In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

Daily Outlook AFGHANISTAN
The Leading Independent Newspaper

April 02, 2018

We Must Negate Superstitions

There are different types of beliefs among human beings and unfortunately all of them are not based on logic or scientific thinking. There are many beliefs among human beings that seem absurd to the logical mind and sometimes it seems very weird how those thought have penetrated within human societies and within their thinking. Nevertheless, they exist and are a reality now.

Superstitions are also the types of beliefs that are not based on logical interpretations. They are based on beliefs which are supernatural and are not necessarily governed by physical laws. They basically try to prognosticate the happenings in daily life on the basis of certain incidents that have already occurred.In this way the result of a particular happening or incident is necessitated by an earlier happening not based on the theory of cause and effect and they, in scientific interpretations, are much apart from each other.

Superstitions exist in most of the cultures of the world. They are able to make their way through the generations as a part of inherited beliefs. Superstitions are also linked with the religions, but they are not the production of religions. However, there are superstitions existing in most of the religions of the world. Further, the religious people are more likely to accept the superstitions than the non-religious people.

One of the basic reasons of the transmission of superstitions and their survival is through the sanctity that is preserved for traditional values and the interests that are maintained for the folk stories and legends. In addition, there is a tendency in most of the people not to question the superstitions that are transferred to them. At the same time it must also be kept in mind that most of the superstitions are taught to the people as a part of their nourishment, while they are too small to differentiate between what is logical and what is not. It can also be observed that superstitions are more common in backward societies that are marked with religious fundamentalism and hard-line traditional values.

Superstitions may affect people in different ways. First of all the most dominating impact of superstitions is that it keeps the people away from finding out the real cause of a particular happening. Relying on the given interpretations of the happenings they do not strive for the truth and remain unbothered.This does not guarantee any struggle on their part for the improvement of their ideas and the eradication of false ideas from society. Moreover, the minds that believe in superstitions can be easily utilized by those who have their business based on such superstitious beliefs.

Afghan society is a kind of society that is marked with extremist religious beliefs and traditional values. There is great shortage of analytical way of thinking in ordinary life. Most of the Afghan people do not bother to challenge the superstitious ideas that are transferred to them from their ancestors. They believe on them blindly and even suggest others and their next generations to keep them intact.

Afghan women in particular are overwhelmingly influenced by the superstitions.Because of their limited exposure to the external world and modern thinking their sets of beliefs are dominantly marked with the superstitions. The dominating role of superstitions in Afghan society provides a golden chance to those who know how to utilize them to earn money. Traditional Mullahs in this regard play a dominant role. They hijack the superstitious thinking and keep on filling their pockets. We can find a lot of people in our society seeking for the services of Mullahs for making their present problems disappear or guaranteeing a prosperous future.Mullahs in this regard give them talisman which they have to tie around their necks or keep them in their pockets or even put them in their pillows and they are thought to bring good luck to them. If by chance the wearer of the talisman is gifted in some way or the other, the Mullahs become famous and have lucrative business. No one even dare to question their qualification or understanding regarding religious teachings. Moreover, there are not many people who dare to question whether such acts are religious or not.

Superstitions are undoubtedly illogical and take us away from reality, making us create a world of imaginations where things happen on the basis of false interpretations. Superstitions should be completely neglected and must be questioned seriously, especially in the societies like Afghanistan. Our people need to have proper understanding of the matters concerning their life and society and have to carry out necessary measures to curb them.

They have to develop a scientific approach, wherein they have to challenge the superstitious beliefs that are transmitted to them from different sources, most of which are untrustworthy. They also have to keep in mind that superstitions are not appreciated by religion Islam.

Islam has clearly asked human beings to think appropriately before forming a belief. There are three stages in Islam that a Muslim has to go through before establishing firm beliefs. They are Ilm-ul-Yaqin, Ain-ul-Yaqin and Haq-ul-Yaqin. Without going through these three stages a Muslim does not have to establish a belief. Have we been doing it?

Will new approaches end the war in Afghanistan?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Apparently more than 20 countries and organizations for the duration of the two-day Tashkent Conference agreed that peace and security in Afghanistan were essential for prosperity in the region and Afghanistan. A joint declaration issued at the end of the conference took place in the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent, noted the signatories' "strong backing for the National Unity Government's offer to launch direct talks with the Taliban, without any preconditions."They also called upon the Taliban to "accept this offer and opportunities for a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.

