

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



February 11, 2015

The Burning Issue of Electoral Reforms

The issue of reforms in the system of elections is resounding in both national and international media and after the resolution of the cabinet, this has emerged as the most important and crucial issue for the unity government. The efforts are underway in the lines of government and according to the sources of Presidential Palace, second Vice-President, Sarwar Danish has been assigned by the president with a special duty to start the work on electoral reforms. At the same time, the Chief Executive has also shown keen interest in making happen these reforms in the earliest time possible.

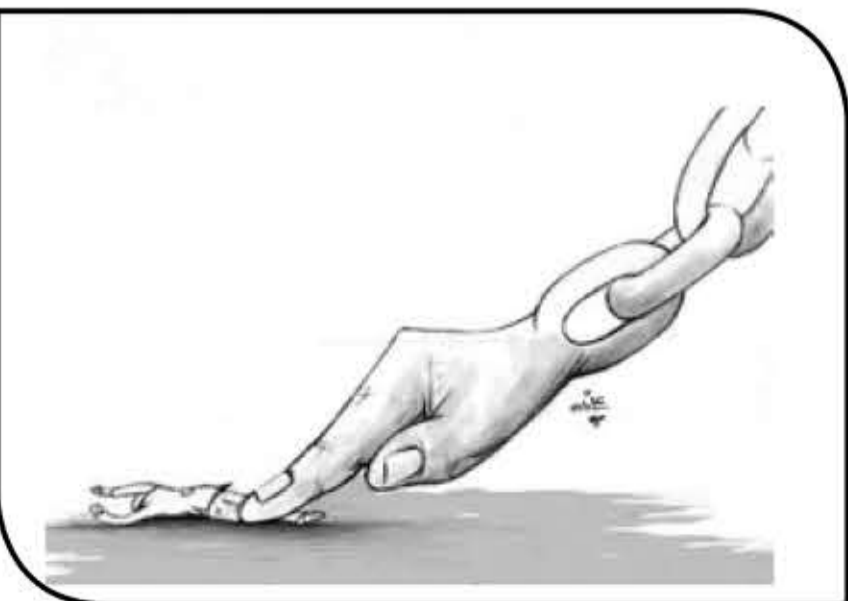
In the wake of upcoming parliamentary elections next year, the reforms in the system of elections are felt very badly. Due to the complications and defects in our electoral system, we had the worst electoral deadlock of history in last year's presidential elections and these fraudulent elections had almost wasted all the gains of last thirteen years' gains of democratic government in the country. These elections not only resulted in the worst electoral stalemate but defamed our electoral system and government practices the world over. These elections not only failed to decide upon the future ruler of the country but created a deadlock that was only solved by the intervention of US Foreign Secretary, John Kerry and representatives of a number of international powers. According to UN, these were the only elections in which hundred percent votes were recounted and the whole process of elections took the longest time ever. It is feared that due to the prevalent defects in our electoral system, the upcoming parliamentary elections will also result in similar complications and once again, the fate of the country would be put on risk.

The intentions and the disappointment of international community about the present system of elections was evident by the fact that European Union recently warned that without proper reforms in the electoral process, they would not provide any financial aid to Afghanistan and their assistance in future will be associated with the performance of country in bringing reforms in the electoral process. Same or less are the intentions of the other countries that are at present supporting the financial needs of the country. With the latest revelations about the fraudulent practices in last presidential elections, these elections have now proved to be one of the worst elections the country had in its democratic life. Poll rigging, the influence of local government bodies and tribal or local elders, the involvement of the employees of commission in the electoral malpractices and other cases of fraud left a shameful mark on the pages of our national history. If proper reforms are not made in this regard, the country may once again fall into the similar dangers and it is not necessary that country should be able to recover from the losses. The first and foremost step in the election reforms would be the replacement of old and corrupt officials of election commission. As has been revealed, the senior officers and also the inferior staff was involved in wide-scale electoral frauds. Until and unless these officials are not changed, the scenario may not change so much. It falls on the shoulder of the authorities to find honest and neutral officers for the election commission. Second most important factor in regards of electoral reforms is to give absolute authority and freedom to the election commission so that they should perform their duties properly without any influence or pressure of anyone. In this regard, proper legislation is needed so that no government official or tribal elders should be able to interfere in the work of the commission. In this regard, no relaxation should be given to anyone, even if holding the most important posts in government.

Like the previous two presidential elections, last year's elections were full of corruption due to the absence of proper voters list. Due to this problem, a person was able to cast his vote for a number of times. Similarly, in an area with a few hundred voters, thousands of votes were casted by bogus voting. Similarly, it was very difficult to find out as how many voters had given the vote. These complications require that proper voters list should be made and proper system of checking should be introduced so that no one should be able to disrupt the process of transparent voting. This target can be achieved by updating the national identity cards. The issuance of computerized national identity cards is in progress and once this process is completed, we will have a comprehensive data about all the citizens and this data can later be used in making the proper voters lists.

