

# **NEGOTIATING VIRTUAL REALITIES: AFGHAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN CYBERSPACE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEBLOGS**

**A thesis submitted during November 2016 to the University of Hyderabad  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for**

**Ph.D Degree in Gender Studies**

**By**

**Atoosa Bahadori**



**CENTER FOR WOMEN’S STUDIES**

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD**

**(P.O) CENTRAL UNIVERSITY, GACHIBOWLI**

**HYDERABAD, 500046**

**TELENGANA, INDIA**



## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “NEGOTIATING VIRTUAL REALITIES: AFGHAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN CYBERSPACE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WEBLOGS” submitted by Atoosa Bahadori bearing Regd. No. 12CWPG07 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies is bonafide work carried out by him/her under my/our supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Signature of the Supervisor/s

//Countersigned//

Dean of the School

## DECLARATION

I, **Atoosa Bahadori** hereby declare that this thesis entitled “*Negotiating Virtual Realities: Afghan Women’s Movement in Cyberspace with Special Reference to Weblogs*” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Professor Rekha Pande** is bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in parts or in full to this university or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby decree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

A report on plagiarism statistics from the University Librarian is enclosed.

Date:

Atoosa Bahadori

12CWPG07

## Acknowledgment

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor **Prof. Rekha Pande** for the continuous support of my PhD study and related research, for her patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my PhD study. I also thank **Dr.Suresh Pande** for his continues support as well.

Besides my advisor, I would especially like to thank my doctoral committee members, **Dr M.N Rajesh**, I appreciate all his contributions to time, ideas, and helpful comments and **Prof. Manjari Katju**, for her insightful comments and encouragement.

My sincere thanks also go to **Prof.K. Suneetha Rani** and **Dr. Deepa Sreenivas** for their valuable feedback and stimulating classes during Coursework.

Particularly, I am grateful to **Prof. Geraldine Forbes** (Oswego State University, New York) and **Dr Nazi Akhtar** for enlightening me during the first stages of research.

I thank **Prasad** office staff of the Centre for Women's Studies, for always extending a helping hand.

It is difficult to name each and every friend here who has helped me throughout my research. I would like to thank the extremely helpful Afghan friends; all of whom have been there to support me and helped me collect data for my PhD thesis.

The past five years in India have been a time of lots of work, great experience, big life changes, amazing travels, new discoveries and wonderful memories with my soul sisters **Ann** and **Urvija**, also other lovely friends **Tahereh, Meenal, Arnav, Ensieh, Jeeva, Rosy, Pooja, Sikha**.

I thank my dear friend and family forever **Mohsen Hallaj**, for the sleepless nights we were working together, and for all the fun we have had in the last five years.

Special thanks to **my family**. Words cannot express how grateful I am to **my parents** for all of the sacrifices that they've made on my behalf and for believing in me. Your prayers for me sustained me thus far.

# **CONTENT**

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>Certificate</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgment</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter- I Introduction</b>	<b>1-18</b>
<b>Chapter- II Internet, Cyberspace and Cyberfeminism with Focus on Afghanistan</b>	<b>19-60</b>
<b>Chapter- III Social History and Status of Women in Afghanistan</b>	<b>61-112</b>
<b>Chapter- IV Media, Internet and Telecommunication in Afghanistan</b>	<b>113-138</b>
<b>Chapter- V Blogging and Women's Movement in Afghanistan</b>	<b>139-172</b>
<b>Chapter- VI Analysis of Women's Issues Raised in the Blogs</b>	<b>173-228</b>
<b>Chapter- VII Conclusion</b>	<b>229-237</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>238-259</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>260-278</b>

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

The present thesis “Negotiating Virtual Realities: Afghan Women’s Movement in Cyberspace with Special Reference to Weblogs” looks at the world that has been experiencing a new form of lifestyle known as post-modernism. The moment we speak the word women in Afghanistan the image that comes in front of us is a much suppressed women with no rights, no voice and living in a war torn country. While this may be true to a large extent what is more important is that today many women are using the internet and becoming a visible presence in cyberspace and showing agency. The advent of the internet or better to say cyberspace has brought in a major change in the world. Thus, with the growth of electronic communication, the concept of “cyberspace” has entered into everyday life. “Cyberspace of everyday life provides a critical framework for understanding how the internet takes a great part in the production of social space” (Nunes 2006:12) among individuals including Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, Google Plus and etc.

In this thesis, an attempt is made to understand the intervention of cyberspace in Afghanistan with special reference to weblogs as the title suggests. The importance of the topic is that it is for the first time women in Afghanistan are able to articulate themselves in certain small spaces that have been created after the technological encounter in the contemporary period and more so in the last two decades. A byproduct of this new technology whose unintended consequence, one of which may be elaborated is the technical need to have personal computers which also flowed to allow some sections of women limited access. However, this limited access also has announced two important things-the birth of a networked society in its fullest sense of a technologically available interface and secondly the creation of a minor discourse.

Cyberspace is a relative addition to a long list of new devices, like radio, TV and newspaper print that activists have used to communicate and raise awareness. Almost a decade later- in the mid-2000s- various terms existed related to computer

and information technology which indicated the growing fields of use. In fact, Cyberspace is a global network with telecommunication, computer and processing systems infrastructure which enables people to use it as a social experience. People of the whole world influence on each other's social life through exchanging information, business, awareness, training, social support, direct activities, the creation of artistic media, political discussion, through cyberspace.

This innovation has been brought a novelty in women's identity giving them an opportunity to be more active than before in the society. Furthermore, women have been the main part of society in the western countries taking significant roles in economic and social development based on their abilities and working parallel to men in almost all social and cultural activities and taking responsibilities in social affairs in modern societies. Obviously, giving opportunities to women increase their self-confidence which enables them to increase their family income and reduces the financial challenges.

Technology and development cannot stop affecting different levels of the societies around the world. In this course, followers of different religions are not exceptions and among different religions, Muslim women participation in cyberspace has become a very significant issue. Although sometimes they are limited to some activities done on cyberspace or the internet, nowadays they have participations and roles over there (Bahadori 2014:128).

Afghan women experienced traumatized social life during the 28 years from 1973 specially during Taliban regime, when Mohammed Zahir Shah the last King of Afghanistan, who reigned for four decades(Democratic Decades) from 1933 was ousted by a coup in 1973. He introduced several contentious reforms during their rule, the most notable being equal rights to women, universal education. On July 17, 1973, Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan seized power from his cousin (and brother-in-law) King Zahir in a bloodless coup (Barnett 2008: 90).

Daoud and most of his family were assassinated during a coup by members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in April 28, 1978. The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan renamed in 1987 as the Republic of Afghanistan existed from 1978 to 1992 and covers the period when the socialist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) ruled Afghanistan. The PDPA came to

power through a coup known as the Saur Revolution, which ousted the government of Mohammad Daoud Khan (Tomsen 2011:110-111).

After that, a power struggle within the Khalq faction began between Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin. Amin won the struggle, and Taraki was killed on his orders. His rule proved unpopular within his own country, and in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union intervened, supported by the Afghan government, in December 1979, and on 27 December Amin was assassinated by Soviet military forces. Babrak Karmal became the leader of Afghanistan in his place. The Karmal era, lasting from 1979 to 1986, is best known for the Soviet war effort in Afghanistan. The war resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties, as well as millions of refugees who fled into Pakistan and Iran (Misdaq 2006:136).

The Soviet–Afghan War lasted over nine years from 1979 to 1989. Insurgent groups "the Mujahideen" fought against the Soviet Army and allied Afghan forces. Between 850,000–2 million civilians were killed and millions of Afghans fled the country as refugees mostly to Pakistan and Iran. The war is considered part of the Cold War (Khalidi 1991: 101-126).

Prior to the arrival of Soviet troops, communists took power in a 1978 coup, installing Nur Mohammad Taraki as president. He initiated a series of radical modernization reforms throughout the country that were deeply unpopular, particularly among the more traditional rural population. The regime vigorously suppressed any opposition and arrested thousands, executing as many as 27,000 political prisoners. Anti-government armed groups were formed, and by April 1979 large parts of the country were in open rebellion. The government itself was highly unstable with in-party rivalry, and the president was assassinated by followers of Hafizullah Amin, who then became president. Deteriorating relations and worsening rebellions led the Soviet government, under leader Leonid Brezhnev, to deploy the 40th Army on December 24, 1979. Arriving in the capital Kabul, they staged a coup, killing president Amin and installing Soviet loyalist Babrak Karmal from a rival faction. After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, some 15,000 Pakistani-backed mujahideen forces attacked the towns. But while Mohammad Najibullah (The last communist president of Afghanistan) and his regime lacked popular support (Khalidi 1991: 101-126).



By early 1992, although the Mujahideen continued to control the bulk of the countryside and the Afghan Marxist regime did fall in April 1992 (Katz 2016: 2).

Then Mujahideen groups fought among themselves, and this was something that the Taliban was able to exploit. The legacy of the wars in Afghanistan was chaos, destruction, and backwardness. The war was worse and all this peace was gone. Afghanistan had become the battlefield between groups, each one slaughtered each other for power. A new Generation of Islamic fundamentalist returned from camps in Pakistan had now become violent extremists, and was "Taliban".

In any war women suffer but the five years of the Taliban regime caused Afghan women to suffer more than at any other time. . Afghan women under the Taliban regime were imprisoned in their homes, denied access to education, health care, and work. A restrictive dress code was enforced and women had to have a husband, brother or father accompany them outside of their home. "Afghan women living under the Taliban virtually had the world of work closed to them", they were forced to quit their jobs as teachers, doctors, nurses, and clerical workers, and forget about their existence as free human beings (Rostami 2005: 36).

After the fall of the Taliban regime, international news channels covered the domestic and political violence against women in Afghanistan. People around the world knew Afghan women through international news, which created an image of Afghan women as the most oppressed and vulnerable group in Afghanistan and that is basically accurate. After the fall of Taliban and establishment of new government, the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially.

But in developing countries, such as Afghanistan, the issue of patriarchy still is a matter of concern which regards men being the total authority in society having all responsibilities for all affairs. The Afghan women had almost no social role in economics and social activities due to culture gap, traditions, preconceptions and poor social system (not to say Barbaric) which adversely affected the women's right. After Taliban regime, entering the cyberspace in Afghanistan enabled women to make a women's cyberspace association and conduct a movement protesting against the social injustices and claiming their rights. In this regard, nowadays, women have an active role in social, political and economic activities in the main provinces through

all over the country in governmental organization, civil societies, national, international and private sector.

Therefore, cyberspace for women in Afghanistan appears as an instrument giving them an active role, new identity and tremendous opportunity to fight for their right. Accordingly, nowadays different Afghan women activists are present on online websites and cyberspace. They attempt to approach different social and political issues through debates on religion and particularly women's right. The area of their activity will be shaped through their idea regarding religious, feminist, secular, cultural problems, a traditional system of society, and therefore these issues could be seen on cyberspace and areas of their activities and the role of the internet in these exchanges is significant. The cyberspace is where the Afghan women could write weblogs which enable them to communicate educate themselves and discuss different social issues and political problems. In fact, since the majority of the people in Afghanistan are Muslims, they express their views on Islamic issues and have a defined agenda which stems from a strong belief in God and commitment to their faith or sometimes criticizing Islamic rules or principles related to women deprivation from rights.

Afghanistan may be the only country in the world where during the last century different kings and Politicians have been made and undone by struggles relating to women's status. The situation of women under the Taliban regime was center stage but the situation of women, today, is not only the result of the Taliban's policies but even worse than that based on the Mujahideen's (1992-1996) record (Wahab 2007:159).

Afghanistan has always had elite and urban middle-class women who asserted their rights and marched towards modernization. But despite these examples, the lot of most Afghan women in rural areas has been depressed by tribal customs and traditions. Those women are helping for a social change to take place and illustrate the potential that women from different strata of society can attempt to change in their lives. Literally, women in Afghanistan are not an isolated institution; their fate is entwined with and determined by historical, political, social, economic and religious forces. In addition to a range of internal tensions, outside or international political forces have impacted Afghanistan in significant ways (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003:11).

Along economic reconstruction of rural Afghanistan as a process towards enhancing women's status under the current conditions. Women could through the cyberspace redefine their roles in the family and community in ways that improve both their and the nation's lives. Furthermore, this reconstruction can lead to social change and political democracy in ways that women could achieve new identity and role in the society.

“The social development of Afghanistan can only be ensured through democracy, education and the reduction of poverty. This can happen with the assured through full participation of women in socio-political issue of the country through increase in of knowledge, employment and cyberspace, Afghanistan, as semi-tribal and traditional society, women do not exist outside the family and community and that tradition customs and family kinship do not necessarily have to be destroyed in order to improve women's status through education, employment and access to resources but it should be reformed” (Wahab 2007: 160).

Emerging the Islamic fundamentalism and westernization, especially in terms of women's status, the current socio-political situation provides a basis for new insights into theoretical constructions of modernity, secularism, and gender equality more than ever. The women's socio-political activities such as weblog writing and making the movement the future of Afghanistan might challenge the dominant condition of citizenship, feminism, social justice and economic equality to all, as defined by west. Women have used the cyberspace to define their own issues and chart a new course of society and created a social movement.

The aim of this research “Negotiating Virtual realities: Afghan women's movement in Cyberspace with Special Reference to Weblogs” is for a better understanding of the interaction between women's movement and the cyber space. Researcher puts an effort to scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages of blogging in Afghanistan, to rise to the challenges of using cyber space especially about weblogs and to offer a practical solution for them. For a better understanding of the interaction between a social movement and cyber space, first, we must have a primary categorization of variation of social movements in the online space.

Sandro, author, and researcher in the context of interaction of democracy and internet categories the online activities of a civil movement to three general parts. (Segre 2013: 67).

1. Awareness and information dissemination
2. Organizing and mobilization of members
3. Action and reaction of the civil

Moreover, each part of the field of women's activity will be discussed generally.

#### 1. Awareness and information dissemination

Awareness is the first step to empowerment. At the same time, internet is a key tool for providing this awareness. A civil movement through the internet in an easy, inexpensive and fast way that makes the foundations, educational demands and strategic issues available for the people. Meanwhile, the internet helps informing and journalism especially when the state media tries to conceal or distort the news. Through this, the monopoly of making the decision about publishing information which is in the hand of government and its media shall be broken.

Women activists play a profound role in cyber space about reflecting and spreading the women's news. From historical discussions and theoretical arguments till news about apprehensions, the collection of stories, songs, and pictures, richness of historical- cultural of women's activity has been shown in cyberspaces by the efforts of these activists.

Beside these prominent roles inside the country, international reliability and validity of the news that has been achieved through an independent and credible broadcasting is so great that they are applicable for "human rights watch", views of operators of the websites in United Nations Conference become a subject of discussion or become a base for a protest campaign by Amnesty International.

#### 2. Organizing and mobilization

Inner aspect of the women's movement in cyberspaces is the collection of those activities that woman activists do in order to communicate with each other,

organizing a project and mobilizing the members in online spaces .Like exchanging ideas of few women rights activists to create a petition via sharing the materials within each other's Facebook pages or sharing the links to their blogs (inner collective movement), or a protest request against an event by a woman rights activist on her personal blog (solitary movement).

Women in Afghanistan has started to use the cyberspaces especially weblog writing immensely in preparation and internal communication for the past couple of years and managed to shape this activity into a movement. Big portions of bloggers connection that live in different countries are via link exchange on the weblogs and it opens up a possibility for exchanging ideas from far distance and necessary arrangement of an statement and cooperation for translation in order to gather information related to the event or issue and broadcasting that news or the theoretical debates over it. The blogs atmosphere demonstrates the intellectual, geographic and age scope of its users and offers a possibility for them to participate and cooperate. Constant writing and receiving continuous feedback removes the shyness of expressing one due to age and experience differences. Also, this interactive space in comparison with tangible space reduces the social complexes exist in Afghanistan in expressing and listening to various thoughts. So blogging has played a vital and affirmative role in organizing and planning for women in Afghanistan.

One of the struggles that female activists in Afghanistan are facing is that many of them are not dealing with women's issues and they are not only limited to write about them due to many problematic issues in Afghanistan, they should write about their right as well as quandaries such as human rights negligence in the country, for instance, ignoring Sharie's law – not constitutional law- to name the few, stoning, promoting education, children's rights, etc. In this way, activists are not only dealing with one topic but they have to go back and forth between many other issues and therefore they cannot have continuous activity in one field. Likewise, the status of online activists varies according to the change of fields. You may normally observe many different topics on women in a female blogger.

Every step was taken in reviving human rights and women empowerment is a move forward in civil movements in Afghanistan and will be helpful for the position of women and the social movement in long run. In addition, experiences of users in

the different fields related to women will raise the general and wholesome perception of issues related to women. But if efforts in generating expert and experienced resources for women's right have the priority, the conditions need to be considered. One solution which can be considered is that the main body and the volume of an activist in the matters related to women should be so vast that the users do not see the need to constant shift between this field and another field of expertise which might reduce their focus.

Blogging and interaction with different groups of women, caused even ordinary women make some attempt to create changes and actively enter the main body of social movements and in many cases bringing the elder member of the family into it as well. One of the best accomplishments of blogging could be the fact that the part of debates which previously occurred only within emails and were only accessible for those active women in particular field, now with the aid of blogging, attract the public audience. This transformation has at least two hidden results: activities towards woman's rights grabbed a bigger network of audiences initiating feminism concern and brought a broader network of citizens whom their concern was not necessarily around women. This can be a constructive perspective in raising public awareness towards women issues and encourages the readers to contemplate and consequently take action.

#### Enriching citizen participation - the outer look to the women's movement

As discussed earlier, social networks and weblogs have managed to enlarge the users activities and make it more common because an online and motivated citizen can spare more time and energy in collaboration with other social movements occurring within the internet - compare to an outside physical reactions. Also, communication and social networks facilitate the connections with reducing the cost of communications and provisions, collecting users and members, recruiting and improvement of the overall efficiency. as a result, it raises the possibility of arrangement of the participation. Among the above factors, we can say that low cost cyber space in Afghanistan advances the public participation.

The citizen participation and recruiting are critical to any movement. The importance of encouragement of participations and recruitment at the current status of

women in Afghanistan who lack the much-needed resources and allocated massive volume of works for some limited users is highlighted now more than ever.

## **Literature Review**

Though there are very few books that focus on women in cyberspace. There are a large number of books which discuss network society and cyberspace in general. The most important of these are the Information Age trilogy,

Castells, Manuel “*The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*”, Vol. I. This first book in Castells' groundbreaking trilogy highlights the economic and social dynamics of the information age and shows how the network society has now fully risen on a global scale. Groundbreaking volume on the impact of the age of information on all aspects of society, includes coverage of the influence of the internet and the net-economy, describes the accelerating pace of innovation and social transformation, based on research in the USA, Asia, Latin America, and Europe (Castells 1996: 6).

Castells, Manuel “*The Power of Identity, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*”, Vol. II. In this second volume of The Information Age trilogy, with an extensive new preface following the recent global economic crisis, Manuel Castells deals with the social, political, and cultural dynamics associated with the technological transformation of our societies and with the globalization of the economy. Extensive new preface examines how dramatic recent events have transformed the socio-political landscape of our world. Applies Castells' hypotheses to contemporary issues such as Al Qaeda and global terrorist networks, American unilateralism and the crisis of political legitimacy throughout the world. A brilliant account of social, cultural, and political conflict and struggle all over the world, analyzes the importance of cultural, religious, and national identity as sources of meaning for people, and its implications for social movement, throws new light on the dynamics of global and local change (Castells 1997:11).

Castells, Manuel “End of Millennium, “*The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*”, Vol. III. This final volume in Manuel Castells' trilogy studies the key defining processes taking place in the last decade of the twentieth century as

an expression of the crises resulting from the transition between the old industrial society and the emerging global network society (Castells 1997: 5).

Fuchs, Christian “*Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*”. In this exceptional study, Christian Fuchs discusses how the internet has transformed the lives of human beings and social relationships in contemporary society. By outlining a social theory of the internet and the information society, he demonstrates how the ecological, economic, political, and cultural systems of contemporary society have been transformed by new ICTs. Fuchs highlights how new forms of cooperation and competition are advanced and supported by the internet in subsystems of society and also discusses opportunities and risks of the information society (Fuchs 2007:1).

Castells, Manuel, Haraway Donna “*Cyberculture Theorists*”. This book surveys a ‘cluster’ of works that seek to explore the cultures of cyberspace, the Internet and the information society. It introduces key ideas, and includes detailed discussion of the work of two key thinkers in this area, Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway, as well as outlining the development of cyberculture studies as a field. The book also explores selected ‘moments’ in this development, from the early 1990s, when cyberspace and cyberculture were only just beginning to come together as ideas, up to the present day, when the field of cyberculture studies has grown and bloomed, producing innovative theoretical and empirical work from a diversity of standpoints (Castells, Haraway 2007: 15).

Barfield, Thomas, “*Afghanistan A Cultural and Political History*”. Afghanistan traces the historic struggles and the changing nature of political authority in this volatile region of the world, from the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century to the Taliban resurgence today. Barfield vividly describes how Afghanistan's armed factions plunged the country into a civil war, giving rise to clerical rule by the Taliban and Afghanistan's isolation from the world (Barfield 2010 :367).

Akbar, Noorjahan, Muradi, Batool “*Daughters of Rabia*”. The book include More than thirty entries, stories, narratives, poems and stories have women's inner reflection, Daughters of Rabia gives voice to the secret lives of Afghan women, for moving, enlightening, and heartbreaking, for the first time. Daughters of Rabia allows these women to tell their stories in their own words from the child bride given as payment to end of a family feud, to a life spent in a dark, dusty room weaving



carpets, from a young girl being brought up as a boy, to a woman living as a widow shunned by society (Akbar, Muradi 2013: 3).

## **Methodology**

This study uses Qualitative and Interpretive content analysis methodology of feminist research. We have used content analysis as the method of research and analysis. "Qualitative content analysis is one of numerous research methods used to analyze text data" (Hsieh & Shannon 2005:1277). Content analysis is a method that can be used both for inductive and deductive research depending on the purpose of the study (Elo & Kyngas 2007: 107). It has been widely used in mass media and social science studies and it is believed to be a fine method of analyzing the text data.

This study has adopted a summative approach to doing the content analysis of the Weblogs. We have selected ten women weblogs published since 2007 to 2016 to analyze the representation of women. The notes were sampled based on convenient or judgmental sampling strategy, which allows for selecting the sources of information based on their availability. However, the notes are selected lead on ten major women's issues and years of publications and the size of the audiences. The researcher could not access all the writers of all weblogs to adopt a randomized sampling.

Some of the weblogs, such as "Ama sangari" had the privilege of being one of the first women's weblog in Afghanistan and can be studied over a longer period of time.

All Ten weblogs have been used for analysis in this study webloggers are from inside and outside of Afghanistan and upper and middle class of a social hierarchy in Afghanistan.

All these weblogs are quite well-known in Afghanistan and cover presumably a larger segment of the Afghan women community and this study analyses, the issues discussed by them and how they bring about change in a unique way with weblog writing.

The reason behind choosing the notes is that they reflect the official concerns, response, and stance of the writers on the most important issues of the day.

Historically ignored women are made visible when relevant artifacts are located and studied," and conversely, analysis of this type of material illuminates the forces that shape the lives of the vast majority. In contrast to the elite minority. Studies using private writing typically have been organized around the life of a notable person or important event. These studies have sought out from historical archives only those parts of private writings that apply to the topic.

As is mentioned based on the traditional condition and view towards women in Afghanistan, collecting the primary data about topic of our study was challenging as collection of primary data and information needs sufficient budget to provide the instruments and materials for conducting survey, or direct interviews which in the present condition of the Afghanistan is a great task.

Therefore, due to the lack of facilities and security of the country for having the interview with women, the present study preferred to use secondary data and it is analyzed the women weblogs based on the factual and available truth and facts. In fact, since the majority of women in Afghanistan do not use the real name in their weblog and wish to remain obscure, the present study endeavored to select them randomly. Besides this we also conducted Skype interviews with a large number of writers of these webpages and weblogs.

### **Problem Statement**

The use of computer networks has become increasingly popular in the last decade and research concerned with both women and technological change and the social implications of computer networking has proliferated, the use of computer networks by women in Afghanistan. However, the use of computer networks in the context of feminism, have seldom been subjects of study. In this regard, the main purpose of this study is, to analyze the role and status of women in cyberspace and the issues highlighted by them,.

It is to say that men and women have different experiences in relation to technology; the author examines the use of computer networks by individual women and women's groups who use this technology to either discuss feminism or facilitate feminist organizing. Women problems on education, employment, health, economics and political freedom, violence and poverty affect their life in the Afghans community.

## **Research Questions and Objectives**

1. Examine how women are using cyberspace?
2. Examine how does the Afghan women's weblogs represent Afghan women's issues and how might that affect the perception and role of the Afghan women in Afghanistan from a theoretical perspective?
3. Examine if there is any women's movement in the cyberspace and how women are articulating about these movements?
4. Examine if women are able to change their social condition in the traditional society of Afghanistan through cyberspace?
5. See if the cyberspace empowers women?

## **Hypothesis**

Rest on the hypothesis that the internet use by Afghan women, the historical landmark in the, long evaluation of the women's journey in Afghanistan, the importance of this network activity is multi-dimensional with many eliminates being visible. An intersection of technology, literacy and internet penetration have open up new spaces for an articulation of various voices of the Afghanistan society, this multifocality, by largely being singular (Afghanistan and Pashtun and male) also allows for other polarities, like marginalised ethnic and gender voices. At one level it is historical continuity as Afghanistan becomes network society and enters the part of development along with other societies of the world. At another level which is not much emphasised is the participation of women that voice against the dominate develops agenda of cyberspace in Afghanistan. This subversive activity is paradoxical and the hypothesis on the assumption that while the mainstream reading of in development internet penetration is a continuation and gender understanding can also point to different break and this is reflected in the women's use of cyberspace. The hypothesis of the present study is that the weblog writing and internet use by Afghan women could be the first and essential instrument in improvement in the women social roles, providing them right movement, giving them equal opportunity of education and employment which consequently leads to economical and situational better condition. In this process women in Afghanistan have created a women's

movement in cyberspace and raised many issues and brought about a change in society.

### **Limitation of the Study**

Any research, generally agreed, has its barriers and limitation and the present research is no exception. Providing data and preparation for the present research has limitations which like others could influence the process of research. The limitations are as follow:

1. The women in Afghanistan have been totally suppressed and there is hardly any scholarly work in English on women in Afghanistan.
2. After reading a weblog and some revolutionary ideas we wanted to interview these women but the majority of them refused. The cyberspace provides an anonymity which is comfortable for them and they do not want to come out in the open. Hence we had to draw our analysis based on what they are writing.
3. It is not possible to interview these women face to face due to the present circumstances in Afghanistan and the financial constraints and hence interviews were conducted with women via Skype.

### **Chapterization**

The present study is divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter is titled “**Introduction**”, and it details the concept of cyberspace, brief history of Afghanistan and effect of weblog writing on situation of Afghan women. It analysis the sources and then it discusses about the methodologies that have been used and followed in collecting and analyzing the data along with problem statement research questions (objectives), hypothesis and limitation of study, and this chapter concludes with the details of the chapterization of this research.

The second chapter titled “**Internet, Cyberspace and Cyberfeminism with Focus on Afghanistan**”. It discusses the concepts and definitions of cyberspace, The Scope of cyberspace, cyberfeminism in Afghanistan, Women’s networking and access to information, position of Afghan feminist movement in cyberspace.

The third chapter, “**Social History and Status of Women in Afghanistan**” analyses the status of social activity of women, economic, social, religious situation and feminism in Afghanistan in general and in particular.

The fourth chapter, “**Media, Internet and Telecommunication in Afghanistan**”, discusses about Social media including YouTube and Facebook. Furthermore, the study focused on weblogs that belongs to cyber-feminists of Afghanistan and electronic magazines that represent women’s affairs. Besides these things, effect of teleworking and cellphone, which also have an empowering women are analyzed respectively.

The fifth chapter, “**Blogging and Women's Movement in Afghanistan**”, discuss the historical development which led to the formation of cyberfeminism with a special focus on weblogging, requirements for blogging, advantages of the entering the technology of blogging in Afghanistan and use of cyberspace for women’s movement with their achievements in Afghanistan and out.

The sixth chapter, “**Analysis of Women’s Issues Raised in the Blogs**”, is in “data analysis” for the present study. About ten pieces of weblogs by different writers were selected and effort was given to analyze their content and to clarify that the weblog writing was a tool for women’s social movement. These weblogs cover a variety of areas ranging from the social life and the situation of Afghan women. Through cyberspace women have raise many issues such as, child marriage, mutilation, cyber stocking, honor killing, stoning, domestic violence, lack of education, immigration, and “Bacha posh” dressing up like men. Hence women have succeeded in creating a women’s movement in cyberspace.

The last and seventh chapter “**Conclusion**” gives a valedictory note of this work and summarizes the facts from the other chapters and gives a conclusion.

## References

- Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. "A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 4, No. May 2003.
- Akbar, Noorjahan, Muradi Batool .*Daughters of Rabia*. Wordpress. Com, 2013.
- Barnett, Rubin. *Dawud khan, Moḥammad*. In Ehsan Yarshater. Encyclopædia Iranica (Online ed, United States: Columbia University. Retrieved January 2008.
- Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Bahadori, Atoosa. The Social Participation of Muslim Women in Cyberspace in Contemporary Society Associated Asia Research Foundation (AARF), *International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences (IRJHRSS)*, Volume 1, Issue 5, October 2014.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. I. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell.1996.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. II. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 1997
- Castells, Manuel. End of Millennium, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. III. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 1998.
- Castells, Manuel, Haraway, Donna. *Cyberculture Theorists*. Ed. David Bell, New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Elo, Satu, Kyngas, Helvi. *The Qualitative Content Analysis Process*, JAN Research Methodology, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. Routledge, 2007.
- Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang, Shannon, Sarah E. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis", *Qualitative Health Research*, Sage Publications Vol. 15, No. 9, November 2005.

Katz, Mark N. *Lessons of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*. Middle East Policy Council, 2016.

Misdaq, Nabi. *Afghanistan: Political Frailty and External Interference*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.

Noor Ahmad Khalidi. *Afghanistan: Demographic Consequences of War: 1978–87*. Central Asian Survey, vol. 10, no. 3, 1991.

