



Role of Afghan women in Peace and Nation - building in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Since 20th century women right were very limited and women were suppressed from social and political rights. Since 2001 there condition has significantly improved in the social and political sphere. However the political transitions in Afghanistan pose numerous challenges and opportunities for women to engage in peace building. This paper focuses role of Afghani women in peace building and nation building in Afghanistan. The Afghani women contributed for peace and nation building in Afghanistan after 2001. The present paper analysis their condition and role prior to 2001 and how they evolved themselves despite insecurity and cultural restrictions with the help of international organization. It further seeks to analysis the condition of Afghan women post US withdrawal in 2014 and how Afghan government promise to uphold democratic right and equality for women. The paper also focuses issues of participating role of women in Afghan nation and peace building process. The paper concludes with an urgent need to form an alliance of men who will stand together with women for their rights such as education, social and political rights. Afghan women need to have an active role in politics, economics, power, and to build a democratic society.

Keywords: democracy, election, civil society, women empowerment, human rights, peace

1. Introduction

In Afghanistan, throughout the twentieth century women had limited right. Women role has always been submerged and suppressed to restrain them from social and political activities. However, the Afghani women gained few rights after 1964 during the cold war era. RAWA was founded in 1977 for women political rights. Another political development took place when bloody coup had taken place in 1978. In Afghanistan, many political and social initiatives were taken by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government including attempt to liberate women. Thereafter several prominent women enter into the political structure of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation in between 1979 to 1989 and in the subsequent soviet-backed government till 1992. The women's education and other emancipation efforts increased with assistance with international organization. The women conditions were worsened in Afghanistan during the extremist Mujahedeen takeover and civil war 1992 to 1996 and the rule of the Taliban 1996 to 2001. The Taliban regime constrained the women right when they emerged in Afghanistan. Taliban atrocities and violation of human rights was very high during the reign of Taliban regime in between 1996 to 2001. The political transitions in Afghanistan pose numerous challenges and opportunities for women to engage in peace building. Since 2001 there condition has significantly improved in many spheres of social, political and economy with the support of international organization. The Afghani women contributed for peace and nation building in Afghanistan after 2001. The present paper analyzes their condition and role prior to 2001 and how they have evolved themselves from a deprived section to major national asset with the help of International organizations like UN, NGO and the role of other regional actors like SEWA sponsored by

India in developing skill building in women in Afghanistan. It also analyses the afghan women role post US withdrawal in 2014 in nation and peace building and how Afghan government will live to its promise to uphold democratic rights and equality to women. In the contemporary time, women leaders in Afghanistan are facing numerous common challenges such as lack of security, which affects women's sense of safety and their ability to contribute effectively to development efforts in their country. Women are also suffering from a lack of educational opportunities, awareness of their rights particularly in rural areas, equal access to justice.

The Peace building is a process that flows through the conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict phases. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is a path-breaking endorsement of women's inclusion in peace processes. Post-conflict structures of development require policies, planning and design that build more effective development. In Afghanistan, women were central to the anti-Taliban discourse. The Afghan woman became an important object of Afghan politics. In the peace and security discourse, the burqua clad woman of Afghanistan became a symbol for the nexus between women's rights and peace and security. A coalition of western NGOs, Diaspora groups and support from United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) enabled an Afghan women's summit for democracy to feed into the planning process of the United Nations.

Afghanistan had a woman presidential candidate, and there are women in the cabinet and a woman governor in Bamiyan province. The Afghan Human Rights Commission, Judicial Commission and Constitutional Commission, have women members. A ministry of women's affairs has been set up, but crucially, it has no legal jurisdiction or implementing power.

In Afghanistan security concerns, continue to inhibit participation especially as the Loya Jirga is controlled by war lords. Malalai Joya received death threats after she criticized the mujahedeen in the Loya Jirga and had to seek UN protection. The former minister for women's affairs Sima Samar was summoned to a Kabul court to face blasphemy charges. The political movements were demonstrated by RAWA for women liberation as well as struggled for secularism and democracy. This organization followed the nationalist and feminist ideology. It operated its ideology separately from patriarchal organizations.

2. Historical Background

Afghanistan's women movement has contributed significantly to its social and political life. The first Amir Abdur Rehman undertook a series of reform with a view to improving the lot of women in the 1880. He forbade child and forced marriages and supported inheritance and divorce right of women, a policy repeatedly emphasized by a succession of powerful men, from king Amanullah to prime minister Daoud and later by communist party leaders. Abdur Rehman's son Habibulla allowed echoes of debated held in the other parts of the near east on women emancipation and participation in public affairs notable among these was Mohammad beg tarsi who advocated education and employment for women while his daughter introduced western dress to women at court. Tarzis daughter Soraya married prince Amanullah. The most significant attempt to transform gender relationship in the history of Afghan society took place during the reign of Amanullah khan. After having fought against Great Britain and gained full independence in 1919, he becomes a hero to many of the neighboring newly independent Muslim countries [1].

