

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



February 04, 2015

Clash between Government Organs

The strife between the parliament and the local bodies of government is worsening with every passing day, and we heard about the closure of some more local bodies in a number of provinces of the country in last few days, including of Wardak and others. This indeed is an alarming situation. The disagreement started when parliament declared that local bodies don't have the authority of oversight of projects in the provinces and they exist to provide with counseling and advice in regards of the issues of the province. In reaction to this, a number of local government bodies in a number of provinces were closed down and the protest of local bodies is still in progress and this shutdown has further spread to a number of other provinces in the country. At present, there doesn't seem to be any kind of resolution to this problem.

Although there is present some concern over the absence of local bodies and their proper functioning but it is also a fact that majority of people in the rural and urban areas are absolutely unaware of the logic for the existence of these bodies. Millions of Afghans of taxpayers are spent every year for the functioning of these bodies. Their members get good salaries and their offices are maintained with proper expense. But large amount of money is spent on the protocol of the members of these bodies. In the same way, the local and central Election Commissions spend millions for their elections. On the other hand, this is a kind of mechanism which has been implemented without proper understanding and public perception. Not many people and even the members of these local bodies are not aware as why they hold their offices and have been selected by people. In the same way, lack of awareness by people makes it happen that no one demands for any kind of service from them. It is the reason why, there has been very less reaction from people after this disagreement and we have not witnessed any kind of protest in support of these local bodies and having a look at the present trend, there doesn't seem to be any possibility of any such support from public.

This drastic picture brings into light another reality that there has not been any proper training for people and members of these local bodies. When millions of dollars were spent for the running of these institutions, it was also needed that little attention could have been given for making grounds for the proper functioning of these bodies. It also shows a gap between our institutions and government organs when no one is there to check the performance of these bodies. It was not clear as who would be responsible to check if these government bodies are actually working or not. It was also necessary that the responsibilities of the members of these bodies should have been properly designed and their authority line should have been outlined but unfortunately, these tasks were not carried out properly and today, we see its results in the form of this uncertainty.

The present situation also shows a fact that these bodies were not functioning properly and if it is a case, there remains no logic in spending millions of the taxpayers that can be spent on other development projects. However, it is a fact that local government bodies are considered to be the most important organs of a democratic system. It is a fact that the central government may not be able to access every part of the country and in such circumstances, these government bodies have been found to be very effective. These local bodies are comprised of the local people who can better understand the situation of the area and the limited working area would also make sure that people would get their problems solved without running to distant offices. It is the reason why, the local government bodies are working effectively in almost all the democratic countries of the world.

But it is also a fact that it would take a number of years before different government organs start working properly. Most important is the need of deciding upon the limits of different organizations so that they should not get into clash with each other. At present, we see so many organs of government that can get into clash with each other. There is a parliament having its two houses. Then there is present a big team of President including of his vice-presidents, and of course, let's not forget the newly added post of the Chief Executive of the country and his vice-presidents. Then there is a long list of deputy ministers, and many more. We should also not forget the presidential governors and many other members of government. Then comes the turn of these local bodies and their members. In short, there is present a number of bodies that can get into clash with each other. It is not that any of these organs are extra or unnecessary but most important factor is the lack of proper understanding of their tasks and authorities. Present clash between these two government bodies gives us an opportunity to overview the whole system of government bodies and decide upon their limits and boundaries. It must be the utmost responsibility of the president and the chief executive.

By Asmatyari

Culture of Violence Must Be Halted

A society can exist with infidelity but not with malice", affirmed, the great Hazrat Ali (AS). The frequent tale of bloodsheds, aggravation, injustices, vindictiveness, corruption and mercilessness witnessed, have made us believe that the society thrives for its very existence against multiple annihilating forces. These evil forces exert hard forcing us to the verge of extinction. If not countered with virtuous forces, they might dominate, once forever. The attributes of modern society, encompassing everything for the good of human progeny, certainly are pursuable.

The long course we advanced could earn us nothing except the rule of nuisance, wicked deeds, widespread manipulation of power, suppression of oppressed and endless tales of barbarism against powerless segment of society. The blind and irrational socio-religious dictates have dominated our deeds and thoughts to the point of no reverse, equally beleaguering our fairer and lucid disposition in every field of human endeavor. Deeming women inferior creature is deliberate negation of their innate aptitude and universal attribute of God's equity.