Nunes, Mark. *Cyberspaces of Everyday Life*, upress, 2006.

Reinharz, Shulamit, Davidman, Lynn. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York and Oxford University press, 1992.

Rostami, E.P. “Women in Afghanistan: Passive Victims of the burqa or Active Social Participants”. *Development in Practice*, Vol 13, Issue 2-3, 2005.

Segre, Sandro . Introduction to Habermas. University Press of America, 2013.

Tomsen, Peter. *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*. Public Affairs, 2011.

Wahab, Sh. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. New York , 2007.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Internet, Cyberspace and Cyberfeminism with Focus on Afghanistan**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 is titled as Internet, cyberspace and cyberfeminism with the focus on Afghanistan and takes up the challenging task of trying to integrate cyberspace and the penetration of new technologies commonly known as ICT arena formation and communication technologies in a particularist cultural setting, that of Afghanistan and the case of women. Beginning with a background of the evolution of cyberspace, it tries to trace the rise of a new media backed by technology and as part of globalization which suddenly became an important part of most regions of the world. This penetration of the cyberspace, is only one such spread as cyberspace and the Internet unlike the earlier linear developments in history like the spread of agriculture and the Industrial Revolution that transformed the lives of millions and brought about a structural change is different because of the fact that it has brought about a new model that is based on different nodes without a center.

It is this uniqueness of cyberspace that allows for multiple discourses, contradictory and very distant and also invisible to be connected at the same time in a study network that never can be eliminated. It is this permanency of the medium that can be active in one part of the globe when it is disabled in other parts and therefore cannot be totally eliminated it is what gives it an adaptable robustness.

The entry of cyberspace is also one of the aspects of digitization of society where digital modeling of all living and nonbeing entreaties based on their physical structure captured through photographs image and sound on one hand and the DNA of the living beings on the other hand which is then digitized is what makes the digital, the repository of all experiences. Therefore, sound, text and image can be combined and recombined in many forms at a very low cost. Thus the real values of production of digital goods are very cheap. Similarly it also thus allows for a new sharing economy based on certain networks of users and disseminators. It is this networked society,



which Castells calls as a new intervention that has made all the difference. As part of this network society, the blossoming of new networks, their adaptation, contestation and a rapid change and the effect of these networks society at large is a new arena of possibilities

## **2.2 Background**

The emergence of the internet in the 1990's and its role in the alteration of societies and their cultures and sub-cultures cannot be underestimated. Since the usage of the internet and its capabilities were visualized, the internet began to form an almost utopian fantasy.

Internet as usage of the World Wide Web inflated towards the end of the decade and the repercussions of its capabilities were visualized. It showed a new world where anything was possible. Empowerment, convenience, global democracy, communities unfettered by geography, mutable identity, and even the erasure of gender and race was possible in cyberspace.

Actually, prior to internet, computers are a potentially democratic technology. While broadcast communication tends to be unidirectional, computer communication was potentially directional, and individuals can use computers to do word-processing to communicate with other individuals (Kellner 2011: 9).

A decade later various related terms were created and IT (information technology) turned into very quick growing fields (Fuchs 2008: 191). It initially started to communicate very little of information flowing through two-way telecommunication networks in the year 1993, but very rapidly grew into large amount of information by 2007. Since then and along with development and technology, use of internet and notably the cyberspace brought huge changes in the organization, institutions, communication and daily life in most parts of the world and amongst nations.

In the early 1980's, it was the science fiction author William Gibson who coined the term "Cyberspace" and used it for the first time in one of his books. Though this invented in a fictional setting, the term was widely accepted and employed in professional and academic setting too. In this, Gibson pointed out some important aspects of the cyberspace: It is a complex system (interlinking information and hence creating a Web of knowledge); it transcends national boundaries; it is based on a

networking of computers; it is virtual in the sense of creating an artificial reality; it seems to be a new space because it transcends boundaries, but at the same time it seems to constitute a new space that here is compared to a city (Fuchs 2008: 136).

In his book, Gibson states:

“A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system, unthinkable complexity” (Gibson 1984: 61).

The Ottis and Lorents mention that this definition focuses on the human perception of the new environment, but is still very relevant as it illustrates the potential for developing a truly immersive cyberspace experience (Ottis & Lorents 2012: 2).

Cyberspace has particularly had a huge impact on the development of the information society with the purpose of empowerment of all its citizens through access and use of knowledge. Novel terms such as cyberculture, cybersex, cybershop, cyberwar, cybercrime, cyberfeminism, cybersquatting, cyberworld, cyberslacker, cyberpunk, cybersecurity etc. are some examples representing the vast use of internet in everyday life (Goulding & Spacy 2007: 1).

Regarding this issue, Fuchs points that:

“Cyberspace is a relatively addition to a long list of new devices, like radio, TV and newspaper print that activists have used to communicate and raise awareness. Almost a decade later- in the mid-2000s- various terms existed, related to computer and information technology which indicated the growing fields of use” (Fuchs 2008:191).

For instance cyberculture refers to ways of life in cyberspace, or ways of life shaped by cyberspace, where cyberspace is a matrix of embedded practices and representations. It is certainly a contested and evolving discourse. Cyberspace was highly offering opportunities to improve the ways for communities and individuals operating by providing alternative, universal and often cheaper ways of accessing and disseminating information (Castells & Haraway 2007: 25).

Basically, cyber is a prefix used in a growing number of terms to describe new things that are being made possible by the spread of computer or a person, thing, or idea as part of the computer and information age. According to Oxford dictionary, cyber is defined as characteristics of the culture of computers, information technology and virtual reality. The term is taken from “cybernetes” or “cybernetics”, Greek for "steersman" or "governor". It was first used in cybernetics ([searchsoa.techtarget.com](http://searchsoa.techtarget.com)).

The modern study of cybernetics began around the time of the Second World War, bringing together developments in a number of disciplines. The name ‘cybernetics’ was coined by scientist Norbert Wiener to denote the study of ‘teleological mechanisms’ and was popularized through his book ‘Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine’ (Castells & Haraway 2007: 18).

In 1990s, the labor party confronted challenges which were not coming from the other parties, but from new populist forces of the left and the right. In fact the thing that made it possible to effectively organize outside of media and politics was “Cyberspace”.

The delicate change from modern world experienced via people, and politics to a postmodern world experienced via celebrity, culture and cyberspace is an effect of changes not only in terms of communication, but in the accumulated techniques available in everyday life for reading what is communicated ([australianhumanitiesreview.org](http://australianhumanitiesreview.org)).

Cyberspace obviously changes concept of space and time; when communicating through e-mail, one does not need to be in the same place with communication partners but in fact the process works asynchronously. In a chat, one needs temporal co presence but no spatial co presence. The traditional sociological concept of space has been associated with borders and fixity, but the fact that new information and communication technologies transcend borders has caused a crisis of the concept of space as understood in sociology.

### **2.3 Cyberspace: Definitions and Perspectives**

However, over the years, many different definitions have evolved for cyberspace. The US Department of Defense considers cyberspace as:

“A global domain within the information environment consisting of the interdependent network of information technology infrastructures, including the Internet, telecommunications networks, computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers” (nsa.gov).

Giles & Hagestad defined cyberspace as:

“Cyberspace Operations [is the] employment of cyber capabilities where the primary purpose is to achieve objectives in or through cyberspace. Such operations include computer network operations and activities to operate and defend the Global Information Grid” (Giles & Hagestad 2013: 7).

This understanding has three aspects that include the technology component, the human component (who accesses and exploits) and the communication and control component.

Even though there is a wide range of definitions from dictionary answers to state-approved terms to the personal favorites, they mostly agree that the core of cyberspace consists of the globally connected networks of hardware, software and data. Another important aspect which is usually not explicitly stated but can be inferred, is that humans can interface with cyberspace and in doing so, become part of it (Ottis & Lorents 2012: 3-4).

This fact can be easily understood that time is notably absent from most definitions of cyberspace. A counter example of this trend is the concept of cyberspace time, which expands on the cyberspace term (Ottis & Lorents 2012:3).

Cyberspace time is the totality of events involving relationships between humans and computers, between humans through computers, and between computers themselves. However, this does not address the dynamic nature of cyberspace, but seems to encompass the entire history of events in cyberspace in one giant static setting. Therefore, with regard to time the following definition is being offered:

“Cyberspace is a time-dependent set of interconnected information systems and the human users that interact with these systems.” (Ottis & Lorents 2012:3).

Cyberspace consists of a variety of virtual products that some of the main important of them include search engines (Google, Yahoo, Altavista, Bing, Ask.com,

IconFinder), websites (social, political, News, economic, sport, educational, entertainment, online channels, events, Radios), weblog, Emails, EBooks, articles etc and a brief description of these products is presented below.

## **2.4 Cyberspace: The Scope**

In a broader view, cyberspace is ubiquitous in everyday life. This online world of computer network tends to occupy a growing part of the social realities of a lot of people today.

In cyberspace, one is able to search for information, plan trips, read newspapers, articles, communicate with others by making use of e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, Internet phone, discussion boards, mailing lists, video conferencing; one can listen to music and radio, watch videos, order or purchase by auction different goods, write blogs, and contribute to the blogs of others; meet, discuss, learn to know other others, fall in love, become friends, or develop intimate relations, maintain contact with others; protest, access government sites, create campaigns, learn, play games, create knowledge together with others in wikis, share ideas, images, videos; download software and other digital data, and so forth. On the cyberspace, one can also feel being lost, disoriented, dissatisfied, scared, bored, stressed, alienated, lonesome, and so the list goes on (Fuchs 2008: 2).

This realm of electronic medium is allowing users to communicate over vast distances and interact in virtual environments whose spatial characteristics differ considerably from the physical world, environments in which one can, for all intents and purposes, leave physical space and physical bodies behind. Cyberspace has some enduring appeal and conceptual purchase, folding together technologies, uses and users, experiences, stories and images (Castells & Haraway 2007: 4).

Thus cyberspace is used as a proper platform or metonym for updated communication since in this sense it has truly become a global village. Cyberspace is known through various explanations and definitions such as a 'parallel universe', as a 'common mental geography', as forming 'wherever electricity runs with intelligence', 'neologic spasm', as a 'realm of pure information, 'filling like a lake', as a 'virtual' landscape made up of all the information in the world, and as a 'soft hail of electrons' (Castells & Haraway 2007: 31).

Setting aside the question of how the user might actually move in cyberspace- by flying or surfing, or by bouncing, seeping, slithering or strolling- according to Michael Benedikt, there are some interesting ideas in the Principle of Transit, which he defines as: ‘travel between two points in cyberspace should occur phenomenally through all intervening points, no matter how fast and should incur costs to the traveller proportional to some measure of distance’. Benedikt’s concern is with the disappearance of the experience of travel- as an experience in itself- made possible by instantaneous communication. Zapping in a flash between places may be convenient, but it will be too disorienting for us and for others. Moreover, being in multiple places at once, for Benedikt, needs some control, for much the same reasons. He suggests a limit on two or three ‘clones’ of oneself being present in cyberspace at any one time (Castells & Haraway 2007: 39).

## **2.5 Cyberspace, Politic and Conflict**

Groups and individuals excluded from politics and cultural production have been active in the construction of internet technopolitical culture, as well. While early internet culture tended to be male dominated, today women circulate information through media like Women’s E-news ([womensenews.org](http://womensenews.org)) which sends email to thousands of women and collects the material on a website. Therefore, score of feminist organizations outspread internet politics and increasing number of women are actually active in various cyberculture activities. Groups and communities of color, gay and lesbian groups, and many others marginal communities have made their own e-mail lists, websites, and blogs and are now self-empowered force active on cyberspace (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 619).

As another instance, one can look at cyberwar- cyberwarfare- that is an internet-based conflict involving politically motivated attacks on information and information systems. Cyberwar attacks can disable official websites and networks, disrupt or disable essential services, steal or alter classified data, and cripple financial systems. Thus it points out that cyberspace has dark sides, as well ([searchsecurity.techtarget.com](http://searchsecurity.techtarget.com)).

In the realm of war in relation with cyberspace, it is noteworthy to mention that in late 2002 and early 2003, global anti-war movements began to emerge as significant challenges to Bush administration policies against Iraq and the growing threats of

war. Political groups like Moveon ([www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org)), A.N.S.W.E.R. ([www.Internationalanswer.org](http://www.Internationalanswer.org)), and United for Peace and Justice ([www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org)) used cyberspace to spread anti-war information, set up protests, and promote related anti-war activities.

February 15, 2003's unprecedented public demonstration of millions around the world calling for peace in unison revealed that technopolitics help to define, coalesce and extend the contemporary struggle for peace and democracy across the world. Indeed, after using the cyberspace and wireless technologies to set up a range of antiwar demonstrations, activists were continuing to build a kind of "virtual bloc", monitoring and fighting against the aggressive and violent versions of western capitalism being promoted imperialists.

Cyberspace along with techno-politics also played a crucial role in the March 2004 Spanish election, where the socialist party candidate upset the conservative party Prime Minister who predicted to win an easy victory after a series of terrorist bombings killed approximately 200 people days before the election. At first the government insisted that the Basque nationalist separatist group ETA was responsible. However, leaked out information showed that the bombing did not have the signature of ETA, but was more typical of an "al Qaeda" attack and that intelligence agencies themselves pointed in this direction. Consequently, the Spanish people highly used cyberspace to mobilize people for massive anti-government, anti-occupation demonstrations.

These protests denounced the alleged lies by the existing regime concerning the Madrid terrorist attacks and called for the end of Spain's involvement in Bush's "coalition of the willing" which had Spanish military troops occupying Iraq. Spectacle of lying government by media, massive numbers of people demonstrating against it and the use of alternative modes of information and communication developed a spike of support for the anti-government candidate. Millions of young people who had never voted but who felt deeply that Spain's presence in Iraq was wrong went to the polls and finally a political upset with truly global consequences was achieved (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 619).

## **2.6 Cyberspace and Communication**

Cybermalls represent as extension of passive information systems based on advertising, where buyers engage in simple interaction across the net with remote hosts that check supplies, record decisions to purchase, and dispatch orders. Banking and related services are moving online and e-money is appearing with credit card services representing the current modes of exchange. Such online shopping is hardly interactive in the sense of users being part of an active community although the cybermarket does involve linking producer to consumers over the net. Its extension to the actual production process is only a matter of time (Batty 1997: 337).

Thus certain possibilities and spaces that were not available in the pre-internet days have opened up these days by cyberspace. Organizations like the “People like Us” are now able to connect with members, organize meetings and discussions in cyberspace that circumvent existing laws that require permission for public assembly (Baber & Khondker 2002: 135).

“The connection of cybernetics and space points out that cyberspace is a technological space produced by human beings “social space” (Fuchs 2008: 147).

In addition to the possibilities for the creation of networks of communities or virtual communities of various kinds, the cyberspace represents a technology that fuses many domains such as economic, communicative, cultural, entertainment, politics etc., in such a manner that these functions cannot be disaggregated. This bundling together of functions is one of the unique characteristics of the Internet and cyberspace specific social consequences. Internet technology with its aggregated bundling of functions cannot be restricted in a meaningful way without the possible curtailment of possibilities that may affect other domains.

As such, the promotion of this technology invariably promotes other functions that may not necessarily be perceived as desirable by the state. In addition to the bundled nature of functions, the internet, as Poster has argued, it is also unique technology because of its inherently interactive nature. Due to this interactivity, the internet is the case with many other communication technologies. Interaction with the internet plays a fundamental role in its evolution. Hence, it would be short-sighted of some states or



governments controlling over the use of cyberspace since it has been a vast technology (Baber & Khondker 2002: 141).

Cyberspace is a type of social space where communication is technologically mediated and that is organized on a global time-space scale. Its subsystems are specific virtual communities, that is, topic- and interest-oriented social systems that make use of specific Internet applications (such as newsgroups, chats, mailing lists, ICQ , peer-to-peer technologies etc.) in order to establish communication that is globally stretched in time-space. A virtual community is not a space that is constituted by shared values, identities, or traditions but a shared interest in certain issues and communication oriented on these topics. Cyberspace does not mark the end of space but the acceleration of communication and the extension of some social systems to a global scale (Fuchs 2008:148). Therefore, cyberspace may be a vehicle for new forms of alternative radio, television, film, art, and every form of culture as well as information and print material. New multimedia technologies are already visible on different web sites (Kellner 2011:11).

Cyberspace has been a communication system where everyone is a sender and receiver and greatly proliferate the range and diversity of voices which undoubtedly gives a new dimension of the concept of information and cultural overload. It was amazing that the cyberspace for large number was deco modified and was becoming more and more decentralized and open to more and more voices and groups.

## **2.7 Cyberspace and the Virtual Space**

The connection of cybernetics and space points out that cyberspace is a technological space produced by human beings. As such, cyberculture study is a complex field (or post-field) which not only makes use of diverse academic traditions and theoretical perspectives, but also deploys a diversity of research methods and approaches. As another instance we can look at cyberwar or cyberwarfare that is internet-based conflict involving politically motivated attacks on information and information systems. It is interesting to mention that many feminists have now established websites, mailing lists, and other form of cyber communication to circulate their struggles (Castells & Haraway 2007:10).

In other word, people establishing websites means that they are establishing their own virtual space. Interactivity between remote computers defines cyberspace. The move from nodes to nets for cyberspace is created through communications, connecting humans. In cyber place the spaces created do not map in any one-to-one relation onto real places, but cyberspace is particularly not imagined space. There is global time, belonging to the multimedia, to cyberspace, increasingly dominating the local time-frame of cities and neighborhoods that leads to a talk of substituting the term “global” by “glocal”, a concatenation of the words local and global. This emerges from the idea that the local has become global and the global, local. Such a deconstruction of the relationship with the world is not without relevant consequences of the relationship among the citizens themselves (Virilio 1995:2).

According to the distinguished media theorist from Swinburne University, Darren Tofts, Cyberspace is the defining figure for a sensibility produced by mediated cultures (Darren Tofts, 15). In his experience cyberspace invokes a tantalizing abstraction, the state of incorporeally, of disembodied immersion in ‘space’ that has no co-ordinates in actual space ([australianhumanitiesreview.org](http://australianhumanitiesreview.org)).

The cyberspace constitutes a dynamic and complex space in which people can construct and experiment with identity, culture and social practices. It also makes more information available to greater number of people in easier way and from a wider array of sources than any instrument of information and communication in history (Kellner 2009: 18).

While reviewing cyberspace, it is remarkable to know that spaces are constructed not just through the objects and boundaries that surround human and the habitual ways which human beings conceive of them, but through interaction with others who are operating in the ‘same’ space. Hollaway and Valentine theorize that young people build their identities by travelling across three main social spaces: home, school and cyberspace. And so this analysis will begin with the home space, and then consider the school space, examining how the physical, social and embodied aspects of these spaces interact with what we have come to call ‘cyberspace’(Jones 2010: 154).

According to Michael Benedikt, distinguished professor of Texas University, there are some guiding principles for the design and building of cyberspace; principles aimed to produce usable, livable, but also magical worlds. These principles concern a

number of key issues; the dimensions of space and cyberspace, how to visualize cyberspace, how to distinguish different 'data objects' in cyberspace, how 'things' will 'look' there, how we will find them, and so on (Jones 2010: 21).

The seven key principles of cyberspace design and build, according to Benedikt are:

- 1- The Principle of Exclusion – two things cannot be in the same place at the same time;
- 2- The Principle of Maximal Exclusion – rules to minimize violations of the first principle, for example, over how 'big' and 'dense' cyberspace can become;
- 3- The Principle of Indifference – 'life goes on whether or not you are there', cyberspace has an existence independent of users;
- 4- The Principle of Scale – the relationship between the amount of information in space and the amount of space in space;
- 5- The Principle of Transit – even though we may move instantaneously, travel as an experience is important, as is navigation;
- 6- The Principle of Personal Visibility – users in cyberspace should be seen, at some minimal level, by other users (but we should also be free to choose who is visible or invisible to us);
- 7- The Principle of Commonality – there needs to be an objective, shared social 'reality' in cyberspace, so that people see and hear the same things (at least partially) (Castells & Haraway 2007: 22).

Austrian-born British philosopher Karl Popper (1902 – 98) proposed the idea of the existence of three 'worlds': World 1, the world of physical objects, events and biological entities; World 2, the world of mental events and objects; World 3, the world of products of the human mind, or abstract objects (theories, formulae, learning). He proposed that World 3 is partly autonomous from the other two, and that changes in World 3 can impact on Worlds 1 and 2. Today, World 3 is sometimes used to talk about cyberspace as an emblematic abstract 'mind-space' (Castells & Haraway 2007: 33).

## 2.8 Cyberspace: Virtual or Real Geography

Michael Batty- British urban planner and geographer and Professor of University College London (UCL), in his article Virtual Geography says that real geographies are being changed through virtual communications while virtual geographies are being invented over the net that have little or no resemblance to the geography of reality. In fact, although real and fictional worlds were first developed inside the computer, these worlds are themselves emerging from the net itself.

This is William Gibson's science fiction of the near future: Cyberspace: "a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system, unthinkable complexity. Lines of light in the non-space of the mind like clusters and constellation of data and city lights receding' virtual geography" (Gibson 1984: 51).

Michael Batty continues to define the reality and its variants as;

- Fiction;
- Abstraction, and
- Vitality.

He declares that the central distinction that everyone poses it between reality and fiction which once embedded within computers and across networks we define as 'virtual reality' ((Batty 1997: 338).

He believes that there are clear differences between geography inside computers and geography inside computer networks. In fact, he claims that, there is a new geography of everywhere that is being created by the very acts of embodying computation within networks and within the material infrastructure of society itself. Virtual geography is therefore the study of place as ethereal space, its processes inside computers, and the ways in which this space inside computers is changing material place outside computers (Batty 1997: 338).

The kind of geography that is emerging in this cyberspace is one that in its clearest form, mirrors local communities or interest groups linked through some common purpose as virtual communities, virtual self-help groups, groups that talk and

act across the net, informally, expediently, embodied in net- action, as ephemeral as ‘internet relay chat’ to formal research groups such as those based on professional communication amongst peers involving frequently asked questions, preprints of articles, announcements of meeting in cyberspace as well as real place.

This is the ultimate quest of cyberspace use in that the net is used as a medium for the sharing of intellects in the pursuit of common goals or the resolution of common problems. It involves highly-organized decision- making, appropriate structures for relevant software, data access and use, and innovative ways of personal consensus building that have hitherto not been widely developed in society- at- large. The net thus provides new structure to action which involves a truly different development of institution of sociality (Sherry 1996: 27).

But cyberplace consists of all the wires that comprise the networks that are being embedded into human-made structures such as roads and buildings. It extends to the material objects that are used to support this infrastructure such as machines for production, consumption and movements that are now quickly becoming a mix of the digital and the analogue (Batty 1997: 337).

## **2.9 Cyberspace and Technology**

Formerly regarded as mobile telephones, these devices can now be increasingly compared to microcomputers, remote controls, and collective social devices. Moreover, every shift in the meaning of an interface requires a reconceptualization of the type of social relationships and spaces it mediates. Because mobile devices create a more dynamic relationship with the internet, embedding it in outdoor, everyday activities so that it can no longer be addressed the disconnection between physical and digital spaces.

Hybrid spaces are mobile spaces, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the internet and other users. The possibility of an “always-on” connection when one moves through a city transforms experience of space by enfolding remote context inside the present context. This connection is related both to social interactions and to connections to the information space that is the internet and cyberspace.

Mobile devices are all types of mobile technologies that promote remote and local multipersonal communication and connection to the Internet, allowing users to exchange information while moving through urban spaces. Location- based applications also create a new way of moving through a city and interacting with other users. In this new spatial perception, cell phones should be regarded as not only mobile telephones- devices enabled to transmit voice in two- way communication situations- but also as portable microcomputers embedded in public spaces (Silva 2006: 759-762).

Mobile spaces are networked social spaces defined by the use of portable interfaces as the nodes of the network. The idea of mobile social networks and the use of cell phones as collective communication devices have been observed in countries such as Japan, the Philippines, Finland and china (Rheingold 2000: 20). One the most popular cases of macro coordination via mobile technologies occurred around the downfall of Philippine President, Estrada in 2001.

After some senators associated with the President succeeded in stopping the President's impeachment process, opposition leaders started to broadcast text messages to call citizens to gather. In 75 minutes after the failed impeachment, more than 20,000 people converged on Edsa, Manila's central through fare. "The rapid assembly of the anti – Estrada crowd was a hallmark of early smart mob technology, and the millions of text messages exchanged by the demonstrators in 2001 was, by all accounts, a key to the crowd's esprit de corps"( Rheingold 2000: 160).

Similarly, a phenomenon called flash mobs has been observed in San Francisco, London, and Berlin. Flash mobs are "dozens or even hundreds of people with cell phones that gather suddenly, perform some specific but innocuous act, and then promptly scatter" (Silva 2006: 759-762).

## **2.10 Cyberspace: The Dark Side**

The cyberspace also carries a dark side too. The very first dark side of the cyberspace could be the 'Hackers' who creatively reconstructed the internet, programs, and code that comforts subscription of research material, communication, and construction of communities. The term 'hacker' initially meant someone who made creative innovation in computer system to facilitate the exchange of information

and construction of new communities. However, largely through corporate, state, and media co-optation of the term, 'hacking' became a mode of 'terrorism' whereby malicious computer nerds either illegally invade and disrupt closed computer system or proliferate computer codes known as viruses and worms that attempt to disable computers and networks.

Another hacker action is the monitoring and exploitation for social gain of the booming wireless, wide-area internet market (called Wi-Fi, WAN, or WLAN). Wi-Fi, besides offering institutions, corporation, and homes the luxury of internet connectivity and organizational access for any and all users within the area covered by the local network and also potentially offers such freedoms to nearby neighbours and wireless pedestrians if such networks are not made secure. In fact, as then acting U.S cybersecurity Czar Richard Clarke noted in December 2002, an astounding number of Wi-Fi networks are unprotected and available for hacking. This led the office of homeland security to label wireless networking a terrorist threat (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 619).

Part of what the government is reacting to is the activist technique of "wardriving," in which a hacker drives through a community equipped with a basic wireless antenna and computer searching for network access nodes ([www.azwardriving.com](http://www.azwardriving.com)).

Many hackers had been driving around Washington, D.C., thereby gaining valuable federal information and server access, prompting the government contractor Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to begin monitoring drive-by hacks in the summer of 2002 (Poulsen 2004:1).

Thus, wireless network hackers are often deploying their skills toward developing a database of free 'networks' that represents real opportunities for local communities to share connections and corporate fees. Such free nets represent inclusive resources that are developed by communities for their own needs and involve values like cordiality and culture, education, economic equality, and sustainability that have been generally found to be progressive hallmarks of online communities.(Schuler 1996: 312-313).

Hactivists are also directly involved in the immediate political battles played out around the dynamically globalized world. Hactivists such as The Mixer, from Germany who authored the program 'Tribe Flood' net that shut down the websites for the 'World Economic Forum' in January 2002, routinely use their hacking skills to cause disruption of governmental and corporate presences online. On July 12, 2002, the homepage for the 'USA Today' website was hacked and altered content was presented to the public, leaving 'USA Today' to join such other media magnets as the 'New York Times' and 'Yahoo!' as the corporate victims of a media hack (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 619).

In February 2003, immediately following the destruction of the 'Space Shuttle Colombia', a group calling themselves 'Trippin Smurfs' hacked NASA's servers for the third time in three months. In each case, security was compromised and the web servers were defaced with anti-war political messages. Another victim of hacks is the 'Recording Industry Association of America' (RIAA) who because of its attempt to legislate P2P (Peer to Peer) music trading has become anathema to internet hactivists. A sixth attack upon the RIAA website in January 2003 posted bogus press releases and even provided music files for free downloading. Indeed, hactivist programs to share music, film, television and other media files have driven the culture industries into offensive movements against the techno culture that are currently being played out in the media, courts and government (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 619).

Cyberspace has always been characterized by change. But almost there has been a major shift in the constitution of cyberspace within the last several years with the rise of social networking, the shift to cloud computing, and the rapid emergence of mobile forms of connectivity.

Although each of these developments are unique, together they have the combined effect of taking users out of an older communications paradigm and into new ones, governed by different rules, norms, and principles. Likewise, mobile connectivity and social networking have given us an instant awareness of each other's thoughts, habits, and activities, while entrusting a massive and unprecedented amount of personally identifiable data to third parties. Our personal lives have been turned inside-out with the result that we can be tracked in time and space with a degree of precision all by our own consent. Mobile devices and their



‘apps’ are corralling into walled gardens controlled by private companies with potential repercussions for the positive networking effects of a borderless Internet (Deibert 2012: 263).

Cybercrime has been a part of cyberspace since the origins of the internet. However, its growth and complexity has become explosive in recent years. The economy of cybercrime has morphed from small and isolated acts undertaken by lone ‘basement’ criminals to a diversified, segmented and highly professionalized transnational enterprise worth billions annually. Security companies now routinely receive new samples of malicious software on the order of tens of thousands each day. Security operations centres that maintain network security for banks and enterprises face millions of cyber-crime incidents each week (Deibert 2012: 265).

The growth of cyber-crime is thus much more than a persistent nuisance. It has become a highly ranked risk factor for governments and businesses. The consequences of this exploding threat vector are going to be numerous and wide-ranging, leading to pressures for greater state regulation and intervention. Not surprisingly a huge industrial sector has sprouted that serves these growing pressures to secure cyberspace, a market now estimated to be on the order of tens of billions of dollars annually (Deibert 2012: 270).

Citizen Lab and its partners have uncovered over the years that many of the countries that censor the internet rely on products and services developed by western manufacturers; ‘Smart Filter’ in Iran in 2005, ‘Fortinet’ in Burma in 2006, ‘Websense’ in Yemen, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates in 2008 and 2009. A more recent Citizen Lab report identified that devices manufactured by ‘Blue Coat’ were being used in Burma and also Syria, helping to identify particular types of communication traffic associated with pro-democracy activists—in the context of what many consider to be crimes against humanity occurring in that country.

