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# NGOs and the Neo-Liberalization of Political Theatre in Pakistan: Ajoka's Surrender to the Politics of Rights

The neoliberal enterprise of NGOs has transformed the left-leaning politics of the political theatre movement in the Punjab region of Pakistan. Commencing in the 1980s, this theatre acted as a vibrant movement of the Left, challenging the brutal military dictatorship of General Zia. At a later stage, its politics changed to the neoliberal politics of NGOs, giving way to economics and the agenda of international donor organizations of the Global North. This article demonstrates the turn-around of theatre company Ajoka's recent production *Saira aur Miara* (2019) and focuses on the production's politics, together with its text, design, and performance modes in aesthetic terms. A materialist and context-specific political approach examines to what extent class struggle and leftist ideas inform this company's ideological imaginings and how much it has moved away from its original political position. It indicates the tensions and contradictions that have been created during this change and because of it.

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AJOKA, a theatre company, founded in 1983 by Maheeha Gauhar, was a creative protest against the brutal dictatorship of General Zia, who toppled a popular democratic government and curbed all voices of dissent through the use of violence, terror, and fear. His coup was the establishment's effort to roll back socialism and maintain the status quo for the vested interests of the propertied classes.<sup>1</sup> In such an environment, the Ajoka theatre company resisted the dictatorship and challenged the unholy alliance of Military-Feudal-Mullah through the theatre.

Ajoka was inspired by Bertolt Brecht and the South Asian political theatre traditions of Badal Sircar (1925–2004), Safdar Hashmi (1954–1989), and the Indian People's Theatre Associations (IPTA). These theatre traditions are left-leaning with anti-imperial and anti-colonial politics and aesthetics. Ajoka's first production was of Badal Sircar's play *Jaloos* ('The Procession', 1984), which was performed

in Gauhar's house because a gathering of four or more people was banned under section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.<sup>2</sup> The minimalist production, equipped with Badal Sircar's Third Theatre techniques, which were derived from his own ideas and concepts, became a symbolic act of defiance because it broke all the barriers imposed by the regime.<sup>3</sup> Sircar considers theatre a *human act* where people (performers) meet people (spectators).<sup>4</sup> He desired direct communication between them and, to achieve his goal, he removed all obstacles and hindrances in the way of this human act: proscenium stage, lights, costumes, curtains, traditional seating arrangement, and naturalistic postures and gestures.

*Jaloos* was performed within this perspective in a circle surrounded by people in the lawn of Gauhar's residence; represented the oppressed conditions, issues, and desires of the working classes through the montage of multiple events; and uncovered the heinous

attempts of the elite to rule the country with the help of a military dictatorship. By exposing the institutions of the state, the play uncovered the anti-people doctrine of security agencies, which distorts reality through religious discourse. The play was considered a 'wonder' on the Pakistani political scene.<sup>5</sup>

Ajoka's second play was Sirmad Sehbai's *Panjwan Chiragh* ('The Fifth Lamp', 1984), followed by an Urdu adaptation of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1985). The leftist politics of Ajoka glorified labourers and farmers, and promoted ideas of class exploitation and resistance against the system controlled by the military regime. This political direction also fed into the company's aesthetics in terms of the design of productions, its non-hierarchical and collaborative working processes, and its choice of language, audiences, and venues. Passion and ideological commitment were the actors' driving forces, and they personally contributed to meeting the company's expenses, helped by donations from the audience.

With minimalist approaches in production design (without relying on the paraphernalia of sets, lights, curtains, and so on, and using simple props and suggestive costumes), participatory appeal, and direct actor-audience communication, inspired by Sircar's Third Theatre techniques, the major focus was to provoke the critical thinking of audiences and inspire them to be part of the project of the political transformation of society. Ajoka also had strong connections with leftist political parties and performed for their audiences.

### Change towards the NGOs

A boom in NGOs around the globe was observed in the 1980s as part of encroaching neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup> The private sector institutions and organizations including the market were given prominence, ensuring the free flow of capital across borders.<sup>7</sup> The ideology of a 'New Policy Agenda' incipient in the project of globalization considered the state unable to provide necessary services and thus it promoted the establishment of non-government organizations (NGOs) as a solution to the problems of third world countries;<sup>8</sup> donor agencies were to pour in huge funds in the name of sustainable development.

However, these non-government organizations have been strongly criticized by leftists and other circles for being the tools of the imperialist drive of neoliberalism for control and ideological indoctrination.<sup>9</sup> Issa Shivji, in her study of the failures of NGOs in Africa, calls them 'organizational foot-soldiers of imperialism' and argues that NGOs, with their 'language of secular human rights', play the same 'legitimizing' role in neoliberalism that church and charities played to legitimize colonialism.<sup>10</sup> The apolitical managerial solutions for political problems of NGOs undermined class consciousness and fragmented the leftist political struggles against imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, humanitarian and service-delivery NGOs also emerged in Pakistan due to the 'liberalization policies' of the Pakistani government.<sup>12</sup> The 1990s was the time when Pakistan became a member of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the global neoliberal economic order showered the country with its funds and 'conditions' of privatization, liberalization, and deregulation under the Structural Adjustments Programmes.<sup>13</sup> In the face of the crackdown on political activities, leftists flocked toward NGOs, finding them to be safe places.<sup>14</sup> Theatre groups also found refuge in the NGOs in the name of financial sustainability. Ajoka was already working with NGOs concerned with women's rights and, in the early 1990s, it changed to an NGO that promoted the human rights messages of donors.

In doing so, Ajoka's earlier revolutionary rhetoric was transformed within the next few years into the 'language of rights' and identity politics. Ajoka's 1989 archives clearly demonstrate this shift in phrases like 'consciousness-raising through theatre', and 'changing attitudes' through theatre, which were part of Shahid Nadeem's (Ajoka's CEO, playwright, and director) and Gauhar's public discourse.<sup>15</sup> Ajoka propagated the idea of the 'theatre as a tool' for taking issues to the people and promulgating a cause.<sup>16</sup> In an interview with Beena Sarwar, Nadeem declared that it was more difficult to change 'social attitudes' than to challenge the dictatorship.<sup>17</sup> In the same year, Gauhar announced Ajoka's plan to make 'village theatre' a monthly feature of its activities,

which focused on issues such as women's literacy and marriage-related problems of dowry, wife beating, and bride burning. This turn towards social issues was one of the consequences of the availability of donor money for approaching such themes.

