

**WOMEN EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN: A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Women's education in Afghanistan has always faced socio-cultural and political barriers. Especially in the 20th century, there have been several attempts to expand educational opportunities for women but failed. This paper tries to understand the ups and downs of women's education in the 20th century in Afghanistan and to explore why the attempts to expand Afghan women's access to education failed. Findings suggest that the opening of Masturat as the first girls' school in 1921 marks the start of modern and formal education for women in Afghanistan. King Amanullah has devoted his efforts to expanding the educational access of Afghan women. Despite some notable achievements, the whole modernizing agenda of the King faced social resistance that led to the rule out of some programs, including women's education, and finally, his removal from the power. From 1930 to 1960, women's education experienced steady progress. Notable progress was made in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s but experienced a radical setback in the 1990s. According to findings, socio-cultural and patriarchal conservative norms, weak central states, and conflict were the main obstacles to women's access to education in the 20th century in Afghanistan.

KEYWORDS: *History, Twentieth Century, Afghanistan, Women's Education, Modern Education.*

INTRODUCTION

The historical journey of women's education in Afghanistan, especially in the 20th century, is accompanied by several attempts and failures. Among several obstacles, three issues were the main preventive factors to women's access to education. Patriarchal social relations, weak central states (Moghadam, 1997), and conflict are the factors that have hindered Afghan women from having equal access to education. The patriarchal social system is a structural element that is deeply rooted in Afghan society. King Amanullah (1919-1929) and later the PDPA government (1978-1992) launched a series of plans, including modern education for women, to transform the country into a modern society. The programs, particularly modern education for women, have provoked strong social resistance and rebels. One of the main reasons for the opposition was to maintain the patriarchal social system to validate men's autonomy and domination over women in family and society.

The other challenge was the lack of robust and stable governments that could successfully

implement their modernization agendas. Both in the 1920s and the 1980s, the administrations failed to implement their plans and finally lost to traditional elements. The third and foremost challenge is the conflict, which has devastated all aspects of Afghans' life in the last decades of the 20th century. Due to the long-lasting war, most Afghanistan citizens, particularly women, have lost their right to education.

Methodology

The current study is an attempt to historically review women's education in Afghanistan from 1919 to 2000. The main focus of the study is to understand what efforts in the 20th century were made to expand women's access to education in Afghanistan and why the attempts have failed to realize the goals. The study is based on secondary data, including historical books, journal articles, historical documents, and reports. The data used in the current research has been cross-checked and verified by refereeing to different sources.

There are many books and articles exploring the history of Afghanistan, particularly the history of education, in which the authors have a glance at women's education as well. However, there is no detailed and specific scholarly work about the history of women's education in Afghanistan. Hence, the current study examines and reviews the journey of women's education in the 20th century Afghanistan with further details.

History of Women Education in Afghanistan

1. Women's Education from 1919 to 1978

Afghanistan was famous in the past centuries for reputed Islamic education centers that functioned in the form of Madrasas (Islamic seminaries). Ghazni, Herat, Balkh, and some other cities had leading Islamic education centers. The centers were private and financially supported by local people and wealthy patrons. Concerning the reputation of a Master teacher in Madrasas, young students had come from even farther regions to acquire Islamic knowledge. There were no opportunities for women to get admitted to the Madrasas (Majrooh, 1987). "The traditional curriculum was not exclusively religious—it included Persian literature and the traditional mathematical, medical, and other sciences of the Islamic world—but it was controlled by a religiously trained occupational group and did not develop the skills necessary for modern state-building: engineering, accounting, modern medicine, military sciences, and Western languages" (Rubin, 2002, p. 53).

Apart from Madrasas, at a lower level, village-based education through mosques was the other means of educating children, including girls. Mosques in the villages had a priest who, in addition to performing religious rites, was responsible for teaching the children. Mosque-based education's primary purpose was to enable children to read the Quran and know basic Islamic principles (Dupree, 1998b). Though no recognized and unique curriculum existed, Quran, Panj Gan (Five Treasures), Hafiz (Hafiz Sherazi poetry), and Arabic grammar were mainly taught in Mosques. Mullah/Mawlavi (priest) was paid and fed by villagers. It is noteworthy that this traditional education system still exists, but its popularity and acceptability are not as in the past.

