

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



May 05, 2015

Media Suffer Restraints, Underlined

Throughout human history, man dare not to speak or preferred observing silence even if the authoritarian government exercised entirely unjust deeds. The masses rendered hapless to a degree that they had to deem an entirely ill-conduct of ruling class, licit. The disclosure of any truth that could harm the so-called self-defined reputation of ruling elites, led to disreputable consequences. World of regards to democracy that enshrined the right to free speech, an uncontested democratic right, making the government accountable for every deed they undertake. The media therefore is crucial organ of democratic society, keeping the citizen informed about every development taking place in governmental avenues.

In modern democratic society, the system of governance requires well-learned citizens, who are known of most if not all developments taking place within the departments of the government. The foresaid proposition is strengthened by implication of a degree on transparency that is fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information.

Democracy ensures the rule of majority by preservation of its core value, keeping the masses informed about every single development in socio-political and economic affairs of the government. In this system of government, say of ordinary masses are given great weightage, who are kept known via unhindered exchange of information between government and masses through impartial and unbiased media bodies. Thus the public representatives hence are left with least chance to manipulate their power or authority or both – are left to follow the due course of action, being closely watched by their Electoral College. The worth of informed civic is immense in democratic societies, having kept that in mind the Access to information Law was deeply felt to get ratified by legislative assembly. Luckily, president Ghani signed the bill into law that awaits its implementation. Reportedly, the government officials themselves are the greatest hindrances to its enforcements.

Nonetheless, this piece of land transitioning towards vibrant democracy intervene certain degree of restraints –including violence and intimidation from both state and non-state actors. Reportedly, most cases of violence against journalists involved the Taliban, government employees and officials of private organizations, but rarely average Afghans. The public official, Taliban, tribal lords demanding censored news, favoring their deep rooted interests irrespective of their legitimacy regarded, serve a primary reason making journalists vulnerable to violence and endless threats.

The killings and death threats demonstrate the major challenges facing journalists and freedom of speech in Afghanistan and the urgency to find ways to provide journalists protection. With exception to risk of life the daily wages are infinitesimally small. Journalists still struggle for fair wages and decent working conditions. It's worth, underlying the media persons suffer lack of laws, protecting wages and secure working conditions.

In order to highlight the fundamental principles of press freedom; to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession, every year, May third is celebrated as Press Freedom Day. This year celebration took place under the theme, "Let Journalism thrive! Towards better reporting, gender equality and media safety in the digital age. Afghan media with minimal assistance from government is striving hard to install improvement in the former; however a pretty long course and undeterred passion are needed to get the latter two propositions put into action. Turning Afghanistan violence free society whilst ensuring the equitable distribution of posts amongst male and female, require ceaseless and committed efforts, we have to make.

Formerly another report surfaced by Freedom House (FH) that showed dreary picture of Afghan media, declining a degree ahead to that of former year. The FH found Afghanistan drop in rankings of press freedom, going from 66th to 67th, based on increased government restrictions on journalists as well as rising violence and threats against the media. The Freedom House report reads Afghanistan's neighbors - Pakistan and Iran - were ranked 65th and 40th, respectively.

According to the report, the systematic imposition of restrictions, non-implementation of the Access to Information bill, increased cases of violence against journalists and broader security threats are the major factors that making Afghanistan a less than hospitable environment for the press. The aforesaid reservation is tallied by officials from NAI, an Afghan media watchdog and advocacy group, confirmed that 2015 saw conditions facing the press worsen from past years.

Earlier, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah met with members of the press and criticized the government's failure to implement the Access to Information bill. This stance certainly is flimsy and contradictory to divert the diligence –the government should not criticize on itself, instead should lay down a plan of action. Consequently, the media bodies urge the leaders of the national unity government to keep their promise relative to safeguarding press freedoms; with Access to Information law standing prior. Conversely, scores of journalists deem the negation of implementation and enforcement of Access to Information bill is a major obstacle to press freedom in Afghanistan.

The functioning of media bodies, foreign or local, becoming targets for reprisal for their work as journalists might get worsened. The governments must come forth sincerely, addressing the boundless challenges Afghan media faces and must not let this very functional organ of society, beleaguer.



Economic Inequality and Liberty

By Dilawar Sherzai

The societies and states that have been formed in today's world, though have evolved with the passage of time, still possess dominant shortcomings. These shortcomings if not met on time, the discrepancies and discontentment would keep on rising and disturbing the human beings, societies and the governments. If we analyze today's societies, we come to know that there are some very basic requirements that are missing. Among those requirements, justice, equality and rights are the most essential ones. And it is important to note that these elements are interdependent.

