

## WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN; RIGHTS AND REALITIES

***Professor Rukhsana Iftikhar***

*Department of History  
University of the Punjab.  
Lahore 54590*

***ABSTRACT:*** *This paper focuses on the women rights in Afghanistan after the fall of America in August 2021. The basic rights of Women are confiscated by the Taliban regime and their survival is at risk in this Islamic state. The basic argument in this paper is Afghan women are stuck between the abuse of the Taliban state and action of the international community which is pushing Afghan government to minimize the desperation of the Afghan women. Taliban government is depriving women from jobs in education sector. Workplaces are segregated and even what kind of mobile phones women must use if they are working declared by the organizations. I argued that Afghan government is hiding the actual situation in Afghanistan by circulation the fake news on international media that women can continue their jobs and continue their educational activities in a usual manner in Afghanistan. Women are becoming virtual prisoners in their homes and Taliban is taking basic rights of the half of its population (Women). The reports of human rights watch, the interviews of human rights activities are the source data of argument in this paper. The interviews common Afghan women who are facing problems in their daily life and interviews of working women provides the picture of insecurities in general and workplaces. This paper is also based on information of the Newspapers and digital media. In the end the efforts of NGO funded by international community will also highlight.*

***KEYWORDS:*** *Taliban, Hijab, Mahram, Ghazni,*

### ***Introduction***

American troops left Afghanistan after 20 years of its occupation. After declaring this all men who shared hands in hands are happy with the

transfer of power to Taliban. Women who comprised half of the Afghan population were not seen anywhere. How this take over conveys the true idea of representation? With the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the nightmare has started for Afghan women. 20 years back when American took over, Laura Bush, the first lady launched the idea, “to fight for the dignity of Afghan women.” Through this agenda women got education, right to work and participate in the public sphere. Women rights faced many bumpy strikes in Afghanistan. Government introduced many developments program during 1960. Women were allowed to travel freely. They could enter their homes with strangers and able to make choice of their education and work life. Girl scout scheme was introduced during 1970 but it disappeared as Taliban took over in 1990. Most of the racial form of Islamic regime was imposed by Taliban. Human rights especially women right were brutally violated.

In 2001 Taliban issued an order to ban the women who drive cars and women were harassed as they publicly appear. Women were restricted to wear full clothes especially the socks. Those women who wore black gloves and socks were beaten and public with AK47 and sent them to home to wear white socks which were less visible in public. The situation changed after American occupation. Although this came under the western mission of civilizing the uncivilized people. Women participation in the public life of Afghanistan was visibly seen in the 2005 when Khotal Mohammadzadi became the first women general in Afghan national army and Malalai Joye became woman parliamentarian in the national assembly and Azra Jafri became the country mayor in 2009. In 2008 35% of girls were enrolled in the schools but this led to the acid attacks on women by Taliban in many provinces of Afghanistan. But women got something out of it in all these years. (Masoma, 2002)

All rights of getting education, to move freely, to do their jobs and get equal share in the state mechanism is about to ruined by the Islamic imposition of *Amar bil Ma,aruf wa nahian un Munkir*. The state orders of wearing Hijab on all public places is implemented by zeal and zest. Women in Afghanistan are facing violence, work harassment, restriction on public mobility. The liberalism which is the complete agenda of modernity not required in the country like Afghanistan. Women hold a press conference recently in Kabul. The participants were parliamentarian,

Director of Afghan women network (1996), representative of Afghan women educational center (1991) and group of educated Afghan women was there. These women demanded “an immediate and permanent killing of civilians, sexual slavery of women, practice of forced marriages” and the women organizations demanded the development and empowerment of women. Women leaders in Afghanistan will not remain invisible. The women asserted that there must be gender equality in the peace negotiation otherwise it will bring disasters results in Afghanistan. Taliban policies hammering the women rights are:

Taliban put ban on the primary and secondary education of women.

Higher education and its curriculum are more focused towards religious studies.

Gender segregation on workplaces.

Women are not allowed to use their cell phones.