In the second half of the 19th century, in the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan, limited measures with all caution were taken toward introducing modern education or some change in the traditional education system in Afghanistan. However, modern education in Afghanistan was officially introduced when Amir Habibullah was in power at the beginning of the 20th century. The starting point of modern education in Afghanistan is attributed to the opening of Habibia school as the first modern secondary school in 1903 (Samady, 2001; Dupree, 1998b) and the Royal Military College (1904-1906) (Rubin, 2002, p. 53). The teachers of Habibia school were mainly Indian Muslims (Rubin, 2002, p. 53). After the founding of Habibia, six branches of the school at the primary level were established in different parts of Kabul (Ghobar, 1996, p. 1111). There is no evidence of

official modern education for girls in this period. Though it was limited and mostly confined to boys in Kabul only, the founding of modern education is the most important legacy of Amir Habibullah.

Habibullah was assassinated in February 1919, and his son Amanullah became the king of Afghanistan. King Amanullah devoted his efforts to major reforms and transforming the country into a modern society. The first five years of his time were the most significant and productive period for implementing modernization and reform agendas. Development of modern education, especially providing education for girls, ratifying Afghanistan's first constitution, economic reforms, and building mutual relationships with different countries, were among the most critical of Amanullah's achievements in the first five years. The first reform measures were in the field of education. Egyptian and Turkish teachers were hired, and the King tried to establish the permanent French Educational Mission in Afghanistan to reorganize and strengthen the educational system (Gregorian, 1969, p. 239). At this time, Afghanistan saw significant educational progress. Several primary and secondary schools were founded, including three leading secondary schools, namely Amaniyya, later renamed Istiqlal, in 1922, Amani letter named Nijat in 1924, and Ghazi in 1927 (Rubin, 2002, p. 56).

Further, vocational schools in arts and crafts, Agriculture, and public administration started functioning in Kabul (Samady, 2001b, p. 26). King Amanullah had built up constructive political and cultural relationships with foreign countries. These relations had a significant contribution to the progress of education in Afghanistan. Countries like France, Germany, and Turkey had a vital role in providing teachers, experts, and scholarships (Samady, 2001a).

The beginning of modern education for girls is Amanullah's most remarkable and perhaps significant legacy. Masturat, the first girls' school, was founded in 1921 in Kabul (Dupree, 1998b). The school for girls was functioning autonomously under the direct supervision of Queen Suraya wife of Amanullah and Mrs. Tarzi. However, boys' schools were administered by the regular educational system (ministry of education) (Gregorian, 1969, p. 243). In addition, an adult education center for women was established in Kabul. For the first time, Afghan students, including boys and girls, were sent abroad to complete their higher education (Samady, 2001b, p. 26). By the end of Amanullah's reign, three schools were open for girls. The number of girls attending modern schools reached 700 in 1929 (Dupree, 1998b). "Amanullah had plans to build five more schools for girls and intended his planned compulsory education system to apply to girls as well as boys. Both projects were dropped after his fall in 1929" (Gregorian, 1969, p. 243).

King Amanullah was keen to modernize Afghanistan; therefore, he made several and continued efforts to implement programs to help the society get transferred. He was inspired by Turkey's modernization process, his visit to Europe, and his innate tendency and personal interest in building a modern society. Mahmud Tarzi (influenced by progress and modernization in Turkey, Iran, and Egypt) also significantly influenced the King. Tarzi's daughter (wife of King Amanullah) also greatly influenced King's agenda toward women's rights (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). King Amanullah openly campaigned against the veil and polygamy. In a public meeting, he stated that Islam does not require females to cover themselves or observe the veil. At the end of the address, Queen Soraya ripped off her veil in public, and the other officials' wives at the meeting followed her. His family also played a significant role in empowering women. Queen Soraya made valuable efforts to expand educational opportunities and raise awareness among women. She and her mother established a magazine for women called Ershad-I-Neswan (guidance for females). Queen Suraya persistently supported and encouraged women to participate in political and social activities in the country. Moreover, one hospital was founded by one of his sister to treat women patients. Another of his sister founded an organization to protect women (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).

Amanullah also made several other efforts to improve women's status in Afghan society. In 1921

family code was ratified to regulate the country's marriage conditions. According to the code, child marriage and marriage with close kin were abolished. The expenses of weddings, including dowry, were limited. Widows were recognized with the right to be free of being controlled by their husband's families. Later in 1924, the right to select their husbands was also given to women. Afghanistan had the most progressive legal system during this period than the rest of the Muslim countries. No other Muslim country had yet addressed the controversial and sensitive issues of polygamy and child marriage. Afghan family legal code became a blueprint for similar reforms in Soviet Central Asia in 1926 (Moghadam, 1997).

