Resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan: Analysing the Status of women during the Taliban regime

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ABSTRACT
Afghanistan with its traditional and religious society is one of the most contested regions of the world. Due to highly patriarchal and traditional societal notions, gender roles in Afghan society are clearly defined. In a society where men are considered superior to women in status, Afghani women have had a difficult time gaining their freedom. Afghanistan has been ruled by various political ideologies over the last four decades, including Soviet communism from 1979 to 1989, Taliban fundamentalism from 1996 to 2011, the US-led war on terrorism after 9/11, and Taliban rule again. The status of women under the Taliban regime is the subject of this paper. Women resisted oppression in various ways under Taliban rule, contrary to popular notion that Afghan women lacks agency and passively accepts oppression. Both patterns of resistance and victimhood were visible among Afghani women, but the majority of the women engaged in nonviolent resistance to the Taliban regime. The biggest question that has arisen since the Taliban regained full control of Afghanistan after President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul is how this will affect women's safety in the country. The growing concern about what the future holds for women in Afghanistan under Taliban's governance is the main cause of concern for scholars working in the field of women studies. They believe that in the worn-torn country, the worst is yet to come. These concerns stem from the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, which stripped women of their natural rights. The purpose of this paper is to better understand the status of women during the Taliban regime of 1996, as well as the growing concerns that women are experiencing as a result of the Taliban's revival in the current situation.

