

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



February 09, 2015

Poverty and Unemployment - Afghans' Twin Problems

An affluent and squeamish individual, who lives in a skyscraper and eats sumptuous meals, will never bother himself/herself to imagine the vicissitudes of the poor who reside the slum area. The struggle for surviving hunger and cold continues unabated among the itinerant beggars and unlucky narcotic addicts. A coterie of hoboes lacks a roof over their heads or even a soft pillow to repose their heads upon and many of Afghan population live in truncated edifices and hardly make the ends meet through backbreaking chores.

It is a matter of great concern to see that a profligate son of a high-ranking official spends a large amount of money for eating lunch in expensive hotel - which equals one-week expanses of an abstemious vendor. Moreover, the derogatory remarks and disgusting looks at homeless individuals, especially at hapless addicts, compound one's dismay. To their unmitigated chagrin, the painful suffering of the needy in torrid summers and frigid winters, which is supposed to come to light, is forgotten.

Poverty precipitates violence and conjugal strife among Afghan families. For instance, when a workman can't afford the demands of his family, he will encounter the fractious attitudes of his family members. Even a phlegmatic spouse will lose her patients to endure the misery of her husband for the whole life. Additionally, Afghan workmen suffer from unemployment and the sporadic employment with nominal remuneration will be no more than a flash on the pan for their households.

It is believed that altruism and a sense of devotion, with few exceptions, are taking their last breath not only in our society but also all around the world. The megalomania of the rich grows more than ever before and their appetite for larger amount of money is insatiable. In other words, the rich bury themselves in the flamboyant world of wealth and comforts turning their backs on their hungry fellows.

"Man's inhumanity to man" is the lugubrious story of our day. When a man starves to death by the skyscraper of his next-door neighbor is not a story at all, but his daughter is molested or the body of his female child is found after being abducted and raped on the grounds of rivalry or revenge, her family's reputations are blackened by his neighbors just for the hack of it.

"We have to recognize that a spirit of individualism and confusion has reduced us to an ethic of 'every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.' This ethic... is nothing but the secular ethic of the affluent society, based on the false assumption that if everyone is bent on making money for himself the common good will automatically follows, due to the operation of economic laws."

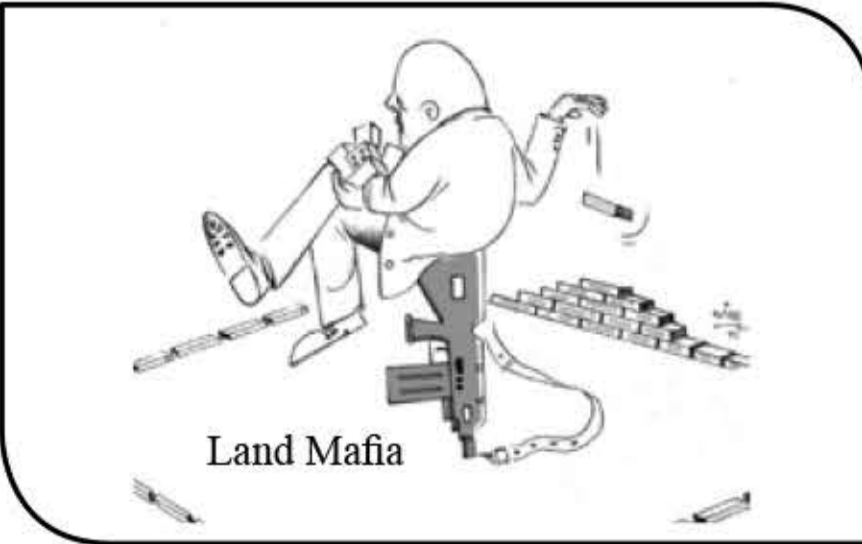
Lewis (1961), a famous sociologist, argues that the culture of poverty exists amongst many poor people. According to him, poverty is not the result of one's disqualification or inability rather it is the result of social and cultural atmosphere in which the poor children get socialized. This passes to the next generation and they will come to know that their expectation of a better life is a dream. Ultimately, they will succumb to poverty and a low morale.

Charles Murray (1984), an American sociologist, extends the hypothesis of culture of poverty. According to him, the case of those who are involved in poverty due to adverse circumstances, such as widows, orphan children or the disabled falls in one category. He talks of a 'dependency culture' among the poor who rely on government's charity rather than going out to work. Murray argues that the affluence of welfare-oriented governments has created a subculture which subdues ambitions and the push towards self-help. Such welfare policies have uprooted the interest in work-ethics from some people.

A feeling of sadness must permeate among the poor who feel no light at the end of the tunnel. The suffering and misery of the poor have been the puissant debates in national and international media, however could not draw the government's serious attention. The schism between the destitute and government has widened to a large extent. The stentorian diatribes and incisive complaints against the officials fall on deaf ears and now there remains no energy for the people to raise their voice. They are expected to grin and bear it.