Ajoka's play *Chulah* (1989) can be seen as the start of NGO theatre, or theatre for development (TfD), whose focus was on the social issues of bride burning following the NGO agenda, but the political dimension of the issue in question with respect to class analysis was missing. Gauhar states that *Chulah* 'was the result of greater awareness of the issue of bride burning due to the work of Indian NGOs and theatre groups working on similar issues'.<sup>18</sup> Written by Nadeem, the play was produced as a concern of women's organizations and was performed at a seminar on Crimes Against Women organized by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. The play focused on women being victims of stove explosion incidents in houses, and the social attitude denying them equality as human beings. In his newspaper review, Jalees Hazir criticized *Chulah* for presenting the theme without any consideration of theatrical aspects and for failing to generate audience response.<sup>19</sup> The play's protagonist was a middle-class woman whose life revolves around the kitchen but whose family does not acknowledge her. It thus depicts her as a miserable slave of the family. In Ilan Kapoor's words, the play was a 'spectacle' of the protagonist's 'miseries'; development discourse makes a spectacle of people's crises but fails to analyze the deeper politics behind those crises.<sup>20</sup> The last paragraph of the play's brochure, produced in English, states:

Pushed to the limit and alone in her misery, Zubeida's first reaction is to commit suicide but her guts fail her. Nailed to her circumstances, she protests in her own little way. In the last scene, she empties a whole container of salt on food taken out for her husband who is always complaining that there is too much salt in the food she cooks. The curtain drops on Zubeida saying, 'No More!'<sup>21</sup>

The play does not address the wider issues of patriarchy and class, and nor does it examine structural violence within society. It presents

the problem solely at the micro level of family, as is the practice of development discourse.<sup>22</sup> The point is that, in the 1980s and 1990s, international donors were funding projects focused on women's issues, and Ajoka produced many plays on these themes.<sup>23</sup> Among them are *Jhali Kithay Javey* ('Where Should this Mad Woman Go?', 1990), *Lappar* ('The Slap', 1991), *Dhee Rani* ('The Daughter', 1990) and *Barri* ('The Acquittal', 1987).<sup>24</sup> Ajoka's focus on women's issues can be found in other development projects as well in the 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

Such was NGO influence on the company's initial projects. By the mid-1990s, the public image of Ajoka was that of an NGO theatre group working for human rights.<sup>26</sup> Gauhar herself had shaped this public image but also the company's public identity: 'we have an audio-visual wing that produces telefilms, TV serials, documentaries, audio and video of plays on women's rights, honour killings, illiteracy, family planning, and the environment.'<sup>27</sup> International NGOs, as well as the donors, had approved all these themes. Moreover, deviating from early practices, the company started performing at establishment venues, the Alhamra Arts Council, among them.<sup>28</sup> These shifts caused criticism of Ajoka as early as 1995. For example, in a news article, Rubina Saigal, a veteran women's movement activist and one of Ajoka's actors, criticized Ajoka by writing about the conflicts between Ajoka and the Goethe Institute and pointed out the company's shift from collective production processes to the use of bureaucratic methods and from horizontal working structures to hierarchical ones, the latter including the misogyny presented in the plays.<sup>29</sup> This indicates the contradictions in Ajoka's practices right after the period of NGO-ization.

Although Ajoka claims that they never allowed censorship of their plays,<sup>30</sup> the group's archives indicate that there were several events when the company accepted the censorship policy of the Arts Council and other institutions.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Ajoka publicly claims that it had not accepted funding with 'strings attached'. Yet in one of her interviews with Indian journalist Rashmi Talwar, Gauhar spoke openly about how the funds they

received had strings attached, and she called the funding a ‘no-win situation’.<sup>32</sup>

By working on the projects of donors and NGOs, Ajoka’s aesthetics and politics of resistance and class struggle had changed to the neoliberal politics of rights dictated by the donors’ agendas. The following analysis of Ajoka’s recent play *Saira aur Maira* (Saira and Maira are the names of two female protagonists) demonstrates this shift.

### **Ajoka’s *Saira aur Maira***

In October 2019, Ajoka premiered *Saira aur Maira*, a tribute to the late Asma Jahangir (1952–2018) and her legal struggle for the rights of minorities, women, and children. Jahangir was a leading lawyer, an advocate, and a human rights activist. She started her political career protesting against the Zia regime and remained a defender of democracy throughout her life. She was given multiple awards by international and national human rights organizations, including the United Nations.

The Asma Gul and Hina Shehla Legal Aid Cell (AGHS), founded in 1987, asked Ajoka to produce a play on Asma Jahangir’s life for an upcoming memorial conference on her life and work, and it financially supported the play. *Saira aur Maira* is a dramatic reconstruction of three famous legal cases that Jahangir fought as a lawyer, facing severe consequences from the other parties. The cases include the famous case of the honour killing of a twenty-nine-year-old Peshawar woman Samia Sarwar (1999), who wanted a divorce from her abusive husband and was murdered by her own family in AGHS’s office; the marriage case of Saima Waheed (1996); and the blasphemy case of Salamat Maseeh (1993), an eleven-year-old Christian. The writer and the director of the play, Shahid Nadeem, Ajoka’s CEO, stated in a television interview that the real names of the people were not used for the characters because of legal issues. Nonetheless, the play is a tribute to Jahangir, in line with Ajoka’s tradition of producing plays about eminent historical personalities.<sup>33</sup>

Nadeem, in the capacity of Ajoka’s CEO, introduced me to the play in September 2019,

informing me that he was writing a new play on Jahangir’s struggle. The following month, I attended its rehearsals and watched its premiere on 19 October at the Faiz International Festival at the Alhamra, Mall Road, Lahore. The second performance, the following day, was exclusively for official guests of the conference. The play was also performed the following month in Lahore at the same venue, and in Islamabad at the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA). Another performance was given at an exclusive event for the court judges. I attended only the first performance, but a copy of the original script and a video recording of the performance, provided by Ajoka, helped greatly in the writing of this analysis. The online media archive of the three legal cases also proved to be a helpful resource for the analysis. I planned to interview the cast; however, this proved impossible due to Covid-19.

