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The Current Concerns and Perspectives of Afghan Leading Women on Girls' Education

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ABSTRACT

Education in general is the transmission of civilization yet, in Afghanistan, as a matter of fact, it is a safeguard weapon against the variety of adversities of life such as: gender inequality, suffering cultural obstacles, child marriage, inaccessibility to education, health, freedom... for girls. Unlike of the other parts of the world where science and technology are being rapidly developed; in Afghanistan, the government of Taliban has prevented girls beyond grade 6th to go to school which this has become a huge matter of controversy worldwide. A qualitative approach was selected for this research, open-ended questions were formulated and administered through a purposive sampling method to find out the concerns and contributions of Afghan Leading Women entitled the representatives of girls beyond grad 6th, who are impatiently waiting for continuation of their education. Twenty Afghan leading women are involved in the present research that have shared their perspectives via email, skype, WhatsApp and face to face.

Education is the second name of life. Therefore, it is the core responsibility of every individual of the world to stand for. Specially the Afghan Leading Women, as they have achieved this fame representing Afghan girls' and women's difficulties, deprivations as well as the capabilities. The mentioned women, beside other small or large groups of people are struggling being voice of the girls who are banned from going to schools throughout: protests on the streets in front of the United Nations, Human Rights, European Union, white house and other influential organizations, conducting dialogues, discussions, meetings with the International influential communities wherever they are so that, they make the Taliban let girls continue their education. The nation of Afghanistan with the help of worldwide influential, especially the organizations that responsibly work in the field of education are obliged to force the politics players to separate the system of education from political games.

Keywords: *ALW (Afghan Leading Women), perspectives, girls' education beyond grade 6, Taliban's unfair decision, UN & International Communities commitment (IC).*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Education for every human being is, one of his/her fundamental rights. In order to have a bright future, to be a fruitful individual for the society and live in a peaceful and developed environment. The government and the nation must put all their potential to create an appropriate atmosphere for the education of their children equally apart from gender discriminations. Although, Afghanistan which has been hosting civil and foreign wars for more than four decades, almost all infrastructures have been damaged and so many deprivations of ease of life are felt; one of the most important of them is access to education. Afghanistan's education system has been devastated by more than four decades of continual conflicts.

Along with constant wars and conflicts, the United Nations and the previous governments of Afghanistan except Taliban, had at least attempted to expand access to education as much as they could, but sadly, at first takeover of the Taliban regime in 1995-2001, the girls confronted a huge discrimination. All girls were prevented from schools. That time that is called the black page of Afghanistan history, the Taliban did not allow girls to learn, but the brave teachers had started their own hidden and private primary schools at their homes. However, that primary education was not accessible to all girls due to poverty and fear (Katawazai, 2021).

In year 2001 by the help of USA, Taliban's regime collapsed and the new government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan led by Hamid Karzai was established. The doors of hope were opened for a hopeless and broken generation who were starving for education. Girls' schools were reopened and millions of girls happily went to schools. Despite of existing problems and deficiencies such as lack of qualified teachers, learning materials, inappropriate infrastructures and long distances to schools; still, the girls did not give up their struggle for stepping forward (Bamik, 2018).

The efforts for betterment were continued that, due to an oppressive political deal, Afghanistan was hand overed to the radical group of Taliban. The ruling group have again started their previous discriminating methods, so many restrictions for girls and women. This time, only primary education, grades 1st -6th are allowed to pursue. The girls from grades beyond 6th were sentenced to stay home. The Taliban kept on their racism and unfair decisions; they do not listen to Afghan people voices. The sad part is the silence of the United Nations and influential countries against current unfair governance, especially, for the most fundamental right. Shortly after taking over Afghanistan, the extremist group prohibited girls above grade six from attending school, leaving more than 850,000 Afghan girls out of education, UNICEF estimates (Ahad, 2022).

