

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



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Ethnic and Political Cleavage

It is likely that the nation-state gap widens with the violation of human rights and escalated insurgency. People claim that their rights and freedoms are trampled upon not only as a result of militancy but also political syndrome. The peace agreement with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun jihadi leader, could not mitigate the nation's sufferings despite being considered significant by the government. On the other hand, the mistrust among officials, which has leaked out, triggered public distrust.

Social and political tension broke out in the past as a lack of pluralism, which is meant politics accepting cultural and ethnic varieties in national frame. In other words, pluralism is contrary to assimilation that denies racial and religious varieties and differences. Under the aegis of pluralism, ethnic groups will change into political groups competing positively for social interests and the government will protect cultural and structural differences – this will reduce the rift to a great extent. Power-sharing will take place based on the population of ethnic groups. The process of religious and linguistic plurality will be officially accepted in such a society and the examples are Switzerland and Belgium. Nevertheless, Afghan nation suffered severely in the wake of no pluralistic politics.

To view this fact historically, regardless of our backgrounds, the gap between state and nation emerged in 1747, when new Afghanistan was established by a Pashtun from Durani tribe Ahmad Khan Abdali. The power in government's body was in the hand of a certain sect. There was a cleavage between the ruling party and other ethnic groups for being marginalized from the political arena for their ethnicity, color and creed. Tribal issues have been very hot.

A number of Afghan kings played highly destructive role in this regard. For instance, Abdul Rahman Khan discriminated people on the grounds of their race, color and creed. During his regime, the ethnic minority groups were supposed to pay tax per capita, whereas those from Mohammad Zai ethnicity were payed salary in return for nothing. Abdul Rahman also stoked sectarian violence through murdering people for their ethnicity and rewarding one group to fight against another. Similarly, Nadir Shah adopted ethnocentric policy and followed Abdul Rahman's footsteps, according to history.

History shows that tribal rift led to tribal conflict with the emergence of a faint chance for the groups who were marginalized politically. After the collapse of communist regime, the civil unrest broke out as a result of vacuum in government's power. That is to say, with the loose control or vacuum of power in government's body, years of suppression will surface and result in violence and bloodshed.

Afghanistan's civil unrest is believed to stem from ethnic and tribal gap ruling for years. Indeed, a strong political control will suppress unrests. Afghan kings exerted violence to strengthen the continuation of their regimes – this method will last as long as violent power is strong. With the decline of power, ethnic and political tension will surge up.

To sum up, the political power originated from ethnic power throughout the Afghanistan's history. To think almost two decades back, the Taliban regime sought to impose their warped minds on ethnic minority groups and spilled their blood on the basis of their race or beliefs. The Taliban's tendency towards assimilation was easily noticeable from their ethnocentric practices. Hence, they widened the historical gap which was a strong blow to national unity.

No wonder, ethnocentric view will stem from lack of tolerance and pluralistic view. With ethnocentric mindset, a group will pursue its self-interests at the cost of others' rights and freedoms. On the other hand, the marginalized groups will feel a strong sense of anger for having their rights ignored. Decades of war and violence were triggered by claiming racial and tribal superiority which was rife during different regimes, mainly the Taliban's regime.

The current violence and bloodshed are also rooted in racial superiority. Warring factions, especially the self-styled Islamic of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), claim to be superior and discriminate people for their social, religious and sexual orientation. For example, the ISIL raped Yazidi women and gunned down the children for belonging to a certain racial and religious group.

History reveals this fact that ethnocentrism and tribalism played highly destructive role and Afghanistan was also beset by them. If this feeling continues among nation or officials, war and violence will never come to an end. To strengthen national unity and boost the spirit of brotherhood, the National Unity Government (NUG) must bridge the gap deeply embedded in society's social and political structure. The state should extend tolerance within social and political fabric. The nation will have to think beyond ethnic, linguistic and racial restrictions so as to have a civil society void of violence. History must be an eye-opener for both state and nation.