Despite all, women in Kabul, especially women from elite families, enjoyed the opportunities, while in rural and tribal regions; women had no chance of enjoying the King's emancipation programs. In the traditional society of Afghanistan, the hasty implementation of the programs was a big shock. Therefore, Afghan society did not welcome the changes. The whole modernizing agenda received strong opposition with severe resistance and anger. Among the different programs proposed by King Amanullah, modern education for women and the family code were the main reasons for the religious establishment's protest and anger because they considered it incompatible and contrary to Islamic principles that threaten the sanctity of Islam in the country. They were also worried that the family code and women's education would undermine the male authority and their complete domination over female family members. The resistance was higher in the countryside. Families were not interested in sending their daughters to a secular/modern education center. Only elite families in urban areas of Kabul enrolled their daughters and hailed the chances. Secular education was continuously criticized and challenged by religious leaders as well as tribal and local chiefs. As a result of continuous protests and resistance, Amanullah was finally forced to slow down his modernizing agenda. His government revised or canceled some of the programs. For instance, sending girls outside for education was stopped, and women again were asked to wear traditional dress and observe Hijab (veil) while going out (Alamyar, 2018). Those who were sent abroad for education were recalled back to the country. Also, girls' schools were closed for some time. Although the King slowed down or even canceled some of his modernizing agenda, it was already late (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003). These measures could not convince the rebel groups and tribal chiefs. Finally, due to intensive protest and opposition, in January 1929, King Amanullah left power and went to Italy.

After Amanullah left power, Habibullah Kalakani, one of the anti-reform movement leaders, took power in January 1929 and ruled Afghanistan for nine months. During this nine-month, Afghanistan experienced civil conflict and an unstable situation. He stopped all Amanullah's modernizing plans, including Modern education, particularly women's education. Afghan Girls students in Turkey were recalled back (Gregorian, 1969, p. 275).

After nine months, Nadir Shah, with the help of tribal forces, overthrew and later killed Habibullah Kalakani and ascended the throne of Afghanistan. His policy was also to avoid Amanullah's modernizing agenda to keep religious leaders and tribesmen acquiescent to his government. He stopped many modernization agendas of Amanullah through Loya Jirga (Big Assembly) in 1930. Nadir gave more chance and power to religious leaders by appointing some of them to high-ranked positions like the minister of Justice in his government. Therefore, Ulama found a greater opportunity to influence the government's policies, especially women's issues and education (Baiza, 2013, 101). Although Samady (2001) states that with the coming of Nader Shah to power, attention was given to education development, Baiza (2013) believes that Nader Shah's education policy was a "selective and slow recovery." According to Ghobar (1999), Nader's government, at its first action, closed girls' schools, Kabul Women Association, Ershadul-Neswan, (women guidance) magazine, and recalled the Afghan students who were studying abroad (Ghobar, 1999, p. 83).

Ghobar (1999) adds that Afghanistan had only 4591 students and 165 teachers during Nadir

Shah's reign. There were not more than 27 schools throughout Afghanistan. The government was interested in establishing and supporting Madrasas and religious institutes instead of secular education. As a result of the heavy influence of religious and tribal leaders, girls' education was limited to midwifery only (Baiza, 2013, p. 102). Though the first secondary school for girls was opened in Kabul in 1932 (Samady, 2001b), the government made it a nursery and midwifery school to relax the opposition of the religious clerics (Mullahs) and other traditionalists (Gregorian, 1969, p. 309). Education for boys continued with steady and selective recovery. Nader Shah inaugurated 12 boys' schools in 1932; all were in Kabul (Baiza, 2013, pp. 102-3). Although the 1931 constitution recognized equality among all Afghans, in reality, the citizens were not treated equally by the government. Especially women had unacceptably inferior status. The constitution also introduced compulsory primary education, but the objective was not realized (Dupree, 1973, p. 466).

Nader was assassinated in 1933, and his son Mohammad Zahir became the king and ascended the throne of Afghanistan. Although Zahir Shah was the king, the country was controlled by his uncles, Prime Minister Hashim Khan and then Shah Mahmud. In the earlier years of King Mohammad Zahir's period in the 1930s, education in Afghanistan experienced steady and limited progress (Samady, 2001a, 2001b). Until 1946, the government tried but failed to expand primary education. The country's overall social and economic situation, shortage of schools and teachers, and the resistance of traditional and conservative elements weakened the government to realize its educational goals (Gregorian, 1969, p. 352). Especially during the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945, education development slowed down for many reasons, including political and economic problems (Samady, 2001a, 2001b).

