

Implications and Prospects of Taliban's Rule on Afghan Women in Afghanistan in the post US withdrawal period.

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Abstract:

The paper identified the fact that right after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, an environment of fear and uncertainty prevailed among Afghan women which ultimately either confined the women into their houses or force them to flee from Afghanistan. On the other hand, the new Taliban regime expressed publicly to ensure the rights of women and would allow them to take part in political, social, education and economic activities; however, the past rule of Taliban are certain memories which do not allow them to be convinced. The paper also found that for the sake award of recognition from international community, Taliban have been compelled to be at the backfoot position. Still international community is so watchful in awarding recognition to the Taliban regime.

The paper also tried to answer the question that what mechanism Taliban needs to adopt in order to convince international community for their political and economic support which is mandatory for Taliban to survive. The paper is qualitative in nature which investigated different facts, events and incidents to find a way forward for the restoration of freedom of Afghan women and their rights under the shadow of Taliban regime.

Keywords: Afghan women, Taliban, International Community, Freedom and Fear

Introduction:

The soil of Afghanistan has been witnessing civil wars, foreign intervention, and uncertain political regimes since 1979 when Soviet forces intervened in Afghanistan since then the life in Afghanistan has been at risk especially the women folks (Brodsky, 2004). The frequent foreign interventions in Afghanistan have resulted an uncertain political environment and social defragmentation that never allowed Afghanistan to flourish economically and politically. The 10-year stay of Soviet forces in Afghanistan did not only divide the Afghan people into different segments (Dupree, 1987; Shahrani, 2002), but it also gave birth to Afghan refugees, the formation of rule of radical Taliban regime (Dupree, 1987). No doubt, the formation of Taliban regime in Afghanistan in mid 1990s was an attempt to ensure political stability and peace in Afghanistan, however, Taliban's regime in Afghanistan proved to be harsh and extremist in nature (Aldrich, 2002) as they violated the norms and values of liberalism, banned women's political, social, educational and cultural participation (Afary, 2004) and remained so much cautious in establishing foreign relations, especially with west. As a result, they remained aloof from the world politics. However, the tragic incident of 9/11 brought a paradigm shift in the foreign policies of major states as most of the international community declared to be the part of US led coalition against Taliban regime in Afghanistan since they were termed to be involved the terrorist attack of World Trade Centre in 2001. No doubt, the US led- coalition ended the Taliban's regime in Afghanistan, however, it failed to establish permanent peace, end Taliban networks from the nip and covert Afghanistan into a modern state. The 2-decade stay of US in Afghanistan remained a question mark as US failed to end Taliban network and strengthen the Ashraf Ghani regime in Afghanistan.

After the withdrawal of US, within a very short spin of time, the regime of Ashraf Ghani fell into Taliban's hand on August 15th, 2021. Fear and anxiety of uncertainty once again prevailed among the women in Afghanistan. After the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban, they announced to form a political government to work along with international community, ensure peace in Afghanistan and establish friendly relations with international community (Yousaf & Jabarkhail, 2021). Meantime, an environment of uncertainty and fear of violation of the fundamental rights of women have prevailed in Afghanistan which has resulted the flee of thousand of Afghan women to other countries (Hatef & Luqiu, 2021). Despite the Taliban frequent assurance of safeguard of women's rights and protection of their fundamental rights, women have been witnessed in extreme tension. The phase of fear further increased as the women in Afghanistan recalled the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001 which had a very bad experience, especially for the women folks (Ismail, 2021). Women believed that the strict interpretation of Islamic Laws on women during the first phase of Taliban regime was a harsh reality for the women as they were not allowed to go to educational institutions, take part in sports and other modern-day activities. Thus, women fear that the Taliban regime once again would return the old days and implement the harsh rules on women which they do not want to experience once again.

The work is proposed to highlight the fear and anxiety of Afghan women from the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Despite the assurance of Taliban that things would change this time, ratio of fear has increased greatly as a great of women either have tired to flee or fled from Afghanistan. The work would try to address the question what strategy Taliban has to adopt so that feeling of security, protection of the fundamental rights and level of trust on Taliban among the Afghan women may be ensured.