Here it is important to remind that in spite of the threats, cyberspace runs well and largely without persistent disruption. On a technical level, this efficiency is founded on open and distributed networks of local engineers who share information as peers in a community of practice that has its roots in the University system. Instead of countermanding that, ways to amplifying have to be thought, however, cyberspace is day by day continuing to evolve into a global commons that empowers individuals

through access to information, freedom of speech and association. Developing models of cyber security that deal with the dark side along with preserving our highest aspirations as citizens, is now an urgent imperative on a planetary scale (Deibert 2012: 274).

## **2.11 Cyberspace, Internet and Network**

### **2.11.1 Search Engine**

Search engines are programs that search documents for specified keywords and return a list of the documents where the keywords were found. Actually a search engine is a general class of programs; however, the term is often used to specifically describe systems like Google, Bing and Yahoo! enabling users to search for documents on the World Wide Web. On the Internet, a search engine is a coordinated set of programs that includes a spider (also called a "crawler" or a "bot") that goes to every page or representative pages on every Web site that wants to be searchable and reads it, using hypertext links on each page to discover and read a site's other pages (webopedia.com).

### **2.11.2 Website**

A Website is a related collection of World Wide Web (WWW) files that includes a beginning file called a home page. A company or an individual tells how to get to their Website by giving the address of their home page (searchsoa.techtarget.com).

From the home page, one can get to all the other pages on the site. For example, the Website for IBM has the home page address of <http://www.ibm.com>. (The home page address actually includes a specific file name like `index.html` but, as in IBM's case, when a standard default name is set up, users don't have to enter the file name.)

IBM's home page address leads to thousands of pages. But a Website can also be just a few pages. A synonym and less frequently used term for Website is 'Web presence.' That term seems to better express the idea that a site is not tied to specific geographic location, but is 'somewhere in cyberspace'. However, Website seems to be used much more frequently (searchsoa.techtarget.com).

### **2.11.3 Weblog**

Blogs, short for “Web logs,” are partly successful because they are relatively easy to create and maintain- even for non-technical web users. Combining the hypertext of Webpages, the multi-user discussion of message boards and list serves, and the mass syndication ability of RSS and Atom platforms (as well as e-mail), blogs are popular because they represent the next evolution of web- based experience that is connecting a range of new media. If the World Wide Web managed to form a global network of interlocking, informative websites, blogs make the idea of the dynamic network of on-going debate, dialogue and commentary come alive both on and offline and so emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree (Kahn & Kellner 2005: 620).

A Weblog, sometimes written as web log, generally, it is a diary of information, specific topics or opinions. A blog author (blogger) links to stories or other websites with relevant and interesting information. These links are typically segregated according to the blog's topic or subtopic and written in reverse chronological order, meaning that the most current links display at the top of the blog's home page. Another major characteristic of blogs is the ease of use to post. Prior to blogs, one needs to understand Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) to produce a website or otherwise involve a back-end production team. Blogs opened up online publishing to the masses (techopedia.com).

One results of bloggers' fascination with networks of links has been the sub cultural phenomenon known as Google Bombing. Documented in early 2002, it was revealed that the popular search engine Google had a special affinity for blogs because of its tendency to favor highly linked, recently updated Web content in its site ranking system. With this in mind, bloggers began campaigns to get large numbers of fellow bloggers to post links to specific posting designed to include the desirable keywords that Google users might normally search.

Blogging has also become important within education circles such as (www.ebn.weblogger.com), and people are forming university blogging networks (blogs.law.harvard.edu) just as they previously created city-wide blogging portals like (www.nycbloggers.com) (Durham & Kellner 2009: 718).

In our study, the introduction of web diaries (web logs) from 2004 has offered a large and free domain of public expression. There are more than 4,000 web diaries in Farsi by which Afghan women bloggers from various walks of life defy the wishes of the ruling clerics.

#### **2.11.4 Email**

Email, short for ‘electronic mail’ is one of the most widely used features of the cyberspace, along with the web.

#### **2.11.5 Ebook**

Ebook or ‘Electronic-book’ is the electronic counterpart of a printed book, which can be viewed on a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone, tablet or Ebook reader (e-reader) (pcmag.com).

### **2.12 Women’s Networking and Access to Information**

Traditionally, the women's movement has made extensive use of networking. The costs of traditional forms of networking can be a problem, but electronic communication offers women a dynamic, efficient and rapid means of contact. The Internet thus makes it possible for women all over world to participate in virtual communities and to converse and share news, information, experience, knowledge, support and advice. This could enhance women's full and equal participation in all aspects of society. Although the negative aspects of the Internet for women are often emphasized, feminist research has also celebrated the positive aspects of the Internet, viewing it as a complimentary means of communication alongside the telephone, fax and even letter writing. As Gittler notes,

“Information and communications have always played a vital role in the global women's movement. Electronic communications are facilitating women's networking and advocacy in ways not previously possible” (Gittler 1999: 88).

It is even argued that the Internet has advantages over and above these more conventional means of contact because of its power to connect women all over the globe in a matter of minutes, women who would probably never have the opportunity to meet anywhere apart from in cyberspace. According to some observers, the Internet

has brought us to "a new age of discovery by women about women" as women with very different lives can be in contact.

An action research project in Australia, for example, established an electronic discussion group which linked women in rural and urban areas, giving rural women information they would otherwise have had difficulty accessing and giving women in urban areas the perspective of those in rural districts. The Internet thus creates opportunities for dialogue, exposing women to the issues and perspectives of other women living and working thousands of miles away. As Bahdi suggests, "the Internet creates the possibility for an expanded dialogue between women"(Bahdi 2000: 87).

The Internet therefore enables campaigns to be mobilized, information and knowledge to be disseminated and personal experiences to be shared. Email, for example, can help female users overcome geographic and social isolation. As one respondent to the Loughborough study argued, women are generally less mobile than men but the Internet can be accessed from home, opening up the possibility of virtual contacts and making vital information accessible. Bahdi suggests that one of the main ways in which the Internet empowers women is by giving them enhanced access to information about their rights. The respondents to the Loughborough study suggested that, through the Internet, information could be found on women's activities that were not reported in the mainstream media. Thus, the Internet reduces isolation and enables women to keep informed of activities and issues of which they might otherwise be unaware (Bahdi 2000: 869-897).

The Internet also enables women to participate in the Information Society in another way. Publishing, traditionally was a 'Gentleman's profession', has it has now become much more accessible to women via the World Wide Web. The Internet offers women the opportunity to express themselves freely and "creates a public space for women's interests".

Women can use Internet publishing tools to develop their own publishing and media activities on the networks and, in contrast to the mainstream media, create gender-sensitive media products. These alternative communications outside the conventional media have the potential to counteract discrimination and stereotyping. Using Internet technology, therefore, women have created and used alternative communication channels to support their campaigning efforts, defend their rights,

disseminate their own forms of representation and question dominant models of mainstream culture.

It is the internet that has brought women's issues to the attention of the mainstream, If the international community is slow to respond to women's global disadvantage largely because of the exclusion of women's voices from the public world, then the Internet is helping to bring women's voices into public space (Bahdi 2000: 189).

Although the Internet began as an instrument of the powerful, as Bahdi argues, the marginalized are now harnessing the technology to promote diverse causes. Women and feminists have not been slow to recognize the potential power of the Internet for information dissemination, gathering and sharing and for connecting with like-minded people in the pursuit of common objectives.

There are still some formidable barriers to overcome in increasing women's use of the Internet and ensuring that they participate fully in the Information Society. Some of the more obvious problems have been discussed above but there are other quite fundamental issues to address, such as the question of language. Web site design can also be a factor rendering some Internet content inaccessible to a large proportion of women worldwide.

Despite the difficulties, women must engage with the technology now if they are to have a say in shaping the Information Society. Women have been excluded from important aspects of society and governance for many centuries; information society technologies could reinforce that marginalization if women do not master the technology and speak out about the future of the Information Society. Although there are concerns about commercialism, explicit, misogynist content and the power of the Internet to homogenize, on balance it is probably more dangerous for women to be excluded altogether than to try to work within a male-dominated electronic environment (Goulding & Spacy 2007: 1).

### **2.13 Constraints and Opportunities**

A variety of research reports and surveys throughout the 1990s and early years of the 21st century documented the digital gender divide, discussed the difficulties faced

by women in accessing the Internet and also explored subtle differences in male and female use of the technology.

The ultimate aim of the information society is the empowerment of all its citizens through access to and use of knowledge, but there is concern that some people, including women, are more distant than others from the opportunities presented by the changes being wrought by ICTs. Thus, although the Internet has been hailed as an emancipating and democratizing force, it is not gender-neutral and it has been suggested that the information society is becoming increasingly divided into information 'haves' and 'have nots' with women, particularly immigrant women, minority women, women with disabilities, women in poverty and older women lacking the information resources available to others (Houdart 1997: 12).

In contrast to this perspective, other commentators have drawn attention to the potentially liberating nature of the internet for women (Bahdi 2000: 86), arguing that through (information and communications technology) ICT women have the opportunity to network on a global scale and become involved in society and community development in new ways.

#### **2.13.1 Lack of Confidence**

The relationship between gender and computers has been much researched. It is argued that a variety of forces and pressures mean that women's relationship to ICT is often characterized as 'problematic'. Social stereotyping, for example, can give girls the impression that computers are not for them whilst negative school experiences can discourage female pupils from pursuing an interest in computers. Forces such as these can lead women to feeling under-confident and reluctant to use ICT. In a 1996 study of female university students, Ford and Miller found that whilst the men in their sample enjoyed "browsing around the Internet", the women seemed "relatively disenchanted with the Internet, generally feeling themselves unable to find their way around effectively" (Ford and Miller 1996: 183-192). Although this study is now some years old, the issue of under confidence or reluctance to engage with technology can still be a problem for women, especially when their experiences of using the Internet is a negative or damaging one due to the problem of 'flaming' and/or computer pornography.

### **2.13.2 Negative Experiences of the Internet**

The literature identifies a number of facets of Internet culture that may deter women from going online including male monopolization of discussion lists and bulletin boards and the flaming and harassment of female users by male users.

Dale Spender devotes a whole chapter to the "male menace on the superhighway" in her book giving an overview of issues surrounding women and the Internet. Spender's earlier works on *Man-made Language* and *Invisible Women* are well known and in *Nattering on the net* she extends her argument that men dominate both linguistically and in conversation, to a study of male and female interaction on the Web. She asserts that, if anything, male domination is worse in cyberspace than in the real world (Spender 1995: 73).

The results of study support Spender's argument. She published the results of a participant count on three feminist newsgroups. Since feminist issues were not expected to be of great interest to male Internet users, female participation was expected to be overwhelming. It was found, though, that males dominated even on these female-oriented lists - up to 80% of posting were from men. This led study to conclude that on "almost any open network, men monopolize the talk". Another study of gender differences in computer-mediated communications found that on the exceptional occasions that women did post more messages than men on a list, the men became hostile and angry, threatening to unsubscribe from the list because they felt they were being silenced (Spender 1995: 85).

### **2.13.3 Potential of the Internet for Women**

As we have seen, women engage with the Information Society through the Internet in a variety of contexts (at home, through public access points and at work) and for a variety of reasons (leisure, citizen participation, work and consumerism). There is, however, a tendency to emphasize the barriers that women face which prevent them participating fully in the Information Society without acknowledging that the Internet can offer women the opportunity to become involved in new ways, empowering groups which have been under-represented in the past. Through the Internet, women can express themselves anonymously.



## 2.14 Cyberfeminism

The joint link between the two phrases of "Feminism" and "Cyber" has made a very significant figure in the history of feminism (s) and electronic Medias. Feminism as beyond national, historical and modern movement is known for carrying equality and freedom for women and deals with the active participation of women in local, national and cross-border networks. Cyber-feminism has the capacity to portray the historical and philosophical methods of communicating in feminism with modern feminist projects and networks in daily life and experiences of women, regardless of age, race, class and economic differences. Social networks are channels which through them a large number of people around the world obtain the majority of the information therefore how women draw a path and contents of these networks are essentially crucial. Feminism has gained an international audience and to be capable of making an impact on the life and living situation, these audiences must be informed on their life and history. Cyber feminism could potentially be a gate for participation of more people to debates the activities of feminism. As already a huge content of information is accessible through networks and data keep increasing on subject it must pointed out that the more politically weighted these data to and deal with solutions, activities and daily experience they are more likely to communicate and motivate people to help ([washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com)).

Knowledge, experience and feminist analysis and solutions that have already been collected are essential for the continuation of cyber-feminists activities. If the goal is to create a feminist politics on the network and the empowerment of women, so to meet and protest against the situations, new technology and organizations, cyber feminists must have the re-interpretation of analysis, criticism and strategies of feminism experiences.

Cyber-feminism was created in West in early 1990s as a reaction against the Tech culture. This view challenged the gender hierarchy created by technology and brought down the differences between men and women. Cyber-feminism sought to undermine the power structure and highlight and cherish the ability, creativity, myths and symbols of women in technology. In cyber feminism, women are not passive victims but active agents in building their identity and destiny. They encouraged women who had a fear of technology to overcome their fears.

The perspectives of cyberfeminism have been the rays of hope amongst feminists and it can discuss complicated areas technologically and provide a new field for women. Of course there are a lots of technology expectation among cyber feminists. Cyber-feminists argue that virtual space is a gender free space and one can have activities on it regardless of age, gender, race, economic class or having a fixed position as someone "real".

It is worthy to note that new media's are still old framed and economic, cultural and political fields are based on old beliefs and are deeply gender oriented and highly racists. Cyberspace unlike the beliefs of many idealistic cannot remove the hierarchy by free exchange of information and spontaneously. The network also is not a non-sexual utopia and currently works with the social point of view considering the body, gender, age, economics, social class and race. Considering the undeniable and progressive work of women in inventions and enhancement of technology, today's networks are still used as a tool for military and male dominant service. Based on the optimistic view of cyber-feminists, IT acts as a bridge between genders. But pillars of power dominate the cyberspace as it does in the physical space.

Cyberspace has created a position for women but the old patriarchal forces still hold the key to this technology. As long as internet remains the free border, it can provide women with more choices and options and activated their potential.

The pioneer of cyber feminism, 'Sadie Plant, Susan Luckman, Donna Haraway, Anna Munster', had an ideal vision of cyberspace where gender inequalities is greatly reduced. They say that with more connected people on internet, the style of writing which was popular before the era of social networks has changed since it allows the user to experience the freedom of speech themselves regardless of their gender. Although the initial cyber feminists including Plant talked more about the radical political ideologies, especially the fact that since women can directly use Internet, therefore they must be fully qualified in the technical field. But reasoning of Luckman and Munster is that this process will at best decrease the complicated IT to a tool and it ignores the historical fields of manufacturing and implementation.

Cyber feminists believe that with intelligence, positivity and diplomacy and using the wisdom of the past struggles, they can create a policy avoid of disruptive and

blunt aim at deconstructing the patriarchal conditions that currently produce the law, languages, pictures and network structures (Wilding1998: 46-59).

Sadie Plant dealt with the dependencies between digital networking and solidarity among women. She compared to the metaphor of weaving to women's relationship with computers and cyberspace. Plant has collected a long history of women as inventors, manufacturers and operators of personal computers. This date holds a meaning and importance for Plant since she believed the computer networking is a base for something natural women has been doing traditionally (Consalvo 2012: 2).

Enthusiasts for women intellectual, often point out that the relationship between networks and women is in fact a myth binding just like the Greek goddess 'Arachne'\*.

Therefore, the world's spread's network for cyber feminism has metaphorically interpret into the myth and the link between home computers and females has extended to the point that cyberspace turned into a spiritual space.

Cyber feminism simultaneously stands against men who want to control it and also fight with re organization of the world against women through a technology that aims at pressurizing and dominating them. Cyber feminism deals with empowering. Some women start using the Web to show themselves. Through personal blogs and chat rooms, these women could debate and discuss on issues such as identity, racism, university, social relationships and sexual issues from their own perspectives.

#### **2.14.1 Cyberfeminism in Afghanistan**

In Afghanistan, a presence of women in cyberspaces is the first indicators of cyber feminism. The cooperative movement within cyberspace is a combination of spontaneously created feminist groups without a central leadership in various fields of economy, nation, culture, occupation and politics amongst the women in over eight states of the country. Accompanied by a large volume of contents, lectures, exhibitions and workshops aimed at women oriented topics, women are very much visible in cyberspace.

Spreading knowledge on women through the passage of history, feminism models for influencing in education and training, women hygienic and the discussion about

how to organize and support the feminism project networks in country. The great achievement of these collaborations includes trust, friendship, deeper understanding of each other and differences, increasing tolerance towards differences, ability to lead a discussion on controversial issues without causing any dysfunction within the groups and mutual education about the women issues. These are the main concerns of these so-called cyber feminists in Afghanistan.

Digital field has become a way for women to show their power of production of ideas without any male dominance. Internet has given women a speaker for communication; women who didn't have a chance to stand behind a speaker and bring their voice to men and to the society. The cyberspace has freed them from the judgments based on the feminine body. Freedom of judgments which determined what kind or how much power they should have in the society.

Women find a chance to be seen for their thoughts and mind only. The cyberspace gives some women the choice to select their geographic workplace and creates home based job and opportunities to create balance and coordinate the tasks while they are raising children -of course that does not mean raising children is mothers duty only but an alternate solution when its mothers turn to take care of their children- also internet provide more opportunities for women to be the manager and run the business from home.

Cyberspace enables women to create a network and publish information for each other to exchange the research and scientific materials, also for political activity that encourage social changes. But all cyber feminism tools are linked to women with income, education and economic foundations and also sufficient lines of electricity and telephone access to the Internet to makes it possible.

Although now in Afghanistan, more women can access to a computer and internet especially via their Smart phones but even these women face problems sometimes, like the electricity problem in Afghanistan as some villages are still under the control of the Taliban and there are limited hours of electricity for them. Despite these obstacles, many women fascinated by it and use the internet for organization. In Afghanistan, women exchange their ideas and opinions via weblogs and Facebook online and more in the interior domain of Afghanistan. Women even interpret religious text book and challenge the tradition which doomed them to be submissive.

In any case, it is important to mention that in this research and in larger scale women who have access to computers generally belong to upper level of society and are educated. Since most of the information online is in English while most of the women in developing countries, especially in the Middle East, are not familiar with any other language but their mother tongue mainly due to economic pressure and facilities shortage, their command over English is limited.

The existence of feminine social networks itself cannot challenge the current situation spontaneously, though it may for a short time through scattered debates but that energy needs to be parallel with political theory and practice. The main objective of cyber feminist's is giving more solidarity to these creative, talented, reckless and smart women author for the exposure of new body, language and intellect through cyberspace. Currently in Afghanistan, there is a little unity among academic, artists and cultural feminists but weblogs and Facebook among all the existing social networks could manage to create a link between the various female users with the aim of exchanging information about the conditions of work and life. Such function in time definitely can combine the flawless vision and politics of cyber feminism.

Butler stated that unlike the social environment in which language can rely on other physical aspect of body and convey meaning along with visual and body language in cyberspace there is no other power but the language and discourse as a compelling force to shape the facts (Butler 2009: 18).

In the online environment of Afghanistan written language is very common. Women chose written style of communication due to the fear of Taliban and some other traditional restriction. Cyberspace is now known as the new site of resistance especially for those victimized people who can now step beyond physical, cultural and social prejudices.

Planet reasons that women are drawn to internet as it makes male dominance on them totally unstable; cyberspace is beyond men's reach. Cyberspace removed the male identity (Dubrovsky & others 1986: 157). Donna Harvey says: "you need not to be a social cyber feminist from west, young or educated to be able to use your position to explore and crack the patriarch hegemony, all you need is internet access to share your story and be a part of this cyber world" (Dubrovsky & others 1986: 187).

## **2.15 Cyberspace, Internet and Telecommunication in Afghanistan**

In late 2001, after the establishment of the interim government, Afghanistan stepped into new horizons of political and socio-economic rehabilitation and reconstruction. The subsequent transitional and the elected Afghan government introduced new legislations which assisted private companies to make investments in the country and provide various services including telecommunications and ICT services for the people of Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) was the first among the sectorial government entities in Afghanistan to design new strategies and policies, enabling private sector to make huge investment in the telecommunication and IT sectors. In 2009, MCIT established the first Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT) in Afghanistan and it was officially named as (AFCERT). The mandate of AFCERT was to fight against cyber threats and crimes and provide awareness and solutions on cyber security to the government and private sector ([mcit.gov.af](http://mcit.gov.af)).

The use of information and communication technologies has been spreading rapidly in Afghanistan and ICTs are playing important roles in all aspects of their lives. Alongside the public sector, entities that provide services in critical infrastructure sectors like energy, health, aviation, communication and financial services have also been heavily using information and communication systems. These systems improve the quality and the speed of the services delivery - thus helping organizations work more productively, efficiently and contributing to the improvement of living standards.

As their public sector organizations use ICTs to provide services at an increasing rate, it has become an important aspect of our national security and competitiveness to ensure the security of information and communication technologies.

Internet in Afghanistan began in 2001-02 after the Karzai administration took over office in Kabul. It was banned prior to 2002 because the previous Taliban government felt that it broadcast obscene, immoral, and anti-Islam material, and because the few internet users at the time could not be easily monitored as they obtained their telephone lines from neighbouring Pakistan ([usaid.gov](http://usaid.gov)).

The current government recognizes the internet as an important source of growth and development for the country, believing that ICT can create opportunities for disadvantaged groups and improve the access of the rural poor to markets.

It has rapidly expanded after the Karzai administration took over in late 2001, and has embarked on wireless companies, internet, radio stations and television channels. The Afghan government signed a \$64.5 agreement in 2006 with China's ZTE on the establishment of a countrywide optical fiber cable network. The project began to improve telephone, internet, television and radio broadcast services throughout Afghanistan. As of 2014, about 90% of the country's population has access to communication services (opennet.net).

Afghanistan is one of the least developed countries mainly due to the decades of war and lack of foreign investment. Freedom of expression is inviolable under the Constitution of Afghanistan, and every Afghan has the right to print or publish topics without prior submission to state authorities in accordance with the law. However, the normative limits of the law are clear: under the Constitution no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam. Mass media law has become increasingly attentive to a more vigorous adherence to this principle.

The Media Law decreed by President Hamid Karzai in December 2005, just before the national legislature was formed, included a ban on four broad content categories: the publication of news contrary to Islam and other religions; slanderous or insulting materials concerning individuals; matters contrary to the Afghan Constitution or criminal law; and the exposure of the identities of victims of violence (opennet.net).

A draft amendment of the law circulating in 2006 added four additional proscribed categories: content jeopardizing stability, national security, and territorial integrity of Afghanistan; false information that might disrupt public opinion; promotion of any religion other than Islam; and "material which might damage physical well-being, psychological and moral security of people, especially children and the youth (mcit.gov.af).

Due to low literacy rate and high internet fees, about 10% of the 26 million population in 2012 has internet access. Services such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter,

Persian Blog and others are limited to the upper-middle-class youth in the major urban areas. Facebook currently has around 289,000 users in Afghanistan, a large part of which are foreign military personnel-related staff (socialbakers.com).

In early 2011, Paywast, a local mobile social network was launched. It is based on mobile, and its users connect with their friends and create groups and communities through SMS. With more than half of the Afghan population owning a mobile phone, Paywast is believed to have more than a million users across Afghanistan. (paywast.af).

There are about 18 million mobile phone users in the country. Etisalat, Roshan, Afghan Wireless and MTN are the leading telecom companies. Etisalat became the first company planning to launch 4G services in 2014. It is predicted that over 50% of the population will have access to the internet by 2015(mcit.gov.af).

The Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan firmly recognizes the importance of embracing telecommunications and Internet technologies to achieve the nation's development and reconstruction goals. An effective telecommunications infrastructure will help stimulate economic growth, raise living standards and restore the traditional sense of community and common purpose that unites the Afghan people. A modern communications network can play a vital role in narrowing the physical distances that separate our villages and towns and dramatically improve access to government services, educational opportunities and humanitarian relief efforts. They will lay the foundation for an Afghanistan that is vibrant, productive and strong (Telecommunication and Internet Policy 2003: 3).

Today Afghanistan has one of the weakest telecommunications systems in the world. Only one out of every 550 Afghan citizens has access to telephone service. Communications between provinces is extremely limited and effectively non-existent in smaller towns. Whole communities of our people face the "tyranny of distance" and the alienation associated with remote geography. Internet and data services have only recently begun. Government operations and the management of civil affairs are hampered by the absence of reliable communications services. Economic activity is difficult, costly and at times impossible. After 23 years of conflict and stalled investment, the entire sector needs to be completely rebuilt (Telecommunication and Internet Policy 2003: 3).



Regarding the issue, the Government moved as quickly as possible to privatize the telecommunications sector to ensure that adequate financing is available to meet our development goals. Private investment has already led expansion of mobile communications. Private participation will be harnessed further to fund Afghanistan's substantial communications infrastructure needs. Taken together, competition and private investment will lower prices to consumers for network services and equipment, improve quality of service and accelerate a faster rate of market innovation.

Providers of Internet services are required to obtain a license. When the TRAA assumes regulatory responsibilities, licenses will be issued by the TRAA. Until that time, the MoC will issue licenses.

Afghanistan will implement a two-class system of licenses for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) that distinguishes between providers of international Internet Protocol connectivity (International Transit ISPs) and domestic Internet service providers (National ISPs). In defining clear and distinct roles for the two types of ISPs, the licensing plan allows Afghanistan to channel international traffic through licensed gateways while promoting robust competition at all levels of the market. Similarly, by providing a simple, streamlined and inexpensive licensing mechanism for National ISPs, the MoC encourages the proliferation of private nationwide, regional, and local ISPs. Modest limits on the number of international Internet traffic gateways will promote both a competitive market and a stable investment climate for international Internet Protocol connectivity (Telecommunication and Internet Policy 2003: 10).

To encourage rapid deployment of Internet networks in Afghanistan, International Transit ISP license holders will be allowed to obtain National ISP licenses, but only through a distinct and separately incorporated subsidiary or affiliate. Even where commonly owned, the International Transit ISP entity will be required to provide its international IP connectivity services to its retail ISP entity at the same prices it offers other National ISPs. The TRAA is authorized to conduct periodic audits to ensure that International Transit ISPs do not undercut competition by offering favorable pricing to a National ISP subsidiary or commonly owned affiliate.

When establishing separately incorporated National ISP units, the International Transit ISPs are not required but are encouraged to consider creating joint ventures with experienced Internet service providers that have built and run Internet Protocol networks in analogous developing country environments.

## **2.16 Creation of Afghan Telecom**

The Government intends to separate the Telecommunications Department of the Ministry of Communications, including authorizing the transfer of related assets, to a newly established state-owned enterprise, “Afghan Telecom”. The legal rights of Afghan Telecom will be further articulated in the forthcoming (Telecommunications Law of 2005).

At the time of establishment, Afghan Telecom shall be a public corporation owned by the Government and administered by the MoC. However, the Government seeks rapid privatization of the communications sector and Afghan Telecom is encouraged to engage operating and investment partners to become a market-oriented and commercial enterprise.

Afghan Telecom’s charter to provide domestic and international telecommunications services in Afghanistan will be normalized with forthcoming licensing requirements to be published by TRAA. Telecommunications is also necessary for the resumption of productive capacity and stimulating activity in all sectors of the Afghan economy. It will play a critical role in reestablishing the financial system and relieving communication bottlenecks in commercial, governmental and cultural information flows. It is essential for boosting productivity and creating a climate for job creation, investment and sustainable growth (Telecommunication and Internet Policy, 2003:4).

Finally, a robust telecommunications environment will provide Afghanistan with greater assurances for achieving and sustaining national and civil security. Domestic preparedness, education, NGO and community outreach, peace-building and national security efforts are all strengthened when reliable and robust network resources are distributed widely throughout society (Telecommunication and Internet Policy, 2003:4).

## **2.17 National Telecommunications Policy Principles and Goals**

To rapidly transform telecommunications into a leading engine in Afghanistan's renewal, the Ministry of Communications (MoC) has defined the following general principles to guide the national Telecommunications and Internet Policy:

a. Create a legal and regulatory environment that nurtures and accelerates industry growth. The Government intends to rapidly introduce a Telecommunications Law of 1382 that will define the rights and responsibilities of market participants in the telecommunications sector. It will also create an independent telecommunications regulator, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan (TRAA), to implement the Government's commitment to international best practices for sector modernization and reform.

b. Engage private investment to the greatest extent possible. Afghanistan's capital requirements for telecommunications infrastructure are tremendous. Neither the state nor the international donor community can provide the vast financial resources necessary to quickly provide for the communications needs of the nation. The participation of private investors is essential and encouraged.

c. Establish a level playing field for competition. The role of the state in providing telecommunications services will be steadfastly reduced in favor of fair, transparent and market-based competition among commercial enterprises.

d. Introduce market liberalization. Afghan consumers will benefit from healthy competition in all aspects of telecommunications networks and services. Market opening will lead to a wider range of suppliers and products, lower costs, and establish a service industry that is responsive to customer demands. New entrants will bid competitively for market opportunities based on open and transparent international tenders. In the near term, the Government will introduce a framework of limited, managed competition to ensure stable market conditions for strategic infrastructure projects. Aggressive liberalization of the sector is anticipated after three years, or commencing in 2006.

e. Encourage the usage of Internet and information and communications technologies (ICTs). Widespread adoption of modern information technology tools will create new educational opportunities for the young, improve the efficiency of

government departments and private companies, and help Afghanistan to “leap frog” into the Digital Age. Recent technological advances have unleashed a range of new alternatives for bringing powerful and affordable voice and data services to consumers. The Government is committed to pursuing an open, flexible, and technology-friendly regulatory strategy to encourage the deployment of the latest technologies throughout Afghanistan.

Specific targets for the sector in the near term include:

- a. Quickly restore the productive capacity of the existing public network with expanded and upgraded systems in the primary and secondary cities;
- b. Establish a national long distance network to provide basic voice, data and Internet communications to even the remotest regions in the nation;
- c. Establish a National Backbone Network around the country that connects major domestic population centers and our international neighbors;
- d. Issue additional nationwide licenses for Fixed Telecommunications Services;
- e. Issue multiple ISP licenses;
- f. Increase teledensity from the present 0.18% to 0.43% in 2003/2004, with the intention of many-fold expansion in the years to come;
- g. Increase mobile teledensity from the present 0.92 users per thousand population to 2.52 mobile user in 2003/2004;
- h. Maximize the use and value of radio frequency spectrum through competitive international tenders; and,
- i. Establish tele-centers in small communities to bring the benefits of modern communications to all of our people as quickly as possible. It is essential that all 423 administrative districts be integrated with Kabul, with each other, and with the rest of the world.

