

The Theory of Victimization: A Case study of Women in Afghanistan

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The theory of victimization is an important theory in social sciences and particularly has great relevance to the subject of Political Science. It explores the various stages through which the victims have to undergo during the course of time. This article focusses on the theory of victimization as applicable to the women in Afghanistan. The theory dilates upon five different stages circling around the structural conduciveness, political consciousness, ideological occurrence, political mobilization and political recognition. Women in Afghanistan have passed through this aspect of victimization particularly during the period of Taliban but had to struggle hard for their survival. The post-9/11 episode enabled the women to go through the five stages by giving them political recognition. Objective of the study is to analyze the theory of victimization in the perspectives of women in Afghanistan during the period of Taliban by comparing their status to the current regime. Research questions of the paper include the sense of deprivation that women have been facing, the worst scenario faced by the women in the history of the country, decision of the US government not to involve the government of Afghanistan in the US-Taliban peace deal and the role of the intra-Afghan talks by including women in the peace talks with the government of Afghanistan but the great tragedy lies in the fact that they have not been included by the Taliban in their team for negotiating with the Afghan government. The paper adopts qualitative approach through secondary sources owing to the importance of the study in the current scenario.

Key words: *Theory, Victimization, Women, Stages and Afghanistan*

Introduction

The theory of victimization is very significant in explaining the concepts of terrorism, insurgency, violence and conflict. This theory is driven by the distinction between victimization as an act of harm perpetrated against a person or group of persons, and victimized as a form collective identity based on that harm (Jacoby , 2015). The theory opines five stages that the victim has to pass through from the act of victimization to the recognition of victim-based identity. These five stages are: (i) structural conduciveness (ii) political consciousness (iii) ideological occurrence (iv) political mobilization (v) political recognition. It is through this sequence that the injured and victim people want to seek their goals. Keeping in view the Afghan women through the prism of victimization, the women have undergone through different stages for the survival for their rights. They have suffered a lot due to the sense of deprivation and their bereavement from the different spheres of life. After the post 1978 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and the five years rule of Taliban (1996-2001) have greatly undermined the rights and development of women in Afghanistan, who had been granted equal rights by the Constitution of Afghanistan (Report, 2020).

It is a bitter reality that women in Afghanistan have undergone through all the five stages by facing many hardships that stood in their way from time to time. The regime of Taliban was one of the worst regimes that denied them many rights they had been enjoying from 1960s and early 1970s. Their good fortune came in the post-9/11 episode but even during this period they were confronted with some of the basic issues of life that put restrictions on them in their social and political life. It is a hard reality that women in Afghanistan had to face the basic issues of structural conduciveness which in turn compelled all the women to act in close collaboration with one another to fight for their rights. In the second place, it was the political inspiration and motivation that compelled them to inculcate in them the spirit of consciousness. In the third stage, the role of ideology was too much important in creating in them the spirit of active participation and involvement in the various activities of life that paved the way for the future course of action in their lives. In the fourth place, this could only have been possible by the political mobility of women and their active involvement by working shoulder to shoulder with men in all walks of life. In the last stage, it was only after passing through the five different stages that they were political recognition in a country that had experienced the hard realities of life during the Taliban regime.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan will have great repercussions on the future history of the country. The regional dynamics are very interested in playing due role so as to increase their role and influence in Afghanistan (Tariq, 2021). The withdrawal of US forces is very important in determining the future of the country since the various stakeholders are likely to get as much important role as possible. Most of the regional powers are interested to play role by increasing their sphere of influence in order to have access to the Central Asian Republics, the Middle East Countries and Pakistan. This will also test the security capability and combating capacity



of the law enforcement agencies of the country as they withdrawal scenario would provide them with more responsibility and liability (Tariq, 2021).

Problem Statement

Women have been the victim of various non-state actors in Afghanistan and have been faced with many unbearable hardships in the past. The Taliban regime of 1996 to 2001 was one of the worst periods in long history of the country whereby they were subjected to many restrictions and were deprived of many rights. In the post-9/11 period they enjoyed more rights by getting almost 27% representation in the parliament of the country. But future of the women still remains a mystery since it is difficult to foresee as to whether they would have their due rights in the future set up or not since the Taliban has not included them in the negotiating team with the government.

Objective

To analyze the theory of victimization in the perspectives of women in Afghanistan

Research Questions

- i) Why have the women been deprived of their rights in Afghanistan?
- ii) What was the worst scenario for women in Afghanistan in the history of the country?
- iii) Why did the US government not involve the Afghan government in the US-Taliban peace deal?
- iv) Does the intra-Afghan talks give any space for the inclusion of women in the future set up and their political participation?

