

## Afghanistan, War Crisis, and Gender Apartheid: A Comment on Afghan Women as War Victims and Nullified ‘Objects’ of Human Rights.

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**Abstract:** Gender has always remained an alarming concern for patriarchal power discourse and thereby has been omitted from securing an important place of discussion in parity to the world’s economic, political, social, and cultural crisis. Recent control of the Taliban’s rule on Afghanistan has reflected and repeated the historical totalitarian sense of dictatorship and gender apartheid; so that, the rule of ‘phallus’ in controlling, re-presenting, and depicting the lives of all women is started. Alarms of ‘girls at risk’, ‘women being abolished from professional spaces’ soon emerged with the Taliban’s rule. The news and report portrayed how the Taliban treated women as ‘objects’ and machines of ‘reproduction’, where the vaginal authority is smashed with ‘legitimate’ phallus, and thus the vaginal bodies turn into the ‘sex-slaves’ and servants to serve the Taliban rulers. Power has a crucial role in ordering the central tendency of ‘bodies’; the Taliban target is to have the power; a power that is allowing countries like China, the U.S.A to dominate. It is important to note more than Pakistan, it is China’s support (secretly) that is permitting the Taliban to accelerate. Gender and Power dynamics always altered domains of inheritance and are associated and inclined more deeply towards the white-cis-heterosexual-phallus (gender) in comparison to any other. Women as subjects have always lacked power because restrictions and marking on the accessibility to ‘gain power’ were blurred. *Politics and*

*phallus* are complementary power dynamics in operation that uses Gender as an operative tool to create 'crises' for one and support for the other. Where the power-play within the phallogocentric symbolic order creates the suffering veiled. Hence, my paper aims to present the deplorable condition of women under the Taliban's rule and make a comparison of their position before 1996 and after that till the present.

**Keywords:** Women, Taliban, Gender, Power, Afghanistan

## **Introduction**

The match-making sense and operation of 'power-play' recurring between global politics and national sentiments has veiled sufferings of numerous humans' lives with an "unconditional" foreword to the perceivers. Before moving into a specific regional political power-frame, it is important to discuss the understanding of culture from an intersectional perspective as a whole, and then the concepts of Gender, Power and Women separately. Ethnographical studies have enriched anthropological branch of speculation and presentation of any individual culture, which further brings forth the multiple operative power regimes functioning. The complex cultural discourses has framed and modulated the prominent 'moral code of conduct' as law abides us with, which further creates specific categories of acceptance for specific identities. Spaces, created for the existence of any being results in the formation of cluster of ethical-epistemology, which can be very much centered and specific to that particular organization of bodies/beings. Observing the marginalized status of numerous identities, what the mainstream generally overlooks is how one identity is multiply oppressed. Intersectionality is therefore to understand, that marginalization does not follow one single mode or pipe to control an anatomy. Intersectionality has provided us with lens to observe how bodies are subjected to subjugation in multifarious ways and to disregard the same creates only another way and branch of marginalization, and also omits the intersectional and layered scuffles against patriarchal discourse. Therefore, to break down to the very source, and to consider that a vagina is oppressed just on the basis of Gender and Sexuality, so let's protest against this and keep a blind eye on caste, class, race, education, language, identity, religion, geo-location, etceteras, then eventually within the process of protesting the accessibility to the medium of protest will make one realize,

one is just not marginalized under one shelter and rather plethora of categories. We can strongly draw here how Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 beautifully coined this term 'intersectionality' and stated the necessity of its application; furthermore, in an interview with TIMES quite recently, she said- "...It's not identity politics on steroids... It's basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other." Applying this view on the distressing condition of Afghan Women, hardly critics used the power of their pen; mostly the works generalize the critical condition and work clearly on the apparently larger issues.

