

THE DEMISE OF FEMINISM IN AFGHANISTAN: NATION, CULTURE, AND MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The recent takeover of the Taliban over Afghanistan has resulted in a global crisis. There are claims that the takeover will take the country over 200 years back in time. From what I have learned, there is an enormous threat to women and even young girls. Enforcing sexual slavery upon them by forcefully marrying them, many young girls are below 14. The US Military forces fled the country, taking away the hopes of the country. The voices of the citizens are unheard and somewhat muted by fear. The idea of orientalism fits in here by the suppressed stereotyped vision of the east. The US gave up on Afghanistan, making them suffer at the hands of this terror group. In the times of feminism, women face oppression; not just that, now the whole country will fall. Women will be highly affected by this takeover as they are always the soft targets of such tragedies. Women were suppressed, and their voices were cut off. The women from wealthy families have already fled the country, but what about the ordinary women? Who will take responsibility for their safety? They are unsafe, and their families can't protect them. The solution is still under process but is hugely related to the bigger picture here, i.e., the takeover by the Taliban. I want to research the different possibilities for the young women of Afghanistan whose lives are in danger. The first step, of course, is to save lives, and the next is to empower these women to have a better future.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan was once known as the forerunner of feminism, under kings and leaders like Amanullah Khan, Mohammad Zahir Shah, and Hamid Karzai. During the communist era in Afghanistan, women had equal rights, girls' education was a priority, and the right to choose their husbands and careers. We are also aware of what happened in Afghanistan during the 1990s when the Taliban took over the government. They were, most of all, brutal on women. From firing women employees to deploying teachers, they raped and married young girls who weren't even of age. Now that in 2021, the Taliban has again taken over the Afghanistan rule, the world is afraid that history will repeat itself. It is a straightforward threat to humanity. Some nuances have already happened recently. Roughly 3-4 months ago, there was news that the Taliban had asked for the list of women between the age of 15-65 who could be married to Talibani's.

I am conducting this research to find solid solutions to improve the horrible conditions of women in Afghanistan. This research will look deeply into all feminist issues and the politics around it, the enforcement of hijab and burqa in the name of culture and related affairs in the country through the help of news and recent articles, and come up with hardcore solutions. I will be looking at questions such as - What kind of feminism do these women need? What are the roles of nationality in this situation? What are the changes seen in the pre and post-Taliban regime? And what are the gender discrimination gaps at the concerned place?

Crimes against women are a widespread phenomenon in Afghanistan. According to the reports of WHO, 90% of women had suffered some abuse within their families. Be it verbal, physical, or mental abuse, crimes against women are widely tolerated in the community, and these women are in serious need of help. In the past few days, the Taliban has given contradictory statements for women. In one statement, they claimed that they would support women and let them be a part of the government and help them. But, their actions do not speak for themselves. There has been news of them manhandling women and practicing physical violence against them. The enforcement of burqa and hijab on women has become the most trending topic on social media. According to their culture, the choice lies in the hands of women if they choose to wear it or not. But in the case of the Taliban, all of this is enforced upon all women irrespective of their ages. They have many bizarre rules, such as women are not allowed to leave the house without any male family guardian. Their names are left out of their children's

birth certificates, restricting fundamental human rights such as the right to education, freedom, and speech. They are treated as entities that have to be handled in the hands of men.

I will be using three theories to analyze the paper, i) Partha Chatterjee's "*Women and Nation*," ii) Benedict Anderson's "*Imagined Communities*," and iii) Stuart Hall's "*Representation Theory*." Through these lenses, I will be able to identify the Nation's problems and relate them to the feminist culture of the regime. Connecting the dots from the issues of a community to that of a country. I will be looking at the politics behind the terror group terrorizing a whole nation and their treatment of the women of their country. Misogyny at its highest level and their disgrace towards women. The mistreatment of women includes rules and regulations, punishments such as execution, and keeping them from education. The research paper will discuss the gap between the terror culture and its specially imposed hatred towards the women of the country.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hearing Afghan Women's Voices: Feminist Theory's Re-Conceptualization of Women's Human Rights by Shefali Milczarek-Desai

