

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



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Women in the Process of Change

Human societies change and with them so many aspects, processes, institutions and strata change that are in those societies. These changes are inevitable and are bound to occur. Therefore, they are unavoidable; and those who are really interested to achieve something positive from these changes have to understand the nature of these changes and try to divert them towards better destinations instead of trying to block their ways. As it can be easily observed that if the way of a flowing river is blocked it is bound to overflow and the water starts flowing out of the river to all directions, but if its way is diverted, it can be made to flow in the desired direction. However, an important fact about the changes that occur within a society is that they influence the weaker strata of society to a large extent.

Afghan society is also one of the societies in the world and it has to go through the process of change. Though mostly the changes have been negative in Afghan society and these changes have made Afghan people suffer to a large extent, the changes have been there and they will be there as long as Afghan society exists and the people live in it. Though these changes have influenced everyone, the weaker strata of society, especially women, have been largely influenced by them.

The changes in Afghan society must be analyzed from two perspectives. The first one must be analyzed from within Afghan society, keeping in consideration the social changes that occur with the interactions and development within the social institutions and other actors. Such a perspective depicts that Afghanistan is a tribal society with a slow pace of changes. The traditional culture and norms and values are strict and slow to change. Moreover, education, that can be a source of change, has not been able to penetrate Afghan society properly. Most of the rural areas still do not have schools and proper education. In addition, the education that is being provided contains obsolete curriculum that does not help much in changing the mentality of the people and thus the society as a whole. This slow pace of changes within Afghan society does not help much in changing the position of women. They, to a large extent, are still suffering from the discriminatory rules and regulations and social behaviour.

Extremist and strict religious beliefs and practices have also made the changes less frequent. Strengthened by extremist religious institutions, these beliefs and practices have no positive approach towards changes and consider them evil. They also support the patriarchal setup and keep the discrimination against women intact and even invigorate it.

The political changes are also very slow as the political setups, in most of the areas, are non-existent. The democracy has not been able to reach to grass root level as local bodies are not chosen through any sort of election. The setup, therefore, is authoritative and dominated by tribal lords and extremist religious leaders, who do not welcome the positive changes at all. The other perspective of changes in Afghan society must be understood in its relations with regional and international community and actors. The involvement of international community has strived to impose liberal and democratic changes in Afghan society. Though, it has been successful to a certain extent, the real changes are yet to be seen. Afghanistan is now recognized as a democratic country. It has had its three regular elections. There are considerations and emphasize on the rights of minority, women and other weaker strata of the society in the constitution and many other developments have been made as well; however, they are prevalent only in the major cities while the rural areas have not yet seen their impacts.

The regional countries on the other hand have always strived to promote and gain their interests in Afghanistan. They have not been supportive enough in bringing about long-lasting changes in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the capability of Afghan administrative structure has not been able to take full advantage from the external support and change the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

The changes so far made and occurred and the ones that may follow do not seem to have much consideration regarding the rights of women and gender balance. Women have been discriminated and they may further be influenced by the future changes to a large extent as they are one of the weaker strata and weaker strata are influenced by transitions and instabilities to a large extent.

Moreover, women fear the return of Taliban-like era and fear that all the developments made for improvement of the status of women may be lost unless wise decisions are made. In the political bargain with Taliban for the peace process, it is possible that government may make certain compromises among which the law regarding the rights of women may suffer further. Therefore, it is really necessary to understand the nature of mentioned changes and try to direct the efforts of the international community and regional players and also of the Afghan government itself in bringing about real changes in Afghan society and keep the consideration for better values through the changes that may occur.