Women must wear hijab on all public places. (The Taliban,s war on Women, 2021)

The future looks very dark, narrated by a woman who worked in a government organization. I have seen many dreams to get my master’s degree and to work for the betterment of my family. But at that time, Taliban do not allowed girls to finish their high schools. Already many of the girls left their schools due to public announcement of the Taliban commandos that women should not leave their houses without guardian and there is no need to go to schools and jobs. Taliban dismantled police force in the ministry of women affair and created more insecurity. They are targeting those Afghan women who were working in foreign organizations and previous government. Most of the women are facing serious mental health conditions like fear, anxiety, hopelessness, insomnia, and sense of loss. (Dupree, 2022)

Women in Afghanistan are a soft target to kill. According to Afghanistan security and defense department, 20 international militant groups are present in Afghanistan and most of them are attached only on soft targets through which they are gaining their target of fear and insecurity. In 2020 many of the human rights activities, parliamentarian and negotiators were attached including Fawzia Koofi but she survived, and she participated in the peace talks of Doha. In American regime women got more training skills and expertise and Palwasha Hussain

indicated that women in Afghanistan have more experience than 1990, and there is more awareness about women rights. This awareness is not limit among Elite classes now the women are more aware on grass root levels. They are striving for their right especially the right to education and freedom of mobility. Taliban recent decree is to cover the faces of women in public places and even on media, “The women must wear chador(head to toe Burqa) , it is traditional and respectful” Afghan supreme leader Hibatullah said, in order to avoid provocation . Women have no important work outside the home its better to stay in home, he further added. When Afghan interior minister was interviewed by Christian Amanpour of CNN about imposing ban on women to go outside their home then he replied that “we keep naughty women at homes”. It is very controversial to define naughty women in the words of interior minister. After explaining the naughty women those who are controlled by the outsiders. He further cleared that Taliban want the Islamic law as the soul of the government as “national, cultural and traditional principles”. According to this decree if women should not cover their faces outside the home, their close relatives and father could be imprisoned or fired from the government jobs. Daud Naji, who is former government official wrote on twitter, Taliban had introduced such Hijab which is not suitable for working in offices and in public fields. The official of the Taliban announced that women in Afghanistan are expected to stay in homes and if they want to go out, they must use loose clothing and Burqa is preferably good for them. Taliban has imposed the ritual to wear hijab by women. It abolished women identity, the issue is not veil but the elimination of women from public sphere. (George, 2021)

Nahid Farid, former parliamentarian comments, Veil is symbol of gender apartheid. Veil is not the end, now Taliban has a strict and larger plan to subjugate women in Afghanistan like in March a woman can board in the plan only when she has the company of a male. The dress code of female after the age of 14 also introduced in the female educational institutions and ministry of education issued a statement for the dress-code, promotion of virtue and prevention of vice”. In Kabul Taliban seem to be more tolerant but in other cities they become violent in the case of dress code. The guardian (Mahram) is required for the movement in public. Those women who have the guardian home they can travel through

transport. During the Afghan crisis many of the male migrated to Iran and other neighboring countries. Now many of women who do not have mahram in their homes, their public movement is restricted. In the health department where female and both are working Taliban has issues certain restriction like; the dress of the nurses, to work separately from male health worker, to talk with the male in angry tone and not to evoke sexual desires in them. In the recent announcement all female journalist and anchor person on TV must wear veil or hijab on TV screens. This decree is created insecurity among women either this decree is only for TV, or they are going to lose their jobs soon. The ministry of Voice and Virtue clearly conveyed that it is a final verdict and there is no room for discussion. According to Afghan press most of the women have seen to cover their faces and many of their male colleagues donned face masks to show solidarity with women. In Kabul only 700 female journalists formally working in private TV and radio stations and international federation of journalist announced a march which showed 87% of women journalist are facing discrimination in Afghanistan and 60% of women journalists lost their job under Taliban regime. (Taliban orders Female Afghan TV presenters to cover their faces, 2022)

Taliban have worsened the crisis for women. The women who were in army and police are targeted. In the province of Ghazni, they have to leave the place. The lives of the women activities are in danger. Taliban killed 2 female police officers in Ghazni two days before when the province falls in the hands of Taliban. Taliban has issued orders to those organizations worked for the women rights, not to engaged with human rights, women rights, and other issues. They can only work in the health sector. In the official meetings the Taliban leader do not talk to women. The asked male personnel to convey them, whatever problem women have, don't raise your voices, don't talk to us, write your problems, so we can read them men should not hear women voice." Women are not allowed to get access to technology. Women are not allowed to carry smart phones as it polluted the minds of women. A health worker said that they conveyed if phone is very much necessary than women should keep Nokia phone without any application. Male shoppers and trailers are not allowed to interact with women, and it is conveyed to the women that they should sew their clothes by themselves. Women are allowed for the socialization