Afghanistan is the land where women are treated as a third class citizen, and a household commodity, whose fate rests to parental sightless ruling. Women found exercising her willingness contrary to parental dictate is subjected to severe castigation and humiliation. The society where negation of unsound commandment is deemed immodesty and conceit, and pursuit of a rational discourse unpardonable sin, lies at the depth of moral abyss. Hence, a woman is bound to lead a life at utter submission of her family associates.

Formerly, an alleged heart wrenching tale of four female prisoners gang-raped by male prisoners who could easily sought entry in women cell unhindered, reflect a deepened loophole in security measure and alleged involvement of officials. This is not the only tragic incident but countless such incidents are the matter of routine happening, many of which go unreported. This depicts sexual abuse and rape of women and children have been rampant in Afghanistan. According to survey report released late last year, at least 245 women and children were raped across the country during the initial six months of 2014. These are the documented account of repressions, out of numerous undocumented. Nonetheless, the flawed jurisprudence can't guarantee necessary safeguards; make them more prone to violence. Rationally speaking, a woman being raped can never ever produce four eyewitnesses, to hold the culprits accountable in the court of justice for his wrong deed. Fearing weighty defamation and denouncement, she frequently opts for eternal silence. Consequently, law renders hapless, apprehending the culprits to restrain the evil practitioners.

Devoid of physical abuse, women are subjected to regular physical torture. The women of Afghanistan had been the biggest victims of violence. This state of affairs is confirmed by the Afghan ambassador to the UN who told the Security Council that women have borne the brunt of the conflict for over 30 years whilst calling 2014 a deadly for females. He stated that during the former year, 12 percent more women were killed and injured than in 2013. The other setbacks for women's rights in 2014 included attacks on high-profile women, including police officers and

activists. Women in Afghanistan, including women in public roles and girls seeking education, are often targeted. The women who opt for outdoor chores in the bid to financial independence are subjected to harassment at work. The government could hardly provide with rare shelved laws, hardly applied. The dominant culture of violence let not government come up with appropriate remedies. Apart from state actors the non-state actors, Taliban and insurgents, opposed to women's independence, are frequently inflicting severe harsh and capital punishments those accused of immodesty.

Responding at the call of human right organizations and restricting the exploitation of women, a landmark law on Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) was designed. Proposed in 2009, the EVAW law criminalizes acts of violence against women and harmful practices including child marriage, forced marriage, forced self-immolation, 'baad' (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute) and 18 other acts of violence against women including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators. But implementation has been slow and uneven, with police still reluctant to enforce the legal prohibition against violence and harmful practices, and prosecutors and courts slow to enforce the legal protections in the law. The incumbent government must do away the containments on the way to fair implementation of the EVAW law.

Earlier, Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO), a non-governmental organization, conducted a survey followed by a report. AHRDO interviewed 1,076 people in Kabul, 756 in Herat, 782 in Nangarhar, 606 in Balkh, and 682 in Bamiyan for the report. The AHRDO expressed great concern in their recent report titled "Women in the Perspective of Men" on the growing culture of female discrimination and harassment in every aspect of life. According to the report, the method of preaching pursued by Mullahs throughout the regions without government control persuade the people toward extremism and violence against females, which has caused the deprivation of women of their basic humanitarian rights and raised violence against them.

Violence against women in Afghanistan have kept women very far away from education which is one of the reasons that usually subjected them to extensive discriminations because they are kept ignorant of their fundamental rights. The choices of Afghan women are extraordinarily restricted; the family decides the fate of their lives.

We turn deaf ears to the hapless cries, blind eyes negligent to see the magnitude of mental sufferings they endure while getting out to earn a livelihood, numb to realize the numerous pain of gender based victimization they bear frequently, because of fallacious socio-religious structure based on irrational biases, which the culture grows rapidly. It reflects women are coerced to repression after being found ill-fated and voiceless.

The escalated graph of violence in Afghanistan such as domestic violence, honor killing, and sexual violence against women and young girls going uninterrupted is the matter of great concern everyone. Unless the incumbent government takes bold and immediate actions undoing all such developments eroding and restraining the capabilities of women we may not put an end to culture of violence.

