

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



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Violence against Women Continues

Following the collapse of the Taliban's regime, Afghan women heaved a sigh of relief for being liberated from radical approach and being entitled equally to men on the basis of Constitution. However, cultural restrictions, deeply embedded in Afghan society, still curtail the freedoms of women across the country.

To view the status of women from legal perspective, there is no room for discrimination against women and both genders are equal in the eye of law. Afghan constitution advocates the rights, liberties and dignity of women similar to that of men as it states in Article 22, "Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law."

Above all, the Constitution recognizes the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) both of which deem men and women equal. UDHR states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and considered everyone to have equal rights and freedoms "without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, etc."

Notwithstanding a democratic constitution, Afghan women still suffer in one way or the other. It is self-evident that gender discrimination and violence against women continue unabated in individual and collective life in Afghanistan. Violence against women makes the headline in national media in recent days. They are raped, tortured and killed in the worst possible way simply for being born female.

There are mainly three reasons behind the ongoing violence and discrimination against Afghan women despite the fact that such practices are in conflict to law and religious tenets. First, cultural restrictions especially in tribal belts take their toll on women. In some areas of Afghanistan, the strict rules of tribal councils and Taliban's regime have led to disastrous consequences and distorted their moderate culture. That is, despite democratic law, women are still treated as pariahs and they are discriminated on the grounds of their sex. In tribal belts, women are supposed to stay within the four walls and they are not allowed to take part in social, cultural, political or economic activities. Hence, a relatively radical mindset still holds sway in tribal areas of the country. Second, the Taliban militants and self-styled Islamic State (IS) pose threat to women's rights and freedoms and hamper their social and political activities. In restive provinces, women are not able to exercise their rights and freedoms for being threatened by militant fighters. So, insecurity is also conducive to women's vulnerability.

Lack of law enforcement is the third reason behind the violation of women's rights. Although men and women are equal constitutionally, they are still harassed sexually in work places and on streets. Even policewomen complain about sexual harassment take place by their male counterparts, which indicates that police officers, who are supposed to safeguard the rights of people and ensure the enforcement of law, trample upon the rights of people and break the law.

To advocate the rights of citizens regardless of their gender, it is not enough to simply inscribe a set of rules on pieces of paper, but to exert the rule properly. If the law-enforcers change into law-breakers, then how it will be possible to protect citizens' rights? Enforcing law is the first prerequisite for protecting the inherent and inviolable rights and freedoms of men and women. Meanwhile, religious scholars will have to put light on the rights and dignity of women in the society and ameliorate the traditional customs of people. In other words, the restrictive traditions which are contrary to national law and religious tenets must be amended. Indeed, there are many baseless traditions which override religious values and need amendment. Moreover, the government will have to spread awareness in rural areas so that people reconcile their mindset with law.

Similarly, the public should listen to the call of their conscience and respect the rights and dignity of women for being human and view them from the humane perspective. It is understandable that women, similar to men, are entitled to live a peaceful life and exercise their rights and freedoms and play their role in social, cultural, political and economic activities. Downplaying the role of women in a society or discriminating them on the basis of their gender will deal a strong blow to the country's culture and development. Hence, all have to practice upon legal principles, religious tenets and ethical code in their approach towards women.



Baba – The Leader of Leaders

By Prithwi Tilak Banerjee

There are many Leadership traits which differentiates great leaders from legends and between legends and immortals. But it is not about which traits are followed. It's all about how and when were the traits used and in which situation and to what extent for what reasons. The right mixture makes a champion. Legendary leaders are all open, social, friendly, humble, sensitive, flexible, honest, and down to earth.

But to become immortal a leader needs to be perceived 'larger than life'. Charisma plays largest part in this perception. Leaders who have charisma are able to arouse strong emotions by embedding a vision, which unites and captivates followers. Using this vision, leaders motivate subordinates to reach toward a future goal by tying the goal to substantial personal rewards and values. Ahmed Shah did exactly that.

Ahmad Khan Abdali (c. 1722 – 16 October 1772) also known as Ahmad Shah Durrani was the founder of the Durrani Empire, hailing from Abdali tribe, and is regarded as the founder of modern of Afghanistan. He began his career by enlisting as a young soldier in the military of Afsharid kingdom, and quickly rose to become a commander of the Abdali Regiment- the cavalry of brave 4000 strong Abdali Pashtun soldiers.

Perhaps the first step of being a good leader is to be a good follower. To become a good teacher one has to be a good student first. So Ahmad Shah 'baba' (as he is lovingly called) did exactly that. At first he was just a young soldier who was learning the art of being in an army. To be accepted amongst his people he knew that learning the techniques of being a soldier to enhance warfare skills, is an absolute must. This shows that he had intelligence to know what sort of basic skills he needs, to exhibit leadership in future.