In all these issues, the help of international community can be sought, especially the electoral experts can be invited to come up with proper reforms in this regard. When sought with this intention, international community will also show willingness to extend all the possible help in this regard.

And above all, all those who were responsible for fraud and corruption in last elections should be brought into justice so that no one should dare to risk the solidarity of the country for attaining their own objectives. If the above mentioned points are properly followed up, the whole system of election and also the country would come into order.



The Plight of Narcotic Addicts

By Hujjatullah Zia

The plight of Afghan narcotic addicts is rapidly increasing in intensity. Afghan men resort to addiction to help themselves to cope with life's vicissitudes. They smoke because of financial pressures, incompatibility, frustration and related reasons. Some also attribute their addiction to adopting evil partners. Although, the addicts realize the harmful extent of the cumulative effect of narcotic addiction, they never taper off in their public and recidive smoking. All the narcotic addicts suffer several diseases in one way or another without anyone to take care of them. The escalation in narcotic addiction among Afghan men is a matter of great concern. It is believed that social acceptance and indifference to the addiction's potential danger are contributory factors.

Resorting to narcotic addiction to get rid of financial problems or mental stress is a wrong approach among Afghan citizens. Finding a fleeting solace in addictive drugs, especially in cigarette, opium, heroin, etc. will compound one's pain and pressures rather than alleviating them. Since most men demur at the appellation of "addict" and endure derogatory remarks, they realize the negatives of the addiction.

Children hurl insults at the narcotic addicts on the streets, pelt stone at them and make derogatory remarks about them constantly. They have a reputation for begging, theft and crime. The addicts suffer from children's booing, whistling and being inundated with vile epithet. As a result, a 25-year-old opium addict, who intended to go for medical treatment, was complaining painfully about the bad reputation in his neighborhood. He said, "Wherever I go, people call me 'addict' and make fun of me. They beware each other to hold their pockets tight so that I do not pick them." He was exhausted from that condition, saying that he was working well on his father's land but his addict friend lured him to opium addiction.

When a commuter asked him how he gets opium, he answered, "I am still working on my father's land but I have lost my energy to work. Shoveling for only five minutes, I get out of breath. I sell some fruit and buy opium but I return a small amount of money to my father saying that it is all the money. Although my father knows the fact, he does not breathe a word." I asked the motive behind his intention to be treated, he replied, "My father beseeched me tearfully to abandon the addiction. My whole family suffers from my condition and I have blackened my family name too. So, I have decided firmly to abandon this lethal habit."

Narcotic addiction breeds many challenges in one's family life. It leads to poverty, conjugal strife and divorce. Since a narcotic

addict loses his zeal and manly characters, he would also resort to selling all his properties, including his wife's jewelry, and even embark on selling his daughter just to get drug. As a result, the local media broadcast last year that a man addicted to opium lopped off his wife's nose as she denied to offer her jewelry to her husband.

Who wishes to wander the streets desultorily being mocked and insulted by children? The addicts sought peace and comfort in drug but now suffer from misery, destitution and excruciating pain. They prefer death to their current plight and realize their egregious mistake. They have not only lost their reputation and physical health but also their humanity, morality and spiritual health. Their only claim to fame is to take drug so as to find a mendacious and temporary repose. In short, they have lost both the world and the hereafter.

Based on Islamic ideology, man is created to accomplish moral goal and nurture his soul by acts of virtue. One is supposed to seek solace in Mosque, Church, Monastery, etc. Men will achieve bona fide peace and salvation through nurturing goodness. A tearful communication with God with pure heart will get one out of loneliness and depression not rather than resorting to addictive drugs.

It is believed that we feel a strong spiritual vacuum and virtual emptiness in ourselves. Therefore we resort to many acts either to find solace or to escape our spiritual loneliness. If you observe, you will see that people are becoming more and more distracted, increasingly sophisticated and worldly. The multiplication of pleasures, the innumerable books that are being published and the newspaper pages filled with sporting events, surely, all these indicate that we always want to be amused. Because we are inwardly empty and dull, we use our relationships and our social reforms as a means of escaping from ourselves.