Literature Review:

After the fall of Kabul into the hands of Taliban, it has been extremely difficult for Afghan women to go to their work and maintain their normal life despite the assurance from Taliban that they would not confine them into their houses this time. Feeling the terror of past experiences, the women did not know what their future would bring to them. They have been terrified to wear hijabs, ensure to be accompanied with male guardians while going out. It has been reported that many Afghan women had to leave their jobs where they were working with male partner. The fear and uncertainty in Afghanistan have created miserable circumstances among the Afghan women. Bukhari (2021) states that the last time the Taliban were in power, they curtailed women's freedom of movement and freedom of expression and suppressed their rights to education. Therefore, this time, despite the assurance of Taliban, the distrust among the Afghan women still remained continued. No doubt, Taliban have tried their level best not to hurt the international norms, ensure the human rights and run the country in accordance with the international law. However, international community are closely watching Taliban rules, government and daily affairs. It is no doubt that international wants the complete insurance of human rights, and restoration of women freedom from Taliban regime. On the other hand, the Taliban regime has claimed that The Taliban are inching closer towards international recognition but any concessions Afghanistan's new rulers make will be on their terms to ensure women rights (Staff, 2022).

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August, 2021, many incidents were witnessed where small fictions of Taliban threatened women. As a result, many women left their jobs, offices, and other social and sport related activities. As the Times of India writes that after Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, the incidents of threatening women are becoming a 'new normal'. Millions of people are unemployed and many are left starved after the country's aid is cut off post-Taliban regime but the Taliban insist on tightening the rules for women (ANI, 2022).

The Women for Women International has raised serious reservations for the women in Afghanistan that women in Afghanistan are risk of political and economic insecurity, educational inequality, sexual violence and poor health. They further asked international community to play its part to ensure the rights of women in Afghanistan. Kallini (2021) investigated the fact that the international community and NGOs should play a significant role in upgrading the position of women in Afghan society.

Afghanistan is currently one of the most difficult countries in the world in which to identify as a woman. Political and economic insecurity, educational inequality, sexual violence, and poor health are pervasive amongst Afghan women and children, but when equipped with powerful vocational and economic tools, women can change their lives, regardless of circumstance.

Methodology

The paper is qualitative in nature which has been written on the basis of analysis of rules of Taliban of two different period which include the period from 1996-2001 and the period onward August 2021. The historical facts and incidents in respect to women rights and freedom which took place during first tenure of Taliban government were extremely severe and harsh; as a result, the 2nd tenure of Taliban created an environment of fear and uncertainty among women folks. No doubt, Taliban leadership expressed publicly that they would ensure the freedom of women in accordance with Islamic Law; however, Taliban failed to convince women and international community to stay on their words due to the historical experiences and many small fictions. The paper further investigated the historical facts, events and incidents of Taliban rule and analyzed the fact that it is next to impossible for Taliban regime to ensure the complete freedom of women.

Historical and analytical approaches have been used in the paper to validate the authenticity of the research. Therefore, the paper mostly relied on secondary sources where the recent literature was collected and investigated for an authentic analysis. However, primary data were also collected through interviews and online discussions with some affected women of Afghanistan.

Taliban Regime: An Environment of Fear and Uncertainty among Afghan Women

After the tragic incident of 9/11 on World Trade Centre, US along with international coalition invaded on Afghanistan on October 6th, 2001 (Arai-Takahashi, 2002) to end the Taliban regime from Afghanistan and installed a democratic government which would end the violation of human rights and safeguard the rights of women, children and make Afghanistan one of the modern states in South Asia. The invasion on Afghanistan no doubt was meant to eliminate Taliban and Al-Qaida from Afghanistan but it resulted counterproductive for the region. Onward, Afghanistan did not witness peace, prosperity and development. Day to day attacks continued despite US present in Afghanistan. During US stay in Afghanistan, US also released fund for the supports, development and freedom of women to ensure that women part is equally played in Afghanistan (Margesson, Kronenfeld, Foreign Affairs, & Division, 2006). The wife of President, Bush, Laura Bush became actively involved to ensure the freedom of Afghan women (Dubriwny, 2005). She said that “the fight against terrorism is also the fight for the rights and dignity of women (Yaqoob, 2008)” There is no denying the fact that as Taliban started disappearing from Afghanistan, the girls and women actively took part in education, sports and other national activities. More girls were witnessed in going to schools, colleges and universities and continued their education along with male with no restriction.