### **The Play in Summary**

The play centres on the stories of Saira and Maira. Saira wants a divorce of her choice, and Maira, a marriage of her choice. Their respective families are the main hindrances in making these life choices. Seema Jameel, a lawyer, defends them in court. She runs a women’s shelter named Aagosh, where both girls take refuge. Maira, from a religious feudal family located in Okara, elopes and marries Irshad, a tutor of her younger brother. Her father sues Irshad for kidnapping his daughter, threatening Maira to withdraw from the marriage. Saira, on the other hand, is from an elite business family in Peshawar. Her mother is a famous doctor, and her father is an educated businessman. Saira wants a divorce from her abusive, drug-addicted husband, but her parents will not allow this. Finding no way out, she runs away from her parents’ home and takes refuge in Aagosh. Jamal defends them both, in addition to Niamat, an eleven-year-old boy accused of blasphemy.

Both families fund media conspiracies that are weaved against Saira, Maira, and Seema at the office of the newspaper *Talqeen* (‘Indoctrination’), headed by the editor Talqeen Shah, who uses the newspaper for his vested

interests by blackmailing people and fabricating sensational news. He also has connections to extremist religious groups. Saira's uncle plans to murder his niece by arranging a meeting with her mother. Saira is murdered at the Agosh office by her uncle and extremist thugs attack Jamal's house and Aagosh. However, the attack is reviled with help from the Governor of Punjab and media channels, including the BBC.

In the end, the court decides in favour of the defendants in all three cases, who thank Seema Jamel. Their success is celebrated at Aagosh. Jamel becomes the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, and is awarded the Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) by the Pakistani government.

### The Politics of Design

The first performance of *Saira aur Maira* was at Alhamra Hall Number 2, a government art and cultural centre in the provincial capital of Lahore. The venue has developed a specific audience over the years and, based on my more than fifteen years of experience in theatre in Lahore, I can state that this audience essentially belongs to the educated middle, upper-middle, and elite classes. The administration of Alhamra maintains strict control over the content of the theatre's activities and promotes art that is in line with the hegemonic project of the nation state.<sup>34</sup> Because the play focused on Jahangir, members of NGOs and the legal community were also present. Ajoka's audience is also predominantly from NGO circles, due to the nature of their work. The venue's atmosphere looked like a social and cultural event of a specific class, appreciating and consuming a cultural and literary performance of intellectual value.

Given that the theme of the play and its focus on women's rights (specifically the right to marriage and divorce), the NGOs-based upper-middle-class audience could be categorized as an already 'convinced' or 'transformed' audience. Since the 1990s, women's rights have been the top priority of multiple foreign donors and NGOs in Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> Michael Kirby criticizes such like-minded audiences as far as the objective of political

theatre is concerned: 'No change will take place if political theatre is performed only for spectators who think the same as the writer/director/performers.'<sup>36</sup> There was a lack of political imperative established beforehand by the choice of audience for the play.

Alhamra Hall's stage has a proscenium arch, multiple entrances, green rooms, prominent divisions of actor and audience spaces, and designed lights, all clearly inspired by western theatre tradition, so different from local traditions. The British introduced the proscenium arch theatre and, in the subcontinent of India, Parsi theatre companies in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai followed suit.<sup>37</sup> In post-Partition Pakistan, the Art Council adopted the colonial legacy by producing English-language plays. This colonial legacy continued in the decor and design of halls, adaptation of European plays, stylized speech patterns, and realistic approaches for performances and sets.<sup>38</sup> Alhamra Hall is the living remnant of the colonial legacy in South Asian theatre.

The set of *Saira aur Maira* was a large black backdrop completely covering the back wall, with black wings for actors' entrances and exits. A one-and-a-half-foot-high fixed wooden platform with two levels occupied the entire downstage centre of the stage. Its white colour against the black backdrop made it very pronounced, and it glowed under the general stage lighting. Although it was on stage throughout the play, the platform was only fully used in the court scenes, where the judge sat on a chair on the highest level of the platform with steps, and both lawyers stood on either side of him on the lowest level of the platform. In the scenes set at Aagosh, some of the women sat on the platform's lower levels, sewing clothes. Overall, this structure was used very minimally. The platform signified the court: its huge volume, prominent position, colour, and lighting gave an elevated feeling to the court and a higher god-like position to the judge and judiciary, showing the court as an important pillar of the state. The set also converted the auditorium into a courtroom where the audience witnessed the cases (Figure 1).

Other locations shown in the play were the women's shelter named Aagosh, the





**Figure 1.** *Saira aur Maira*. Ajoka Theatre. Photograph and copyright courtesy of Ajoka Theatre.

newspaper office, and Seema Jamel's house. Realistic, mobile sets were used to create all these locations, showing tables, chairs, office cupboards, files, books, pictures, sofa, bench, and other objects. The materiality and aesthetics of the stage were visual messages specifically designed for an educated upper-class audience, who would instantly recognize them.

This approach towards sets, creating an illusion of reality on the stage, comes from naturalistic theatre conventions rooted in the bourgeois,<sup>39</sup> commercial, and colonial theatre traditions, in contrast to the simple, suggestive, minimalist and de-colonial approaches of political theatre in the 1980s that were inspired by the political theatres of Brecht, Badal Sircar, and Safdar Hashim. Instead of a real-life setting, Brecht wanted sets to give 'hints'; to give 'statements of greater historical or social interest'.<sup>40</sup> According to radical-left imaginations of aesthetics, the realistic set of *Saira aur Maira* could be categorized as a regressive political act.<sup>41</sup> It does not spur the imagination of the

audience but offers a complete picture without any room for active participation.

Moreover, the fixity of sets and its static presentation killed the idea of transformation and change in both the material and non-material senses of these terms. In Brecht's concept of political theatre, natural and fixed sets are discouraged in favour of design that is always in a state of *becoming*.<sup>42</sup> Political theatre disturbs the idea of the *natural* organization of life, presenting life and things as a result of social relations and power discourses, which can be changed with the actions of the people.

Costumes were realistic too, designed according to the characters to show their social and class status, gender, religious or secular identity, and urban or rural background. The design of these elements in preconceived binaries was to convey clear messages.<sup>43</sup> In Ajoka's plays, a religious person always wears a *shalwar qameez* (long tunic and baggy trousers) and has a beard without a moustache, as exemplified by the character of Maira's father. In contrast, Zahid, a liberal, educated lawyer,

was clean-shaven and in western dress. Similarly, people from the Peshawar region, together with Saira and her family, were presented in traditional Pashtun costumes. This approach is essentialist, looking at things from a specific lens and in fixed binaries. It also limits the imagination of the audience by simplifying complexity (Figure 2).