Until the end of the Second World War, Afghan girls had minimal access to education. It was mostly confined to nursing and midwifery education. Female education in Afghanistan received attention only after the Second World War when Afghanistan got United Nations membership in 1946 and became committed to complying with the international conventions. Before 1946, there was only one midwifery secondary school called Malalai or Lycée Zanana-ye- Kabul (The Women's Lycée of Kabul). The curriculum was restricted to domestic science and nursing. In 1948 a school named Lycée Rabiya-ye Balkhi was established in Kabul. In 1949 the Malalai midwifery school was changed to a ninth-grade school for girls with a French-based education model. Female teachers from French were employed in the school to teach the students (Baiza, 2013, p. 104).

In 1948, the literacy rate was around 8 percent. In the same year, there were just 98660 students and 2758 teachers. In 1949, less than 10 percent of the school-age girls were admitted to educational centers. By 1954, only 4.5 percent of around 2.4 million school-age children had the chance of schooling. At that time, Afghanistan had only 13 primary, one middle, and two secondary schools for girls, most of the schools located in Kabul. A total of 8625 girls were receiving any kind of education (Gregorian, 1969, p. 356). In the 1950s, the government started expanding education to villages and remote regions by establishing three-year village schools with one teacher, known as "one teacher village schools" (Baiza, 2013, p. 104). The teachers of the schools/Maktabs were religious clerics/ Mullah, paid by students' parents. Ministry of Education occasionally provided teaching materials, textbooks, and tables but did not control the curriculum. There were no such schools for girls' until 1957. In 1959 Afghanistan had 504 three-year village schools, while 90 percent were for boys (Gregorian, 1969, p. 353). By 1958 the number of village schools for girls reached four. This number increased to 95 in 1961 and to 231 in 1970, while village schools for boys increased to 693 in 1961 and 1621 in 1970 (Baiza, 2013, p. 104).

Further attention to the systematic progress of education was given from 1956 onward when the government launched a series of development plans (Samady, 2001a, 2001b). As a result of systematic plans, from 1956 on, significant improvement was realized in primary education. However, the chance of getting beyond primary education was very limited because few

secondary schools were available in the country. In 1968 the number of school students reached 540000, out of which only 13000 were studying in 40 high schools, the majority located in Kabul. There was a greater disparity between boys and girls in high school, as girls constituted only one in five high school students (Hyman, 1984, p. 52). The total number of female students increased from 900 in 1941 to 92500 in 1970, constituted 14% of all students. These students participated in 231 village schools, 166 urban elementary schools, 46 middle schools, and 16 secondary schools (Samady, 2001b).

In July 1973, when King Zahir was on a trip to Italy, Daoud Khan (previous prime minister 1953-63), with an alliance of pro-communist politicians and army commanders, took power through a bloodless coup. President Daoud declared Afghanistan a republic country. One month after the coup, he introduced his modernization programs and social reforms, including equal rights for men and women and expansion of education (Saikal, 2004, pp. 172-76). President Daoud Khan was a reformer and modernist leader who had advocated for female education and tried to expand literacy among women (Pourzand, 1999). By 1978 the last year of Daoud Khan, the number of schools increased to 3825 (12 percent girls' schools) with above one million pupils and 40000 teachers. The school-aged girls' enrollment percentage was 8.6 percent in the primary, 3 percent in middle schools, and 1.4 percent in high school. While it was not satisfactory, the number compared to the 1960s was twice in levels 1-9 and five times in levels 10-12 (Dupree, 1998).

Despite all attempts made from 1919 to 1978 to expand education in general and women's education in particular, all administrations failed to provide universal education for Afghan citizens. Rural areas especially experienced greater educational deprivation as most educational institutions were in Kabul and some other big cities. In 1975, Afghanistan's literacy rate was only 11.4 percent (18.7 % male and 2.8 % female). Out of which 25.9 percent (35.5 % male and 14.8 % female) were urban residents, and just 8.8 percent (15.7 % male and 0.6 % female, in some provinces, 0.1 percent) belonged to rural areas. As stated, most of the students were from Kabul. In 1978, 32 percent of the pupils lived in or around Kabul compared to only 3.3 percent from the central mountains (Dupree, 1998).

