

### Original Research Article

## Women's Representation in Paintings from Hamid Karzai's Era in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

Representation of the image of women in Afghan painting is a subject worthy of attention due to the fundamental and ongoing changes in the type of political governments and the diversity of views on women's issues, as well as the dominance of patriarchy and the limitations that exist about the sanctity of the image of women in religious governments. Also, considering the wide presence of women in the field of painting, both as painters and as subjects of paintings, after Karzai came to power, it became more necessary to investigate and analyze the representation of women in paintings. The current research aims to investigate and analyze the visual representations of women in the works of art created during the administration of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, to classify them. The question is how the images of women were represented in paintings during this period. This is a qualitative studying employing a descriptive-analytical method, using library resources and existing archives. The sampling technique was non-random and purposeful. The samples were selected from the works created during this period. Therefore the images of a woman have been in form of portraits and self-portraits, a woman's body. The images represent women in everyday life. A woman's image has been a sign of peace, resilience, and motherland and represents the women's issues in Afghanistan through the combination of traditional and modern paintings. The painters' stylistic forms of representation of women in paintings are realism, symbolism, and expressionism, with different common themes before and after the Karzai period. The works of the Karzai era in the representation of women are mostly critical and protesting, revealing the extent of women's suffering and oppression. What is important in the representation of women in this country's contemporary art is respect and adoration for their position.

**Keywords:** *Contemporary painting of Afghanistan, Representation of the image of woman, Afghan art, Representation.*

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## Introduction

For various reasons, including the tribal structure, some religious challenges, and common customs, any issue related to the identity of women is challenging in Afghanistan. Because the subjugation of women and assuming a second identity for them, as a legitimate and natural matter, is one of the accepted assumptions in this country. In this way, the history of Afghan painting also has a patriarchal foundation and has been written and relied on the rule of male rationality. This is due to the fact that before the era of Amanullah Shah, women had a very small presence in the pictorial field of painting, and there was no mention of them as painters or patrons of painting either. In fact, especially from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, women were represented in paintings generally through the representation of contemporary objects related to women in each period, such as clothes (Scarce, 1975, 4). On the other hand, the field of painting was full of famous painters such as Behzad and Talalu, Shahrukh, Abu Saeed, Sultan Hossein Bayqra, Baisanqar and others like them, as patrons of painting and representation of men in key governmental and structural roles of society. With the beginning of Amani reforms, this process took a different course and the representation of women in images became clearer. As the representation of women in painting as the main subject of the work can be seen in the works of male and female painters such as Maimanagi, Breshna, Shabnam Ghaznavi, Siddiq, Shakuroli, and many others. After the fall of Amani reforms, long-term internal and external wars, along with other factors such as population structure and religious, linguistic, and ethnic fragmentation, long-standing customs against women's rights, and continuous changes of governments had many effects on this issue. Actually, after the failure of the radical socialist measures and the following inefficiency of the Mujahideen in the administration of the government, the status of women experienced deep crises in patriarchal riots

and ethnic, religious, and political prejudices, and the insignificant achievements that had been achieved in the field of art were completely lost with the emergence of the Taliban and the formation of the Islamic Emirate. However, with the beginning of the transitional government and the continuation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and through the recognition of Afghan women's rights for the first time, in accordance with international principles, the representation of women and their issues became one of the main subjects of contemporary painting in this country in many ways. Now the question is, in what ways is the image of women represented in paintings in this era?

## Research Background

The studies that have been done in the field of contemporary painting in Afghanistan can be divided into several categories. Some of these researches have briefly studied the painter and the works, such as the book "The Migrant Painters of Afghanistan" written by Mohiuddin Shabnam Ghaznavi. This book introduces fifty-four male and female immigrant painters (from 1978 to 2001) and two hundred of their works in the form of biographies and artistic portfolios, as well as a column called "Viewpoints" (Shabnam Ghaznavi, 2002). The book "Afghanistan's art in the 20th century" in Pashto language, written by Abdul Hai Habibi in 2004 also deals with all kinds of applied and pure arts, including painting in the 20th century in Afghanistan. In this book, masters such as Abkam, Maimanagi, Breshna, Mohammad Khorasani, and several old painters of Herat have been introduced, but their works have not been mentioned (Habibi, 2004). Also, Abdul Qadir Sarwary's article titled "A Study of the Art of Painting in Kabul" was published in 2020, which introduced several contemporary painters such as Maimanagi and Breshna, as well as their works (Sarwary, 2020, 17-20). The research entitled "Afghanistan art in the last century" in 2018, and another article in 2017