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Does Democracy Challenge Our Religious Beliefs?

By: Hujjatullah Zia

Embracing human rights in modern term, as stated in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which are based on being human irrespective of one's race, sex, color, beliefs, etc, plays a highly integral role in democratic systems. Citizens are supposed to be entitled with equal rights and opportunities in participating in political decisions, general assembly and/or playing their role in social, cultural and economic issues. Since, democracy is popularly defined by Abraham Lincoln as, "The government of the people for the people by the people"; people's part is salient in democratic government.

Mr. Mujtahid Shabestari, an Iranian religious intellectual, believes that democracy will adapt to the customs, cultures, beliefs and particular philosophies of all tribes and nations in any geographical parts of the world without causing a change or imposing particular custom or beliefs on citizens and it is the very antithesis of dictatorial regimes. According to him, democratic government will not prioritize any interpretation of the world, human, custom or belief, for government's involvement in these issues - which are supposed to be dealt by scholars and philosophers - will pave the way for despotism. He adds that since democracy aims to provide citizens with welfare and worldly comforts rather than heavenly prosperity, one's religious beliefs will be untouched by this system.

In our society, it seems that democracy challenges our religious beliefs and understandings - which mostly root in traditional interpretations of religion. For instance, the equal rights of men and women or Muslims and non-Muslims are yet the debatable issues not only in our society but also all over the Muslim world. What is the reason behind such interpretations or traditional mentalities? For centuries, our Muftis referred to the historical backgrounds of women in Arab Peninsula - where women were considered inferior and a sudden Islamization of their culture would lead to a social backlash. Therefore, a swift change was deemed inappropriate in the sensitive condition of Bedouin Arabs and Muslims had no choice other than living with a minor cultural reformation such as precluding them from burying alive the girls, adopting sympathetic attitudes towards women, developing humanly perspectives about them, etc. In other words, Muslims' humanitarian practices towards male and female smack of their indiscriminate and corroborate the equal rights of both the genders. It is widely believed that a number of issues were imposed on Islam despite being disfavored by this religion. For instance, if Islam invalidated slavery abruptly, it would not be welcomed in that certain time or circumstance. Therefore, our Prophet (PBUH) was freeing slaves and preached that it was an act of virtue. So, the system of slavery was invalidated with the passage of time. Since Prophet Muham-

mad (PBUH) held his society's cultural and social values in high esteem, Muslim Ummah should also respect the social norms of the present era. In other words, our Muftis and clergy are supposed to interpret Islam in a modern way so as to respond properly to the current needs of our younger generation. A great Afghan Ayatollah Sheikh Ishaq Fayyaz, a theologian in Najaf Madrasah in Iraq, interprets Islam in harmony with our modern age. As a result, unlike many other Muftis, he has issued fatwa that women are no more under the dominance of their husbands. In other words, it was previously said by Muftis that women cannot leave their homes without the permission of their husbands, but he denies it. Moreover, he asserts that women can be candidate for being a leader or a judge and can take active parts in social, cultural, economic, etc. activities the same as men. Islam has an open structure and no especial parties or institutions are introduced officially in the nature of this religion to explain religious Sharia. Therefore, there exists a myriad of interpretations in Islamic texts, and fundamental interpretations are more prominent than secular ones which are done by the people and among the people. In short, people simply take traditional or radical views out of context.

To know better, let us view these two verses of Holy Qur'an, "O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered - the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct. This is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment. And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous." In the second verse which asserts that there is saving of life in retribution, many interpret that letting the murderers kill one with impunity will encourage them more which may lead to further deaths, thus they must be punished. But to ponder over the context of the above verses, the fact will be otherwise. The verse was descended when some tribes, among Bedouin Arabs, prioritized their people and for the death of one member of their tribes, they killed more people in retaliation. In such a case, the verse was sent to establish justice and the correct interpretation is that killing two or more people in retaliation for one death will jeopardize further lives and a just retribution will save the life of others. To conclude, the door for interpretations of religious texts is open to Muslims and they, especially the Islamic theologians and Muftis, have to interpret Islamic law in a way to suit our modern needs. And considering the above analyses, democracy does not challenge Islamic law but confronts fundamental and traditional interpretations of Islam.

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