Afghan Women and Need for Widespread Discourse

By Horriah Bayani

Within the last two decades, Afghan women have been the casualty of great changes and several incidents. Women were restricted within the four walls without the right to get education two decades ago. However, their active presence in educational centers and active role in social arenas in recent years filled us with a great sense of hope initially. Women's participation in educational centers and their engagement in social and economic activities, with restriction though, triggered public optimism for the betterment of women's situation. The positive discrimination implemented regarding women by international community and a ripe political environment enabled Afghan women to become members of parliament and promote to the position of minister.

The hope for future prompted more girls to study, get job and stand for their rights. Accelerating demands for real change in a society will lead to frustration among women. That is to say, women will quickly learn the concepts of independence, income individualism and so on and demand them from their community without seeing any fundamental changes in the community.

Many laws have been approved for the progress of women's status, but there seems little acceptance and tolerance to implement them. It should be noted that development will take place with changes in social, political and legal arenas. There is no exception for changes in women's state and cultural development. A colossal evolution will not take place as a result of superficial change at the level of women's education or income.

This fact will be risky for us and the society will witness a female generation with great demands in their minds but no one will realize them. These girls will feel rejection from the main body of society.

Hence, women's accelerating demands, on the one hand, and society's movement at a snail's pace, on the other hand, have already led to women's self-burning and running away from home.

If we seek to balance the speed between girls' education and the level of society's realization and gradual cultural development, we will have to bring changes simultaneously in public education, policies and laws. Otherwise, we will see a gap between educated women and society's body. This gap is currently seen since women do not support the demands of female civil and women's rights activists. To create fundamental changes, we have to pay attention to two significant elements: first, generating public demands in men and women. Second, the presence of women or representatives in line with the "Review of women's status" in positions of leadership and influence in macro policy is important.

To bring positive changes in women's situation, witness their effective role in family and society, and witness decrease fundamental violence against them, we should be able to make the Islamic and human values as public demands in the society in a way that not only women but also men think about and practice upon them. If men and women realize the harm of violence against women and the negative result of illiteracy – which is prevailing in the society – people will gradually support the agenda for eliminating the challenges. So, the public demand will be formed for reviewing women's situation rather than changing the law or implanting some concepts in women's minds without localizing them.

On the other hand, women's accessibility to the high position of leadership and their serious effect on government's decision will catalyze culture-building. This fact is in need of women's support and trust among them. It is likely that we need to create an atmosphere for "discourse" so as to achieve this goal and gain women's major support in the process of reviewing women's position. In this discourse, women from different spectrum of thoughts and all female groups, including different religious, ethnic and racial groups should take part with the aim of differentiating between real and unreal demands, declaring and monitoring the demands and ensuring the fulfillment of officials' responsibility in this regard.

Currently, the women in the line of supporting women's rights in social and political arenas are not able to represent all Afghan women since there is a wide gap between their terms of discourse and women's daily demands. For instance, these women focus on individual freedom and create their own criteria for it. However, there are women, in some parts of the country, who are deprived of their basic rights such as education, literacy, primary profession and modern concepts – this is believed to be the imbalance between speed of changes in the society's body and some apparent laws.

A widespread discourse among Afghan women with the presence of different intellectual groups will – in addition to creating an empathic feeling – lead to adjustment of laws with society's public atmosphere. Such a discourse can claim to represent the bulk of Afghan women. It is worth saying that a women's network might be formed with the support of cyberspace and opportunity accessible for women's discussion, although to a small extent. Practicing morality and tolerance and overlooking racial, religious and linguistic differences will help us (Afghan women) to achieve our demands and plan an appropriate and local agenda for betterment of our situation.

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Populism – A Threat to Existing Order

By Mohammad Urozgani

Populism, an emotional issue which is in conflict with reason, is a widespread plague across the human society. It is detrimental to social order. Populism is replete with part of society's accumulated feelings and harm or eliminate social order.