Nader Shah, after conquering Kandahar, freed Ahmad Shah and kept him as his personal attendant. Ahmad Shah proved himself in Nader Shah's service and was promoted from personal attendant to command a cavalry of four thousand soldiers and officers- the Abdali Regiment. Nadir Shah saw the talent in him and because of his "impressive personality and valor", as well as his highest loyalty to Nadir Shah.

He was spotted by Nadir Shah at a very young age amongst thousands. This proves he had the basic raw-materials of leadership imbedded in him. Ahmad Shah also showed his leadership, in choosing the right leader as follower and became extremely loyal to Nadir Shah as both their mentality and skills matched. Ahmed Shah first showed his interpersonal skills by being his assistant and then showed his war skills by being his commander. As all great leaders, Ahmad Shah sharpened his leadership skills from his master.

Nader Shah's rule abruptly ended in June 1747 when he was assassinated by his own guards. The guards involved in the assassination did it secretly so to prevent the Abdalis from coming to their King's rescue. Despite the danger of being attacked, Ahmad Shah rushed either to save Nadir Shah or to confirm what happened. After reaching Nadir Shah's tent, he was only to see a body and severed head. Having served him so loyally, Nadir Shah first wept at having failed his master. Then, Ahmed Shah "removed" the royal seal from Nader Shah's finger, and the Koh-i-Noor diamond tied around the arm of his deceased master.

Ahmed Shah was the greatest leader of Afghanistan ever. There are many concepts that describe a great leader. But nothing can precede the Great Man theory- the idea of "cometh the time, cometh the man". Right at the time when Nadir Shah was starting to take complete control, via Iranians taking over higher admin positions, and keeping Pashtuns as just hired fighters in his reign, Nadir Shah's death "happened". Sense of timing is a special asset of great leaders too, and not to mention the asset of knowing when to lead from the back and when to come up in front. Everything is fare is love and war. At least sometimes.

Effective and successful leaders transcend. They find ways to achieve perfect combination of charisma, enthusiasm and self-assurance along with a healthy dose of luck and timing probably added to the mix. Ah-

mad Shah was no exception to that. Leaders like him are the visionaries, knowing that when to seize opportunities and how to rally the followers to work hard toward goals. Greatness doesn't come cheap.

After Nadir Shah's death, realizing that his life was in jeopardy, if he stayed among the Persians who had murdered Nader Shah, he decided to leave the Persian camp, and with his 4,000 troops he proceeded to Kandahar. On their way back to Kandahar, the Abdalis had "unanimously accepted" Ahmed Shah as their new leader. Hence he 'assumed the insignia of royalty' as the "sovereign ruler of Afghanistan". Along the way by sheer luck, they managed to capture a huge caravan with very expensive items being transferred by almost unarmed businessmen from India. He and his troops were suddenly rich, moreover, they were experienced fighters and thus formed a formidable force of young Pashtun soldiers who feared nothing.

All these are proofs of great leadership. If there is anything that is more enigmatic than Great Man, then it is Charismatic. Ahmed Shah had it. That is why he was chosen by all 4000 without doubt. As Pashtuns always need a Role Model to follow, a father figure to look upon, he started in that new role. These sorts of Situational leadership characteristic traits he had in him to automatically create the right image that is needed for his followers. He even took the tool of 'story-telling' which today became a legend that Nadir Shah once told him that after his death Ahmad Shah will 'take over' his empire. That is really something. Plus he was aided by other traits like 'self-awareness' and 'intuitiveness' regarding whom to trust or not.

Ahmed Shah, like all great leaders, knew brand building. Even though his followers had already renamed him from Ahmed Khan to Ahmed Shah (as the right heir to Nadir Shah), but he 'emphasized' on the word Durrani, which he adopted as his last name and name of his Empire. It is because his leadership foresight told him that the word Abdali is a tribe's name, so to stand out in history, he needed a unique word; and no other word he loved so much that the nickname Nadir Shah gave him; meaning 'the pearl of pearls'.

Ahmad Shah began his military conquest by capturing Ghazni from Ghilzais. This depicts his 'dominance' trait as the Ghilzais had arrested his father and he had flee & grow up alone in India. He then took Kabul from the local ruler, thus strengthening his hold over eastern Khorasan, comprising most of present-day Afghanistan. Leadership of the Afghans rested on the ability to provide booty for clan, and Ahmad Shah proved remarkably successful in providing both booty and military action for his followers in quick time. This depicts his other leadership trait, conscientiousness- his sense of duty and his strive for excellence.