In addition to female emancipation, Amanullah's other political reform and Soraya's penchant for shock tactics using dress code successfully alienated conservative elements who found another leader for their foment. The reign of Zahir Shah was slow but steady gains for women and girls. In particular once Zahir's cousin, Doud Khan became prime minister. In his period more girls from urban areas started enrolling to schools as well as an increasing participation of women in government sector and private sector was seen. In 1964, Afghanistan implemented new constitution with women right. By 1978, though on a smaller scale women did enroll in the police force, army and industry. By the mid 1960 and the early 1970s small numbers of urban, educated women had more property raised their voices and organized protests for their rights. For the first time women were jailed and tortured for having ties with political groups. In rural areas women and girls were forced to attend literacy class with several documented cases of sexual abuse in these classes, led to popular outcry and the bombing of some school. During the communist regime many Afghan women became heavily involved in the jihad efforts women were told that they had equal obligation with men to participate because it was sanctioned by the prophet Mohammad. As reported in Hadith strong vocal women took

leadership roles, enjoying others to support the jihad in order to provide essential moral support for men, home from the front, these women also chased funding for education and health care while male counterparts attracted military support. This period was marked by double standard; women were expected to be veiled and housebound but were often victims of the unbridled lust of commander's and their troops. In 1989, soviet forces withdrew, leaving Najibullah's communist regime to struggle. In 1992 Najibullah's government fall and the constitution, which guaranteed the fundamental rights to women, was suspended.

3. Condition of women during the Taliban regime 1996 to 2001

Under the Taliban the position of women witnessed its worst scene. By the time the Taliban took Kabul in 1996. Taliban justice, consisting of public hanging, stoning and amputation of limbs was cruel by modern standard. Taliban's success in imposing a medieval way of life on Afghan people brought to the attention of the international community what had gone unnoticed in part of Afghanistan for centuries. Taliban imposed the strictest Islamic system in place anywhere in the world. All women banned from work, 70,000 female students and a strict dress code of head to toe veils for women was imposed. (Rashid 2010: 50) And yet as discussions on the radio filtered into remote villages, Taliban actions and subsequent international outcries resulted in many Afghan women hearing for the first time that they had rights [2]. Since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, many would agree that the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially.

4. Role of IGO'S and NGO'S for empowering women in Afghanistan

With the change of time, a number of Afghan women were gaining leadership positions. They emulated the male model of leadership. Increasing numbers of women have begun working for NGOs and UN agencies, both in the refugee camps and inside Afghanistan. They have taken the lead in advocating for the health and education needs of Afghan women and children, and some eventually have become the heads of Afghan women's NGOs. They have faced hostility from conservative elements but remain undeterred. The work of women NGOs has evolved rapidly, and they have moved into new areas dealing with more sensitive issues such as women's rights, protection, and domestic violence. A number of Afghan women's NGOs have the grassroots contacts and professionalism to represent women's majority interests effectively, but compared to men's organization they are still hugely under-funded and have very little contact with mainstream donor agencies.

The ministry of women of Afghanistan was set up in 2001 in the Bonn conference. The MOWA is politically and economically marginalized within the Afghan government. Due to the inadequacy of funding, they have not been able to

¹ Zulfacar Maliha, The pendulum of gender politics in Afghanistan. Central Asian Survey, Vol: 25.No. 1-2. Pp-29

² Donini, Antonio; Niland, Norali and Wermester, Karin. (ed.). "Nation-Building Unraveled? (Bloomfield, USA: Kumarian Press, inc., 2004), pp-100

scale up their operations sufficiently to occupy a strategic position in pursuing women's advancement.

The victory of the April revolution prepared the ground for the first time in the history of Afghanistan for the participation of women in building the new society and in diverse spheres of social life. Afghanistan Women Council (AWC-1986) has mobilized women from different strata of the society, strive to change each member to an active element of the society and enables the women to take a conscious part in the defense of the homeland and revolution and to contribute their part of building the new life in democratizing the state.

The first women club was set up in late 1982 in Kabul with the aim of further mobilizing the toiling women, familiarizing term with the various forms of social activities, upgrading the level of their professional knowledge, ensuring their active part in social production, eradication of illiteracy among women, raising their political consciousness, and training the women in the spirit of patriotism. The number of women's club in the country has increased largely. A women's club aim is to make women self-dependent through various means like a small scale works like handicrafts etc. Since the sixth plenum of the Afghanistan women's council 15 special centers called the "House of Peasant Women" has been setup in rural areas of the country.