outside their houses and this decree is communicated to every mosque. Taliban is not only issuing the orders but checked its implementation. The guards in schools, hospitals and Imam in mosques convey their feedback to Taliban. In health care doctors are scared from female patients. Even in the case of lady doctors, they are not allowed to work in private clinics. Female health workers which were double under American regime, now it is hard to find them out. Every woman patient needs Mahram even in the case of emergency. Male doctors are allowed to ask the condition of women from their guardians. A medical student conveyed if a woman is pregnant and she does not have guardian with her, she would not be able to get treatment in the hospitals. (Harrison, 2021)

In the field of education, Taliban is depriving girls of education. There are 27 girls secondary schools in the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Teachers are concerned about the girl's attendance, but girls asked that their schools would reopen soon. Girls from 7 to 12 must stay at their homes. The date of the opening of universities is still not clear. Many universities in the different cities are still closed. Only the girls in primary schools are allowed to go to schools but they are worried about their future. Private schools are opened but they are a bit expensive, and parents are not able to pay the fee of their children due to the economic crisis in the country. Teachers did not get their salaries. This crisis also affects the learning abilities of the students as teachers told, many of the students come to schools hungry. Many of the girls do not afford to buy schoolbooks and stationaries. (Taliban Impose gender Segregation at universities in Afghanistan, 2021)

Taliban also changed the curriculum in schools. Religious texts are made compulsory and physical education, sports, civil rights, fine arts, and social studies are removed from the school's curriculum as it is considered unnecessary. Soraya Peykan, a female professor in Kabul university gave an interview to international media and said that Taliban deliberately confiscate the basic rights of the women and they want to use Afghan women as bargaining chip for the better negotiation to international community but Afghan conflict is no longer receiving the international spot light. (www.ohchr.org, 2021)

All universities in Ghazni province are closed. Many of the female students studying medical are at their homes, and they do not know

what happened in future. Primary and secondary schools are opened but girls' attendance in these schools are very low after the orders of Taliban to stay women in their homes. Private schools in Afghanistan are also opened but parents are not able to send their children at schools due to the financial crisis in the country. Taliban took the control of many academic institutions that's why students are very much scared. The teacher said that we were very afraid of Taliban in the beginning but now we are used to it.

The working women have to face different kinds of difficulties as they are on low profile now. Preventing women from will increase the economic issues in families as Afghan women are working in government institutions, health care, education and even in state capacity. Former senior judge Fawizia Amini gave an interview to Hard Talk BBC in which she said , The Taliban had institutionalized discrimination again Afghan women and they are denying our fundamental rights. Former women police officer Zala Zazia said, the international community put pressure on Taliban to ensure the rights of women in Afghanistan and they must do everything to for the women participation in Taliban government. The Taliban cannot ignore the half of the population of Afghanistan. The women who are doing their business must shift it to some male. Women are not allowed to go outside without their father, brothers, and husband. They are not allowed to go outside with their friends. Women are missing their professions, their work, and their freedom as they are so much isolated in the society under Taliban. The violence against women and girls is increasing in Afghanistan. For the last twenty years under the sway of American control women right organization built up a courtyard support system. Now it has totally collapse. Those who were involved in women right activities are receiving threats. There were 27 women safe houses in working conditions but now few are working but under extreme pressure. Girls are forced to marriage even before the age of 16 now. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is at on highest peak especially for those who are losing their families. Due to huger large families are adopting patriarchal structure to offer their daughter into marriage and receiving something in return. (Koofi, 2022)

Women who led their household and do not have any male member receiving the demand of a bride for the Taliban fighters and they are able

to get good social status in return. The right to work is subjugated since Taliban got power. The definition of the work is again interpreted by Taliban. Those women who are journalist and women who are working on Radio and TV station are out of job now. Women entrepreneurs who are doing their work in the market forced to shut their business. Women lost their freedom of expression. A protest session was led in Kabul in the recent past demanding the basic rights of women. Financial bottle neck and insecurity after Taliban regime reached 65%. Those who demonstrate in this procession were torture, imprisoned and murder. This led to poor mental health and traumas in life of many Afghan women, and they are not providing them the physiological help to come out of it. The young girls who are victims of these incident are not able to survive. Those girls who are married at the age of 14 and 16 are not able to bear the burden of childbirth and the mortality rate is increasing. It is sticking to 638 cases per million in case of still births in 2020 and it is highest in the world. In Afghanistan 4 out 10 children die before their first birthday. (Reid, 2021)