1. Women's Higher Education from 1947 to 1978

In 1947, the women's faculty with two departments, science, and literature, was established for the first time. Graduates from Malalai and Zarghuna schools were admitted as the first faculty batch. The faculty had no independent building. Therefore, the ministry of education decided to locate it in one part of the Malalai High school building. Until 1956 the faculty was headed by male managers. But, in 1956, Mrs. Peghla Kubra Norzia, the principal of Malalai High School, became the first woman dean of the faculty. In 1957, the department of medical science was added to the women's faculty due to the need for female doctors. According to the development plans of Kabul university, in 1961, women's faculty was combined with other relevant faculties in Kabul university, and the higher education system became co-educational (Kabul University, 1968, pp. 64-66). Till 1960 the female students in different faculties of Kabul University were from elite families residing in Kabul. From 1960 onward, a small number of girl students from provinces found the chance to get admitted to Kabul University (Baiza, 2013, p. 111; Rubin, 2002, p. 76).

The second university in Afghanistan was Nangarhar University, established in 1963 in Nangarhar Province. The Polytechnical University of Kabul, was the third university in the country, came into existence in 1969 with the support of the Soviet Union (Abdulbaqi, 2009). Significant progress in higher education happened in the 1960s and 1970s. The number of students in higher education institutions was 1700, including 157 girls students in 1960. However, The number increased to 12,260, including 1680 girls in 1975. In the same year, out of 1100 academic staff, 64 were women (Samady, 2001a, 2001b).

1. Women Education from 1978 to 2000

In 1978 People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) captured the power from president Daoud through a coup. After taking power, the party named the state the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. The coup against Daoud and his murder, followed by the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1979, entered Afghanistan into a bloody and long last war that continues until today. The war claimed over one million lives and led to millions of people's migration to neighbouring and western countries. The conflicts have devastated the country's social, political, and economic foundations. After 1979 Afghanistan was transferred from a peaceful country to a country where war, opium, and terroristic activities collapsed all infrastructures and negatively impacted its culture. The country where women experienced more and more oppression (Sidky, 2007).

From 1978 to 2001, Afghanistan experienced three different regimes with different state structures, ideologies, policies, orientations, and objectives. From 1978 to 1992 PDPA communist regime, with the backing and direct invasion of the Soviet Union, ruled Afghanistan. The regime faced continued armed resistance and rebels, especially in rural areas of the country.

During the PDPA government, although the country was in anarchy, war, and destruction, notable efforts were made for emancipation and women empowerment. The DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) government believed that development is not secured without women's active participation. According to N Dupree (1984), Within twelve days (After Saur Revolution/cope), the Revolutionary Council under the administration of Noor Muhammad Taraki had developed the "Basic Lines of the Revolutionary Duties of the Government of the DRA (Democratic Republic of Afghanistan)" and presented it through Radio Afghanistan to people. Article 12 guaranteed "equality of rights of women and men in all social, economic, political, cultural, and civil aspects" (Dupree, 1984, p. 312).

Noor M Taraki declared the programs of the government regarding providing compulsory and free elementary education to all school-age children and the government's intention for literacy campaigns in the country. Later, the government launched a nationwide literacy program in urban and rural areas. The primary purpose was to literate citizens from ages 10 to 50. According to the literacy campaign decree, literacy was marked crucial, and the decree requested all active members of the society to take an active part and "join hands" to make the literacy campaign a national agenda. However, the program was not successful because it was politicized and raised ideological concerns (Sokhanwar et al., 2018). The declared literacy objectives for women were to empower them and enable them to understand their rights and responsibilities. However, in reality, classes were "political meetings in disguise." The curriculum was heavily influenced by Marxist ideology. People, especially in the countryside, did not welcome the programs. A considerable number of people who fled as refugees to Pakistan in 1979 mentioned the forceful application of the literacy program among their women as the main reason for their migration. In Kandahar province, three literacy workers from the Khalq Organization of Afghan Women (KOAW) were assassinated due to anger against the literacy campaign (Dupree, 1984, p. 321). People thought that the curriculum would turn their daughters into communism. They also perceived the program as antithetical to Islam. Thus, tribal and rural groups began burning schools and other government buildings. The state's use of authoritarian and autocratic tactics only intensified a precarious situation and contributed to revolt in the provinces (Burki, 2011, p. 53).