Due to the ever-changing nature of the telecommunications sector and its importance to the nation’s development and reconstruction goals, the MoC will

periodically review this policy and publish updates to its official website (Telecommunication and Internet Policy, 2003:9).

## **2.18 Role of the Government**

The Government's chief objective as articulated and led by the MoC is to set the overall vision for the telecommunications sector, to promote access to ICT as a facilitator for sustainable development and to create an enabling environment for private investment, competition and rapid industry growth. Through the creation. "Corporatization" and rapid privatization of Afghan Telecom, the Government will relinquish its role as an operator of public telecommunications services. The MoC's specific responsibilities include:

i. Provide overall direction for telecommunications sector development and formulate broad policies for the benefit of all of Afghanistan;

ii. Ensure that this Policy is consistent with other national development plans and laws; iii. Rapidly separate the Ministry's Telecommunications Department into a state owned enterprise to be known as "Afghan Telecom";

iv. Encourage private investment in the sector from the earliest stage of development and immediately open Afghan Telecom to private equity participation;

v. Establish an independent Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Afghanistan (TRAA) to ensure regulatory transparency and fair treatment for all market participants;

vi. Promote domestic and international investment in the telecommunications sector; vii. Encourage competition in infrastructure, services and investment; viii. Stimulate introduction of telecommunications network services in underserved and rural communities to the best of its ability with available resources and with support from donors; and,

ix. Represent the Government of Afghanistan in telecommunications and Internet matters pertaining to regional and international organizations.

Hence in spite of various constraints and limitations, the ICT is spreading in Afghanistan and more women are coming forward to use it.

## References

- Baber, Zaheer, Khondker, Habibul. "Sites of resistance: Alternative websites and state-society relations." *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.53, Issue 1.March 2002.
- Bahdi, R. *Analyzing women's use of the Internet through the rights debate*. Chicago-Kent Law Review, Vol. 75, No. 3, 2000.
- Batty, Michael. "Virtual Geography, Futures." *Elsevier Science*, Vol.29, No.4/5, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of One self*, Fordham University Press, 2009.
- Castells, Manuel, Haraway, Donna. *Cyberculture Theorists*. Ed. David Bell, New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Consalvo, Mia. *Cyberfeminism. Encyclopedia of New Media*. Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2002. SAGE. Web, 4 Apr. 2012.
- [http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17\\_Cyberfeminism.pdf](http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17_Cyberfeminism.pdf)
- Deibert, Ronald. "The Growing Dark Side of Cyberspace (...and What To Do About It)." *First Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*. Volume 1, Issue 2, November 2012. <http://elibrary.law.psu.edu/jlia/vol1/iss2/3>.
- Dubrovsky, Vitaly, Siegel, Jane, Kiesler, Sara and W McGuire, Timothy. "Group processes in computer-mediated." *communication Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Volume 37, Issue 2, April 1986.
- Feenberg, Andrew, Barney, Darin. *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Ford, N, D. Miller. "Gender differences in Internet perceptions and use." *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 48, No. 7/8, 1996.
- Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and society (Social Theory in the information age)*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.

Gittler, Alice. "Mapping women's global communications and networking." In: Harcourt, Wendy. *Women@ Internet. Creating new cultures in Cyberspace*. London, Zed Books, 1999.

Giles, Keir, Hagestad II, William. "Divided by a Common Language: Cyber Definitions in Chinese, Russian and English." 5th International Conference on Cyber Conflict, NATO CCD COE Publications, Tallinn, Estonia, 2013. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA479060>

Goulding, Anne, Spacey, Rachel. "Women and the Information Society: barriers and participation". *Information Center Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (JSRPD)*, 2007. <http://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/2007>

H. Jones, Rodney. *Cyberspace and Physical Space: Attention Structures*. Computer Mediated Communication. 2010.

Houdart-Blazy, Véronique, "European Commission, Age becomes her: older women in the European Union." Information for Women, Directorate-General X, *Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media*, 1997.

Kellner, Douglas. *Intellectuals, the new public spheres, and techno-politics*. Education & Information Studies, University of California, 2011. [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)

Kellner, Douglas, Kahn, Richard. *Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach*. UK, Berg, Chapter 37, Techno politics and Oppositional Media, 2005.

Kellner, Douglas, *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Meenakshi Gigi Durham, John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

Ottis, Rain, Peeter, Lorents. *Cyberspace: Definition and Implications, Cooperative Cyber Defense*, Centre of Excellence. Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, Tallinn, Estonia, 2012.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, MIT Press, 2000.

Sherry, Turkle. *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of Internet*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.

Silva, Adrina de Souza e. *From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile technologies as interfaces of hybrid spaces*, North Carolina State University, 2006.  
<http://sac.sagepub.com/content/9/3/261>.

Spender, Dale. *Nattering on the Net*. Melbourne, Spinifex Press, 1995.

Schuler, Doug. *New community networks: Wired for Chang*. Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1996.

Tofts, Darren. *Parallax: Essays on Art, Culture and Technology*, Craftsman House, 1999.

Trescott, Jacqueline. "What bell hooks had to say about the state of feminism in 1999", *washingtonpost.com*, Feb1999. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/1999/02/09/what-bell-hooks-had-to-say-about-the-state-of-feminism-in-1999/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/1999/02/09/what-bell-hooks-had-to-say-about-the-state-of-feminism-in-1999/) [Accessed on 24/10/2014]

Virilio, Paul .*The Art of the Motor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Wark, McKenzie. *Cyberspace and the virtual public*. Australian Humanities Review, July 1999. [www.australianhumanitiesreview.org](http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org) [Accessed on 09/02/2013]

Wilding, Faith, Critical Art Ensemble. "Notes on the Political Condition of Cyberfeminism." *College Art Association*, Vol. 57, No. 2, summer, 1998.

[www.jstor.org/stable/778008](http://www.jstor.org/stable/778008) [Accessed on 20/10/2014]

Hardware and Software, [www.azwardriving.com](http://www.azwardriving.com) [Accessed on 21/10/2014]

Poulsen, Kevin. "Warspying' San Francisco. "Web. *securityfocus.com* 28 January 2004. [www.securityfocus.com/news/7931](http://www.securityfocus.com/news/7931) [Accessed on 18/11/2014]

Salam, Where is raed? [dear\\_raed.blogspot.in](http://dear_raed.blogspot.in) [Accessed on 24/10/2014]

[www.instupundit.com](http://www.instupundit.com) [Accessed on 02/11/2014]

[www. Internationalanswer.org](http://www.Internationalanswer.org) [Accessed on 09/11/2014]



[www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) [Accessed on 08/11/2014]

“Telecommunication and Internet Policy.” Final Working Draft, *Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Communications*, November, 2003. [mcit.gov.af/en](http://mcit.gov.af/en) [Accessed on 07/11/2014]

[www.nsa.gov/public\\_info/speeches\\_testimonies/5may09\\_dir.shtml](http://www.nsa.gov/public_info/speeches_testimonies/5may09_dir.shtml) [Accessed on 13/11/2014]

Afghanistan. OpenNet Initiative, *opennet.net*, 8 May 2007, Retrieved 16 January 2010. [opennet.net/research/profiles/afghanistan](http://opennet.net/research/profiles/afghanistan) [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

[paywast.af/about](http://paywast.af/about) [Accessed on 07/11/2014]

[www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/42214/e-book](http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/42214/e-book) [Accessed on 26/10/2014]

Poulsen, Kevin. “Wi-Fi Honeypots a New Hacker Trap.” SecurityFocus. Web. *securityfocus.com*, 29 July 2002. [www.securityfocus.com/news/552](http://www.securityfocus.com/news/552)

[www.socialbakers.com](http://www.socialbakers.com) [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

[searchsoa.techtarget.com/definition/ezone](http://searchsoa.techtarget.com/definition/ezone) [Accessed on 29/10/2014]

[www.techopedia.com/definition/5207/web-log-blog](http://www.techopedia.com/definition/5207/web-log-blog) [Accessed on 25/10/2014]

[www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org) [Accessed on 10/11/2014]

[www.usaid.gov/sites](http://www.usaid.gov/sites) [Accessed on 06/11/2014]

[www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/search\\_engine.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/search_engine.html) [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

### **Notes:**

\* Arachne: (is a talented mortal weaver who challenged Athena, goddess of wisdom and crafts, into a weaving contest; this hubris resulted in her being transformed into a spider. The Great Mother’s frightening aspect is that she is the weaver of the fate. Almost all goddesses are weaving fate. For more details please refer to: Thames & Hudson. *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols*. J. C. Cooper, 1987.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Social History and status of Women in Afghanistan**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

it is very difficult to introduce women in Afghanistan as part of the general course of the history as it is a contested area so much so that one woman in Afghanistan in a local saying said we all sing in men's voices. Women, therefore, are represented only through certain male imaginary that over the period of time characterises Afghanistan's history as a history of clan warfare, warfare between different ethnic groups and invasions from outside it is, therefore, a story of the kings and queens and in addition in Afghanistan, it is the story of the tribal chiefs because the monarchy as an institution was not very strong. There is, hence, a strong need for a historiographical corrective to the larger narratives. One of the ideas that we get from scattered sources is that women were enjoying some freedom before modernity in the tribal situation as they are part of some production related activities and secondly also because the society was isolated and some gendered spaces like family and household and communal collectives continue to exist and function. Some disruption happened along with many invasions but these freedoms are seen largely in the cultural patterns and residual traditions.

In the 19th century, the contest between Great Britain and Russia intensified in Central Asia and this aspect is known in world history as the great game that was fought on the imperial chessboard and this chessboard is taken to mean Afghanistan and Tibet. Both these landlocked countries were now drawn into world politics and modernity was rapidly enforced on them leading to many reactions from within. The nation-state as an idea was not fully crystallized in Afghanistan and competing ethnic groups with support from the newly formed Russian and British interests complicated the situation. All this came to a boil during the rule of the kings Zahir shah. His period was also one of the most important periods in the history of Afghanistan mainly because of the post-war period and the delicate situation with the establishment of the

USSR in the North and the state of Pakistan in the south-east in the onset of situation of the Cold War. While a modernist middle-class was already beginning to take shape in Kabul and other major cities, the old elite comprised mainly of the rentier class and exports were mainly from dry fruits and carpets. Even in this situation poverty was less and social conservatism also was less so much so that, the Chader worn was only by the conservative women in some very rural areas. This representation has escaped notice and is very important as it brings to us the idea of an open moment. Afghanistan at this time was open to many influences, communism from USSR, Islam from Saudi Arabia, Shia culture and Persian values.

In such a situation it was necessary for Afghanistan and the future of the country to chart a separate course of action in the bipolar political world and the contending and contesting ethnic, linguistic and ideological forces. The two extremes were the monarchists on one hand and the Marxists on the other end the Islamists were not in the picture largely except for certain fringe groups. This is also because of the fact that radical Islam was not an important force in the Cold War period but a force that was legitimized by American presence and therefore did not constitute the principal opposition. Under the trying circumstances the King Zahir Shah was toppled from his throne by a group of Tajik military officers who actually were ruling clique in the military but could not directly aspire for the throne of Afghanistan as the numerically in a minority and therefore they promoted the King's cousin Daoud and it led to the overthrow of the kingdom.

In a sense, 1973 was one of the main cut-off years after which he went accelerated so fast that the title of the book 1979, the year that changed the world seems apt and a one star is taken as one of the prime examples is this book. By 1979, the Marxist regime had come and there was no hope for the monarchy to reassert itself. On the other hand, competing forces like new social movements that were based on religion-particularly the Islamist movements and the role of extraterritorial actors like Pakistan and the United States of America on one hand and the USSR on the other hand along with Iran to some extent led to violence and competing ideas of reorganisation of society. This reorganization of society on the lines of Marxism, reactionary ideas of royalty, Islamism et cetera were bound to fail as the two obstacles-the lack of order on one side and no change in the production process. In short, any reorganisation of society should be based on the restructuring of the production process and hear the

changes were only political. Therefore, Afghanistan became a battleground and competing groups of small fighters battled it out and this the society that came in the post-1980s was the network Society wherein no large power could control the entire country but only networks of fighters and their clients and patrons. We may thus locate the changing position of women in this two developments-violence and disorder on one hand and the rise of a network Society on the other.

Throughout the 20th century, the debate on women's rights and their role in Afghan society had been closely interlinked with the national destiny.

In the long history of Afghanistan, from the days of Alexander and earlier to the post-Taliban period, political and military history take center stage and the major areas of Afghanistan are about wars, inventions and resistance of the Afghanistan. Both Afghanistan and outside world are united.

Women play an important part in the social and economic development of any society. However, their role had been neglected in many countries in the past few decades. But now they seem to have caught the attention of the society. Women are considered only as wives meant to do household chores like cooking, cleaning and taking care of children and with no rights to vote or participate in the social, economic and political activities of the society. In every society there are hero women but they become inferior due to pregnancy, birth and such reasons force them to look to men for protection and make them dependent on economic issues. This dependency becomes the basis of women slavery which often exists. In almost every family a man would be the sole provider and of course, this task comes with enormous amounts of responsibilities.

In developing countries men are responsible for earning money to satisfy the needs and requirement of their family. In Afghanistan, like other developing country, the role of women is weak in economic and social activities because of low cultural and traditional environment, along with some other factors influencing the women community. Some scholars argued that women can work positively in the economic activities with cooperation from men in society. Afghanistan seriously needs economic growth and women can play a positive role, in sharing idea, responsibilities and duties for economic growth as well as increase their income to satisfy their family needs. Women along with men have an active role in social, political and economic

activities in the main provinces through all over the country in governmental organization, civil societies, national and international NGOs and private sector (World Bank Report 2005: 4).

The report of the World Bank points out that, women suffered from very serious human rights violations throughout the conflict. With the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan embarked upon a new beginning, with women playing a positive role in it. This Country Gender Assessment report identifies critical areas in which gender-responsive actions are likely to enhance growth, poverty reduction and human well-being. Though there is a lot of gender discrimination in Afghanistan this report talks of both short and long term intervention (World Bank Report 2005: 5).

There are gender gaps in health, education, access to resources, job opportunities and power and politics, and while women face these inequalities, the negative effects are felt throughout society. The World Bank reports points out that improvement in women's situation are essential for the reconstruction of the country - and that investments will bring great benefits.

In Afghanistan, there is no question of women's rights and gender equity in the forefront of nation-building efforts and regime changes. The aggressiveness towards women under the Taliban was cited as one of the justifications in 2001.

At no point in time did Afghanistan have a coherent sense of nationalism due to spatial and ethnic impenetrability. A lot of interference also presented any kind of unity in Afghanistan. Ethnic loyalty determined Afghan polity. Though there have been various attempts to bring the various tribes together at no point did Afghanistan experience a nation state (Moghadam 1997: 76).

As Ahmed-Ghosh puts that: ever, the Mujahedeen's (1992-1996) record is worse than the Taliban as for a women's situation is concerned. However, we cannot approach women's situation in Afghanistan within the ideological framework of, before and after, but we have to see women's situation within the larger historical context of Afghanistan (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003: 1).

The impact on women has been especially harsh, since women's lives had often been used to establish ethnic prominence. Since Afghanistan, somehow, is a tribal country (i.e. tribal laws could influence the life style, ideology and social norms)

tribal and constitutional laws have been taken in deciding gender roles, especially through kinship hierarchies in the rural regions. Tribal power plays, institutions of honor and inter-tribal shows of patriarchal control have put women's position in jeopardy.

Women's rights in Afghanistan have always been constrained by the patriarchal nature of gender of the tribal community. The weak centralized state could never implement any program for modernizing. Beside this, foreign interference by the British, Soviet Union and the United States of America, dating to the 1880s, critically impeded social development in Afghanistan. The tribal leaders blocked reform efforts that aimed to separate women's identity from that of her family and tribal community, and there was no attempt to modernizing the state (Moghadam 1997: 76).

Women's status is defined within the family. Tribal laws view marriages as alliances between groups; women are pawned into marriages and not allowed to divorce and a total obedience to the husband and his family is expected. Women are prevented from getting any education. Hence women are seen as custodians of the honor of the family which is patriarchal. Women stay in the domestic sphere, observe the veil and are voiceless. The honor of the family, the tribe, and ultimately the nation is invested in women (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003: 1).

As Moghadam points out, women could not cut their hair, mullahs were given unlimited powers to institute their agendas and the old tribal system was to be reinstated. Amanullah even married a second time (for a brief period) to pacify the opposition, but it was too late. (Stewart 1973: 219), nevertheless, pressures on Amanullah mounted, and in 1929 he was forced to abdicate and leave the country.

Amanullah's efforts to improve the lot of women were based on some reformist trends which she understood in Islam. Further, he was ahead of his time as the idea of nationhood in Afghanistan was not already in function. Moreover, his liberalism came at a wrong time but, one could see the large increase in the presence of women all over ranging from universities to the Parliament to the civil society and this was a period of the late 1970s (Gregorian 1969: 134 & Dupree 1973: 104-5).

As similar to Iran, most of the people speak languages that are related to Farsi, the official language of their western neighbor Iran; they differ from most Iranians in

their continued adherence to the Sunni stream of Islam, which Iran abandoned in the 16th century in favor of the Shia sect in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan does not possess national unity like many other countries and this ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous. Many ethnic groups till recently had translational cultural connections that came in the way of centralism unify afghan identity. It is strange situation that some afghan had commonalities that went beyond borders hundreds of km rather than share cultural tribes with their fellow countrymen, a few meters away.

One of the critics of this approach which is dominant inter presenting Afghanistan can be replaced with a different model of a state that is multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic with loose centralization. That best describes the historical situation of Afghanistan.

While northern Afghanistan shows linguistic, cultural and geographic continuity with the Central Asian republics across the Amu Darya, its people were spared the destructive if transformative experience of two generations of czarist Christian suzerainty followed by 75 years of Soviet communism. In fact, many Uzbeks and Turkmen first arrived in Afghanistan as refugees from the Russian or Soviet empires (Wahab 2007: ix).

1747, the year of Durrani empire was founded by Ahmad shah Durrani, is seen as a new period when Afghanistan had become unified , and most people present of Afghanistan were part of this political formation. For there, the border of presents of Afghanistan also largely, corresponds to the Durrani Empire (Wahab 2007: ix).

This is also seen as the landmark the sense that the previous situations did not have any such unified parallel till the recent day, 250 years till the end of the Great Game, Afghanistan skillfully divided not only Russian and British but even Persian interest. That root of afghan nation identity transcending ethnic and religious identities, crystallize and service for 250 years from 1747.

It was at the same time that the city of Kabul not only became the city of politics it many important offices functional there but also hosting diverse ethnic groups like Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek and many others from abroad, leading to a cosmopolitan centre. One can also disagree with Wahab in some points when he says that it was a

Durrani who inaugurated an Afghan state from pre-modern, near anarchic conditions. The point is that Afghan's history should not be approached from the model of these 2 neighbors India and Persia .where both the Moghul and the Safavid role , rather it should be seen as central Asia model where many new states and politics revolve into larger units.

The position of Afghanistan astride the ancient trade and invasion routes between East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East once made Afghanistan a crossroad of cultures. In the modern era, however, it served as the end point of two expanding empires—Britain and Russia. Both powers were eventually contented to allow the country, with its forbidding topography and sparse resources, to remain as a buffer state outside their formal control and beyond the networks of railways, telegraphs and cultural infrastructure that were then stretching across the rest of Eurasia (Wahab 2007: ix).

A century and a half is a long period but during the long 18th century to the mid-19th century, when the whole world drastically and event change influenced by modern ideas Afghanistan, was caught in a time warp. Subsistence agriculture, low literacy rates and almost nil industrialization with zero infrastructure characterized Afghanistan and this was particularly a feature of Kabul and the smaller towns that could never be governed because of this infrastructural problems. (Wahab 2007:1).

With the rise of the (PDPA), Marxist idea of revolutionary change was uppermost on the parties' agenda. These revolutionary acts cast a great impact on locations particularly in the rural areas where land reforms bride price and raising the marriage age were, contested. Directly hit where the mullah's and the tribal chiefs who saw this not only as going against regions and authority but against afghan tradition. 1973 brought back memory of 1920 when mass literacy was launched in Afghanistan.

Most publications focus on (PDPA) on one side and the reactionaries - the mullahs and the tribal chiefs on the other side. This approach erases the large mass of Afghans and more specifically women on whose identity and future both parties fought (Moghadam 1997:78).



During that time, shooting of women, killing of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) reforms in the rural areas and harassment of women increased. Afghanistan lacked an accurate recent census of its population, due to the wars and internal and external migrations that prevailed for 28 years.

As per the reports of the CIA, the fact book with this agency publishes showed a population of 28, 513, 677 which would greatly from the earlier census that was last conducted in 1979 and had recorded only a population of 15, 551, 358. The census also took into account not only the Pashtuns but also the diversity through linguistic societies of Afghanistan (Moghadam 1997: 13).

Despite different ethnic groups, tribes, languages and dialects, certain qualities unite Afghans as a society. Religion is the strongest unifying factor, but many other social customs and traditions are also shared among the varying groups, as are many economic technologies and patterns. In addition, in wars and foreign invasions, they had always put their differences aside and united against the enemy, as they did against the British several times in the 19th and early 20th centuries and against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Many people, especially in the cities, have different cultural background; even this can be found in villages and communities of mixed ethnicity. Furthermore, nomads and local tribes are often assigned to different ethnic groups based on different criteria.

Pashtuns today comprise an ethnic group of Afghanistan and are around 40% of the Afghan population. The ethno genesis of Pashtuns is not clear and based on myth. It is expressed that they were the one among the ten lost tribes of Judea who were expelled by the Assyrians according to biblical narratives. Some other versions privilege the story that the Afghans are the grandson of King Saul .in the modern period, after world war two and the establishment of Israel, new ethno religious element in the world, have led to Israel be identify as an enemy of the Muslims. Displacing this myth another myth has taken precedence and is narrated that the first descendant was the companion of the prophet Mohammad replacing Saul. And this lineage trough Saul's elder son leads to the Durrani and through his second sons to the Qais. On a more historical ground on the Vedic materials, historical central Asia came as the representation and seems to be better suited to take the place of the technology basis will of the ancient Pashtuns. The Scythians who ruled many parts of

the Indo-Iranian borderlands seem to be the prime candidates. Various ethnic groups have a problem of locating the past in the modern period due to that impact of modernity and the rise of scientific temper. This was not a problem in the pre-modern period because traditional societies gave value to myth and did not ask for scientific validation of myth. Such of this explanation is having some face only in the period of modernity and this has led to an idea of scientists and employment of scientific methodology to validate both myths and religious practices. According to this view, myths in some rare instances contain elements of truth. The departing from this approach and borrowing the recent studied on studies one may quote Mary Midgley who says “myth is neither true or false but the system of possibilities” (Moghaddam 1997:13).

Pashtun tribes have a great deal of autonomy. The major tribes are the Durrani, Ghilzai, Momand, Afridi, and Yusufzai which follow a code of honor called Pashtunwali. The Pashtun are famous for strict gender role division, and women are often kept isolated in their home and families. However, families are matriarchal and mothers, sisters and wives encourage their men to be courageous in defense of the family's honor.

The Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen share ethno cultural linkages with their ethnic brethren in the respect of nation states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, originally many of these groups fled to Afghanistan in 2 massive waves- the 19th-century czarist Christian and followed by the atheist Bolshevik onslaught a century latter.

In terms of social location, they were more complex societies enable to the role of regional khans rather than the more tribal Pashtun society of Afghanistan establishes that clear link between identity and territory as the Pashtun tribal and settlement (homelands) are coeval and connected, the Hazaras stand out both physically and religiously distant and were descendants of the of the Mongol armies, they look like Mongolian people in terms of physical stock. With elongated chick bones and the epicanthic fold in the eyes. In this tapestry of ethnic identities, is the place where we locate the different mixture of social groups in Afghanistan. (Wahab 2007:16).

There are many stories about the origins of the Nuristani which tries to show that they are blond or red haired and have light-colored eyes, especially in the more

remote valleys of Nuristan, located at the high eastern Hindu Kush. In their tribal lore, many Nuristani claim descent from the soldiers of Alexander the Great.

Most Brahui are similar to south Indians, physically. They are either original founders of the Indus Valley civilization, or they may have migrated to the area from southern India. They generally occupy a lower social status in relation to their neighbors, the Baluchi. The Baluchi include many fishermen, a rare trade in Afghanistan. (The Baluchi are mostly fishermen which is a rare trade in Afghanistan) They fish the marshes and seasonal lakes of the Sistani, others farm the fertile banks of the Helmand River.

The Indo-Aryan linguistic, opponent is predominant among the Afghan population and the Dari language belongs to this group. However, the spread of these languages cannot be fully explained by easily keeping in mind the spread of population. 2000 B.C.E., is seen as important date and is suggested as the period for the entry of for the entry of the hyphen Indo Aryan's, and .this is however not conclusive (Wahab 2007: 36).

Like ethnic population figures, the number of speakers of each of the languages of Afghanistan is often disputed—one person's "language" is another's "dialect." Using CIA figures again, the 2004 linguistic breakdown was Afghan Persian (Dari), 50 percent; Pashto, 35 percent; Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen), 11 percent; 30 minor languages (primarily Baluchi, Brahui, Pashai, and Nuristani), 4 percent; and "much bilingualism" (Wahab 2007: 18).

Dari has traditionally been the language of the large number of the people of Afghanistan and is also the ways in which all the transactions of the government took place. Actually it is an inheritance of the Persian rule in the Afghanistan and has thus managed to embrace all the major ethnic groups including the Tajiks who speak Dari. Pashto, which is the official language of Afghanistan, is another language.

Most of the people can speak both this language. Other smaller ethnic groups who speak different groups of languages like Baluch, Brahui, Turkic languages and Nuristani. On this languages belong to different genetic families and do not have any mutual intelligibility in built into them. It is in this situation that the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic population of Afghanistan which is heterogeneous came to constitute

a nation. One of the factors that have not been examined much is the communication between these ethnic groups over the centuries. All this was not done only under the state or the patronage of the state but also under the contact by the people to people (Wahab 2007: 18).

Most Afghans today (apart from members of the Uzbek and Turkmen ethnic groups) speak languages similar to Aryan. Many Afghans may find themselves as migrated people. The pre-Aryan populations of Afghanistan were never as numerous as those in the Indus Valley and may have been driven out or replaced by the Aryans in certain areas. The modern Afghan languages are more closely related to the languages of Iran than to those of India; the Iranian branch of the Aryan peoples may have come in a second migration that passed through northern Afghanistan into Iran and spread to the south of the country as well.

During the 1980s, about 50,000 Hindus and Sikhs lived in urban areas. They were mainly traders, merchants and moneylenders. Afghan Hindus and Sikhs speak Hindi or Punjabi in addition to Dari and Pashto. Several thousand Jews used to live in Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar. They were free to practice their religious ceremonies and attend synagogues; they spoke Dari or Pashto, and some could also read and write Hebrew.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the civil war and Taliban rule forced most Jews to leave the country. In 2002, of the entire Afghan- Jewish population, only two individuals remained, both living in Kabul. During the years of war, many Hindus and Sikhs left as well, but some returned following the fall of the Taliban in November 2001. The constitution of 2004 made freedom of religion to all citizens. All religious groups, including Christians, are free to practice their faith.

We come to the most important text of the Zoroastrian, the Avesta. As a historical text, it uses an understanding of the geography of ancient Persia and the neighboring regions, most notably Afghanistan. We get an idea of the city of Balkh, in Afghanistan and it is speculated that Zoroaster may even have been born and died there. As a borderland, the northern regions of Afghanistan were at times part of ancient Persia and fell in and out of the imperial control of the Persian Empire. It was during one of these times from the North that the prophet Zoroaster was said to have been killed by the Medes. What is more important to us is the historical setting that the

geography of this region reveals. It reveals the fluid nature of people and religion and other aspects of identity in the ancient borderlands of Iran and Afghanistan that leads us to assume the rise and fall of religions from neighboring regions in Afghanistan. One point also needs to be made clear is that Afghanistan was not simply a reception for all the cultural and religious influences in a passive way but also interacted and modified these influences(Wahab 2007: 18).

### **3.2 Mujahidin Period**

The mujahidin period is the most brutal and operative in Afghan's memory. After the fall of the city of Kabul, following the withdrawal of the soviet forces, a great crisis unfolded on account of the large-scale destruction of the countryside and the towns. Refugees flock to the cities in large numbers most of them in a very impoverished state simply because of the fact that the already fragile subsistence agriculture failed. A compound in this crisis was the fact that the trade routes fell under the control of armed militant groups and it was this situation in which force could decide. Opium cultivation and trafficking reached the high proportions on account of these conditions and became an easy way of generating money in the wake of the collapse of agriculture. A parallel economy started with the drug trafficking and establishment of new networks that became translational and came to be later known as the Golden Crescent.

It is at this particular juncture that the hard-one freedoms of women under the Russian occupation were all together scrapped and all forms of reaction set in, compounded by force and the threat of use of force against women. Women now became the main target of not only the male patronage but also their marker of status. Does the honor of a society was dependent on honor of a woman and under these conditions, women were converted into dependents and material assets. (womenforwomen.org).

This may produce "novel forms of abuse, such as forced marriage and servitude. Although the degeneration of Afghanistan during this period did not attract the attention of the West, the prevailing anarchy did elicit a local response. Reacting to the social, economic, and moral degradation brought about by a dissipated collection of mujahidin warlords, a movement grounded in respect for Islamic morality began to take shape in southern Afghanistan. The Taliban (students) movement was not a

spontaneous combustion of public outrage, but a deliberately mobilized, ideologically coherent force (womenforwomen.org).

### **3.3 The Rise of the Taliban**

In the middle of the war, a new group emerged: the Taliban.

The base of the Taliban was originally among the Pashtun tribes, who form the numerically preponderant majority and not only a martial people but also dominant in all sectors of the fun society including the economy and polity. However, they were also tired of the war and the small-scale conflicts that had plagued the nation for almost 2 decades and in this chaos they seem to be no solution. A promise to the solution was a new idea of the Taliban and in 1995 their lawlessness had gone to great heights after day be delayed until Mazari (Canfield 2004: 241).