When the Taliban took power in August 2021, they announced that education for both boys and girls beyond the 6th grade would be suspended, but would resume after the Afghan new year, that is March 23, 2022. The Taliban said that it needed time to revise the school curriculum so that it would better reflect Islamic values, a female curriculum and school uniforms for women could be developed. (Jackson, 2022).

(A) Objectives

The main objective of this research is to figure out the concerns and contributions of Afghan leading women regarding girls' education, in particular, the Afghan girl students beyond grade sixth who were prohibited of going to school by the Taliban's unfair decision.

(B) Need for the present investigation

Education, which is simply the basic right of every individual, rather in Afghanistan, unfortunately, girls' education is a hot matter of controversy. More than one year of Afghanistan take over by Taliban group has passed. Since last year onward the ruling group have shown that they are not committed on what they had promised to the world and the nation of Afghanistan. Beside several other incompetence in the governance system, one of the big challenges is banning girls beyond grade 6th from schools. Today's girl is tomorrow's mother. Uneducated mother will not present capable children to the society. Moreover, women are the half part of the society and they should not be ignored by a small armed radical group. So that, this investigation entitled **(The current concerns & perspectives of Afghan Leading Women on girls' education)** has been done in order to find out about leading women perspective and contributions regarding to this vital issue as they are the hope of girls prevented from school.

(C) Methodology

This research is qualitative in its nature. Purposive sampling method as well as snowball sampling approaches has been used for the better and effective of the research

- a. **Sample:** the sample of the study consists of 20 leading women from different working areas
- b. **Research Tool:** The researcher used a well-prepared open-ended 8 interview questions as the research tool.
- c. **Administration of Tools:** the questionnaire consisting 8 open-ended questions was administered to 20 well known leading women within Afghanistan and abroad like: minister of education, parliament members, professors, human rights commissioner,

singer, civil activist and journalists and the interviews were accomplished written and verbal via email, skype, WhatsApp and face to face.

II. RESULT

Based on the responses, all of the respondents have shown their concerns about the prohibition of girls from schools that have strongly negative impact on their future. This is a big loss and a huge concern of banning girls' schools; while, the continuation of current situation may gradually lead to elimination of the women which is paralyzing half of the society. Moreover, "This is a serious concern! There is no country in the world that has closed schools for girls beyond grade 6th. This time, that girls are losing "patience" for the decision of Taliban leadership is costly from every aspect of life that the women will impact in the future of their personal, professional, and social life in Afghanistan." Rangina Hamidi (former minister of Education of Afghanistan)

"On this occasion, based on the United Nations report, the closure of girls' schools in Afghanistan in last year, has caused five hundred million US dollar 500000000 \$ financial loss to the country which is a huge amount for the needy nation of Afghanistan." Said: Shabnam Salehi (former Human Rights Commissioner & Professor at Kabul University)

Preventing girls from schools has an apparent downside effect on the psych of society. "The statistical graph of the female hidden suicide has gone up. Based on Afghanistan International news channel survey, a hundred of female have committed suicide after Taliban take over. Further, discriminatory treatment makes girls feel lesser than boys whereas, the girls had drawn a bright future for themselves. The lack of participation of females in social, economic, politics and culture activities, turns the females into passive elements of the society and force them to obey every command of men." Shabnam Salehi

All the respondents have expressed their concerns regarding the current worrying situation. As they are experiencing the conditions lively and some following through social medias, most of the girls have got psychological and mental problems so that itself, automatically situates the family under anxiety pressures first, then the whole society. Girls banning from school feel hopeless and helpless that it is a big challenge as sign of human resources, economic, cultural, politics and security losses in near future in Afghanistan.

