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

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Threatening Social Evils

There have been many evils in human societies that have been disrupting the smooth development and improvement. Though there have been efforts to overcome them, they have kept on existing in some way or the other. They clearly depict that human societies are never perfect and there are always certain shortcomings. It is important to understand those shortcomings and strive to find out the main causes of those evils and their appropriate solutions in order to support the societies move towards perfection.

Though it is a matter of concern that a social evil erupts in a society, more concerning, however, is when the evil keeps on increasing or gaining strength and starts penetrating within social fabrics. One of the basic reasons that any evil gets promoted within a society is the appreciation and support it gets from within the society members. Or there may be indifference on the part of society members towards the evil. The members of the society may neglect the evil and thus support in promulgating it. Therefore, it is necessary that an evil must be considered an evil and must be treated in the same manner; i.e. an evil must be punished; otherwise it may get out of control very soon. The indifference of the members of the society plays a significant role in helping the social evil gaining magnitude and penetration.

The example of Afghan society in this regard is very much relevant. There are different social evils that get no proper attention by the members of the society. For instance, the evil of corruption has penetrated deep within Afghan society and most of the institutions in the country are being influenced by it in some way or the other, yet it is not being taken as much seriously as it should be taken. People consider it an integral part of their social life. They complete their tasks through corrupt ways without even feeling guilty. Corruption, unfortunately, is a now a routine. It is no more weird to find corruption; the weird incident is to find someone being honest. Such a social value is really very much pathetic and it has kept on feeding corruption to a great extent.

People's indifference towards corruption around them is really very sad; there has not been any comprehensive movement or there have not been series of protests to condemn corruption within Afghan society.

It is common to find people, who complain against corruption, getting involved in corruption easily. It is easier for them to get their tasks done through some bribery and recommendation than to follow the honest, lengthy and tiring process of 'honest means'. They quite easily forget their demands for corruption-free society and higher standards of honesty. It is not to deny that the people responsible for controlling the corruption must play a role in controlling the corruption, but the importance of social movements is very much vital in facing a social evil. The control mechanism within a society can enforce a law and can control a social evil by force to a certain level but if the society members do not support the mechanism it is very difficult to control the situation. For example, the violence against women in Afghanistan has been identified as social evil by the control mechanism, yet it has not been controlled as Afghan society is not yet ready to accept it as social evil. The society members do not consider it inhuman and unlawful to carryout violence against women. It is very much normal in patriarchal Afghan society to find husbands beating their wives, fathers beating their daughters and brothers being violent to their sisters. And when there are cruel incidents of violence against women, the society members, except few, do not come to the roads to protest and shun such incidents as social evils. Same is the case with the evil of drug use. The people of Afghanistan use drugs as if they are part of their normal lives. People use it as painkillers and as medicine to fight against cold weather. Though in some cases people do so because they are not fully aware of their negative consequences but at others they just do so because they are totally indifferent towards the issue. They know that using such drugs may lead them towards negative consequences, yet they are not ready to avoid them and find out ways of getting rid of them.

It is really imperative to note that the sustainability of any social evil within the society largely depends on the attitude of the society members towards the evil. If from the very beginning the society members realize that social evils are negative and they are hindrance for the development of the society and may generate problems for them, there are possibilities of fighting the social evils properly, but if the society, either due to ignorance or negligence or individual considerations, remains indifferent towards evils, it would be very difficult to control them. Therefore, it is necessary that as a part of society, we must feel our responsibility and be very much vigilant. It is our responsibility to rise against the social evils, stand against them and raise our voice. Unless we respond to those evils, we do not have the right to complain about them and we do not have any way of avoiding them.

In Pursuit of Reviving Identity

By Hujjatullah Zia

Social-traditional structure and tribal customs have constantly marginalized women from social and political arenas. Women's identity was veiled in mystery and their role was reduced to breeding and mothering. Since the process of women's rights and freedoms was influenced by several regimes and their approaches, it passed a tortuous path. Tribal traditionalism, Amani modernism and Talibanic radicalism played a key role in the process of women's rights. To view cultural characteristics, a traditional culture is a set of unwritten code practiced among the public and based on one's will.