Theoretical Framework

The theory of victimization with five cardinal principles explain the status of women during the Taliban regime and in the post-US withdrawal scenario. Theoretical framework runs through the whole of the paper and dilates upon the sense of deprivation and the card of women's rights used by the Afghan government urging the US government to stay in Afghanistan even in the May 2021 scenario.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature that focusses mainly on secondary sources as the fate of the women in Afghanistan seems bleak in the post-US withdrawal scenario. The study is based on the logic of documents analysis by the various experts though the views of women and experts have also been taken into consideration for highlighting the significance of the study. A

comparative analysis of the Taliban regime and the current regime best explains the status of women in Afghanistan.

Significance of the study

The study is very significant for focusing on the very important issue of the women rights in Afghanistan. It centers on the basic issues that were faced women during the Taliban regime and are more likely to face more issues in the wake of the US withdrawal scenario since the Taliban have not included any women member in their team for the negotiation with the Afghan government. Though the government of Afghanistan has included 9 members in their squad for the negotiation yet it is not clear whether the Afghan government would continue to maintain their seats in the parliament or allow them more liberty to participate in the socio-political activities of life or not.

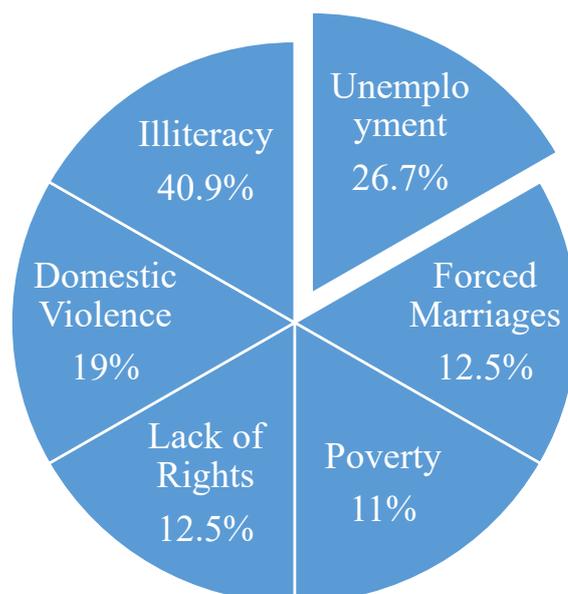
Since the fall of Taliban as a result of the US intervention in Afghanistan, they have been granted their rights in some areas such political representation, access to education, employment, and health care (Report, 2020). But despite that they are confronted with some issues and challenges from the various quarters and they remain far behind than Afghan men and other women at the global level. Although the current Afghan government has been showing her concern and commitment towards the rights of women and their empowerment, they still continue to face significant hurdles in the exercise of their rights (Khan, 2018). It is significant to mention that from the period of 1930s to the early 1970s, Afghanistan was generally liberal- to the extent that the capital Kabul was regarded as the Paris of Central Asia (Khan, 2018). However, the subsequent years that followed, women saw the worst scenario particularly during the Taliban regime when they were deprived of their rights in the form of repression, culminating in the large scale violations against women's rights and violence against women under the Taliban regime. It was an era of strict gender segregation and expulsion of women from the duties of public life. This was the worst era in the history of Afghanistan as far as the rights and political participation of women in Afghanistan is concerned.

The 9/11 marked the beginning of a new era in Afghanistan when a democratic set-up was established in the country as a consequence of the dethronement of the Taliban regime. It was the post-September 2001 scenario in Afghanistan that gave women the opportunity to make substantial gains in most of the areas placing them at par with men. The Constitution of 2003, gave women their due rights and made them more powerful as compared to the previous regime. This was followed by the successive governments that pledged to give women protection against violence and violation and make arrangements of the uplift of women in the economic and political fields. According to the Survey of the Afghan People conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2018, women's rights and political participation in the country have been improving since 2001 when the democratic set up was installed in the country.

It is on the record that women bring more cases to the Family Courts for the resolution than men, with the ratio being 21.8% vs. 16.4%. Moreover, the *Huquq* Department or *Jirga*, or the local *Shura*'s progress can partly be ascribed to the three agencies of the Afghan government- the Ministry of Women Affairs, the Attorney General's Office, and the Police. They work in close coordination by establishing specialized units for providing support services to the oppressed women in case of civil and other disputes. Social media, public opinion, and public awareness campaigns led by the civil society organizations and international donors are also playing their due role in creating awareness among the women about their rights and role in the society. This is one of the greatest achievements of the Afghan women ever since 2001 when they were greatly suppressed as a result of the Taliban Regime though they were enjoying their rights and political participation in the state's affairs during the 1960s and 1970s.