Though there have been many endeavors in human society to acquire justice equality and liberty, the French Revolution of 1789 was largely a protest against the prevailing inequalities and the Revolutionaries adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) asserting, "Men are born and always continue to be free and equal in respect of their rights." But, it was only in the present century that effort was made to eliminate inequalities in the economic and social sphere and necessary laws were enacted to protect the interests of the workers.

It was emphasized that equality in the economic sphere was more important than equality in the civil and political spheres. It was asserted that political liberty without economic equality was a myth. The decline of imperialism and colonialism and the emergence of a large number of independent states in Asia, Africa and Latin America gave a further impetus to the principle of equality.

All the states began to be treated as equals at the international levels irrespective of their size, resources and importance. The war against racial discrimination and the introduction of universal franchise further strengthened the doctrine of equality. Most of the modern states devoted great attention to the improvement of economic lot of the deprived ones to bring about economic equality. Yet, there are serious matters to be resolved in this regard.

Laski has said, "Political equality is never real unless it is accompanied by virtual economic equality; political power, otherwise, is bound to be hand-made of economic power." Definitely, in the absence of economic equality it is difficult to imagine a just political system.

It is important to remember that economic equality does not imply that there should be equal distribution of wealth, because this sort of equality is incapable of realization. On the other hand it means that there should not be concentration of wealth in few hands only and certain minimum standards of income should be assured to all before anyone can be allowed to have more.

In other words, the basic needs of all should be met before some people are permitted to lead a luxurious life. Prof. Laski expresses this point, "I have no right to take cakes when my neighbor is compelled to go without bread." Unfortunately, these concepts are being neglected in today's world.

A very intimate relationship exists between political liberty and economic equality. It has been asserted that there cannot be any political liberty without economic equality. This assertion con-

tains a great amount of truth because the political liberties like right to vote, right to contest election, right to hold public office etc. cannot be genuine unless there is economic equality in the state. As the successful working of the present democratic system depends on the active and effective participation of the people, it is indeed difficult to envisage that such participation can be possible in a society suffering from economic inequalities. Further, as the public opinion is greatly molded by media like press, radio, films etc. the capitalist classes who own these media are able to use them for furthering their own interests. As a result the poor people are not able to make an honest use of their political liberty. Hence, political freedom becomes meaningless in the absence of economic equality. Laski says that 'either the state must dominate the property or the property will dominate the state. For proper liberty it is essential that there should be democratic setup both in the administration of justice and industry. Political liberty in reality can only be real when there is social and economic liberty'.

It is widely accepted phenomenon that only when the people have reasonable economic opportunities, like employment, reasonable wages, adequate leisure, etc. they can develop themselves properly in a society where some people starve while the others have things in abundance, the weaker sections are inevitably denied these opportunities and hence cannot make a genuine use of their political liberty. For an effective use of political liberty it is desirable that the economic inequalities should be removed. Even other kinds of liberties, like civil liberty are meaningless without economic equality.

The intimate relationship between economic equality and liberty has been brought out by Prof. Cole: "it is not possible for men to be socially or politically equal as long as there exist among them differences of wealth and income so great as to divide them into distinct economic classes with widely differing opportunities in childhood to become healthy, educated, travelled and used to regard the world as a place made to suit their convenience. The slum child is not as healthy as the child whose parents can afford to give it the privileges of good food and sunlight. In school, the children of the poorest classes lag behind those who come from better equipped homes. Secondly, education is still a privilege for a minority selected mainly on economic grounds. And there is a difference, for the most part, between the few who are taught from childhood the arts of command and the many whose lessons are intended to inculcate rather the duties of obedience and respect for their betters."

In conclusion, the words of Hebert A. Deare can be quoted: "Liberty and equality are neither in conflict nor even separate but are different facets of the same ideal ... indeed since they are identical, there can be no problem of law or to what extent they are or can be related, this is surely the nearest, if not the most satisfactory solution even devised for a perennial problem in political philosophy". In fact, as Tawny has put it, "A large measure of equality, so far from being inimical to liberty, is essential to it".

Dilawar Sherzai is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at emai.urya@gmail.com

Women - The Pariah

By Hujjatullah Zia

A group of activists in Kabul staged a re-enactment last week of the killing of Farkhunda, a 27-year-old Islamic law student, who was lynched to death on March 19 after being falsely accused of burning a Holy Quran.

