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Disappearing Afghan Women from Public Spaces — Collapse of Women’s Rights in Afghanistan

The present paper attempts to understand the plight of Afghan women under complete absence of women’s rights. Beginning with a brief sketch of the historical past of the Afghan women prior to 9/11, this paper attempts to document their journey through the post-Bonn period including the present situation under the new Taliban regime. The paper is based on secondary sources of information and narratives mainly from media reports. It addresses the situational of women in Afghanistan and how they are positioned in the public spheres, while their basic rights are gradually getting eroded. It is ironical that when the world is looking forward to ushering in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) particularly the SDG-5, a part of the world completely ignores Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality! The purpose of the paper is to highlight the gradual depletion and severe disruption of women’s rights in Afghanistan and understanding the socio-economic implications of the Taliban policies. Restrictions on women’s education, participation in the workforce and closure of women’s public spaces are all gradually coming into force. The paper suggests a few policy recommendations so that the young Afghan girls and women could continue with their education and skill development training and obtain a livelihood option.

Keywords: Afghan Women, Taliban 2.0, Women’s Rights, Afghanistan, Gender Equality, Empowerment, Inclusive Afghanistan, Sustainable Development Goals-5, Human Rights Abuse, Violence against Women.

Context

Women’s participation undoubtedly is crucial for enduring peace and security. It’s impossible for one-half of the human race totally being cut off from the process of ushering in peace and harmony in the society. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325, was thus enacted so that more women got encouraged to participate in ensuring international peace and safety. Unfortunately only few women actually got to participate in the peace building process. In spite of considerable progress, women continue to be underrepresented in positions of power, in negotiations, and in peacekeeping operations. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), as well as security sector reform, rehabilitation of justice, and the rule of law, all fail to take into account the needs and perspectives of women after the conflict ends. Sexual and gender-based violence is pervasive in post conflict situation often persisting even after fighting stops with no consequences for the perpetrators. Integration into economic life and leadership gets hampered for the women in a post-conflict culture mainly due to absence of physical protection and significant legal restraints.

In the context of Afghanistan, women faced one of the worst devastations with a gruesome past and now with no future. They were referred to as the “Vanished Gender” (Rashid A, 2022) while the UNDP states, that Afghanistan is “one of the most dangerous places in the world for a woman to live in”. Studies suggest most women in Afghanistan suffer from domestic violence and the most common perpetrators happen to be family members. “Violence against Women” (VAW) such as beheading the women, inflicting torture and violence, rape, forced marriages, physical abuse and women being bartered, are a continuing torture that never seems to stop. A bizarre fact is when a woman gets raped; she is imprisoned for being guilty of committing adultery! Several hundreds of women and girls remain imprisoned on grounds of “moral crime” even during the post Bonn period when some semblance of democracy had settled in.

Prior to 9/11 In March 2001, the Human Rights Commission reported 1026 cases of violence against women. Today “Violence against Women” is rampant under Taliban [1]. The period prior to 2002, was a gory period for women. The chief of Taliban’s religious police, Maulvi Qalamuddin, had unleashed terror and constant fear from his position as the deputy minister for the “Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice” among the population. The city of Kabul remained under constant threat. He was a Pashtun tribesman. His physique itself was scary with large feet and hands, a long broad nose, black eyes, and a bushy black

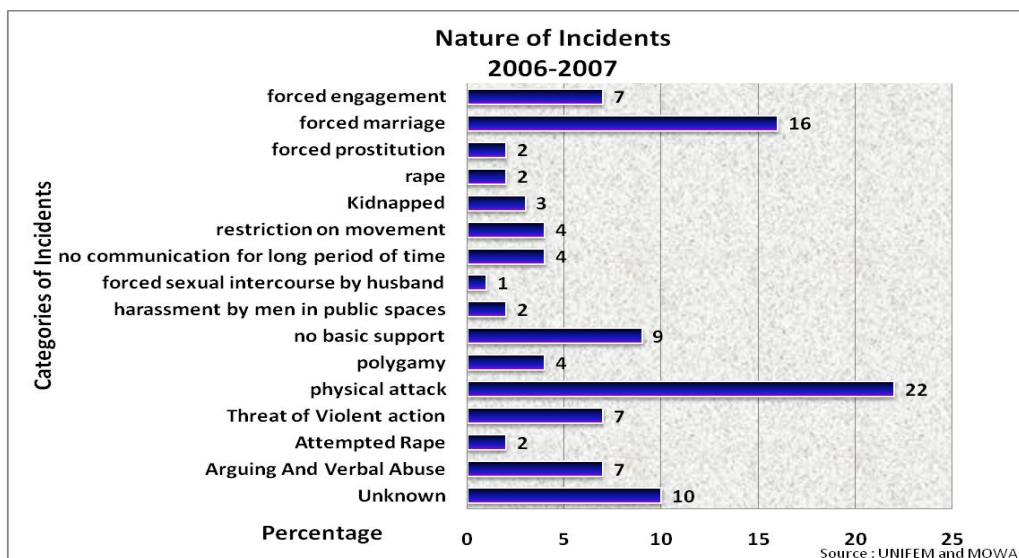
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beard that brushed his desk as he spoke. As chief of the Taliban's religious police, the stream of regulations he issued from this office dramatically changed the lifestyle of Kabul's once easy-going population. Half of the population never even witnessed his office, located at the heart of Kabul, as the Maulvi had banned all women from entering the building. As a result, the Afghan women were forced to disappear from public view [2]. Strange but true the same person got nominated then by the President Hamid Karzai, along with five other former Taliban officials, to negotiate with the insurgency at the High Peace Council.