The Rise of Taliban and Radicalization of Afghan Society

The Taliban were the only militant group backed by both the Pakistani and US governments in their fight against the Soviets. Pakistan chose the Taliban to guard a convoy in 1994. Pakistan's government intended to establish a commerce corridor connecting Pakistan to other Central Asian countries. The Pakistani government provided both military and financial support to the Taliban, which enabled the group to capture Afghanistan's cities and take over Kabul in 1996 (Peter Marsden, 1998, 46). The Taliban, a Pashtun-dominated ultra-conservative Islamic movement, is a fundamentalist militant organisation that took control of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2011. It controls over two-thirds of Afghanistan, including Kabul, the country's capital and largest city. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have been internally displaced as a result of the conflict, and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 5 million refugees living outside the country. Pakistan is home to 2.4 million of them. Women and girls account for a disproportionate number of these (75%) (Loar, 1998). Prior to the Taliban's rise to power, Afghanistan's political and social landscapes were rapidly shifting. As the civil war erupted, many Afghans sought refuge in nearby camps, the two conservative interpretations of Islam i.e Deobandi (Pakistan) and Wahhabi (Saudi Arabia) philosophies respectively, influenced the refugees. Several of the refugees were influenced by these two interpretations and formed the Taliban, a social movement that rose to power in Afghanistan in the hopes of restoring a pure form of Islam. The Taliban, on the other hand, took these interpretations to a new level, using Islam to disempower Afghans, particularly women. For decades, women's rights have been a source of contention in Afghanistan. With the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and their planning for the expansion of women's rights, retaliated by Islamic militants claiming that this expansion threatened their religion and way of life. As a result, despite the passage of laws protecting women, women's rights began to deteriorate with the country's descended into chaos. Afghanistan was left in economic and social turmoil following the overthrow of the Soviet army in 1989, and women's rights vanished as the mujahdeen took power. The mujahdeen's start imposing their strict rules and regulations, particularly on women, in order to "gain by intimidation what they could not impose by force" in Afghanistan, which was earlier controlled by a fragmented group of mujahdeen’s' (Fleming, 2015). To keep the Afghans under control, the mujahdeen began to use intimidation tactics. The Taliban rose to power as various Afghan groups fought for control. The Taliban gained political control of Afghanistan's southern and western regions and entered Kabul in 1996, with the goal of restoring the country to a "pure Islamic state." Prior to the Taliban's rise to power, Islam
had little government involvement, and most decisions were made by tribes and communities. The Sunni Hanafi sect, which focuses primarily on Islamic customary practices, is home to nearly 80% of Afghanistan's population (Rabbani, 2008). Because Sharia law was part of the legal process and was reintegrated into the new civil codes in 1946, Islam was the bedrock of Afghan society (Rashid, 2000). The differences between tribal customs and religious practises, on the other hand, could be conflated, angering Taliban members who want a pure Islamic state free of societal or tribal customs. The influence of Sufism, a mystical form of Islam, alarmed Taliban members even more. Sufism arose in Central Asia and Persia as a reaction to "authority, intellectualism, law, and the mullah." As a result, Sufism grew in popularity among the poor, and Sufis gathered frequently to perform dhikr (remembering God) and visit the shrines of Sufi saints. Although the general public has embraced Sufi practises, conservative groups such as the Taliban have criticised Sufism for emphasising contemplation and piouss living over strict adherence to the law. In Afghanistan, Islamic extremism had never been successful. Wahhabism, for example, is a movement aimed at preventing Sufism from spreading among Arab Bedouins. The movement's founder, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, argued that popular Islamic beliefs and practises were idolatrous and a return to paganism. As a result, Wahhabi Muslims backed an interpretation of Islam that returned to the fundamentals of Islam, the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah" (Esposito, 2011). Wahhabism rose to prominence in Saudi Arabia after the oil boom of the 1970s, prompting Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, an Afghan, to establish a small Wahhabi cell in Peshawar. Wahhabi Afghans, also known as Salafists, opposed both Sufism and the tribal system in their country (Brown, 2015). As a result, the Afghani people despised the Salafists, who saw Wahhabism as a foreign religion. The failure of Islamic extremism was partly due to the fact that it was perceived as foreign. Despite the fact that the majority of Afghans disagreed with Wahhabi doctrines, Arab mujahedeen in Afghanistan, including Osama Bin Laden, attracted a small Afghan following due to their wealth and weapons. As a result, Islamic extremism began to take root in Afghan society, despite the fact that it was unpopular. Furthermore, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, the mujahedeen who had fled to Pakistan were preparing to lead a jihad. The mujahedeen desired political change that would "create a true Islamic society as constituted by the Prophet Mohammed in Mecca and Medina, as well as deal with the challenges of the modern world," according to the mujahedeen. They advocated for women's education as well as their advancement in everyday life. They also attempted to establish an Islamic banking and economic system. The mujahedeen, on the other hand, rejected tribalism, ethnicity, and nationalism in favour of a reunification of the Muslim community. As a result, they abandoned various ethnic and tribal identities of former Afghanistan. Another form of Islam known as Deobandism, which was spread by Pakistani Islamic parties in Afghan refugee camps, influenced the Taliban. One of the many branches of Sunni Hanafi Islam, Deobandism, saw education as the foundation for a modern Islamic society and established madrassas (schools) across India. Madrassas were eventually established in the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. These madrassas provided free education, food, shelter, and military training to Pakistanis and Afghan refugees. Many madrassas in Afghan refugee camps, on the other hand, were "run by semi-educated mullahs who were far removed from the Deobandi’s original reformist agenda." As a result, the Pashtun tribal code had a strong influence on their interpretations. Furthermore, because these madrassas were funded by Saudi Arabia, the students were influenced by Wahhabism. The Taliban, on the other hand, took these interpretations to their logical conclusion. They “represented nobody but themselves” and “recognised no Islam but their own.” Despite being influenced by both Wahhabism and Deobandism, the Taliban's interpretation was far more rigid and had never been seen in Afghanistan before. As a result, the Taliban rose to power in the midst of social and political unrest. In order to bring stability to the nation, the Taliban believed a pure Islamic state was needed.