It follows the recent Kabul conference in which President Ghani offered the precondition talks and promise do allow the Taliban to establish itself as a political party and said he would work to remove sanctions on the militant group, among other incentives, if it joined the government in peace negotiations. In turn, the militants would have to recognize the Kabul government and respect the rule of law. Meanwhile, most Afghan people and political parties urge Taliban to use the opportunity and present their own wants instead of killing and destructions. Accordingly, it was emphasized that we must have the courage to listen to grievances, analyses the root causes and drivers of conflict, and hear a diversity of proposals for reconciliation. Nevertheless, Taliban has not formally announced their stance, but earlier insisted in direct talks with the United States. The Taliban also says that NATO forces must withdraw before negotiations can begin. Meanwhile the United States has refused to withdraw troops and on contrast deployed some fresh troops in Afghanistan and insisted that the Afghan government must play a lead role in peace negotiations. Also earlier President Ghani had said that the threats facing the international community were from transnational terrorist networks and transnational criminal organizations. "Both are deeply interconnected, do not respect borders, and our global in reach and influence."

Based on President's expressions, to effectively confront these threats, it is essential that the region take away the platform inside Afghanistan that the Taliban provides to transnational terrorist and criminal networks. "Inclusion of Taliban through a political process in the fabric of society and polity will enable national, international and regional energies to focus on the threats of terror and criminality."It is for the interest of countries in the region to take action and do their best to stop the conflicts in Afghanistan, otherwise the conflict could spread to neighboring countries and eventually destabilize the entire region.

So, the international community, especially important organizations like the UN and EU's cooperation is vital for boosting the peace process. Meanwhile regional powers, especially Afghanistan's immediate neighbors, have influence over the Taliban, they can convince the Taliban leaders to sit down with the government of Afghanistan to reach an agreement on ending the war in their country. The Central Asia countries and Afghanistan are united by a shared history, culture and geography. They have an enormous potential for jointly tackling regional threats, increasing trade and connectivity. The conference indeed gives appropriate prominence to Afghanistan's neighbors and partners, as well as countries that have also supported the post-2001 political order and reconstruction effort. It is important that the region should acknowledge the Afghan-owned nature of the peace process and commit to accepting the agreement reached between the Taliban and the government.

More specifically, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is very important. Only Kabul and Islamabad together can deal with the Taliban, politically if possible, and militarily if necessary. Counterinsurgencies are essentially a governance issue. Afghanistan needs to conciliate the areas under the Taliban control, and Pakistan should help by making its lands inhospitable to them. And both must work on joint border management and resolution of the refugee problem. This is a long-term plan, but it is doable. U.S. engagement with them would be essential to their success, as would be China's involvement. Recently, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif said bringing Taliban to the negotiating table and establishing peace and stability in Afghanistan is a shared responsibility of the international community. Addressing the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan in Uzbekistan, he said Pakistan has been consistently stressing for the resolution of Afghan conflict through a political settlement. He emphasized the need of a regional approach for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, and the region.The Foreign Minister reiterated Pakistan's support for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's national peace and reconciliation plan unveiled during Kabul process meeting, and his offer of peace talks to Taliban under an Afghan-led and owned process. Khawaja Asif said there is a need of collective pressure on Taliban to shun violence and join the peace process. The foreign minister expressed concerns over unchecked proliferation of Daesh and phenomenal increase in drug production in Afghanistan. He emphasized the need for cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors to prevent cross-border movement of terrorists and criminal networks.

Lastly, the insecurity crisis has really reached in the level that no countries would be safe if the new approaches fail to resolve the problems whereas a fierce new fighting season is expected to kick off in the spring and summer. Terror groups frequently took lives of thousands of civilians from both countries. Hopefully, this must be the high time to end the crisis by friendly and fundamental agreements. However, such hopes and approaches have been repeating in one way or other ways since 2001 and it seems that talks without collective will ensuring all parts of concerns would be fruitless.

Mohammad Zahir Akbari is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at mohammadzahirakbari@gmail.com

Partnerships should be based on solidarity and trust, and not on greed

By Shobha Shukla

Partnerships that are critically important to progress towards a better world where a just social order is a reality for everyone, must be based on solidarity and trust, and not on greed. So believes Wardarina Thaib, who works at Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and is co-chair of Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (AP-RCEM), which is a platform for civil society organisations (CSOs) in Asia Pacific region to engage with different processes at the United Nations (UN).

Wardarina looks like a simple feminist next door, with a big smile on her face. But her work is about dismantling patriarchy and corporate power. She was in conversation with CNS (Citizen News Service) on the sidelines of the 5th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) intergovernmental meeting held in Thailand on the theme of 'Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.'