During this time, the education system was heavily influenced by the Marxist ideology and policies of PDPA. The extensive teaching of the Russian language started in universities and high schools and expanded to secondary and primary schools, replacing English and French. "Principles of Marxism-Leninism," "Political Economy," "Dialectical Materialism," and "the History of the Party" were taught in all departments of the colleges (Majrooh, 1987). As a result, Mullah and tribesmen regarded compulsory education, particularly for women, as an agent of degrading the tradition, Anti-Islamic, and challenge to male domination (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).

Due to war and migration, from 1978 to 1990, there was a notable reduction in the number of schools, students, and teachers. By 1985 the number of students decreased to 700,000 in schools and education institutions, compared with over one million in 1978. The destruction of primary education infrastructures, particularly in rural areas, has been quite extensive. Data shows 3,352 primary schools with 995,650 students, including 152,750 girls and 29,900 teachers, including 5,070 female teachers, in 1978. In 1990, the number declined to 586 primary schools, 628,800 students, including 214,560 girls and 16,500 teachers, of whom 8,870 were female teachers. During this time, there was a significant decline in the number of boys in primary schools and male teachers. The reason was conflict and migration or the loss of teachers. The number of female teachers at the primary level increased, but almost 75 percent of them were concentrated in Kabul schools (Samady, 2001a). The DRA government introduced three main educational programs: The National Literacy Plan, Changing the Educational Curricula, and the Multicultural Education Plan. "Implementation of two of the above programs was a step forward in attaining gender justice because it contributed significantly to achieving and realizing gender justice" (Sokhanwar et al., 2018).

During this period, urban women had a significant role in the continued functioning of the government. Women constituted over 70 percent of the teachers, 40 percent of doctors, and 50 percent of university students. Women also were protuberant in other traditionally male-typical jobs like law and engineering. In the meantime, the social status of women in rural areas remained poor due to war and armed conflict. The government could not mobilize resources to rural areas to improve women's quality of life and position. (Burki, 2011, p. 53).

In April 1992, the collapse of the Soviet-installed president, Dr. Najibulla's government (1986-1992), and the seizure of the capital Kabul by the Mujahideen opened a new but painful chapter in the history of Afghanistan. The Mujahideen announced the country as an Islamic state (Islamic State of Afghanistan) for the first time in its history (Saikal, 2004, p. 209).

By 1993 Afghanistan was divided among Mujahideen, and each group controlled a particular part of the country (Barfield, 2010, p. 252). The heads of Mujahideen, who had a better base of acceptability than the previous government elements for founding a national government, lost their credibility. They abused a nation's victory, which had lost so much and suffered too much for its political, religious, and ethnic interests. The political and military activities by armed political groups in many directions decentralized the country's social and political structure. The cycle of violence and the nation's massive mobilization continued in an unclear direction, with no popular leadership (Nojumi, 2002, p. 116).

Mujahideen's government imposed boundaries on women, like Hijab (veiling), greater discrimination, and limitations on the type of employment (Pourzand, 1999). According to the U.S. Department of State (1995) cited in Ahmad Ghosh (2003), in 1992, women were increasingly precluded from public service. "In conservative areas in 1994, many women appear in public only if dressed in a complete head-to-toe garment with a mesh-covered opening for their eyes" (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).

The education policy of ISA was to Islamize education in Afghanistan and abolish the previous (DRA's policies) policies and programs. Mujahideen believed that previous educational policies and programs had "non-Islamic" content. Development of textbooks with prominent Islamic concepts (radical religious messages), and abolishment of coeducation (separation of boys and girls), were among the Islamization policies. Further, providing education for girls based on the need of Islamic society was also one of their plan (Baiza, 2013, p. 172). The textbooks of the ISA, especially during the fighting against the Soviet invasion, did reflect an orientation toward militant ideology. For instance, elementary school mathematics subjects developed exercises about the number of alive and dead Soviet soldiers. Pupils have been taught how to divide bullets among

commanders equally. The religious textbooks at the secondary levels were influenced by Deoband ideology. “The textbooks of the time did not reflect a love for one’s country, but rather a love for militant ideology” (Spink, 2005).