The Taliban Policies and Rule of Law

In Afghanistan, Islam is the most widely practised religion, and religion plays a significant role in the lives of Afghans. Religion was a driving force for both the Mujahedin and the Taliban. The retreat of the Soviet Union, the deaths of millions of people, and the devastation of the country were all carried out in the name of Islam. Taliban commanders and members were educated in madrasas (religious institutions) in Pakistani refugee camps, where they were radicalised. Radicalization occurred not only among males, but also among youngsters, who were recruited from orphanages at an early age and compelled to join the Taliban. Taliban members carried out what their commanders (such as Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden) had taught them. Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader, issued directives that were as barbaric as the Taliban's abuse of civilians. To the rest of the world, the Taliban presented a new picture of Islam. To create terror and inspire obedience and cooperation with the Taliban, the Qur'an was used to deliver orders to the public, and any who opposed were publicly punished. Zaeef was a former Taliban member who penned the memoir "My Life with the Taliban." Most Mujahedeen fronts, according to Zaeef, were fairly homogeneous, with the majority of people hailing from the same background, tribe, family, or region. The Taliban were a unique group. They were a group of religious professors and students from various backgrounds who were able to transcend traditional coalitions and divisions. They were battling for their trust in God and their deep religious belief in jihad. Different from other mujahedeen factions who fought for money and landed Property, they were solely there to serve Allah. Sharia (which is a religious law drawn from the Quran) was strictly enforced by the Taliban. Some localities had more stringent regulations than others. Due to the communist influence, Kabul was one of the regions where rigorous conservative laws were reinforced.

Procedures and Codes for Women during the Taliban regime

Women and girls were forbidden to work outside the home or attend school by the Taliban. In Afghanistan women above the age of 13 were not allowed to speak in public to the members of opposite sex. Women were required to wear a burqa and be escorted by a male relative while venturing
outside the home. Men were also required to follow the rigorous rules such as grow beards, offering Namaz five times a day in the mosque, and wear a turban and salwar kameez, according to the Taliban (traditional pantaloons and body shirt). Music, television, and other forms of media were outlawed by the Taliban. In addition, all images and statues that were deemed offensive to Islam were demolished. In 2001, they desecrated Buddha monuments in Bamiyan province, for example. Those suspected of adultery were sentenced to death according to the Taliban’s understanding of the Quran, and the punishment was stoning to death. The Taliban used stoning as a type of punishment for adulterers, although it is crucial to note that stoning is not a punishment for adulterers in the Qur’an; it is only mentioned in the Hadith. People who were caught stealing were also subjected to severe punishment. Their punishment included public amputation of arms, preventing the individual from stealing again. To ensure that people followed the policies, the Taliban conducted house-to-house searches. People had no choice but to comply to Mullah Mohammad Omar’s severe rules during his reign of terror (Skaine, 2002).

In order to achieve this state, the Taliban would soon begin to impose draconian restrictions on Afghans, notably Afghan women. Women and girls were barred from acquiring an education as part of these limitations. Women were immediately barred from all job outside the home when the Taliban took control of Kabul, with the exception of traditional agricultural work conducted by women in rural portions of the country. One of the Taliban's hardest prohibitions has been the prohibition on working outside the home. According to the Taliban, they are gradually creating exceptions by allowing some women to return to work as doctors and nurses, but only under tight conditions. For the most part, the ban on working outside the home remains in place for the great majority of Afghan women.” The ban on working outside the home has been disastrous for Afghanistan's thousands of widows. 176 According to statistics, there are over 30,000 widows in Kabul alone, owing to Afghanistan's lengthy history of civil war and political instability. These widowed women are the sole source of support and income for their families due to the loss of their spouses and other male family members (Inderfurth, 1998).

Access to medical services and hospitals for women has been severely hampered. Female nurses, who are the backbone of Kabul's health system, have been beaten by guards for not wearing the burqa. Only a few nurses have been given permission to work in very constrained circumstances. In October 1996, approximately 50 female patients in a Kabul hospital were urged to leave because their modesty could not be safeguarded in an overcrowded ward. In January 1997, hospital administrators were told to stop providing services to women and fire female employees. Women's services were to be supplied by a single hospital that was currently being built. This directive was changed to allow women to receive emergency care in all hospitals. The Kabul Caretaker Council later authorised women to receive non-emergency care in eight Kabul hospitals. Women might be seen for emergency treatment in any Kabul hospital, it was reiterared. In one case, though, a lady burn victim died because Taliban authorities refused to let her see a male doctor. On their route to the hospital, Taliban militiamen continue to beat women in the streets (Inderfurth, 1998).

