabilitate their culture and make human values known.

Whose films were important for you?

If you mean Afghan filmmakers, I am interested in works of Siddiq Barmak and Atiq Rahimi. I also like the works of my sister, Alka Sadat, because they are very different, and also the work of some young filmmakers like Diana Saqeb and Malek Shafi'i.

How do you finance your films?

I made my first film in collaboration with my friends, and the other two TV series that I directed were financed by TOLO TV itself. The last two works were actually TV series. But it is really difficult to make feature films, as there is no budget for this whatsoever and no technical facilities and so on and so forth. It is worth mentioning that I financed five films of my sister Alka with the salaries I received from TV.

What role do international (aid) organisations play in production?

Unfortunately, as I have mentioned before, there is not a significant foreign or domestic producer in Afghanistan, and international aid organisations only help indirectly through some legal and civil organisations and NGOs - in some cases like production of short documentaries - which in my opinion has no impact on the improvement of film production in Afghanistan as all the rights of films are reserved by an NGO that has no idea about the process of film production. Therefore, Afghan filmmakers or producers, like the civil servants, have a very little share, and this kind of indirect collaboration is very restricted.

I would like to suggest an idea through your program. If these aid organisations try to establish direct relationships with Afghan film companies or organisations, they can both have a positive impact and provide support to help improve film production in Afghanistan.

For whom do you make your films?

That is the main and fundamental issue. Obviously, there are two groups of filmmakers in this world. The one group that makes film for the very inherent reason of cinema and considers cinema as a valuable and true art in the path of high human values. Through their work, they want to express something that casts light on the complex and vague issues in society. Filmmakers in this group are actually artists who are devoted to their values and high moral beliefs. They use cinema as a fundamental weapon to protect human rights against any kind of oppression and political, cultural dictatorship and superstitions. They do this by means of their beautiful artistic devices and their understanding of dramatic principles and expression in cinema.

In the second group, there are filmmakers who have been called filmmakers or artists, but have no talent in cinema, and no value can be placed on their works. They have done enough to earn money from their work without any understanding of the culture of people, history, stories and objective realities that are present in society. Beside all these problems, they call themselves the pioneers of Realism in cinema. In my opinion, there are many filmmakers from the second group in our country. The point is that the majority of people from deprived groups of our society have become used to these kinds of commercial, valueless films that are actually imposed on them from the outside. In people's opinion, cinema must consist in action with violent scenes. Others believe that cinema is a place for prostitution and a safe place for idle and unemployed people. Regarding your question, I say that what we make and what you see should express which type of film it is and for which group of people in society it has been made for. I just want to say that the responsibility and duty of each artist, especially a filmmaker, is to create a valuable work to replace the commercial ones in the market, so that people will understand and acknowledge the value of cinema and will know what artistic cinema is.

What is the relationship between the national and international market for you?

Beside all the important and fundamental issues, the market and the economy are also valuable for the survival of cinema. Undoubtedly, cinema is a group and collective profession. It is contrary to arts such as painting, sculpture and others in which there is only an artist, a piece of paper, an easel, and some painting brushes, and the artists express what they want to say and can create what they want on their own without an obligation to others. But cinema needs more people and is very expensive, and this makes the filmmaker pay attention to the market and the economy. In developed countries like the United States, giant film companies that make films sometimes have their own cinema theatre for screening the film which is actually a guarantee for the money that has been spent on their films. Because of the high income that these companies have, they pay a high rate of tax to the government. Contrary to this, France assists its cinema with millions of dollars every year in order to protect it from getting harmed economically.

In Afghanistan, there is no place for screening films at all for filmmakers to at least screen their films after the production in order to get some money. There are very few cinema theatres with very old and poor equipment, chairs and sound systems. These places are not safe logistically and in terms of security for families. And consequently, these cinemas cannot have a high number of spectators and box office sales. Moreover, a copyright has not yet been institutionalised in Afghanistan, and some thieves make terrible copies of cinematographic works and sell them. Because of this, those filmmakers who have invested once in filmmaking, will not be able to do so again. It is worth mentioning that the state does not have any clear strategy to save Afghanistan's cinema economically and, as far as one can see, other aid countries in Afghanistan are not that interested in improving and supporting Afghan culture, particularly cinema, and are doubtful about it.

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