After all, even though the poor and the unemployed take the brunt of hardships, they hold out hope via resistant strain to survive the hunger and misery. The fate has played a cruel role in their life, and it is they to change it for the better one. As citizens, they are entitled with the right to urge the government to provide them job - especially after the mouth-watering promises of the president in his electoral campaigns regarding the economic crisis.

In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life or contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which has been so laboriously built up.



The Graveness of Afghan Refugees' Plight

By Dilawar Sherzai

The poor Afghan refugees who have left their homeland and are compelled to live in other countries have very uncertain and on some occasions even pathetic lives. The foreign lands have not always treated them with warm hugs; every now and then they have been the victims of discrimination and ill-treatment. Most of the Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries, especially in Iran and Pakistan have suffered the consequences of fluctuations in the way they are treated. Definitely, it has been generous of both the countries to compensate the Afghan refugees, who because of wars and instability left their dear homeland, but on certain occasions they have also displayed the attitude that have violated the rights of the refugees to a great extent.

Definitely, these countries have their own problems; they are developing countries and they have their own economic issues to face; however, they have been supported by international community and United Nations to assist the refugees and guarantee their rights under international law. The refugees in Pakistan, recently, have been facing serious problems. Especially the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) government, after the incident of the killing of innocent school children in Army Public School Peshawar, has been very harsh towards Afghan refugees. Alleging the involvement of certain Afghan refugees in the incident, the KPK government, since January this year, has been very active in compelling the refugees to leave Pakistan or even directly expelled them from Pakistani land. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Afghanistan has said that thousands of Afghan families are fleeing Pakistan to run away harassment by KPK police. In a statement, the IOM's chief in Afghanistan - Richard Danzinger has mentioned that more than 22,000 undocumented Afghans flocked across the border at Torkham in January, 2015 alone, which is more than twice the figure for the whole of 2014. This clearly depicts the stance of the KPK government towards Afghan refugees, which is not acceptable by any standard. Even if certain culprits among the Afghan refugees were involved in the Peshawar incident, it does not, in any way, give the KPK government freehand to treat all the refugees alike. There are definitely, small children and women among these refugees and they do not deserve to be treated in such a harsh manner.

According to certain estimates there are about three million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and out of these three million, more than one million are believed to be undocumented and do not have legal protections like the documented refugees and they are the most vulnerable ones. As they do not have legal protections, they bear the brunt of changing circumstances the most. Whenever, law enforcement agencies in Pakistan face any pressure, these refugees are the first to be victimized. The sad story is that the Afghan refugees who return to Afghanistan do not have proper services and requirements available for them. The Afghan government is not in the position to completely absorb the returning refugees and would face immense pressure in order to provide compensations for them. IOM currently claims to be monitoring the return situation in Afghanistan along with the Afghan government, particularly with Afghan Ministry

of Refugees and Repatriation. The Organization has deployed field monitors to Torkham to interview returning families and further assess the situation but post assessment would require practical measures and a lot of financial support and assistance from the international community. It is also an undeniable fact that Afghan refugees have to return to their country some day. They cannot and should not be living away from their motherland forever; however, Afghan government at present is not in a situation to shoulder the responsibilities of all the refugees from Pakistan and even the undocumented refugees. Pakistani government in this regard should cooperate with Afghan government and make the return of the refugees possible step by step, giving Afghan authorities and international community and organizations enough time and capacity to handle the situation. Pakistani authorities, in particular, Pakistani police should change its stance and behavior against the Afghan refugees. They have the responsibility to take care of the security situation but they do not have the right to harass or discriminate the Afghan refugees. Afghan people currently have concerns regarding the condition of their fellow countrymen in Pakistan. On Sunday, February 08, the Young Activists Network for Reform and Change (YANRC) urged the UN and other international organizations to clarify their stance over the ongoing harassment of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Sayyed Maisam Ihsan, the spokesperson for the Network said in a statement that Pakistani security officials have been arresting innocent refugees from roads and streets and putting them behind the bars. He insisted that the Afghan government should take serious notice of the situation. He also claimed that over 3,000 Afghan refugees had been deported from Pakistan and that their harassment was against international norms and agreement between the government of Pakistan and the International Organization of Migration (IOM).

Similarly, Afghan Ambassador in Islamabad Janan Musazai held a meeting with Imran Khan and KPK Chief Minister Parvaiz Khat-tak and discussed the ongoing situation of Afghan refugees. Janan Musazai emphasized that the intensified deportation of the refugees and their harassment was a matter of concern and Imran Khan, in response, assured that police would no longer harass Afghan refugees in KPK province. He also assured that Pakistan would continue assisting and cooperating with their Afghan brethren. He also directed the KPK government to make sure that Afghan refugees were treated in accordance with the law. He also directed the government to make arrangements for return of Afghan refugees.

