

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

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Education is Central to Collective Progress

Education is a versatile tool guaranteeing stability, social cohesion and societal uplift whilst ensuring respect for human rights. Many societal problems get regulated after education stands top most priority. The skinny budget allocated for education ridicules us as a nation and marks deep-rooted state of intellectual bankruptcy. Unless education renders preliminary requisite, success may remain a day dream.

Control of the education system has been a mobilizing force for the conservative and radicalized movement that led to overthrow of the Soviet government and the subsequent rise to power of the Taliban. During the reign of Taliban the educational system was inclined to produce Mujahedeen. Till date Taliban misinterpret several Quranic verses to justify killings of thousands of innocents, prohibit women of acquiring education, label co-education illicit and the modern scientific inventions desecrated – the list goes on and on.

Formerly, Taliban reiterated their support to education in Afghanistan given in a proper environment in line with Islamic instructions. "Parents should not to enroll their children to schools funded by Christians," Taliban warned. None is defiant of the fact that Taliban talk of education but keep on promoting violence, bloodshed, butchery and mass killing of innocents on biased religious grounds.

Aiming to put Afghanistan on the course of endemic upheaval and turmoil, Taliban's advice will stand sufficient. It is evident that education can function as a root cause and feeder of conflict, with the potential to retrench ethnic/religious divides and other societal cleavages. This dual nature of education reflects both the positive, or peace building and the negative, or conflict enhancing potential of education. A careful examination of the linkage between education conflict and peace building in Afghanistan demonstrates the ways in which education policy reforms have to be deliberately used creating the conditions for building a foundation for reconciliation and sustainable peace. It is right for the world and us to worry about the impact of Afghanistan's dysfunctional educational system especially when it has been demonstrated that poorly educated young men in a country as large as Afghanistan pose a serious security threat to the rest of the world. Millions of families, especially those with little money, send their children to religious schools or Madressahs. Many of these schools are the only opportunity available for an education, but some have been used as nurturing ground for violent extremism. There is no doubt that Madressahs need to be reformed but what is even more critical is the reform of public sector educational systems. Aside from the aforesaid facts, a glance at our deserted national priorities disheartens us of interminable irrational and abrupt priorities which happen to be mostly influential than inspirational. The undertakings executed under the influence of forged circumstances than national priorities do not yield the desired result based on national interest.

The misleading opinion owned by political elite deluded them of genuine issues, instead are stuck to unfound motives in seeking the traces of others involvement despite owing hundreds of operational departments under their service. Sticking to state of constant denial, owing the responsibility of mishaps undertaken in one's realm marks an in-depth degree of incompetence whilst negating any expectancy of betterment. Consequently the politicians are lost in delusion and do not try to revisit the grey areas of governance; consequently improvement has turned an intangible target given a rational dictum for intellectual and material achievements has never been a pursuable discourse for our politician. Regrettably the efforts are mostly exercised to earn the credit for else good deeds instead of owing and following a clear stance. Formerly a report surfaced that unearthed that three million children remain out of school across the country, despite partial improvement in the quality of education and staff capacity. This is a worrisome figure reflecting government's interest towards educational betterment. According to Ministry of Education in recent year, more than nine million students, 40 percent of them girls, were enrolled in schools across the country. Over 700,000 others, 60 percent of them females, attended literacy programs. It further entails 24 percent of children were still deprived of education due to lack of professional staff, closure of schools in insecure areas and other challenges. The unending state negligence depicts, a magic might reverse the notorious state Afghanistan faces at present.

Afghanistan's spending on education is not enough seeing the magnitude of illiteracy. The remedy is to increase the proportion of public resources going into education. If tax-to-GDP ratio cannot be increased, the state should be willing to divert resources from sectors with lower priority towards education. The donor community has been prepared to help with funds when it is not feared that domestic resources were constrained to allow for an increase in public sector expenditure on education. The obvious solution is to invest in teacher training, reforming the curriculum and improving the quality of textbooks that should be deficient of religio-ethnic biases. The role of education for joint uplift of a nation is irrefutably central. The collective socio-economic and political advances of a nation are determined by the degree of concentration diverted to improve its literacy graph and the amount of resources allocated to this preliminary societal need. A nation reaches to prominence, turn unbeatable and matchless, only when greater intrepid steps are taken to eliminate illiteracy by declaring the state of educational emergency. The profound significance of education in societal ascend is established and undisputed, contrary to being failed to inspire our politicians.