### **Literature Review**

The popular practice of few celebrated norms and suppression of the rest, where binarized ontological (existence of a being) representations function vibrantly, over years of un-interrogated praxis that leads to the understanding of "natural/naturality", which is very similar to what Nivedita Menon wrote in her book *Seeing Like A Feminist* (2012) was- "The whole point of nude make-up, clearly, is to spend hours painting your face to make it look like you had not touched it at all. The maintaining of 'social order' is rather like that... Complex network of cultural reproduction are dedicated to this purpose solely" (Menon, vii). This small community or space or spot eventually grows and spread its branches to become the 'global ethico-ontological space', which perhaps omits and restricts the layers, experiences, intersectional occurrences, individuality, isolation, personal spaces, etcetera, to ambitiously get recognized as the authentic authority of a specific anatomical power- a phallogocentric society; hence, from epistemology to ontology, everything becomes phallus-oriented. Focusing on few articles written on the derogative situation of women in Afghanistan more appropriately surges the domain of Media and visibly limited academia (at least the searchable ones Referring to the article by Bart EDES "Afghan Women Under the Taliban rule", which has delicately convoluted the segmented game of death and life played with women as objectively absent subjects. She talked how "For the last three months, girls over the age of 12 have been prohibited from attending school, and segregation of women and men in universities is negatively impacting women's opportunities in post-secondary institutions" (Edes, 2). Much of the media, and short research works have

been done on the precarious condition of women under Taliban where their personal safety is coming under huge risk. To these inexhaustible research operations and interpretations my research inclines on the same line yet a bit different for I will be analyzing the ‘why’ of this articles. Numerous articles have presented beautifully the horrendous condition of women; but I would delve to theorize and reflect the power regimes of the past and present ‘hunger of control’ that yields to this horror, wherein ‘women’ are only left as *veiled survivors*.

Therefore, culture and its creation is simply practice over years, that finally results in some formats and structural set-ups that ethico-onto-epistemological space both globally and in planetary. Working on the global as opposite to planetary, it is crucial to understand the dealings, interrelations and functioning of gender (also sexuality), power and women distinctively and in association with each other to frame why Talibans (operating phallus) in Afghanistan typically modifies the Quran to teach women that Male are representatives of God and Women are to serve them within the Madrasas.

### **Theoretical Interpretations**

Gender then, is that complex operative device which is fixed within a binarized pattern omitting its spectrum. Gender Intersectionalities therefore, becomes that lens which assist the minds to comprehend how ‘a body’ is doubly and multifariously oppressed, so a *dalit-Muslim-bisexual-trans-woman experiencing subjugation*, presents the layered oppression. Gender and Sexuality are two complex terms ambiguously and socially constructed within the spectrum of Feminism(s) that uses “sex” as an operative term to theorize the deconstructive perspective on the cultural set-up of India. Helene Cixous noted in *Laugh of Medusa* that the entrance for men and women is different in the ‘symbolic social order’, and the ‘subject position’ open for either of the sex is different; therefore, ‘crisis’ churns from this clear source of ‘difference’! Crisis simply means the ‘lack’ of required amenities in parity with the amount of requirement. The crisis in this premise of Gender and Sexuality is because of paranoia; the fear that inclusion and acceptance may break the “nude make-up” like social arrangements, which is so intricately designed to provide a preview of a “natural” outlook that inclusive structure, may unveil the loopholes. From this separate and different position open to women and men within the

patriarchal and phallogocentric symbolic order, churns the rhythm of 'power'. Power is thus created from a sheer difference of subject positions; wherein, one form of 're-presentation' takes control and builds up the 'norm' of identity and body politics. Eventual practice and acceptance of this differential presentation of identities for the convenience of power to operate gives birth to numerous branches of 'regulating and ordering' bodies in patterns 'acceptably suitable'. Power always exists in relation to what it is not, as Gayatri C Spivak in introducing the *Breast Stories* wrote, "Power is nothing if not opposed to what it is not...make the latter's form of expression concretely possible" (Spivak, x). Until the phallus decided 'what is woman should be' there was no 'space what a woman should not be'! The 'power regime' operates only within a tensional dimension where one is created and maintained while the 'others' are substantially trying to redefine the 'one'.

The concept and definition of women has been a crucial area of focus since times immemorial in numerous regions, and in their own way, and that also includes and must address the global-political scenario. The definition(s) of 'what a woman is' is created culturally and regionally in association with the geo-political social structure. The linguistic concept and political representation of the women as a defined term can be explained referring to what Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* said- "Women are the sex which is not 'one'. Within...a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*...women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity" (Butler, 13). This linguistic absence has created the marked and unmarked distinctions yielding 'women' as comparative figures of subservience and reproduction. The patriarchal definition of women is restricted to body and its identity discourse, where only vaginal presentation depicts the identity of 'actual women', omitting the layered and intersectional experiences underneath, as identity and its construction has only been analogous to the tangible pleasures of 'body' and 'sex'. This system has further been epitomized as the 'accepted' form of representing and defining woman; thereby, omitting intersectional and overlapping experiences. The creative definition of 'what a woman is' is structurally and linguistically cornered under the inherent connection between one's sex/gender/desire that is culturally bound and anonymously dubious. This teleology or the end reasoning of identifying women has projected the plight of "women" and restrictions imposed upon them, because they

