

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



August 13, 2016

## Rise of Consumerism

Consumerism plays a dominant role in today's societies, wherein, one of the main goals is to make money, by whatever means possible and exploiting whichever potential flaw that might exist. The human race is one with the wildest imagination, and this imagination, though a great strength at certain times, can, like all great strengths, serve as a potential weakness.

It is our imaginations that is exploited by advertising, and it is our imaginations that religion and myth traditionally played the role of satiating through stories with morals to them and lessons to be learned. Now consumerism has replaced this role.

In today's world the consumer ideology serves as the golden rule, advertising serves as discourses, products serve as our idolatry, and just as religion instills faith at an early age, the same is done by consumerism. Consumerism stimulates our imaginations. It does this by telling us a story, wherein we are the main character, enjoying a better life with the products being sold to us.

Our imaginations are conquered by these stories. We like believing them because they make sense of the world.

We start believing that all it takes to be happier is to take a trip to the store. For instance, almost all the cigarette ads feature a picture of an ideal person smoking his brand. The ads seem to say that we can also be like them if we start smoking. All it takes is a trip to the store and a couple of bucks for a packet.

Similar to the myths, the stories told by these ads have a moral to them. The lesson they teach is that our life can be better with these products or we can be a better person with these products. This is the consumer ideology and, just like every religion has some 'golden rules' that encompasses all of its lessons.

All of its rules seem to be based upon this underlying assumption that more is better, that we need the things we're being sold, and that somehow buying them will make us happier and better people.

Of course the medium for these lessons are the ads themselves. Advertising nearly always has some emotional attraction attached to them. Instead of conforming to our intellect and giving us rational reasons why we should consume the products they boast, and mostly they cater to our emotions.

One heavy emotion that we are vulnerable to is fear. Fear tactics are widely used in advertising. For example, different ads highlight the losses and the disadvantages a person may have if he does not use the products being advertised.

Just as advertising appeals to the emotion of fear, it also appeals to the emotion of hope. This can be seen in many of the commercials. They show deeds of great philanthropy and they ensure us that there is still hope that things are not as bad as they seem, although they also seem to claim that they are, in some way or the other, the cause of it all.

There are hundreds of stimuli which provoke reactions that are induced by advertising. From before we can speak, we experience constant, repeated, product-oriented stimulation coming in from all five senses.

Many companies base their entire advertising on the enticement of children. Some of the first words many children speak are from advertising jingles. All of the toy companies and most of the fast food restaurants have multi-million campaigns aimed at children. It is not even children that do the purchasing, it is the parents, and these companies are cashing in on the parents' love for their children, as well as the prone minds of the children.

Mostly children are found shouting for certain products in different shops and shopping malls, it is because their minds are already stimulated towards those products through advertising.

The important factor in this regard is not the possible outcomes of the use of the toys by the children but the rising sales of the companies.

It seems consumerism shares with religion many more of the bad characteristics than the good ones.

Consumerism takes advantage of innocent minds much more than religion does. Also, religion serves many good purposes, such as teaching charity and love whereas consumerism tends to only teach greed and fear. Even good ads are stained with the greedy aims of the company.

## Democracy - A Pyrrhic victory for Afghan Nation

By Hujjatullah Zia

Afghanistan has passed numerous ups and downs throughout the history for democratization. Following the 18th century, as democracy burgeoned in some parts of the world; Afghan nation suffered violence and bloodshed under absolute monarchy and despotic regimes. Tribes fought for power and kings willed their throne to their descendants the same as private property. People's rights and liberty were violated, any movements for freedom were suppressed and kings' mandate was the only law to be practiced upon.

During the French Great Revolution (1789 - 1795) which demolished the despotic palace of sultanate and waved the flag of democracy on its debris and declared human rights, Timur Shah, who ruled Afghanistan, was involved in luxury life along with his ten wives and fathered 33 sons and 13 daughters.

Similarly, emir Habibullah established a luxury harem where more than hundred women dwelled and the costly expenses, such as food and clothing and jewelries, of harem-dwellers kept him involved and marginalized him from considering the social and political issues of the country.

