

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



November 11, 2015

## Socio-political Changes and Afghan Women

Human societies change and with them so many aspects, processes, institutions and strata change that are in those societies. These changes are inevitable and are bound to occur. Therefore, they are unavoidable; and those who are really interested to achieve something positive from these changes have to understand the nature of these changes and try to divert them towards better destinations instead of trying to block their ways. However, an important fact about the changes that occur within a society is that they influence the weaker strata of society to a large extent.

Afghan society is also one of the societies in the world and it has to go through the process of change. Though mostly the changes have been negative in Afghan society and these changes have made Afghan people suffer to a large extent, the changes have been there and they will be there as long as Afghan society exists and the people live in it. Though these changes have influenced everyone, the weaker strata of society, especially women, have been largely influenced by them.

The changes in Afghan society must be analyzed from two perspectives. The first one must be analyzed from within Afghan society, keeping in consideration the social changes that occur with the interactions and development within the social institutions and other actors. Such a perspective depicts that Afghanistan is a tribal society with a slow pace of changes. The traditional culture and norms and values are strict and slow to change. Moreover, education, that can be a source of change, has not been able to penetrate Afghan society properly. Most of the rural areas still do not have schools and proper education. In addition, the education that is being provided contains obsolete curriculum that does not help much in changing the mentality of the people and thus the society as a whole. This slow pace of changes within Afghan society does not help much in changing the position of women. They, to a large extent, are still suffering from the discriminatory rules and regulations and social behaviour.

Extremist and strict religious beliefs and practices have also made the changes less frequent. Strengthened by extremist religious institutions, these beliefs and practices have no positive approach towards changes and consider them evil. They also support the patriarchal setup and keep the discrimination against women intact and even invigorate it.

The political changes are also very slow as the political setups, in most of the areas, are non-existent. The democracy has not been able to reach to grass root level as local bodies are not chosen through any sort of election. The setup, therefore, is authoritative and dominated by tribal and religious leaders, who do not welcome the positive changes at all.

The other perspective of changes in Afghan society must be understood in its relations with regional and international community and actors. The involvement of international community has strived to impose liberal and democratic changes in Afghan society. Though, it has been successful to a certain extent, the real changes are yet to be seen. Afghanistan is now recognized as a democratic country. It has had its two regular elections. There are considerations and emphasize on the rights of minority, women and other weaker strata of the society in the constitution and many other developments have been made as well; however, they are prevalent only in the major cities while the rural areas have not yet seen their impacts.

The regional countries on the other hand have always strived to promote and gain their interests in Afghanistan. They have not been supportive enough in bringing about long-lasting changes in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the capability of Afghan administrative structure has not been able to take full advantage from the external support and change the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

Another important factor to consider regarding the nature of changes that may occur in the times to come in Afghanistan's socio-political scenario is the ongoing transition period and the withdrawal of international troops. As the security transition has been completed and most of the international troops have already withdrawn, there are concerns that the security situation may deteriorate and there may be many compromises in the peace deal with Taliban that may lead the society towards further religious extremism and backwardness.

The changes so far made and occurred and the ones that may follow do not seem to have much consideration regarding the rights of women and gender balance. Women have been discriminated and they may further be influenced by the future changes to a large extent as they are one of the weaker strata and weaker strata are influenced by transitions and instabilities to a large extent.

Moreover, women fear the return of Taliban-like era and fear that all the developments made for improvement of the status of women may be lost unless wise decisions are made. In the political bargain with Taliban for the peace process, it is possible that government may make certain compromises among which the law regarding the rights of women may suffer further.

Therefore, it is really necessary to understand the nature of mentioned changes and try to direct the efforts of the international community and regional players and also of the Afghan government itself in bringing about real changes in Afghan society and keep the consideration for better values through the changes that may occur.

## Afghanistan Suffers Acute Destitution

By Asmatyari

A person dies if he stops to breathe; couldn't be called human if he fails to feel the pain and agonies of other fellowmen", is indeed a mind blowing quote. This dictum applies when societal needs of human beings are remunerated with equal distribution of affluences and riches by legislative and executive branches of government. However, the part of land that encounters unequal distribution of wealth and property have toughened man receive their daily requirements with ease and are left with only option to think wild of courses to earn their livelihood.