are ‘marked’. The marking of women as objects of reproducing the norms imposed on them is because they are severely all body, which is visibly noticeable in opposition to men who are considered universal and representative of lives because they are ‘unmarked’ and functions as an awful ‘subject to be recognized and categorized under ‘norms’; an omnipotent sense of “purity” is linked with men; wherein, whatever they initiate has a pure, logical, and affirmed base.

### **Theorizing Afghan’s Women Present Deplorable Condition- under Taliban**

During the struggle to capture and occupy the position of the ‘controller’ the Soviet was up on their occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, the United States, through a Pakistan-based covert CIA operation, contingent billions of dollars to fulcrum insurgent militias known as *mujahedin*. Eventually, after the Soviet’s withdrawal in 1989, the *Mujahedin* factions were entrapped into a civil war and in 1994 the Taliban usurped as the dominating power. Raised and skilled inside the ultraconservative spiritual regimes and frames of Madrassas, those Taliban (organization of younger guys and boys) rarely lived or experienced the Afghan social subculture and status. The Taliban regime of Afghanistan was granted official recognition only by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Pakistan.

Taliban, an extremist hunger of Power has eventually commenced their totalitarian rule and system of gender apartheid since 1994 (Herat), and 1996 (Kabul), wherein women were stripped from their basic human rights to work, enjoy, socialize, being visible, opportunity to education, health, and mobility. Here, most importantly, the curbs on visibility and opportunity to education are highly crucial concepts of discussion. Before moving on to discuss these two areas broadly, let’s drop our focus generally on the distressed positions and oppressive conditions of women-

- Women are banned from working or being professionally involved
- Women doctors and nurses are prohibited from working; females are restricted from visiting male physicians or getting checked by the same.
- Women are prohibited from getting out of their houses until accompanied by a relatable male person or male kin.

- Bifocal presentation of Taliban; peace talks in Doha and Qatar, while tremendous oppression and draconian rule on the youth and women of Afghanistan.
- The freedoms and rights relished by the lives were suddenly shattered and upturned into a web of subjugation under phallus-control.



### *Education, Afghan Women and Taliban*

Education has always opened spheres of perception and visualization in the field of self-understanding and reliance. We cannot omit this very fact that Education is a political and a highly motivated political zone; Education is not ‘apolitical’, rather the only source of communicating commutes in a viable system. Networking this politically influenced educative thread, critical analysis can draw us closer to the understanding that Education teaches how ‘not to accept’ what ‘an identity should be’! Within this contextual comprehension banning of Education (general ones) and limiting the same to Religious Madrassas results in the birth of numerous patriarchal heads, which are subjected to the difference in the representative power of body-politics. So, if one form of modified education is provided to create products that will control the phallus-oriented social structure, then another form of regulated education (Madrassas for Girls) has to be given to sustain the controller’s control and not object or protest against them. Thus, Education as such is banned for Women, and they are open to sexual and reproductive slavery. Stripping women from their basic human rights,

- Schools for girls are closed and women from Universities are expelled.
- Running home schooling for girls could lead to death in front of family members and friends.

- A subversive system has been framed where the patriarchal regime of control and dominance stays but in a benevolent form, where Taliban clearly claimed to have universal policy for women's rights and allow to work in public but under ad with Taliban's rule.
- For the patriarchy virus to continue and sustain it is important to mutate and become drug resistant; hence, Taliban being one of such viruses mutates itself so that, it can control and rule women under the veil of liberty.
- Prioritization of religious education over any other subjects within the schools based on Taliban's control of curriculum.
- Percentage of girls passing puberty to attain and receive education in schools is remarkably few; while girls from few areas are not even allowed to get minimum education.
- University of Kabul uses a 'curtain' to divide male and female students within a class; while the number of female students pursuing higher studies is highly restricted by Taliban threats to 'stop education for females'.
- Female educators have move to hiding, and hardly few female teenagers have 'encroached' Herat University.