However, when his son, Amanullah Khan, succeeded him as king, the first constitution of Afghanistan was approved by Loya Jirga (Grand Council) in 1923 - it was a great milestone in the history of Afghanistan and a significant step toward democratization. With the approval of this constitution, constitutional sultanate based on law was established in the country and the individuals' fundamental rights and liberty and equality of the citizens on the basis of law, ban on slavery and torture, etc. were recognized. Subsequently, 50 other bylaws (Nizam Namah) were approved and Afghanistan's legal system was known the modernist in the region. Ill-fatedly, it did not last long and Amanullah's reign collapsed in 1929 and Habibullah Saqa was appointed as his successor. Then Nadir Khan reigned the country from 1929 to 1933. During Nadir Khan's reign, the second constitution of Afghanistan was approved in 1931 which included the establishment of parliament for the first time in the country and it was a greater step toward democracy. The third constitution was approved during Zahir Shah's forty-year sultanate (1933 - 1973). This was an amendment to the two previous constitutions and considered the segregation of powers and the independence of judicial, legislative and executive powers - this period was known as "decade of democracy" or "decade of constitution". This constitution also restricted the king's power and his family's interference in government's issues. Ultimately, Dawood Khan succeeded Zahir Shah, while he had an official trip to Italy, through bloodless military coup in 1973. He proclaimed republic but cancelled the segregation of powers. The fourth Constitution under the term of "Constitution of Republic of Afghanistan" was approved

by Loya Jirga and Dawood was selected as president of Afghanistan for six years based on this constitution. In short, after about one year and two months, Dawood's reign was collapsed through a coup carried out by People's Party (Hezb-e-Khalq) led by Noor Muhammad Turakey which was an irreparable blow to democracy and the country was dragged to violence and bloodshed as the vestige is still felt. I would like to cut short and do not go through the periods of Babrek Karmel and Dr. Najib since they did not either take satisfactory steps toward democracy.

From 1992 to 1996, civil unrest emerged in the country and Afghan nation suffered painfully amidst violence. Finally, the Taliban regime gained foothold in Afghanistan and inflicted great harm on Afghan nation. They did not have the faintest idea about human rights, freedom or democracy and ruled the country with the point of gun. The Taliban showed high sensitivity to democracy and deemed it against Islamic beliefs. Their radical ideology and parochial mindset revealed nothing other than violence and hatred. The Taliban violated the rights and dignity of the people flagrantly. Hence, these eight years were the dark period for the nation which suppressed democracy and eroded the democratic outcomes.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center by al-Qaeda, the US-led coalition forces launched attack against the Taliban which led to the downfall of their regime. Consequently, "Bonn Agreement" was signed in a UN meeting held in Germany - which was headed by UN's envoy Akhzar Ibrahim and attended by the representatives of Afghanistan, US, England, Germany, EU and six neighboring countries. In this agreement, holding presidential election, approval of constitution, establishment of Afghanistan's Human Rights Commission, etc. were stated which was a unique milestone in the history of Afghanistan.

By and large, the last constitution of Afghanistan was approved by people's elected representatives in Loya Jirga held on January 03, 2004 in Kabul. This Constitution includes the inherent and inalienable rights, liberty and dignity of the individuals irrespective of their race, creed, color and sex and upholds international charters and Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This constitution, which is based on national values and international standards, states, "Liberty and human dignity are inviolable. The state shall respect and protect liberty as well as human dignity." Now, as the nascent democracy is weakened by the Taliban fighters, it is the government to fight for protecting the rights and liberty of the nation and does not let warring parties to undermine democratic movements in the country. Democratic government is a pyrrhic victory for Afghan nation since large sacrifices were made and streams of blood were spilt to gain it.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia\_hujjat@yahoo.com

## Understanding America's Electoral College

By Elizabeth Drew

Anyone watching the United States' presidential race needs to understand that national opinion polls do not provide an accurate picture of how the election might turn out. Thanks to America's Electoral College, it's not who wins the most votes nationwide that matters in the end, but who wins in which states.

Each state is awarded a certain number of votes in the Electoral College, depending on the size of its population. The candidate who crosses the threshold of 270 electoral votes wins the presidency.

In almost every state, a candidate who wins 50.1% of the popular vote is awarded 100% of its electoral votes. (Only Maine and Nebraska don't follow the winner-take-all rule; they divide the Electoral College vote by congressional district.) As a result, the votes of millions of people who cast their ballot end up not counting. If you're a Republican in New York or California, which are dominated by the Democrats, or a Democrat in Wyoming or Mississippi, which are reliably Republican, you can forget about your vote for president mattering.

One peculiar result of this peculiar system is that a candidate can win a majority of the national popular vote but lose in the Electoral College, by losing narrowly in populous states and winning in some smaller states. It doesn't happen often, but whenever it does, the US goes through a paroxysm of hand-wringing over this seemingly undemocratic mechanism. In the most recent case, Al Gore won a majority of the popular vote in 2000, but George W. Bush won the presidency.

Due to the Electoral College, voters cast their ballots not for a candidate but for a slate of electors - party activists, including friends and allies of the contender - who will support their choice. The role of the electors is a brief formality; they meet in their state capitol and cast the vote. But we already know how it's going to turn out, because the presidential election results are reported at the time in terms of who won each state.