entitled “The function of the figure in the painting of two decades of Afghanistan” also studied and divided the historical course of Afghan painting with a stylistic approach. The former study divided the historical course of Afghan painting into four periods of “pre-Islam”, “post-Islam”, “realism period” and “post-civil-wars” (Rafiei Rad & Tomiris, 2016, 19-20), and the latter’s division goes as “pre-Islam”, “the first golden period (Herat school)”, “The second golden period (Amani’s rule)” and “modernization (the last two decades)” (Omarzad, 2018, 16). Some researches, such as the article entitled “Thematic Analysis of Contemporary Afghan Painting” in 2022, which was carried out by thematic analysis method, while introducing several contemporary Afghan painters, categorized and then analyzed the themes of their paintings (Rafiei Rad, Mohammadzadeh & Moridi, 2022). In the field of women’s contemporary painting in Afghanistan, one can refer to research such as the article entitled “Strategies of Afghan female painters in recreating and reviving the heritage of image painting in the contemporary painting of this country” published in 2018. This study has presented the numerous techniques that were used by female contemporary painters of Afghanistan to revive contemporary painting in ten paragraphs, along with examples (Rafiei Rad & Mohammadzadeh, 2020, 16-1). In addition, another article entitled “Comparison of the ways of using painting traditions in the works of contemporary female painters in Iran and Afghanistan” in 2020, also compared some ways of using the painting tradition in the works of female painters of Iran and Afghanistan (ibid., 24-38). Some other studies have also dealt with aspects of contemporary painting in Afghanistan. The article “Analysis of the representation of architecture in the paintings of the last four decades of Afghanistan” was also published in 2021, which makes a small reference to the female painters of Afghanistan (Rafiei Rad, 2021). According to what was said, the difference between the present study and the past

studies is the collection and analysis of contemporary Afghan paintings during Hamid Karzai’s era, whose main theme is the representation of women.

### Research Methodology

The current study is qualitative and was carried out using the method of content analysis and archival, library, and internet sources. Content analysis is the process of seeing the text, making a proper understanding of seemingly unrelated information, systematic observation, and converting qualitative data into quantitative ones (Boyatzis, 1998, 4). In terms of its nature, content analysis can be descriptive, interpretive and relational (King & Horrocks, 2010) and in the current study, content analysis is interpretive. It is necessary to explain that in the descriptive method, what is in the text is described. In the interpretive method, what is in the text is interpreted, and in the relational method, the type of relationship in the text is expressed. Based on this, the theory stage starts with the initial design, questions, and understudy elements (painting works). Then, in the group creation stage, the units of analysis are identified and separated. In the data evaluation stage, the appropriate analysis is presented based on the research questions and problems. The statistical population of the current study included all the works of paintings representing women that were created in the period from 2002 to 2014. There were four hundred and fifteen works by seventy Afghan painters with this description. The sampling method was non-random and purposeful. The inclusion criteria were as follows: The focus of the painters needed to be on women and they needed to be qualified for at least one of the aforementioned conditions. Their biographies or works had been published in reference books or they had studied painting in art universities inside or outside the country and had some works in archives. The samples were recruited from those who had been selected or chosen for prestigious art festivals in the country of Afghanistan, such as the Biennial of

Painting or Afghanistan's Painting, or those who had held at least one individual or collective exhibition in prestigious galleries inside or outside Afghanistan.

### **The Image of Women in the History of Afghan Art**

First of all, to explain the issue of women in Afghanistan, it is necessary to state a few points. The first point is that in Afghanistan, there are still customs that blatantly violate women's rights. Among them, we can refer to the traditions of Jirga, Pashtunwali, Merke, Merke-chi, Michalagheh, Baramate, Pur, Nanvanti, Bad, Vellore in the southeast; and the customs in Hazarajat, such as Nagheh, Sharm, Diyeh, Khunbaha, Roydar, Gale; and customs such as Tavyane, Gero, Sho-ra, Khastegaari, Badal (goods for goods), Gahvaareh Bakhshak, and Nazr in the north (Setiz, n.d., 11). On the other hand, the long-standing religious approach, which is equivalent to tribal feudalism in Afghanistan, and the official representatives of religion in this country, the Taliban, have imposed severe restrictions on women. Their goal is to deprive women of any political-social activities and to exclude them from keeping children at home. They believe that women's participation in society and presenting any image of women causes moral corruption in society. Many studies consider these restrictions as "not a matter related to the Sharia or tribal customs, but a political solution" that makes half of the society passive in front of the government's decisions (Esmatolahi, 1999, 127). In this approach, any presence of Afghan women in any way in artistic fields is considered forbidden fruit (Kholosi, 2000, 144). Issues related to the sanctity of the image of women before the modern era in Afghanistan are the subject of other studies, but this study briefly examines the representation of the image of women in Afghan painting in the form of four periods:

#### **• Prehistoric era**

Most of the works obtained from the archeology of Afghanistan are related to the designs on coins, cylindrical beads, and pottery during the Achaemenid

period. Some researchers believe that the artefacts discovered from the Aynak copper mine, excavations in Khair Khaneh area of Kabul city, and cities like Bamyan, Ghazni, and Herat indicate the expertise of the local people in that area in the art of sculpturing and painting (Breshna, 1954, 15). Also, some documents have been discovered indicating the existence of painting and sculpture on the shores of the Oxus (Amu Darya), and Professor Hertsfield considers that school to be the origin of the Buddhist industry and the Central fine arts and the industry of the (Parthian, Kushan & Sasanian) periods (ibid, 19) (Fig. 1). Archaeological findings of the prehistoric age in Afghanistan, by Louis Dupree in the Navar plains of Ghazni region in the 80s from the "Morde Gosfand" cave near "Faryab" and "Dareh Kur" in "Badakhshan", by the Kyoto University delegation in the 60s in "Hazar Som" in "Samangan", by Carlton Ken in "Qara Kemer" area (Samangan), and by S.M. Poglyzzi in the 70s in "Dere Kalan" show that single-edged razors, cleavers, non-patterned hand axes and hatchets, and functional pattern-less tools were found from this era.

#### **• Historical era**

In the historical period, the works are generally patterned pottery that is designed geometrically and the line is the main visual element in these works. The drawings of this period include geometric shapes, such as rhombuses, squares, and parallel lines; And the design of love flowers and animals, such as goats, is done linearly by maintaining real proportions. In this period, the representation of the image of women is not observed. In the Greco-Western era in Afghanistan, the effects of Greek art can be seen in the representation of women (Fig. 2).

#### **• The first golden period**

This period refers to the post-Islam era and especially the Herat school. With the reign of Sultan Husayn Bayqra in Herat and with the help of Amir Ali Shir Nawai, who both happened to be great admirers of fine literature and crafts, a distinguished school was

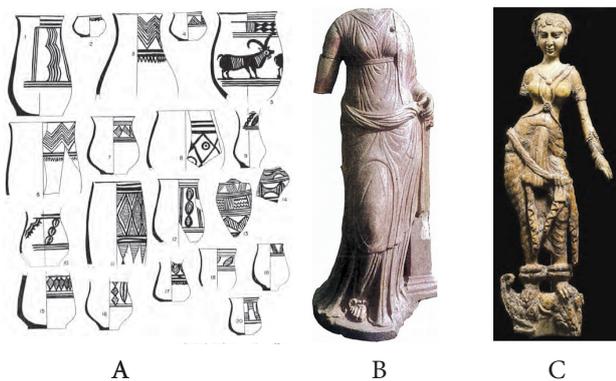


Fig. 1. Examples of works obtained from the pre-Islam era in Afghanistan. A. Room No. 10, National Museum of Afghanistan. Source: Mohammad, 1991, 29. B. Female statue made of limestone, Ai Khanam, temple. Source: Frankfort, 2014, 55. C. Examples of engraved pottery designs in the Neolithic period of Afghanistan. Source: Rafiei Rad, 2021, 29.

established and fine arts and literature achieved such progress that it continued in the Safavid era (Khwandamir, 2001, 3-4). During the rule of Sultan Husayn, Herat was developed as a real center of civility, painting, and the art of calligraphy and book design (Mardanov, 2008, 47). Baysunghur established a library in Herat and gathered forty painters, calligraphers, writers, and masters of arts and words for composition (Khwandamir, 2001, 622). Behzad was the head of the group of court calligraphers and painters and excelled in that setting. The Herat school was the center for the cultivation of art and artists for a century from about 810 to 912 A.H. (1407 – 1506 A.D.), but with the death of Sultan Husayn Bayqra and the invasion of the Uzbeks from the north and the Safavid forces from the west, it was destroyed and its artists were forced to seek refuge in the courts of India, Bukhara or the Safavid (Habibi, n.d., 558). Although after the Timurid era, Afghan painting did not shine much, in the following centuries, after the establishment of Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durrani, artists such as Mohammad Azim Abkam and Hessamuddin Chandauli and several others kept the sparks of this school alive in the courts of Shir Ali Khan and Dost Mohammad Khan. Ustad Mohammad Saeed Mash-al and some others also helped this cause (Rafiei Rad et al., 2022, 43). One