#### *Why is Religious Education a priority for Talibans?*

A sense of 'caveat' always accompanies the value, rules, and laws, passed by the Talibans for women, where the deployment of such a framework hardly and truly guarantees any legal and real rights to women in terms of Education and Social Visibility. The religious ideology and view-point of Taliban's hardly has any parity with real Islamic or Muslim ideology; it is rather an obscure amalgamation of the same, as according to Angelo Rasanayagam in his work *Afghanistan: A Modern History* (2003), he said, that the Taliban's rule is similar to or based on the Deobandi School; it is also opposed to reformation and innovation including injunction of women within the home territory and is also characterized by fundamentalist interpretations. Thus we can perceive how religious is re-created and re-presented in accordance to the convenience of phallus-power to rule. Now, if such molded religious education is not imparted



among the females, then how will the Taliban be able to create reproductive products that align with their concepts and values? Therefore, this regime of oppressive and politicized education only veils the reality of women's forceful curbs from receiving their basic human rights, because of their gender, which has been created as an 'absently marked' form of identity.

*Social Visibility, Gender-Construction, Afghan Women*

Visibility and Women are dices of patriarchal presentation of how "respectful" a culture can be. In this form of regressively progressive culture, what gets a strong statement is the control this very "respected" form of body-woman. 'Burqa' is an explicit form of such visible invisibility in comparison to the other form of invisible engagements. Let's consider some archaic forms of Brahminical cultures, where higher caste Brahmin women could not step-out of their house or come or relish anything in the presence of outer society without their husbands (appropriately male bodies not a part of family); few women were second or third in number, as 'polygamy' for the satisfaction and pride of phallus' was and is still acceptable. Often when objects are old, we tend to buy new; thus, invisibilizing the objectified bodies too. Society as a broader spectrum comprises of real information, which somehow the phallus never wants a woman to come in touch with; society is also that gaze from which the phalluses 'desires' to 'protect' heir bought objects, so that, they can only be the owner of the same. Getting back to Afghan, it is important to look at UAE also, where the famous sheiks are having numerous children and huge number of wives; where despite money ruling their lives women 'runs' for safety and escapement from these terrorized cultural authority that prevails. Now, what is this issue with woman identity and the term that its constructed gender always has to go through invisibilization? It turned into determined at the start of the feminist motion that women wanted a language in their personal to mark out an area far from patriarchal discourse. Although their thinking of the language as patriarchal turned into all very well, however they took it as a right that the term 'woman' turned into unproblematic and that it can live because it turned into the unquestionable perfect presentation of bodies with 'vagina'. But what's a 'woman'? Legal and juridical manufacturing constitutes and produces women as 'subjects' of patriarchal discourse, which encompasses the accepted mode of definition within patriarchal framework. Power produces and represents the

subjects, wherein political analysis considers juridical basis for their discourse; however, not presenting what actually lies under this basis. So, defining 'what a woman is' is juridical and productive, as Men creates women and then regulates them through rules, and values, where they decide whom to make visible and whom to invisibilize. 'Nature and Natural' only defines the foundationalist fable that creates and re-creates what a 'woman' is based on the patriarchal needs. Thus, visibility is regulating the invisibilized domain of Afghan women, as their gender construction has been 'invisible under the veil' which has been accepted; what a woman is never defined by a woman but a phallus! The elimination of the marked absent bodies takes place when-

- Women are not allowed to leave home without their male partners (close) accompanying them.
- Women have to cover up with 'burqa or chadari' that shrouds the entire body, and can only see through small mesh-covered opening.
- Regulation is majorly done to control the sexual discourse under patriarchally stated norms, that's why women with adultery were beaten to death by Talibans but not men.
- Accusation is another form of domination and oppression; hence, women 'accused' of prostitution were beaten to death or hanged; where verification was not even done.
- It is crucial to note that sexual freedom shows freedom of a body to choose; hence, curbing this presents the major control of a body on another.
- Women whose ankles, and or any body parts were visible through 'burqa' were horribly hurt; recent report said that a woman's ankle was broken as it was visible.
- Visibility and Sexuality could be the most dynamic tools for the Talibans to control as that demonstrates control to its extremity.



### **Comparative Study of Afghan Women ‘before’ and ‘after’ the USA-Taliban Snapshots!**

The comparative study is crucial to understand as to why and how this present situation of “modernization” suddenly back lashed the status of Afghan women; why the global demand of ‘radical change’ and support for women is still getting downwardly escalated and elevation of subversive *Sharia* webs are constructing and designing the patterns and stimuli of women identities with social, economical and political framework. Not in depth but an overview of the background till present situation gives us a glimpse to this dominance and hunger of power!