Narrative-based scenes moved the story by providing details of the events. However, there were also choreographed scenes: two mimes and two dances, which had the core purpose of giving emotional fervour and entertainment to the story. The mime scenes were choreographed with simple swaying movements synchronized with music, and the dances included a simple Bollywood-inspired dance as well as *kikli*, a Punjabi women's folk dance.

The demarcation between the spaces of the actors and the audience was marked by the erection of the invisible fourth wall. The audience was in the dark, which made it difficult

for the actors to observe them. Explaining Brecht's V-effect device, Meg Mumford argues that in this illusionistic state of theatre, 'the actor behaves as if he is the character and as if the audience is not present'.<sup>44</sup> This marginalizes a mutual sense of understanding and the political function of theatre. Consistent with Brechtian views, the fourth wall inhibits the critical capacity of audiences.<sup>45</sup> The demarcation between the two groups is also against Badal Sircar's philosophy of political theatre: he desired direct communication between actors and audiences, enabling this by erasing the boundaries established by stage layout, sets, lights, and costumes so as to make theatre a *human act*.<sup>46</sup> The conventional placement of the audience and actors in Ajo-ka's play reduced communication between the two groups.

Form is as important in political theatre as the content.<sup>47</sup> In Nandi Bhatia's reading, the theatrical realism of *Saira aur Maira* could be categorized as the 'high realism' practised in



**Figure 2.** *Saira aur Maira*. Ajoka Theatre. The father and uncle of Saira wear traditional Pashtun tunics, caps, and shoes. Photograph and copyright courtesy of Ajoka Theatre.

conventional theatre.<sup>48</sup> The central, powerful position of the court could be read as the director's trust in the judicial system – a system that ultimately strengthens the status quo and marginalizes attempts at transformation and change. Secondly, the use of elaborate realistic sets, while leaving limited space for the participation of the audience, is an apolitical approach. The production was weighty, huge, immobile, and expensive, making it hard to perform for diverse audiences, especially working-class audiences in non-theatrical settings. In its decor, design, and infrastructure, it could never be a theatre for the working classes. True to form, out of four performances, two were exclusively for invited audiences, and the other two venues were government cultural spaces in Lahore and Islamabad, thus inaccessible to disadvantaged classes, both socially and financially.

Moreover, the latter two performances were advertised in English on Ajoka's Facebook page, restricting the news to the middle and upper classes proficient in the language and with access to the internet. These factors make it bourgeois theatre rooted in the western tradition, which entertains the Pakistani upper-class audiences exclusively and which stands in stark contrast to the South Asian political theatre traditions of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA)<sup>49</sup> and of Badal Sircar,<sup>50</sup> as well as Safdar Hashmi.<sup>51</sup> In its attempt to make theatre aesthetically 'beautiful', Ajoka stands with conventional theatre in contrast to its earlier political positions.<sup>52</sup>

The form and content of *Saira aur Maira* are interconnected. The patterns and approaches in the design discussed earlier are built on the politics of the narrative and action, evident in the play's choices of language, theme, and its approach towards the issues raised.

### The Language of the Play

The choice of language for a play is fundamental for any theatre-maker.<sup>53</sup> In multilingual and postcolonial Pakistan, where there is a strong hierarchy of languages, the choice of language for theatre becomes a highly political performative action. After the Partition in 1947, the nation-state project of the Pakistani

establishment marginalized the country's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. Due to this policy, East Pakistan separated in 1971 after a violent war; the Bengali language movement had catalyzed the liberation movement. As a colonial legacy, Urdu, in addition to English, emerged as a language of power, status, education, and economic progress in Pakistan. However, the Punjabi language, despite being the majority language in the province, received no state provision. By choosing Urdu as the language for *Saira aur Maira* in the Punjabi-speaking city of Lahore, Nadeem sends a clear message that he accepts the supremacy of the national language and ratifies the state's linguistic and cultural hegemony, which rejects the cultures, languages and subjectivities of diverse communities.

If the choice of Urdu is analyzed in respect of the choices made of having of a state-sponsored venue and an upper-class audience, then that choice can be said to be aligned with the dominant social order. This supports the argument that *Saira aur Maira* was written exclusively for the urban, educated, upper classes. Only the mother of Niamat, in her two very brief appearances on the stage, speaks in Punjabi. By having an uneducated working-class character speak Punjabi, the playwright strengthens the stereotype that uneducated people do not know Urdu and are 'ignorant'. Further, Seema advises Niamat's mother to send him to school, which is also bourgeois and neoliberal thinking, assuming that children should go to school because education is the way to progress. This thinking disregards the contextual situation in Pakistan in which most parents send their children to work instead of school due to financial constraints. Second, although education is considered an 'empowerment' in the neoliberal scheme of things, Fawzia Afzal Khan, in the context of Malala Yousafzai's efforts for the education of Pakistani women and children, pertinently asks 'how, precisely, would it solve the problem of the children living on rubbish mountains, scavenging on rotting food for survival?'<sup>54</sup> Going national (by choosing the language of the dominant order) instead of local is Ajoka's attempt to be a theatre of the mainstream. Instead of



choosing the Urdu language, the choice of Punjabi would have connected Ajoka's play to the struggles of the working classes. This was not the case in *Saira aur Maira*.