Harsh gender policies that prevailed, included prohibition of women from working outside the home, wearing a head-to-toe covering in public, prohibition of young girls from attending school, women not being allowed to go out in public unless and until accompanied by a close male family member, prohibition of wearing certain types of clothing or/and jewellery, and other punitive punishments were meted out for sexual misconduct and adultery. Exploitation of Afghan women who got captured by the Taliban was forced to work as slaves. These policies resulted in, lowest life expectancy and literacy rates of the Afghan women in Asia, highest infant mortality rate in Asia, and significantly higher rates of beggary and prostitution even before the Taliban's ascent to power in 1996. During the peak of the Taliban 1.0 such restrictions became hard and rigid making the scenario even graver.

Decades of civil war gradually dismantled upon Afghanistan. The 9/11 bombings had left one third of the Afghans as refugees with many more leaving the country even today. A majority depend upon international aid, half of which are women who became destitute and were in utter darkness. This was the moment when major international intervention was introduced. Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1386 to establish a permanent government there in accordance with the Bonn Agreement. In December 2001, the future of Afghanistan government started to get discussed. There was a multinational military presence in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2014 called the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). While ISAF's initial focus was on training the ANSF and helping Afghanistan restore its core government institutions, the organization eventually became involved in the larger battle in Afghanistan against the Taliban insurgency.

**Violence Against Women (%)
2006-2007**



Source: Dutta Mondira, 2010, Unpublished report on “An Evaluation of Indian Initiatives for Afghan Women”, sponsored by the Ministry of External Affairs, Govt of India

With Hamid Karzai taking over the country as the President in 2002, the picture of Afghan Women started to look brighter. The international community and UN came forward pouring funds to build Afghanistan once again. Activities involving women in Afghanistan started to gather momentum with gender equality and women's empowerment was not a distant dream anymore. The gruesome past and the period of the worst catastrophe seemed to be a forgotten past. Although women continued to live in a state of abject poverty facing the worst forms of violence in Afghanistan even during the presidency of Hamid Karzai, in the

years 2009-2010. One encountered incidents like stoning to death, punishment for adultery, selling daughter/wife for opium and other such atrocities. A society fraught with illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness, traditions, strict religious regulations and the like continued as the main causes behind such violence. Studies [3] revealed that a large section of the population were victims of war or left the country as a result of series of civil war and bombings. As a consequence, several women who became widows were left on their own to fend for themselves and their dependent children. The anti-women regime of the Taliban days still seemed to haunt Afghanistan and the conditions for women remained gory. A report of the Ministry of Women Affairs stated that in 2006-2007, a total number of 2133 cases were registered, out of which 22 % were that of beatings and 16 % were that of forced marriages. The Afghanistan Independent Human Right Commission emerged with a similar picture in 2006 where a majority (47 %) of the registered cases were that of beating followed by forced marriage. Unfortunately the exchange of girls, selling of girls and trafficking showed an increase in the registered number of cases. Data pertaining to the outcome of violence suggests that 3 percent of the cases are reported to be either committing suicide or attempt to commit suicide.

A Trajectory of Afghan Women

The first Bonn, however never led to an enduring political settlement and was scattered with political unrest and insecurity. The USAID Implementing Partners, reported security Incidents under their assistance programme. There was continuous ongoing insurgency with killings and a rise among the wounded on a regular basis. Although the violence levels did decrease but at the same time there was a rise in targeted assassinations among the soft targets.