About the role of International Communities, all the interviewees are certain about the power of international communities that if whatever they want to do, they are able. Majority of the respondents have expected the IC to increase the sanctions on Taliban until they defer to the wishes of people and reopen the schools. There is an incredible documented response which

simply enlighten the entire inquiry regarding the responsibility, strength and the anticipation of the Afghan nation, in particular Afghan females: “The world is like a village and the communities are like family. On the basis of fourth generation of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all the human beings should equally be benefitted of their basic rights through extra territorial rights. Therefore, ICs are strongly responsible for the support of mentioned rights that in the present time, it is supporting Afghan girls’ right to education.” Shabnam Salehi As a mother, sister and ultimately as an Afghan girl, they think as if they are the most miserable human beings on the earth as they are the first victim of every revolution and all changes in politics happen in Afghanistan. In 21st century while the other people of the world are discovering and conquering the universes, regardless of gender phenomena, they rapidly step-up towards scientific progressions, at the same time, Afghan girls still have found themselves sacrificing of being girls, who, besides of several other culturally negative obstacles, do not even have the basic Islamic right, to peruse their secondary education.

ALW from different areas of profession, such as minister, human rights commissioner, parliament members, professors, civil activists, singer, film maker and some Ph.D. scholars have addressed that they are strongly and consistently working with international communities through international and national conferences, seminars, meetings, social medias and any other platforms to present the voice of Afghan girls remaining out of schools, besides they are committed to keep that voice alive and loud enough to be heard up to opening schools’ gates.

“Afghan nation’s role accordingly is hugely and solely important quite literally. Those outside the country, can scream loud and consistently, it could be helpful, yet the ultimate and systematic change will have to spring from within the society. At the moment, Afghans have to be realistic. Having dreams and desires for a different reality is a good thing, but Afghanistan remains a poor, ill-educated, surrounded by not the kindest neighbors geographically, a collapsed economy and managing a serious brain-drain. Some suggest violently fighting the current forces to kick the Taliban out of power hence this is calling for another war, however, war is not the solution. The people of Afghanistan must struggle for their rights through dialogues and discussions. So, it is better to be supporter of communication in the hopes of changing hearts and minds of the current administration to refocus its strategies.” Rangina Hamidi

When the respondents were asked to share their experience accordingly as a motivative message, out of 20 respondents, 15 of the responses to the relevant question indicate the bravery of Afghan girls and women, that is their tireless struggle for good. Besides, in the worst situation

ever, they had kept the hope for bright future. They admire the strikes of the females and their fights for their rights. In the meanwhile, they ensure the girls that the support of ALW is constantly with them defeating their rights.

Some of the respondents had their messages as follows:

“Afghanistan was not born in 2001 and did not die in 2021. As our troubled history has taught us, this country of resilient people always finds ways to get up and reshape itself. So, while the current time and circumstances are looking very grim and pessimistic, I hope that our Afghans – women and men – will take the time to analyze and assess what has happened to them and their country in the last 20 years and learn from our mistakes. Only when we learn, we will rise again.” Rangina Hamidi

“At the first takeover of Taliban which is called the black page of the history, I was a school girl with the dreams of a successful future, I have been living a life free of any fear. Then, the terrible day came, my dreams and all the girls in Afghanistan bitterly smashed. For sometimes, I lost my hope and motivation but it did not last long, I started self-studies renting books from bookstores around. It is noteworthy to say that those readings caused significant increase in my knowledge. After three years sitting home, I start working in the hospital in a remote area. There I saw the lifestyle of girls and women even worse, so I decided to do something for them as much as per my ability and it was rising their awareness about small and simple things of their rights and daily life at that time, since then, I have been doing social work, meanwhile pursued my in-service education. The condition was quite suffering but, all those challenges became my strength, as by passage of time, I could build an acceptable reputation in the society. So, through this story, I want to make you sure that the difficulties make you stronger, the challenges turn to opportunities. Never give up. Go after your dreams. You win!” Zahra Jalalzai, social & women activist.