Unfortunately, we are being estranged from our moral characters and spiritual health. The main reasons behind this fact are worldly temptations, physical pleasures, carnal desires, etc. Being pressured by economic constraints, mental stress or physical discomforts, we succumb to smoking cigarette, taking drugs, etc. rather than resorting to worship or spiritual comfort. I emphasize, let us not seek refuge to addictive drugs from our life vicissitudes, financial problems, etc. This act will compound our challenges more than ever before and alienate us from our humanity, manly characters and moral values. Besides resisting the difficulties, let's seek mental peace in the houses of worships through virtual communications with our Lord. It seems the only remedy for our challenges.

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Proper Socialization Affirms Societal Normalcy

By Asmatyari

Man is entitled to be a social animal owing dual character of speech making, exhibiting togetherness and displaying exceptional intelligence. Human infants are born without any culture. They must be transformed by their parents, teachers, and others into cultural and socially adept individuals during which, we learn the language of the culture we are born into as well as the roles we are to play in life. For instance, girls learn how to be daughters, sisters, friends, wives, and mothers. In addition, they learn about the occupational roles that their society has in store for them. We also learn and usually adopt our culture's norms through the socialization process. Norms are the conceptions of appropriate and expected behavior that are held by most members of the society. The term enculturation is also used for the process of being socialized to a particular culture.

Socialization takes place during one's entire life; it is the process that one learns the physical, mental and social skills one needs to survive in their culture. It is important for one's well-being and it is also important for the protection and constancy of one's society. Two major forces that socialization depends on are heredity and the environment. Heredity determines one's physical make-up, while environment affects how one develops and behaves. Development is obtained by interacting with people. It strongly influences what kind of person one becomes, and it begins in very early childhood.

The family probably has the strongest influence on a person's life. It is a primary agent of socialization. Family is the grounds by which an individual learns most of the basic or primary norms and values of society, such as the difference between right and wrong, social manners and proper behavior and gender roles. Other ways parents enforce socialization is by seeking out playmates for their children, joining play groups, or joining organizations.

They do this because they usually want their preschool children to learn how to interact with adults and children outside of their family. The role of a parent is very important to influence the child's development of all the other agents.

The school and peer agent is also important because it helps a child learn social friendship, loyalty, values, and patriotism skills with other peers. I think these two agents are very similar due to the fact when you go to school and get peers and this is where you learn about peer pressure at school and many other places. Peer groups serve as reference groups. Peer groups teach individuals how to share, handle conflict, participate with others, and see how capable their mental, physical and social abilities are. Peers help as adolescents go through their identity problems when they are not sure what they are doing and who exactly they are. The way people dress, behave and their attitudes are encouraged by peers, while others will be ridiculed, rejected, or modified by them.

Having the mass media as one of our major agents of socialization could be very hard on our society today. Watching TV could be a good thing when an actor or actress is on TV in different shows or

music it could bring many good things like being a role model for an adolescent teenager who wants someone to look up to. They are unsure about how influential it is and if it is harmful. The report says, starting at the age of 12, an average child watches 17,000 hours of television by their high school graduation; while they only spend 11,000 hours in school. Television wins the popularity contest hands down among other forms of media, such as radio, magazines and newspapers. Reasons why television is more popular are the continuous rapid movements and loud sounds which cause the viewer to be completely oriented to the screen, the interactions between people and events that are vivid and short causing several senses to be stimulated by the bombardment of sights and sounds.

Another aspect, television influences children is because they have not developed the capacity to distinguish fantasy from reality, they are unable to distinguish between a story line and a commercial, and they do not know what is true and what is fictional.

Too much violence in children's programs is a concern because children may come to believe that the fantasy violence they see on TV is commonplace and acceptable in order to resolve problems in society. Media also has been guilty at times for stereotyping racial minorities, as well as young people and old people, among other groups. Thus, young children may think it is okay to discriminate and demonstrate/exhibit prejudice. Marketers are also guilty of often using the media as a way to sell their product because they can brainwash children to want their products and create a fantasy for them.

To avoid falling into confusion and disorder, societies must have ground rules that most of its members will accept without question. Waiting one's turn in a line-up at a store, and saying, "please," and "thank you", are society's social norms and values that people must be willing to obey. This is why it is important that individuals learn how to socialize appropriately. They can establish this with family, peers and the media.

Successful socialization can result in uniformity within a society. If all children receive the same socialization, it is likely that they will share the same beliefs and expectations. This fact has been a strong motivation for national governments around the world to standardize education and make it compulsory for all children. Deciding what things will be taught and how they are taught is a powerful political tool for controlling people. Those who internalize the norms of society are less likely to break the law or want radical social changes. In all societies, however, there are individuals who do not conform to culturally defined standards of normalcy because they were "abnormally" socialized, which is to say that they have not internalized the norms of society and are usually labeled by their society as deviant or even mentally ill. Henceforth we have to stress over socialization of children and youths aiming at cultural and social uniformity and harmony, cultivated in our society.

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