Though the assurance by Imran Khan is an important development, assurances alone would not solve the issue. The most important step required at this moment is that both the countries must agree upon a particular strategy regarding the return of the refugees, keeping in consideration all the issues faced by Pakistani government to retain the refugees and all the difficulties faced by Afghan government in compensating for the requirements of the return of the refugees. It has to be taken care of that the return of the refugees must not turn into one of the most serious tragedies of the time.

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Civil Society and Social Challenges

By Hujjatullah Zia

From the earliest times, human communities required cooperative behavior for survival, and it is clear that ancient patterns of social coordination imprinted institutional practices and beliefs that still shape our contemporary world. Recent decades have witnessed a great surge of new interest in civil society. Scholars, commentators, and political actors of all stripes have debated the concept, universally acknowledging its centrality to the rise of modern democracy while disputing its definition and function. It remains a contested and elusive idea, simultaneously animating and complicating contemporary debates about the nature of political life.

We are all members of civil society. Just as citizens relate to the state and family members relate to domestic life, we all connect to one another in society through a network of values and institutions that define us as actors in the civil sphere. The quality of our participation in private and public life is in fact closely intertwined with the character of our actions in civil society.

A major concern today is that the very impulse to protect and invigorate individual preferences may diminish a broader sense of social bonds and trust necessary for collective action. The growth of exaggerated individualism in civil society becomes clearly one of the preeminent public concerns for liberal democracy.

To the degree that civil society's ability to balance the pursuit of private interest with public well-being is diminished, to that degree is liberal democracy endangered. The health and evolution of civil society thus has profound importance for the unfolding of political life in the 21st century.

For The French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, civil society resulted from the degeneration of a basically good state of nature. Man's problems arose because of civil society. He believed that the state of nature changed because it was internally unstable. For example, because talents were not distributed equally among persons, the balance that existed in the state of nature was disturbed and with inequality came conflicting interests. The more talented, able, and intelligent people brought about advances in science, technology, commerce, and so on. Because people simply are born with certain natural endowments, a person cannot be praised for having talent or blamed for not having it. Rousseau saw talent as naturally leading to achievement. Inequality developed as some people produced more and earned more. He failed to acknowledge the importance of motivation, industry, and volitional use of one's reason and other potentialities.

Rousseau observed that although life was peaceful in the state of nature, people were unfulfilled. They needed to interact in order to find actualization. Evil, greed, and selfishness emerged as human society began to develop. As people formed social institutions, they developed vices. One such institution was private property

that encouraged greed and self-interest. Rousseau viewed private property as a destructive and impulsive institution that rewarded greed and luck. Hence, civil society was born when people began fencing off their property, claiming that it was theirs, and finding that other people agreed with them.

The perspective of many of today's environmentalists can be traced back to Rousseau who believed that the more men deviated from the state of nature, the worse off they would be.

Rousseau seems to strongly believe that a government is only truly "free" if all of its citizens have the ability to voice their opinions and vote. The natural levels of inequality based on age, gender, and race that are apparent in the state of nature, are eliminated with the creation of a civil society and "social contract".

Everything changed as civil society developed, but permission was not given for things to change. He contends that it is wrong to change the condition of all without asking. Rousseau is concerned that some people become relatively poorer without having lost anything. Not only are their feelings hurt, their right to stagnate has been violated. The poor, weak, and indolent did not want to change, but things around them changed, forcing them to steal or receive subsistence from the rich.

He thought private property to be the source of social ills. He considered that private ownership of property tended to corrupt men and destroy their character and regarded the man without property to be the freest. Although he did not actually support the abolition of private property, he believed that private property should be minimal and should be distributed equally among the members of the society. Rousseau anticipated the need for the state to minimize private property. He wanted the property of the state to be as great and powerful as possible, and that of the citizens to be as small and weak as possible. With private property being so limited, the state would need to apply very little force in order to lead the people.

John Locke's central belief is that society is set up to protect the individual's personal property and to avoid disputes over property. These disputes can either be local or international, and can go as far as causing civil, or world wars.

In Locke's social contract, men have unequal amounts of possessions on earth, which is contrary to the understanding of Rousseau. What seems to undermine Locke's reasoning is the fact that Locke's underlying basis for man having personal property is that there is enough to go around for everyone. I find this reasoning to be completely flawed based on society today. Comparing Locke and Rousseau is not as black and white as it may appear. Both believe in the power of the "civil society," but for different reasons. Each of the thinker's reasoning ultimately lead to one point that the power of the community to provide protection; whether it be for an individual's personal property, or for the protection of the society as a whole.

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