

History of satire in Afghan media: From the beginning to the fall of the Islamic Republic

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Article Info	Abstract
Review Article Main Object: Interdisciplinary Scope: Afghanistan Received: 10 February 2025 Revised: 21 March 2025 Accepted: 12 April 2025 Published online: 12 April 2025 Keywords: Afghanistan, humor, media history, satire.	Satire, alongside news and analytical genres, has been one of the significant forms extensively utilized by Afghan media throughout history. Although researchers have conducted studies on satire, the historical background of satire in Afghan media has not yet been independently examined. This research employs a library-based and theoretical approach to explore the history of satire in Afghan media, aiming to partially fill the research gap in this field and pave the way for further studies on satire. In this study, satire is considered a subset of humor. The findings indicate that the use of satire in Afghan media dates back more than a century and is closely tied to political affairs. This century-long history is divided into eight periods: the emergence of satire in Afghan press; the period of law-based press and early growth of satire; the period of crisis and stagnation in the press, leading to the decline of satire; the flourishing period of satire and its emergence as an independent genre; the period of silence in satire; the transformation of satire and its emergence in radio and television; the period of satire's concealment and exile; and the golden age and new chapter for satire.

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Extended Abstract**Background**

The history of media in Afghanistan spans over a century and a half, beginning with the first publication, *Shams al-Nahar*, during the second reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan. It reached its peak growth during the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Over this period, Afghan media has experienced a tumultuous history. Various regimes have imposed strict controls, shutting down newspapers, silencing radio, blinding television, closing cinemas, and even burning film reels. Some regimes exploited media for ideological purposes, while others allowed it to operate with little oversight, enabling individuals to use it for personal gains. Consequently, the life of Afghan media has oscillated between "absolute tyranny, maximum repression, ideological exploitation, relative freedom, and maximum freedom." Despite these challenges, Afghan media has largely retained its traditional functions of informing, educating, entertaining, and promoting. Critical and entertaining content has often been delivered through humor and satire, which have been integral to Afghan media since the publication of *Siraj al-Akhbar Afghaniya*. Mahmud Tarzi, in *Siraj al-Akhbar Afghaniya*, published critical writings that some scholars consider satirical, marking the emergence of satire in Afghan media. The unique and turbulent history of Afghanistan and its media, coupled with the deep connection between humor and popular culture, underscores the importance of studying satire in this context.

Aims

This research aims to provide a comprehensive history of satire in Afghan media and explore how humor and satire have evolved over 110 years in the country's media landscape.

Methods

The study employs a library-based, theoretical approach with a descriptive-analytical framework to offer a concise, coherent, and comprehensive examination of satire in Afghan media.

Results

The findings reveal that satire in Afghan media has a history spanning over a century and is closely tied to political developments. This century-long history is divided into eight periods: the emergence of satire in Afghan press; the period of legally grounded press and early growth of satire; the crisis and stagnation of press and the decline of satire; the flourishing of satire and its emergence as an independent genre; the silencing of satire; the transformation of satire and its appearance in radio and television; the period of hidden and exiled satire; and the golden age and new chapter for satire.

Satire first appeared in Afghanistan with the publication of critical writings in *Siraj al-Akhbar Afghaniya* during the reign of Habibullah

Khan. It saw initial growth during the rule of Amanullah Khan, but this progress was halted under the regimes of Habibullah Kalakani, Mohammad Nadir, and Mohammad Hashim Khan due to political crises and authoritarianism. Satire re-emerged and flourished during the reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah in the 1950s and 1960s, establishing itself as an independent genre.

During the rule of Mohammad Daoud Khan, satire was suppressed. Under communist rule, satire transformed and found a place in radio and television. During the Mujahideen and first Taliban regimes, satire was either exiled or published covertly. Finally, with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, satire entered a golden age, appearing in various forms across different media platforms.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that satire has a long-standing presence in Afghan media, with media authorities in each period utilizing it as a significant component of their programming. Beyond its political implications, satire has also maintained a unique connection with Afghan popular culture. Therefore, satire in Afghan media offers substantial potential for further study in areas such as politics, representation of social groups, and interpretations of popular culture.

Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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