### Theatre of Peace and Celebrities

*Saira aur Maira* presents Jahangir as a celebrity. It is important to explore this shift in Ajoka's practice to understand its new politics in the context of 9/11 and the US War on Terror. In her article 'Sufi Politics and the War on Terror in Pakistan', Alix Philippon discusses 'Sufi politics' in Pakistan and the international context. She states that, since the start of the War on Terror, the Pakistani government had included Sufism as a pillar of national identity that challenged the earlier practices and forms of radical Islamic identity and the Talibanization in the country.<sup>55</sup> Several practical steps were taken under this policy to disseminate Sufism through 'editorial activities, the production of CDs, TV or radio programmes, and the organization of Sufi music festivals and conferences'.<sup>56</sup> She argues that 'Sufism has indeed been overwhelmingly politicized through a process of culturalization'.<sup>57</sup>

Most of the Punjabi poets who challenged the oppressive societal divisions of class, gender, religion, and sect were designated as Sufis, and their poetry was promoted to counter Talibanized Islam.<sup>58</sup> Extensive funds were offered to Pakistan specifically for military and security purposes to deal with the Taliban.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, a boom in NGO projects on tolerance, democracy, and peace-building was observed in the country. It also influenced theatre groups to produce plays on similar themes. Concurrently, Musharraf's dictatorial government and NGOs promoted a 'soft' image of Islam.<sup>60</sup> Ajoka produced the play *Bulha* in 2001, incorporating selected 'soft' poetry by classical Punjabi poet Bulleh Shah. Labelled 'Sufi poetry', it was promoted in subsequent years in order to bolster narratives of peace and tolerance. Given the wide acceptance of Bulleh Shah and his poetry among people across the Indo-Pakistani borders, the play became a considerable success, with performances frequently and widely spread. Due to its message, as well as the global war

against extremism at issue, *Ajoka* and its plays became popular among donors.

It is Ajoka's practice to write and produce plays on historical poets and writers celebrated by both the people and the authorities. This practice is appreciated in large sections of society. Hence, several plays on celebrated figures can be seen in Ajoka's list, notably: Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911–1984), an internationally renowned Urdu language poet; Bhagat Kabeer (1398–1518), a mystic poet who was associated with the Bhakti movement of Saints, which promoted ideas of religious harmony, non-violence, devotion, and ideas against the caste system; Saadat Hassan Manto (1912–1955), an Indo-Pak Urdu language short-story writer and playwright; Bulleh Shah (1650–1757), a classical Punjabi language poet; the Mughal prince Dara (1615–1659); and, now, Asma Jahangir.

However, the productions featuring these figures have been criticized for not covering and emphasizing their revolutionary, pro-people, and anti-state spirit. Instead, their poetry and other writings are utilized to fuel the neoliberal project of peace, tolerance, and democracy. For example, it is a common criticism of Ajoka's play *Bulha* (2001) that only the soft poetry of Bulleh Shah was chosen for the play. The political worker and playwright Shabbir Hussain Shabbir criticized Ajoka's *Bulha* in a personal interview, saying that it did not raise the important political questions as to why Bulleh Shah was declared an infidel by the state, or why an ordinary person like Bulleh Shah would have threatened the state.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the anti-state features of the writers chosen had been eliminated for selectively presented productions. Distorting history by recreating their works according to donor requirements is a process of depoliticization that damages the leftist project in existence in the country at its very core.

Moreover, focusing on celebrated characters is a mainstream, populist activity, which uses known brands to market your own brand; and market brands consume celebrities to sell their products. In his *Celebrity Humanitarianism*, Ilan Kapoor exposes the ideologies of NGOs, international charities, and big corporations in which celebrities use humanitarian

activities to market their own brands; through this, he argues, they legitimize and promote 'neoliberal capitalism and inequality'.<sup>62</sup> It can be argued that, by exploiting celebrated poets, writers, and activists, Ajoka promotes its own brand along with the neoliberal ideology of peace and tolerance. Over the years, Ajoka has established itself as a progressive brand against the backdrop of a fundamentalist, fanatic, and hate-ridden society.

### Historicizing *Saira aur Maira*

In his critique of celebrity humanitarianism and development discourse, Ilan Kapoor illustrates how ideology works by giving an example from Slavoj Žižek: 'It doesn't only matter what you say (or see), it also matters what you don't say.'<sup>63</sup> For Žižek, critiquing ideology necessitates 'uncovering the unsaid'. It is also the task of the critic to uncover what has been hidden. Kamran Asdar Ali introduces the concept of 'selective amnesia' by giving the example of the Pakistani State, which had eliminated the history of East Pakistan from its historiography in order to hide the military's war crimes of rape and killings of innocent people.<sup>64</sup>

*Saira aur Maira* also exemplifies selective amnesia because it produces a selective version of Jahangir's life. Firstly, the script omitted certain aspects of that life, and the legal cases at issue; secondly, the director further censored the script. Why was this done? The answer lies in the nature of the content being hidden or censored. Following Žižek and Kapoor, it is necessary to 'uncover the unsaid' in an ideological critique of Ajoka.

The play ignores Jahangir's political stance against Pakistan's powerful military institution. She was the most vocal person in Pakistan's history to speak against the extra-constitutional activities of the military establishment: its corruption, arrangements of forced disappearances, and political manoeuvring against civil supremacy. Jahangir was one of few lawyers who dared to fight missing-persons cases and, as a result, she had to face strong criticism from military-backed religious groups. Her patriotism was put into question and she was branded a traitor.<sup>65</sup>

In 2017, Jahangir openly opposed the country's military courts. The play, ignoring this aspect of Jahangir's life, chooses three of her cases that the neoliberal paradigm can easily defend. Although the blasphemy case could be controversial, the playwright deals with the subject in such an elusive way that no space for controversy is left. Nadeem does not take a political position on the law but a moral stand on the innocence of the victim. Why did the playwright not choose legal cases in which Jahangir voiced support for missing persons or voiced opposition to the military courts? The answer to this question is obvious in the Pakistani context: the company did not want to criticize the military, for to do so would have a price. Ajoka can criticize the civil government, Mullahs, the police, or the courts because that is acceptable to, and even supported by, the military establishment, but criticizing the military would be too risky. Radical political work countering the state in Pakistan involves countering the dominant military.<sup>66</sup>

The director's hesitancy can be observed when the text of the script is compared to the performance script for the stage. In Scene 25 of the original script, Seema narrates courageous stories about her late father, who was a politician, to her daughters. In one of the dialogues, she tells them that 'the military rulers used to tremble in facing him'.<sup>67</sup> However, this sentence was omitted in the performance. Whether it was a case of self-censorship, or a decision taken by the authorities of Alhamra Hall, is unknown. Nevertheless, the director had accepted the decision.

Similarly, Saira's story misrepresents the actual legal case of Samia Sarwar (1999). According to the play, Saira wanted a divorce because her husband was abusive. In reality, Samia Sarwar wanted a divorce so she could marry her new lover, Nadir Mirza, a captain in the army.<sup>68</sup> Samia eloped with him to Lahore, but, when they ran out of money, he left her and returned to Peshawar. After his betrayal, she chose to stay in Dastak, the shelter house of AGHS in Lahore, knowing that going home would cost her life. The play hides these facts and creates a false narrative about her as an abused wife, which aligns well with the NGO paradigm for addressing women's issues.