thing that can be said about the presence of women in painting in this era is that the portraits (male or female) in Behzad's paintings explain the excellent levels of human existence and introduce the "perfect human being" (Ebrahimi Naghani, 2012, 98). Also, creating illustrations based on Shahnameh provided this opportunity to show the presence of women in a more prominent way. Because Shahnameh is a book in which women are present throughout the book, but it is not the same as in the Iliad, in which women are the fire-starters of disasters (Motaghi & Rashidi, 2011, 74).

#### • The second golden period (Contemporary painting of Afghanistan)

The second golden age is related to the reign of Shah Amanullah Khan around 1923. Gholam Mohammad Maimanagi founded the School of Sanaye-e Nafiseh (Precious arts) in Kabul. Abdul Ghafoor Breshna also taught in this school. In 1949, the Faculty of Fine Arts of Kabul University was established by Amanullah Haiderzad, with the support of President Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan (Omarzad, 2018, 15), and in 1996, with the end of the war, teaching art was completely removed from the country's educational program (Rafiei Rad, 2021, 117).

Hamid Karzai took over the government from 2001 to 2014. Until the Amani reforms, there were no traces of women in the field of painting in Afghanistan. The accession of this country to the international human rights and women's rights covenants of the United Nations, as well as the adoption of laws supporting women's rights in this country, after the defeat of the Taliban and the inauguration of Karzai, paved the way for women to enter and engage in all fields in an open political environment. To measure the situation of Afghan women, after the overthrow of the Taliban and the start of Hamid Karzai reign, the method of secondary analysis of international data was used. In the index Tables (1) and (2), the HDI (human development), GDI (gender development), GII (gender inequality), and GGI (gender gap) indices

Country name	Ranking in HDI 2015	GDI score 2015	GDI score 2015	GII score 2015	GII score 2015	GGI score 2015	GGI score 2015
Afghanistan	171 from (188)	0.6	161	0.693	152	--	--

Gender development					Gender inequality				Gender gap			
1995	2005	2009	2015	Index of changes	2010	2013	2015	Index of changes	2006	2010	2015	Index of changes
0.169	Na	0.31	0.6	0.431	0.797	0.712	0.693	-0.104	Na	Na	Na	Na

Fig. 2. United Nations Human Development Report 2015, World Economic Forum gender gap report. Changes in indicators of women's status in Afghanistan; United Nations Human Development report from 1995 to 2015 and the World Economic Forum gender gap report from 2006 to 2015  
Source: Rafiei Rad, 2021, 182.

are presented to measure the status of women in the years 1995 to 2015.

United Nations Human Development report from 1995 to 2015 and the World Economic Forum gender gap report from 2006 to 2015 (*ibid.*, 182).

As the statistics show, gender development had a relative growth in 2015 and the amount of gender inequality also shows a negative growth. In fact, after the 11th of September and the attack of NATO and the fall of the Taliban, a new plan for the formation of a government in Afghanistan was made at the Bonn Conference. This was the product of the coalition of the international community and the internal forces of Afghanistan, and one of its achievements was attention to women's rights and their participation in all political and social fields. In this way, with the beginning of the transitional government and after that, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and with the recognition of the rights of Afghan women in accordance with the international principles of women's rights in the world, a large number of women started painting for the first time and found a special place in the contemporary painting of Afghanistan.

The inauguration of Hamid Karzai's government paved the way for the contemporary artists of Afghanistan and art at its highest point. During this period, on the one hand, the orders given to Afghan artists by foreigners led to the prosperity of painting, and on the other hand, caused artists to stay away from miniatures (due to lack of orders). Also, the commercial aspects of the creation of the work were at the top of attention. A new space has been opened in the direction of modernization in the

last twenty years in Afghanistan. The establishment of the first contemporary arts center in Afghanistan in 2014 is an important step in this field. Thereafter, creativity, the emphasis on the power of thought, novel thinking, innovation, and freedom of expression in the art are emphasized more than ever. The pioneering of women in this period is one of the characteristics of this new season (*Omarzad, 2018, 16*).