The association of wife's and mothers of martyrs of the revolution, a direct result of the imperialist undeclared war in Afghanistan, was set up in early 1986. The Afghanistan women's council has maintained friendly relations with various national, regional and international organizations of the women. The delegations of AWC participated in the international congress of peace held in Copenhagen, in a regional seminar in Tashkent, the 12th congress of the national federation of Indian women, the 12 congress women's league of Global Depository Receipt (GDR) and the congress of women's international democratic federation in Moscow.

Role of Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) as a women's organization cannot be neglected in Afghanistan. The revolutionary association of women of Afghanistan RAWA is an organization founded in 1977 as an independent afghan women's organization to fight for human right and social justice in Afghanistan. Russians forces were opposed by a women's leader Meena in 1979. She published a magazine for women awareness in 1981. In 1992, RAWA involved against fundamentalist and Taliban. As a result, RAWA faced serious threat from fundamentalist group. The organization faced non support from around the world. U.S and Northern alliance played important role to defeat Taliban. However, RAWA suspected over Northern alliance for being fundamentalist. RAWA argued that President Hamid Karzai has no popularity in largest part in Afghanistan. On the other hand, fundamentalist are also imposing harsh anti-women laws like Taliban regime. Some of the events is organized for strengthening women in Kabul recently. Afghan Women's Mission (AWM) arranged a large fund rising program for RAWA in Los Angeles. RAWA emphasized and focused on education and health. It also organized program for awareness of right to fight against fundamentalist. It also provide finance for self-help group for handicraft for economic empowerment. In February 2012, the group commemorated the 25th anniversary of the death of RAWA

founder Meena Keshwar Kamal with a gathering of women in Kabul ^[3].

5. Women role in Afghan nation and peace building post 2001

Since 2001, Afghanistan has been improving the women's position and their role. Despite all the efforts threats to women and their right is continuously under threat. The stages in which Afghanistan has gone through which women faced very difficult but women are still taking part in and it women is very remarkable in Afghanistan's history. It can be termed as a zigzag path. A pervasive atmosphere of fear persists for women involved in politics and women's rights in Afghanistan, despite significant improvements in women's lives since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. During the Election of October 5, 2004, Afghan women's faced life threat from insurgent group because of political participation and other female officials were also targeted by the militants. It has been exaggerated by the official women's voters' ratio. They claimed that 41 percent of the 10.5 million listed Afghan voters are women ^[4]. Women residing in near the Pakistan border, only 10 percent were listed their name in southern Zabul and Uruzgan provinces. United States and Germany assured for providing donor fund and if it is not provided in time it could lead to negative impact on women development and on Election Day as well. Up till now 12 election workers were killed in which three were women ^[5].

6. The Bonn meeting formation of interim administration

The Bonn meeting concluded with the establishment of temporary government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai who belong to Pastun an ethnic group. In January 2014, traditional Afghan assembly approved new constitution. The following seats are reserved such as 25 percent at least 68 seats from 2 each province out of 34 provinces for women and 10 seats reserved for of Kuchis (nomads). The provincial council selects 34 seats for the upper house. From 400 districts another 34 seats are selected finally 34 seats chosen by President out of them 50 percent are to be women. The Afghan constitution never permits any law contrary to holy religion of Islam and all men and women are equal before law. There were 42 percent women who registered their name in the electoral process and 80 percent turns out of voters have taken place in 2004 elections ^[6]. On May 25, 2004, Dr. Masooda Jalal an afghan women for the first time in Afghanistan's history contested president. Masooda Jalal, got 91,000 (1.1%).votes. Karzai was declared the winner on November 3, 2004. There were a total of 2,815 candidates (including 347 women) for the lower house and 3,185 candidates (including 279 women) for the provincial councils.

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revolutionary_Association_of_the_Women_of_Afghanistan

⁴ www.nytimes.com/2003/12/16/international/asia

⁵ <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2004/10/04/afghanistan-women-under-attack-asserting-rights?print>

⁶ http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metacrs8957/m1/1/high_res_d/RS21922_2006May25.pdf

Out of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, three (Nangahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul) did not have enough female candidates for the provincial elections to ensure at least 25% female representation; these seats remain vacant until the next election. Two deputy lower house speakers were selected on December 22: the first deputy is Aref Nurzai (a relative by marriage to the Karzai clan); the other is Kawzia Kofi, a Tajik woman from Rabbani's home province (Badakhshan). A number of unaffiliated, well educated Afghans also won the election, including several prominent women. They included 27-year old Malalai Joya (Farah Province), an outspoken women's rights advocate who is emerging as a leading government critic in the new parliament. Another female winner is Fauzia Gailani, who came in first in conservative Herat Province, and Shukria Barezai, editor of *Woman Mirror* magazine. The U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI) is working to organize and train the estimated 93 lower houses "independents" the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is assisting the larger, organized factions. After making his 34 appointments to that body included the mandated 17 women^[7]. Despite the dangers the number of women seeking representation in parliament has risen sharply, from 328 in 2005 to 406 in 2010 parliamentary election across Afghanistan, according to an international election monitor in Kabul. They are running for at least 64 of the 249 seats reserved for women^[8].