When the Taliban seized power in Kabul in September 1996, they issued edicts prohibiting women from working outside. Houses with female occupants were forced to have their windows painted over. Women were not allowed to leave the house without being accompanied by a male relative. They had to wear a lengthy garment called a “burqa” that covered them from head to toe if they went out in public. The only way to view is through a small mesh-covered aperture. Because of the burqa's obstructive vision, a number of women have been hit and killed by cars. For any apparent violation of these restrictions, Taliban guards wielding lengthy chains have mercilessly whipped many women in public. The Taliban made it illegal for girls to go to school and receive an education. (However, there are legitimate claims that some Taliban members have sent their wives and daughters to Pakistani refugee camps to get an education.) Men were also required to grow long beards and worship five times a day in the mosque. Music, pictures, and children's pastimes like kite flying were all prohibited. These bands have been imposed at random. Severe beatings and perhaps execution were among the punishments (Skaine, 2002). Women were most affected by Taliban prohibitions in cities like Herat and Kabul, where there are large numbers of educated and professional women, as opposed to rural areas where women have traditionally been barred from public life. Kabul University, which has been shuttered since the Taliban took control, had roughly 8,000 female students, according to reports, and thousands more professional women worked in the city in various positions. Following the Taliban's takeover of Herat in September 1995, over 3,000 women were said to have lost their jobs. There are credible reports that shows that many women, especially professional women, become house bound and forced to live under these pathetic conditions. Before the Taliban gained control of Kabul, many women wore the burqa. It was not, however, a mandatory dress code. Scarves that only covered the head were commonly worn by women in public. The Taliban forces attacked the working women who demonstrated in Herat in late 1995 against the Taliban's rule and restrictions. Women who show even an inch of their ankle beneath their burqa or walk about for no reason acceptable to the Taliban are ruthlessly pursued (Inderfurth, 1998). Women who do not own a burqa have had to pay exorbitant prices to obtain one. A burqa was said to cost as much as US$33 in mid-October 1996, roughly three times the salary of a top civil servant. This adds to the punishments meted out to women who have previously been fired for being women. The Taliban's decrees have been particularly harsh on an estimated 30,000 widows, many of whom are the family's main breadwinners. They are no longer able to work to support the family. Women who do not have close male relatives to accompany them in public are also heavily struck. During the Taliban regime women’s access to medical services and hospitals has been severely hampered. Women working in the health sector, who were the backbone of Kabul’s health system, were beaten by the guards for not wearing the burqa. In October 1996, it has been found that approximately 50 female patients in a Kabul hospital were urged to leave or take early discharge because of their belief that their modesty could not be safeguarded in overloaded hospitals.
In 2001, shortly after Al-Qaeda's terrorist strike, the United States invaded Afghanistan. Women’s rights and freedoms in Afghanistan under the Taliban were at the centre of the Bush administration’s "war on terror" agenda, despite the fact that the US invaded to hunt Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. The political discourses on Afghan women’s rights and freedoms informed US gender policy for post-Taliban Afghanistan; yet, the gains made by Afghan women as a result of the program’s implementation are inherently fragile. As a result, nineteen years later, the fate and future of Afghan women are once again on the negotiating table between the United States and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar (Ahsan, 2021). Gender policy in the United States for Afghanistan was politically crafted in 2001 in order to justify the US invasion of Afghanistan and get American support and financing for the war. Afghan women were portrayed as silent prisoners in every manner conceivable to justify invasion and war, so that Western countries regarded it as their moral and political mission to run and free them. In “Women’s Rights and ‘Righteous War’: An Argument for Women’s Autonomy in Afghanistan,” she argues for women’s autonomy in the country. Former US president George W. Bush, according to Gillian Wylie, pushed discourses on Afghan women’s rights and freedom to advance his objective of invading Afghanistan: “In defending US policy, President George Bush never failed to emphasise the emancipation of women as one of his moral ends.” He declared that “the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan are now free” as he welcomed the fall of Kabul in January. The rhetoric of Afghan women's freedom in the aftermath of the US invasion, however, proved to be a delusion, as Wylie's study shows. Wylie claims that the Bush administration's case for war in 2001 included political discourses about women's rights and liberties. "Establishing women's rights became part of the moral justification given for waging 'war on terror' by overthrowing the Taliban and ensuring regime change in Afghanistan," Wylie says of Bush’s approach to the issue. The Bush administration’s focus on Afghan women’s oppression emerged in the midst of the construction and implementation of the “war on terror,” and given that public support for the ongoing war is being mobilised through a strategic use of words and images” (Berry,138).