Poverty and unemployment are identified as the driving forces behind insecurity, and called for these issues to be addressed as a priority. Some people participate in insurgent activities to acquire an income. Joining anti-government elements or undertaking other illegal activities, such as drug production and trafficking, is often more lucrative, and with immediate returns, than struggling with farming or working in the informal sector for low wages. Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world and the third highest rate of child mortality. Only 23 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and only 24 per cent of Afghans above the age of 15 can read and write, with much lower literacy rates among women and nomadic populations. The practical dilemma in implementing the new strategy is that food and agriculture problems cannot be separated from problems caused by conflict, corruption, and narcotics trafficking.

The masses are constantly asking for economic relaxation, end to unemployment, better living facilities, peace, security and human rights protection who are turned a deaf ear to, instead are responded with vague declaratives like, concrete measure are undertaken to bring eminent changes, committees are formed to assess the causes of terrorism and corruption, people will be given economic incentives, the country will be made a prosperous in the region. Irrespective of the aforementioned promises, not a single plan is put into action that could materialize within desired course of time. The promises made volatile enough capable of easy evaporation. The ruling class keeps on building castle in the air by making impracticable pledges. The masses are asked to wait and hope for the betterment and are instructed to earn faith in supreme creature deciding something good in their fate, at the end of day. We have been practically changed into a nation who is to just wait and hope for the best. The government and ruling elites relies on making promises, as if their hollow and fuzzy assurances could solace the relentless issues related with unemployment and poverty. The masses are fed up with the formless promises. The high degrees of disappointment are reflected from their sun burnt faces which are the timely manifestation to the underlying facts. It is an uncompromising reality that the escalating graph of poverty made it difficult for an ordinary person to make the ends meet.

Consequently, anybody striving selflessly to earn his livelihood with great earnestness does owe an undying virtue. However, the public departments and institutions are devoid of such pieties and are bursting with corruption, monopoly and nepotism and favoritism. Any public official enjoying a notable position competes his counterpart in drawing the greater benefits out of public assets. In the public offices an ordinary person has to wait and suffer until the officials is not paid a sufficient amount of bribe. You are not regarded amongst dignitaries unless you divert greater public resources and accounts into your personal use and subsequently claim them your birth possessions at the end of day.

Afghanistan is one of the most impoverished nations in Asia. According to a report published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), some 9 million Afghans - 36 per cent of the population - are believed to live in absolute poverty and a further 37 per cent live only slightly above the poverty line only second to Bangladesh as Asia's poorest country, despite an estimated injection of billions of dollars in previous years. This report quit a lot tallies with formerly released financial report of World Bank. According to a joint survey by the ministry of economic and the World Afghan economic analysts say that the government must start investment in infrastructure projects to solve these challenges. They warned that if the government does not take serious measures, the people will cause the fall of the system. Some are said to believe that if the government and donor countries have invested in infrastructure projects in the past 14 years, the country would not have this problem.

The government earning confidence of international investors and door agencies can launch programs in areas duly identified as crucial in meeting its development goals, including education, health, irrigation, energy, infrastructure and rural development. The government got to stay focused on improving the government's capacity to deliver services to its citizens, and foster business climate that unleashes the job-creating potential of the private sector. With inclusion to said propositions Afghan leaders too need to engender strong, inclusive economic growth, reduce poverty, create jobs and fight corruption whole heartedly.

The national and international financiers and donors are willing to extend their services, businesses and aids, provided the government ensures a corruption free and a transparent systems operating efficiently. The confidence installed in them, only then the government can attract the international investors -if safeguards to maltreatments are rendered. Following a transparent undertaking in governmental business, the financiers, donors and investors may actively contribute to poverty alleviation by creating job opportunities. The government is consequently held responsible to take poverty alleviating measures on war footing by making the use of all possible steps.

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## The Assad Dead End

By Bernard-Henri Lévy

Forget principles and morality. Forget, or try to forget, the quarter-million deaths for which Bashar al-Assad is responsible, directly or indirectly, since choosing to respond with violence to a peaceful uprising of the Syrian people. Set aside the fact that Assad's forces have caused 10-15 times more civilian deaths thus far than the Islamic State, whose horrific execution videos have overshadowed the Syrian dictator's invisible massacres. But even if you can purge all of this from your thoughts, a policy for Syria that posits Assad as an "alternative" to the Islamic State is simply not viable.