Lessons from the World's Second Economy

By: Sarwar Danish

Despite the fact that Marxism-Leninism used to rule the eastern bloc as a social, political and philosophic school, currently it is being faded into oblivion. There are hardly any countries found to follow this school's theory in political, philosophic or economic arenas. This school is ignored in its hotbed namely Russia and China. However, the fact is that one of the main theories of this school which considers economy as infrastructure to social evolution has been remained intact in world's practical approach. The main problem in accepting this theory was the linking of this theory by Marxists to dialectical and historical materialism, division of history into five famous stages, formation of government based on the ownership of the means of production, countering class differences, rule of the proletariat, and other ideas presented in the light of philosophical, social and historical materialism. But if economy - apart from forming non-scientific and non-realistic theories - was presented only as a significant factor in shaping the social and political developments in the human society, no one would be against it. After all, the opponents of Marxism namely liberalism has realized its significance and all states in the world today set their policies based on their economic interests. A government, which enjoys strong economic power, will be successful. China, a large and the most populous country in the world, which used to be one of the founder of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, today is ranked the second economy of the world and likely to be the first economic power in the near future. Now the question is that what is the main reason behind China's economic power?

It is believed that a number of major factors have played a key role in China's current evolution:

1. Ancient civilization and continual historical experience that has led to sustainable stability and modern political and social order in this country.
2. Enjoying modern knowledge and technology.
3. Sensible and capable leadership and healthy, organized, and disciplined management.
4. Following the policy of open door and positive interaction with the world.

It is worth saying that all these factors are the product of mental creativity of mankind for evolution and one will claim that virtually the creative and innovative thought of mankind is the cornerstone - which has formed the present China. Currently, the President of this vast land cherishes lofty ideas such as "One Belt One Road" which will, at least, link three continents, if implemented. And it will establish a colossal economic evolution with China in the central point; i.e., the world's supreme economic and political power. Luckily, Afghanistan is located in a strategic position in this "Belt" from geo-political and geo-economic aspects. Furthermore, we have a very friendly relationship and good neighborhoods with the government and people of China, and the political leadership of the two countries also have a special respect to each other. If we realize our position truly and if the enemies let us use this position appropriately, we will have a bright future ahead.

Afghanistan is bordered with Xinjiang, China, from Wakhan area of Badakhshan about 96 kilometers. Xinjiang, which was called "Eastern Turkistan" in the past, now an autonomous region with 23 million population. Uyghur Muslims form the majority in this region and the first formal language is Uyghur and the second one is Chinese. The length is 1665000 square kilo-meters that forms one-sixth of China and equals many countries in the Middle East and Europe. It borders eight important countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia. Moreover, this region owns rich natural resources, mainly oil and gas. According to experts, Xinjiang will be China's economic and trading door towards central, southern and eastern Asia as well as Europe. Afghanistan is the shortest route connecting central Asia to southern Asia. Urumqi, which means "pretty villa", is the center of Xinjiang and contains more than three million population. Kashgar is one of its historical city which was called the Pearl of the Silk Road and is one of the centers of cotton business. Kashgar has a rich history of over 2,000 years and served as a trading port and strategically important city on the Silk Road between China and western world. Kashgar is now about 100 km away from the Badakhshan borders of Afghanistan.

With the view to historical, and religious culture of Xinjiang, it had a tension with central government Beijing after the victory of Chinese revolution led by Mao. This tension had sporadically led to armed conflict. On the other hand, Xinjiang was deprived economically. However, the feature of this city has been changed dramatically today. In addition to the open-door policy with the world and supporting its private sectors, applying public and private partnership policy on economic issues with different regions and tribes, China also took step in dismantling deprivation, balancing development and implementing social justice, which reflect China's sensible leadership and management. A government will have to treat all its citizens equally and focus its policy on implementing balanced development and social justice and ensuring citizenship rights. This way, the amount of discontent and protest movement will be diminished naturally.

On a trip to Urumqi and Kashgar last week, I heard from reliable sources that besides the government's investment and implementing large-scale infrastructure projects in Xinjiang cities and granting religious and cultural freedoms to the people, the leadership of Chinese government has ordered large Chinese companies, whose main centers of activities are located in other large cities of China, to invest in Xinjiang region so as to fulfill their national and patriotic responsibilities, and transfer part of their economic, industrial and productive activities to this region to achieve prosperity and economic growth which has been put into practice. Currently, the largest and most important agricultural farms and productive industrial parks have been established in Xinjiang that is changed into a significant economic zone in China. I further heard from authorities that all Xinjiang residents are tied up and united with each other similar to the seeds of pomegranate and there is no kind of discrimination among them.



