

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



February 03, 2018

On Lashing of Woman in Takhar

It seems that violence and discrimination against women in Afghanistan would take a long time to diminish. Although, there were promises for Afghan women in the early days of the so-called democratic government in Afghanistan, there have not been real efforts to eradicate discrimination and violence against them. Therefore, every now and then, different sorts of incidents in different parts of the country remind the people in Afghanistan, particularly the women, that their role and position have not been heightened within the society in true sense.

One such incident has been recently highlighted by social media and relevant authorities. As per the details, a woman was publicly lashed several times by forces of a local commander in a village in Takhar province. The order of lashing of the woman was given by a kangaroo court, though, for unknown reasons. A video of the event, also spread through social media, shows at least five men lashing the 22-year-old woman in a public place while others shout at her with abusive words. The relevant Takhar officials have confirmed the incident, but they claim that the incident took place about 45 days ago.

It is not important whether the incident took place a day ago or 45 days ago, the important point is to ask what the government authorities have been doing to stop such incidents; particularly, in the places where they claim to have their control. Moreover, it is also vital to question that what tangible measures are carried out by the government to control violence and discrimination against women in different parts of the country.

Unfortunately, issues pertaining to women have been handled by the authorities in a hypocritical manner. They have been used to attract donor funding and treated on project-based manner. Some efforts are made only temporarily to show the donors that there are actions being taken but it is also ensured that the issues are not solved permanently; thus, enabling the officials to keep on attracting donor funding.

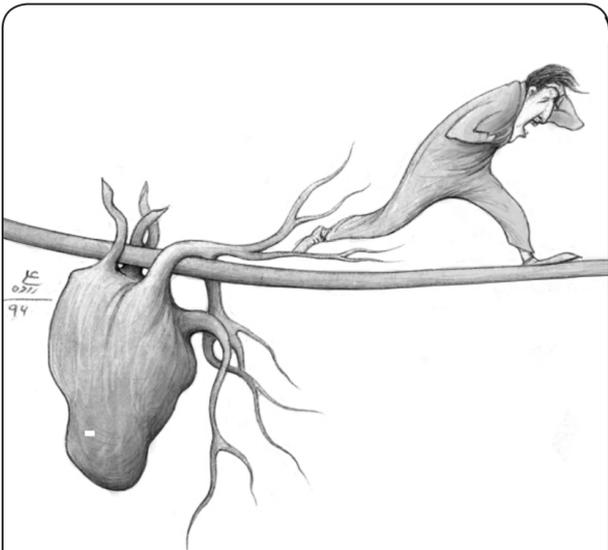
As a matter of fact, the magnitude of work that has been done regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan is much less than the funds and resources that have been utilized. A cursory look at the condition of women in different parts of the country would reveal the whole story. Moreover, the incidents of violence and atrocities against women have kept on multiplying, which shows the nature and frequency of violation of women rights and their subjugation by the male members of the society and the social norms and values.

There is a clear rise in incidents of violence against women. This is directly linked to the overall security situation. As the security situation in the country has deteriorated the weaker strata seem to be in trouble the most. There was no serious attention to their woes and now with rising insecurity, the authorities have more excuses for less attention to the issues of women. Women and many intellectuals believe that even if the security situation improves there will be serious challenges for women to earn a reputable position within Afghan society. Even if peace is restored, there are fears that Afghan government may sacrifice some of the achievements that are made regarding the heightened role and position of women. Taliban and Daesh insurgents have never been in favor of active role of women in social and political lives and they will make every effort for limiting their role as much as possible. Afghan social structure has been fervently dominated by religious extremism and tribal partiality.

Most of the self-designed religious doctrines and tribal norms are against the women and discriminate their basic rights. Regrettably, these norms and principles have even gone to the extent of aggression and have tortured women physically - even in the public. They, in the name of dignity of women, have in reality dishonored them. Though they have been raising their voices every now and then but in the noise of male shrieks they seem to be negligible and get faded away. In fact, the male-chauvinistic ears are not ready to hear them though they feel their vibrations clearly. Nonetheless, the efforts in this regard must never be given up and they should continue in every possible way.

With such a situation existing around, it is really difficult to see development in condition of women who have been undergoing discriminations since ages. Afghan authorities and all the Afghan people, both women and men, must strive to change the scenario as it would help the society as a whole as women are an essential part of it.