#### - Forms of the representation of women's image in paintings of Hamed Karzai's era (2002-2014)

Before Karzai's era, the subjects of male and female painters were not very different from each other. Still, life, portraits, urban and rural landscapes of Afghanistan, independent or non-independent painting of literature, historical monuments of Afghanistan, and abstracts are examples of these themes. But perhaps Dunia Gobar can be considered an exception in this field, who created paintings with new themes, such as the ghosts of war, war, stop being hypocrites and cruelty, imagine, in a storm, and criticizing the war and the social situation of Afghanistan. During Karzai's era, the condition of women improved and in the democratic system of this period, in addition to the fact that many women turned to paint to gain identity, they also gained the opportunity to be represented in painting. Examples of the representation of women's images in the paintings of this country can be classified in the following ways:

#### - Portrait

One of the forms of representation of women in the contemporary painting of Afghanistan, which can be seen in any period, is portrait painting. Many painters,

such as Khair Mohammad Khan Yari and also Simin Shakur Vali, and some others, have presented paintings of the faces of women who were present in their lives such as mothers, wives, sisters, neighbor women, and so on in the years before the Karzai era. Also, the self-portrait is a rare style in Afghanistan, which can rarely be seen in the works of painters of this country, but this style of painting can be seen both before (Shakur Vali's portrait) and after Karzai's era (Shamsie Hassani's portrait). Another thing that became very popular, during the Karzai era and later, was painting portraits of women politicians (such as Belqis Roshan's portrait). Painting the faces of politicians in Afghanistan has a long history, and above all, these paintings only included images of men. But since women became widely present in politics after Karzai's era, this was reflected in the case of women, too (Fig. 3).

#### - Representation of the female body

A woman's body, especially in traditional and Islamic countries, has sacredness according to religious and traditional rules, which generally makes this subject to be avoided painting. Representation of women's image in Afghanistan is mostly in the form of a cover. Many painters, such as Saliha Wafa Javad and Saber Naqshbandi as examples, when depicting a woman, put her body in the official or unofficial clothing of the country. However, in a few works, the female bodies in paintings are without any covers. Moreover, such examples cannot be found before the Karzai period. On the one hand, some works of Afghan painters like Mohsen Hosseini depict the body of a wounded Afghan woman in such a way that criticizes the dirty and lewd ogles of some men and the insecurity of women in Afghanistan, and on the other hand, Abdul Naser Sawabi depicts the beauty of an ideal female body along with delicate and beautiful elements such as flowers and silk in his works (Fig. 4).

#### • Women in everyday life

The daily life of Afghan women has many differences in cities and villages, and depending on the extent to which the region is influenced by extremist groups, the

quality of women's lives is also different. The laborious and exhausting work and the productive aspect of women's lives is a recurring theme in contemporary paintings of Afghanistan, and it was popular both during Karzai's period and before that. In fact, in the works of Breshna, the women of Logar region are depicted doing daily chores and fetching water with jugs on their heads. The difference that can be found in the works of Karzai's period in this regard is the deeper display of these difficulties and hardships and their unfairness. For example, the motherly role of a woman is presented in the works of Nasser Ithar, but they lack poetry and tenderness in their visual expression. Realism in this type of painting, by negating poetics, reflects the definition of women that is limited to work only for housekeeping and childbearing. The reason for this is the fact that a certain type of approach to women prevails in Afghanistan, a clear example of which is stated in the statements of Sheikh Rahat Gul, the director of one of the Taliban schools in Pakistan, who compares a woman to a rose or a thousand rupees that should be kept at home or in a safe.<sup>1</sup> These types of paintings in the Karzai period are generally critical. Like the works of Mohammed Tariq Habibi and also Rashed Rahmani, in which everyday reality is reflected in the purest form of time, place, clothing, and patterns. Through the same pure realism, they critique the daily life situation of Afghan women. This representation of women in Afghanistan has many examples, but only a few images are presented in the present study as examples (Fig. 5).

#### • Representation of the image of women as signs of peace, resistance, and motherland

In some works, women are depicted not in a normal way, but in the position of eternal life. This woman represents a human ideal and the meeting point of the supernatural world with natural instinct. A healthy and pure woman is a bright and chaste force and a good ideal. For Jung, this woman is the embodiment of an aspect of the unconscious, known as the anima, which is the embodiment of all female psychological tendencies in the human psyche (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2019,



Fig. 3. Representation of women in the form of portraits and self-portraits.