Moreover, certain words from the script were censored for the performance, among them *beghairat* ('sexy'; Urdu slang for a person who has no honour), *zaani* (adulterer), *zaania* (adulteress), *zana bilraza* (adultery with consent), *qadiani fitna*,<sup>69</sup> *jallad* (an Islamic executioner), *mazhab* (religion),<sup>70</sup> *aamir* (dictator), and *munkar-e-Khatam-Nabowat* (a Muslim who does not believe that the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, is the last messenger of God – a crime punishable by death). These are all morally, religiously, and politically charged words that could incite controversy. At the same time, they signify the seriousness and sensitivity of the situation, and the misogyny, biases, and intolerance embedded in the language, human behaviours, and societal practices. Censoring these words might avoid controversy, but it also turns a blind eye to the severity of the issues, thereby depoliticizing them.

It can be argued that the selection of certain facts and the rejection of others is an example of selective amnesia. It is an attempt to maintain the status quo by deciding not to challenge the dominant discourses of power. The director did not say a word about these changes. However, in an interview for the television channel Geo News, he said that some names had been changed in the play for legal reasons, and a fictional element had also been added for entertainment purposes, but that 80 per cent of the play was based on Jahangir's legal struggle.<sup>71</sup>

### Neoliberal Approaches to the Issue

Under the funding regimes, Ajoka's recent approach towards sociopolitical issues was informed by development discourse's neoliberal values, and this approach marginalizes class and evades material analysis. The celebration of selective parts of Jahangir's life was evidence of such shifts in Ajoka's practice. Jahangir was a symbol of the NGO-based movement of advocacy and human rights. During the rise of NGOs, she co-founded AGHS Legal Aid Cell (1987) and Dastak with her sister Hina Jillani. Both are foreign-funded NGOs providing free legal services to religious minorities, children, and vulnerable women.<sup>72</sup> During her career, Jahangir won

many national and international human rights awards from the Pakistani government and international donors, including the United Nations. With her privileged background, she enjoyed close relations with the United States, which provided her with a safe position from which she could be critical of the establishment.<sup>73</sup> By celebrating her life, *Saira aur Maira* actually celebrates the NGO struggle – a clear message for the neoliberal reformist agenda.

Development discourse does not locate problems in class and structural terms but resolves them through managerial and technical solutions at the micro-level. In his article 'NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism', James Petras argues that 'NGO ideology depends heavily on essentialist identity politics', seeing class analysis as a reductionist approach.<sup>74</sup> He further proposes that the identity politics of NGOs, a new politics of post-modernism, 'does not challenge the male-dominated elite world of IMF privatizations, multi-national corporations and local landlords'. Instead, patriarchy is challenged at the micro-level of home and family, thus focusing on the exploited people.

Similarly, Asim Sajjad Akhtar argues that NGOs do not represent the labouring classes, but promote liberal visions.<sup>75</sup> Such is the case, Akhtar indicates, of the evictions of urban squatters in Pakistan. Instead of looking at this as a matter of class conflict with the state, NGOs took it as a problem of international human rights, and their strategy was to engage in 'advocacy and lobbying'.<sup>76</sup> NGOs do not challenge the state or the class-based structures that perpetuate such violations. Akhtar also considers NGOs as negotiators between the state and other powerful groups, which perpetuates the state's class war against the working classes, imperial forces, and local propertied classes.<sup>77</sup> In this way, NGOs mystify the class question as well as alternatives for a transformed world. By the same token, the play *Saira aur Maira* does not analyze from a class perspective, looking at the problem of violence against women only through the micro-lens of family issues. Nor does the play consider the patriarchy embedded in the entire social structure. It offers merely a

technical solution in the neoliberal language of advocacy and rights, strengthening the prevalent systems of law and justice.

Both Saira and Maira are educated individuals from the upper class, and both come into conflict with their families over marriage and divorce. Saira is killed in the name of honour. However, Ajoka's play failed to analyze their upper-class background. The perception that honour is linked to female behaviour is more prevalent in affluent than working classes, as can be deduced from the practice of *purdah* (veil) by South Asian Muslim women, which is related to a religious perspective on good behaviour, but is an upper-class phenomenon rather than a lower-class one.<sup>78</sup> It is linked to a family's 'respectability and status',<sup>79</sup> and is used to 'maintain control over wealth and property', which makes it 'more important for the wealthy upper classes who have property to protect than [for] poorer lower classes'.<sup>80</sup>

In contemporary Pakistan, working-class women do not generally practise *purdah*.<sup>81</sup> The working classes generally do not follow rigid forms of religion; they visit shrines and spiritual places where there is devotional music and dance – signs of 'subaltern resistance' countering dogmatic forms of religion.<sup>82</sup> However, as soon as the working classes are upwardly mobile, their women start practising *purdah* and become potential objects of 'honour', as well as susceptible to 'killing'.

In the Pakistani context, men treat women as their property and objects of honour.<sup>83</sup> From a Marxist perspective, this commodification is linked to ownership of property and its transfer, which sets the stage for men to control women.<sup>84</sup> Men feel entitled to buy and sell women.<sup>85</sup> In the feudal families of Punjab and Sindh, women are married to the Holy Quran to save the family inheritance.<sup>86</sup> In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, even brides are sold.<sup>87</sup> In this scenario, honour killings hide the object of the killings, which is to take the woman's land or capital.<sup>88</sup> Dowry deaths are also hidden, indicating a correlation between status, class, and honour.<sup>89</sup> Caste also plays a part in marriage and violence against women. Cousin marriages (a caste-based phenomenon) strengthen patriarchy,<sup>90</sup> and are a common tactic for retaining

property within the family.<sup>91</sup> Love, on the other hand, is considered a low moral act and a strain on the modesty of women. Actually, love and love marriages are rebellions against the interests of class, caste, and clan. The above examples show that religion has little relevance in these matters, instead meaning to protect class and capital interests.<sup>92</sup>

The play does not explore this societal complexity and totally ignores the interplay of class, caste, and family background when addressing the cases of Saira and Maira. When documenting the case of Samia Sarwar ('Saira'), Swedish writer and journalist Karin Alfredsson writes that Samia's parents accepted to help her in her divorce on the condition that she remarry within the family, given the fact she had an extramarital affair.<sup>93</sup> It is not the objective here to deny Samia's agency in deciding her life choices. The point is that the play does not cover salient factors of a class-based, tribal, feudal, and capitalist society: it fails, then, to address the multifaceted reasons behind honour killing. Much the same occurs in the case of Saima Waheed ('Maira'). Saima fell in love with Irshad, her younger brother's home tutor, whose profession indicates his lower-class background – a possible reason for Saima's parents' rejection of him. Saima's father subsequently arranged her marriage to a doctor, recently returned from Dubai, in an attempt to convince her to leave Irshad. Being a doctor and working in Dubai indicate high economic status thereby showing that her parents wanted her to marry into her own economic level, which is common practice.