The Taliban, a hardline Islamic organization, seized control in Afghanistan in 1996, according to the article. The Taliban's abuse of Afghan women was swiftly criticized by the Western world (particularly the Western media). In response to the invasion, the Taliban promptly said that their treatment of women is based on cultural and religious traditions. Because both the West and the Taliban base their arguments on shaky understandings of women's human rights and culture, the tug-of-war continues today. As a result, the debate over Afghan women's human rights has devolved into a debate between those who believe in universal human rights standards and those who feel that human rights are conditional on a society's culture. This Note combines feminist philosophy and practice to refute proponents of universalism and relativism's either/or argument. It then applies this determination to an asylum claim filed by an Afghan woman, allowing for an asylum decision that is informed by both universalism and relativism, as well as a conclusion that is not constrained by either. Although this Note began as a hypothetical query, there is more at stake here than a game. An Afghan woman in Tucson, Arizona, applied for asylum in the United States on November 5, 1998, two years after the

Taliban gained power in Afghanistan, fearing persecution for her gender if she returned home. As a result, this is a serious debate with real consequences for a real lady.

Feminist-nation-building in Afghanistan: an examination of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) by Jennifer L. Fluri -

The feminist and nationalist political movement RAWA is a success. Women are active members of the organization, not simply symbolic ones, and they contribute to the ideological development of the Afghan country. The fight for women's rights (through feminism) is then linked to the nationalist aims of democracy and secularism by RAWA. The use of conservative nationalist methods by RAWA to reproduce the organization's future and develop "citizens" for its idealized nation, while opposing patriarchal social and familial systems through a re-configuration of women's roles in the family, society, and nation, is also examined. This research is based on geographical and feminist analyses of RAWA's organizational structure, literature, and political goals, which were obtained through content analyses of RAWA's political literature and interviews with RAWA members and supporters living as refugees in Pakistan in the summer and winter of 2003/05. RAWA is an interesting example of counter-patriarchal and nationalist feminist politics that tackles patriarchal views of the nation and its inhabitants by reconfiguring gender norms and envisioning gender relations in the home as a reflection of the country.

A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan by Huma Ahmed-Ghosh -

The book talks about the upper and middle classes women who have always stood up for their rights and marched towards modernization in Afghanistan. Tribal conventions and mandates have oppressed most Afghan women living in rural areas despite these examples. Those publicly visible women throughout Afghanistan's history belonged to the country's royalty or elite, and they made a very small percentage of the country's population. They do serve as role models, offering a glimpse into the possibility of societal change and demonstrating the ability of women from all walks of life to make changes in their lives. Afghanistan is currently in such a precarious position that its future will be imperiled even more if it does not receive external assistance and financial aid. Understanding the plight of women in Afghanistan must be done within this political backdrop. There will always be major decisions to make on which course to choose. There will always be discussions about the "western model," the "urban elite model,"

the "Islamic model," and the "fundamentalist model." The most basic necessity is to ensure that women, like men, have access to survival resources such as education, work, mobility, and public visibility. They, too, need to be accorded dignity and respect for their judgments, just as men do.

Feminism, Peace, and Afghanistan by Sima Samar -

“The journal talks about Afghanistan's 41-year battle that has produced a slew of complicated concerns policymakers must contend with. Among these realities is the plight of Afghan women's human rights. The overt politicization of Afghan women, their rights, and their place in society can be traced back to 1978 when Daud Khan's government was overthrown and the brutal militarization of communist factions and mujahedeen began. The ensuing history of Afghanistan's continuous war has exacerbated Afghan women's isolation from social, political, and economic life. This has not only exacerbated widespread poverty but has also contributed to the continuation of the Afghan conflict. Peace and negotiation with opposing non-state groups have dominated the present discussion as the foreign presence in Afghanistan feels pressured to conclude the nearly two-decade intervention. Afghan women continue to be left out of decision-making processes and denied leadership positions. Permanent peace in Afghanistan will be impossible if women are excluded from all peace procedures, including discussions. Feminism must play a key role in preparing the road for Afghanistan to achieve long-term peace. This article recounts the author's personal experience as she witnessed Afghanistan's transformation from the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan's extreme leftist government to the Taliban's radical rightist government and considers the implications for the future of women's human rights in Afghanistan.”