Women have been struggling for gender equality and have been successful in growing this equality. It is important to note that support for gender equality has grown in education, from the 82% in 2017 to 84% in 2018. Support for girl's primary education has also grown from 87.7% in 2017 to 89.7% in 2018 (Khan , 2018). Despite that the challenges faced by women in the education sector, lack of education 40.9%, unemployment 26.7%, and domestic violence 19.2%, forced marriages 12.5%, lack of rights 12.5% and poverty 11.3% (Khan , 2018). It is also on record that Afghanistan has the lowest literacy rate in the whole world, currently standing at about 31% of the population having 15 years of age or older. According to the report of the United Nations Development Program, female literacy rate stands at 31.7% of the adults while 3.7 million school-age children are out of schools- almost 60% of them are girls.

Chart showing problems faced by women in Afghanistan





There has been decline in support for women in the politics and leadership positions from 2017 till date. Although a great number of women participated in contesting elections in the October parliamentary elections of 2017 yet their strength fell from that of the strength of 2016. Support for women serving community development fell from 69.7% in 2017 to 67.5% this year. Their ratio has also fallen from 55.4% in 2017 to 53.1% as far as support for women as Provincial Governors is concerned. They have also observed decline from 54.6% in 2017 to 52% as far as the office of the Chief Executive Officers is concerned (Khan , 2018). Support has also witnessed a fall for women's right to vote, from 89% in 2017 to 87.6% in 2018.

The fate of women in Afghanistan still remains a mystery since the US-Taliban deal of February 29, 2020 leaves the future of women to the outcomes of the intra-Afghan negotiations and battlefield developments (Allen & Brown , 2020). In exchange of this deal the US has only received assurances from the Taliban that they would not attack the security forces of the US, their installations and would not allow any non-state actors to use the ground of Afghanistan against the US and their allied partners. The intra-Afghan talks would be a key determinant in deciding the fate of the future of women in Afghanistan. The fate of the Afghan women and particularly those inhabiting the urban upper and middle class families who were earlier benefited from the post-2001 scenario, seems to face the worst fate (Allen & Brown , 2020). It is a great tragedy that the US-Taliban talks said nothing about the future of women in Afghanistan nor did the US press either the Afghan government or the Taliban to focus on the socio-political rights and education of women (Maizland , 2021). It would have been really a great step by the US government to have raised this point during the US-Taliban agreement and would have given it a practical shape in black and white but a meticulous look at it suggests that the US had taken a wise decision to leave this to the entire free will of the Afghan government and future set up of the government.

During the intra-Afghan talks that started in September 2020, the Afghan government while appointing a 21-member team included five women to signify the importance of women in the future set up of the government. This was a great breakthrough in the history of Afghanistan since women had to be recognized in all the social, educational, social and political spheres of life. For monitoring and directing the negotiation team, Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani had to establish the High Council for National Reconciliation and a higher supervisory body in this regard (Allen & Brown , 2020).

But the thing is out of the 46 appointed members, only 9 are women while the list is dominated by the former warlords and older male powerbrokers. It is also a bitter reality that there are even rivalries between the groups of President Ashraf Ghani and Head of the High Council (his political rival, Abdullah Abdullah (Allen & Brown , 2020). This is viewed by most of the Afghan analysts as a marginalizing Afghan women and giving them representation in 'reserved seats' only. This, according to them, would reflect a 'Power Structure of 2001' that was exclusively dominated by warlords and tribal elders.

A close look at the intra-Afghan talks shows that the women in Afghanistan are there on the agenda of the Afghan government for which the government had to negotiate with the Taliban. But it is also a fact that they were not given any importance in the original US-Taliban deal which need to have been given on account of their 27% representation in the Afghan Parliament. It is also a tragedy that in the 46 member team they should have at least 12 members so as to raise voice for their rights and get their demands fulfilled. Another significant thing is that the team of 46 members is, most of the members are former warlords and old power brokers. The rivalry between the group member of President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah is another contributory factor that may leads towards the failure of the intra-Afghan talks that would bear a direct imprint on the future status of women in the Afghan parliament. The domination of the group by the former Afghan worlds is testimony to the fact that they would be more concerned with grinding their own axe while they would pay less attention to the rights of women. Again, the rivalry between the two groups is also detrimental to the future of the Afghan women.