The issue which needs to be noted by Xinjiang Muslims is that these people will have to interact with the government positively and utilize the current open space and huge facilities about developing their land. They should not let radical and violent groups such as Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) change their land into battleground. The radical groups also should revise their status and policy and resort to peace, coexistence and civil movement. China's current situation is far more different from decades ago. On the other hand, the policy based on war, violence and brutal terrorist attacks of ETIM similar to the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Daesh and so on in Islamic countries like Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, etc. will do no good other than causing destruction and blemishing Islam and Muslims.

Today, we are eye-witness in Afghanistan that the outcome of radicalism is nothing other than killing tens of innocent people in suicide attacks and explosions, burning mosques and schools, massacring worshippers, destroying bridges, roads and waterways which facilitate people and reflect development. Is Islam the religion of killing and destruction? Is a Muslim supposed to impose religious beliefs on others through spear and sword or terror and suicide attack? Is it the mission that Islam carries for the entire humanity? Is it the idea of "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds."? Can we introduce Islam as a superior religion to all mankind through radical and violent practices? Today, our and all Islamic societies are in paradoxical state in individual and social life. Our practices are not in accordance with our beliefs. We act differently in public and private. We are not able to realize the demands and conditions of our time and are unaware of our surroundings. We do not know that the world has reached the peak of success and we are deeply drowned in quagmire. Absolute extremism has left us blind and deaf. I am sure that the terrorist groups which commit all those crimes under the terms of Islam and Jihad, neither believe in Islamic and human values nor even in development and progress of the country. Otherwise, they would never ever put the people and their land into trouble.

By and large, what is expressed by Chinese leadership and local authorities of Xinjiang regarding Afghanistan, represents a good intention for good neighborliness and the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. Now as we are beset by many challenges, attracting China's support and cooperation and participating in major strategic and economic plans of this country such as "One Belt One Road", can link us to a great political power and to a regional and international and sustainable, strong economy. Chinese government and investors of large companies are willing to extend our business and trading exchanges in Afghanistan and invest in different fields of mines, infrastructure and thermal, solar, wind and water energy. Similarly, they are inclined to take part in implementing our national macro-projects. In this case, we will be able to use the knowledge, experience and technology of this country and find a safe way for export and trade exchanges. Ill-fatedly, it should be acknowledged that despite the international aid within the past decade and half, neither our technical capacity grew to the required level nor we got access to the world's modern technology. Now we have to struggle to build technical capacity and gain experience and technology through any possible way.

Moreover, we need a strong private sector the same as other countries besides government's activities. Our private sector, in addition to economic interests, must realize its national responsibility and put effort to enhance its capacity and import technique and technology from other countries, particularly China.

The chamber of commerce and industry and our businessmen should seek to cultivate the best relation with their Chinese counterparts. In addition to importing from China, they have to export Afghanistan's products, mainly dried and fresh fruit, saffron, carpets, marble stones and other materials to China. Chinese officials, especially in Xinjiang region are willing to facilitate our traders properly and cooperate with them.

What can extend and strengthen our relationship with Chinese government and people is cultural relations. Currently, about 400 Afghan students are studying in Chinese different universities in different fields from bachelor degree to doctorate. Likewise, about 280 students have been graduated from Kabul University in recent years in the department of Chinese literature. Lately, a large number of our civil servants have been sent to China for short-term training courses and were familiarized with their management and planning practices. Familiarization with Chinese culture and language will be a highly major factor in cultivating and developing mutual relations between the two countries and will pave a better ground for learning knowledge and exchanging experience and technical outcomes. Therefore, our Holy Prophet has been quoted to state 15 centuries ago as, "Seek knowledge even it is in China."

It is hoped for developing a friendly and constructive relationship between Afghanistan and the entire world and hoped for ensuring peace, stability and prosperity for the grieving people of Afghanistan.

This article was written by his highness Sarwar Danish the Second Vice President and was first published in Afghanistan-e-Ma and translated to English for the Daily Outlook Afghanistan

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