Nevertheless, Afghanistan was certainly not where it was prior to Bonn and had come a long way since then. No doubt there was phenomenal progress achieved in Afghanistan over the twenty year period with 35–40 % girls back in school. From almost no girls attending school, the number had crossed well above 3 million. Longevity increased from 44 years to more than 60 years. Healthcare facilities improved from 6 to 60 % with the Afghan Mortality survey targeting high value, low cost intervention. The Afghan infant mortality was down to 25 %. Children less than five years in age were dying in the proportion of 256 per 1000 to a maximum of less than 100 children. The maternal mortality went down to more than 300 percent with access to healthcare under the Afghan leadership. Many other notable achievements worth mentioning include, 120,000 Afghan girls graduating from high schools, 15,000 enrolled in universities and nearly 500 women were on university faculties. Maternal mortality, infant mortality, under-five mortality rates had all significantly declined.

It was a marvel to find the Afghan women representing as legislators. They constituted 28 percent of the total legislators in the Afghan parliament including 9 percent at the decision-making level. Women comprised 40 percent of the registered voters in the presidential elections held after 9/11. Women were among the doctors, medical workers, pilots, army, police officers, media, sports activities and constituted many active civil society groups. In fact, President Bush had stated on Sept 21, 2004 that,

“More than 10 million Afghan citizens — over 4 million of them being women — were now registered to vote To any who still would question whether Muslim societies can be democratic societies, the Afghan people are giving their answer”.

Indeed this was a milestone achieved!

This was not all. The government of Afghanistan also had approved a new constitution in 2004 guaranteeing women of equal rights. In 2009, a law was declared stating that “Violence Against Women” (VAW) was a crime. However a total of 70 % Afghans still continued to be engaged in agriculture, and were in the food insecure regions of the world.

The fiscal sustainability in terms of Infrastructure such as building schools, training teachers, building road network and so on, began to take shape and became a reality by 2010/2011. The security aid constituted the bulk of the total aids with the total external resource coming into the country was almost equal to the GDP that was a total of 15 billion dollars. This did sustain the tattered and battered economy and Afghans were able to sustain their Government, infrastructure, salary of security flows, governance gains and so on.

Though these have been significant but weak governance and issues of corruption played havoc, as a result the capacity building did not usher in the desired results. There was a severe need to enhance domestic revenues. Data generated by the Ministry of Finance, suggested an enhancement in the revenue source gathered from customs, mobile licensing, other innovative ways for increasing the external trade and transit flows. The human capacity development needed to create an enabling environment for economic growth and investment focused on the following measures at the Bonn II conference of 2011. These were:

- Corruption which aimed the 182 corruption index to be moved up to 25 places in the coming three years
- World Bank business report ranked 160th position out of 183 countries. No doubt it had moved their scores to 7 places over the last one year, however it committed to move another 15 places in the next three years
- The HDI put Afghanistan at 172 position out of 179 countries. This also committed to increase by 25 % in the next three years.

However, despite all a widespread poverty continued to prevail. Almost one in two Afghans lived below the national poverty line in 2019 [4]. The stability of Afghanistan's peace and economy remained precarious, relying heavily on international aid. Children and women were routinely subjected to extreme cruelty and abusive practices such as honor killings, child marriages, domestic abuses, and sexual violence due to the extensive destructive practices prevalent in the social norms that got engulfed into the gender inequity policies. Nothing seemed to be of human rights consequence as far as women were concerned. Besides the effects of COVID 19 had seeped into the terms of conflict, natural catastrophes, food insecurity, significant cross-border mobility, and the social, economic, and health effect that hit Afghanistan severely. This left almost half the Afghans in need of humanitarian aid by 2020 [5]. The security budget for ushering in sustainability had been targeted for five billion dollars and other five billion dollars were for non-security expenses. Indicators needed to be identified that would significantly create the necessary impact.

Nevertheless, although the picture was not far from being gruesome, the takeover of President Karzai, ushered in a ray of "hope" in the minds of women. Every woman hoped that things would eventually improve and soon they would be relieved from the torturous situation. This encouraged them to go on with their lives. They felt much more safer under the present regime as compared to the Taliban period. Girls were able to pursue education and skill development, they also had the liberty to move out on their own and attended to their daily chores. The "Sharia" law was not such a weapon for the women. Women got engaged in livelihood options such as nurses and doctors in the hospital; there were women parliamentarians, TV/radio announcers, women who imparted driving lessons to other women, beauticians who worked in beauty parlours, etc. Projects were undertaken to usher in livelihood options by various international community for the women in particular. Along with other countries India too organized several programme to train and educate the Afghan women and girls besides young boys. The Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (AREDP) initiated the National Solidarity programme (NSP) covering several remote areas within a short period of time especially in the states of Bamiyan, Balkh and Parwan. The long duration of the civil war and its associated trauma was now beginning to dismantle through the NSP to offering some respite and livelihood options to the locals.