A. Ustad Khair Mohammad Khan, the painting of Mother, paint, and oil. Source: Rafiei Rad & Amirpour, 2021. B. Simin Shakur Vali, 30x40 cm, paint and oil on canvas. Source: Rafiei Rad, 2021, 120. C. Hanif Shabgard, Belqis Roshan, representative of Farah Province in the Senate, paint, and oil on canvas, catalog of works. D. Shamsie Hassani, self-portrait, pencil drawing on cardboard. . Source: the personal archive of the artist

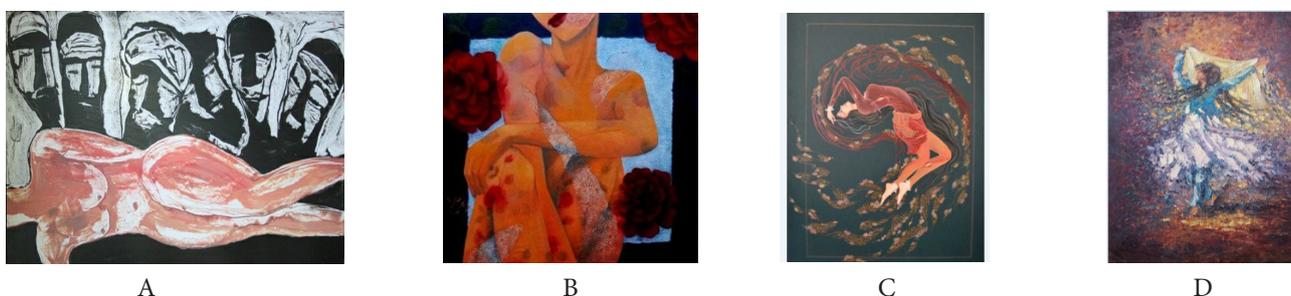


Fig.4. The female body as a subject of beauty and suffering in Afghan paintings.

A. Mohsen Hosseini, (Kabul Art Project), 'Without Men', oil on paper, 30 x 50 cm. Courtesy Kabul Art Project. B. Abdul Naser Sawabi Personal archive of the artist. Photo: Abdul Naser Sawabi. C. Saliha Wafa Javad, painting, watercolor, gouache on cardboard. Source: Personal archive. D. Saber Naqshbandi, paint and oil on canvas. Source: Author's archive.

476).

In the works of Afghan artists, we also see the presence of women, with the same eternal quality. In the work of Tawfiq Rahmani, the woman is standing in a green dress, the same color as cedar, and in the work of Syed Navid ul Haq Fazli, the woman is shown in a white dress, with a dove in her hand, and gold bands. In the paintings of Farooq Faryad and Ruhollah Naqshbandi, women are a sign of the homeland that has presented martyrs. In Faryad's painting, the flower ring has created a relationship with the mass of martyrs' graves. However, the work of Naqshbandi, which was painted in the following years, refers to the killing of children of this land, which is offered by the motherland (Fig. 6).

#### - Representation of women's issues in Afghanistan

The problems that Afghan women face may be considered the same as the problems faced by women in other countries or even in the Islamic world. However,

this is not true. In a historical overview, it can be seen that Abdul Rahman was the first person who established the sexual policy in this country, and apart from some measures for the benefit of women, he left Hazara women and girls to slavery and concubinage (Heravi, 1961, 58). After him, Habibullah Shah also challenged the power of tribal leaders by reforming the issue of polygamy and opening women's institutions, which finally led to his assassination in 1919 (Magnus & Naby, 1998, 39). Amanullah Shah's rule, although not long-lasting, created a suitable opportunity to recognize and spread the concept of women's rights. Shah Amanullah's actions regarding women were strongly attacked by tribal leaders, and then at the Paghman meeting in 1928, he forcibly canceled some freedoms for women. The results were the prohibition of literacy for women, the permissibility of marrying an underage girl and the marriage of a man with four women, and the freedom of



Fig.5. Representation of women in everyday life in the paintings of Afghanistan.

A. Abdul Ghafoor Breshna, Women with water jugs, Logar Valley, watercolor, 39 x 29 cm, 1962. B. Akbar Salam, Rural Girl, oil on canvas, around 2004. C. Nasser Ithar, artist's personal archive. Photo: Nasser Ithar, 2005. D. Rashed Rahmani. Source: watercolor album, 2012. E. Mohammad Tariq Habibi, catalog of Zaytoun Gallery. Source: Herat, 2016.



Fig. 6. Representation of the image of a woman as a sign of peace and resistance and motherland in the paintings of Afghan artists.