Assad, after all, literally unleashed the Islamic State's current savagery: in May 2011, he released hundreds of Islamic radicals from prison, quickly supplying the infant group with fighters and leaders. He then methodically shelled positions held by moderate rebels, while no less methodically sparing the Islamic State's stronghold in Raqqa. And then, in mid-2014, he allowed Iraqi elements of the Islamic State to find sanctuary in eastern Syria.

In other words, Assad created the monster that he is now pretending to fight. Is all that not a little much for a potential ally? Can working with Assad possibly provide a sound basis for what is supposed to be a common effort?

The bottom line is that Assad has no interest in winning. The man who now holds himself up as civilization's last bulwark against the Islamic State is also the last man who wants to see it eliminated.

After all, does a chess player, even a bad one, intentionally sacrifice his most powerful piece? Do any of us ever tear up our insurance policies? Do we really believe that Assad and his cronies are too stupid to have realized that their political survival depends on that of the Islamic State and on maintaining themselves as the keepers of the gate through which the rest of us must pass to wage war against it?

"Of course not," the advocates of working with him concede. "But let's take a two-step approach. Let's defeat the Islamic State and then worry about Assad."

But this, too, assumes that dictators are more stupid than they really are. Worse, it ignores that politics follows its own logic, or at least its own dynamics. What the sorcerer's apprentices who want to work with Assad ignore is that they would most likely have a great deal of trouble, when the time comes, distancing themselves from an ally who would not be shy about claiming his share of the victory.

As a result, jihadism would rush back in, though perhaps in a different guise.

"Bashar al-Assad is the Syrian state," the same people say.

"And we must not commit the fatal error of destroying the state." But this argument is not valid, either. The state has already failed: Assad's regime controls only a fifth of Syria's territory, and the remaining four-fifths will never willingly resubmit to its terrifying control. If the regime prevails, Syria's citizens will continue to flee in droves to Turkey, Lebanon, and Europe.

In fact, Assad's regime cares so little for its pseudo-state that it abandons its own soldiers caught beyond the territory it controls, as occurred in Tabqa, near Raqqa. Baathist Syria, whatever its friends in the Kremlin and elsewhere say, is dead and buried. And no military trompe l'œil can revive it.

But the supposed realists refuse to accept reality. Just as it was necessary to ally with Stalin to defeat Hitler, they claim, we should not be afraid to play the Assad card to rid ourselves of the Islamic State. Yes, jihadism is the fascism of our day, infected with plans, ideas, and a will to purity comparable to those of the Nazis. I was one of the first to suggest the comparison some 20 years ago.

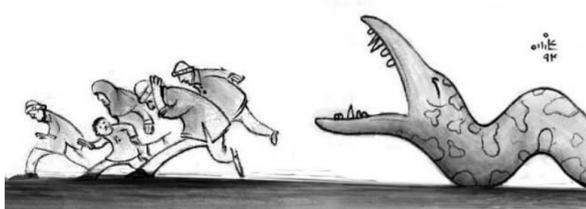
And yet it is absurd to compare the power of the two phenomena, or to suggest that in the confrontation with the butchers of Mosul and Palmyra, the democracies face a strategic challenge analogous to that of the Nazi Wehrmacht. This historical leap is possible only for people whose political irresponsibility is matched by their proclivity for lazy analogy.

Make no mistake: the Islamic State is strong. But it is not so strong as to leave those who would fight it with only the politics of the lesser of two evils.

The West must decide what to do. In the aftermath of last week's peace talks in Vienna - which convened the United States, Russia, Iran, China, Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, Jordan, Lebanon, and key European Union members - that question becomes increasingly difficult. Should we equip what remains of the Free Syrian Army? Should we deal with the few remaining Alawite leaders whose hands are not stained with blood, or those members of Assad's clan who chose exile early and thus were not involved in the massacres?

Perhaps there is still time to bring together, on neutral ground, some of the elements that comprised the old Syria. Or perhaps more radical solutions - of the type implemented in Germany and Japan after World War II - are now required. All of these paths remain open, but they are narrowing. And none of them depends on the political survival of Bashar al-Assad. (Courtesy Project Syndicate)

Bernard-Henri Lévy is one of the founders of the "Nouveaux Philosophes" (New Philosophers) movement. His books include *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism*.



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