The Dystopia of the Villagers

By Hujjatullah Zia

I can still feel the pinch of the cardboard on my feet as I walked three miles to school. But it was better than having leaking shoes. This was only one childhood experience that gave me the resolve to strive for a better life."

I remember vividly when a number of children were walking to school for long hours in a mountainous village of Dairkundi province. Their sloppy clothes and leaking shoes, in frigid weather, could raise one's concern easily. Moreover, the teenage boys and girls were trembling with cold on the way to tuition classes in chilly winter. Some seemed to be faint with hunger and, perhaps, had got only a roof over their heads.

I could hardly repress my emotions to know that being a child in remote villages is unlucky. Although, the kids were romping jauntily in their childish games, their hearts must have been fraught with pain and suffering. In other words, their pale faces and wan smiles reflected the surreptitious world of their deprivation. Perhaps, whilst playing game or writing in the class, the children worried about dinner more than their parents. As a result, some of the kids curtailed their game to help their parents in household chores.

The twin problems of poverty and unemployment compound the challenges of the rural areas. They either have to grin and bear it in their sedentary life or must choose a nomadic life. Since the said problems are indigenous to their areas, people flock to neighboring countries so as to make the ends meet. So, the assiduous workmen leave their homes for many years in search of bread and butter. After all, they encounter manifold challenges in their peregrinations without receiving a cursory attention from the officials.

Lack of birth control multiplies their poverty. In spite of their economic constraints and nominal remuneration, many feel less sense of parental responsibilities regarding contraception and neglect paying a consummate attention to the needs of their children. It is believed that such issues precipitate violence or even social disorders.

Children naturally fantasize about utopian world in their childhood. Since a hungry person dreams a hot barbecue, the poor individuals also dream coins and visionary apartments. However, when their dreams do not come true, they will feel a lump in their throat. Therefore, some will resort to illegal activities so as to undo their deprivation – though it is a wrong selection. So, how to curb this challenge?

The government is supposed to facilitate the citizens and provide them equal rights and opportunities so that they can flourish their latent talents. Being born in a village must not be considered unlucky. In other words, a baby born in a remote area should be treated the same as one being born in

the heart of a capital city. A high imbalance, in social, cultural, educational and economic issues among the citizens will put the government's justice under question. Hope, the government no longer turns its back on the challenges of the rural areas.

Moreover, it is a great misfortune to see that the schism between the poor and the rich widens with each passing day. In the frigid zone of our inhumanity, one will not care about the empty stomach of his/her next-door neighbors. It is highly amazing for me that how the rich mollify their conscience to eat sumptuous meals in skyscrapers and don't lose any sleep over their fellows' poverty. To state incisively, the rumbling stomachs of the poor, who stay awake for the whole nights for feeling cold and hungry, cannot rouse their concerns at all.

It is rightly said, "... I was like a blindfolded man in a forest, who doesn't even know where north or south is. If you don't eventually come to truly understand the history of the class struggle, or at least have a clear idea that society is divided between the rich and the poor, and that some people subjugate and exploit other people, you're lost in a forest, not knowing anything."

I really feel nauseous with such types of life that we live. Moral values, which are the soul of a society, are taking their last breath and humans are short of humanity. No one feels the pains and pressures suffered by neighbors. So, how one can claim to cherish moral values?

"One of the reasons behind failure of the recent moral crusade is due to a lack of moral courage in identifying the root of corruption not just in Afghanistan but in the world. The root of corruption lies in the economic dictatorship of the world's economies by a handful of financial interests who operate using banks and corporations. Those who profit out of this reign are corrupted by their blood money and those who are victims of this reign are corrupted by cultural imperialism and poverty. Hence, if we really want a moral society, we have to end economic exploitation of the economic dictatorship of Afghanistan and the world. This involves a movement for economic rights for every person to be guaranteed the rights to survival – such as food, water, clothing, shelter, education and medical care. This is a mission to create an economy of the local people, by the local people and for the local people."

