

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



April 09, 2018

Bridging the Gap Between Classes

A glance at Afghan society will clearly depict that there is a marked division between the rich and the poor. This division has existed for a long period in Afghan history. When the society was overwhelmingly tribal and feudal and was led by monarchy, the situation was no different. The king, his relatives, the landlords, and tribal heads had most of the authority and power by dint of their wealth, while the poor people, mostly farmers, had to face lack of resources, wealth and ultimately power.

The situation has not improved much even in today's Afghanistan. Though, the country is said to be democratic, it still remains tribal to a large extent. And, more unfortunate is the fact that the socio-political setup has not changed much in its essence. There have been certain changes in the appearance or the attire but the infra-structure still remains the same.

Afghan society can be easily divided into two classes, factions or strata, whatever they are named. There are marked differences between both the classes and they can be easily observed. A very dominant and clear line can be drawn between them and the gap between them can be observed conveniently. Ill-fatedly, that gap seems to be getting wider with each passing day.

The intervention of international community, though changed Afghan society to certain extent, it could not bring about real change. In fact, it further widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The wealth that poured in the country for assistance and help could only find the rich people waiting for them. Therefore, they made sure that it did not reach the poor and deserving masses and made sure to strengthen their position with its support. This intensification in inequality can be easily observed in different parts of the country. For example, in capital Kabul, through cursory observation one can find the unevenness in the so-called development - poor and muddy houses can be easily observed in the shadows of tall buildings and in similar fashion various groups of poor children can be found running after or beside luxury cars for alms.

Apart from that, its manifestations can be found in various other ways as well. Just consider the way the law and order system treat the people. There is a marked difference between how the rich people are treated by it, and how the poor are victimized. Those among the rich who might have earned all their earnings through illegal means, can easily avoid any sort of punishment by law enforcement agencies. They can threaten the police, dodge them or even bribe them. They can even buy the decisions of the courts in their favor. There is no way they can be punished. If they have no other way, they can even escape easily from the country. While there are many poor people, who might have not done any crime or may have committed small crimes so as to fulfill the overgrowing necessities of life, to serve their families or to find some morsels of food can be caught easily, and more easily can they be punished. Thus justice has itself become the will of the rich.

This division is not a natural phenomenon. There can be rich and poor in a society but in Afghanistan they have reached to the extreme. There are extremely rich and poor people and the gap between them is ever widening. This generates injustice and also a sense of dispossession. The ones who are deprived, who are intentionally kept away from the facilities and treated in the worst possible manner, will become nonconformist. They will definitely rise against the government and against the system. They know that they would not be provided the deserving rights; therefore, they will opt for illegal means and will thus generate many social evils. There should be necessary measures to curb the situation. First, it should be made sure that justice should be maintained in its true spirit, i.e. it must not favor only the upper class; rather the upper class itself should be treated by the law and order system in the same way as the other classes. To put it in simpler terms it can be said that social stratification should not be changed to social injustice.

Second, social mobility should be made smoother in our society. For example, it should not be very difficult for a person taking birth in a lower class to work hard, develop the capability and move to the middle and even to upper class. There should be equal opportunities for almost all the members of the society to excel in their lives and become rich. The reverse should be maintained as well, i.e. the people born in rich families but not working hard should be pushed to the lower strata. Social mobility should be able to provide some oxygen for the social setup to inhale so that it must keep on living.



Will blame games end between Afghanistan and Pakistan?

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Pakistani Prime Minister, ShahidKhaqan Abbasi, has traveled to Afghanistan and met with Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, and other high-ranking Afghan officials on Friday. According to the local press reports, peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, joint counter-terrorism efforts, the return of Afghan refugees, boosting bilateral political and trade ties, and regional connectivity topped the agenda of the talks. However, it is also said that the two leaders held a one-on-one discussion following the recent delegation-level talks at the Presidential Palace.

Apparently, Abbasi welcomed Ghani's vision for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and his offer of peace talks to the Taliban militants. Thus, both leaders called on the Taliban to respond positively to the peace offer and join the peace process without further delay. They agreed that there was no military solution to the ongoing Afghan conflicts and that the political solution was the best way forward. The two leaders described terrorism as "a common enemy" and "agreed not to allow their soils to be used for anti-state activities against each other. Abbasi also extended invitations to Ghani and Abdullah to visit Islamabad at their earliest convenience.