The arrival of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Kabul along with the cheering and booming of armed individuals has reviewed the populist memory of 1370s (solar year) and worried Kabul residents. Although the proponents of Ahmad Shah Masoud (Jamiat-e-Islami) show their power and satiate the nostalgic feelings of his supporters, there was no opponent for them earlier and the war-weary people watched and forgot. Now with the arrival of Hekmatyar in Kabul and the revelation of its power, it is likely that the constant rival of Hezb-e-Islamic Afghanistan (HIA) will also demonstrate its power, which will align the two parties against each other and result in fragility of social order. The question is will Afghanistan return to the former state of 1370s and a battlefield for armed parties? This commentary intends to answer this question after introducing populism.

What is populism?

Populism is a belief in the sanctity of people versus elites and used by militants, demagogues and left-wingers. To state in the words of Daryosh Ashuri, an Iranian scientist, populism is demagoguery. According to populist view, some deem people's demands right and moral and prefer them to any possible mechanism. That is to say, this view sanctifies people to the extent of changing them into taboo. This is done to motivate people and pursue political objectives. Historically, the roots of populism, alike radical mindset and leftism, refers to the 19 century Russia. In 1860s, a group emerged from Russian fundamental intellectuals called narodnics who were critical of linear progress and believed that Russia would reach socialism directly without reaching capitalism. They suggested the solution that boosting rural commune, one can gain universal commune. Therefore, students and educated individuals were sent to rural areas to pave the ground for universal revolution through inspiring farmers and workers.

Populistic view infiltrated the Latin American revolutionists after Russia. Almost all workers' revolutions in Latin America occurred with emphasis on populism and attracted the world's attention.

Generally, populism is a short-term nature of Commons keeping its supporters happy for few weeks and so. In other words, populism, alike anarchism and fascism, is an ideology with general characteristics which may prevail in all societies but with different roots and grounds. For instance, populism might be rooted in ethnicity in one country and

in financial poverty or cultural poverty in another country.

The Roots and Characteristics of Jihadi Populism

There will be many factors for populism in Afghanistan and the most significant factors are financial poverty, cultural poverty, historical poverty, lack of feeling collective character, contrast of multiple identities and lack of national symbolic capital. However, jihadi populism has its certain factors. Jihadi populism is a kind of unique populism which emerged in 1370s as a result of mujahedeen's opposition and civil unrest. With such a demagoguery, which aims to mislead supporters' thought, politicians and tribal officials seek to seduce public opinion and give false personality to the group under their dominance and false identity to a certain tribe – through displaying their military equipment and their armed men – so as to maintain their own survival. In 1370s, all jihadi groups, belonging to any ethnic groups or any particular political sides, had their certain personalities, uniforms, and certain terms and their communications were different from other parts of society. For instance, the nostalgia of Pakol (a certain type of Afghan hat) evokes the memory of Ahmad Shah Masoud, turban of Taliban and a particular American jacket of Hezb-e-Wahdat's popular commanders who were based in Kabul's west. These all give specific identity to a part of society based on Jihadists' populist view.

One of the significant parts of jihadi populism is intolerance to the current social order and modern bureaucracy. Dismantling the order formed by past puppet government during the active role of former Soviet Union, they will also break the post-Taliban order and establish their own. The arrival of HIA's leader along with certain military equipment and armed men reveals this fact. Previously, members of HIA had high positions in the government's body but never showed tendency to break the social order. Within few days, the feature of Kabul has been changed and maneuvering of hundreds of vehicles is the reminiscent of 1370s.

To sum up, the method of demonstrating power the same as HIA, in addition to awakening the populist feelings and false heroism in society, will trigger populist senses within other political and ethnic groups. It is believed that this is not the end of game. The social order will be weakened and its executives, who are the government's security institutions, will lose their control and real prestige gradually. Therefore, the HIA's leader and its officials, who operated for years within the frame of government, will have to pay serious attention to this issue and let not the past disorder repeats itself.

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