In addition, the rich should note that the blazing fire burning their neighbors emits smoke which will go to their eyes. To avoid going blind, they are recommended to go to their aid with a sense of humanity.

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Concerns Persist after 13 Years

By Najeebullah Wajahat

Afghanistan, like so many other countries, has tasted the flavor of so many ups and downs in its history and has experienced variant political systems; from tribe-based system to absolute monarchy and from constitutional monarchy to democracy, and even Sharia Law (Taliban claim it to be a system based on fundamental Islamic principles.) Throughout the history, Afghanistan has been engaged in varied wars and battles. Despite all the conflicts, all the wars and all the ups and downs a reality has coexisted with this country. And it is that no other country or force regardless of its power and strength, has been able to rule on this country. So, no one can question the dignity and greatness of Afghanistan. It is a dignified and proud country. It has its own historic antiquity values.

The current face of Afghanistan is its democratic face. After almost three decades of darkness, warfare, immigration and slaughters which caused immense and irreversible destruction and miseries for the country and its people, finally; a candle was burned and a light was enlightened in the heart of the country. That candle revived the hopes of Afghans and enabled them to think of new dreams for their country and their children. They could see peace and stability in the light of it. When the transitional government was formed with the backing of International community and inflowing aids, public anticipation was very high and a lot was expected from it. There weren't any ill- anticipation and ideal demand. In fact all the expectations were right and fulfilling. All the government had to do was to show a little honesty and utilize the aids properly.

History has proved that changing momentum and developmental chances come rarely for a nation and shouldn't be squandered. Throughout the history whenever the opportunities are utilized and the progressive and changing momentums are kept on, the genuine changes and developments have been brought and seen in countries. Without them the societies go on monotonously and people live repetitive lives. Afghanistan has had many opportunities so far but unfortunately due to different preventing factors (including dishonest politicians and corrupt leadership on the top) has not been able to utilize the opportunities as required.

No doubt, the presence of international community with its support and significant aids created a golden opportunity for Afghanistan to get out of the troubles, enhance

its security and more importantly build its infrastructures. Since formation of the first transitional government after the collapse of Taliban regime, huge amount of money has been donated to Afghanistan for its constructional projects and institutionalization of democracy.

But the reality is that after the passage of 12 years the Afghan masses have the same anxieties, the same dreams and the same expectations. No eye-catching change or difference can be seen in the lives of ordinary people. Still the main concern of an ordinary Afghan is how to feed his children and keep them alive. The secondary life requirements are far away from ordinary Afghans. This regretting and tear shading condition proves that neither both the transitional and the elected governments have been honest and sympathetic to the people nor they have been able to use the international aids properly during the last 12 years.

This trend was sparked after the incident of 9/11, when Taliban were asked to break ties with Al-Qaeda and surrender Al-Qaeda leaders; but they refused. This refusal dared the United States of America and its allies to invade Afghanistan which resulted to the collapse of Taliban regime and empowerment of first transitional government under the presidency of Hamid Karzia.

Security condition in most parts of the country was far better in early years after the defeat of Taliban which made Afghans more hopeful and optimistic about the future. But unfortunately since then security has been on the track of deterioration in all provinces of the country. Taliban have not been crack-downed rather they are given chance and time for reinforcement to broaden their devastating attacks. Furthermore, helpless Afghan passengers have been put on the mercy of their brutality on the highways.

Having a glance at the new setup formed almost four months ago, one comes to know that the new government wants to play the same game; played by the ex-government. There is no prominent cue or witness to approve the waiting will of the new team for change. As long as there is no political will for change, expectations for change seem like a daydream. As they use the same cards and go on with the same strategies so the people suffer from the existing crisis and chaos. What is required from the new setup is to listen to the voices of people of Afghanistan rather than listening to the armed groups. People are chanting that they need security, good governance and sincerity. That's what the new government has to focus on.

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