7. Women role in post 2014 Afghanistan elections

Since the fall of Taliban regime in 2001 Afghan women had made significant contributions in all spheres of life. The democratically elected government in recent past has come with much legislation empowering women. In May, government of Afghanistan tried to remove the reservation of women from electoral seat. However, the attempted was not succeeded because of pressure from women leader. Yet the allotment of reserve seat was reduced to 20 percent In July. In contemporary, women have achieved 68 seats in the parliamentary lower house and 28 percent women in senators. Along with women succeeded to achieve three ministerial births, director of human rights commission, director of the Red Crescent, a governor, nine members in the High Peace Council. In 2014, election is very crucial for women and big challenges for Afghan peace and nation building and their development to build a modern nation. Women representation in decision making is always unnoticed and remote areas women are extensively ignored. Since 2010, the women standing in election created a hope for making a modern Afghanistan. There were several women came forward to fight election in the negative environment. Their participation is not only in politics but the enthusiasm of 2014 election will promote in every sphere of Afghan development. The cultural and practices needed to be change by modern law in which women can take part like men in every public life. The constitution has given equal right and duties to the women.

⁷ Ingallas. James, "The New Afghan Constitution." *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 13, 2004

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/24/record-women-candidates-afghan-election>

However, it has not succeeded due to lack of effectiveness and transparency. The more participation of women could provide more right to them. The international community can play an important role by supporting international fund with strict policy for implementation and effectiveness can rebuild the modern Afghanistan. The DFID has several programs for the development of the women and AISF security measures can build modern Afghanistan by protecting the democratic values and free and fair election. It can provide opportunity to the people of Afghanistan to choose such leader or party that can build modern Afghanistan with equal opportunity to the more than half of the population in the main stream.

8. Conclusion

From the human development perspective, good governance is democratic governance. Democratic governance means that: People's human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live with dignity. Citizens have a say in decisions that affect their lives and citizen includes both men and women. In comparison to the verbal support and enormous international interest to date, women's effective involvement in male dominated national and international forums and discussions on Afghanistan has been minimal. The challenge is to engage male leaders, afghan and international, and convince them that the change for women, will not occur in a gender vacuum. Though the women of Afghanistan have been struggling to have a crucial role in nation building process in Afghanistan but it is yet to realize properly. There is an urgent need to form an alliance of men who will stand together with women for their rights. The need of hour is to provide education to young Afghan girls the government should ensure that they should get access to education, providing them with schools and better education in secure environment. The needs of future generations are reflected in current policies. Economic and social policies are responsive to people's needs and aspirations. Economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives. The future of afghan women will lie in transferring more power and resource control to the new group of capable women leaders and to women NGO, who are increasingly outside the network of trained political factions. The gains made by Afghan women are significant, given the degree of oppression they emerged from in late 2001. But progress has been uneven and has yet to dramatically improve the overall status and role of Afghan women. In the political sphere, women have increased their representation at each stage of the political process. However, these gains have only increased the presence, not the power, of women. They have not yet enabled women to encourage moderation and democratic norms, deliver critical services, and help protect the rights of minorities the very acts that will help to stabilize Afghanistan. The presidential elections were promising in many ways. Insecurity and violence proved to be far less widespread than feared. Women voted in significant numbers and in many parts of the country. And women seem to have embraced voting and political Participation. The upcoming parliamentary elections will show whether Afghan women are consolidating their advances and solidifying support for their leadership. If Afghanistan is to benefit from all that its women have to offer, the international community

must make the parliamentary elections 2015 a success for women^[9]. The further condition of women will depend on the type of government elected in Afghanistan and the policies adopted by them empowering women.

Finally, the study concludes that Afghanistan is going to step in process of democratization. On the one hand Afghan is coming out from various challenges and women are also gaining more right. At same time, withdrawal of western forces and less amount of donors fund spell danger for Afghan women fighting for rights to better education, justice, health and employment. On the other hand, foreign presence giving space to close down the opportunities of women. It leads to anti women and antigovernment that can provide space to emerge militia group. It can curve the women right as well as a hindrance for peace and nation building. Thus, it would be early to predict that Afghan would achieve peace and nation building very soon but it is in process of democratization and peace and nation building.

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