However, all this happiness and freedom turned into uncertainty, bleak and fear after the end of 20-year US stay in Afghanistan. Right after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 15, 2021, females confined themselves to their houses and knowing not what their future would bring to them (Bagai, 2021). In addition to this, many women left Afghanistan without any proper settlement in a foreign land due to fear of Taliban rule. The fear of human rights violation and restriction on women created an environment of fear and uncertainty that resulted Afghanistan to be isolated politically and economically (Tariq et al., 2021). No doubt, this time Taliban publicly assured that they would follow the norms of international community and ensure the rights of female in all aspects of life. However, the past rule of Taliban refreshed the memories of women where they were restricted, freedom was curtailed, corporal punishments were regularly witnessed and strict policies were imposed on them. Thus, such circumstances created trouble for Taliban to convince women of Afghanistan to remain calm and normal.

Hadia Ibrahimkhel, a senior economics student at Kabul University, tells that “her life just isn’t the same anymore, ever since the Taliban have started to gain control again amidst the U.S. forces’ withdrawal. “Every day, I go to the university thinking it might be my last day. I fear the Taliban will take over Kabul University and I am reminded of the time when they attacked our university in November 2020 and killed many of my classmates and took many others hostage,” she says (Bukhari, 2021).

There are many girls in Afghanistan whose stories are not different from Hadia’s. They all have fallen into an environment of uncertainty and fear. Miss. Mariam Atahi, talks with DW broadcaster (Wesley Dockery) that she was in fear that Taliban would not allow her to be alive anymore since she has been actively working for women rights during US stay in Afghanistan (Dockery, 2021).

There is no doubt that the life of women got dramatically changed after the US withdrawal from Kabul. The fear and uncertainty among women resulted the migration of a great number of women in other countries (Mahendru, 2021). Women fear that they would have face inequalities, sexual violence and restrictions in Taliban’s controlled-Afghanistan (Malik & Jan, 2021). It is feared that Taliban would put a reverse gear to the development which were done by women in last twenty years during US stay in Afghanistan, especially in sport, media and entertainment industries. Ms. Amin who is a female journalist in Afghanistan, has told media that he has been stopped to work (Cunningham, 2021). Such behaviors of Taliban made millions of Afghan women afraid to return to the tyrannical history when the Mujahideen put severe restrictions on women work, education, social, economic and political activities in 1990s.

On the other hand, Taliban have expressed on many occasions that they would ensure the rights of human being, give freedom to women in accordance with Sharia Law (Yousufi, 2021). They have also expressed that this time their governance would be different with the rule of 1996s and would follow the norms and values of international law and international community. Moreover,

the Spokesperson of Taliban, Zabihullah Mujahid said that no prejudice, inequality and injustice would be allowed towards women in Afghanistan (Gul, 2021).

On the other hand, the international community has been extremely reluctant and hesitant in respect to the recognition of Taliban regime in Afghanistan since they want complete and authentic guarantee which Taliban have failed to give so far. The disappointing fact for Taliban is that Taliban are divided into many small fictions in Afghanistan which is extremely difficult for lead-Taliban leadership to control over all other fictions throughout Afghanistan. There are certain evidences which verify the fact that despite assurance of freedom of women under the banner of Islamic Law by Taliban regime, females have been either forced to wear head-to-toe Burqa or have been stopped going to educational institutions and workplaces by Taliban elements. In Afghanistan, a great number of female students left university as they were forced to be accompanied by a male guardian which became tough for so many female students to arrange a male guardian in the Capital city (Mannell, Grewal, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2021). Therefore, creating balance between safeguarding and protecting the human rights and ensuring their ideological values in respect to freedom of Afghan women has been a litmus test for the lead-Taliban who are in power in Kabul. As result, Afghan women have become the most effected people in Afghanistan after US withdrawal period. However, Taliban needs to realize the fact that women are the integral part of economic and social development of a state which Afghanistan is dire need of it.