Social solidarity originates from race and blood in this culture and 'blood is' viewed 'thicker than water'. Traditional culture is restricted with ethnic and tribal boundaries and aligns insider against outsider. This kind of culture is authoritarian and person-oriented rather than considering one's personality. In other words, identity is defined on the basis of blood and tribal interests and national identity is reduced to a narrow ethnic structure. In such a traditional, patriarchal and authoritarian culture, women encountered an identity crisis and their rights and freedoms were grossly violated. For instance, Nadir Khan's regime forced women to wear heavy veil and burqa and shut down the girls' schools which were established during Amanullah Khan's regime.

In spite of the strong sexual discrimination applied against women, the evolution of women's rights in former regimes is an undeniable fact. For example, girls' schools were established during Zahir Shah's regime – as Shah Mahmud was the premier for seven years – national council election was held, and women's institute was founded. Based on such steps, Shah Mahmud was titled the "father of democracy". Following Mahmud's resignation, Shah's cousin Mohammad Dawood Khan was appointed as prime minister and made great evolution regarding women's rights. In late 50s, solar year, women were allowed to involve in social activities. Subsequently, woman' voice and then a song with woman's voice was first heard through radio. Meanwhile, women were allowed to disclose their face through abandoning burqa. In brief, one of the Dawood's significant acts was lifting forced hijab in 1958 which was called "Women's Movement". However, some conservative and radical elements who were influenced by Deobandism and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan nurtured strict view regarding women's status and role during Mujahedeen's regime.

With the emergence of the Taliban and their unique attitude towards women, the process of women's rights was pushed to a steep slope and declined tremendously. Entering Kabul, the Taliban closed beauty parlors and women's baths and declared that tailors were not allowed to measure women's bodies for making clothes for them. Painting nails, taking pictures, listening to music, etc. were deemed violation of the Taliban's decree. Besides being deprived from getting education, women were not allowed to travel without chaperon. So, their identity was exposed to threat once more.

After the downfall of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate and establishment of new administration on the basis of election and public will and endorsement of democratic constitution, the discourse of women's rights resurfaced as a hot debate. According to the current constitution – which was approved in January 2004 with the participation of people's representatives, jihadi leaders, academic and political figures, and religious scholars – the principle of equality or non-discrimination is recognized as one of the basic principles which lets no distinction or discrimination between men and women. That is to say, men and women are entitled equally. In the post-Taliban administration, Afghan women have active role and participation in social, cultural, economic and political arenas. For example, women hold high political positions in the current government such as being minister, deputy minister, district governor, provincial governor, ambassador, head of the Independent Human Rights Commission, deputy to High Peace Council, and members of lower and upper houses.

Despite the ratification of the constitution and the establishment of a democratic system, the Afghan government has not an acceptable record on the protection of women's rights and freedoms. Violence against women is widespread and they are forced into self-immolation and committing suicide in some cases. Forced and under-aged marriages, desert courts – carried out by radical elements and tribal council – sexual harassment, mostly with a sense of revenge, still hold sway in villages. Although women hold a certain dignified status in the constitution and principle of non-discrimination is recognized, they are hardly implemented.

On the other hand, traditional customs are in conflict not only with national law but also with religious tenets, which reflect government's low record in upholding women's rights. Realizing this fact, a number of Afghan women sought to revive their identity through social media. They launched a movement titled "Where is my name?" in social network. It comes as scores of Afghan women are using Facebook under false names and features. In short, they are operating under clandestine identity but seek to revive it.

To sum up, this movement is ridiculous and will hardly ever bear the desired result. Afghan women need to launch systematic movement and raise their voice strongly against injustice and discrimination done against them.

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The Gulf crisis: A Battle of Megalomaniacs

By James M. Dorsey

There are fundamental problems in trying to learn lessons or draw conclusions from the Gulf crisis for the role of small states in international relations.

For one, the Gulf crisis is an epic battle between small states rather than simply one small state being targeted by its larger regional detractors. Indeed, it is the United Arab Emirates against Qatar with the UAE rather than Saudi Arabia as the driver in the crisis. The problem, moreover, in making comparisons is not primarily that both the UAE and Qatar, whose leaders viscerally dislike each other, have massive war chests on the back of their energy exports and therefore are able to wage and sustain the kind of battle that is being fought.