Karim Khalili was chosen as his successor. The Taliban took Kabul in 1996 and overthrew the ISA and Rabbani. Seeing that there was no longer a governmental position for him to fill, Massoud subsequently reverted to being a rebel fighter and the Northern Alliance, strengthened with more members, regrouped to fight the Taliban (Canfield 262).

The Northern Alliance pulled back to the north, leaving the Taliban in control of Kabul. The rise of the Taliban can also be explained by a large number of artillery and materials of warfare like rifles, ammunition and other artillery pieces including some large weapons and also helicopters and very surprisingly a sizeable number of tanks that added to its arsenal. In a crossover the Northern Alliance that comprise the ethnic armies of which the Uzbeks led by General Abdul Rashid Dustom, whose subordinate Malik Pahlawan played a key role. After the rise of Omar who became the head of the Taliban, heavily armed units were deployed to Helmand and Zabul in the East and West. A crucial turnover in this was the rise in number of fighters of the Taliban who now captured that strategic town of Mazar-i-Sharif after which Malik Pahlawan immediately switched over and then started attacking the Taliban (Wahab 2007: 205).

Two of the greatest mistake that took place during this period were engineered by both the Northern Alliance and the Taliban respectively. In the first instance, Pahlawan played a trick by asking the Taliban forces to surrender and then after they deposited their weapons collected all of them and tied their hands with their own

turbans. They were all housed in the Fortress of Qala-i-Jangi and the genocide of these 2000 or so Taliban fighters goes by the name of the same Fortress. The scene was so gruesome that one driver name Abdul Majid was driving a container truck heard hammering sound and then drilled a hole into the container and the inmates inside who are severely dehydrated asked for water. Their tongues were cracked and asked the driver whether he was a Muslim and told them that it was the duty of every Muslim given the water to a thirsty man. Most of the people in the container were ex-Taliban imprisoned by Pahlawan who had masterminded a new technique of killing people by letting them rot in the containers. All the Taliban who died were not Uzbeks and therefore this ethnic component also lead to another most gruesome incident that has not been condemned so far. The point here is that the Taliban may be guilty of human rights atrocities but the same cannot be meted out to them (Wahab 2007: 206).

Similarly, another massacre that is infamous is the killing of the Hazaras in western Afghanistan. Like the Mazar-i-Sharif massacre in which 2000 people were killed and another 4500 rounded up, all belonging to the Taliban, the culprit were seen as the Hazaras. After the fall of their province, Hazarajat in 2000 a large number of killed and most of their lands were spoiled and also their livestock was taken. This was an incident which shook the world. However, it would repeat itself again in 2001 when the Taliban once again kill the Hazaras (hrw.org).

One man's body was found tied to a tree, his limbs positioned in such a way that the Taliban would have been able to manipulate him like a grotesque marionette.

Tragedy for the Hazara did not end there. In January 2001, Taliban forces advanced on Yakaolang (sometimes yakawlang) district in Bamiyan province in a bid to recapture it from Shia resistance groups. During the course of four days they massacred up to 300 Hazara civilians, including local aid workers and village elders (Zabriskie 2008: 3).

One of the victims, a 17 year-old boy, had been skinned either alive or after death. The frozen corpses of the victims had to be separated with boiling water prior to burial. The bazaar in Yakawlang, consisting of 300 shops, was torched, along with schools, the hospital, library, and a number of aid offices. Thousands fled to neighboring districts and some even to Iran and Pakistan (hrw.org).

The story would not end here as a group of anthropologists and forensic archaeologists stumbled upon the bodies in the deserts of Afghanistan and found that most of the bodies were killed after severe dehydration and tied back to their hands. This is one of the most important and horrifying incidents in the fight against the Taliban. It is also important to mention that this incident has not been condemned.

September 11 brought about a change in world politics and on focus suddenly shifted to Afghanistan after the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City. This was one of the likely hideouts for Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda. United States now saw Afghanistan and more particularly the Taliban as the prime mini me and the Al Qaeda was seen as the hub of terrorism (Zabriskie 2008: 35).

### **3.4 Situation of Women in Afghanistan**

According to a decree of October 1978, with the explicit intention of ensuring equal rights for girls and women. So if the minimum legal age of marriage was 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. The content of the decree and the compulsory education to all the children special girls was perceived by some as unbearable interference in domestic life (democraticunderground.com).

By 1928 the ethnic tribal leaders in the rural areas grew restless and protested against the freedom that women experienced in Kabul. Tribal leaders most of the tribal and rural areas outside Kabul and women here did not received benefit of modernization. They also opposed the education of girls and Amanullah had to reverse some of policies and conform to more traditional agenda of social change. Schools for girls were closed down and women had to wearing the Veil (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003: 5).

The PDPA's use of force in bringing the changes to fruition, combined with a brutal disregard for societal and religious sensitivities, resulted in massive backlash from the rural population (Marsden 2002: 24).

The direct impact of global politics in the 1980s when the Cold War was at the peak should be taken as for the immediate context to understand the internal politics of Afghanistan. The connection is very clear since the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and Pan Islamism which is now identified as beginning in the aftermath of September 11 attacks actually goes back to the 1980s. One of the reasons



for this is the intense competition in the bipolar world and after the fall of the USSR, the integrity of the left to engage and bring about a new agenda. This explains the shift between the lack of any Universalist ideology on one hand and the rise of homegrown Islamist among the other (Ahmed-Ghosh 2003: 9).

As Hawley and Proudfoot point out for American Protestants, The family is an institution is one of the important bedrock for society and has been constructed so by many historians. However, we know that the family is only a historical creation with the rise of monogamy and sedentary cultures. The ideal image of the family leads to certain problems that seem to empower women by glorifying them but at the same time restricted spaces and extract more from their labor and freedom. The conjoining of family and religion is also another problematic aspect as it gives the religious sanction to the family and makes it a primary unit of analysis which then becomes unquestionable (Hawley & Proudfoot 1994: 118).

The East and the West have been a point of comparison and discord for more than a century and more so heightened after the concept of Orientalism played its full force. In this context, the ideas of western citizenship and their wholesale applicability to the east is taken to be a mismatch. It is argued that the idea of citizenship does not be compatible with individualism and liberalism. A critique of the same would entail that such positions are actually dominant male interpretations and multiple possibilities and readings of eastern societies exist beyond this (Joseph & Slyomovics 1).

Women in Afghan public life often face threats--in many cases from inside the Afghan government. The government frequently fails to respond when such threats are reported and often becomes complicit in shutting women out of the public discourse. By failing to act on reports of threats against women because they are women, the government reinforces the perception that regressive actors can target women with impunity.

These conditions are true mostly in developing countries, especially in Afghanistan. As we observe that women have a passive role in social development since their presence is not accounted for on many significant issues concerning them. Moreover, their lack of access to legal and regulatory facilities only accentuates their

inability to decide their own future particularly in remote areas dominated by traditional and tribal culture.

Studies done by the United Nations Development Program reveals, that Afghanistan is one of the most extreme cases of Gender inequality in the world. In 2011 the country was ranked at 139 from 145 and was included among the worst countries to become mothers, with a maternal mortality rate of 1400 out of 10000 (thebellforum.com).

Most of the attacks and threats to women are unreported and it is also too largely of men because the fear of reprisal is a clear indicator of ever-present danger. In such a situation the use of force and threat of use of force are not much different and therefore they largely go unreported.

### **3.4.1 Women in Villages**

Women have very challenging lives in Afghan society because of the different social expectations. These expectations badly impact on women and they differ from city to village life. There are more limitations on village women than in urban areas. For example, women must wear a burqa in public and little girls must wear veils. Old women only wear either a white or black veil.

Women in Afghanistan traditionally are restricted by quotes of culture not to speak with any strange men and the only interaction they have with men are the men of the household and that too in restricted spaces. Most of these roles are accessed and without question as they acculturated and therefore the idea of them speaking to any stranger let alone a uniform man is a long cry (Khinjani 2012: ix).

With regard to women in the villages, who form the bulk of the population in Afghanistan, most of their moments are socially conditioned. The mobility has to be with someone else, always dressed in a burqa in public so as to present the image of women as a domesticated person in keeping with the patriarchal ideals. Further other aspects, such as fun and frolic and also little pleasures like gossip that are an essential part of the social life are also largely absent.

Sometimes women of the family get permission from the mother in-law to go shopping, but they must return before the men of the family come home. In most

families, women are beaten if they go out without permission. Sometimes, families do not even allow women to go shopping and men bring them whatever they need. In some families where there is no older woman available, the men of the family lock the young women at home when they go to work for the day. Older women at home are considered to be protection for younger women. There are some public places where only women can go, such as women's gardens and shrines where women come together and pray. There they often bring sweets such as "alwa" to share with each other (Khinjani 2012: 15).

### **3.5 The Modern Era and Afghan Women**

The advent of printed press in Afghanistan dates back to a hundred and thirty years ago. The importance of the printed media and its specific role in socio-cultural development in Afghanistan is undeniable. The newspapers in Afghanistan, during the last thirteen decades, experienced lots of ups and downs. They were severely controlled, censored and suppressed by the government which led them to be confiscated and shut down. In the meantime, dissentious epochs of liberty, had also existed.

According to many historians, these movements in Iran, Egypt, Turkey and Afghanistan were under the influence of Sayyid Jamal al-Din Afghani (Asadabadi) thoughts. Reforms in political, economic and social construction and tend to modernism were different manifestation of his influence. In the 19th century, a series of political and social movements in some independent Muslim countries occurred not only in response to occupation and colonization of European countries but also as an attempt to achieve equality with western.

Paying attention to women's lives, rights and freedom were the most significant characteristics of this period which could be regarded as Modern Time. Providing rules to assure women's right, establishing schools for girls and the advent of the first women paper, Ershad Al Nesvan are important indication of this turn. The women's paper in such a traditional society was known as a manifestation of modernism and the strength of progressive circle. It was one of the first women specific papers which were published in the region.

The impact of modernity on women has been especially harsh, since women's lives have often been used as the raw material with which to establish ethnic prominence. Tribal laws and sanctions have routinely taken precedence over Islamic and constitutional laws in deciding gender roles, especially through kinship hierarchies in the rural regions. Tribal power plays, institutions of honor, and inter-tribal shows of patriarchal control have put women's position in jeopardy. Tribal laws view marriages as alliances between groups; women are pawned into marriages and not allowed to divorce, total obedience to the husband and his family is expected, and women are prevented from getting any education.

One has to pay attention to long-term events like the significant turn of events in the last century including the great war of Indian independence in 1857, The Great Game which is referred to the contest between Russia and Britain after which the landlocked regions of Afghanistan and Tibet were sucked into world politics because of the contestation of these two great powers and their games on the imperial chessboard. Similarly, these influences brought both these countries that were largely isolated from the modernizing process to a face-off with modernity. As part of these enforced modernists' agenda, they also came about certain reactions and are these two strands that continue to come up again and again in Afghanistan. In 1921 the king Amanullah Khan and his wife who returned from Europe opened schools for girls. It was an important event but then could not take off on account of the large-scale attitudes of society but cannot be wholly dismissed as it made a mark. We may say that the continued engagement with other countries and in education particularly through teachers from other countries has made an important change.

Amanullah actually float this agenda under the name of Islam but two aspects particularly the compulsory education of girls and the prohibition of polygamy was too much for the mullahs to digest and as it was seen as breaking the vitals of the traditional society (Olsen 1999: 186-187).

Under these pressures, Amanullah Khan was forced to moderate the reforms about women. According to scholars, the king and queen's reforms were relatively executed hastily and were unable to reconcile initiatives with the traditional society of Afghanistan. Finally, in 1922, under Loya jirga (council of the head of tribes, clerics, and people representatives) these reforms were doomed to stop.

### **3.6 The Social Role of Women: Islamic Feminism**

In light of the information presented so far, it should come as no surprise that development scholars generally view women as playing the central role in the development drama. Globally, women tend to be poorer than men. They are also more deprived in health and education and in freedoms in all its forms.

Moreover, women have the responsibility of bringing up child. Children need better health and education, and studies from around the developing world shows that mothers spend a big part of income for the children than fathers do. Women also pass culture to the next generation. In this regard Franks mentions that:

Many strategies emerge in a reading of how Muslim women actually articulate their positions within the spaces available in the Islamic framework. Calm in her book titled *women Islamism in the State* reiterates a factor that Islamic societies like other societies are never in a position of stasis and therefore this changing contexts are therefore cleverly utilized or to put it in a more sophisticated way strategically utilised by women to articulate certain rights and freedoms (Karam 1998: 5 & Franks 2001: 25)

One of the problems today with regard to feminism in Islamic countries is the use of the term Islamist feminism and the chief proponent of this point is karam, who argues for this term by saying that Islamic principles guide women in Muslim societies and the term feminism is incompatible. Her argument is also based on the aspect that women in Muslim societies are not placed in unnatural settings as in the western countries. This critique is how were unfounded as oppression between the genders is a part of everyday life in all societies on account of their involvement in the domestic production. Further, the spaces in domestic life are one of the important arenas of contestation and therefore the term feminism cannot be rejected wholesale (Piela 2010: 428).

Muslim feminists argue that gender equality is valid in Islam because the message of the Qur'an is holy which focuses on the gender equality. Therefore, their goals are to un-read patriarchy from Islamic sources and popularize this idea in the Muslim societies. It is based on contextualization of Islamic law and contesting predominantly male power structures in the discipline of theology. Women classified as Muslim

feminists acknowledge the common goals they have with other feminists. On the other hand, they also note the different challenges that they face and claim that the only way to be recognized as authentic in their quest for women's empowerment in their societies is to engage with Islamic sources.

With regard to Egypt once again karam argues that the description of Islamist and Muslim feminists distinctions do matter and did not cooperate with each other and that Muslim and secular feminists are likely to cooperate. Another problem joined issue by Piela is that there is space for Muslim women's emancipation and struggle by cooperating with other feminists. In this situation, one can also see that Egypt is a peculiar example because of the presence of Coptic Christians who form around 10% of the population and were also highly westernized and fugue not has any religious or clerical authority to censure them in matters of social and religious attitudes. It is this relative freedom that has made the Egyptian women's movement largely populated by the Coptic women, however, this point is underplayed by both the writers. (Piela 2010: 427).

### **3.7 The General Status of Women**

It is impossible to study the status of Afghan women, regardless of the factors such as war, poverty, illiteracy, destruction of economic and political foundations, etc. over the past decades for this is the reasons that Afghanistan had turned into a backward and third world country. It was devoid of any sort of development elements, hence there was an extreme need of human and natural capitals and resources for a holistic reconstruction and rehabilitation.

It is necessary to mention that a general overview of women's status offers us a more accurate picture. The status of Afghan women is low to a great extent in comparison with either men of Afghanistan or women of many other countries. The fields of comparison would be hygiene, violation of rights, economic production, education and literacy, and political participation.

Due to the nationwide insecurity, census was not precise but approximate and estimated through cluster or random sampling and based on reports, out of the total population of the illiterate with 8 million, 60 percent were women. Educating women in Afghanistan would be a solution to rescue them from the unusual condition but

there are lot of problems to do so, therefore the rate of illiteracy among women usually stands more than men.

The statistics published by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2013 represented the ratio of 37 percent of girls at schools and 18 percent at universities. In addition, according to data in 2013, only 28 percent of teachers and 15 percent of university lecturers and professors were women. The total number of teachers was 200,000 out of which 70,000 were females. Moreover out of the total number of university professors of 3,500, only 500 female professors were teaching at several universities. Therefore the percentage of women at higher levels of education in the country has remained insignificant (unicef.org).

According to UNICEF organization report: In the case of medical specialists, the number of doctors reached to 2,119 of which 633 were women (unicef.org). Usually female doctors specialize in the fields of obstetrics and gynecology. The numbers of general physicians also were about 6,000 out of which 1,000 women. The average life expectancy of Afghan women was 44 years which was 20 years less than the women of other countries. While in rest of the world, women generally live longer than men; women in Afghanistan die younger and even earlier than men. In spite of loss of men during 28 years of war, the population of men is significantly higher than women.

Actually, this figure was quite high because the average figure in the world during 2009-2013 was 2.56 children per woman and in undeveloped countries this figure stood at 5.02 children. Thus, 6.6 among Afghan women were very high. Early marriages and successive births were reasons for high maternal mortality rate making it the highest maternal mortality by birth in the world. Relying on figures and statistics to study the status of women is always likely to be wrong or can involve errors. Although the statistics represent the situation in Afghanistan closer to reality, due to insecurity in many zones, the regions remained away from the researchers to study. Therefore, as a matter of fact, it could be claimed that represented statistics could be even quite less than this (unstats.un.org).

During recent years and from an optimistic viewpoint, it can be said that many opportunities for women had been provided to represent and develop the country as much as possible. Several women are standing on critical jobs and obtaining important positions in political, judicial and prosecutorial areas and fields.

To provide security, thousands of women are working in different sectors of Afghanistan security forces and the military. Most of them work to inspect homes and individuals, mostly at night, air force and army logistic units.

In the economic sector, there are almost 1200 factories out of that only 4 large factories are owned by women. 10% of the total numbers of workers in the industrial sector are women which are equal to 200,000, and also approximately 15 million women are working in the business sector. About thousand companies are run by female managers. Approximately there are 38 thousand registered companies in Afghanistan. Though most business sectors belong to male owners, women are more active in handicrafts industry of the economic sphere.

75 percent of women are directly or indirectly working in agriculture and animal husbandry. Among industries, agriculture and animal husbandry are of particular importance since they provide 66 percent of the country's exports of wool and vegetable products. In spite of women's large participation in agriculture and animal husbandry, the main income belongs to men (acci.org.af).

In Media, out of total 6,000 employees 2,400 were women. In film industry also only 10% (100 persons) of the total staffs were women. In film-making profession, they achieved a couple of regional and international awards. The numbers of female filmmakers have reached to 20. In addition, they achieved some outstanding records in different sports sectors; out of 10,000 sport-persons, there were 500 female athletes who were active in 23 different sports. The total female athletes in the country, who informally exercised, estimated at about 3,000 (jobportal.ir).

### **3.8 Afghanistan a Patriarchal Society**

#### **3.8.1 Greeting**

The women are subjugated in a way that even their most simple social activities seem unusual. The Afghan women are supposed to greet in a different way from how men do in the society. In fact, the greetings in Afghanistan vary according to gender. For example, Afghan women do not kiss or shake hands with most men, but they do shake hands with close male family members such as their fathers, brothers and uncles.



A routine of Afghan women reveals the indicate have his patterns of patriarchal operations in the society on a day-to-day basis. Socialization between man and woman is rare and takes place only on formal occasions and this is codified by certain formal. A typical Afghan greeting lasts 5 min indicating the nature of format society which is actually a carryover from the Persian courtly culture. It also reveals the different layers of society and the way the younger person has to behave with the older person and the different members of a group who are addressed on the basis of their social position and also their age and gender. Thus, a decoding of a simple ritual such as greeting is understood by all women of the Afghan society as a marker of the status and also a cultural transaction where honorifics are exchanged in a prescribed manner. One may summarize that the socialization shows the women her true position which is supposed to reenact on a day-to-day basis and so as for reproducing the patriarchal structures (Khinjani 2012: 5).

### **3.8.2 Clothing**

Dress is one of the important markers of social identity and also cultural identity in Afghan society and over the years, the changes in dress also reflect the overall changes in the society and nowhere is this reflected radically than in the transition from the Marxist rule where women wore skirts and very few rural women wore the full burqa or chador. The expensive material and colorful material also reflects the social status but under the Taliban state courts of dress are enforced. (Khinjani 2012: 3).

Another compulsory adornment along with dress is jewelry and most of the one-woman are fond of jewelry particularly gold which they wear along with expensive clothes on festive occasion not only to mark the occasion but also to display a certain amount of social values like superordinate status and a sense of richness. Presently, this has been stalked to the large degree and thus explains the transition that was rapid from a relatively western liberal ethos to an imagined Islamic ideal.

### **3.8.3 Marriage**

In Afghanistan, marriage is of the utmost importance. Afghans say, “Without marriage, life and faith are incomplete.” Therefore, there are few unmarried people in Afghanistan. Parents are always trying to find suitable partners for their sons and

daughters. The Law on Marriage stipulates that marriage must be through choice and that 16 years is the legal age of marriage for women and 18 years for men.

However, there is no clear provision in the Criminal Procedure Law to penalize those who arrange forced or underage marriages. Article 99 of the Law on Marriage states that marriage of a minor may be conducted by a guardian, known under Shari'a law as a Shari'a-wali, i.e. the legal minimum age for marriage can, and is safely ignored. There is currently a failure to treat forced marriage as a criminal offence due to the attitudes of judicial personnel and of the wider society. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is currently advocating for an increase of the legal age of marriage for women to 18 years, as well as a reenactment of the requirement to register marriages also at provincial level (Khinjani 2012: 2).

The traditional Islamic idea of marriage does not fit in neatly in the social value of Afghanistan where the tribal realities are ever present and your marriage is seen as the union of two families not just us to individuals and therefore the family and the Honor of the family are important (Khinjani 2012: 3).

In Afghanistan, marriage starts with the boy's family going to the girl's family to ask for her hand. Then the boy's family visits the girl's family from time to time. Sometimes, the girl's family does not give an answer right away to the boy's family because a quick answer implies that the girl's family is eager to get rid of her. If the boy's family thinks that the girl's family is eager to marry her off, the boy's family may think her worth less, and they too may value her less (Khinjani 2012: 3).

Honor is one of the most important elements in Afghanistan and embraces all aspects of society, including both men and women and women, are supposed to adhere to the traditional courts of marriage and can never say no to an arranged marriage which is the norm as other forms of marriage are too rare and also not sanctioned. From the feminist point of view, this type of marriages is forced marriage and in a case of refusal by the bride, taking of her life would also follow and is not a big deal.

In contrast to rural Afghanistan, the urban centres of Kabul and other main cities follow a different pattern of consumption that is also wasteful. Hotels and restaurants are the main venues where lavish display of wealth occurs and it also reflects the

capacity of the patron. In the villages, marriages are performed at the houses of the groom and also the bride one notices a clear gender segregation where men and women are both entertained separately. Some traditional practices which also empowered women and give them space that was part of the rituals have also been pushed to the background or totally removed. The poor security situation of Afghanistan has forced many changes including changes in marriage and thus it is assumed that an announcement of marriage will be an open invitation (Khinjani 2012: 3).

While the marriage ceremony is an elaborate affair and may last for a week, many elements including the application of henna, which is part of the traditional South Asian culture and also one of the important spaces for women to get together and also perform by singing songs or exchanging pleasantries is any event that is looked forward to. Like the real marriage function which is a religious element and called “Nikah”, where marriages are solemnized, is an universal affair in all Islamic societies but the other functions are peculiar to each society and it is here that in Afghanistan, the vitality of rural life gives to women a large amount of gendered space that is created during such ceremonies like marriage. One of the most important points of this is that a sudden community of women is also formed which lasts temporarily during the henna ceremony.

#### **3.8.4 Divorce**

With the issue of divorce, one notices a stark contrast between theory and practice in Islamic societies where women have the right to divorce in theory but in practice is not allowed as the operation of patriarchy brings about the tribal nature of Afghan society. We also see that it is difficult for women who were widowed, divorced or single due to physical ailments. The reason is very simple as the identity of women is not autonomous but returned the identity of her caretaker and family.

#### **3.9 Women’s Right Due to Islamic Teaching**

It is generally agreed that women all over the world, whether in Islamic or non-Islamic societies, have long struggled for equality. However, the issue of inequality between men and women is large and quite significant in Afghanistan.

All aspects of women's lives are dictated or to say controlled by certain codes and these are actually restrictions. Most of these codes actually do not have any religious basis but a cultural artefact and therefore are not only residues but ever-changing elements of culture that are introduced continually and confused both by insiders and outsiders and having legal basis in the Islamic religion (Khinjani 2012: 27).

Islam forbids female infanticide which was often practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia and other parts of the world. Islam also instructs Muslims to educate daughters as well as sons and insists that women have the right to refuse a prospective husband. Islam also gives a woman rights if her husband divorces her and women have the right to a divorce in certain cases. Furthermore, Islam gives women the right to own and inherit property (Khinjani 2012: 27).

### **3.10 Equality of Right and Inequality**

The Constitution of Afghanistan reports that: According to the new Constitution of Afghanistan passed in 2003, there are new kinds of protections for women on a firm legal basis particularly article 22 in article 23 which prohibits discrimination and proclaims equal rights and duties before law respectively. Further there is also another important article titled number 45 which is more in the domain of the directive principle that provides for the state to adopt measures for the physical and psychological well-being of the entire family including women and children. One of the important provisions in this article is the abolishing of cultural practices that are contrary to the sacred religion of Islam. The cellphone/outlaws the cultural deadweight that has characterized of one society and which is borne by the women (Constitution of Afghanistan 2003: 5-10)

The Bonn Agreement was slightly more specific in terms of calling for the creation of a gender-sensitive and fully representative government and underlining the importance of women's participation in the Interim Administration. As we can understand from the survey which was done by the Afghanistan, it shows the perception of the people throughout the country both men and women. Their idea reveals that the biggest problems in Afghan Society are Education/ literacy, lack of jobs Opportunity, Lack of rights/ Women's rights, Domestic Violence, Forces marriages/dowry, General health care and poverty.

Based on the “Survey of the Afghan People” nearly one third of respondents (29%) identify lack of education and/or illiteracy as the biggest problem faced by women followed by lack of job opportunities (14%). Ten percent mention the lack of rights (including women’s rights), 8% say domestic violence, and smaller percentages mention forced marriage/dowry (6%), general healthcare (5%) and poverty (4%)” (Osman Tariq 2012: 10).

Despite constitutional gender equality, the notion of complementarities between male and female roles rather than that of equality still greatly influences the lives of Afghan women. Afghan women are far from a homogenous group, and differences by ethnicity, region, socioeconomic status, education level and residence in urban/rural areas are significant. Overall women's lives center on the family and the household, which are seen as their main area of activity. Their rights and duties are assigned by both formal and informal systems, which ultimately define their place in the family and in the society.

Afghanistan is one of the few countries in the world that has a very low life expectancy rate not only because of the conflict but also because of the high rates of illiteracy. One of the main problems that have been identified with regard to a preventing the advancement of women is a lack of education and this has a direct coalition with gender inequality and it is shocking to note that Afghanistan ranks 139 /145 in the list of countries with regard to gender inequality, meaning that it is in the bottom-most countries. Lack of education has also led to child marriages and the fact that women are unable to be agents of any change or even of their own actions largely. The table in appendix gives a clear idea about the trends of education and illiteracy in Afghanistan over the decades (See Appendix, Table 1, page No 260).

Women are subjected to the social control system and their marriage headed by their husband’s fathers; are subordinate to all men and the older women of the family. They have no claim on paternal inheritance rights or other assets; have their labor and progeny appropriated by male members of the household; and are sometimes subject to institutionalized seclusion, severe restrictions on movement and strict division of gender roles assigning the public sphere to men and the private sphere to women. It is, however, important to recognize that, at least in theory, this system of control is framed as a mutual set of rights and obligations, whereby Afghan men are expected to

provide for the entire family and treat women in an appropriate fashion, and there is scope for women to wield a degree of influence within the domestic sphere.

However, recent years have also witnessed a degree of backlash against women's empowerment. Many of the rights promised to women in the 2004 constitution and elsewhere are yet to be implemented across the country, and including the recent legislation—such as the infamous Shia Personal.

Changes to the election law in 2010 and profound effects more so in the domain regarding gender. This was actually enacted in a period is characterized by a state of exception with the breakdown of law and order and therefore one consensus. One of the important characteristic features of these sets of legislation since the return of conservative's strain that was also endorsed by the international funding bodies and also the other overseers. One of the immediate effect of this is a rapid shrinkage of gendered spaces in the public sphere (Lough & others 2012: 2).

This was vividly illustrated on 2 March 2012, when the country's Ulema council—a body of leading religious scholars—issued a statement asserting that women should not mix with unfamiliar men in education or the workplace, and should only go outside when accompanied by a Mahram (close male relative). Strongly echoing previous Taliban decrees, the statement would, if applied logically, bar all women from political office. Perhaps most shockingly, it was later endorsed by president Karzai, possibly in a bid to align himself as more sympathetic to Taliban goals in the context of proposed peace negotiations.

Gender equality has a very important correlation with 14 as most of the women do not participate in any production or income generating activities and are therefore directly dependent on their husbands. They cannot take part in agricultural animal husbandry for the simple reason that they are not allowed rather than they're not being unknowledgeable about these aspects (International Monetary Fund 2008: 31).

Nevertheless, the gender gap remains large with (i) the literacy rate among women being much lower (19%) than men (40%) and, (ii) the net primary school enrolment rate for girls (6-9) is around 21 percent while it is much higher for boys (28%). Female-headed households are closely correlated with high poverty due to lack of education and employment opportunities.

The implementation of strategy for gender equity is a shared responsibility among government's constraints and challenges have been addressed in detail inspector strategy paper as well as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), main entities at the national and sub-national levels. Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)'s status as lead ministry for women's advancement will be maintained and strengthened. All government entities will:

1. Foster a work environment that supports egalitarian relationships between women and men
2. Establish internal enabling mechanisms for gender equity
3. Support women's shuras. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) consultative and working groups will be provided with capacity to pursue gender mainstreaming.

Gender capacities of sector professionals will be strengthened and Institutes for Gender Studies will be established in selected universities beginning with Kabul University. The informal network of gender advisers will be tapped for a 'gender mentoring program' that will transfer gender expertise to nationals.

A technical support program for women managers in the civil service will also be created. Local chief executives are mandated to ensure that gender equity theme is incorporated into the local development plan and into the overall work of the local government. Pilot provinces on gender mainstreaming will be developed. DOWAs will build a network of gender advocates and their capacity to oversee sub-national gender mainstreaming will be strengthened" (International Monetary Fund 2008: 149).