“This is the repetition of the history. When the Taliban took over the country in 1995, closed all the girls’ school and prevented girls’ education, I was a teacher then. As a teacher, as a mother of girl-children and as a woman who is condemned to stay at home and obey men’s order, it seemed a nightmare to me. As a capable person, my conscience did not allow me to sit idle. I had to do utilize my potential for good. Hence, my colleagues and I started hidden private classes to teach our children and the neighbors’. Obviously, I faced variety of problems that way still continued my efforts: I did not abandon the situation by itself. And those educational services have built my inner peace and satisfaction. 25 years of my life I have been serving my people in the field of education. Those services helped me to be a louder voice of my people as

a parliament member. These dark days also pass, the torch of the knowledge will shine again and no one can take this right from our girls.” Mahuba Rahmat, Parliament member.

“During the first authority of Taliban when I was in 3rd grade. “Girls’ schools will be closed till further notice.” Said the radio announcer: while I was listening to the radio. So, this unpleasant news ruined my all hopes for the future at that moment and since then, the expression (further notice) feels terrible to me as it took a long time. However, those restrictions and obstacles on the way of girls’ education could not deter my drive for learning, on the contrary, it turned my passion towards learning even more than before. I began reading variety of books: novels, history, general information and so on. Those non-stop studies have increased my general knowledge as well as, built up my understanding in literature innumerable, as I am still being benefitted of those studies. After the collapse of first period of Taliban, by the help of those studies, I have become a smart student at school and a successful individual in the entire educational and professional journey of my life. Eventually, I call on the brave girls of Afghanistan, this situation is not permanent, never lose your hope! Continue your studies from any possible way. You achieve your dreams!” Shabnam Salehi

III. THE EXPECTATION FROM UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations and the international communities that has a huge influence on the entire world, are expected not to forget Afghan people. The experiences have shown that only financial support is not sufficient to help the broken nation. However, at this historical period, the strong United Nations are being suggested to meaningfully stand beside Afghan people particularly beside Afghan girls who are impatiently waiting for the doors of schools to be opened for them. Afghan girls and women are exhausted of being ignored, being treated as a second gender by radical and dictator groups. The Afghan girls and women as independent human beings, apart from any discrimination want to be heard, seen and want to demonstrate their mental and physical abilities to all aspects of the society.

The Brief of ALW Demands from International Communities

- The international community can assist in advocating and raising the voice of the girls when they are unable to be their own voice
- Entrusting supervision of education system to UNICEF, to keep the system out of political games
- Another vital matter of concern is monitoring the curriculum, they must not be allowed to place their former religious extremism in curriculum

- Support communities as they fight for girls' right to education
- Allocation of funds specially for girls' education
- Stand by Afghans under threat for defending the right to education
- Monitor all aspects of access to education
- Provide opportunities to Afghan women to pursue their education out of Afghanistan such as scholarships.
- Put the pressure on Taliban to reopen the school's doors
- The international communities are expected to be very careful about the recognition of the Taliban especially when they did not act as they promised regarding women and girls

IV. CONCLUSION

Preventing girls from secondary education is a major issue and unfair decision of Taliban, since illiteracy is what prevents women from achieving equality in society because, the education is one of the most important avenues for girls' empowerment, gender equality and ultimately results in a healthier and more fulfilling life. So, first of all, it is the responsibility of parents as well as the whole Afghan society to resolutely stand by their girls and consistently practice the loud voice for their daughters right to secondary education as it has already been about two educational years which were wasted.

Afterall, as Afghanistan has been suffering of existing variety of failed politics, collapsed economic, cultural and social difficulties meanwhile, this country is an undeniable at the same time inseparable part of this world; so, the responsibility of protecting human rights in the region refers to worldwide influencers to take care of. Therefore, the International Community should not let any group to take over the power then govern the helpless people according to their personal interests. The United Nations are highly expected to understand the critical situation of Afghan girls and women that is a sign of not gradually however, rapid systematic exclusion of them from the body of the society which is completely against the Islamic guidelines and the standards of human rights. One of the effective methods for decreasing misogyny of Taliban is to increase the pressure on them and compel them to follow their promises regarding girls' education. Online education can be an option yet, there are plenty of difficulties in the internet connectivity, lack of learning devices and a proper digital system. Finally, the girls must be taken out of the Taliban political games and pursue their secondary education.

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