Overall literacy remained at a dismal low with 0 to 11 % (Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team, 2011) among the women, barring the exception of Kabul (48 %), Herat (28 %) and a few other places. According to figures of 2012, less than 50 percent of the children were enrolled in schools with Zabul and Uruzgan recording as low as less than 1 %. Access to health facilities for the women was still at a rudimentary stage where a large section of the women (50 % on an average) travelled more than 10 kms for obtaining a health care facility. Women constituted only 9 % among the decision making bodies.

Nevertheless despite such proactive steps, there always was a lingering fear that the troop pull-out may take place any day from 2014 onwards. This would impact in a lack of interest among the international commitment to push the Afghan government for promoting and protecting women's rights. This was especially crucial in the context of the endorsed Ulema Council statement on 6 March 2012 by President Karzai. There was a nagging fear and apprehension that the decrease in the foreign aid would badly impact in the running of schools and clinics. All this would result in, the Afghan women getting forgotten and abandoned once again by the rest of the world.

The declaration then by President Karzai stating that, "men are fundamental and women are secondary", was unwarranted for! This already set the tone for speculation and apprehension among the Afghan women leaders. To top it, there were activities such as the on-going negotiations with the Taliban which did hint that women's rights may get bargained away after all. Any attempt of peace process which excluded more than half of the population could hardly usher in peace and sustainability. Unless the women's voices are factored into the peace process and properly represented in all the decision making bodies, it was expected that time was not far away, when all these achievements would become history. Undoubtedly history is repeating itself!

The New Dawn — Taliban 2.0

The apprehensions are happening after more than two decades. It is official now — secondary education for girls and higher education for women are both prohibited in Afghanistan. For the past six months, women and girls have been prohibited from attending public playgrounds, swimming pools, fitness centres, and athletic clubs. The employment of women in NGO headquarters is also restricted. Following the Taliban take-over of Afghanistan in August 2021, women were barred from holding any position of authority. Women and girls in the so called modern-day Afghanistan were now supposed to adopt the new dress code, while travelling beyond 75 kilometers without a male escort was a taboo [6].

Since the Taliban 2.0 began, a serious humanitarian catastrophe occurred in Afghanistan. It's been nearly two years since then and people are struggling to meet their most basic requirements. The Taliban's repressive policies against Afghan women and girls have effectively removed them from the society and systematically eliminating them from public forums. It is an irony that despite the Taliban's oppressive rule, the emir Sheikh Haibatullah Akhundzada, boasted in a public address, that his administration were providing the Afghan women with a "comfortable and prosperous life". Women all around the country complained of living in dehumanizing conditions, feeling trapped and powerless. A lack of work opportunities and humanitarian relief, especially for victims of violence (including sexual violence), left many, especially the female headed household in a deep crisis, while meeting their most fundamental requirements. This incident serves as a stark warning of how easily and quickly women's and girls' rights were getting eroded.

Twenty years of progress of women's rights in Afghanistan have been erased, and the situation is now the same as it was before 2002, when the Taliban 1.0 controlled the nation. It was in 2002, that the Afghan women celebrated the International Women's Day exuberating hope and cheers, after years of denial of their rights under Taliban 1.0 [7]. The day had been celebrated in Afghanistan and at the United Nations Headquarters under the subject "Afghan women today: realities and opportunities". Pledges had been made to help the Afghan sisters to start all over after the war. A statement was issued by the World leaders for treating the Afghan women as "an affront to all standards of dignity, equality, and humanity". It emphasized that mere words of solidarity were not enough from the international community to help them re-establish their rights. The Afghan women and girls had finally overcome several obstacles to achieve their basic human rights. Women who were denied their rights to an adequate education, to gainful employment, to the highest possible standard of physical and mental health, had started to enjoy their freedom of movement, freedom from fear and want, and freedom from discrimination; a situation regressing significantly since 2002.

Inclusiveness and Governance

It's been two years since 2021 since Taliban 2.0 has taken over Afghanistan. The restrictions mounting on women since then has escalated making the situation more and more abusive. The Taliban now depute armed men to barge into girls' classrooms ordering teachers to check students' bodies for any signs of puberty so that, they could keep them out of school. Women in Afghanistan complained that Taliban enforcers beat them up, if they are caught wearing trousers or jeans instead of the mandatory robes. It seems the attacks by the Taliban are more as retaliation in response to the escalation of women's rights initiatives and protests that are being launched in Afghanistan and Iran. This is to nip these protests at the bud and simultaneously reassert the Taliban's own power. Undoubtedly if such crackdowns continued, it could lead not only to widespread atrocities but a rise in extremism as well as a broader threat to international security.