### **3.11 Women's Health**

On health, there are two gender-related issues. First, women have the role of mothers and caregivers in the family. It means that maternity is a central issue. Since motherhood is important then certainly it should also be made as safe as possible. Second, addressing the ways in which gender exclusion and the disempowerment of women also raises child mortality as a key issue. Afghans have access to basic health

care. In spite of that it is alarming to note the very high rates of maternal mortality. As the “Mahbub-ul- Haq Development Centre” (2000) points that:

In Afghanistan, the household is largely managed by women while the men are also in charge of work outside home and this in the domestic sphere, it is the women who is practically the head of the family though not a matriarch. It is best illustrated by the familial structure as the death of women and more particularly that of a mother has large-scale implications for the health of her children particularly the girl children whereas the death of the father did not impact this to very large degree. Cross-cultural studies with reference to similar situations in India also validate this point and drive home the message that men, though replete with cash cannot manage the household because of their inadequate socializing in the domestic sphere that is largely left to the wife or mother (documents.worldbank.org).

In Afghanistan, tribes mostly live in villages and due to the lack of medical facilities and hospitals, the women are faced with many problems including depression, various diseases, dying in childbirth and having too many children and most of village women suffer from mental problems. In fact women encounter various psychological pressures. They suffer greatly from the harsh mistreatment imposed by family members.

One of the important problems to emerge in the health sector is the case of mental health and certain religious explanations including the effect of jinns and evil spirits are blamed. Most of the women also do not come out of this state of mental sickness because seeing women doctors only are allowed and seeing them a doctor is not allowed and they are a rarity.

Women are under great pressure to have baby boys because boys are considered a great blessing for a woman especially if it is the first baby. Women who have baby boys receive more attention from their husbands and are taken care of by the family. They also have the choice to rest as long as they want and can request gifts from their husbands. The men are also proud of them for having a baby boy. They buy clothes for all the women who helped their wives during labor (Khinjani 2012: 27).

The family also sends sweets to relatives and neighbors. If a baby girl is born, women feel embarrassed and their husbands value their wives less. Women who



deliver baby girls provide their husbands with a good excuse to marry another woman (Khinjani 2012: 27).

### **3.12 Violence against Women**

Violence is another problem that influences the life and activities of the Afghan women all over the country. Report on the condition of the Afghan women reveals so much attention combat against growing of violence. However, such analysis ignores the impact of an ongoing war, the legacy of the historical conflict and the outcomes of fragile governance. Experiences show that violence had created its share of bad effects on the victims both physically and psychologically as Khinjani also mentions:

Pre-war Afghanistan was one of the most peaceful countries in the world and also one in which gender equality was in full flow particularly after the reforms of the King. As the women's education is compulsory and many women meant the University many professions, particularly lawyers, teachers, doctors and other urban professionals were largely women. They are also seen in large numbers and dressed in western attire confidently walking without arousing any public disdain. On the contrary, women clothed in traditional attire were fast becoming a rarity and are also considered as conservative and old-fashioned in social circles. Many of the provinces also reflected the strengths (Khinjani 2012: 34).

But the various changes such as social, economic, political and other small or tremendous changes had made the society disastrous and problematic which consequently led to social challenges and violence for women in particular. In Afghanistan the issue of violence against women turned into a widespread and undeniable reality. In fact, Afghan women face variety of violence. The instances of violence were recorded and classified into four different types, namely physical, verbal and psychological, economic and sexual violence.

According to Womankind Worldwide, a UK charity, 80% of Afghan women are affected by domestic violence, over 60% of marriages are forced, and half of all girls are married before the age of 16. Violence against women not only has serious physical and mental effects but it also can result in self-immolation, suicide, running away, forced prostitution and drug addiction. (De Matos & Ward 2012: 164).

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has said that worsening insecurity in large swaths of the country, a growing culture of criminal impunity, weak law enforcement institutions, poverty and many other factors have contributed to increasing violence against women, including rape, torture and forced marriages (aihrc.org.af).

Forced marriages are often financial transactions “whereby a family is able to repay its debt or resolve immediate economic hardship by contracting an engagement for their daughter” (afghanistan.unifem.org).

According to the (2008 Violence against Women Primary Database Report from UNIFEM, in Afghanistan): Women and girls are mostly abused by people close to them; i.e. family members (father, mother, brother(s), life partners (husband, fiancée, ex-husband and/or boyfriend), step family members, in-laws and other relatives). This group amounts to 92% of the reported cases of abuse, when the women or girls seek recourse from the government they are further molested by the government representatives, this repeated victimization demonstrates the tremendous risk that women face if they dare to complain about violence at home. Their situation can also worsen if the officials or elders from whom they seek help refuse to protect the girls and women and return them to the same situation. Both the qualitative and quantitative data support information about forced and early marriage or engagement as a prominent element of violence against women (afghanistan.unifem.org).

Other such transactions, while not financial in nature, are still “compensatory to make amends for either a failed marriage transaction between the families where the initial marriage portion cannot be repaid or for a crime committed by a member of the girl/woman’s family, also known as Ba’ad.

Consequently, all the societies are suffused directly and indirectly from violence and aggression which are seen mostly in developing countries. Lack of equipment and facilities to the necessities services, men deserving, poverty, low level of literacy, low level of health care, high rate of mortalities, political Instability, fragile governance are the reasons that hinder women from having convenient lives and to participate actively with equal opportunities in the process of social and economic development.

### **3.12.1 Physical Violence**

The table below gives a clear idea about the predominant violence against women is physical violence. According to Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)'s research, during 2012, 88914 instances of physical violence had been reported (See Appendix, Table 2, page No 261).

In addition, women were also heavily affected by the ongoing armed conflict. Many women and children had lost their lives in suicide attacks, explosions of roadside bombs and air strikes. A recent AIHRC report states that 150 women and 821 children were seriously injured or killed by pro- and anti-governmental forces in the first 6 months of the current year (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012: 14).

### **3.12.2 Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence is a common but socially and culturally hidden form of violence against women. Though talking about and enlarging upon sexual violence is a taboo in Afghanistan traditional society, the table given in appendix shows that there had been an increase in the reported cases of sexual violence in 2012 by AIHRC (See Appendix, Table 3, page No 262).

It is very obvious that rape victims face new hardships, not just from the direct physical injuries sustained but also from the psychological impact which is increased by the risk of being infected by HIV/AIDS or having an unwanted pregnancy. The stigma attached to rape threatens women who speak out about the abuses to be abandoned by their husbands, ostracized by the community, left with no economic assets or income and puts her at risk of further human rights violations and deteriorated health.

Enforced silence is one of the main answers that people get when looking for victims of sexual violence and rape as this are connected with the idea of honor which is one of the important foundational values of South Asian and West Asian societies. In such cases, the idea of the victim and her plight are thought to be kept under the carpet as it would bring a bad name to the family. It is this aspect of tradition that has prevented the government from undertaking any large-scale program to stop sexual violence. Therefore sexual violence is also not about sex only but about power and honor combined in the body of the person.

As a result, rape is shrouded in social taboos that help maintain a conspiracy of silence, and by extension, inaction, that perpetuates and exacerbates the problem. Consequently, sexual violence is under-reported in Afghanistan, However, available information points to a widespread phenomenon. It affects all communities and all segments of the population (Human Rights report 2009: 21).

### **3.12.3 Verbal and Psychological Violence**

A common type of violence, that is rarely recognized as such, is verbal and psychological violence. Insulting and threatening, however, can seriously affect women's personality and psychology and have drastic consequence in their personal and social life. Humiliating and degrading behaviors against women occur in all spheres of society, inside the family as well as in public spaces, and puts women in a dangerous subjected position.

From the table below, we get many instances of women committing abuse to their own bodies and also taking the extreme step of even itself immolation as a means of approaching violence meted out to them. This not only includes physical violence but other forms of psychological and mental violence that has done much damage to the self of the women, 808 instances have been reported by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) during 2012 (See Appendix, Table 4, page No 263).

### **3.12.4 Economic Violence**

The data collected by AHIRC during the first 6 months of 2012 in the below table counts a total of 715 registered cases. In many cases, if women demand their rights, men resort to force and violence (See Appendix, Table 5, page No 264).

### **3.12.5 Other Instances of Violence**

Violence against women is not limited to the aforementioned boundaries, but there are other forms and types of violence imposed on women. 661 instances have been registered during the period of investigation at 2012 by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AHIRC) (See Appendix, Table 6, page No 265). Due to the widespread occurrence of these types of violence against women in the society, there is less social and cultural reaction against them. These types of violence are

often considered ordinary or normal and are accepted as common practices (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012: 20).

As the data presented show, forced and early marriage, expulsion from home or receiving high dowries occur frequently in Afghanistan and are rarely considered as violence against women. In reality, however, these practices have far-reaching negative impacts on women's life, personality health, social and economic conditions. Early marriages, for example, have devastating physical and psychological impacts on young girls. Harmful traditional practices and customs are the main reasons for the continuation of these forms of violence (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012: 21).

### **3.12.6 Perpetrators and Place of Violence**

The findings and information collected by regional and provincial offices of the AIHCR clearly show that acts of violence takes place almost exclusively within the victim's own family, making 90% of all reported cases. Against general opinion, the findings of this report show that those family members who are the closest to the victim are the main perpetrators of violence (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012:22).

On the long list with perpetrators, the victims' husbands take the first place with 2329 reported cases, followed by father (182), parent (152), fiancé (114), brother (98), brother in law (92), mother (49), sister in law (husband's sister) (35), victim's sons (31), paternal uncle (23), maternal uncle (17), sister (12), teacher (8) and others. In other words, the victims' husbands commit 70.1% of all violent acts. This appalling figure reveals a bitter reality of domestic violence that often remains in the dark of family structures (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012:22).

Besides close family members, other people have perpetrated violence against women. This group encompasses unidentified people in the streets and other public places, taxi and bus drivers, people at work, teachers, clergy and other people that are not part of the victim's family (Hasrat & Pfefferle 2012: 23).

### **3.13 Education**

Education is the basic element that can allow women to create better circumstances for their future lives. Unfortunately 80% of all Afghan women are illiterate mostly in rural areas. However, the government has made serious efforts and

strides sending girls to school. More than 60% of school aged girls are still not in school due to lack of schools and teachers and some other psychological fears and threats like school burning and acid attacks on girls and Venoms. Another problem is that most of girls are getting married before they can graduate from the schools.

Earlier efforts to raise the educational standards of women in Afghanistan prior to the Taliban rule text only the elite classes but did not filter down and today according to a report by the World Bank female literacy rate is just 21% which is one of the lowest in the world. These also confirmed by the fact that the statistical updates of Afghanistan are prone to over 14 and this may be a figure which is actually much lower than 21%. One of the positive trends is that 30% of enrolment in schools by women today is a very all-time high and has come after the restrictions were removed by the Taliban. Enrolment rates at school in 2000 were seen to be only 4% for girls and 29 % for boys, both of which are considered abysmal (World Bank Report 2005: 103).

The historical evolution of education policy and its politicization has been a major factor in the uneven development of education in Afghanistan. Successive governments and political groups have used education and girls' education in particular, as a launching pad for ideological and political maneuvering. Years of conflict have also taken their toll on educational infrastructure and access to education.

“In 1935, primary education was officially made compulsory and free and was constitutionally guaranteed in 1964, but serious nationwide implementation was lacking for many years. In 1975, several years prior to the conflict (which started with the Saur Revolution/PDPA coup in 1978), only 11.4% of Afghanistan's population of six years of age or above were literate, and a significantly greater proportion of males were literate than females. In urban settings 14.8% of males were literate while for rural women the figure was as low as 0.6%” (Hunte 1978:24).

Nearly 80 percent of all Afghan women and girls are illiterate and 90 percent in rural areas. Although the government has made significant strides getting girls into school, more than 60 percent of school age girls are still not in school. This is due in part to a shortage of schools and teachers, and in part to the reluctance of parents in

insecure areas to send their daughters to school for fear of reprisals such as school burnings and acid attacks on girls (Asia Foundation Report 2011: 2).

According to new survey which was conducted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2011-2012, total number of schools all over the country were 14394. Total number of students was 7861988 people, out of which 3013009 students were female. This includes all students in primary, middle, professional, night time schools, teachers training and religious schools. There was an increase of 10.2% in female students in 2011-2012 compared to 2010-2011. The total number of teacher was 180489 in 2011-2012 out of which 54069 were female (Ministry of Education 2013: 14).

The Human Development Index (HDI) 2011 showed that population with at least secondary education in 2010 with the age 25 and older is 5.8 for female and 34 for male which express a high gap between female and male (Human Development Report 2015: 2).

Total number of Government and Private Universities was 69, and total number of faculties was 285 all over the country in 2011-2012. Total number medical and sciences, technical and vocational institute was 62 with 145968 students out which 25236 students were female. There was an increase of 30.4% in female students in 2011-2012 compared to previous year. Total number of teachers was 6361 in 2011-2012 out of which 959 were female (Afghanistan Statistics Yearbook 2013: 73).

Again and again the government of Afghanistan next many programs and announces its commitments to further girls education. The investment in education is one of most important factors and one sees a poor relation between the educated girls and the later life as they tend to marry later, are more till the end also increase the hopeful income and the health indicators and economic indicators for the family in the country also rise proportionally (World Bank Report 2005: 27)

The first issue explored relates to gender equality in education. Respondents were asked whether they agree with the statement, "Women should have equal opportunities to men in education." Almost nine in 10 respondents (87%) say they agree with this statement, including 48% who strongly agree. Only 12% say they disagree with the statement. The response for this question in 2012 closely matches

those for 2009-2011; in fact, responses have been fairly consistent since 2006. Respondents' views on equality in education are broadly consistent with the high level of public support for equal rights under the law, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion (83%). A higher proportion of women (92%) than men (83%) support equal opportunities for women in education.

Children's access and particularly the access of girls to school is an important concern because of the high rates of illiteracy in Afghanistan. The patriarchal attitudes deemed that education is unnecessary and also harmful and as such not needed. Further, other factors like lack of women teachers, poverty and attacks on girl's schools which then become insecure spaces have also contributed to this.

After the downfall of the Taliban, Afghanistan saw the highest school enrollment rates in its history, with more than 4.3 million children enrolled in primary and secondary school in 2003, of which one-third were girls. In the age group 7-12 years, 67% of boys and 40.5% of girls were enrolled (United Nations Development Programme report 37) with such a high level of girls' enrollment in particular representing an impressive achievement.

Likewise, the number of schools had increased from 3,800 in 2002 to 7,134 currently. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports that demand for girls' education is surging and that the girls' schools that opened for informal winter sessions in all parts of the country after the defeat of the Taliban were overflowing in 2003, even in traditional Pashtun areas like Helmand Province, where 500 girls showed up on the first day. At Kabul University, more than 18,000 students took the admissions examination at the beginning of 2002. Thus, demand for education is high, but there are also serious constraints (qt. from Report Card: Progress on Compulsory Education ([reliefweb.int](http://reliefweb.int))).

The majority of formal educational institutions in Afghanistan are sex-segregated from grades 1-12. In 1974 only 12.3% of schools (all levels) were girls' schools, and the geographical disparity was also great – 30% of the country's lycees were located in Kabul, and in some provinces there were no lycees at all for girls secondary school. In 1979, as few as about 3,500 schools existed in all, and only 13.1% of these were girls' schools (Lahr & Azerbaijani-Moghadam 2002: 14).



The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government's pro-active secular education policy led to an increase in access, so that by 1990 almost 20% of primary schools were girls' schools. However, the ongoing conflict after the collapse of the PDPA government in 1992 resulted in a worsening security situation and in a sharp reduction in both boys' and girls' schools. In 1993 only 13.2% of schools were girls' schools - a return to the situation of 15 years earlier (unesco.org).

Access to education deteriorated further from 1994 onward as a result of the Taliban's draconian policies on girls' education and female employment. By 1996-97, female education was prohibited and only 2% of Directorate [government-managed] schools were girls' schools, while many boys' schools were gradually transformed into madrasas (religious schools) in the same period (World Bank Report 2005: 36).

Despite these official restrictions, female primary education continued to some degree, supported by NGOs. When these schools are included, a proportionate increase in girls' schools appears, reaching almost 14.5% of total number of schools in 1999, mainly due to the increase in NGO funded girls' schools in the Eastern and Central regions where the Taliban's closing down of the Directorate managed [government-managed] girls' schools was felt the most strongly. The resulting proportionate increase in girls' schools during the 1990s was also partly due to the reduction in the number of boys' schools (World Bank Report 2005: 37).

### **3.13.1 Educational Barriers for Women**

There are many barriers for women's education in Afghanistan. Based on the (The Central Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2004) the MICS of 2003 addressed the issue of why children (aged 7-12) are not enrolled in school. Both urban and rural families refer to 'distance' as the most common reason for not sending their children to school. While 29% of rural parents refer to the inadequacy of the school facility and 24% to the lack of a separate facility, i.e. lack of a girls' school, as the reason for not sending their child/daughter to school, these are far less common reasons for the urban population, which are better served with school facilities.

However, 'domestic work' and schooling 'not necessary' are quite frequently mentioned by both urban and rural households, interestingly enough with a higher frequency among urban households. These figures are a clear indication to planners

that lack of access and lack of adequate facilities, including lack of separate girls' schools, constitute the main obstacles to school enrollment (World Bank Report 2005: 41).

Other factors are lack of toilets and water in schools; ADB reports that approximately one-third of the schools have no identifiable water source, and less than 15% have toilets for children's use and that this discourages particularly older girls' from remaining in school (reliefweb.int).

Considering the dramatic regional disparities in enrollment, this calls for a major effort in expanding the coverage of quality schools for boys and girls all over the country. As far as the urban population is concerned, increased attention should be paid to the households' domestic demands on children's labor and ensuring that the curriculum will convince parents that education is not only relevant but also 'necessary' (World Bank Report 2005: 42).

During the 1990s, the absolute number of employed teachers decreased and the proportion of female teachers was also reduced, with the result that in 2000 the number of female teachers was between one half and 1/3 of what it had been in 1979. Of these, more than 60% were working outside government schools (in NGO run schools). There are now over 70,000 teachers, 28% of whom are women (i.e. about 19,600), but geographical and rural-urban disparities are still glaring: For example in the Khost province there are 1,374 teachers for grades 1 to 9, and only nine of them are women (World Bank Report 2005: 43).

Higher education experiences a similar gender disparity among its teaching staff. In 2003 around 12% of professors were female, but while they constituted 1/6 of professors with a Bachelor degree only 1/13 of professors with a Master degree were female. Only 2 female professors had a PhD as compared to 130 male professors (World Bank Report 2005: 43).

The norm of early marriage creates both social and legal impediments to girls' education. Not only do girls drop out due to increased domestic responsibilities after marriage, but a law passed in the mid-1970s prohibiting married women from attending high-school classes was upheld by the Afghan government in September

2003, and defended on grounds that it was meant to “protect unmarried girls from learning explicit details about sex from their married classmates” (iwpr.net).

One of the interventions in the recent period by the Ministry of women's affairs in 2004, following a presidential decree, is the establishment of a vocational high school in Kabul to cater to the married woman and as such, there was also a government ordinance that removed obstacles to married women studying. (Bahgam & Mukhatari 2004: 14-15).

In Badakhshan, which is characterized by a comparatively favorable climate toward girls' education, girls still tend to drop out around puberty, because they are kept at home to prepare for marriage (which may happen at an age as young as 13). Strategic

Mobility and dress, particularly the burqa for an older girl which is a mandatory requirement for her to cover up and go to school is also a costly affair in regions like Badakhshan too where relatively liberal views exist, restricted mobility on girls who have typically travelled beyond the confines of their villages is a major constraint. Another point needs to be made here is that it is more uneconomical to keep a boy in school because of the loss of a productive hand at home. In the case of girls, this is not much of a problem as the economic participation of girls is low. (Bahgam & Mukhatari 2004: 35).

The Afghanistan Institute of Learning has found that communities consider linkage to health education appropriate. Community suggestions to include domestic studies or health care in addition to the required academic subjects for girls at secondary level perpetuate what are considered appropriate gender roles.

The International rescue committee's efforts have led to some results in the sense that local communities are able to allow girls to go to school by improvising certain structures like safe transport, teaching at home and in a house based location and also with providing learning opportunities for student's lost out during the conflict period.

The broad concept of domestic sciences have in other conservative societies helped to pioneer female education, apart from its potential impact on household health and nutrition. Community-derived concepts of relevance have also determined content of ‘second chance’ education for girls. In the experience of International

Rescue Committee, the focus has been on incorporation of life and livelihood skills appropriate to the local context.

The acute shortage of female teachers has been dealt with by the Swedish Committee, CARE and International Rescue Committee, by accepting a community-selected woman (and particularly for younger age groups, possibly a man) with lower levels of education (usually 9th Grade) and providing teacher training supported by regular on-job monitoring and mentoring. While the weakness of this approach may be the quality of education, it has nevertheless reinstated female education disrupted by conflict or lack of qualified teachers, and more remarkably, it has also facilitated first-time ever female education in a number of rural communities. For example, CARE has achieved 48% female participation among its students in Logar, Paktia, Paktika, Wardak and Ghazni. Emphasis is given to frequent and effective monitoring to support and maintain quality.

### **3.14 Women's Employment and Salary**

Employment in Afghanistan like other developing country is abnormal with lot of difficulties especially for the women. The share of women in employment is very less than the male and most of women are engaged in government sector (education), self-employment, agriculture, services sector, National and International Organizations.

Afghanistan has relate economic potential but is not fully realized and the absence of an entrepreneurial class was earlier blamed, but it gendered reading also points to other possibilities that have not been explored. The invisibility of women heights them from participation in production related activities. The agrarian economy of Afghanistan which contributes around 80% of the total employment figures has vast potential to change if it includes women and also point to new set of household -based prosperity (National Development Framework 2013: 13).

Contributing 53% to Gross domestic product (GDP) and 67% to the labor force in 2003, agriculture (including crops, livestock, forestry and fishery) is central to the Afghan economy. Agricultural and related activities are a major vehicle for women's participation in the economy. Production is dominated mainly by subsistence-oriented family holdings, with a well-defined division of labor based on age and gender (World Bank Report 2005: 53).

Women play an important role in all dimensions of agricultural production - in certain regions women's time input equals men's, while in other regions traditions restrict their work to the household where they are involved in crop processing and are in charge of household maintenance and reproductive activities. In most cases women's labor is non-monetized, but they make large labor contributions to a range of marketed products such as dried fruits, opium, fuel wood, dairy products and handicrafts (Afghanistan Gender Report 2005: 55).

Women's involvement in the formal sector has grown since the 1960s, mainly as civil servants in the health and education sectors. Currently, close to one-third of all teachers are female, but many more are required to ensure increased enrollment of girls. In the health sector, an estimated 40% of health facilities lack female staff, which along with the shortage of rural health facilities constitutes a major constraint to delivering much needed health services to the female half of the population (ibid).

In rural Afghanistan, as elsewhere in the region, there are distinct male and female roles in the rural economy. Evidence from surveys in Laghman, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Paktia, Helmand, Faryab and Saripul confirms that women and girls engage in a number of farm based activities ranging from seed bed preparation, weeding, horticulture, and fruit cultivation to a series of post-harvest crop processing activities such as cleaning and drying vegetables, fruits and nuts for domestic use and for marketing (Afghanistan Gender Report 2005: 56).

Statistics regarding the production aspects revealed certain strange findings with 37% and 27% of domestic activities undertaken by women and girls respectively in the domestic domain and only 15% of men. With regard to agricultural activities, the time spent by both men and women was equal whereas women were more involved in works at home and thus amounts to more of processing and background work. As mentioned earlier the province of Badakhshan shows favorable gender indicators relatedly (Afghanistan Gender Report 2005: 55)

The role of women in agricultural production is largely determined by the life cycle of the household, the location of household fields and other reproductive and productive tasks that women undertake during the agricultural year. The availability of sufficient labor within the household can often mean that women are not required to participate in cultivation outside the family compound. However, widows, women

with young children, or married daughters will often be required to assist with the cultivation of particular labor-intensive crops (Kerr-Wilson & Pain 2003: 97).

Report of gender roles in five villages based on fieldwork by Grace in Faryab and sanipul release also certain class factors that are prominent in the society of Afghanistan. Rich women are not interested to do much labor and it has also become a fashion to be away from laboring activities.

Furthermore, with labor becoming unremunerated with regard to the returns on the land labor-intensive crops do not provide much remuneration whereas opium gives a lot of rewards. (Kerr-Wilson & Pain 2003: 112 & Grace 2004: 21).

The public role of women in reciprocal labor arrangements for opium poppy cultivation highlights the importance of unpaid labor in the production of poppy (Mansfield 2002: 11).

Almost no economy pays equal wages to men and women, even for the same work, and Afghanistan is no exception. In agriculture, women receive a fraction of the wages that men do, ranging from 50% to 60% for specific tasks. The NRVA provides very useful information in this regard. These wage gaps are indicative of the value placed on women's work and on the social context of female poverty, e.g. in case of female-headed households.

The NRVA results upended in the table in appendix shows certain serious lapses with regard to the low salary paid to women on one hand and also another type of scrimmage and it is evident is the monotonous and backbreaking jobs that are repetitive are largely done by women similarly children too (See Appendix, Table 7, page No 266). This leads to the production process itself generating more inequalities in all where women are present (Afghanistan Gender Report 2005: 64).

In urban areas women's employment outside the domestic sphere had always been limited and subject to severe restrictions. In 1975-76 approximately 5.6% of government employees were female, while in the industrial sector only 1,536 out of a total 36,875 employees were women. The fertilizer and electricity establishment in Mazar-i Sharif employed the largest number of women; in addition, factories which processed foods and beverages or produced cotton cloth also had considerable numbers of female workers (Hunte 1978: 34-38).

During the PDPA government, the female labor force in the cities increased and women were employed in all major government departments, in addition to the police force, the army, business and industry. Women taught, studied and acted as judges in the Family Court, dealing with issues relating to divorce, custody of children and other family matters. When the Taliban assumed power and initially prohibited all female employment, it was estimated that in Kabul city there were some 40,000 women in public service. They accounted for 70% of all the teachers in Kabul, about 50% of civil servants and an estimated 40% of medical doctors (Yaseen 2015: 12).

## References

Agneta, Jacobson Söderberg. *Security on Whose Terms? If Men and Women Were Equal*. Introduction, Kvinna till Kvinna Report, Women's Empowerment Projects, 2009.

Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. "A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 4, No. May 2003.

Karam, Azza, *Women; Islamisms and the State (Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt)*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998.

Bahgam, S, Mukhatari, W. *Study on Child marriage in Afghanistan*. Medica Mondiale, Cologne, May 2004.

Canfield, Robert L. New Trends among the Hazaras: From 'The Amity of Wolves' to 'The Practice of Brotherhood.' *Iranian Studies*, vol. 37, no.2. June 2004.

De Matos, Christine, Ward, Rowena. *Gender, Power, and Military Occupations: Asia Pacific and the Middle East since 1945*, Routledge, 2012.

Dupree, Louis. *Afghanistan*. Princeton University Press, 1973.

Grace, J, Pain, Adam. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. AREU (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit), Synthesis Paper Series, Kabul. 2004.

Gregorian, Vartan. *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*. Stanford University Press, 1969.

Hawley, John Stratton, Proudfoot, Wayne. *Introduction in Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan." *hrw.org*, 1 February 2001. [www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/afghanistan/](http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/afghanistan/) [Accessed on 06/02/2015]

Hasrat, M.H, Pfefferle, Alexandra. *Violence against Women in Afghanistan*. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, Afghanistan, 2012. [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/VAW\\_Final%20Draft-20.12](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/VAW_Final%20Draft-20.12) [Accessed on 20/02/2015]



Hunte, P. *Women and the Development Process in Afghanistan*. 1978. Project: Regional Training for Women, July 1978.

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper." *International Monetary Fund*, 2008.

Joseph, Suad, Slyomovics, Susan. *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Kazim, Seyed Abdullah, *Afghan women under the pressure of tradition and modernity*, Afghanistan: Maiwand, 2005.

Kerr-Wilson, Alice, Pain, Adam, *Three Villages in Alingar, Laghman: A Case Study of Rural Livelihoods*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) Case Studies Series, November 2003.

Lau, M. *Afghanistan's Legal System and its Compatibility with International Human Rights Standards*. International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2002.

Lahr, J, Azerbaijani-Moghadam, S. "Afghanistan, education." Report of the EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission. *European Commission Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit*, Brussels, 2002.

Lough, Oliver and others. "Equal Rights, Unequal Opportunities (Women's Participation in Afghanistan's Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections)." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit Synthesis Paper*, UN entity for gender equality and the empowerment of Women in Afghanistan, March 2012. [www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Synthesis%20Paper%20copy.pdf](http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Synthesis%20Paper%20copy.pdf) [Accessed on 16/02/2015]

MacDonald, Laura Zahra. *Islamic Feminisms*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2007.

Marsden, Peter. *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan*. London: Zed Books, 2002.

Moghadam, Valentine. *Nationalist Agendas and Women's Rights: Conflicts in Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Rutledge, In West, Lois A. (Ed). *Feminist Nationalism*, 1997.

[news.newamericamedia.org/news/mobile\\_cats.php?view=article&article\\_id=263](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/mobile_cats.php?view=article&article_id=263)

Mansfield, David. "The economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production: Myth and Reality." Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan, *International Conference on the Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development*, Cooperation. Munich, January 2002.

Mir Ghobar, Mohammad Gholam. *Afghanistan in the course of history*. USA, Vol 1, Communist Party of Afghanistan, 1999.

Myfanwy, Franks, *Women and Revivalism in the West: Choosing 'Fundamentalism' in a Liberal Democracy*, London: Palgrave, 2001.

National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, "The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future." *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*, March 2005.

Olsen, S. *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*. Khalil Ali Az-Zumar, Denmark, 1999.

Osman Tariq, Mohammad and others. "Afghanistan in 2012; A Survey of the Afghan People." *The Asia Foundation*, 2012, [asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Surveybook2012web1.pdf](http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Surveybook2012web1.pdf) [Accessed on 16/02/2015]

Piela, Anna. 2010. "Muslim Women's Online Discussions of Gender Relations in Islam." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 3, September 2010.

Peters, Gretchen. "A city trembles at ethnic fault line, war's front line." *The Christian Science Monitor*, vol. 93 issue 228. 22 October 2001.

Phillips, Denise. "Hazaras' Persecution Worsens: Will the New Government show Leadership by lifting the Suspension on Afghani Asylum Claims?" *aph.org.au*, 28 June 2010. [aph.org.au/hazaras-persecution](http://aph.org.au/hazaras-persecution) [Accessed on 08/02/2015]

Razaagh, Hamed. Employment situation of women in Afghanistan, *jobportal.ir*, 30 April 2008. [www.jobportal.ir/s3/Default.aspx?ID=9\\_2\\_7413\\_9\\_514](http://www.jobportal.ir/s3/Default.aspx?ID=9_2_7413_9_514) [Accessed on 15/02/2015]

Khinjani, Shaima, *Afghan Women: A Guide to Understanding an Afghan Woman's Role in her Society*, Defense Critical Language/Culture Program, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, 2012.