The 'social boldness' trait for 'risk taking' was always in him. That flourished further, when he decided to attack Punjab. He crossed the Indus and sacked Lahore. He had conquered the whole of Afghanistan in 2 years but after Lahore he took 6 years to reach Delhi. This shows his trait of 'mental stability'. He was bit compulsive, but when it came to bigger matters, he was a cool Type B personality; like all great leaders.

He did not replace the Mughals in India. He converted them as puppets under him, and after looting and plundering returned back to Kabul. This shows the great trait of believing in "know thyself and know thy enemy and half the battle is won". He saw that the British had started to encroach Asia via starting with India. He knew that although he had won against Marathas / Sikhs in the emotional name of Jihad but this will be a different ball game. So he stayed aloof of it, plus his booty was filled up for many years to come.

There will never ever be another Ahmed Shah for Afghans. He stands out as the 'pearl of all the pearls'.

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Reclaiming European Sovereignty

By Joschka Fischer

After US President Donald Trump's recent European tour - which culminated in his infamous press conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin - there can no longer be any doubt that he and his supporters want to destroy the American-led international order and global trade system.

To be sure, Trump is not synonymous with the United States. He triumphed in the 2016 election despite winning three million fewer votes than his opponent, and his public approval rating has never surpassed 50%. Still, he is the US president, and that makes him the most powerful man in the world. His actions, though often absurd and contradictory, have serious real-world consequences, particularly for America's closest partners. During his recent stop in the United Kingdom, Trump went so far as to describe the European Union as a "foe."

By seeking to disrupt virtually all that has defined the West since the end of World War II, Trump has brought the world to a historical turning point. At stake is not the US-EU relationship, which remains strong, but rather the West's dominant position on the world stage. Trump is accelerating a shift in the global balance of power that will leave both America and Europe weaker in relative terms. As income and wealth shift from the West to the East, China will increasingly be able to challenge the US as the world's leading geopolitical, economic, and technological power. This transition will not happen smoothly. For Europe, the stakes could not be higher. The rebalancing of power that is already underway could determine the fate of Europe's democracies, welfare states, independence, and way of life. If Europe does not prepare itself, it will be left with no other choice than to become a dependent of either America or China - Atlanticism or Eurasianism.

Europeans should not count on existing alliances and rules to offer much protection during this period. But nor can we fall back on the logic of traditional nineteenth-century power politics. The world may well be heading toward a situation in which there is no clear hegemon, and great powers constantly jostle for position. But circumstances today are very different from those of the "Great Game" era. An escalating rivalry between China and America will be anything but advantageous for the Old Continent.

For Europeans, the nineteenth century was shaped by the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, whereas the twentieth century was driven by two world wars, the Cold War, and the development of nuclear weapons. At the end of WWII, two non-European powers on either side of the old European state system - the US and the Soviet Union - asserted themselves, and Europe became just another square

on the chess board.

Up to that time, Europe had ruled the world, owing largely to its technological prowess. But with the end of WWII, its dominance came to an end. Europe - and particularly Germany - was thereafter divided between the two new powers, and European sovereignty was effectively subsumed by the US foreign-policy establishment and the Kremlin.

To be sure, France and Great Britain, as the two victorious European powers, retained a remnant of sovereignty as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (and later as nuclear-armed states). But, given the global balance of power, this was more symbolic than a reflection of their real influence.

Then came the end of the Cold War, when all of Europe adopted a staunch transatlantic orientation. In terms of security, Europe remained dependent on the US. But on the economic and technological fronts, Europeans had regained their sovereignty. Institutionally, this division of labor was manifested in NATO and the EU, respectively. It is an arrangement that has served us well; but it is now under attack by Trump.

Three developments, in particular, have given Europe reason to fear for its future. First, Trump has continued to question the US commitment to mutual defense under the North Atlantic Treaty. Second, his administration is actively undermining the World Trade Organization and the global trade system upon which much of Europe's prosperity rests. And third, the rise of digitization and artificial intelligence now threatens to upend global technological hierarchies.

These developments are each challenging Europe's place in the world. The question now is whether the EU will reclaim its full sovereignty and assert itself as a power on the global stage, or let itself fall behind for good. This is the moment of truth. There will be no second chances.

Only the EU can win back European sovereignty for the twenty-first century. If the task falls to traditional nation-states such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, it will fail. Reclaiming sovereignty will require not just enormous effort, but also a united front, and a new understanding of the relationship between the EU and its member states. The European project will continue to facilitate trade and ensure peace; but it must now also enshrine joint sovereignty.

If the EU succeeds in this task, Trump will have inadvertently done it a big favor. History sometimes proceeds in strange ways. The key is to take it as it comes, and not hesitate when the moment for decisive action arrives.

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.

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