It is believed that the trend for the increasing violence against women is a symptom of Afghanistan's broader problems. In spite of international efforts to make Afghanistan a more inclusive economy, Taliban government cannot afford to adopt an all-inclusive policy, as it will not be in their interest. They can never become more inclusive despite their promises to reform [8]. The economic catastrophe has only served to increase their brutality. All the rigorous discourse and rhetoric in international diplomatic forums such as the United Nations, the European Union, the USA, Russia and others is a fantasy.

Despite the fact that the Taliban are commonly thought of as a Pashtun group, they do not represent the Pashtun people as a whole. The top commanders of the Taliban, are mostly ethnic Pashtuns from the southern districts surrounding Kandahar who were trained in hardline religious schools in Pakistan. They are against shadowy differences among Taliban sub-groups like the Haqqani network, based in the eastern provinces, the ethnic Uzbeks, based in the northern parts of the country and the like. The rights of women are the focal point of the Taliban's internal disputes [9]. They are the most dramatized lot where women's rights are concerned.

When the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan in 2021, they quickly reinstated the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which had been used by the previous administration in the 1990s to suppress women's rights and public participation. The dictatorship claimed that this was supposedly to safeguard women's rights, but its "virtue and vice" enforcers have been monitoring women's clothing in public places like streets and buses. These enforcers are mostly bearded males dressed in white tunics with a ministry logo. The Taliban has gradually increased its prohibitions on women's clothing, movement in public, and the pursuit of education or employment in whatever field that it finds offensive. Clearly a trend is emerging that suggests, women's restrictions were formerly enforced by the Taliban's official under the "morality police". Taliban's more stringent demands to regulate women have encouraged or pushed numerous additional males to abuse their positions as the "enforcers". The regular Taliban fighters and civilian regime sympathizers have launched ad hoc enforcement against any and every lady they come across. The Taliban have coerced shopkeepers, teachers, and other members of the general public into acting as the law enforcers. Campaigns of intimidation or violence against vulnerable populations, especially the women, have been shown to increase mass atrocities, according to experts in the field of peacebuilding. There are several, albeit small, windows of opportunity to affect Taliban behaviour.

In May 2022, they announced new regulations, including mandates that women wear facial coverings in public and that they are not be issued drivers' licenses or be allowed to travel great distances without a male relative acting as a chaperone. But there is another wide range of strictness in practice, which is to be followed as corollary to the dictums. Kabul, which is a home to more than 10 percent of the country's population, has been hit hard by the increased repression and assaults on women in recent times. The remote areas are even worse according to some eye witnesses. Afghan women have reported that individuals in civilian clothes are increasingly using violence against them. These armed groups want to inspect the clothes of female students attending colleges and private institutions around Kabul.

The students had been coerced into uncovering their undergarments from their skirts and robes. According to the women, the enforcers would beat anyone they caught wearing western-style trousers with electrical cables. Women's rights advocates in Kabul confirmed to their international peers of the latest violations via secure electronic mail and encrypted SMS messages. Information also trickled out via social media, most notably via the Afghan women-run news website [10]. The social media has brought out several pieces about the new laws and violence against women and girls in Kabul, Herat, and elsewhere in the country.

The U.N. special reporter, Richard Bennett, has highlighted the worsening problem and suggested to provide greater manpower and funding to look into the numerous cases of alleged violations of women's rights and, if necessary, to refer cases to the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, states that negotiate with the Taliban or provide asylum to Afghan refugees ought to create special envoys for human and women's rights to advocate change within the Taliban's diplomatic negotiations. Constant news on human rights abuse and violence from Afghanistan are out, in spite of the severe restrictions on social media, mobile apps and video recordings. The Rukhshana Media [11], alone reveals some of the latest atrocities of August 2023. These include,

- Shooting and killing of innocent people by the Taliban forces including a child, during a religious ceremony in Ghazni city and on Shiite mourning
- The Taliban stopping a journalism training course in Nangarhar as there were girl students in the class
- Burning of musical instruments in Herat, Kabul and Bamyan by the Taliban
- Women accused of adultery and desertion were systematically tortured in Taliban prisons especially those who revolted
- The police under the Vice and Virtue department warned drivers of three-wheeled vehicles and motorbikes in Herat not to allow girls wearing mantles to ride their vehicle.

The latest was the Taliban ordering the closure of beauty salons across the country. This was one place where the women relieved themselves and interacted amongst each other but this was also shut down. A protest had broken out by the beauticians but the Taliban immediately sprang into action and attacked the women with the help of water cannons, tear gas and warning bullets. The women sloganeered "bread, work, and freedom", "justice", "don't take our work", and "stealing women's bread is theft" and so on. It has been observed that the Taliban even smashed the phones of many female beauticians, destroying any footage or images of the demonstration that might have been on them. Women have reported that the Taliban has been prohibiting girls from having cell phones that can capture video in an effort to stifle both strategies, as this

has been a main method in which women in Afghanistan and Iran have energized their campaigns and gained international support.