Men pummeled her with rocks and paving stones, knocked her down, kicked her and ripped her scarf off, all the while shouting religious slogans and denouncing her as a blasphemer. Blood tangled her hair and made a red mask of her bruised face.

The killing of Farkhunda has sparked numerous protests and galvanized women's activists more than almost anything that has happened since the days of the Taliban's public executions of women. In addition, the attorney general's office announced that formal charges were brought against 49 participants in the killing, 19 of them police officers accused of failing to try to stop it.

Woman is a historical pariah in our patriarchal society and doomed to suffer a painful life. She is the heir of her hapless mother, who raised not her eyebrows under excruciating pains. She has to live within the four walls with her lips sealed and do household chores docilely – as her mother did. According to traditional frames of mind, women have to be restricted within the four walls and do the household chores with their lips sealed. They should live under the dominance of their husbands and created to satisfy their carnal desires. Their presence in social life is toxic to the society on the grounds that their devilish charm will challenge men's faith. Ultimately, men will be tempted to their feminine attractions and divert from the right path. Therefore, women have to live behind a screen.

To view it historically, Afghan women suffered severely under the Taliban. There is a film recorded few years ago, which rightly reflects the hardships of Afghan women. In this film, the Taliban are ruling Afghanistan. Their regime is especially repressive for women, who are not allowed to work. This situation becomes difficult for one family consisting solely of three women, representing three successive generations: a young girl, her mother and her grandmother. With the mother's husband and uncle dead, having been killed in battle during the Soviet invasion and their civil wars, there are no men left to support the family. The mother had been working as a nurse in a hospital, but the Taliban cut off funding to the hospital, leaving it completely dysfunctional with no medicines and very little equipment. One foreign woman working as a nurse in the hospital is arrested by the Taliban. The

mother does some nursing outside the hospital and receives payment from the caretaker of a patient, but after the patient dies the mother cannot find any more work.

The mother and grandmother then make what they feel is the only decision they can to survive: they will have their preteen daughter disguise herself as a boy so that she can get a job to support the family. Her grandmother tells a fiction to Osama, the preteen girl, about a boy who changed to a girl when he went under a rainbow – an old fiction among Afghans – in order to help persuade her to accept the plan. The daughter agrees despite being afraid that the Taliban will kill her if they discover her disguise. Partly as a symbolic measure, the daughter plants a lock of her now cut hair in a flowerpot. The only people outside the family who know of the ruse are the milk vendor who employs the daughter – he who was a friend of her deceased father – and a local boy named Espandi, who recognizes her despite her outward change in appearance. Espandi is the one who renames her Osama.

The disguise becomes more difficult when the Taliban recruit all the local boys for school, which includes military training. At the training school, they are taught how to fight and conduct ablutions. Osama attempts to avoid joining the ablution session, and the master grows suspicious of Osama's gender. Osama realizes it can only be so long before she is found out. Several of the boys begin to pick on her, and although Espandi is at first able to protect her, her secret is eventually discovered.

The preteen girl is arrested and put on trial, along with a Western journalist, and the foreign woman who was arrested in the hospital. The journalist and the nurse are both condemned and put to death. However, as Osama is destitute and helpless, her life is spared. She is instead given in marriage to a much older man – a Taliban's leader. Osama's new husband already has three wives, all of whom detest him and say he has ruined their lives. They take pity on Osama, but are unable to help her. The husband shows Osama the padlocks he uses on his wives' rooms, reserving the largest for Osama.

This film rightly displays the dolorous story of Afghan women. They suffered not only under the Taliban, but also under the current traditions. The violation of women's rights such as sexual discriminations, physical tortures, honor killings, forced marriages, etc. are rampant in our society. In short, women are the historical pariah, born to suffer and then burnt or buried without deserving a gravestone to protect her identity.

Hujjatullah Zia is the permanent writer of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan. He can be reached at zia_hujjat@yahoo.com

Chairman / Editor in Chief: Dr.Hussain Yasa

Vice Chairman: Kazim Ali Gulzari

Phone: +93 799 005 019/799 408 271/777 005 019

E-mail: mail@outlookafghanistan.com, outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Address: V-137, Street 6, Phase 4, Shahrak Omeed Sabz, Kabul, Afghanistan

Sub Office: Shora Road, Street 10, District 6, Kartey 3, Kabul, Afghanistan