Singh, Iesha. "Exploring issues of violence within the recent context of the Hazarajat Afghanistan." *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 20, no 2, 2001.

"Silence is Violence (End the Abuse of Women in Afghanistan)." *Human Rights*, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Kabul, 8 July 2009.

Stewart, Rhea Talley. *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929: Faith, Hope and the British Empire*. Garden City, Doubleday and Company, 1973.

Wahab, Shaista. *A brief history of Afghanistan*, Infobase Publishing, 2007.

"Women for Women International, Stronger Women, Stronger Nations." Afghanistan Report 49, 2009. [www.womenforwomen.org](http://www.womenforwomen.org) [Accessed on 03/02/2015]

World Bank report, Afghanistan, "Country gender assessment: national reconstruction and poverty reduction - the role of women in Afghanistan's future." Report Number 35606, Volume No 1, Washington DC, US, 2005/03/01 [www.documents.worldbank.org/](http://www.documents.worldbank.org/) [Accessed on 05/02/2015]

Yaseen, Reehana. "Women in Afghanistan: A Historical Study." *The International Asian Research Journal*, issue 3, No 1, 2015. [www.tiarj.com](http://www.tiarj.com)

Zabriskie, Phil. *Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders*. National Geographic. February 2008.

[www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=show\\_mesg&forum=389&topic\\_id=3655930&mesg\\_id=3656143](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=show_mesg&forum=389&topic_id=3655930&mesg_id=3656143) [Accessed on 09/02/2015]

"Obama's War: US Involvement in Afghanistan, Past, Present & Future." [www.thebellforum.com/showthread.php?t=9543&page=2](http://www.thebellforum.com/showthread.php?t=9543&page=2) [Accessed on 10/02/2015]

[www.unicef.org/afghanistan/health\\_nutrition](http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/health_nutrition) [Accessed on 11/02/2015]

"Demographic Year Book, United Nation, 2013. [unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2013.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2013.htm) [Accessed on 12/02/2015]

“Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and industries.” [www.acci.org.af/da/](http://www.acci.org.af/da/) [Accessed on 14/02/2015]

The Constitution of Afghanistan 2003-4, Afghanistan, Kabul. 2003. [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Laws/afghan\\_constituion \(1\).pdf](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Laws/afghan_constituion%20(1).pdf) [Accessed on 15/02/2015]

[afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw](http://afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw) [Accessed on 18/02/2015]

“Violence against Women Primary Database Report.” UNIFEM Afghanistan. March 2008. [afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw\\_primary%20database%20report\\_EN .pdf](http://afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw_primary%20database%20report_EN.pdf). [Accessed on 19/02/2015]

“Women’s Empowerment Programs in Afghanistan.” The Asia Foundation Report 11/2011. [asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGWEP4Pagerfinal8.5x11](http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGWEP4Pagerfinal8.5x11) [Accessed on 21/02/2015]

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education. “Strategic Plan- Program Five: Education Management.” July 2013 [moe.gov.af/en/page/2016](http://moe.gov.af/en/page/2016) [Accessed on 22/02/2015] & [www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Information%20Mapping.pdf](http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Information%20Mapping.pdf)

Human Development Report 2015, [hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/AFG](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/AFG) [Accessed on 23/02/2015]

Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14, [cso.gov.af/Content/files/Abstract%20Dari,%20Pashto%20%26%20English.pdf](http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Abstract%20Dari,%20Pashto%20%26%20English.pdf) [Accessed on 24/02/2015]

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), [reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/new-start-afghanistans-education-sector](http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/new-start-afghanistans-education-sector) [Accessed on 25/02/2015]

[unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/ rapport\\_1.html](http://unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport_1.html) [Accessed on 26/02/2015]

“Afghan Recovery Report, produced by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting”, November 5, 2003. [iwpr.net/](http://iwpr.net/) [Accessed on 26/02/2015]

"National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future." Worldbank.org. The World Bank, Mar 2005.

[www.afghanstangov.org/resources/itsa/ig-april/NDF\\_Revised\\_Draft.pdf](http://www.afghanstangov.org/resources/itsa/ig-april/NDF_Revised_Draft.pdf),  
2002[Accessed on 25/02/2015]

National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction — the Role of Women in  
Afghanistan's Future, March 2005 "Afghanistan Gender Report".  
[www.scribd.com/document/78633268/Afghanistan-Gender-Report](http://www.scribd.com/document/78633268/Afghanistan-Gender-Report) [Accessed on  
26/02/2015]

## **Chapter Four**

### **Media and Women Development in Afghanistan**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, we look at the role of media and women's development in Afghanistan which combines a complementarity and a certain corrective to the other chapters that focus on cyberspace. This chapter is necessary in the case of Afghanistan is important. Simply because of the fact that the presence of cyberspace is not well pronounced. Most of the news about Afghanistan consumed within and outside is primarily generated by the print and electronic media which are again susceptible to the larger forces of patronage.

It therefore becomes imperative to map the spread of media to understand the psychology of afghan people and the Afghan diaspora.

Nowadays with Spread of new technologies and the internet, it is necessary for Afghan media to be more active in cyberspace, the media needs to have a strong presence on the web. One of the powerful and influential media in Afghanistan is Radio, which women were using even during the Taliban. Radio is known as a national media in Afghanistan. Media such as Internet radio (online radio) are popular specially among youth. The applications of media in cyberspace help to increase the audience.

Before discussing the media and its role in Afghanistan, it is worthy to mention that Afghan women experienced a very stressful social life during the Taliban regime. During that time, Afghan women had to face a double oppression one due to patriarchy and the other due to religious extremism. The five years of the Taliban regime caused Afghan women to suffer more than at any other time. Under the Taliban regime, the Afghan women were like prisoners in their homes and deprived of education, health care and work. A restrictive dress code was enforced and women had to have a husband, brother or father accompany them outside of their home.

“Afghan women living under the Taliban virtually had the world of work closed to them” (Rostami, 2005:36).

Some non-governmental organizations like the United Nations after Taliban tried to bring some changes and motivate women to take part in social life again and be part of active society, so they have set up bureaus to help women who have been forced to leave their occupations in different departments and sections and support them to live as a free person in their societies.

In developing countries, like Afghanistan media evolution and media practitioners helped women to find a stage for expressing their ideas and having a share in the development of their country. For example, radio shows were supposed to enhance the general view of supporting women. It is generally agreed that media evolution leads to a movement of distributing the concerns about women. In other words, women should be able to cooperate in media production and their own communication mode. This would not be possible unless media specialists use their profession for political, cultural, and social evolution.

In fact, media development came at a time when women were looking out for new methods of interaction and it made them believe that Media transitions and development communications is the chance to try to evaluate their work and determine the desirable outcomes and the possibility for more equality. On the other hand practitioners are trying to inform Afghan women about different assumptions that frame their practices and help them to effect the society by using media.

## **4.2 Media Transition: Definition and Insights**

In mass communication theories, media plays a key role. In spite of studies about definition of development, media transition, and how media are used in this path, in a country like Afghanistan, media and cyber space can be the best tool to open a way and ease off the situation for women's freedom.

Many researchers and authors like Darbishire believe the main political and economic development in the world occurred by the help of media and cyberspace especially after the collapse of Soviet Union (Hume 2004: 11).

It is the aim for emerging democracies in developing countries, media professionals and journalists to concentrated on spreading ideology of independent press. For example US foreign policy and UN programs after the end of cold war attempted to initiating media exchange and training journalist to build a new system of media.

In democratic nations media is considers as the fourth state and keep a balance with government media, to use it as a stage to make voice of citizens are heard in public policies which leads to building an independent media with fund of non-governmental organization (NGO) which are dedicated to media transition and free media.

In Afghanistan media was more dedicated to making the initial changed toward democracy rather than creating a democratic nation and mainly is used in describing and reflecting daily problems and life of people. In fact media is the first steps of plans in developing countries like Afghanistan to make a stable political and general social situation.

To describe the exact definition of media transition in Afghanistan we should study the real situation and requirement in this nation. Therefore, we can compare professional and active international media with newly formed media in Afghanistan which is mostly running by no trained journalist and with nonacademic methods.

Following only theories will not have the best outcome in Afghanistan due to this country is still at the phase of development and media has recently started taking part in this transition and it takes time for it to be in the best shape.

#### **4.3 The Social Media: Space and Privacy for Afghan Women**

After the fall of the Taliban regime, international news channels covered the domestic and political violence against women in Afghanistan. People around the world knew Afghan women through international news, which created an image of Afghan women as the most oppressed and vulnerable group in Afghanistan and that is basically accurate. After the fall of Taliban and establishment of new government, the political and cultural position of Afghan women has improved substantially.



As Flanders stated in her report on Afghan women entitled “Speak behind the Media Veil”: “We have begun to see a lot in the media lately about the oppression of women under the Taliban. We have begun, finally, to hear about the women whom the Taliban ban from working, keep out of school, flog for wearing makeup, even execute” (Flanders 2004:2).

Such reports have observed a change after the fall of the Taliban with regard to women activities in Afghanistan, indicating that the social space for women has expanded and now in most areas i.e. big cities women go to school, work outside their homes and participate in social affairs. The representation of Afghan women through women’s media is a mechanism to assist the process of change for Afghan women after the Taliban regime. With the presence of the Afghan women’s media, it is anticipated that Afghan women working in the media will represent women through the eyes of Afghan women themselves (Flanders 2004:2).

It had been argued that the media representation of women has a huge impact on the development of positive or negative perceptions of women’s images in any society. The dominant image of Afghan women wearing the Burqa in the media during the Taliban regime was subordinate, weak, oppressed, and vulnerable. Again it had been argued, that the negative representation of women in the media has negative impacts on the self-esteem and confidence of women as well as a negative impact on the perception of women in a society. The positive representation of women is argued to change the power relationship and create respect for women (Joshi 2015:39).

One of the most important social media, which was the privacy for women in Afghanistan, is the radio station named Zohrah Radio which was launched by Zarghuna Hassan from Kunduz. She was born in 1980 and is unmarried. Until 2009 she was the chief editor of Radio Zohrah. According to Zarghuna Hassan it was so difficult to find empowered women who were ready to work for media. She helped to organise courses on journalism training through some institutions for women in Kabul with the aim of having greater role and more participation of women in the media. In fact the main purpose of Radio Zohrah is women's empowerment and increasing their awareness.

Since people's mind is controlled by the media, Zarghuna tried to increase the number of radio outlets in Kabul so that as she says:

“In this way women who are mothers of the families and play an important role in the future of their children and society could understand that war is enough and it is time to think about reconstruction” (dw.com).

Radio Zohrah was the first local audio media that began to work after the fall of the Taliban in the province of Kabul. Currently, it has achieved self-sufficiency, working through the whole 24 hours uninterrupted, and covering up to 55 km of the surroundings. It pays for its expenses by accepting advertisements and more than 20 people work there officially and with honor. It is run by Najia Khudayar and majority of the employees are women.

Zarghuna Hassan invites most of the Islamic scholars to their programs in order to bring them in their fold. However the Taliban who follow the Islamic law strictly consider her and other women's rights activists as the agents of Western influence, threatening the basic morality of the country.

In the same year, Zarghuna Hassan founded Radio Keihan with her personal capital and hired a number of boys. She believed that those boys who joined the Taliban did not have sufficient awareness or they joined Taliban due to poverty. Therefore, there was the need to provide a job and educate them. Currently, Radio Keihan is a well-known radio with more fans in Kunduz province which provides recreation and fun for the youth and gives them useful messages.

Radio Keihan provided a platform for 50 boys of Kunduz to make positive changes in their community. These young people who are mostly school students or university students are active in various fields of sports, health; culture, society, politics, economy, human rights and anti-corruption. They produce different programs and broadcast them. The station operates from 6 am to 12 pm and covers 40 km of the surroundings. Radio Keihan earns through advertisements as well (bokhdinews.af).

In 2014 Zarghuna Hassan established another radio channel, particularly for mothers, called “Shayestah” and only mothers can work over here. The aim of Radio Keihan is raising the mothers' ability and knowledge while the purpose of Radio Shayestah is for mothers' to attempt for a better society and bring peace in that region

of crisis. Radio Shayestah tries to make women aware of their rights addressing uncommon or banned issues of women, such as reproductive health and domestic violence.

One of the important programs of this radio is called “Undesirable Traditions” with a critical approach to some centuries-old traditions in Afghanistan such as forced marriage of young girls, suggesting some solutions to settle the disputes. “Introducing Elite” is a program that interviews with women who have achieved great success in politics and other areas of activities or women who are, in any way, ready to help Afghan women and can be role models for them.

#### **4.4 Reconstruction Media in Afghanistan and Women’s Share**

Media is generally supported by the Afghan government. However, reports reveal that in some parts of the country journalists are still threatened, violated and killed. Insecurity, threatening by security officials and provincial, hiding information from journalists, imposing high taxes to the local radio stations, and inappropriate reaction from some governmental departments are some of the main challenges for media activity or activists. Only 45% watches TV, Radio therefore becomes the best means for spreading messages and creating awareness in rural where most of the population is illiterate (mtholyoke.edu). The table in appendix based on the Asia foundation 2012 survey, with 6290 cases, gives a clear idea about the proportion of respondents who have the following communications technologies in functioning order in their household (See Appendix, Table 8, page No 267).

The radios which require batteries are more popular and highly used in areas where there is no electricity or the electricity is not regular. Local radio is a great way to spread important messages about women’s rights where they need to be heard the most,” said Cecilia Ncube, UNDP’s Gender Project Manager. Women in conservative areas such as Kunduz are often being deprived of healthcare, employment and legal services, as well as basic rights and freedoms. Local radio can advocate for social change and also let women know what services are available, what their rights are and where they can go if they need any help (af.undp.org).

Radio programs and cyber space was one the primary national projects to ease off the situation for women, and to promote general living condition of women in the society and offer them enough support to reform their role in their daily life .

New media system was meant to create a strong civil society which can count on the government. Therefore, they set up funds to support different media project such as advertisement, films, and videos and enhance the quality of produced programs. As a result, all these projects opened opportunities for women to become more active in these fields. One of examples of these changes happened in Kunduz which gave courage to women in this city to regain their voice and hope. Said UNDP Country Director, Douglas Keh. "Hearing other women's voices on air can bring hope and encouragement to those who feel trapped at home and are afraid to speak out" (Hartenberger 2005: 3).

However, radio has always played a key role in political transformation. Listener surveys in 1990s reveals radio had the largest geographic reach of any mass media. In other words, because of its political nature again women had a very little role in media and political environment.

Radio is something which can be operated even in places where there is no electricity and is accessible to the illiterate populations also. Thus, radio seemed to be the most influential mass media amongst the Afghan population during political transition. US government started radio projects as one of their first plans to reach common people of Afghanistan all around the nation. For this purpose they provided radio broadcasting equipment in different states. This programmatic emphasis on radio broadcasting by the US continued with the funds initially being directed towards training and programming and later on providing a network of commercial radio stations.

An instance would be the funding of newspapers and magazines published throughout Afghanistan by the Open Media Fund with the support from the Soros Foundation, UNESCO, bilateral and other private donors. Similarly, funds for producing and exhibiting educational videos and training filmmakers were also obtained from various sources through a French NGO, namely, Aïna. New equipment for television broadcasting was provided by the Japanese government while funds for starting up a private television station were given by the US government.

The US government have supported and helped Afghan media through an agency called (USAD), (US agency for international development) which was established in 1994 to provide quick and more effective aid in countries like Afghanistan. This agency has struggled to define its role in development aid to further US foreign policy goals. How can USAD influence outcomes in situations of rapid political change? OTI is one answer; their stated purpose is to intercede in the countries undergoing transitions from authoritarian to democratic systems, from violent conflict to peace, or in other situations of political crisis. Media are a special focus area of OTI (usaid.gov).

#### **4.5 The Freedom of the Media: Politic and Women**

In the process of political transition to democracy, media has played a key role in building the democratic governance. Relatively women who are taking a part in media as part of this political transition also play a major and effective role in this path.

However, this transition includes four phases which challenges dictatorship, modifies political roles, renews body of civil society, and finally election brings this transition to last phase.

Transition defined above might not lead to a stable form of democracy, but its messy process and uncertain outcomes of a transition phases is worthy of more analyze since democracy is been an ideal future for all the countries around the world (O'Donnel & Schmitter's 1986: 98)

“In a January 2002 article in the “Journal of Democracy,” Thomas Carothers declared “the end of the transition paradigm.” He argued that scholars should be trying to understand what he called “gray zone” democracies, political systems that remain in fairly stable, but not fully democratic, configurations. The article generated so much debate that the journal’s editors dedicated part of the July 2002 issue to responses to Carothers” (Hyman 2002: 26-32, Carothers 2002: 5).

Political researchers have discoursed upon the parameters of democratic transitions and its uncertain outcomes which result in both democratic and dictatorship trend in many countries. Some scholars concentrate on describing how pre democratic government makes different kinds of outcomes in this transition. Other researchers work on the stability after first democratic election.

“Much of the current debate within political science centers on how to understand and define the quality of democracy that occurs after transitions” (Diamond & Morlino 2004: 20-31).

It is impossible to deny the key role of mass media in democratic transition and there would be a better result of this process if media goes along with this transition and woman in this stage can make a major effect on the outcome with their participation.

At the international level of human right it is mentioned that, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.” With media freedom embedded in human rights, media transition researchers derive international standards like international right for media to intervene in countries that are involved in violation of human right.

To give a framework to the media which all nations could fit in unlike their political system from authoritarian to libertarian was the main plan. For instance in authoritarian media publishes limited information since in these countries government decides what kind of news and information is in favor of their citizens. Some private media which are not active under this framework in these nations might be more controlled and censored by authorities. on the other hand libertarian nations believe in making information available for their citizens who are capable of decision- making, so media is going along with people in seeking truth (Hartenberger 2005:12)

Gross believes that media have more effect on the democratic transition, journalists need to be trained to be objective and avoid stating their own opinions. “What is most problematic about the region’s news media is not the nature of their pluralism, diversity, autonomy, ownership or infrastructure, but their lack of professionalism” (Gross 2002: 163).

However, “the liberal political philosophy that Siebert refers to seems to be the key theoretical and legal foundation for freedom of the press. In John Locke’s notion of a social contract, citizens surrender some of their personal control in exchange for the guarantee from the state for the protection of their natural rights, According to

John Stuart Mill, freedom of press is also included among those rights” (Siebert & others 1956: 87).

In this framework, the media works as microphone for people to express their opinions. When the country is restricted to imposing certain limits such as to place a ban against obscenity or libel, media can give a stage to people to share their point of view.

A normal strategy for media transition is to set up some international standard media laws and reform constitution. “Periodic U.N. regional conferences function as sites in which freedom of the press proponents can reinscribe international standards within local parameters and bring regional political pressure to bear on individual regimes” (unesco.org).

however, we can refer the Almaty Declaration in nations located in center of Asia to support free press, besides the Sana'a Declaration would be effective in the Middle East to initiate a right and proper form of press. (unesco.org).

#### **4.6 The Effect of Media Transition on Afghan Women**

The outlets of media demonstrate how free the media is in that nation and how freely various ideas take place in the body of media. The more outlets practitioners receive the more they can support new outlets in media. It is the issue that women have very little chance to have their own share in this outlet concerning their own issues.

In northern Afghanistan, where only 15% of women are literate, radio is a gate to the outside world and the most important ones have been launched by Zarghuna Hassan from Kunduz. On her personal page on Facebook, Zarghuna Hassan has written about how radio channels existed and for what reasons. She mentioned that After the Taliban regime; it was highly needed to have a source for education and informing women. In 2004 Impact Institute (Afghan Institute of Learning) gave the radio equipment on 8th March “International Women's Day” as the gift to Kunduz women. She and her four stepsisters began working with the support of Inter news Institute (afghaninstituteoflearning.org).

“Although not all media outlets will be sustainable in the long run, free press advocates may argue, they are still useful in the short-term transition environment because they contribute to a vibrant public sphere in the vital pre-election phase. In practice, this emphasis on increasing the number of outlets implies starting new media, either commercial or NGO-run, that can compete with state or public media” (Hartenberger 2005: 36).

In press transition standards there are some major indicator like number of audience, listenership, readership, and viewership that are important. This point leads to conflict between free press transition advocates and more traditional media development programs that have traditionally worked with state media. Audience numbers, expressed as readership, viewership or listenership, are another important quantitative indicator in the freedom of the press paradigm (lib.utexas.edu).

Traditionally, to analyze media transition, scholars use method of studies comparative cases. By ensuring that the cases are logically grouped and that they are comparable, it allows scholars to study outlets, processes, and situation media transitions which then help them in constructing generalized models.

According to some media transition arguments, we cannot apply the full process of transition in one nation to another one; since countries cultural and political differences brings different audience expectation and outcomes of the whole process.

One of the major factors which help practitioners predict the result of media transition is how well they are informed about pre-transition condition of that nation. In this regard an organization called “FREEDOM HOUSE” has tried to prove some governments repress their media, harass the journalists, and use censorship. So, they created a media freedom index to compare nations and track trends. They also rate level of freedom media have in different nations and study main factor impressing this freedom which would be political condition as the most effective factor and legal environment and economical pressure following it in the list (Hartenberger 2005: 45).

In spite of criticisms about the Freedom House index being subjective and inaccurate in reflecting subtle difference, it is still widely used For example, the World Bank has created a set of five aggregate indicators for good governance. The indicator for “voice and accountability” includes a variable for press freedom (as well



as measures of other civil liberties) that uses a combination of a press freedom indexes created by Freedom House and the advocacy NGO Reporters without Borders as data sources (Kaufmann & others 2003: 3).

In turn, USAID's new Millennium Challenge Account, for which eligible nations must meet minimum good governance standards, uses the World Bank aggregate indicator for voice and accountability ([mcn.gov.af](http://mcn.gov.af)).

In short, the larger the number of women having access to mass media outlets more number of audiences for the outlets, it is expected by the policymakers that the mass media will be more effective in creating vibrant public spheres. The women desire a mass audience of women. In fact, what matters most in this paradigm is the aggregate. That is, regardless of individual characteristics, what the policymakers want is proof in the form of quantitative audience analyses and the substantial number of audience for one or for a combination of the media outlets. The ideal is to reach the entire Afghan women with one or several outlets, thereby creating an equal public sphere.

#### **4.7 Development in the Media and Journalism**

A renewed stress on researching media content is placed by the critiques of press freedom from the new propaganda and developmental journalism to study media outlets. In this regard, analyzing content, which is relatively complex and expensive, can usually take place during elections.

Content analysis is something that needs news translation which would take a great deal of time and/or requires judgments from groups of qualified scholars of the country on how specific news items should be categorized. Those content analyses connected with national elections are more likely to receive funding assistances from donors because elections can help the most to transition program. Comparative content analyses, particular comparing private owned and state outlets, are considered as important means of measuring the relative independence of different media outlets.

The main paradigm of having a free press in a nation is to create the audience for national media. While developmental journalism concentrates on the constructing specific group of audience and deliver their message to their group of audience and bring some considerable change to their audience life and opinions.

For example, to make sure how much the media has influenced the group of their audience in developmental system, surveys and listenership figures come to the aid of practitioners. To know exact figure of female listenership in the group of their audience they need to motivate women to take part in surveys and in polls.

There is an argument that developmental journalism brings more social changes and to challenge media transition researchers to measure how much media has effected the democracy transition programs. The suggested way of capturing aggregate effects of media was social mapping. (Price & others 2002: 9).

It is argued that mapping structure of media could be a great help to construct policy for using media in different ways to have a political transition. However, the attempt by Noah Miller to map the transition of Afghan media illustrates how difficult it is to map all the various media-related projects, leaving aside the task to give a conclusive comment on their long-term social effects. The task of capturing the entire universe of projects itself is very difficult. Miller's primary source of information on media projects was the Afghan Donor Assistance Database (Miller 2003: 25).

However, the database used is a compilation of donor self-reporting and may not reflect those NGO projects with multiple sources of funding. This makes the database woefully incomplete with new projects being funded and even the on-going projects changing plans and expanding into new areas, the database is also a constantly changing one. Some of these projects for example in the field of education and health do not fit exactly in the category of media (Miller 2003: 26).

Development communication and media transition both are concerned with forming the role of media in social changes. What is important for both is make a change, analysis the society, and measure effects of media in social development with the aid of some global models (Escobar 2000: 60).

It is difficult to say if media has effected the social transition in Afghanistan. Miller believes the only way to prove media has come to help of this transformation is to see if Afghan themselves have learnt and gained the power to use media in social changes which only would be possible when international programs come to an end in the country (Escobar 2000: 60).

#### **4.8 The Social Media and Women's Awareness**

Credit for the sudden increase of social media in the country can also be given to the cheaply and abundantly available Chinese-made smartphones. These phones can be bought at rates as cheap as \$ 10, coupled with the falling prices of SIM cards. In a country like Afghanistan which has a young population of 68 percent under the age of 25, the social media has taken off spectacularly largely boosted by the huge growth of mobile internet use (independent.co.uk).

With the impact of media or better to say social media, incredible changes can be seen amongst Afghan women since the turn of the century. The World Bank reports that there has been a tremendous increase in the figures of women having access to formal education. In addition, according to the UN figures, the number of Afghans who has access to safe drinking water had also gone up from 4.8 percent to 60.6 percent by 2011 (World Bank report 2013: 11).

A British photographer called Jessica Fulford-Dobson visited Afghanistan in the summer of 2013. In that summer there was a national project in school that was concentrating on giving this chance to girls to take part in sports specially skateboarding. Before this education project, girls were not allowed to be in any sports program. Jessica captured photos of girls skateboarding in Kabul and published them in a book titled "skate girls in Kabul" and also exhibited at the Saatchi gallery. She also had an opportunity of observing how Facebook found a way of being part of Afghan's life specially young people she met during the time she stayed in Afghanistan (independent.co.uk).

“What was interesting was that, in a year, suddenly Facebook had popped up,” she says. “The students I had photographed at the Afghan National Institute for Music, who were in their teens, were suddenly asking for my photographs for Facebook. I was showing one boy some of the pictures, a little street boy selling plastic bags, but suddenly he was saying 'I need that for my Facebook,' and I said 'Oh, you're on Facebook?' and he said 'Yes, we're all on it'. In just a year, it was a thing that was important for him” (independent.co.uk).

International development company GIZ studied internet user in seven major cities in Afghanistan including Kabul. This study shows that the sudden emergence of

social media “has had a profound impact on communications in Afghanistan”. The study showed the growing popularity of Facebook in the race for dominance in a brand new market.

“Social media documented the incident and those who shared it provided an opportunity for justice,” says Hamidi. “Now when we claim that the judgments of the first court have not been fair, it is because of the videos we have seen. I think it helped the world to notice” (independent.co.uk).

However, it had been the case that men in communities outside Kabul had often shown their dislike over the efforts to change the attitudes. According to Hamidi, besides the many benefits social media offers for the country, it had also proved how widespread is this attitude toward the changes.

“It's horrible, when you read some of the posts,” she says. Describing the explosion of internet and telecoms in his country, Mashal says: “It's hard to exaggerate just how much this growth has affected everything in Afghan life, maybe especially dating” (independent.co.uk).

Directed by the media affect theories, numerous studies had been done on the media representation of women around the world. The objectives of such studies had been to figure out how media present women, and how the media representation of women affect their role and perception in a society. Women's media had always been successful in using themes and women empowerment agenda and placed them within certain contexts, meaning that convey the messages directly to the target audiences. As, Debra Merskin said in her article that women images “(re)presented, re-enforced), and repeated in the content of mass media and popular culture, had embedded the racist and sexist stereotypes in brands, labels, landforms, which is an exercise in power” (Gharji 2015: 50 & Merskin 2010: 92).

Hamidi says it is still not acceptable for girls to have their own pictures on their Facebook because it might cause problems for them in family and society. There are many women who use fake names and picture to keep their identity hidden. Parents and brothers don't let their daughters and sister share any picture since it is not right to keep your picture in public as a girl and might cause trouble for the girl and family (independent.co.uk).

Noorjahan Akbar is the author of a blog, "freewomenwriters.org", for young people to share their ideas and concerns about their country, about the impact of social media on the world around her. Her view of opinion is that it is more than complex to explain, however, Social media has opened a door to public to have a conversation about daily matters but sometimes Afghan conservative society draw women back to take part in these groups of conversations. for instance, Recently, there is a trend to publish photos of civil rights activists and defame them publicly on right-wing social media (noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com).

Hamidi still feels the fear of the future of women in her country when international forces depart the country and Taliban regain the power. "Nothing is stable", she says. "You become really hopeful and then something goes really wrong, something happens that creates a great question about what will happen to women in this country, like what happened to Farkhunda" who was murdered for burning the Quran and was falsely accused by a Mullah. She was recognised as a symbol of oppression of Afghan women (independent.co.uk).

#### **4.9 The Social Media and Empowering Afghan Women: Facebook Effect**

The issue of gender equality is discussed consistently and extensively in the Afghan women's media. It is addressed in a contextual sense to cover variety of issues that had affected the condition of women in Afghanistan. The condition of inequality is diagnosed and a thorough analysis and a solution to the problems is offered. The issue of inequality stands on the top of issues addressed in the Afghan women media. It is because Afghan women have been dominated by the masculine values in a patriarchal society. In addition, political violence against women and the domination of the radical groups especially during the Taliban period have marginalized Afghan women. In Afghanistan "That there are so many social barriers which prevent Afghan women from equal participation and practicing their civil rights (Gharji 2015: 11).

Violence against women, traditional culture regarding women status, low awareness of women about their rights, and many other problems are the obstacles on the way of Afghan women to achieve equal rights (Gharji 2015: 11).

Afghan women have been deprived of many rights that can guarantee the equality of men and women. The Afghan women's media regard women to be equal to men and capable of doing all that men can do. The physiological difference between men and women cannot create unequal social condition between men and women. According to the understanding of the Afghan women's media studied in this research, the inequality is created by certain factors which vary from context to context. Traditional and political constraints have been major issues concerning the situation of Afghan women that have prevented them from practicing equal rights and opportunities with their male fellow citizens. Inequality and violence against women have been a major and consistent issue spoken about in the editorials of the magazines studied in this research (independent.co.uk).