Again the great pathetic thing is that the though the Afghan government has included 9 members in their squad for the negotiation with the Taliban but the Taliban has not included even a single women in their team which is a sign of bad omen for the future of women in Afghanistan. It is more likely that the Taliban may again emerge on the scene of the country and would try to rule the country as per the strict Islamic Law. In such a system of government the women would have no place in either the Afghan parliament or the overall social structure of the country. This absence women in the Taliban team is highly criticized by both the Western observers and members of the Afghan civil society (FELBAB-BROWN, 2021). This criticism from both the local and international level testifies the fact the women have a key role to play in the social and political aspects of life and that too in a country where they have already been 27% representation in the parliament of the country. It would be really very encouraging if the Taliban includes some women representatives in their team so as to expedite the intra-Afghan talks and enable the women to be active members even in the eyes of the Taliban. This would have great impact on the far-sightedness of the Taliban and other religious groups that would settle some scores relating to the participation of women in the educational, social and political spheres while be in *parda* (veil).

According to Felbab- Brown the Taliban have remained rigid and unresponsive to suggestions it include women in at least some of its governing and political bodies and particularly its negotiating team—a position that reflects the Taliban’s continual marginalization of women. This marginalization of women by the Taliban shows the attitude of Taliban towards the ignorance of women in the future political and governmental structure of the country. In case the Taliban comes to power in the future, it is likely to exclude the women from the spheres of functions of the country, which may again make them the focus of the regional and international actors for the ignorance of the human rights. But it is also fact that the future of Afghanistan may be determined by a cumulative of factors in which all the stakeholders of the country are

likely to be given their due representation with respect to their population and ethnic groups. This may be a sign of good omen if all the stakeholders are taken into confidence before the formation of the future set up.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan if on one hand gives the Afghan people the opportunity to be free of foreign influence but on the other hand, security situation may worsen as the Afghan National and Defense Security Forces till now have been dependent on the foreign troops for the security of the key installations and key sectors of the country (Putz, 2021). The intra-Afghan talks focusses on the on the deal between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban regarding the swap of prisoners (Tariq, 2020). The fate of the urban Afghan women would greatly be affected from the intra-Afghan deal partly on account of the not including Afghan women in the deal with the government and partly on the past experience as they had to undergo some acts of restrictions including the wearing of *Burqa* (clad), and denying them the right to have access to education, health facilities, and getting jobs (Allen & Brown , 2020). Thus women were prohibited from appearing in the public without their male guardians and children.

The Afghan government seems to be displeased with the US-Taliban deal on the ground of being faced with many issues:

- Security situation may worsen in the country which may further deteriorate the law and order situation in the already war-stricken areas, particularly where the Taliban have stronghold.
- Direct deal with the Taliban up to the exclusion of the Afghan government from the deal with the US means that the Taliban are more important for the US than the Afghan government. This would give more legitimacy to the Afghan Taliban to ascend the throne of the country.
- The Taliban and other non-state actors particularly the ISIS may emerge on the scene that would more likely claim to challenge the writ of the government.
- The Afghan women would feel more insecure in some of the areas and would be deprived of some of their fundamental rights such as socio- economic, socio-political, socio-health and socio-educational rights.

The Afghan government tries to use the card of women's rights by urging the US government to stay in Afghanistan even in the post- May 2021 scenario (Allen & Brown , 2020). This urge by the Afghan government is in contravention to the Doha Agreement of February 29, 2020 requiring all the US troops to withdraw from Afghanistan and leave them to their own fate so as to decide their form of future government and the different stake holders particularly the Taliban to be a part of the Afghan government. This prognosticates some important lacunae in the existing system of the Afghan government showing their inability to cope with some of the issues that may pose threat to their survival.

- Inefficiency of the law enforcement agencies to cope with any untoward security situation arising out of the post-US withdrawal scenario.
- Future threats and challenges by the Afghan government with respect to the emergence of the non-state actors on the map of the country.
- Sense of insecurity to the civilian people and children posed by the various terrorists and insurgents.
- Total denial of the women's rights putting the regional and international community to raise voice for the rights of women in Afghanistan since they have already a very bitter experience during the Taliban regime.
- Lack of coordination between the Afghan government and the US that preferred to sign a deal with the Taliban instead of the sitting government.
- Failure of the Afghan political system to the extent that though the Afghan women have 27% representation in the Afghan Parliament and were included by the government to be part of the negotiating team during their peace parleys with the Taliban but the latter has not included even a single woman in their squad. This prognosticates the denial of rights to the Afghan women in the future set up and may face some more issues.
- No relaxation of restrictions to the women with respect to their education, job opportunities, social and political activities.
- A sense of deprivation faced by both the Afghan government faced at the hands of the US government by not including them directly in the peace process and by the women while being ignored by the Taliban circle in the intra-Afghan talks.