We need to accept that women form an integral part of society and have an imperative role to play. Their representation and participation in different walks of life can help society develop suitably. They cannot be kept on being discriminated and violated without letting up, because it is not only non-religious but at the same time cruel because above all women are human beings. Unfortunately, this evident fact has not been realized by many in Afghan society. The Afghan authorities, therefore, needs to revitalize this fact and play a more effective, honest and determined role to secure Afghan women from violence and discrimination on daily basis.



Barriers to Female Education in Afghanistan: Challenges and solutions

By Sakhi Rezaie

Education, is one of the most influential tools overcoming poverty and raising standard of living; it produces human capital, one of the scarcest resources, for a nation. Although, Afghanistan has a good progress in the education sector, there is a marked difference between the enrolment rates between males and females in the country.

There are many barriers to female education in Afghanistan. Educating girls is critical for any country, especially for Afghanistan as a developing country, because it can improve its living standard. Also, educating girls, reduce their fertility rates and they can better manage childbearing.

In addition, more educated females seek earlier parental care when they are pregnant, an approach that can reduce maternal mortality. In terms of economic benefits, it helps the country to benefit from the labor and intellect of half of its population and can make GDP from another half of its population. Studies of N. D. Kristof and other researchers have shown that when females have income, that money is more likely to be put into saving, into the community, into the education, or into a family wellbeing and health than when that same amount of money is earned by a male.

Education sector had a good progress in Afghanistan since the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001 by the international Alliance under the leadership of the United States. Unfortunately, the pace of education progress, especially for females, saw a decline since 2014 when the international community decided to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan.

Challenges of Education of girls in Afghanistan

The first is cost. Although school is free according to the constitution, uniforms, textbooks, suppliers, and transportation can be expensive for some families. If the family is not able to pay for the education of all its children, preference goes to the boys due to the traditional norms of the society. Second, cultural perception towards gender inequality is one of the strongest barriers to female education in Afghanistan. Traditional Afghan culture has a negative view on females who advance into higher educational levels in the country, especially in the rural areas. These communities focus on a subservient role for women, and discourage higher career pursuit for them. One of the strategies that the Afghan government and the international community may pursue to change this attitude is putting emphasis on Islamic teachings in terms of education, such as the famous hadith of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), that says: "Seeking knowledge

is a duty for all Muslims, men and women." Another approach that may change this attitude in the rural communities is to emphasize the practical value of female education, such as the improved economic stability and increased family income with two working adults.

Third, Early marriage and teenage pregnancy also has a negative effect on female education, particularly for higher education of them. Often families may arrange a marriage for their daughter while she is still in her teenage years, and it interrupt their education path in most cases. The daughter may also become pregnant early.

Fourth, sexual health information is not widely accessible, and the lack of contraceptive use leads to a high level of pregnancy. Better education on sexual health information, increased access to contraceptives, and discouraging early marriage would help alleviate this barrier. Fifth, lack of security, is one of the critical barriers to all students in general and to the girls in specific. This problem is compounded with the traditional norms in the parts of the rural communities in Afghanistan. The terrorist groups have repeatedly warned the girls not to go to schools and have targeted the girls' schools repeatedly. As a result, the number of girls has reduced significantly in the rural communities.

Afghanistan requires to find a solution to sociocultural perspectives on females' education and insecurity threatening the whole country in general and the females in specific, especially in terms of education. Studying the security and education approaches of Islamic countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Iran can help the country to cope with these endemic problems in a sustainable manner.

Education can play a vital role in development of a country. It enables a country to use the full labor potentials of all of its population that leads to poverty reduction significantly. The education sector of Afghanistan improved rapidly after the US and allies who ousted the Taliban regime. However, this trend decreased significantly after 2014, when the international community withdrew their troops from Afghanistan and also decreased their funds to the country. Girls' education faces numerous barriers in Afghanistan, including economic, negative social attitude, early marriage, child marriage and lack of health of sexual health information. To enable half of the society, to realize its potentials, the Afghan government shall develop and implement a comprehensive strategy based on the lessons learned from the other countries having the same challenges like Afghanistan.

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Asia at the Crossroads: Are we Observing a March Towards an Uncertain Future?

By Saikat Kumar Basu & Manish Rai

The geopolitical situation across Asia is hitting the nerves across the globe; and possibly standing at an unique crossroads of modern history. The ancient landmass of Asia is the largest and most populous of all the continents; enriched with tremendous diversity of numerous races, languages, ethnicities, faiths, creeds and cultures. The geographical, geological as well as biological diversity of the continent from the vast Siberia in the north to the super natural archipelagos of Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea in the southern reaches of the continent; and from Turkey in the west to the island of Japan represents in itself a world of its own. Several ancient civilizations marks the glorious history of the continent like the Assyrian, Sumerians, Chinese and the Indus Valley civilizations to the reign of the Sasanids, Kushanas, Persians, Mongols, Huns, Guptas, Mouryas, Mughals to name only a handful.