The high-profile visit came after Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry alleged that Pakistani jets had dropped four bombs in Pakistan's Kunar Province's Dangam district. It was also warned by Afghan officials that continuing violations of international norms... will have further consequences on the relations between the two countries. On the other hand, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry rejected that allegation as baseless and was justified that operations had been conducted against originally Afghanistan-based militant groups on the Pakistani side of the border, not the Afghan side.

Overall, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been playing blame games for many years. As a consequence, the tensions in two sides' peace talks have widened insecurity and wars in Afghanistan. Afghanistan had frequently said it does not trust Pakistan, and they do not want to be honest about Afghanistan's peace and security. For this reason, when Pakistan invited the president to visit Pakistan but repeatedly rejected. In dealings with Pakistan, Afghanistan insists on a few points: first, Pakistan is in an unannounced war with Afghanistan which means that peace with the Taliban is not possible without peace with Pakistan; initially, we need to resolve our fundamental issues with Pakistan, then with the Taliban and other insurgent groups. Because these groups are blamed for receiving orders from the intelligence circles of that country and that's why they cannot join the peace process until they are allowed. Secondly, it is blamed that Pakistan is not honest in fighting against terrorism; they divide terrorism into good and bad, targeting only those groups that are hostile to the Pakistani government and carry out terrorist attacks on the territory of Pakistan but those groups that target Afghanistan are supported. Meanwhile, Kabul stress that Islamabad should set their relationships on the basis of government to government and adjust its policies to the same extent. Supporting terrorist

groups and negotiating with some insurgent groups instead of the government can undoubtedly damage the relations between the two countries. Farther more, they must understand that the current situation is not in the interest of any party, and none of the countries could profit from the insecurity of each and other.

Thirdly, Afghanistan wants Pakistan to recognize its national sovereignty and accept that Afghanistan is an independent state that independently adopts its domestic and foreign policies. Afghanistan has always called for good-faith relations and good will with neighboring countries, regions and the world, and has never intervened in the affairs of other countries. Afghanistan does not allow any country to use its soil against other countries and always respects the sovereignty and national interests of the countries.

Although the details of the Pakistani prime minister's visit to Afghanistan have not yet released and yet it is unclear what the trip has made for peace in Afghanistan, but anyway, this trip hope to be the start of a new chapter in the political relationship between the two countries. But the main problem in improving relations between the two countries is the lack of trust and lack of transparency in the negotiations. As long as mutual trust is not drawn to each other, political negotiations will not result in arbitrary results. Therefore, the Government of Afghanistan has announced that it will welcome all the options that can help build trust between the two countries.

Accordingly, in the past six months, Pakistan has been increasingly pressured by diplomacy and the volume of US aid has fallen to a great extent, and it will be too costly for Pakistan after formulating a new strategy by the United States and the European Union, the authorities of these countries clearly criticize Pakistan's actions on terrorism. America, but has taken a more explicit and sharp reaction to Pakistan and has warned the authorities that the United States can no longer tolerate Pakistan's dual battles. However, Pakistan has been trying to shape a new coalition with Russia and Iran in the region for a year and to establish a wider economic relationship with its strategic partner, China.

However, major economic agreements with China, in particular China's connection to Gwadar Port, may have macroeconomic implications for Pakistan, but these benefits cannot compensate for the political, security and economic costs that are caused by the blurring of relations with the West. For this reason, Pakistan is attempting, from one hand, to find a possible alternative to Western countries to reduce the negative effects of the pressures on these relations, and on the other hand, it seeks to restore the confidence of Western countries, and in particular the United States, in the honest struggle with Terrorism. These efforts seem no longer possible without watering the ice of relations with Afghanistan and serious steps against terrorists. For this reason, they have repeatedly tried to show their relations with Afghanistan normal by reopening talks with Afghanistan.

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Learning from Martin Luther About Technological Disruption

By Nicholas Davis

Five hundred years ago this week, a little-known priest and university lecturer in theology did something unremarkable for his time: he nailed a petition to a door, demanding an academic debate on the Catholic Church's practice of selling "indulgences" - promises that the buyer or a relative would spend less time in purgatory after they died.

