

AN APPEAL

Cry of an Afghan Daughter

In a feeble and subdued voice through WhatsApp, Saeeda Ghazni was telling me, “I cannot be the same anymore; I am in some kind of a mental distress. I am unable to make my dreams come true.” A student of International Relations, at the University of Afghanistan, Saeeda Ghazniwal, had many dreams for herself and her country, but now she feels that all her dreams are shattered and would never come true. Saeeda in tears told me “do you know that my dreams are ruined. I am a daughter of Afghanistan but I am helpless. I love my country, I cannot abandon it, but it seems that, with a heavy heart, I will have to leave my land. I feel that the Taliban’s current narrative is because of the International pressure, which the Afghan women do not believe in.”

After taking over the control of Kabul, the Taliban spokesman, Zabeeh Ullah Mujahid, in his maiden press conference tried to give somewhat a moderate impression, and to some extent, also assured women liberation and freedom of expression. But in his latest press conference, he raised many doubts when he asked people to wait for a final decision regarding the status of women in the country. He said working women should stay at home until their security was ensured. He further explained that these restrictions on the Afghan women were temporary as the security forces did not know how to deal with women and how to talk to them. Unless foolproof security arrangements were in place, women will stay at home. Saeeda, not convinced, had her own apprehensions and viewed these statements with skepticism. She referred to Shabnam Dawar and the other journalist’s case where they continued with their work, based on what the Taliban had stated earlier, but restrictions were soon imposed, clamping down on all women’s freedoms, including the right to work. The Taliban claim of being supportive to Afghan women is not true, well reflected in their changing statements. Having seen her dreams go sour, Saeeda wants to convey her concerns to the world. She asked us to tell the world not to let their dreams be shattered. Distressed about her remarks, I got a message from Doctor Shukriya Nizami, whose message reiterated the same element of mistrust regarding women rights in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

Shukriya Nizami told us that she could not say anything with certainty under the current circumstances, though everybody was waiting for her reaction to the new government’s formation. Although, they are all trying to run the affairs as usual, yet listening to their

statements, I wonder if there would be a woman vice-president like before or will there be a woman judge? If this does not happen then it seems the draconian rule has returned. Shukriya Nizami opines that if a coalition government is set up and is in favour of the people's will, especially with reference to women's rights, particularly the rights ratified by the international community for women, not based on extremism, then we have no issue with the Islamic hijab. But for now, it is difficult to conclude anything from the Taliban's statement that women are allowed to work according to sharia.

Helen Ezgo is an Afghan student currently enrolled at University Bishkek Kyrgyzstan. Another of the university students Helen Ezgo seemed disappointed with the sudden change taking place. Helen was of the view that while the Taliban representative talked of equal rights for all citizens irrespective of their gender but only under the sharia and Islamic laws. It makes us wonder as to what is happening against sharia in Afghanistan till now. Afghanistan has been and still is an Islamic state. Afghans are proud Muslims especially women. But the matter of concern is the fact that the Taliban used to say the same in their previous rule that women were being treated equally but the world should recall that women were deprived of their right to work, education, or to go outside without mahram male. If this is sharia then it is quite obvious that they again intend to trample women's rights. If the Taliban talk of change, peace, and equality then they should not deprive women and girls of their basic rights.

Helen feels that if that does not happen then the hard work and investment of years would be wasted. I asked Fatima Kohistani the girl struggling for the last many years for human rights in Afghanistan that people think the Taliban have changed, what is your opinion? To this, she said that the Taliban have not changed. They acted in the same manner during their last rule. They are talking about girls' education but they will not allow women to work in other professions. The Taliban propagate Islamic law but they interpret it as per their desire which is not acceptable to us.

They iterated that the onus lies on the international community to force the Taliban to let women come forward in every profession. They should ensure equal rights for women that are already enshrined in the constitution of Afghanistan.

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26 August 2021