

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



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Continuous Discrimination against Women

Violence and discrimination against women do not seem to be decreasing in Afghanistan and there are fears that the gains acquired in uplifting the position of women in Afghan society in the last some years, may be compromised to a certain extent. Instability and disorder have further deteriorated the situation for the weaker stratum, like women. This is coupled with discrimination and violence that basically originate from the extremist religious and tribal practices.

Women in Afghanistan, unfortunately, have seen some of the worst discriminations ever heard or experienced. Most of them were seen during the civil war and Taliban reign. After the downfall of Taliban, though there have been certain improvements, still a large portion of work needs to be done to save women from violence and discrimination and support them to live a life with dignity and honor.

The discrimination against women starts since their birth, and even before that. There have been incidents when girl babies have been killed in the wombs of their mothers. In certain cases, after the fathers come to know about the gender of the babies before their birth, they arrange for forced abortions and thus the so-called honor of the family is saved. This has, thus, given rise to a double discrimination. The first one is that the girl before taking birth has been killed because of her gender and the second is that the mother's will has never been considered regarding the birth of her child. In addition, the women who do not give birth to boys are considered as worthless and their in-laws do not respect or honor them at all.

It has also led to a situation wherein the women are compelled to keep on giving birth unless the baby is a boy. This has a very negative impact on the health of women as continuous pregnancy reduce their energies and spoil their health. There are situations when women have to give birth to 8 to 10 children. As it deteriorates the health of the mothers, it, at the same time, engages her in the responsibilities of nourishment of so many children, as fathers are mostly considered free from such responsibilities in our society.

Continuously engaged in giving birth to too many children and nourishing them does not let women pursue any career or profession in life. Even if the women are educated, they are mostly not able to pursue their education or the profession of their choice after they are married. This deprives them from their right of pursuing the career of their choice and at the same time deprives them of financial benefits. As means of income in a family are with the men, they are financially stronger and make decisions about the family and women, as they are not able to make income by doing a job, fail to gain such advantage and are, thus, considered burden that is being shouldered by men.

Even if some of women are able to pursue their own will, against the will of the family or tribe, they are considered as dishonor to the family and tribe and are thus punished. Last year in October, a video footage showed a 20 years old woman, Rukhsana, stoned to death in Firozkoh for having eloped to save herself from a forced marriage. This is how women are rewarded here if they try to pursue their own lives.

As far as marriage is concerned, there are only few occasions when women are asked about their consent. Mostly, they are married in accordance to the decision of the family, or of the father, brother or uncle. They are even married to settle disputes among families and to cancel the debts of the families. They are mostly married when they are children. Child marriages are now a very common practice in Afghanistan. This gives an opportunity to the society to discriminate them as much as possible because as children they are not able to understand their basic rights and consider their situation their destiny. In addition to what has been mentioned above, one of the worst sorts of violence against women is a sexual assault. There are different incidents when women are brutally raped by savage men to quench their covetous desires. We have witnessed incidents when women or even small girls are gang-raped in different parts of our country. One such event was witnessed recently - a dozen men gang-raped a nine years old orphan girl in the Jawand district of northwestern Badghis province more than a week ago. A member of the provincial council from the district, Farid Akhizai, told news reporters that the 11 rapists included four policemen and seven illegal gunmen, who sexually assaulted the minor girl in Piraji village. The girl was later married off to a man in return for 750,000 Afghanis by an illegal armed group. This is one of the worst types of violence that can be witnessed only in our society. A society, that claims to be Islamic, and where women are considered as the honor of the family and tribe, a little girl is gang-raped in the most brutal way. This society really requires changing its attitude and standards. It requires throwing away the mask of hypocrisy and needs to safeguard the honor and dignity of women in a really true manner.



Intensifying Insurgents Attacks

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

There has been a sharp rise in militant attacks in the capital Kabul in recent weeks. The insurgent groups have launched a number of bombings and suicide attacks in the city, causing many civilian casualties. Taliban have claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. The recent attacks in Kabul have sparked fresh concerns over the security situation in the country and the rise of the violence in a season when the militant groups are usually in a recess from their spring and summer offensive. The casualties of the attacks are mostly civilians, while the militant groups focus is on targeting major government and public institutions. Despite the rise of the attacks, the militants have failed to strike major assaults with high casualties from government employees or security personnel. The rise of the militant attacks in the capital is coming at a time when the Afghan government is preparing to participate and landmark four-way summit with representatives from Pakistan, China and the USA to consider resumption of peace talks with the Taliban.

The recent intensifying attacks by the Taliban clearly indicates the militants' struggle to maintain high pressure on Afghan government as Kabul and three other major stakeholders of the Afghan peace process - Pakistan, the US and China - are planning to hold a meeting for resumption of peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. In the previous round of peace efforts last year, the Taliban were believed to be ready for coming to table of negotiations with the Afghan government, though some members of the group were staunchly resisting against any peace negotiations with the government in Kabul as well as the United States. This time also the Taliban core leadership around Mullah Akhtar Mansoor, the new leader of the group, seems to be willing to negotiate with the Afghan government.

This is because Pakistan is believed to have influence over the Taliban faction led by Mullah Mansoor. Along the Afghan government, Pakistan is spearheading the current round of efforts for resuming talks with the Taliban leaders mostly based in the country. As Pakistan is playing a leading role in the process, the country is obviously having a role in convincing the Taliban to come to the table of negotiation with the Afghan government. On the other hand, Pakistan has assured that there will be action against those militant groups who refuse to join the talks with the Afghan government. This means that the main Taliban group is convinced to join peace talks with the government in Kabul. So, it can be concluded that the Taliban are expecting a peace process to resume, and are willing to participate in possible future talks. So, the question rises that why the Taliban are stepping up violence if they are willing to enter

peace talks?