At this point, the national vote count is meaningless. Congress convenes and "counts" the electoral votes; but this, too, is a mere formality. (The Bush-Gore contest was unusual in that it wasn't settled until December 12, more than a month after the election, when the Supreme Court, in a partisan and highly controversial decision, voted 5-4 to end the recount in Florida, handing the presidency to Bush.)

Now, here's where it can get convoluted, and possibilities for mischief arise: if no one wins 270 Electoral College votes, the election goes to the House of Representatives, where each state delegation casts a single vote, regardless of how many voters the delegation

represents. Wyoming (population 585,000) and California (population 39 million) each get one vote. And the delegations aren't bound to vote for the candidate who won the most votes in their state.

Then, after the House elects the president, the Senate picks the vice president, with each senator getting one vote. It's theoretically possible that Congress could elect a president and vice president from different parties.

This labyrinthine system for choosing the president reflects the ambivalence of America's founders about popular democracy. They were suspicious of the rabble - the public - having its way on the basis of misinformation or a lack of understanding of the issues. The United Kingdom's vote in June to leave the European Union - against the advice of experts and allies - appears to validate this concern.

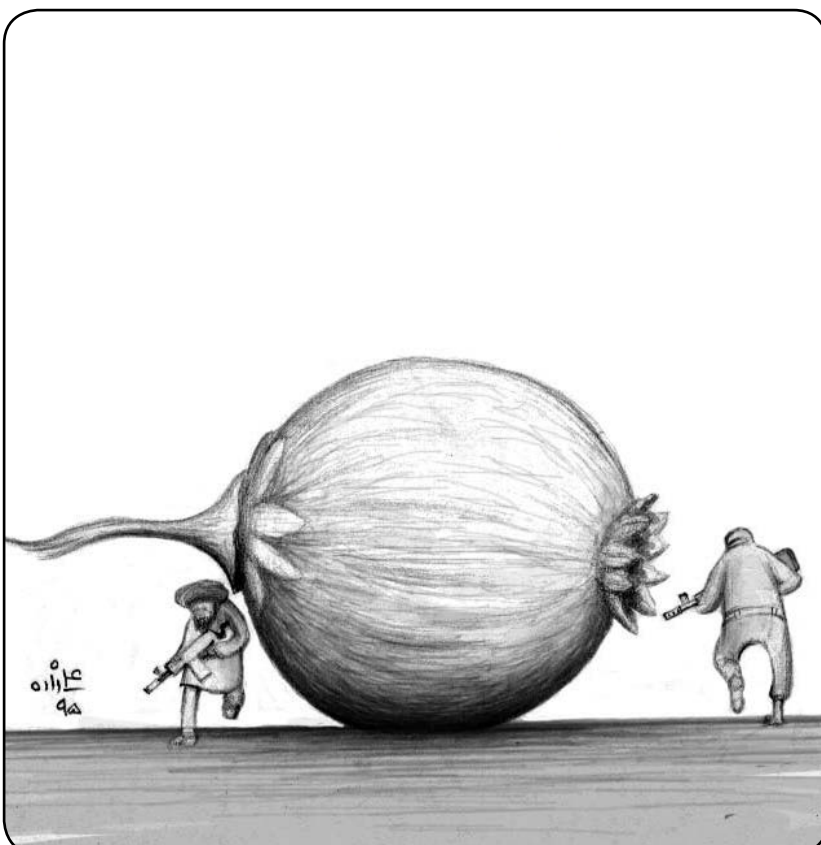
From the outset, America's founders were aware of the dangers of government by plebiscite. Alexander Hamilton worried about giving power to the people because "they seldom judge or determine right." Fearing "an excess of democracy," they interposed institutional buffers between the popular will and government decisions. Until 1913, senators were chosen by state legislatures, not directly elected by the voters. And they gave us the Electoral College.

This system has an enormous impact on the actual campaign for the presidency, because it determines where the candidates spend their time and money. Only about ten states are considered "swing" states that could go for either party; the rest are considered "safe" states for one party or the other.

Of course, sometimes the political wisdom can be wrong and a state bounces out of its category. But these ten "battleground" states are the ones to watch for clues as to how the election will turn out. They are much more indicative of the final result than national polls.

For example, California and New York are so routinely Democratic that the only reason candidates turn up in either one is to raise money. By contrast, Ohio - the jewel in the crown of swing states, because tradition has it that no Republican can win the presidency without winning there - is well trodden by the candidates. The other states considered most important to victory for either side are Florida and Pennsylvania. Because such populous states, along with a handful of others, routinely go Democratic, the Democrats have a built-in advantage in the Electoral College. So Donald Trump is widely believed to have more limited options for accumulating 270 votes. Maybe the Electoral College isn't such a peculiar idea, after all. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Elizabeth Drew, a regular contributor to The New York Review of Books, is the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall



Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Hussain Yasa

Vice-Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



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