The Politics of Gender and Reconstruction in Afghanistan by Deniz Kandiyoti -

The primary goal of this paper is to place the debate over women's rights in Afghanistan within the context of the multiple transitions that post-conflict reconstruction entails: a security transition (from war to peace), a political transition (from legitimacy to effectiveness), and a socioeconomic transition (from poverty to prosperity) (from a "conflict" economy to sustainable growth). These transformations do not occur in a social vacuum; rather, they are based on existing social structures that limit and confine the range of possibilities available. Women's rights have been used as a bargaining chip in disputes between social forces whose geopolitical entanglements have resulted in sharp swings in the pendulum, such as the Soviet-

backed socialist experiment of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and the Islamist policies of the Pakistani-backed Taliban. Attempts to study women's rights simply through the prism of government policy, on the other hand, have severe faults in a context where the state's participation with local communities has always been restricted, whether in terms of the legal framework, revenue collection, or service delivery. Instead, the profound upheavals caused by years of continuous fighting should be used to get a better understanding of the obstacles to more gender-equitable development in Afghanistan. Women's rights have been used as a bargaining chip in conflicts between social forces whose geopolitical entanglements have resulted in sharp swings in the pendulum between extremes such as the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan's (PDPASoviet-backed) socialist experiment and the Pakistani-backed Taliban's Islamist policies. Attempts to analyse women's rights simply through the prism of government policy, on the other hand, have severe faults in a system where the state's relationship with local communities has been permanently limited, whether in terms of the legal framework, revenue collection, or service delivery. Instead, the profound upheavals caused by years of relentless fighting could be used to better understand the barriers to more gender-equitable development in Afghanistan.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Partha Chatterjee's "Women and Nation"-

The framework of this paper is mainly through the feminist lens and *Partha Chatterjee's - Women and Nation*. In the former, we discuss mainly the fourth wave of feminism in relevance to its accuracy in the current situation in Afghanistan. In that chapter of his book "The Nation and Its Fragments," he talks about women in India, specifically in the region of Bengal, and their autobiographical writings. From women born at the beginning of the nineteenth century to women who reached a young age by that time, the writer covers fragments from all of their writings and discusses their points of view. He says, and I quote, that "self-interested men are mindful of the improvement of women only to the extent that it furthers self-interest, not for any other reasons." He talks about 'ideal masculinity' by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, which deals with the stereotypical image of men, i.e., strong, proud, just, wise, a protector of the righteous, and a terror to the mischievous.

The theory suggests that women are only given the contributive role in the household and society. Even their autobiographies were recorded as "voices of the 'others'," including poor, illiterate, madmen, and women. Women have been regarded as being involved in revolutionary terrorism⁶ and have been discussed as a political nuisance occasionally. Some contemporary accounts of women's engagement in the movement speak of the movement's overall strength and broad base. It's worth noting that much information on women in modern Indian historians writing in English before 1975 relates to women in the upper crust. The lives and conditions of the vast majority of women and their responses to shifting historical forces have been ignored and marginalized throughout history. We know little about the lives, views, or social backgrounds of most women who joined the movement in different locations, other than from

a few autobiographies of women leaders, primarily from elite groups because there has been virtually no research in this field.

Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Community"-

The oppressed Afghani women are dominated by the Taliban, which follows ideologies imagined by the terror group and is supported by their false consciousness. Benedict Anderson defines a nation in *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson argues nation as an imagined political community with a limited reach and sovereign essence. It is imagined because the reality of even the tiniest nation exceeds what a single individual can comprehend—one cannot know every person in a country, nor can one comprehend every facet of its economy, geography, history, and so on. However, as Anderson points out, imagined is not fake or fabricated; instead, it is the unconscious abstract thought exercise. In context to the Taliban, their ideologies are something they blindly follow. They do not question it, they do not think beyond being passive recipients of the ideologies, and lastly, they do not give reasons they shoot.

Imagined Communities also exemplify the greatest levels of critical thinking skills in interpretation and analysis. One of the essential aspects of Anderson's work is the seemingly straightforward task of defining exactly what we mean when we say "nation" or "nationalism" — an interpretative step critical to the analysis he goes on to do. Nations are not 'natural,' according to Anderson; as historians and anthropologists know, nations, as we know them, are a comparatively recent creation, dating back only to roughly 1500. But how can we agree on what a "nation" is if this is the case? According to Anderson's description, they are "imagined communities" — groups of people who believe they belong to the same community even if they have never met and have nothing in common. Anderson's idea of the nation becoming a political norm is possibly justifiable in the case of Afghanistan. Taliban's politics to conquer the nation and bring in the promotion of terror culture using modern-day means. The suppression of citizens and constantly controlling the Nation's women is a practice the Taliban has followed for several decades now and swears by it. It takes pride in maintaining its citizens and treating them as bare entities.

