

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



May 14, 2017

Actual Problems in Oblivion

No problem can ever be solved unless it is identified properly. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to do it. There are different problems within a social and political life and people are caught in them in such a way that it is always difficult to come out of them. In most of the cases people become accustomed to those problems and never realize that they have the option of getting rid of them. This situation is further complicated by different interpretations of the problems and their solutions. Different people view social, economic and political problems with different spectacles and they have their own versions of how the problems are solved; therefore, they create a sea of confusion that drowns everyone.

At this stage it is important for the political and social leaders to come forward and provide guidance to the people. They should be educated, trained and experienced enough to understand the true problems and make the best choice among the choices that are available for their solutions.

However, in case of Afghanistan, the political and social leaders, themselves, further add to the confusion of the people, instead of providing them solutions. In most of the cases, they even highlight the wrong problems so that people get diverted towards those issues and forget the real issues that the society faces. In this way they are able to achieve their self-centered objectives and keep on meeting their personal goals.

People, on the other hand, remain confused and unaware of their social and political responsibilities. A cursory glance at the mindset of the common people will depict that though there is a realization and complain against myriads of problems, there is no clear idea or vision about how to tackle these problems and what to prioritize.

As a matter of fact, we have forgotten the real issues and we are so lazy that we do not want to reach to the roots of the issues that we are facing; that is why we are not able to solve our issues. We keep on cutting the leaves, while never touch the branches, the trunk and most importantly the root, and we expect that the leaves would not grow again, which is really weird. We believe that changing few things here and there may solve our real issues, but that is not the case.

In fact, the measures that we take to change few things are all based on the wrong diagnosis. The medicine that we have suggested for the infection in our society is not suitable for it at all because the diagnosis is not appropriate. Unless, we have proper diagnosis, how can we suggest the proper medicines? It is really impossible that the medicine for fever must cure tuberculosis.

There are many in our society, among our so-called leaders, the most intelligent among our government authorities and intellectuals who claim that they are paying service to their countrymen, and they believe that they have the treatment of all sorts of our social diseases and infections.

They keep on insisting that they the society has the same disease that they have cure for; they do not let us know that it is possible as well that our disease is of the type they do not have any awareness about.

Nonetheless, now we have to decide that how long these sorts of insane and illogical approaches and practices would continue? How long would we keep on suffering from the, otherwise, curable infections?

Now is the time that we adopt a somewhat logical and reasonable approach. We require understanding that we have to change the society as a whole if we are really interested in curing its disease. We need to rebuild and strengthen its immune system so that it is able to resist against the infections successfully. We have to make it believe that it can live without an infection and that it has a choice to do so.

We need to make it appear beautiful and clean and let its susceptibility to diseases shrink. We need to fill its stomach with the hard-earned and easily digestible food, and make its veins filled with the blood full of energy and life. We need to strengthen its bone with the vitamins of determination and iron will. We need to make its mind clear and able to think logically and rationally. We need to make its legs and hands supportive enough so that it will be able to stand on its own and do things independently. There is no more room for mistakes, laziness and ignorance. The time would never wait for us and the history is never lenient to the ones who are not prepared and who waste their time in repeating their errors.

We need to re-diagnose the infections of our society and need to suggest medicine as per the proper diagnosis.



Women's Dignity

By Hujjatullah Zia

Nothing and no one else in this world deserves to see even the nails of the feet of a girl. Nakedness is a disease of our time. I am old and my words might sound funny. But me, your naked body must belong to one who loves face your soul,' these words have been spoken by a popular British Comedian Charlie Chaplin to her daughter, an actress.

Women suffered painfully throughout the history. Their honor was blackened and their freedoms were curtailed. Women were treated as pariahs and believed to be an inferior creature on the grounds of their sexual orientations. Their social, cultural and political roles were denied. In other words, cultural restrictions and parochial view regarding women marginalized them from social life. They were deemed to satiate men's carnal desire.

The discourse, in modern world, regarding women's rights and liberty sought to free women from traditional structure. Their rights were politicized and debated hotly around the globe and in international instruments.

Modern world nurtures secular view about women. According to international instruments, men and women are entitled equally. Both were born free with inherent rights and dignity and should be able to exercise their rights without social, cultural and political barriers. Women's biological, mental and emotional differences with men will not outweigh their rights. They are equal on the basis of being human and are not allowed to be discriminated for their sexual orientation.

Secular views about women's rights triggered sensitivity in traditional societies, mainly among religious figures. The rift between secular and religious views are growing wider. Traditional structures still resist against secular outlook on women.

Cultural barriers hamper women's social and political role in closed structures, including Afghanistan. For instance, although Afghan Constitution is approved on the basis of democratic view and entitles men and women equally, traditional and patriarchal mindsets hold strong sway in villages.

Additionally, some traditional figures, who gained high positions in the government's body, hardly tolerate women beside them. Similarly, tribal councils and local elders play key role regarding women's issues and pay no heed to national laws. Desert courts, in which women are punished, has no legal basis but carried out in accord with local decisions and elders' decree.

Hence, women are still prone to traditional practices and patriarchal mentalities.

On the other hand, the secular view tends to free women

not only from traditional and religious restrictions but also from moral values. Under the pretext of modern discourse, women's rights and dignity have been trampled upon and their charm and beauty are used for advertising gimmicks. In modern world, women's role is salient in Hollywood and Bollywood. Their motherly role is in decline and their dignity is overlooked.