The ‘war on terror,’ led by the United States, had an impact on how the social media and literature addressed and stereotyped Islam. The status of women and the constant images of oppressed Afghani women sparked an outpouring of anti-Islam sentiment. During the Taliban's rule, Afghan women were portrayed as passive characters waiting for liberation from the west. Following the tragedy of 9/11, defending the rights of Afghan women became one of the moral justifications for US to wage the ‘war on terror.’ In Afghanistan, gender politics is inextricably linked to the ruling regime. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as well as the social and cultural changes that followed, had a direct impact on women and their Muslim identities. Women's participation in the public sphere was to be drastically altered under both the Soviet and Taliban regimes. Afghani women were oppressed and their agency was taken away by each regime's gender politics. Afghani women, on the other hand, never gave up hope for freedom and equality (Wolf, 2012). To refute the popular perception that Afghani women played a passive role in their country's history. Already the rest of the world tried to liberate the Afghan women from the clutches of war and terror, Afghan women indeed maintained their autonomy in violent situations and fought for their rights. They used a variety of tactics to resist, ranging from attacking oppressors directly to keeping their resistance hidden. They were, on the contrary, change agents in their communities (Rezai, 2017).

Women’s Agency and Resistance Movement during Taliban Regime

Afghanistan's history reflects the country's patriarchal nature. The actions of mostly men are recorded in history, leaving women without a place. Women's history in Afghanistan is still being written. Despite this, women have played an important and influential role. Although Afghani women's contributions to the development of Afghan society have been underappreciated, they even endangered their lives to defend their country and especially women from invaders. Women were granted equal rights under the 1923 constitution, which gave them agency and autonomy in comparison to men. Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan altered the course of history. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) was the most visible phase of women’s movement in the years of Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Another women activist Meena Keshwar Kamal and a group of some Afghan women founded the organisation, which became official in 1977. Following the Soviet invasion, Kamal and her supporters began anti-Soviet campaigns. RAWA published Payam-e-Zan (Women's Message) magazine in 1981. RAWA built schools, hospitals, and handicraft centres for Pakistani women who were displaced by the organization's political movements. The mission of RAWA is to secure human rights for women. The democratic and secular principles that underpin RAWA's vision are fundamental, and women are treated equally to men. According to Faegheh Sherazi, In Afghanistan, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) had worked tirelessly for the women's cause. In Heart, Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Jalalabad, RAWA provides education, shelter, vocational skills, to displaced women and prostitutes (Sherazi, 2009, 100). In the early 1980s, the organization's main base was relocated from Kabul to Pakistan. However, the majority of RAWA members' fieldwork and evidence gathering took place during the Soviet Union's and Taliban's rule in Kabul (Rezai, 2017).

Afghan women’s bravery, determination, and ingenuity acts as transformative elements in women’s condition in a patriarchal society. Women’s oppressive status is not a new phenomenon in Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world. This is evident from the fact that women in the United States were granted the right to vote in the same decade as women in Afghanistan. The fact is that the Afghan government failed to uphold the rights promised to women, whereas the government in United States made significant progress and changed its system. As a result, women took part in activities that demonstrated resistance to the condition of being submissive and passive. For many Afghani women, joining or taking part in activities of women’s organisation like RAWA was not an option, so they also looked for other available options. Women, for example, defied the Taliban by donning a lot of makeup.
beneath their burqas. They sang and danced at parties and went to secret salons (Rezai, 2017).

The Afghani people were unfamiliar with Soviet ideology. The failure of atheist Marxism-Leninism to modernise Afghanistan was due to the fact that most Afghans preferred their own traditional rule and regulations. The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) grew in power due to the support of Afghans who supported secularist ideology and for change. The Afghani people were divided into four groups as a result of the Soviet invasion—One that supported the PDPA government; the second one belongs to a more liberal secularist ideology, but not the form of secularism promoted under communism where religion had no place; the third group did not embrace nor reject the new government; and the fourth group rejected communism. The same can be said for the Taliban’s fundamentalist ideology. During the Taliban period, Afghan society was divided into two major groups: One that adapted to the system’s coercive and oppressive ideology, and second group state away rejected the Taliban’s radical interpretation of Sharia and fought for their rights (Rezai, 2017).