Instead of acknowledging the precepts of political theatre with its references to the socio-economic aspects of power,<sup>94</sup> Ajoka's play focuses on religious practices, positioning families against their daughters in the name of religion. Moreover, the families are aided by Talqeen Shah, the editor of the *Talqeen* newspaper, who runs a character-assassination media campaign against Seema, exploiting the religious sentiments of the general public against the 'un-Islamic' acts of both girls and mobilizing religious groups to protest and to attack the Aagosh office and Seema's house. Talqeen's assistant is named Janooni, which

literally means 'fanatic', and the term is commonly used in Pakistan for religious zealots. Talqeen also means 'indoctrination', and is very close to the word *tablighi*, which means 'preaching Islam to others'. In Pakistan, there is an organized Tablighi Jamat, an association of preachers who go around the world to preach Islam. They are a symbol of dogmatic religion and fundamentalism and are considered a security threat by some South Asian and western intellectuals because of their indirect links with the terrorist activities of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.<sup>95</sup>

Tablighis and the Taliban share the Deobandi school of thought. In Ajoka's plays, all Mullahs or conservative Muslim characters are personifications of Tablighis. These descriptions and signs inform the play; they place religion and religious forces in conflict with young women's freedom to choose; they are the cause of the honour killing of Saira. However, honour killing is not limited to Muslims or to Pakistan. Amir Jafri, in his scholarly study of honour killing in Pakistan, makes it clear that the act of honour killing 'knows no religious, cultural, racial, or geographical boundaries'.<sup>96</sup> He also notes that there is no space in Islam for the violent act of honour killing: it is performed by 'men who interpret the sacred texts according to their tribal vision of life'.<sup>97</sup>

Without considering class and the cultural dynamics of Pakistani society, Pakistani humanitarian and advocacy NGOs funded by western donors take a stance against all shades of religious groups. Akhtar posits that the NGOs' criticism of the religious right alone is an attempt to distract attention from the real fight against imperialist forces and the state.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, the Left sees the Right as the product of the Afghan War of the 1980s.<sup>99</sup> Akhtar does not deny the dangers of the religious right, but points out the short-sightedness of NGOs and liberals who ignore the fact that a large percentage of the country's population is under the influence of Islam.<sup>100</sup> This shows their alienation from ground realities; they blame the religious right and ignore the fact that sociocultural values are the product of various economic, political, and historical processes.

The play explores these issues through advocacy of equal rights and the provision of shelter to both young women in Aagosh. NGOs support managerial solutions, which, in this play, are manifest in the legal experts protecting the rights of the victims, while consideration of political questions is cast aside. Sangeeta Kamat, when analyzing Indian NGOs, argues that development discourse does not take into account the class conflict integral to the organization of social relations between people, seeing the matter only as one of 'needs' and 'absences', further separating economics from politics.<sup>101</sup> Development programmes provide poor people the 'things' they need, and this apolitical approach conceals the 'relations between people' – and the inequality between them. The discourse of equal rights under state law protects and perpetuates the inequalities between social groups in a society heavily structured on class distinction.<sup>102</sup>

In Kamat's reading, *Saira aur Maira* is a manifestation of development discourse. Saira, Maira, and Niamat need the rights absent in their lives. The NGO (namely, here, Aagosh) helped all three, through human rights advocacy, to gain these rights from the judiciary and the state. However, this approach does not address the power relations that produced those inequalities or absences of rights. Rights are not things: they are aspects of the power struggle between people, groups, and institutions in a contested political space. The play's solution simply to take the rights that the court gives does not address the patriarchy structurally embedded in the system. For example, it has been observed that government authorities avoid involvement in honour-killing cases; if ever they were involved, they would help the perpetrator, thus continuing the practice's inherent gender discrimination.<sup>103</sup> This inequality on the structural level, with patriarchy in government, makes it less likely for a victim to receive justice.<sup>104</sup> The play, following an NGO approach, does not delve into structural inequality, offering, instead, the jargon of 'rights', 'justice', and 'advocacy'.



Moreover, the play establishes the idea that the state is a neutral body, which it is thus the responsibility of civil society to guide in matters of conflict. In Scene 9 (in both the script and production), a discussion on Niamat's death sentence for blasphemy occurs in the elite home of Seema's family. Throughout this discussion, the playwright connects the three institutions – the State, the Judiciary, and Civil Society – and their responsibilities. In this constructed narrative, the state is a neutral body, spared from the responsibility of providing justice; civil society is responsible for guiding the judiciary to make just decisions; the state is obliged to implement these decisions. Civil society is depicted as the 'eyes of judiciary', which has to struggle to protect people's rights. In the play, however, instead of the state, it is the NGO Aagosh that provides shelter and protection:

TEHSEEN [*daughter*]: But Mum, how can they give a killing punishment to a fourteen-year-old?

T.J. [*husband*]: Not a killing punishment, a death sentence.

TAZEEN [*daughter*]: But it's the same, isn't it, Mum?

SEEMA: Yes, dear! The death penalty is killing by the state.

TEHSEEN: Can't the state see he is just a little boy?

TAZEEN: The state is blindfolded, silly! Haven't you seen the statue of the Goddess of State?

T.J.: hat's the Goddess of Justice.

TEHSEEN: But it's the same thing.

SEEMA: There is a difference. Judges order punishments, the state only implements them.

TAZEEN: But why is Justice blindfolded?

SEEMA: Because we are their eyes – we, the Civil Society, the lawyers.