They are paid to cross the red line through playing immoral and anti-moral scenes. Nakedness and moral corruption are widespread in our era. Secularists are likely to bestow women absolute freedom. Charlie aptly says that "nakedness is a disease of our time." This disease is infectious and grows rapidly across the world. Women are used and treated as object in social life.

Their sisterhood and motherly sanctity are ignored. In short, the form of women's exploitation has been changed in modern world.

This radically secular view about women is believed to create fundamental groups who deny women's social and political role and discriminate them on the grounds of their sex. For example, religious fundamentalists in Islamic societies such as the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria, Boko Haram in Nigeria, etc. oppose secular views and cherish highly radical mindset vis-à-vis women's rights.

They target women for two main reasons: first, believe that women's social role in society lead to corruption. Second, women are targeted in case of not being covered according to their definition of dressing.

Radicalism - be it secular or religious - will create challenges. The rights and liberty of mankind have their legal and ethical borders and there is no absolute freedom. Women's dignity must be respected, if not on the basis of religion, based on ethical code.

Neither of the roles, i.e. their motherly and social roles, should outweigh each other.

Indeed, there is no issue of superiority between men and women. Both men and women were born with fundamental rights and dignity. Women in the world in general and Afghan women in particular should be held in respect and able to exercise their rights without fear and barriers. In brief, women's social and political role is really significant in human societies. Women form the half population of the world and their role is instrumental in societies' progress. We have to treat them with respect and uphold their rights, which have been violated throughout the history. No stereotypes, misogynistic views and patriarchal systems are acceptable.

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Where We Must Vaccinate

By Zulfiqar A. Bhutta and Naveen Thacker

With measles outbreaks currently spreading across Europe and the Midwestern United States, and meningitis infecting US college students, health experts are doing something they never thought they'd have to do in early 2017: reminding people in developed countries that vaccines save lives.

Perhaps vaccines are a victim of their own success: they work so well in protecting people against certain illnesses that many in the West have forgotten how devastating preventable diseases can be. With the recent outbreaks in the US and Europe, parents are being reminded that foregoing vaccinations for their children is a deadly gambit.

Sadly, in many other parts of the world, particularly South Asia, parents need no reminding that immunization saves lives. What they need is access to vaccines.

Preventable disease outbreaks, rare as they are in Western countries, are all too frequent occurrences in a region that is home to the world's largest number of unvaccinated children. In the early 1980s, one of us almost lost our baby son to bacterial meningitis, because no vaccine was available in Pakistan at the time. The boy made a full recovery, but only because of an early diagnosis and care at a premier hospital, which is out of reach for many parents in Pakistan. The boy's siblings were later vaccinated, too, but only after stocks of the vaccine were secured in the US and hand-carried back to Pakistan.

Fortunately, going to such lengths is largely unnecessary today. On average, 90% of children in South Asia now receive vaccines for preventable illnesses such as tetanus, influenza, diphtheria, and pertussis, and the number of infants protected against Hepatitis B has increased by nearly 60% in the last decade. Moreover, six countries in the region were declared polio-free in 2014, following extensive vaccination campaigns. Only those living in marginalized and remote areas remain unvaccinated for polio, typically owing to local hesitancy and refusals.

Collectively, these remarkable figures amount to a public health miracle. But too many children are still suffering needlessly. The just-concluded World Immunization Week (April 24-30) should spur us to redouble our efforts to vaccinate the millions of children in South Asia who remain unprotected from preventable illnesses.

Globally, more than 11 children under the age of five die every minute, many of them in South Asia, from preventable diseases. Despite the region's progress, one in four children remain unprotected against diseases like measles and hepatitis, and the figures are even higher for major killers such as pneumonia and meningitis. As a result, the mortality rate for children in South Asia today is almost twice as high as it was in the US 50 years ago.

We have the tools to address these shortcomings and ensure that no child dies unnecessarily from an illness that vaccina-

tion could have prevented. To succeed, however, several obstacles must be overcome.

First, we must resolve systemic weaknesses in the region's underdeveloped health systems, by improving training for health workers, ensuring proper storage and transportation of vaccines, and developing effective ways to deliver them. These improvements, together with more effective information sharing in the medical profession, are critical for better planning and accountability as well.

Second, we must actively confront the growing anti-vaccine lobby, which threatens to undo the gains made in recent years. These groups spread falsehoods about vaccine safety that can lead parents to leave their children unprotected. Foregoing vaccinations not only puts the health of individual children at risk; it also raises the likelihood of outbreaks that jeopardize the health of entire communities.

Finally, we must continue to encourage countries in the region to increase vaccine coverage rates, in particular with newer vaccines proven to protect against pneumonia and diarrhea, the two leading infectious killers of children.

Positive steps are already being taken to realize these goals. In Pakistan, for example, officials in Punjab province, hoping to protect one million children from a common form of diarrhea, recently introduced the rotavirus vaccine. Next door, India has vaccinated close to four million children since launching an initiative to expand the rotavirus vaccine's coverage in ten states, and plans to reach 13 million children by the last quarter of 2017.

There is still much to do in both countries. In India, 13 million children annually are not reached with the rotavirus initiative; in Pakistan, five million children annually are not vaccinated. But, with help from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, more vaccines are being brought to the world's poorest communities through funding, training, and delivery. Health officials everywhere can learn from and replicate the gains made in these two countries.

We are at a pivotal moment in the global vaccination drive. As pediatric professionals who have dedicated our lives to protecting children from preventable diseases, we believe it is within the world's capacity to end this needless suffering. Vaccines are a proven tool for improving children's health and development.

Ensuring that children have access to them is an achievable public health goal behind which parents and pediatricians everywhere should unite. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

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