Human Rights Crisis and Status of Women during Taliban Regime

All sides in the conflict have committed human rights violations. Thousands of civilians have been killed in deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on residential areas; people have been detained after being abducted by various armed groups; civilians have been tortured, including women being raped; civilians have been routinely beaten and ill-treated by armed guards; and thousands of men, women, and children have been killed by armed guards. The discovery of mass graves in northern Afghanistan in November 1997, which contained an alleged 2000 corpses, reportedly of Taliban forces captured and executed by Northern Alliance forces, was reported in the international press. These allegations are being investigated by the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Loar, 1998). There have been disturbing reports of an increase in serious human rights abuses against civilians since the Taliban emerged as a military and political force in late 1994, and again shortly after the Taliban arrived in Herat in September 1995 and Kabul on September 27, 1996. Former president Najibullah and his brother, who had been sheltered in a UN compound since the fall of his Soviet-backed government in April 1992, were executed and hanged as one of their first acts after entering Kabul. Women were already subjected to widespread discrimination, including rapes, kidnappings, and forced marriages, which were perpetrated by all political parties. Women’s conditions, which were already precarious, deteriorated dramatically after the Taliban took control of Herat and Kabul. Taliban-affiliated Islamic courts and religious police carry out their extreme interpretations of Islamic punishments, including public executions for adultery or murder, and amputations of one hand and one foot for theft. Taliban give full rights to the militia force to decide right or wrong and administer punishments, women often become more and more the targets of these assaults.

During the year 1999, human rights violations in Afghanistan were on the rise. In March 1999, the UN Rapporteur on Human Rights, Dr. Kamla Hossain, a former Bangladeshi Foreign Minister, visited Afghanistan. "Continuing violations of and denied human rights," he told the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. He described Afghans as “becoming hostages in their own land or refugees while externally armed forces seek to rule Afghanistan without the effective participation or consent of its people.”

Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Harold Koh told the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva:

The Taliban’s blatant mistreatment of women represents one of the most severe abuses of human rights in the world. This includes public beatings for failure to wear a burqa and for not being accompanied by a close male relative. Women have drastically limited access to medical services and education, and only a tiny few are allowed to hold jobs, forcing many to beg on the streets simply to feed their children.

Secretary of State Albright also went on the record at the Feminist Majority Foundation's March 29, 1999 event in Los Angeles:

Afghan women have asked our help and we have responded by increasing our aid to feed, educate and train refugees; by pressing both factions to permit non-governmental organizations to operate freely and securely; by seeking a peaceful settlement to the war; and by making it clear to Taliban leaders that they will not gain the international respect they seek until they accord Afghan girls and women the rights they deserve.

Women have no rights under Taliban rule. They can't get access to things that most people consider a right, not a privilege. For example, they lack adequate medical care, or in most cases any medical care, education, employment, or access to their mosques. The Taliban claim that their goal is to “preserve women's honour,” and that "women's restrictions are for their own safety” (Bloch). In response to the negative media coverage on the Taliban's treatment of Afghan women, the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar expressed the following opinion about the Western world's treatment of women: “their interpretation of women's rights is only those ugly and filthy western cultures and customs in which women are insulted and dishonoured as a toy” (Shakil, 2019). The Taliban and their supporters have given a variety of reasons for the strict restrictions on women, including the need to restore civil unrest in the country and the belief that Western women are not truly respected in their culture. According to the Taliban and their supporters, Muslim women are the queens of their homes, and it is their husband's responsibility to care for them; thus, they do not require the same rights as Western women. (Taleban).

Withdrawal of U.S. Forces from Afghanistan, Resurgence of Taliban and Repercussions for Afghan Women

The biggest question that has arisen since the Taliban took full control of Afghanistan after President Ashraf Ghani fled Kabul is how this will affect women's safety in the country. Countless people have expressed their concern about the future of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban's rule. They believe that in the worn-torn country, the worst is yet to come. These fears are rooted in the history of how the Taliban’s rise in Afghanistan took away women’s natural rights the last time they were there. On August 17, the Taliban made its position...
on women very clear. It stated that they will give women full rights while remaining within the confines of Islamic law. It also stated that women can now join their government. Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, a Taliban spokesman, called on women to join the Taliban government as partners. The statement, however, contradicts the Taliban's order in early July for women working in a Kandahar bank to leave their jobs. They were escorted to their homes by a few gunmen who warned them not to return to their jobs. Instead, they suggested that male relatives could take their place, according to Reuters, an international news organisation.

Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid stated at a press conference on August 17 that the Taliban will not allow Afghanistan to become a "terrorist land," and that no harm will be done to neighbouring countries or embassies working there. Afghan army personnel involved in the war against them will be granted amnesty. Furthermore, under Taliban rule, the country’s economy and the lives of its citizens will improve. Those who take up arms against them will face the consequences in the end. US President Joe Biden claimed during a press conference on July 8 that the US had accomplished all of its goals in Afghanistan since the invasion in 2001. He used the capture of Osama Bin Laden and the end of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan to make his point. However, the US is forced to leave the country after two decades, with the Taliban re-emerging as the most powerful player. In the midst of this, Biden appears to have forgotten that one of the main justifications for the invasion of Afghanistan was to protect women's rights.

Meanwhile, despite the uncertainty over who will control power in the country, Afghan women are preparing for a fight to protect their rights despite the US's unwillingness to confront the Taliban on these issues. Women have been among the worst victims of Afghanistan's decades-long conflict. Women have been denied crucial constitutional protection against the dominant conservative elements in society, who prefer women to remain within the confines of four walls, since the fall of the socialist government in the early 1990s. Following the 2001 invasion, Afghanistan's so-called democratic governments have failed to make a significant difference in women's lives. Some argue that because of the presence of some form of stability and the emergence of civil society groups, women's conditions were better than they were during the Taliban's rule. However, with the Taliban poised to retake power in the country, women in both urban and rural areas are fearful of the uncertainty and instability that could result from yet another war. The fear has grown primarily as a result of US actions against the Taliban. The US failed to acknowledge the Taliban's tumultuous history or demand a verifiable apology. Instead, it signed a deal allowing the Taliban to continue their fight against the current Afghan government, which the US assisted in the formation of, as well as accepting the Taliban's participation in a future Afghan government. Before announcing its withdrawal, the US failed to obtain any assurances from the Taliban regarding the protection of basic human rights for all members of society, including women, which was one of the main slogans used to justify the Afghan war. The resurgence of the Taliban is already leading to a large number of Afghans, who can afford to do so, to leave the country or plan on it.

The majority, on the other hand, has no choice but to remain at home. Some Afghans have made up their minds to fight. Women took to the streets of Afghanistan in early July with banners and guns in hand, chanting anti-Taliban slogans. The central Ghor province saw one of the largest protests. Although the real threat and concerns about the failure of the United States’ gender policy, which now belongs to those women who celebrated victory, and thus concerns about women's vulnerability and achievements over the past nineteen years, since the US invasion of Afghanistan, were revealed in 2014, when plans for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan were announced. Furthermore, concerns have grown day by day since 2019, nearly two decades after the Taliban's defeat and the US invasion of Afghanistan, as US–Taliban peace talks continue, and once again, Afghan women's future and destiny are on the table at the US–Taliban peace talks in Qatar. While insecurity was rampant and the Taliban had begun targeting civilians as they reclaimed power in many parts of Afghanistan, the United States announced its military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Afghanistan has been invaded by several great powers throughout its history, from the United Kingdom to the Soviet Union to the United States. Both US and Soviet Union has projected a different opinion for Afghan women during their time in power in Afghanistan. During the former USSR occupation of Afghanistan, the USSR-backed government led by Nur Mohammad Taraki for the first time used women's rights as a political tool: “It was around this time that they started using women's rights as a political tool” (Samar 147). Following the defeat of Najibullah's USSR-backed government and the victory of the mujahidin, which was aided by the former US government, women were once again forced to stay at home and out of public spheres. Following in the footsteps of the mujahidin, the Taliban Islamic fundamentalists have made it illegal for women to work, attend school, or appear in public without the presence of a “mahram” (a male companion). The Taliban's brutality aided the Bush administration in justifying the war and invasion.

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