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Continuous Discrimination against Women

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Violence and discrimination against women do not seem to be decreasing in Afghanistan and there are fears that the gains acquired in uplifting the position of women in Afghan society in the last some years, may be compromised to a certain extent. Instability and disorder have further deteriorated the situation for the weaker stratum, like women. This is coupled with discrimination and violence that basically originate from the extremist religious and tribal practices.

Women in Afghanistan, unfortunately, have seen some of the worst discriminations ever heard or experienced. Most of them were seen during the civil war and Taliban reign. After the downfall of Taliban, though there have been certain improvements, still a large portion of work needs to be done to save women from violence and discrimination and support them to live a life with dignity and honor.

The discrimination against women starts since their birth; and even before that. There have been incidents when girl babies have been killed in the wombs of their mothers. In certain cases, after the fathers come to know about the gender of the babies before their birth, they arrange for forced abortions and thus the so-called honor of the family is saved. This has, thus, given rise to a double discrimination. The first one is that the girl before taking birth has been killed because of her gender and the second is that the mother's will has never been considered regarding the birth of her child. In addition, the women who do not give birth to boys are considered as worthless and their in-laws do not respect or honor them at all.

It has also led to a situation wherein the women are compelled to keep on giving birth unless the baby is a boy. This has a very negative impact on the health of women as continuous pregnancy reduce their energies and spoil their health. There are situations when women have to give birth to 8 to 10 children. As it deteriorates the health of the mothers, it, at the same time, engages her in the responsibilities of nourishment of so many children, as fathers are mostly considered free from such responsibilities in our society.

Continuously engaged in giving birth to too many children and nourishing them does not let women pursue any career or profession in life. Even if the women are educated, they are mostly not able to pursue their education or the profession of their choice after they are married. This deprives them from their right of pursuing the career of their choice and at the same time deprives them of financial benefits. As means of income in a family are with the men, they are financially stronger and make decisions about the family and women, as they are not able to make income by doing a job, fail to gain such advantage and are, thus, considered burden that is being shouldered by men.

Even if some of women are able to pursue their own will, against the will of the family or tribe, they are considered as dishonor to the family and tribe and are thus punished. Last year in October, a video footage showed a 20 years old woman, Rukhsana, stoned to death in Firozkoh for having eloped to save herself from a forced marriage. This is how women are rewarded here if they try to pursue their own lives.

As far as marriage is concerned, there are only few occasions when women are asked about their consent. Mostly, they are married in accordance to the decision of the family, or of the father, brother or uncle. They are even married to settle disputes among families and to cancel the debts of the families. They are mostly married when they are children. Child marriages are now a very common practice in Afghanistan. This gives an opportunity to the society to discriminate them as much as possible because as children they are not able to understand their basic rights and consider their situation their destiny.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, one of the worst sorts of violence against women is a sexual assault. There are different incidents when women are brutally raped by savage men to quench their covetous desires. We have witnessed incidents when women or even small girls are gang-raped in different parts of our country. One such event was witnessed recently – a dozen men gang-raped a nine years old orphan girl in the Jawand district of northwestern Badghis province more than a week ago. A member of the provincial council from the district, Farid Akhizai, told news reporters that the 11 rapists included four policemen and seven illegal gunmen, who sexually assaulted the minor girl in Piraji village. The girl was later married off to a man in return for 750,000 Afghanis by an illegal armed group.

This is one of the worst types of violence that can be witnessed only in our society. A society, that claims to be Islamic, and where women are considered as the honor of the family and tribe, a little girl is gang-raped in the most brutal way. This society really requires changing its attitude and standards. It requires throwing away the mask of hypocrisy and needs to safeguard the honor and dignity of women in a really true manner.