TEHSEEN: If you are the Judge's eyes, why couldn't they see how an illiterate boy wouldn't write something on the wall, and why would he?

SEEMA: Maybe the fault is within us.<sup>105</sup>

In the context of Pakistan, 'civil society' is a phrase synonymous with NGOs.<sup>106</sup> Akhtar argues that 'civil society' is a neoliberal term, along with 'participation', 'liberation', 'change', and 'community', which were introduced by development discourse in Pakistan during the 1990s. These terms have replaced the Marxist terms 'class' and 'class-based

struggles'.<sup>107</sup> This replacement is the result of the onslaught of donor funding.<sup>108</sup>

The term 'civil society', Petras also argues, 'facilitates the collaboration of NGOs with financial institutions and corporations in managing their projects and business interests [that sustain] neoliberal economies'.<sup>109</sup> The Musharraf regime even included civil society in the form of members of NGOs in his cabinet. Ironically, these were the same individuals who had taken anti-dictatorship positions in the past.<sup>110</sup> *Saira aur Maira* does the same by helping to build people's trust in the institutions of the state and by supporting the neoliberal model of rights and advocacy. NGOs imagine the change within the parameters of existing structures and social relations, thus maintaining the status quo of power relations.<sup>111</sup>

*Saira aur Maira* resolves the issues examined in the plot through the existing system's institutions. It shows that Seema wins all three cases, and everyone celebrates this success. Such 'success stories' become the model for NGOs. AGHS still uses these cases like medals on their chest. Kamat argues that development discourse makes a few individuals models for the rest, who get nothing.<sup>112</sup> This preference for 'individuality' rather than collective identity and collective justice is a depoliticizing project in its very essence.

Although the play demonstrates that Seema won all three cases, the reality was starkly different, and the aftermath far from victorious. While it is true that Maira and Irshad won their case, they knew they could not continue to live in the country. Neither the state nor the NGOs could provide them with protection. They fled Pakistan straight after the verdict in the case. Niamat also had to flee the country to save his life.<sup>113</sup> However, one of his alleged uncles in the lawsuit and the judge who acquitted them were killed.<sup>114</sup> Her own family murdered 'Saira' (Samia) in the Aagosh office. Her killer was not punished by the Pakistani legal system. Seema filed a case against the uncle involved in this murder, but the court acquitted him, as per the legal forgiveness granted by her family.

Jafri notes that 'the state . . . in its judicial discourse presents obstacles to full redress of honour killing in Pakistan';<sup>115</sup> and, as per the Islamic ordinances of *qisas* and *diyat*, killers receive impunity from the family of the murdered person. This situation reminds Kamat that taking rights from the court does not address the change in power relations at the structural level. The play does not include these facts in the performance. Neither does it ask the difficult questions: Why was Saira killed? Why couldn't the legal system punish her killer? Why was Niamat's judge killed? Why did Maira, Irshad, Niamat, and his second uncle flee the country? Instead, the play celebrates the success of Seema Jameel.

## Conclusion

As the above discussion seeks to show, *Saira aur Mair* belongs, aesthetically, within the western theatre tradition rather than the political theatre of Pakistan, which started in the 1980s. Its choice of performance language follows the national hegemonic project of the state, which undermines regional languages. Its politics are informed by NGO development discourse in which issues are analyzed through the lens of neoliberalism, devoid of class and materialist perspectives. Change, in this approach, is envisioned through the idiom of rights negotiated between the state and civil society; the people are powerless in this equation. In Badal Sircar's words, the play does not show reality but an 'illusion of reality'; it mystifies the reality of the ruling classes as the reality of the people. The play thus strengthens the status quo and makes the definition of political theatre redundant in the South Asian postcolonial context.

The analysis of *Saira aur Mair* presented here leads to the conclusion that Ajoka has abandoned its practice of political theatre of the 1980s. The company started with the aim of resistance against the state, taking the side of the powerless classes. Now, however, Ajoka is empowering the state in its linguistic, legal, and political hegemony. Having previously rejected performing in the state's buildings, it now performs primarily in state-sponsored Art Councils. Previously, its aesthetic and

theatre settings were simple, inexpensive, portable, thought provoking, and relevant to the working classes; now the company's focus is on entertainment, using heavy sets and settings to appeal to the upper classes. In the 1980s, Ajoka's themes were determined by Marxist ideology; now it promotes the neo-liberal ideology of development organizations. Politically, Ajoka now stands directly opposite the Ajoka of the 1980s.

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4. Badal Sircar, *The Changing Language of Theatre: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Memorial Lecture* (Calcutta: Bit Blits, 1982), p. 20.
5. Sarwat Ali, interview with the author, Lahore, 2018.
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9. James Petras, 'NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, XXIX, No. 4 (1999), p. 429–40 (p. 429).
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26. 'A Street Theatre and Many More', *Daily Dawn* (26 August 1995), Ajoka archives.
27. Reshmi Talwar, 'Using Theatre to Rebel without a Pause', *Tribune on Sunday* (23 November 2003), Ajoka archives.
28. Sarwat Ali, 'Review', *News on Friday* (21 October 1994); Abbas Ali Siddiqui, 'Manto Remembered', *Nation* (16 February 1994); Ajoka archives.
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30. Shahid Nadeem, interview with the author, Lahore, 18 July 2018.
31. Rahman Rashed, 'Takey Da Tamasha: A Preview', *Nation* (11 December 1991), Ajoka archives.
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33. 'Saira aur Maira Dramey Ki Tashkeel: Ajoka Theatre Ka Asma Jahangir Ko Khiraj-e-Aqeedat' ['Production of *Saira aur Maira*: Ajoka Theatre's tribute to Asma Jahangir'], Geo News TV (17 October 2019).
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36. Michael Kirby, 'On Political Theatre', *The Drama Review: TDR*, XIX, No. 2 (June 1975), p. 129–35 (p. 135).
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51. See Hashmi, *Puchaan Dasaan*; V. Raghavan, 'Cross-Continental Subversive Strategies and Thematic and Methodological Affinities in the Plays of Dario Fo and Safdar Hashmi', PhD dissertation (University of Calicut, 2007); and Eugène van Erven, 'Plays, Applause, and Bullets: Safdar Hashmi's Street Theatre', *TDR/The Drama Review* XXXIII, No. 4 (1989), p. 32–47.
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