In a fear and uncertain environment among women folks in Afghanistan, a good number of brave women have been witnessed in protesting against the Taliban regime in Kabul under the shadow of armed Taliban, demanding for freedom (Mahendru, 2021). No doubt, resisting the Taliban's regime in Afghanistan by Afghan women indicates the fact that women are the most effected figures in Afghanistan after the arrival of Taliban government in Afghanistan which surely needs the support of international community and other international government and non-governmental organizations.

Recommendations:

There is no denying the fact that women are most important parts of national development of Afghanistan whose contributions for the socio-economic development are not deniable. The women involvement in economic activities is important for the economic prosperity and poverty eradication. Therefore, freedom of women and safeguard of human rights must be the top priority of the international community's political strategy in respect to the recognition to Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Pressurizing Taliban regime to ensure the rights of women by all sectors might be a slow process but needs to be implemented immediately. The current political, economic, and social scenario of Afghanistan can be blessing and disguise for Afghan women as Taliban are dire need of recognition and supports of international community; and they would go to every extent and would be ready to comprise their ideological values to give freedom to women. The hindrance and opportunities situation for Afghan women itself created an

uncertainty for Afghan women in Afghanistan as they don't know where they future leads them. Another disappointing fact is that Taliban don't have complete control over all Afghanistan; therefore, they would be unable to ensure freedom of women throughout Afghanistan. However, the key Taliban leadership has been so careful in running the affairs of states as they do not want to hurt the norms and values of international law. The following suggestions are forwarded for the safeguard of women rights in Afghanistan.

1. The international community must capitalize on the compulsion of Taliban and needs to pressurize them to ensure the rights of Afghan women so that fear may among women may reach to an end.
2. The United Nations along with its agencies play their parts to end the discriminatory approach of Taliban regime against women folks.
3. Taliban are to be convinced that women role in the national political and economic development is mandatory for which Taliban need to be convinced to accept women participation in economic, political and social activities.
4. Extra-ordinary efforts need to be put by the international community to access Afghan women to provide them shelter, education, security and safety. The international community also needs to involve the liberal civil societies of Afghanistan who could take risk to challenge Taliban regime in Afghanistan for the restoration of women's freedom.
5. The recognition of Taliban regime should be conditioned with safety, safeguard and restoration of women rights in Afghanistan. In this regard, the de facto recognition should be grant to Taliban regime to check out their approaches towards women folks.
6. Most importantly, plans and strategies for the restoration of freedom of women need to be materialized at the earliest, getting written guarantee from Taliban regime so that fear may end among Afghan women.
7. The international community should give every possible assistance to Taliban regime to ensure the rights of human rights, women and children in all walks of life.
8. Parents are to be ensured that their daughters would be safe and sound in educational institutions and workplaces.

Conclusion

The fear and uncertainty among Afghan women has created a tense and uncertain situation for Afghan women as they do not know what would be done with them. Moreover, the very tense situation has resulted the migration of millions of women in foreign land without any economic and social guarantee in order save them from Taliban extremist regime. In this given situation, the life of women in Afghanistan has not only been tense, it is also uncertain. Therefore, the roles of international organizations and international community are mandatory and indispensable. On the other hand, Taliban are in dire need of the supports and recognition from international community. Capitalizing the compelled situation of Taliban, international community are to bound Taliban to restore and ensure the freedom and rights of women, children and human being

in all walks of life. Therefore, the paper worked out to give a way forward to international community for the restoration of freedom of women rights in Afghanistan

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