The present dispensation has ordered children and teachers to keep their faces covered, and according to women in Kabul, the Taliban have invaded girls' elementary schools to enforce this policy. The law enforcement officers were seen using electrical cables, sticks, and gun butts to beat alleged offenders. A mother in Kabul reported to the United States Institute of Peace [12] that her daughter had been abused by Taliban members in class because she did not have her face covered. The child is traumatized and is scared to go to school. Another woman reported how enforcers from the Taliban stopped their car where her family was travelling in. After serious interrogation they were allowed to proceed only after the mom was told to switch seats with the kids and ride in the back seat. Women complained that Taliban gunmen have been abusing them in several neighbourhoods. Several girls' schools and privately run education courses were searched by "enforcers" in the southern neighbourhood of Chihil Sutun. Students and teachers were beaten for wearing trousers as undergarments, outer robes that did not reach their ankles and colourful clothing other than black. Other forms of abuse and restrictions by the Taliban were also reported by the women.

The ethnic Hazara community has been among the worst victims due to their ethnicity. Being a woman has hit them doubly hard. A study [3] undertaken by the Ministry of External Affairs, Govt of India in 2010 showed how insecure the Hazara community felt even in 2010, while recalling the horrors of Taliban 1.0. They had narrated an incident where some of their men were lined up against a wall and shot down at point blank range.

Some pictures below show how entrances to their homes still remain camouflaged and the community continues living in fear, in case history repeated itself! Children born after post-Bonn were yet to get a taste of the "Taliban". History indeed is repeating itself. Once again the Hazaras are the target group for the Taliban. Some of the following incidents confirm their plight [13].

- Nearly sixty female students, from the Hazara ethnic minority, were kicked out of university dorms on October 11, 2022.
- Suicide bombing of September 30, 2022, at a Hazara education centre in Kabul that taught girls, killed at least 53 people. Eye witnesses say that the expulsions appeared to be a retaliation for public protests by Hazaras over violent attacks against their community.
- High school graduates, who sat for university admission exams then, were told by the Taliban officials that they could not enroll in programmes like engineering, economics, veterinary science, or media which were open only for men. Further this ban was confirmed by an education official to the Spanish news outlet EFE.
- The news outlet, stated that the Afghan women have been unable to return to classroom since the Taliban seized power and first banned their access to high-schools and later universities, even as the world marked the International Day of Education

Entrance of Hazara homes located underground, Khulm, Balkh Province, Afghanistan



1



2



3



4

Stoning to death of women for alleged adultery continues and was observed since the regime of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. In 2015, the province of Ghor, located in the country's central region, had witnessed the 19-year-old woman who was stoned to death after having her body buried in a pit, up to her waist for allegedly committing the crime of adultery [13].

Despite the sword hanging on their heads, Afghan women have dared to come out and protest for their rights. There are incidents of women activists in Afghanistan who are protesting not only in private spaces but also in public about the increased repressions by the Taliban. Such incidents are posted on social media as well. The increased number of reports on violence against women gets more evident from this trend. Perhaps to control such outpouring of protests, the Taliban have started favouring particular women over the other in order to divide and rule. Those women, who have attended madrassas sanctioned by the state, are put in positions of authority in public elementary schools. Some school administrators have been directed in recent weeks by the Taliban's "Virtue and Vice Ministry", to check the bodies of girls as young as 10 or 11 for symptoms of puberty and to dismiss from school any girls who appear older or whose bodies are beginning to mature.

Facing the Challenges

Majority of the Afghan women tried hard to leave the country, but a majority was trapped in Afghanistan. In February 2020, under the Doha agreement, it became pretty evident that the United States will be withdrawing all its forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. By August the US ended its military presence from Afghanistan after nearly 20 years. There was total chaos and all were running helter-skelter towards the airport to leave the country by hook or by crook. Some even clambered onto the moving airplane. A few of the men fell from the plane to meet a gory death. Once again Afghanistan was facing a refugee crisis. The heart rending scenes at the airport covered by the TV channels showed how crowds of people were trying to reach the flight that carried the soldiers back to the USA. Women were trying their best to get into the plane in competition along with the men. A scene which can never fade is when a woman who could not manage to get into the plane, went to the extent of throwing her infant baby daughter over the barbed wire to the soldiers waiting to board. The woman who could not run away to safety, wanted at least her daughter to reach safer destinations as they dreaded and knew the Taliban's anti-women intentions.