Here are some excerpts of this exclusive interview:
Countries are aggressively promoting public private partnerships (PPPs) to achieve SDGs. How are PPPs impacting progress on development justice in the Asia Pacific region?

Wardarina: "The governments, as well as the UN, have been harping upon the use of public private partnerships (PPP), which is very problematic, as it diminishes the role of the state as a duty bearer, and it also diminishes the rights of civil society as rights holders. PPPs are inundating various sectors- health, education, basic services—all of which are obligations of the state towards its people, but are now going into private hands. Thus governments are selling people's rights to the corporations. It is not only AP-RCEM and the people's movements that have been rejecting these PPPs. The Special Rapporteur on Education too has said that it is not good to give all away to the corporations. There are other ways of doing partnerships—what we call the public public partnerships—a partnership that is not based on wealth or greed, but is based on solidarity and trust."

What about multi stakeholder partnerships?
Wardarina: "This is yet another jargon used around sustainable development. We have to be very careful on the word of partnerships. There must be some qualifiers and criteria—what kind of partnerships do we want, who would be the partners, what safeguards have to be put in place—only them can we talk about multi stakeholder partnerships. One talks about multi-stakeholder partnerships having civil society, corporations and state actors at equal footing. But it can never be equal, what with a long history of inequality and disparity faced by civil society in terms of resources."

What safe guards can be put in place to ensure that corporations are not able to dilute or water down the sustainable development process?
Wardarina: "Having such safeguards is very important, yet challenging, knowing how strongly corporate power is influencing the discussions around sustainable development agenda. The International Business of Commerce is now one of the observers at the UN. And as an observer, they have the privilege of sitting together and having discussions with governments, and also lobbying with the governments. Contrast this with the 3 minute time allotted to civil society major group to make their speech in inter governmental process.

In order to make the corporations accountable, we will have to change the current system of neoliberal economy that benefits just a few. Wondering where the money to implement SDGs will come from, the UN and some developed countries are more aligned in favour of involving corporations, who, for their own benefit, are just too eager to enter into the discussions on SDGs,. Having said that, I agree that in the health sector, WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is a good example that talks about conflict of interest with the tobacco industry. For us, in the conversations on Green Climate Fund we have some similar criteria for the corporations who will fund certain projects. They should not have any bad track record about environmental destruction or human rights violations."

How can APRCEM feed into the process of UN treaty on business and human rights?
Wardarina: "AP-RCEM was established with the aim of being a platform to engage with the UN system across the region. For now, AP-RCEM's entry point into the SDGs process is at the regional level. But we are yet to discuss how we will engage with business and human rights, even though there are many members in AP-RCEM and in its constituencies who are working closely on this issue.

We have to look into SDGs critically, focussing on the existing contradictions, and not just on their progress and implementation. For us the contradictions are that along with the SDGs, we also have a lot of unjust trade and investment agreements, massive land and resource grabbing, patriarchy and fundamentalism, militarism and conflict, retaliatory governance. All these need to be addressed, if we aim to achieve the sustainable development goals.

AP-RCEM has been documenting these systemic issues that are impeding sustainable development. One area in which we can engage with business and human rights is to collate case studies on the component of trade and investment agreements and corporate power."

What, according to you, is a sustainable and resilient society?
Wardarina: "I do not like the word resilience. It is like putting a sort of award on communities for being resilient, while there is no concrete action to actually address the root structural causes that force them to be resilient. It is not fair for communities to be pushed to the wall all the time. For me the key meaning of resilience is active and meaningful action—working together collectively to demand the state and non state actors to be accountable. That should be our resilience. Rather than make people more resilient, in the strict sense of the word, we must talk about addressing systemic issues and making the system more resilient, through inclusive policies. Sustainable societies are those which have an economic model that is for the people, where there is equal distribution of power, wealth and resources among its members, and basic services are available to all so that everyone is able to live a decently comfortable life with dignity."

Note: APFSD 2108, where several governments, other stakeholders, including over 100 CSOs gathered under the umbrella of AP-RCEM, reviewed the cluster of Sustainable Development Goals to be discussed later in July 2018 at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) - SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG 15 (life on land) and SDG 17 (partnership for the Goals) - as well as the interlinkages within the cluster and with other Goals.

Shobha Shukla is the Managing Editor of CNS Citizen News Service. Follow her on Twitter @Shobha1Shukla or be welcome to visit: www.citizen-news.org