#### *Mapping the Historical and Progressive Efforts*

The reason of drawing the historical background in comparison to the present condition of women in Afghanistan is to depict that the real culture and socio-political position for women were not the same as it is of now under Mujahideen and Taliban. The present political disassociation and dislocation, along with social and economical marginalization is a result of two prominently impacting epoch that changed the socio-economic and political ethnography for women of Afghanistan. The first era of reformation was brought by Amanullah in 1923, where he focused on bringing about improving the position of women within patrilineal and patriarchal family structures; however, these reforms were adhered to vibrating changes for the then cultural set-up, and thus met with huge protests. Moreover, it was also against their traditional customs and finally resulted in the demise of Amanullah. The second period was when the communist-

backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) focused on bringing social change to uplift the status and position of women; to empower them, and elevate their identities. But, this leadership led to a ten-year long war between Soviet Union and Afghanistan giving births to militant parties like Mujahideen and Taliban; thereby, resulting in declination of women. The plight of women has worsened more appropriately due to the absence of centralized state and dissident tribal forces that cling to the ethnic claims of traditional forces. Despite the fact that these reforms were suppressed and could not possibly last long under the patriarchal power regimes, but significant historical flexibilities were framed, like-Schools were opened for women under the rule of Habibullah and his wife Asma Tarzi, and also implemented English curriculum, but the mullahs and tribal leaders visualize it as going against their tradition and shifting the paradigm of their patrilineal and patrilocal kinship ties and dominance. Furthermore, huge reforms were introduced (1950s-1960s) by the state presenting the freedom of women and equal participation in social structure and was appearing towards a more prosperous and peaceful society, where-

1. Kabul became the cosmopolitan centre
2. Afghan government established new schools, funded universities
3. Women in urban areas took jobs outside their homes, ran business of their own
4. Women also started participating in politics
5. Modern infrastructures were eventually built and
6. Burqa were becoming optional for a time being.



*Mapping the advent of Soviet's Power and Afghans Suffering*

It was gradually during 1970s when liberation for western women took ground, progress for afghan women came to an abrupt halt. Henceforth, with the accession of Talibans restrictive regime of subjugation commenced where women were exempted from all forms of basic human rights. Later in 1996, when Talibans were supported by U.S.A, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia to control the mismanaged state under Mujahideen, that swift laws to control and regulate women were introduced. Radios were the medium of order, T.Vs were banned, the Islamic fundamentalist regime brought new rules for women, where no fancy shoes or make-up will be used, and women cannot go social except for a 'maharam' (male relative). The same history got repeated with Talibans re-capturing of Afghanistan, but this time the discourse follows a subversive policy. Whatever maybe the efforts or challenges, changes or wars, Women has always been used as raw materials for the productive purpose of the 'phallus and country'. The patterns that clearly depicted 'resistance to change' also informed that in order to really bring forth a future that is freer for women one must recognize the numerous fissures, conflicts, hunger, and resistances.



## **Conclusion**

The crossroads of Islamic Fundamentalism and economic reconstruction has somewhere followed a blind eye and deaf ear to the policy of 'gender apartheid' that is followed; how the treatment of women and gay communities are nullified with objective dynamics. Gender Studies has unlocked interpretations from interdisciplinary sources, and applying this point of view is

immensely crucial to understand an ongoing sense of 'absence'. It matters how we think and how we see others are and how we sources and evaluate others with our concepts and matters. Therefore, applying the lens of Gender theory, an interpretation of the inferior situation of women can be presented to mark the molded 're-presentation'. There is a continuous flow of crises that requires paramount attention for having freer future. Within this scenario of global political ramification, Gender and Sexuality are few of the most crucial and edged tools of oppression, where the social organizations are determined to create and sustain the thread of 'self' and the 'other', which further obliterates the demands, requirements and spaces of the *othered identities*, resulting in an immense 'crisis' of 'safe space'. Moreover, the autonomy of a particular anatomy over the 'othered' anatomies needs to diminished, so that, the regressive terrorism of subjugation can be altered with a sense of 'equality in equity'. Thus, a careful conversation and not silence, inclusion and not exclusion, intersectionality and not singleness, visibility and not absence can bring about changes that can free bodies getting submerged with the pressure of patriarchal definitions.



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