Stuart Hall's "Representation Theory"-

The representation by Stuart Hall states that language is said to work like a mirror when it takes a reflecting approach to representation; it reflects the genuine meaning of an item, person, idea,

or event as it exists in the world. To explain how language imitates (or "mimics") nature. The reflective hypothesis suggests that language simply reflects or imitates a fixed "truth" that already exists in the real world. The purposeful approach contends the contrary, claiming that the speaker or author of the work uses language to impose meaning to the world. Words have only the meaning intended by their authors. This isn't to argue that authors can invent their private languages; communication, after all, is based on culturally shared linguistic rules and protocols.

The representation of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan by media is similar to this, the truth is being portrayed in its purest form and there is not even a pinch of exaggeration. The laws enforced upon the country and especially upon the women can make a definition of suppression as well as oppression. The relevance of language to this context is the language used by the media to showcase what's happening in the country. What meanings it predicts, and what can be predicted from the meanings. The concepts of the Taliban are shown to the world through very descriptive language. The language showcases the enforcement of laws as well as an enforcement of the culture. In the analysis, I would use this theory to analyze the depiction of the situation of women in Afghanistan through the representation of Media.

ANALYSIS

Afghanistan's current situation and Policies for Women -

The rules and regulations concerning women pretty much say a lot about their situation in their own country. These rules include, women should not walk along the street unless accompanied by a blood relative and wearing a burqa. Women shouldn't wear high-heeled shoes because no guy should be excited by a woman's footfall. No stranger should hear a woman's voice if she speaks loudly in public. All ground and first-floor home windows should be painted over or covered to prevent ladies from being visible from the street.

Females were prohibited from being photographed, filmed, or displayed in newspapers, books, stores, or homes. Any place names that featured the word "women" were changed. "Women's garden," for example, was renamed "spring garden." In the balconies of their apartments or houses, women were not permitted to appear. Women are not allowed to be on the radio, television, or at any public gathering.

These rigid policies come with severe punishments that are frequently carried out in public, either in official spectacles performed in sports stadiums or town squares or in the shape of random street beatings. Civilians lived in terror of harsh punishments since there was no mercy, and women who disobeyed directives were frequently subjected to terrible cruelty. Penalties include horrible instances such as cutting the thumb, tongue, torture, and even execution. For them, a free woman with fundamental human rights is a myth. This community imagined by the Taliban is an example of Anderson's Imagined Community, where the Taliban has a false consciousness of being correct in their ways of treating their women.



Fig 1 Women Tortured by Taliban.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treatment_of_women_by_the_Taliban#/media/File:Taliban_execute_Zarmeena_in_Kabul_in1999_RAWA.jpg.



Fig - 2 Two Sisters Burned with Acid for Going to School.

latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2011/11/afghan-sisters-hurt-acid-attack-rejected-proposal.html.

Politics of Terror -

There isn't any doubt that the Taliban is a terror group that has its own rigid identities. The main is that of spreading fear in their own country as well as around the world. The citizens of Afghanistan live in constant fear and agony. They have no control over their lives. The politics include a sense of "toxic nationalism" and "toxic masculinity." The 2021 politics of the Taliban started with the removal of the U.S Troops in the country and hijacking the powers and civil rights of the Government and the Citizens of the Nation. Many observers of the Taliban hoped to see a more pliant and conciliatory rule than the one the Taliban had previously led, as the Taliban appeared keen to gain legitimacy both domestically and internationally. Early signs, however, suggested a lack of commitment to change: in September, it appointed a hardline transitional government, reopened males' schools exclusively, and reinstated harsh criminal penalties.

Another lens I look at the politics of terror is in context to Partha Chatterjee's women and nation. As he mentioned in his essay t, Bengaliomen, while being lazy and not attending the house guests properly, were valid because they were too busy looking after their families and loving their husbands. Another argument he states is that women in his hometown only play the supporting role, and this ideology is inflicted on them since childhood. The only difference here is that Partha Chatterjee is talking about the women in the nineteenth century and hundred years later, here's where the Taliban brought back Afghanistan.