In this social set up women are desperately in need of their basic human rights. All international organization, NGO, and UN should pressurize Taliban to at least meet the international standards of human rights in Afghanistan. Donor countries must insure the rights of girls and women. This humanitarian crisis will lead towards the collapse of basic right in Afghan society. Mostly the institutions of human rights, women protection and women empowerment like human rights commission, the ministry of women affairs and civil society organization are abolished by Taliban. In fact, the basic right to choose, express, to work and move are banished, and women are not able to take part in the public life, but women are not ready to give up as it is expressed by female activist Zohra Zaheer. The provincial women network (PWN) is a key partner in the gender equality in work since 2015 and it is financed by the Dutch Ministry of foreign affairs in Afghanistan recently reviewed that this organization need the support of international community and donor's countries to safeguard the rights of Afghan women. In every province of Afghanistan this network is tackling violence against women and boosting the participation of women in very sphere of Afghan life. As in the Herat province government has announced that women should stay inside their homes, but women are still trying to be organized themselves. The funds



for the outdoor activities are not sufficient. In the province of Qandahar, individual women are helping each other, I am not allowed to support the cases of violence against women, abused women are not able to go anywhere. Currently they do not have legal support. In this scenario we are doing what we can do best possible, added by the woman activist. In Daikundi, the Central Afghanistan, the situation is better as they said, we feel free as compared to the other provinces of Afghanistan. Women have right to move and speak freely. All human rights organization are facing the problems of lack of funds even the program of PWN is on the verge of collapse although it must be end in 2024. Director Marco Savio of Cordaid Afghanistan said, “we want to use very opportunity big or small to keep alive our women empowering activities to support Afghan women in these hard times”. They are in all places in Afghanistan if they disappear it would be a blow for woman and overall, for civil society. If they shut down once than it would have been very difficult to restore, he added. In Paktya, another province of Afghanistan one women said that we have achieved a lot in the past 20 years. Now we need the support of international organizations and donors to save all these achievements, said Najla Ayoubi, former judge, and chief of coalition program. (Jamshaidi, 2022)

The high representatives of European Union and G7 ministers expressed their strongest opposition against the Taliban restrictions in Afghanistan especially for closing girls’ schools and abolishing women rights. Human rights watch is arguing people mostly diplomats to show their support in favor of women rights in Afghanistan. Taliban assured international law to respect the women rights in Afghanistan and they will provide them humanitarian assistance including education and health care. But this task will not be necessarily fulfilled by the religious groups in Afghanistan. Under international law Afghanistan ratifies the provisions of CEDAW ( the convention on the eliminations of all kinds of discrimination against women 2003. Donors should put political pressure and monitor it during the time of their aids timeline to fulfill the targets of women rights. Through this they can insure equality in this region.

### ***Recommendations:***

Women should be given the right to educate themselves. All schools,

colleges and universities must reopen with the permission that women can continue their education.

Women can move freely in the society in the dress which they like.

Women should take part in all kinds of work and employment.

Women seats in all institution will reinstate and women ministry should be reactivated.

The harassment of Taliban on all level must be stop immediately.

The condition of guardian especially for health facility must be removed.

Donors can play their role in such conditions:

Support for the livelihood of the women especially create opportunities for the women of employment for women.

Community based education programs must be introduced by the NGO, s and international donor's agencies.

Mental health services for the women in Afghanistan for those who are really in need of these services.

Protection from the gender-based violence and discrimination.

Support for the women who are facing persecution in and outside Afghanistan.

### ***Conclusion***

A new chapter of women resistance is emerging in Afghanistan by women and the members of the civil society who are protesting the Taliban regime. Women aren't quiet now they were 20 years back. They know their rights and they are calling for them. Women are comprised the half of the population of Afghanistan, and it is very difficult for Taliban government to ignore them. Taliban must review all the orders issued for the restrictions and stop this fake propaganda that women freedom is the agenda of the west. It is for the better future of Afghanistan is that women should participate in the public life, she must get education, she has the freedom to express and move freely in the society. She can work for her and the future of the family. It is not the agenda of west. It is agenda of a human society.

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