A. Mohammad Tawfiq Rahmani. B. Syed Navid ul Haq Fazli, paint and oil, gold leaf, 100 x 70 cm . C. Syed Farooq Faryad, oil on canvas, 2001. D. Ruhollah Naqshbandi, Mother of the Country, 60 x 80 cm, 2008. Source: Raffei Rad & Tomiris, 2016.

discretion and jurisdiction of judges in punishment. After that, Taliban's prohibitions are part of the limitations of women in this country that are stated in the following; Wearing loose pants under the burqa (mandatory burqa), wearing white socks or plastic slippers without socks, any activity outside the house (except with a mahram<sup>2</sup> man) even getting into a taxi, talking to non-mahram men, wearing high heels and cheerful colored clothes, using cosmetics, going to a male doctor, forced tinting of glasses, no education (except for informal Quran learning), no job (except for nurses and midwives), laughing loudly, any type of presence of women in the media, no sports, sitting on bicycle or motorcycle racks, attending women's celebrations, washing clothes by the sea and river, fashion shows in shops, women's public bathrooms, using men's buses, taking pictures of women and publishing them in the media, publications or even hanging in shops and houses.

With the beginning of the Karzai era, which was accompanied by the fall of the Taliban, new themes emerged in paintings that addressed such limitations and issues. In the works of Afghan artists Sudabeh Mehrayin and Mitra Bashiri, a kind of suffocation is observed, in which the main issue is women's freedom of expression and their exclusion from various aspects of social presence. The patriarchal atmosphere and the sad situation of women are criticized in the tableau of Grief by Hassan Pavand and in the work of Khadijah Hashemi. In the two works of Mina Nayebkhil and Fardiana Tabibzadeh, a woman named Farkhunda Malikzada, who was killed and burned in 2014 only a few steps away from the Presidential Palace, is depicted in two different ways (Fig.7).

#### - The image of a woman in the combination of traditional and modern painting

Modernism provided a space for contemporary painting to experience new aesthetic fields both in

terms of subject and content. In prominent Afghan paintings by Melina Suleiman, the traditional role of women is depicted using materials and mixed media. In 2015, at the Bethnal Green Gallery in London, she held a solo exhibition called “Beyond the Burqa: Detexturing”, in which some burqas were presented, each in a traditional calligraphy form of the aspirations and ideals of the Afghan people. In the pictorial tradition of Afghanistan, especially in painting, linear value is very important. In the works of Mushtari Hilal, although the lines are drawn without linear value, these works are close to the tradition in the subject matter. This is the result of the painter’s emphasis on the local dress and traditional paintings of Afghanistan, and in general, his works present a critique of the topic of tradition. Also, Reza Hazare tries to present his critical statement on the position of women in Afghanistan by using abstract methods by creating wide color spots. In his works, the events that create the fluidity of materials such as watercolor on the page are very important to the deformed shape of the figures. Also, the work of Shakiba Saifi emphasizes the freedom of expression of Afghan women by using the element of traditional motifs and the enlargement of the lips (Fig. 8).

## Conclusion

From the time of Afghanistan’s independence until Hamid Karzai’s inauguration, the country’s leadership has changed thirteen times due to ethnic, religious, and political conflicts, the war with the Soviet Union, and then civil wars and other factors, and these developments have also influenced art. While in

the Amani reforms, Western art was supported and led to the establishment of educational institutions. On the other hand, in the era of the Mujahideen and the Taliban, art, and education were restricted or completely banned, and the colleges and museums were looted and burned. With the inauguration of Hamid Karzai and the formation of a democratic government that accepted international conventions and covenants about women, the possibility for the presence of women in the field of painting and gaining an independent identity was provided, and the visual representation of women in the works also increased widely. In response to the question of how the image of a woman is represented in painting in this era, the findings of the present study show that the themes of painting in the Karzai era are: portrait and self-portrait, representation of a woman’s body, representation of women’s everyday life, representation of women’s image as signs of peace, resistance, and motherland, representation of women’s issues in Afghanistan, and representation of women’s image in the combination of traditional and modern painting. Some of these themes were also present in the works of painters in the era before Karzai, but in the era of Karzai, they were done differently. For example, women politicians are also depicted in the theme of the portrait.

From the point of view of stylistics, the format chosen by painters to represent women in this era is painting in realistic, symbolic, expressionistic, and sometimes abstract styles.