Fig - 3 "Taliban on Their Way to Execute a Child for Suspicions on Father Being a Part of the Resistance Force." India Today, 2021, www.indiatoday.in/world/story/taliban-execute-child-over-father-in-afghan-resistance-force-1858047-2021-09-28.



Fig - 4 Women Being Executed by Taliban. www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-adultery-idUSKCN0R13UE20150901.

Statistics -

Female Literacy Rate in Afghanistan as compared to Male Literacy Rate -

The following graph shows the massive difference in male and female literacy rates in Afghanistan. The statistical difference itself shows the misery of women in the country. Also, in the above-displayed picture (Fig-2), a case has been mentioned where two little girls are shown with their faces inflamed by acid attacks. The reason behind these acid attacks was the girls’ audacity to attend school. Even if we look at things without statistics, we’ve not seen any female representation from Afghanistan in a long time. Afghanistan used to be more forward in its thought before the intervention of the Taliban in the 1970s.

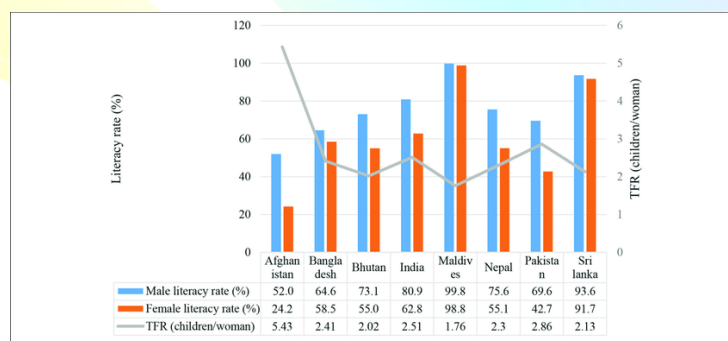


Fig-5 Female Literacy rates of several Asian countries including Afghanistan.

Sheikh, Saba & Loney, Tom. (2018). *Is Educating Girls the Best Investment for South Asia? Association between Female Education and Fertility Choices in South Asia: A Systematic Review of the Literature. Frontiers in Public Health. 6. 10.3389/fpubh.2018.00172.*)

Gender Differences and Gaps in Afghanistan -

In the following graph, we see different South Asian countries and their literacy rates and gender gaps. Afghanistan is the bearer of the most extensive back, accompanied by Pakistan, with a vast Talibani influence and interference after Afghanistan. The size of the gender gap and differences in the literacy rates show how much work is required in the country. Although we are not aware of the actual miseries of the country, it might be even more than what we see on paper.

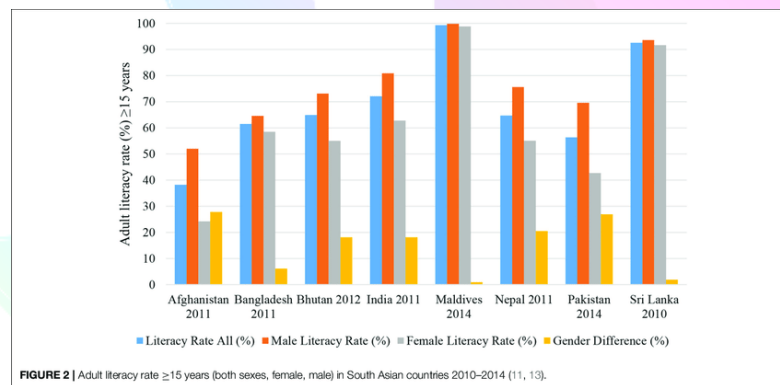


Fig-6 Literacy rates and Gender differences in major South Asian countries, Afghanistan having the highest Gap.

Sheikh, Saba & Loney, Tom. (2018). *Is Educating Girls the Best Investment for South Asia? Association between Female Education and Fertility Choices in South Asia: A Systematic Review of the Literature. Frontiers in Public Health. 6. 10.3389/fpubh.2018.00172.*

Afghanistan before the intervention of Taliban -

In the 1950s and 1960s, many efforts were made to liberalize the women's culture in Afghanistan. The government at the time also supported the westernized ways of living, culture, and empowerment of women. The happiness index of the country has dramatically declined to almost a dot recently. They were showing the negative impact of the Taliban on the Country.