Today, Martin Luther's "95 Theses," posted at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany (he simultaneously sent a copy to his boss, Cardinal Albrecht von Brandenburg), are widely recognized as the spark that started the Protestant Reformation. Within a year, Luther had become one of Europe's most famous people, and his ideas - which challenged not only Church practice and the Pope's authority, but ultimately man's relationship with God - had begun to reconfigure systems of power and identity in ways that are still felt today.

What made Luther's actions so momentous? After all, calls for reforming the Church had been occurring regularly for centuries. As the historian Diarmaid MacCulloch writes in *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, the two centuries before Luther featured near-constant challenges to papal supremacy on issues of philosophy, theology, and politics. How did the concerns of a minor theologian in Saxony lead to widespread religious and political upheaval?

A central piece of the puzzle is the role of emerging technology. A few decades before Luther developed his argument, a German blacksmith named Johannes Gutenberg had invented a new system of movable-type printing, allowing the reproduction of the written word at greater speeds and lower costs than the laborious and less-durable woodblock approach.

The printing press was a revolutionary - and exponential - technology for the dissemination of ideas. In 1455, the "Gutenberg Bible" was printed at a rate of roughly 200 pages per day, significantly more than the 30 pages per day that a well-trained scribe could produce. By Luther's time, the daily printing rate of a single press had increased to roughly 1,500 single-sided sheets. Improved printing efficiency, combined with steep declines in cost, led to a dramatic increase in access to the written word between 1450 and 1500, even though only an estimated 6% of the population was literate.

Luther quickly grasped the potential of the printing press to spread his message, effectively inventing new forms of publishing that were short, clear, and written in German, the language of the people. Perhaps Luther's most enduring personal contribution came via his translation of the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into German. He was determined to "speak as men do in the marketplace," and more than 100,000 copies of the "Luther Bible" were printed in Wittenberg over the following decades, compared to just 180 copies of the Latin Gutenberg Bible.

This new use of printing technology to produce short, punchy pamphlets in the vernacular transformed the industry itself. In the decade before Luther's theses, Wittenberg printers published, on average, just eight books annually, all in Latin and aimed at local university audi-

ences. But, according to the British historian Andrew Pettegree, between 1517 and Luther's death in 1546, local publishers "turned out at least 2,721 works" - and average of "91 books per year," representing some three million individual copies.

Pettegree calculates that a third of all books published during this period were written by Luther himself, and that the pace of publishing continued to increase after his death. Luther effectively published a piece of writing every two weeks - for 25 years.

The printing press greatly expanded the accessibility of the religious controversy that Luther helped fuel, galvanizing the revolt against the Church. Research by the economic historian Jared Rubin indicates that the mere presence of a printing press in a city before 1500 greatly increased the likelihood that the city would become Protestant by 1530. In other words, the closer you lived to a printing press, the more likely you were to change the way you viewed your relationship with the Church, the most powerful institution of the time, and with God.

There are at least two contemporary lessons to be drawn from this technological disruption. For starters, in the context of the modern era's "Fourth Industrial Revolution" - which Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum defines as a fusion of technologies blending the physical, digital, and biological spheres - it is tempting to assess which technologies could be the next printing press. Those who stand to lose from them might even move to defend the status quo, as the Council of Trent did in 1546, when it banned the printing and sale of any Bible versions other than the official Latin Vulgate, without Church approval.

But perhaps the most enduring lesson of Luther's call for a scholarly debate - and his use of technology to deliver his views - is that it failed. Instead of a series of public discussions about the Church's evolving authority, the Protestant Reformation became a bitter battle played out via mass communication, splitting not just a religious institution but also an entire region. Worse, it became a means to justify centuries of atrocities, and triggered the Thirty Years' War, the deadliest religious conflict in European history.

The question today is how we can ensure that new technologies support constructive debate. The world remains full of heresies that threaten our identities and cherished institutions; the difficulty is to view them not as ideas that must be violently suppressed, but as opportunities to understand where and how current institutions are excluding people or failing to deliver promised benefits.

Calls for more constructive engagement may sound facile, naive, or even morally precarious. But the alternative is not just the hardening of divisions and estrangement of communities; it is widespread dehumanization, a tendency that current technologies seem to encourage.

Today's Fourth Industrial Revolution could be an opportunity to reform our relationship with technology, amplifying the best of human nature. To grasp it, however, societies will need a subtler understanding of the interplay of identity, power, and technology than they managed during Luther's time.

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