Generally, girls’ education was seriously hit during Mujahideen rule, particularly in cities. The total number of female students reduced. However, in rural areas, the schools/Maktabas were functioning (to the extent they existed). Some parts of the country even experienced improvement, especially regarding the girls’ school. Young women from Kabul and other cities were hired to teach girls in rural areas (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007, p. 172). According to a survey conducted in 1993, 70 percent of all primary-level students belonged to rural areas but with significant variation by region and province. Out of the 70 percent of pupils admitted in rural areas, 65 percent were boys, and just 5 percent were girls, while among 30 percent of students admitted in schools in urban regions, 23 percent were boys and 7 percent girls (Olesen et al., 2005, pp. 33-4). According to Andishmand (2008), as cited in Baiza (2013), in 1994-5, the primary level students were estimated at around 797, 480, of whom 168,820 were girls. The total number of pupils in secondary level was almost 282, 340, of whom 85,692 were girls. Most of the students belonged to rural regions or parts of the cities where war was not so severe (Baiza, 2013, p. 173).

During the Mujahideen, NGOs (mainly international) supported education in Afghanistan (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007, p. 180). In addition, families also contributed by paying the salaries of teachers in rural areas. The salary paid by parents was mainly wheat, based on the number of children in schools. The teachers’ salaries and the contracts were defined through meetings and agreements of local elders in each area.

Despite a steady increase of students in rural parts of the country, the education system itself started to fragment. There was no unified and central authority to manage and regulate the education system throughout the country. Kabul government had lost control over provinces; instead, each group of Mujahideen had their own educational policies and managed their controlled provinces’ educational offices. It should be noted that though not all, some of these groups did not accept modern education, particularly for girls (Baiza, 2013, pp. 173-74).

Out of political turmoil and civil war in Afghanistan, the Taliban, the most radical group, emerged in 1994 in Kandahar, and by 1996 they had captured Kabul and expanded their control in Afghanistan.

The time of the Taliban was a setback for Afghanistan, especially for women. Women were not allowed to attend schools, be treated by male doctors, do makeup, display face or hands or any other parts of the body, and wear shoes that produce sound (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). Dupree (1998) indicates that within hours after the takeover of Kabul, the Taliban instructed women to limit their movement in public and step out only when fully covered and accompanied by a male member of the family (Mahram). Women’s work outside the home was prohibited, and girls’ schools were shut. Taliban closed Women’s public baths in cities like Kabul and Herat (Dupree, 1998a, p. 145).

The Taliban went further and banded even home-based schools (underground schools). The schools provided girls’ education, including home-based vocational training programs like weaving carpets and sewing (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). However, some parents continued to fulfill their children’s educational requirements by keeping open such schools within their houses. Toward the end of the Taliban regime, in Kabul, there were around 160 home (underground) schools in the primary level (1-6 classes) enrolled 21296 students (54 percent girls) with 389 teachers, of whom 67 percent were female. Most home-based schools (underground schools) were supported by NGOs working to provide primary education and vocational training (UNESCO, 2000, p. 39).

The international communities have continuously pressured the Taliban to reconsider the girls' education ban policy. In November 1995, UNICEF suspended its educational support and programs in those parts of the country where females were deprived of education. By November 1996, Save the Children called upon all humanitarian aid organizations to suspend non-emergency activities in sectors where female employment was banned. Such pressures left no impression on the regime. The Taliban emphasized only the validity of the Sharia (Dupree, 1998a, pp. 146-47).

CONCLUSION:

Before the 20th century, a traditional form of education was available for girls through attending mosques and getting primary religious education. The main aim was to learn Namaz, read the Quran, and understand basic Islamic principles. The opening of Habibiya high school in Afghanistan marks the beginning of modern education. However, until 1921 women were denied of having access to formal education. In 1921 when King Amanullah was in power, a girls' school in Kabul was inaugurated in the name of Masturat for the first time. King Amanullah made the ultimate efforts to improve women's status in general and women's education in Particular. However, his plans provoked socio-political resistance, finally leading to his removal from power. In Nader Shah's period, women's education was confined to midwifery education, with only one functioning midwifery girls' school. From 1932 during King Zahir's reign till 1960, women's education in Afghanistan experienced steady and limited progress. Significant progress was made in the 1960s and 1970s. Girls' enrolment continued to increase in the 1980s but drastically reduced in the 1990s. By the 1980s, more than 30 percent of children, including about 20 percent of girls, were admitted into schools (Guimbert et al., 2008). During the Taliban (1996-2000), women experienced complete deprivation of their fundamental human rights, including the right to education.

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