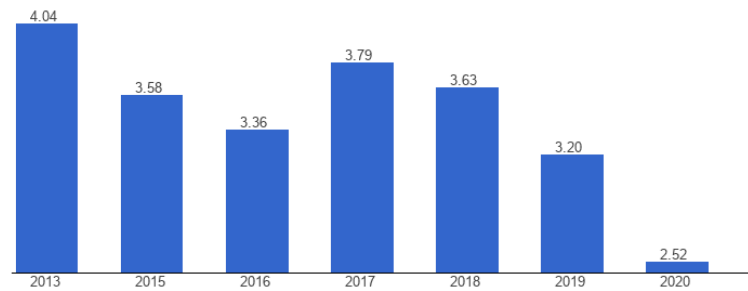


Fig - 7 Decline in the Happiness Index of the Country.

Economy, Global. "Decline of the Happiness Index in Afghanistan." Global Economy, 2020, www.theglobaleconomy.com/Afghanistan/happiness/.

Global Media's response and responsibilities to the Talibani intervention -

While fighting and carnage between the Taliban and the Afghan National Defense and Security Personnel (ANDSF) have continued, the White House's statement that the US will remove all of its forces from Afghanistan by September 2021 has led to an increase in Taliban brutality. The number of districts controlled by the Taliban increased from 73 to 157 between May 1 and June 29, 2021, according to the Long War Journal, which has been recording the battle. Due to the seeming speed with which the Taliban are gaining control of districts, the number and data of districts under Taliban control are frequently changing. According to the Long War Journal, the Taliban controlled 50% of all districts in Afghanistan as of July 8th.

If this evaluation is right, it is terrifying. The Taliban's growing power across the country conjures up a scary image of what can happen if they continue to dominate and control the people they do. The gang has consistently demonstrated that it is the same despicable, aggressive terrorist organization it has always been.

While the Taliban's rampage across Afghanistan cannot be denied, the terrorist group has garnered enormous benefits from constant media coverage of the rampage and the Taliban's control of areas throughout the country. The world news has concentrated on how the Taliban has taken control of several areas and how the ANDSF was besieged by militants and forced to escape to Tajikistan — without highlighting the latter's battlefield victories.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the enforcement of these laws by the Taliban on the nation and the women is barbaric. Afghanistan was doing much better without the enforcement of Talabani laws. The rules and regulations inflicted upon them have a significant issue when seen through the lenses of Feminism and Nationalism texts. The Taliban breeds on the 'fear factor' imposed by their religious texts (Hadhis) to oppress the citizens of their own country. The regulations these religious texts follow give men the ultimate power, leading to the Demise of Feminism in Afghanistan. The sacred texts they follow are not Quran but other texts which guide and instruct them on their behavior. They breed on the fear they impose upon their followers to retain their religion and the Nation's politics in the case of the Taliban.

Coming back to the kinds of punishments they impose (on women), the violence and torturous practices the particular group uses to retain the religious practices is too much in the past and needs to evolve with time. Although according to some sources, the religious group is trying to catch up with social media. They have said that all of these restrictions upon their citizens (especially women) are temporary until it is entirely safe for them to step out of their houses. Their history and track record suggest something else, and it is difficult to believe them based on what they put their citizens through.

The statistical references I have put through show exactly how impoverished the society is in terms of education, equality, and the least cared about, happiness. The country is like a prison that none of its citizens can escape because of resources. With everything being controlled by a terror group, even the escape plan is controlled by the terror group. Women's education restrictions are so rigid that they are given violent punishments, including public executions. These practices were carried out thousands of years ago when the societies were not as civilized as they are now. Here, civilized means a healthy way of living and a non-toxic lifestyle where people have civic sense and can practice their human rights.

The way forward in this situation is to slowly move forward and take help from resources outside the country. The world pressure might bring in some change in the mindset of the group. The only issue here is that nothing will happen without action. They might actually need to be treated in their own ways. This is a very debatable conclusion as violence handled by

violence will lead to even more such problems in the near future and peacefully sorting things out seems almost impossible in the future with the Taliban.

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APPENDIX

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