The present study also showed that the works that represented women in paintings before the Karzai era

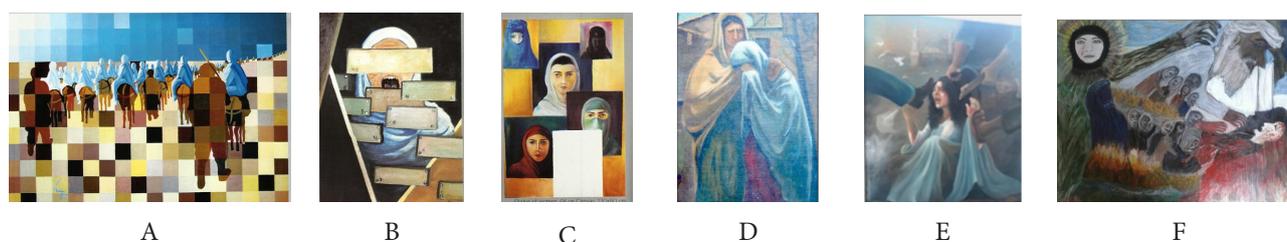
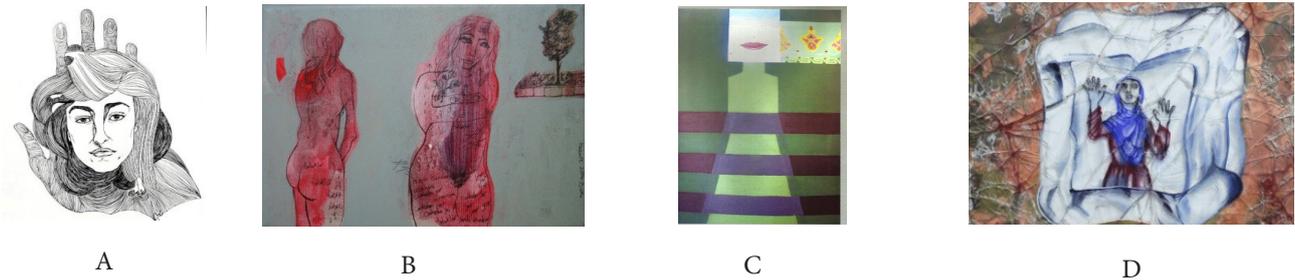


Fig.7. Examples of representation of women’s issues in Afghan painting.

A. Khadijah Hashemi catalog. Source: Kabul University Exhibition, 2010, 72. B. Sudabeh Mehrayin. Source: *ibid.*, 206. C. Mitra Bashiri. Source: Kabul University Exhibition, 2010, 72. D. Hassan Pavand, Grief, paint and oil on canvas, 1998-2005. E. Mina Nayeckhil, Farkhunda, paint and oil on canvas, 50x70 cm. F. Fardiana Tabibzadeh, mixed media on canvas, 120 x 100 cm. Source: Author’s archive.



Examples of combining traditional and modern painting in Afghan paintings.

A. Mushtari Hilal, "STRUKTUR" 2020, Duo-Show with Barbara Lüdde at Feinkunst Krüger in Hamburg. B. Reza Hazare, Catalogue of Azerbaijan. Source: YAY Gallery, 2014, 15. C. Shakiba Seifi. Source: Catalog Kabul University Exhibition, 2010, 134. D. Melina Suleiman. Source: Kabul Art Projects, 2013.

lacked critical aspects, and on the contrary, during the Karzai era, the representation of women in paintings is protestant and critical. In this era, the open political space for women and international conventions defined the limits and boundaries of women's rights and the formation of women's institutions and their access to the pillars of the system provided new opportunities for the formation of women's movements. Also, the number of female painters increased, and as a result, women found a new tool to express their issues and problems.

Also, there are some representations of the image of women, such as the representation of women in everyday life, both during the Karzai era and before it, but the difference is that realism in the works related to the Karzai era, as in the past, does not only depict moments of women's daily chores. Rather, it reveals the depth of suffering and oppression that have been inflicted on Afghan women and the fact that they have been forced to do exhausting work.

An important point that must be acknowledged is that respect and praise for the status of women can be seen in paintings in all eras. This is a sign of the high culture of this country and its cultured, art-loving, and art-nurturing people, which itself is proof of the elegance of their nature and the tenderness of their souls.

### Endnote

1. Payam Zan Monthly, 1377, page 7.
2. In Islam, a mahram is a family member with whom marriage would be considered permanently unlawful (haram). One's spouse is also a mahram.

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