

What is the situation of cinema like in Afghanistan?

Currently, the situation of cinema in Afghanistan is very disordered and deteriorating. Afghan cinema is facing a crisis and problems in different ways. On the one hand, lack of state attention to the importance and impact of art, and particularly cinema, on people's life, and the lack of a robust and functioning management have resulted in cinema and consequently cinema professionals not receiving enough support and backing to make films. On the other hand, unfortunately, those cinema professionals who have enough support and budget for making films do not possess enough expertise and knowledge about cinema, and most of their works are poor copies of Indian movies. This issue has affected Afghan commercial cinema negatively.

How many and what kinds of cinemas exist and where are they located?

I am not aware of the total number of cinemas in Afghanistan. Based on the statistics issues by Afghan Film, it is believed that there are seven operating cinemas.

Which films are shown?

Films that are being shown in Afghanistan are usually third and fourth-class Hollywood and Bollywood movies whose main themes are action and romance.

What kind of audience visits the cinemas?

Cinemas in Afghanistan are places for unemployed and idle youths. As a matter of fact, cinemas in Afghanistan do not carry a cultural identity/aspect.

Do women and/or families have the opportunity to visit the cinema?

No. Not only is there no possibility, but the current tradition and norm in the country also do not allow this for women, and the only cinema that was allocated for families is out of service.

What role does the sale of DVDs play? Which films are available?

The question is not very clear. Despite this, if you mean the impact of sales of DVDs on Afghan's culture and cinema, I shall say, yes. It had some effects. This impact could be either positive or negative. It can be positive because in a poor society like Afghanistan, films could be easily available to Afghans. Afghans could also be familiarised with film, the art of filmmaking and, in general, the phenomenon of cinema. It can have a negative impact because it will destroy the culture of watching a film in a cinema and going to a cinema. It will make people lazy. Another issue has to do with the absence of copyrights in Afghanistan that result in many films being easily accessible to the public and without any supervision.

Which films are available?

In most of shopping or rental film clubs, second or third-class Indian or American films can be found, but in very few clubs we can find good and artistic films.

Do Afghan people watch TV? Do they watch domestic or international TVs?

Yes. People watch TV which is actually the only entertaining activity in Afghanistan. The majority of people has access to foreign channels through satellite TV and they also watch domestic channels.

How widespread is national and international television? How do private and state television broadcasters differ?

There is one governmental TV channel in Afghanistan. This channel is actually a platform for the state to reflect its opinions and demands. The conservative and fundamentalist approach of this TV channel leads to it being watched less in comparison with the weaker private TV channels, of which 14 are in operation. Although the programs of these TV channels do not have a high quality, the diverse and youth-friendly content of their programs has made them serious rivals for state TV.

What influence do they have on the production and distribution of cinema films?

Afghanistan's TV channels play no role in the production and distribution of either short or long cinematographic films. Since these TV channels are commercial, with some being religious or political and pursuing their own objectives, they are not intent on improving cinema for the public.

How did you personally learn filmmaking?

I started playing in theatre when I was little and beside that I was also interested in cinema and films. After completing my studies at school, I decided to continue my studies in the field of cinema and, therefore, finished my cinema education at the Art University of Tehran. The main incentive for filmmaking was the fact that I thought through filmmaking I can express what I want to say.

Where and how does one learn to make films?

There is only one recognised centre for cinema education in Afghanistan, which is Kabul University. But unfortunately, because of the lack of facilities and experienced teachers, graduates obtain nothing but confusion. However, there are some private filmmaking institutions that teach cinema, but not in an organised way, and still do not meet the required standards.

What is university education in Afghanistan like?

Unfortunately it is very basic and poor, which is of course because of the lack of the state's attention and academic expertise to the subject of cinema and film.

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

Personally, I have no relation with these two institutions. As far as I am concerned, they were taking good actions, but presently these institutions have turned into commercial institutions and other aspects of their works have faded quite a bit.

What opportunities do women have?

In general, cinema-related possibilities are very limited in Afghanistan and there are no target facilities for women except the fact that some foreign organisations and institutions are interested in giving some projects to women.

What cinematographic influences are significant for your work?

I like so many films and filmmakers that had impact on me such as European filmmakers, independent American filmmakers and some Iranian filmmakers. But I have always attempted to take on my own perspective in my works through which I can express my views.

Whose films were important for you?

If I wanted to name some filmmakers they would be: Krzysztof Kieslowski, Andrei Tarkovsky, Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, Alejandro Gonzalez, Tom Tykwer, Jane Campion, and many other world filmmakers.

How do you finance your films?

I finance my films in different ways such as through various foreign or domestic non-governmental institutions and organisations as well as foreign TV stations, and sometimes from my own budget.

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