There are women activists who managed to emigrate from Afghanistan along with some Afghan women. The "SOLA" project is an example. "SOLA" meant "Peace" in Pashtun. It ran a School of Leadership in Afghanistan. "SOLA" started initially as a scholarship program for Afghan youth who were identified to access quality education abroad and, later on, go back to their home country as highly-skilled Afghans in whichever profession they chose. This was a boarding school for girls but with the Taliban taking over, co-founder and President of SOLA, Shabana Basij-Rasikh found it extremely tenuous and risky to carry on [14]. She immediately relocated 250 members of the "SOLA" community, including the student body and graduates from the programme, a total of more than 100 girls, to Rwanda, in Africa. The capacity to teach Afghan girls after the return of the Taliban became a challenge after the right to education of girls in secondary schools got banned. Lack of resources undoubtedly was a major issue.

Boarding schools that allowed Afghan girls to study and live at the same place were the best way to promote their education. Similarly, CARE undertook a study on the severe poverty in Afghanistan and showed how the food crisis impacted women and Girls in Afghanistan. "Afghan Aid", "Save the Children" and several others contribute to enhance the women's basic rights in Afghanistan by imparting education and involving them in community participation. However such initiatives are at a low ebb with the ban on women's education and skill development by the Taliban. The "Save the Children" states that "Child marriage and poverty will soar if the Taliban does not immediately lift ban on girls' education".

At the meeting of the United Nations Security Council held in December 2022, the misery of the Afghans who were in great poverty was clearly highlighted. Therefore the fact that their future was dark and uncertain was put forward. Roza Isakovna Otunbayeva, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), spoke at great length about the suppression of media and civil society. She said the Taliban do not entertain any sort of intra-Afghan dialogue as they claimed that their Government is inclusive and sufficiently representative. It was essential that there ought to be a more pluralistic polity with representation from all including women and minorities. She also mentioned that in addition to a number of other damaging orders, women were continuously targeted and prohibited from entering most public parks, bath houses, and gymnasiums [12]. Although the Taliban's policy of preventing Afghan children from pursuing secondary education has been wide-

ly criticized by the international Islamic community, and unpopular among the local Afghans; nevertheless the dictates prevail. This damage no doubt will leave behind a long term trail of misery which may become difficult to erase in the coming future.

Conclusion

Afghanistan formally embraced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at ensuring long-term progress in these areas. Children's and women's rights are an integral part of these goals. They must be realized before the SDG objectives can be attained. Additionally, Afghanistan signed the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, promising to “leave no one behind” and working towards universal human rights, gender parity, and women's and girls' empowerment. Further the nation supported the pledge towards signatories to guarantee that all men, women, boys, and girls can reach their full potential in an atmosphere of respect, equality, and safety.

The rewritten Penal Code that went into effect in 2018 made it illegal to sexually exploit or recruit minors. Crimes against children, as well as punishments for those who commit them, were specified in the new Afghan Penal Code. The Afghan Parliament passed the Law on Protection of Child Rights in 2019, which established the legal definition of a child as a person under the age of 18, and established a legal framework for promoting, protecting, and guaranteeing children's basic rights by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in 2019. But alas! all this will mean nothing in the present context. Having come this far, the Afghan women continue living in dehumanizing conditions where they are trapped and powerless. Victims of abuse, particularly sexual violence, a lack of access to job and aid opportunities, prevent them severely from meeting their most basic requirements. Such a situation is a stark warning of how easily and quickly women's and girls' rights can be eroded. Under the present circumstances, it is unlikely that the de facto government will yield to any pressure to remove restrictions on women and girls in the true sense, despite their commitments to international human rights conventions.

Economic sanctions may only boomerang to aggravate the situation indirectly impacting the Civil Society Organizations and the women activists who are contributing towards carrying forward the SDG5. Girls born in the post-Bonn period hardly know who the Taliban are and what is the impact of their policy strategy. They have been brought up in a democratically elected government that was a signatory to conventions like CEDAW, etc. These young women can hardly understand why education must be banned for them, why they are not allowed to walk in the park independently. Why must the government be indifferent to “Violence against Women”?

It is important to facilitate women and girls to continue with their education and pursue a livelihood or develop skills to empower themselves. It is difficult to adopt measures for empowerment of women and usher in gender equality living in Afghanistan. Cases of abuse are on the rise and girls and women may get browbeaten into submission. Nevertheless mechanisms to impart education to the Afghan girls and women must be addressed urgently. Therefore the international community needs to adopt out of the box (OOTB) solutions. Despite challenges and threats, there are Afghan women activists who dare to come forward in solidarity with the victims of violence and abuse of human rights.