The birth place of all the major and minor global religions like Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism have all originated in Asia; and then spread across to the other continents over time. The majestic tundra and taiga in Asia's north to the uniquely biodiverse archipelagos, atolls, coral islands and remote island groups stretching from the Indian to the Pacific Oceans, the spectacular deserts across Arabia, China and South Asia, the gigantic mountain chains with the world's youngest fold mountain the Himalayas and the vast Tibetan plateau, the vast steps of Eurasia, dominant river valleys across Central, South and South East Asia, virgin forests and wildlife, unbelievably rich biodiversity and other natural resources, vast seas and oceans make Asia one of the most unique landmasses of our planet. Several smaller tribal populations with their unique and distinct cultures and anthropological characteristics are spread across different landmasses and unique localities across the vast continent.

Unfortunately though, Asia has been at a perpetual crossroad of several serious regional conflicts among bordering countries, witnessed two bloody World Wars and devastating regional wars like the Korean war, Vietnam war, Gulf war, Iraq-Iran, Indo-Pak and Israel-Palestine wars, the Afghan war, Bangladesh Liberation war; Genocides in Indo-China (Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos) and the current war and conflict hit Middle East. Thus Asia continues to be one of the most highly discussed conflict zones in the world. Together with Africa and Latin America; Asia also represents one of the poorest, war torn, politically destabilized, insurgency impacted, under developed, high conflict areas of the world that do not show any sign of resolution in the near future. The continent has seen some of the worst forms of human migrations fleeing conflict zones into the European Union from the war hit Middle East, Rohingya communities in Myanmar to adjacent countries to mention only a handful. Asia has been a volatile conflict zones with millions of lives lost over decades in war and ethnic violence and in territorial wars. Almost all countries in the continent have been exposed to such form of war and destabilization in some parts of their modern history and socio-economic life. Territorial disputes among several countries across

the continents is the most conspicuous character of Asia; the most prominent being the conflict between Israel and Palestine over West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem; and between India, Pakistan and China on their Himalayan front, between Japan and Russia over the Kuril islands and between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the Durand Line has remained perpetual with zero resolution achieved till date. Numerous conflicts over ownership of islands between China and countries like Japan, Viet Nam, the Philippines, Brunei and Malaysia has been hitting frontline news across the globe. Regular geostrategic conflicts between global powers like the US, Russia, India and China is further deteriorating the peace and stability process that is much needed for the entire continent.

Lack of coordination, cooperation, communication, mistrust and proper diplomatic channels have been hampering the process of peace and stability between several countries. Insurgency in the worst forms have been observed across the Middle East and South Asia impacting trade and commerce, livelihood, tourism, environment, infrastructural development, education and training and modernization of vast areas of several under developed and developing countries located in the region. The changes in the foreign policy of most global powers are also impacting the process of peace negotiations, political stability and economic development in several countries of the Middle East, Central, South, South East and Far East nations in Asia. To add the last nail to the Asian coffin; the region also has one of the most highly sophisticated, legal as well illegal concentration of nuclear weapon systems that could prove to be a future catastrophe.

Hence, it is quite pertinent to ask if the volatile and destabilize areas of the continents like the Middle East, the Gulf region, Gaza, West Bank, Jerusalem, South Asia, Korean Peninsula, South and East China sea will continue to observe deteriorating situations. The perpetual conflicts between Israel-Palestine, Saudi Arabia-Iran, Afghanistan-Pakistan, India-Pakistan, South Korea-North Korea as well as between India, Japan, China and Russia and the US will raise more questions than answers we may have in the not so distant uncertain future. If all the major global powers do not come and discuss the destabilizing issues observed across Asia; and find comprehensive, humanitarian and acceptable solutions for the regional conflicts, Asia will continue to serve as global high flash point with serious implications for the rest of the world.

A peaceful Asia will mean a better and resilient world; and a disabled and disintegrated Asia with huge power vacuums can seriously catalyze our own demise, no matter where we live. Asia represents the core of current global conflicts and needs highest attention and support for timely resolution of conflicts. If these continue to go out of proportion as we have been observing over the decades a very dark future awaits the continent as well as the planet. If the global powers and the regional and local governments do not work with another with mutual trust and respect; we are probably pushing the continent and her unfortunate people in slowly but steadily marching towards an uncertain future. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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