There are even doubts whether the Afghan government is sincere towards the women and their rights or not, which need to be proved by the time when the US forces withdraw from the country and leave the reigns of the security in the hands of the law enforcement agencies of the Afghan government. This may lead again to the victimhood of women in the future set up of the Afghan government. The future of women is still a question mark on the Afghan government and the Taliban and would find practical manifestation in case the US forces completely withdraw from the country. If after all, the Afghan government is sincere in its efforts for their rights then it will also be a great challenger to press the Taliban by extending their favor for the due educational, civic, economic, social and political rights.

Discussion and Conclusions

Women in Afghanistan have suffered a lot during the Taliban regime on account of the strict observance of the Islamic laws that brought made them the focus of the regional and the international community. The infliction of various strict orders and keeping certain restrictions on them by preventing them to get education, disallow them health facilities, not allowing to participate in the social, economic and political activities of life and providing them with job opportunities. The end of Taliban era was an end of the worst scenario of lives of women in Afghanistan but the post-9/11 episode enabled them to express themselves in all the activities

of life and particularly in the social and political life. At present the women in Afghanistan enjoys 27% representation in the Afghan parliament which is more than the women representations of Iran, India, Tajikistan, the United States and Pakistan. This shows the liberal attitude of the Afghan government towards the women in the political affairs of the country. Their importance can be gauged from the fact that the Afghan government has nominated nine members from side for the negotiation with the Taliban while the Taliban have not included any women from side for the negotiation which shows the harsh attitude of the Taliban towards women.

This denial by Taliban to include women in their team will have great impact on the status of women in Afghanistan in the future set up. This will usher in a new era for women since the history of their long struggle will give way to their inability to participate in the various activities of life already enjoyed by them in the post-9/11 scenario. The harsh attitude of Taliban may prove very detrimental for the women regarding their future role and status in the country but this also shows the importance of Taliban in the eyes of the United States and the Afghan government. The importance of Taliban in the eyes of the former is crystal clear from the fact that they had to enter into peace deal with them to the utter exclusion of the Afghan government. But their importance is also very clear from the fact that the sitting government of the country had to enter into negotiation with them under the guise of the intra-Afghan talks.

The exclusion of women from the circle of negotiation by the Taliban would further to the miseries of women leading to the sense of insecurity coupled with their inability to participate in the social activities of life. The miseries of women increased by the time when the US-Taliban agreement of Doha held on February 29, 2020 did not mention anything and focused on the talks with the Taliban. This was a great blow to the status of women in Afghanistan because the exclusion of the Afghan government from the main US-Taliban deal was in itself the step towards the denial of the women rights but it is also a fact that the status of women is the internal issue of the Afghan government and can better be resolved by the government of Afghanistan being the internal issue of the country. Looking this prism, even the Taliban are the internal issue of Afghanistan and their fate can better be decided by the government of Afghanistan but the United States did not do so keeping in view the importance and key role of the Taliban.

There are even threats challenges from the other non-state actors such as the ISIS and ISKP, who are more concerned with grinding their own axes in the post- US withdrawal scenario. They are in search of finding a space for themselves since they have already entered into altercations with the Taliban with the aim of struggle for power. This tug of war between the government of Afghanistan, between the Taliban and the ISIS & ISKP and finally between the Taliban and the women by denying not including them in the negotiation team is tantamount to the ignorance of women regarding their basic rights in the country.



Thus, women in Afghanistan have a very history in so far as their social and political history is concerned. They have to make huge sacrifices for the sake of their survival and by paving the way for the future women to play their due role in the politics of the country. It is correct that this great achievement had a long history and bitter reality that compelled them to pass the different stages and make a huge blow by getting 27% seats in the Afghan parliament but their future seems to be darkened by the Taliban who are still reluctant to include even a single women in the negotiation team with the Afghan government. Even there are doubts about the success of the Afghan government against the insurgents and the Taliban and it is for that account the Afghan government has been using the “Women Card” pressing the US forces to stay in Afghanistan even in the post-September US withdrawal scenario.



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