The following recommendations are worth consideration:

- Pressure from the United Nations and other funding agencies is rigorously mounted on the de facto regime to reinstate Afghan women's rights and involve them in all decision making bodies of Afghanistan in order to overcome “freedom from fear and want” and from “discrimination”.
- Women at present are banned from working in NGO offices and have been wholly excluded from public office and the judiciary. They are compelled to stay at home. Livelihood options are exclusively introduced for the Afghan women especially for the female headed households.
- International scholarships and funding are made available in schools and in higher education Institutes both in Kabul and abroad, meant exclusively for Afghan women and girls. This should include boarding as well. Despite challenges, the women Afghan activists need to be encouraged and funded who are running Education centres for Afghan women in South Asia, Africa, Europe and other regions.
- Health care for child and maternal well-being are carried forward on a war footing before there is a fall in the sex ratio of the country. Similar schemes are also imparted for the senior citizens and the differently abled women and girls in Afghanistan.
- The UN Headquarters must organize more events like “Today's Afghan Women — Rights and Opportunities”. “Struggle of Afghan Women” and so on to create a greater awareness among the people.

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Мондира Дутта

Ауған әйелдерінің қоғамдық орындардан жоғалып кетуі Ауғанстандағы әйелдер құқығының күйреуі

Мақалада ауған әйелдерінде әйелдер құқығының толық болмауы жағдайы және әйелдерге қатысты зорлық-зомбылық туралы айтылған. Сонымен қатар ауған әйелдерінің тарихы, өткені туралы қысқаша очерктен бастап, бұл мақалада жаңа талибан режимімен қазіргі жағдайды қоса алғанда, олардың постбондық кезеңдегі тұрмыс-тіршілігі құжаттамалар негізінде берілген. Мақала негізінен БАҚ хабарламаларынан алынған қосымша ақпарат көздері мен әңгімелерге негізделген. Автор Ауғанстандағы әйелдердің жағдайы және олардың қоғамдық саладағы мән-жайын қарастырған, олардың негізгі құқықтарының бұзылуына зерттеу жасаған. Бір қызығы, әлем тұрақты даму мақсаттарына (SDG), әсіресе SDG-5-ке қол жеткізуді асыға күткен кезде, әлемнің бір бөлігі әйелдердің мүмкіндіктерін кеңейтуді және гендерлік теңдікті мүлдем елемейді! Мақаланың мақсаты — Ауғанстандағы әйелдердің құқықтарының біртіндеп сарқылуы мен елеулі бұзылуына баса назар аудару және талибан саясатының әлеуметтік-экономикалық салдарын түсіну. Әйелдердің білім алуына, жұмыс күшіне қатысуына және әйелдердің қоғамдық орындарының жабылуына шектеулер біртіндеп күшіне енген. Құжаттарға сүйене отырып, автор жас ауған қыздары мен әйелдерінің білімі мен дағдыларын дамыту бойынша оқуын жалғастыруға және күнкөріс үшін бірнеше саяси нұсқаулар ұсынған.

Кілт сөздер: ауған әйелдері, Талибан 2.0, әйелдер құқықтары, Ауғанстан, гендерлік теңдік, мүмкіндіктерді кеңейту, инклюзивті Ауғанстан, тұрақты даму мақсаттары-5, адам құқықтарын бұзу, әйелдерге қатысты зорлық-зомбылық.

Мондира Дутта

Исчезновение афганских женщин из общественных мест. Крах прав женщин в Афганистане

В настоящей статье предпринята попытка понять бедственное положение афганских женщин в условиях полного отсутствия прав женщин. Начав с краткого очерка об историческом прошлом афганских женщин до 11 сентября, автор пыталась задокументировать их путешествие в постбоннский период, включая нынешнюю ситуацию при новом режиме талибов. Статья основана на вторичных источниках информации и нарративах, в основном из сообщений СМИ. Рассмотрено положение женщин в Афганистане, в том числе и в общественной сфере, в то время как их основные права постепенно нарушаются. По иронии судьбы, когда мир с нетерпением ждет достижения Целей устойчивого развития (ЦУР), особенно ЦУР–5, часть мира полностью игнорирует расширение прав и возможностей женщин и гендерное равенство! Цель статьи — подчеркнуть постепенное истощение и серьезное нарушение прав женщин в Афганистане и понять социально-экономические последствия политики талибов. Ограничения на образование женщин, участие в рабочей силе и закрытие женских общественных мест постепенно вступают в силу. В заключение автор предлагает несколько политических рекомендаций о помощи молодым афганским девушкам и женщинам, которые могли бы продолжить свое образование и обучение по развитию навыков и получить средства к дальнейшему существованию.

Ключевые слова: афганские женщины, Талибан 2.0, права женщин, Афганистан, гендерное равенство, расширение прав и возможностей, инклюзивный Афганистан, Цели устойчивого развития–5, нарушение прав человека, насилие в отношении женщин.