Past experiences have shown that each time there are plans for resumption of talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government - in which the Taliban are also set to participate - the group spares no efforts to mount a heightened offensive against government forces to gain military advantages on the ground. Such achievements on the battlefields help the Taliban over the table of negotiations for gaining more political and economic concessions. As plans for the four-way meeting in Islamabad are underway, the Taliban would further attempt to mount attacks against government forces. The government must be ready for a counteroffensive against the militants to repel their pre-peace talks offensives.

On the other hand, as the Taliban are unable to keep a sustained anti-government offensive in the cold season, the group obviously does not sit idle to wait for another spring to resume the summer season fighting against government forces. During the group's winter recess from the fighting, the group will attempt to find alternative ways for maintaining the momentum of the insurgency.

The government was viewing the winter season as an opportunity to crash them as much as possible before they launch another deadly summer season fighting. The Taliban have always tried to pursue war strategies with higher efficiencies. The two-pronged war strategy of group in recent years has been to launch spectacular ground attacks on major towns and cities and targeting high-valued government installations. Among others, the ultimate aim from both war strategies is to advance the group's propaganda war against the government and prove itself indestructible to the public.

One of the key objectives of the heightened Taliban offensive against both the government and other militant groups is to further strengthen Taliban's monopoly over the insurgency in the country.

This is particularly important for the Taliban at a time when more militant outfits are starting to challenge Taliban's supremacy in jihad activities in Afghanistan. The Taliban's heightened anti-government offensive and foreign support for the group along with the government's military actions against rival groups such as the Islamic State have helped the Taliban to build its monopoly in the country. The Taliban's supremacy in the jihad may prove instrumental in the future for the government to make peace with various militant groups operating under the umbrella group.

However, Taliban's supremacy over other groups fails the government to crash the warring and weak militant groups militarily.

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KANKOR; The Bleeding Wound of Educational System!

By Muhammad Rasool Shah

Once again, the annual university entrance examination or Kankor is approaching and once again, the reservations and fears are high among the citizens. The entire process of Kankor examination has come under severe criticism in the last few years and if corrective actions are not taken, the whole system might lose its credibility.

Just like other spheres of life, the old system was adopted in the beginning of our democratic government in 2001 to provide our educational system with a tool to assess students willing to enter universities and help them get their desired faculties. The whole system was hastily developed and it was hoped that rational and positive changes would be brought in it with the passage of time. There were also plans to replace this system with an alternate system that might address this issue properly but until today, no action has been taken in this regard and this wound of our educational system is bleeding even after 14 years of democracy. In the meantime, millions of dollars invested in the educational system but this system remained unchanged and its flaws are becoming more evident with every passing day.

The biggest drawback of this system is the way students are allotted different departments or faculties. These departments have been categorized according to their market values and students choose these departments according to their market value, without considering their skills, aptitude and wishes. In fact, this problem is created by parents, teachers and educationists who fail to guide them properly. The overall societal attitude is also the same that people prefer departments regarding their market values and this attitude also moulds the minds and decisions of students while selecting different departments in their Kankor exam. In this ranking, medical faculty lies at the top, followed by the engineering faculty and so forth. At the bottom, there are faculties that are least demanded by students and parents like arts, literature and teaching. Due to the blessings of this system, almost all the hardworking and bright students are becoming doctors and engineers while the lackluster and lazy students are left with the options of becoming teachers, librarians or others. This is greatly affecting some important fields of our life like teaching where able teachers are rare. According to this system, there are total 360 marks. After this comes the turn of engineering and so forth and the students with low scores at the bottom are left with options to accept departments that they might not like to choose. Parents and students sustain this division of departments according to their market values as students want to become doctors and engineers to earn more and more to become respectable members of the society. Due to this strange and nonsense system, a number of complications are created. The parents and students might

not realize these complications and problems but some officers of educational department are paid for the same job but they are also not interested to suggest anything different and better. Due to all these complications, we are giving birth to a generation for whom money is the most important thing in life and who have no idea of doing a work that they enjoy the most. It is also the reason that the graph of corruption in our society is soaring and eating away the benefits of all the efforts in different fields of life.

The scenario also shows absolute lack of career guidance and counseling. This responsibility is lacking at all the levels like schools, parents and the responsible people in the ministry of education. Almost 90% of students do not realize about their talents or skills and they keep working for a field in which the possibilities of their success are very low. Instead of conducting these exams, it would be better for the concerned ministry to conduct such tests or observations in the light of which they should suggest suitable career options for the students and parents.

Another drawback is the inclusion of only Kankor marks in the results of university entrance exams and not including participation and curricular and extra-curricular achievements of students at school. It is the reason why, students have developed a perception that hard work starts only after class 10 when two years are left which is considered a sufficient time to prepare for this exam. The format of Kankor exam is also strange and requires special information instead of hard work or knowledge of subjects. There are large numbers of Kankor preparatory centers where students go not for seeking knowledge but for learning tips to attempt the Kankor exam. It is the reason why, students with better skills and knowledge about the format of exam score more than those who actually have more knowledge.

The system of Kankor has also given birth to another problem. Students of Kabul might secure hundreds of seats of medical and other important faculties while students of a backward province might fail to be successful even on one seat of these important faculties. Due to this, the complaints of unequal treatment are increasing and might be a reason of strife between different provinces if the conditions remained the same. And the most importantly, this system does not encourage our students to work hard for gaining knowledge. Rather it makes them work to gain more marks only. It is the reason why, we are facing with the frustrating situation that our university graduates are in terrible condition and they are terribly weak in their fields. In the short run, these problems are frustrating but in the long run, it might cause much harm to Afghanistan by weakening our coming generations. Kankor exams are an essential part of our education system and sooner we repair this pillar of our society, safer will be our future.

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