It is therefore that we are dealing with states that are megalomaniac in their ambition and the length to which they are willing to go to ensure the survival of their regimes. Megalomaniac means that their survival strategies go far beyond the normal strategies adopted by small states. Buried in their megalomania is also a measure of naivete, a naïve belief that the consequences of their actions will not come to haunt them.

The UAE and Qatar have adopted strategies that go far beyond the palette of options most small states believe are available to them in the sense that, despite their differing visions of what they think the political lay of the land in the Middle East and North Africa should be, both strive to shape their region in their mould. In effect, to achieve their goals the UAE and Qatar act not as small states but as big powers, using the kind of tools big powers use: financial muscle, support of opposition forces to stimulate or engineer regime change, military coups, covert wars, and more recently cyberwar.

In fact, the UAE, or what US secretary of defense James Mattis likes to call Little Sparta, is in the mould of a big state establishing foreign military bases and using its commercial strength to control ports across the broader region. The parameters of the debate about small states in Singapore, sparked by the Gulf crisis, irrespective of what the different positions advocate, are far more reflective of the behaviour of small states. They accept by definition, whether they argue for a more submissive or more activist policy, in word and deed that Singapore is a small state. That shapes discussion of what Singapore can and should do and within what parameters it can and should stand up for its interests; a public discussion that one would not be having were one in either Qatar or the UAE. Singapore also has, beyond the ability to have a public debate, another advantage. However, one wants to describe the Singapore system of government, it is a system grounded in institutions, the rule of law, and checks and balances.

Singapore like Qatar and the UAE is consumed by a degree of fear. It is a fear about national security, it is a fear grounded in race riots surrounding Singapore's birth, the perception of living in a volatile neighbourhood, and the fear resulting from the fallout of convoluted transitions that have wracked the Middle East and North Africa as well as Islam. It is not a fear about the survival of the Lee family as Singapore's foremost political family.

Neither Qatar nor the UAE has Singapore's degree of institutionalization. Their fears are grounded in the equation of the survival of autocratic ruling families with national security.

Ironically, a silver lining of the Gulf crisis could be over time that this could change with the wave of unprecedented nationalism that the crisis has unleashed in Qatar as Qataris rally around the Al Thani family that accounts for 20 percent of the citizenry in a nation of 300,000 nationals.

Both Qatar and the UAE project themselves as regional and global hubs that are building cutting-edge, 21stcentury knowledge societies on top of tribally-based autocracies in which education, in contrast to Singapore, is designed to ensure that citizens have marketable skills and can interact globally rather than develop the skills of critical thinking that could result in criticism. Similarly, Qataris protested when in 2009, some households in the Gulf state hired Saudis as maids, yet never raised their voice about the widespread abuse of Asian maids. Saudi maids were too close to home. If Saudis could be reduced to the status of a maid, so could Qataris one day. The limitations of modernity are evident. Criticism of Qatar's labour regime after it won the 2022 World Cup hosting rights did not resonate among Qataris.

Nonetheless, despite their different attitudes towards political Islam, Qatar and the UAE have both developed societies in which religious scholars have relatively little say and Islamic mores and norms are relatively liberally interpreted.

This, however, is where in terms of survival strategies the communalities between Qatar and the UAE stop. To be sure, Qatar and the UAE share building blocks of soft power creation and the manufacturing of national identity some of which are also employed by Singapore that include foreign military bases; world class airlines that service global hubs; museums that both attract tourism and manufacture a national heritage; high profile investments in blue chips, real estate and the arts, sports and the ambition of becoming centres of excellence in multiple fields. This is also where the comparison with Singapore or any other small state ends, Qatar and the UAE diverge, and where conflict between the two became inevitable.

The UAE views autocracy as the key to regional security and the survival of its autocratic regime, no more so than since 2011 when popular revolts toppled the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. As a result, the UAE has backed regime change in a number of countries, including Egypt and reportedly Turkey; supported anti-Islamist, anti- government rebels in Libya; joined Saudi Arabia's ill-fated military intervention in Yemen; and in the latest episode of its campaign, driven imposition of the boycott of Qatar.

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