Afghanistan has experienced a boom in social media, and now it is a battleground in the struggle for and against women's rights. Joshi Herrmann reports about the initial reluctance of Samira Hamidi to join Facebook. In 2009, her friends in York University encouraged her to open a Facebook account though it was not usual for women in Afghanistan to have a Facebook account. Now at the age of 35 she is an Afghan women's right consultant and active on Facebook and twitter. She has more than 1000 friends on Facebook with 4000 followers on twitter, almost all of whom she knows (independent.co.uk).

People in Afghanistan recently started using Facebook and mostly it is been used for news, sending messages, and entertainment. At a monthly rate of around one dollar, a popular internet package that provides a Facebook-only data plan is offered by the best telecoms company, Roshan.

Certain activities which were previously unimaginable and even punishable like flirting online or criticizing government are these days like a routine activity on Facebook in Afghanistan (independent.co.uk).

Hamidi, a resident of the Kabul neighborhood of Macro Rayan, have won many awards for her work and is among the country's most respected activists of the younger generation. She was in charge of 90 organizations running by more than 5,000 women. Lately, she has concentrated on the case of Farkhunda who was brutally murdered by a large group of people in 2015. In this case, Facebook played a powerful role to display ideas and reaction of people.

The murder happened outside Kabul's Mosque (the Shah-Do Shamshira) with medieval cruelty. It started with an argument with a mullah who had wrongly accused her of burning the Quran. She was thrown off the roof, beaten on the road and vehicles, ran over her body, her body was burnt and finally thrown into the river while police were watching the incident. "We had power cuts that day," says Hamidi, "so I came to know about the incident, through Facebook, at about 1am. An activist had posted a video of the murder." It soon went viral. "I would say for a month, every day you would see everyone posting about Farkhunda" (independent.co.uk).

Facebook was seen to have been platforms during the previous year's elections where many politicians had used it for promotion or people make groups on Facebook make fun of candidates. Even the political hostility has transferred to the social media. As some politicians told GIZ that "there are some politicians that could not create a profile for themselves on social media, as their involvement in the civil war meant that they had many enemies who would sabotage their online presence" (independent.co.uk).

"After Farkhunda, there was a university lecturer who posted a message saying that all these women who are advocating for women's' rights are working against sharia – and that they should be shot to death. It was very provoking and very dangerous. We copied his message, and shared it. That guy disappeared – I think he deactivated his Facebook and Twitter accounts after a lot of pressure was put on him" (independent.co.uk).

Samira Hamidi believes Facebook can come to the aid to change personal opinions but it does not happen quickly, so they have to be careful not to post any offensive word and how to use this trend for making a change in the society. For instance there is a radio station in Afghanistan which asks young Afghans to share their relationship stories without mentioning their names and the best story will be shared on their Facebook page which has 750,000 followers. Therefore, a program like this has brought a change in dating and relationships of this generation in Afghanistan.

"In the female [Facebook] comments, one can sense a sisterhood developing. Facebook has broken old cultural barriers," says one Kabul citizen. "Some boys will

sneak a phone to their girlfriend, if her family doesn't approve of the relationship, so they can chat online” (independent.co.uk).

A media and journalism teacher at Herat University, Facebook presented a new way of social relations and meeting new people and conversation. Although dating is not the only reason for young generation to join Facebook and some of girls only accept female's friend requests but a large number of young boys and girls are looking for a partner on Facebook to find love and secretly chatting with them without family coming to know about it.

while foreign donors initiated many projects in Afghanistan some of them were concerned with the conservative attitude toward women In this regard a group of politicians and activist gathered at a school in Kabul carrying a banner of "a brave man stands for women" to follow the “HeForShe” campaign which based on gender quality in UN (independent.co.uk)

#### **4.10 The Media: Identity of Afghan Women**

Media representation of Afghan women's image through online media is an exercise of power to build a powerful image of new Afghan women in the post-Taliban regime. Stuart Hall describes representation as an ‘essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture’ (Hall, 1997a:15). Hall explains that there are two major ways in which representation works, the first is to depict or describe something, to be able to picture it in one's mind, as a consequence of a description or portrayal, because something bears a likeness to the thing being represented.

According to the United Nations Office of Regional Development such radio programs have had a significant impact on women's lives, increased their awareness on their rights and what they can achieve, encouraged them to participate in politics and voting, and finally try for provincial council seats. In fact, the media is playing a role in media outlet to reconstruct the women's identity in Afghanistan. The Afghan women appeared with a new appearance, knowledge, thoughts and social role which truly was a great movement in women's social role and identity constructing. Moreover, these programs encouraged women to persuade their brothers and sons in putting their guns aside and end up the 15-year-old war.



Zarghuna Hasan faced many problems; she was repeatedly threatened and was even at the risk of being kidnapped. Her radio office was attacked .but she still continues her work in Kunduz.

Through her radio programs, not only the awareness of women and young people has increased, but also there have been positive changes in society. The media had a great impact as a model for young boys and girls who liked to be journalists and currently many of them have become prominent journalists ([dw.com/fa-af](http://dw.com/fa-af)).

These radios play the role of a distant teacher in absentia for those women who are not allowed to go out, study and stay aware. She emphasizes that radio waves do not need permission from male members of a family and can be accessed and heard easily by women at homes. They learn from our programs while they are sitting at their homes.

Two radios of “Shayestah” and “Keihan” were cut out in the war between the central government and the Taliban on 28th September 2015 after the temporary fall of the Kunduz city by Taliban. Kunduz was occupied by Taliban for three days during which they looted the city and harassed many activists and journalists. After two weeks and with the help of America’s air strikes, Afghan forces drove Taliban out of Kunduz. But by that time Taliban had looted radio Shayestah and another radio office, also dealing with women’s issues and run by Hassan, were set on fire ([da.azadiradio.com](http://da.azadiradio.com)).

The UN statement declared that the staffs of these two local media left due to insecurity in Kunduz province. An employee was also killed during Taliban attack. All radio technical instruments at the time of Taliban presence in the city were plundered as well. Earlier, these two radio programs which were mainly about health, education and women's rights, could be heard in Kunduz province and the neighboring provinces. But later The Committee of Afghan Journalists Safety announced that in the city of Kunduz 13 media faced serious break downs so that they were not able to start their work.

The UN Development Program had recently announced that on 8th March 2016, International Women's Day, in the province of Kunduz two radio programs which were for women and youth and were stopped by Taliban attacks started broadcasting

their programs. The officials of The United Nations Development Program helped two local radios to disseminate their programs with \$ 9000 (af.undp.org).

Additionally Hall suggests that representation is the thing that connects meaning to language, both verbal and written as well as less obvious forms of language such as images. However, as Hall states, there must be a group of people to whom the language, the signifiers have meaning for them to be used and for representation to be achievable. Debra cited Henry & Tator, who said that “Language constructs knowledge and knowledge is power, according to theorists, philosophers, and scholars. The words we choose to use help construct social, cultural, economic, and historical reality. Thus, “discourses of domination” put language to the social use of defining and oppressing those constructed as other (Henry & Tator 2002: 13).

The fact is how women are presented in their writings affects the image building of other Afghan women. The *Feminine Mystique*’ Friedan raises the issue of magazines and how they endorse myths of fulfillment through domesticity in a chapter called ‘The Happy Housewife Heroine’ where she states that ‘the image of a happy women by television, advertisement, and magazine was presented as a housewife with many children and husband coming back home from job which an ideal kind of lifestyle for women (Friedan 1963: 30).

If Afghan women print media represent women as a doctor, teacher, politician, Member of Parliament, engineer, independent this changes the socially constructed image of Afghan women in the media.

Debra cited, Probably Sundquist, who examined “134 Indigenous women characters from ‘American imaginative literature poems, plays, short stories, and novels, wrote the most comprehensive study of the representations of Indian women in print media between 1799 and 1911. Although the majority of characters were men, with characteristics such as “iron constitution, superior physique, proficiency in wilderness skills, stoicism, and a special way of speaking,” Indian women were not represented with these positive qualities. White women wore the shawl of virtue and goodness whereas Native women were variously categorized as “the Drudge, the Fury, and the Witch” (Sundquist 13).

Women's media can play a role in breaking the taboos surrounding women's experiences, since the media can be used for giving information and educating people which can be a practical process of changing society. Afghan women's media can help this process of change for Afghan women, because they have the knowledge of women's history, Afghan culture and current challenges. Afghan women's media is also a mechanism through which Afghan women represent, educate and develop socially accepted discourse with other Afghan women and Afghan society as a whole (Debra 365).

Hence we see that the media is very important in today context, social media and cyberspace such as Facebook and online radio has played a major role in empowering women. Media representation of Afghan women's image through online media is an exercise of power to build a powerful image of new Afghan women in the post-Taliban regime. The rules governing on media and as well as how people deal with media including cyberspace space also.

## References

Afghanistan, "From Transition to Transformation II." July 2, 2013, The World Bank Report,

[www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/SAR/afghanistan/SOM-WorldBank-July2013.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/SAR/afghanistan/SOM-WorldBank-July2013.pdf) [Accessed on 28/02/2015]

Asante, C. E. Press, *freedom and development: A research guide and selected bibliography*. Westport and London, Greenwood Press 1997.

Carothers, Thomas. "The End of the Transition Paradigm". *Journal of Democracy*, Johns Hopkins University Press and the National Endowment for Democracy Vol 13, Issue1, 2002.

Flanders, Laura. *The W Effect: Bush's War on Women*. Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004.

Merskin, Debra. *The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman*, *The Howard Journal of Communications*, School of Journalism & Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA, 2010.

Henry, Frances, Tator, Carol. *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-language Press*, University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Downing, J. *Internationalizing media theory: Transition, power, culture: Reflections on media in Russia, Poland and Hungary, 1980-95*. London and Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications 1996.

Diamond, L, Morlino, L. "The quality of democracy: An overview". *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 15, Issue 4, 2004.

Diamond, L. *Developing democracy toward consolidation*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Escobar, Arturo, Walter Greene, Ronald, & others. *Redeveloping Communication for Social Change; Theory, Practice, and Power*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*, W.W. Norton and Co, 1963.

Gross, P. *Entangled evolutions: Media and democratization in Eastern Europe*. Washington, D.C, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002.

Hyman, G. "Tilting at straw men". *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 13, Issue 3, 2002.

Hume, Ellen, *The Media Missionaries: American Support for Journalism Excellence and Press Freedom Around the Globe*, Knight Foundation, 2004.

Hartenberger, Lisa Anne. *Mediating Transition in Afghanistan, from 2001 to 2004*, University of Texas at Austin, 2005.

Huntington, S. P. *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

Herrmann, Joshi. "How social media is empowering young Afghan women: The Facebook effect." *The Independent*, London, England 11 July 2015, [www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/how-social-media-is-empowering-young-afghan-women-the-facebook-effect-10375022.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/how-social-media-is-empowering-young-afghan-women-the-facebook-effect-10375022.html) [Accessed on 02/03//2015]

Kamal, Sarah. *Cultured men, uncultured women: an exploration of the gendered hierarchy of taste governing Afghan radio*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dept. of Comparative Media Studies, 2009.

Kaufmann, D, Kraay, A, Mastruzzi, M. "Governance matters III: Governance indicators for 1996-2002." *The World Bank*, 30 June 2003. [siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/govmatters3\\_wber.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/govmatters3_wber.pdf) [Accessed on 03/03//2015]

McQuail, D. *Mass communication theory: An introduction*, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1987.

Miller, Noah. "Media assistance post the Taliban regime and the implications for transforming the Afghan social system." *Unpublished Dissertation*, London School of Economics, London, 2003.

O'Donnell, G, Schmitter, P. C. *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Price, M. E., Thompson, M. *Forging peace: Intervention, human rights and the management of media space*. Edinburgh University Press 2002.

Price, M. E, Noll, B, Luce, D. *Mapping media assistance*. University of Oxford, Centre for Socio-Legal Studies, 1 February 2002. [pcmlp.scoleg.ox.ac.uk/archive/mappingmediaassistance.pdf](http://pcmlp.scoleg.ox.ac.uk/archive/mappingmediaassistance.pdf)

Rahim, T. "An identity of strength: Personal thoughts on women in Afghanistan." *International Rice Research Institute*, 84, 2002.

Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. *Four theories of the press*. Urbana University of Illinois Press, 1956.

Shah, H. "Modernization, marginalization, and emancipation: Toward a normative model of journalism and national development." *Communication Theory*, Vol 6, No 2, 1996.

Shirmohammadi, Reza, Hassan, Zarghuna, "A woman could change the life of so many women." Jun 2015. [www.dw.com/fa-af/18514367](http://www.dw.com/fa-af/18514367). [Accessed on 02/03//2015]

Sundquist, Asebrit Pocahontas. *The Fictional American Indian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Study of Method*, Solum Forlag, 1987.

Taylor, M, Kent, M. "Media transitions in Bosnia: From propagandistic past to uncertain future." *Gazette*, Vol 62, Issue 5, 2000.

Azizi, Makhfi. "Afghan Media". [www.mtholyoke.edu/~azizi22m/classweb/afgmedia/Radio.html](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~azizi22m/classweb/afgmedia/Radio.html) [Accessed on 03/03//2015]

The Office of Transition Initiatives OTI, "USAID Afghanistan field report Afghanistan. Kabul." 15 August 2005. [pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pdacf383](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacf383) [Accessed on 04/03//2015]

Mainwaring, S, O'Donnell, G., & Valenzuela, J. S. "Democratic consolidation: The new South American democracies in comparative perspective." South Bend, University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

[www.unesco.org/webworld/com\\_media/development](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/com_media/development) [Accessed on 04/03//2015]

Human Rights, Peace and Elections, [www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org](http://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org) [Accessed on 05/03//2015]

[mcn.gov.af/fa/page/1836](http://mcn.gov.af/fa/page/1836) [Accessed on 05/03//2015]

“UNDP Re-equips Women and Youth Radio Stations in Kunduz for International Women’s, Few, Robert, Kasaat, Jalal. [www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/03/08/](http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/03/08/)

Gharji, Roya. *The Media Representation of Afghan Women in Post-Taliban Afghanistan: A content analysis of women’s media in Afghanistan*, Department of Gender and Feminism, University of Ottawa, 2015.

Hamishe bi bi Mahroo, Weblog. [noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com](http://noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com) [Accessed on 06/03//2015]

Local Radio in Kunduz, 12 December, 2015. [da.azadiradio.com/a/27604262.html](http://da.azadiradio.com/a/27604262.html) [Accessed on 07/01//2016]

[www.lib.utexas.edu](http://www.lib.utexas.edu) [Accessed on 08/03//2015]

Increase of female staff in Kunduz media, April 3, 2012. [www.bokhdinews.af/social/8644](http://www.bokhdinews.af/social/8644)[Accessed on 09/03//2015]

## **Chapter Five**

### **Blogging and women in Afghanistan**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter titled blogging in women in Afghanistan embarks on a survey of women's activity in cyberspace popularly known as blogging with particular reference to the blogs created by them. The chapter begins with a definition of blogging and the types of blogs that one encounters in cyberspace and how it is transformed over the years, with the developments in technology and also in designing and delivery. With the rise of blogging a new sophistication has entered the cyberspace particularly with the rise of new tools.

A large jump in blogging was witnessed in the last 10 years within certain regions primarily because of the development of tools for and disseminating knowledge in the different scripts. In the case of Afghanistan, the Persian script with which most people have familiarity was one important factor which led to the publication of blogs and the audience was also ready-made for these blogs. In this narrative, we highlight some of the important themes that are encountered at the beginnings of blogging in Afghanistan and its adoption by women and the creation of certain women's groups through the networks.

The ideas, agendas and the various viewpoints which lead to a narrative that combines from different viewpoints and synthesis is one of the main focus of this chapter. The invisible effects and the so-called visible effects in the forms of women's movements and everyday impact on women's life are also examined in detail in this chapter. These two aspects try to highlight the impact of blogging or to put it more succinctly micro blogging in Afghanistan among women.

Women's moment the world over and there interfaces with the Internet has created not only new forms of activists but also has accelerated many other older forms of



activism which have been sufficiently transformed. This has also led to transnational networks as the Internet is a truly a global phenomenon.

## **5.2 An Introduction to Blogging**

The blog is one or several personal Internet pages in which the person or a group of bloggers put out divers topics and areas of interests for the public to study (either daily or once in a couple of days). A blog is also called a "personal Internet publication". Some specialized blogs where their authors are professional journalists or writers are known as "Internet media".

Also, a blog is a Web page that is usually prepared in the form of a short and precise summary and its contents are often published in chronological order just like the pages of magazines or newspapers. The content and objectives of each of the blogs are widely different. It is varied from the links and comments on other websites to the news about companies and people, different ideas about issues of the day, diaries, poetry, literature, photographs, music, software and computer programs, social, political and cultural news, sports, and even science fiction.

Many blogs are personal and people express what is in their minds. Some of these are team work of collective goals and shared interests, another kind of blogs are just for games or recreation or some other scientific articles and researches. Blogs work as facilitators of team communication, institutional and family gatherings. They employ a lot easier and simpler methods to help communication between smaller communities in comparison with emails and forums. Usage of private blogs among internet networks, make it possible for each and every team members to reach and share their links & files and their comments and suggestions with others. Creating a family blog will enable the family members to share the family and any other insider news. A blog helps people to remain in the group circle and will upgrade the union and culture of that group (Rodzvilla 2002: 42).

A research on the blogs of Afghan girls shows the issues they are concerned with in the order of their importance from daily writings, romantic memories, and diaries in the first ranks and then comes the specialized blog and also the Photo blogs. Also, these women are using blogs for achieving virtual identity, interaction and providing a link for sharing their comments.

Blog and blogging are the new phenomena in the world of internet. Currently, hundreds of millions of people around the world, from all levels of society and backgrounds are on blogging and through that they subject their writings for the general audience from all parts of the world. The main language of blogging around the world is English and those blogs with non-English languages such as Farsi generally gathers only a limited audience mainly limited to its native speakers. Since the majority of the Farsi speakers are limited to three countries of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, therefore, the content of internet blogs in this language will highly reflect these three countries only.

Blogging in Farsi began its service providing in September 7, 2001 from Iran and the provision of the first service was (persianblog.ir) and then it continued to make a link between all these Farsi speaking countries of Tajikistan and Afghanistan and also changed blogging pattern which initiated from Iran. In pre blogging time, most of the content in the cyber space was one-sided, where a few would share and comment and others were merely the listener. Blogging gave the possibility to all interested readers to be the speaker which is a great accomplishment. Blogging changed the status of an individual in Web from an audience to an actor and created the individual empowerment (regimechangeiran.blogspot.in).

By observing the achievements of Iranian women, Afghan women started to realize the importance of this media and now the Afghan women's voices can be heard mostly through these weblogs. There are no exact statistics on the topic of these Persian blogs, and specifically related to the women of Afghanistan.

One way to evaluate the number of these Persian-language blogs is to check their records in the main service provider server and what we do know so far is based on the numbers the servers announced in Servers like persianblog, blogfa, blogsky and livejournal.

For instance, Persian blog had stated that is has 500,000 registered blogs and among them around 60,000 are active, by active they mean the bloggers are regularly putting up new content. But these statistics have no value and any kind of analysis cannot be based on this provision of statistics. There are several reasons for this, for instant an individual has multiple English and Farsi blogs in ten different servers that

makes statistics invalid, or there is a probability that many has registered several blogs at the same time but they have remained inactive.

Another issue to be considered is that a server such as blogsky may not necessarily give any service to its Farsi speaker users since the majority of its users are from China and Germany ([www.blogsky.com](http://www.blogsky.com)).

Or a server such as blogfa in the year 2015 wiped out many of its blogs due to certain problems and issues but they continue to show the recorded number of 50,000 blogs in their website ([digiato.com](http://digiato.com)).

It is important to understand the concept of ownership of the blog. A Farsi blog is one which is written by Afghan women in Farsi based either in Afghanistan, Iran or Tajikistan. We also include blogs written in English by these women.

However choosing the female bloggers of Afghanistan was not based on statistical analyses but choosing these female bloggers directly based on their visibility. Women who are known in the community and the city, some even are popular in the whole Afghanistan and some are even known as activists in the fields of fiction, politics, and women's rights. A few other women also were chosen based on statistics of their writings and the impact on specific topics without they being specific, prominent social personalities.

### **5.3 Requirements for Blogging**

Since majority of server providers do not charge their users and provide the services free of charge, the users only need to pay the charge for their internet connections and the price in Afghanistan is comparatively lower than many countries ([mcit.gov.af](http://mcit.gov.af)), but we are not sure how many women would use these public facilities along with men. Hence women would access these internet facilities if they are only for women.

“Internet Café\* and internet facilities are available in over 33 provinces out of 34 in Afghanistan and over 250 cities and towns” ([afghanistan-culture.com](http://afghanistan-culture.com)), but we are not sure how many women would use these public facilities along with men. Hence women would access these internet facilities if they are only for women, only in women cafes.

According to the 2015 statistics of Afghanistan's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, access to Internet is equally distributed among men and women and almost 89% of the populations have access to cheap and high speed internet ([mcit.gov.af](http://mcit.gov.af)).

Entering to the age of communication and expansion and development of new communication technologies had led to a change in the way people communicate in the society. Availability of personal computers at home followed by the access to network connection to the internet global network which commenced in 2003 in Afghanistan, it reached to highest point with service providing by blogging and it continued to grow till 2010 and it also fetched up its highest popularity especially among young ([internetworldstats.com](http://internetworldstats.com)).

But the possibility of training in the field of technology for women is not equal with men. Many of the educational facilities and their associations with new technology are in the hands of the public or the private sector. Besides employers put men in priority to have these new facilities in access. Likewise the equal accessibility to the internet does not mean equal training. A set of "economic, political and cultural" reasons cause less opportunities for women in the area of technology and training which would create discrimination.

According to a report UNESCO in 2014 the number of females in courses related to technology was only 13%. According to the information contained in the website of women and technology, information technology in Afghanistan is still providing the educational software with a masculine design and in production approaches, purchasing technology from other countries and producing and assembling is still very manly. This view is non-interactive and is applied from top-down institutions linked to the rest of the community and hence the role women are limited to operational work ([womenintechnology.org](http://womenintechnology.org)).

Those Afghan families, who are interested in girls' education, play an important role in determining the educational track. Since in Afghanistan it is more important for a girl to have a good marriage. So they prefer for the girl to study in the fields of human sciences rather than computer science or specialized fields.

Another issue in relation to women's education is a shortage of Afghan girls in expert field of computer science. A general belief is that girls don't need to be in charge of family as it's her husband's responsibility to take care of their requirements. Believing this only has a logical conclusion that even girls do not wish to follow technical fields that are also reasonably harder to get a seat and then study the field. Why they would choose a hard path if there is no desire for better income from them in the fields that has a term "boy's field". Also the common stereotypes about the type of employment of girls in Afghanistan are very clear.

Women blogger's opinion about what causes the Afghan girl to be less interested to study in the related areas of technology are as follows: A Blogger named "Farzane" writes, "In my opinion, the world of computer in Afghanistan seems more manly and men prefers not to share this world with women" ([farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com](http://farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com)).

Another blogger named "Munera", who is a women's rights activist, writes in her blog "Shiddokht": "part of the family education in Afghanistan is to reproduce the" cliché "for the baby boy and girl. In many families it is less common to see any digital tool for their girls. Families buy their boys computers and similar stuff and a doll for their girls. This type of education itself is shaping the role of the stereotypical and it's quite effective" ([shiddokht.blogspot.in](http://shiddokht.blogspot.in))

Another blogger who writes under the pen name of "Saghi" writes: "the quality of access to technology and the Internet for women in comparison with men is not equal. If there is a computer in the household, usually the original owner of the device is the male of the family they have more hours to use the device. This only will raise their knowledge in this field" ([saqiya.blogfa.com](http://saqiya.blogfa.com)).

There is no detailed statistics available on what percentage of Internet users of Afghanistan are women. Yet having a look at some of blogs and social network pages in Farsi suggests that the ratio is perhaps not very unequal especially in the case of a blogs. According to the statistics of Afghan penlog the number of women bloggers is even higher ([afghanpenlog.com](http://afghanpenlog.com)).

Statistics of many active girls in the field of blogging and other virtual networks such as Facebook and also the number of articles which are published in daily newsletters such as "Eight morning", "Daily Open society" and "Armanshahr" by

women will prove that Afghan girls and women look forward to a larger share of technology and cyberspaces to express themselves on the face of technology, so that they do not lag behind the speed of the virtual transformation ([www. openasia.org](http://www.openasia.org)).

One of the achievements in women's access to the internet is the inauguration of an internet cafe for women in the year 2012 in Kabul. In a society where many of its men believe that the use of the internet is not culturally appropriate for women, a group of Afghan women activist “the young women for change”, inaugurated a special Internet Café for women named “Sahar Gul” coinciding with the international women’s day on 8th march ([youngwomenforchange.org](http://youngwomenforchange.org)).

This Internet Café was created with the hope to providing a safe environment for women away from the judgmental look of society, to have an access to the internet and interact with the world. The group “young women for change”, is a nonprofit institutional and independent and consist of thousands of Afghan women and several men who also called themselves the harmony rhyme with this movement.

Selection of the name “Sahar Gul” is in memory of a 15 years old bride named Sahar Gul who got married to a man much older to her and upon refusing his request for prostitution got beaten up and tortured. Her courage to stand against the wishes of her husband made her a symbol for the resistance for Afghan women and the founder of this café net do not wish her name to be forgotten.

Taking into consideration the current situation of Afghanistan in which women can hardly participate in the public sphere and even their presence in government sectors and public schools, a place such as Sahar Gul internet café represents more than just an Internet Café and will bring a social status for women. Sahar Gul café is not only a place for women to use internet in Kabul but also a location for gathering of the community, sharing their problems and to share their knowledge and experience to solve these problems as well (See Appendix, Image 1-2 page 268).

The initial costs of establishing this Cafe was provided by domestic and foreign-funded charities. A charity organization donated 15 laptops to them. Afghan women are paying 50 Afghan Afghani which are cheaper than the common rate of cable Internet Café in Kabul.

Sahar Gul has a technical expert who helps the users in the Cafe if they need any help. The Cafe cautiously painted from the outside – unlike the interesting interior design – and it's fairly hidden not to attract Taliban. However, monthly 200 dollars is spent for its security, since the current situation in Afghanistan requires such protection. The founders are hoping that the café reaches its own self-sufficiency and they can make its branches in other provinces as well and create this exceptional opportunity other women in Afghanistan.

In the end, it should be noted that launching a project of women's Cafe in Afghanistan raised the question whether gender segregation is a way to reach sexual equality in traditional societies such as Afghanistan? Many experts believe that the path of progress toward an equal society and gender free society without discrimination and injustice is not through gender segregation. The founders of this café have declared clearly that this project does not mean to promote gender separation. In fact, the step of group of innovators of "young women for a change" in establishing a woman Internet Café should be viewed as an innovative act in giving an option among very limited choices to empowering women in Afghanistan; but these projects should be act as intermediate stages for temporarily time to strengthening women and make them ready for participating in social activities where there is equality between men and women. This is very important step because Afghanistan has been a segregated society from the beginning and had there not been separate café for women, very few women would even come out to use the internet. Hence this would be the first step and once more and more women slowly come out and use it. It could open up for more interaction between women and men leading ultimately towards creation of a gender society.

One of the most important and authentic ways of establishing culture is the content writing, to pass on new perspectives to readers. For writing to be professional and to be accepted by the readers as well as having the capability to be eligible for publishing in newspapers, publications, books and other spaces, the author must have special skills and educations in relation with texts accompanied by other expertise associated with the literacy. Finally the content itself should be worth presenting to the audience and passing along for publishers and the readers either the common people or particular ones. Although even in the field of literature it is also essential for

a poet or author not only to have literacy for writing and composing but also unique taste of artistic literacy.

In addition to these issues that most expert writers are facing, women, historically, socially and culturally face more obstacles in the way of progress and success in writing. That is the reason we witness less activity from women in various writing texts such as poems, newspaper articles and any other published materials. However, in the past couple of decades we can observe more works published from women in areas like poems, literature and novels in Afghanistan. Moreover, with increasing number of educated women in specialized academic fields, figures of expert articles published by women also have grown considerably (8mars.com).

Blogging has two kinds of advantages, firstly it does not require spending money like for registering a website, and secondly it also does not need special skills and knowledge to write a book or a novel. In addition to the above advantages, blogging does not bound to time frames and the writer may not necessarily need to mention his or her real name in the virtual space.

Despite the existence of popular networks such as Facebook or Twitter, blogging is still a very important method of communicating among professionals and journalists. The most important point is that blogging is a concept which does not happen only in a blog. The Facebook status, a picture in Instagram or a tweet are all considered to be blogging, and it is also the best option for women in Afghanistan to experience feminine writing.

Blogging is not limited to stratum or sex and everyone including enthusiastic immigrant with different classes of education with various social and different cultures are potentially bloggers.

This research has shown that the main aim of blogging developed by women in Afghanistan is to write about their day to day experience in life as women. This has gradually become a motivation to lead a social movement of women in the society and upgrading of their social base. Using blogs, their awareness of their potential has increased in society and brought about changes. They can communicate with all over the world from the safety of their home place. That is how blogging has turned into a feminine medium through which women can share their experiences and raise their



voices and it gives them confidence to blossom in a patriarchal society away from any pressure and prejudice. This leads to a movement where women are entering the society and are capable of raising their voices and can write and bring about a change.

Some of the factors that have lead to an increase in blogging in Afghanistan are:

#### 1. The presence of better weblogs in the search engine

With thousands of user writing in different social networks, even if you put a word in Google or any other search engine, what you see as results is still many blog's content. The reason is that the access of searching engines to blog pages and indexes are easier and more importantly is, the value given to the web addresses by search engines. In the social networks there are settings which are limiting the access of public to them such as private access to contents by users, policies and social commitment of that particular website, the link relation between the social networks with search engine. These issues lead to the loss of significant amount of information and contents or not have an appropriate position in search engines. But blogs are public pages and can be seen and accessed by everyone.

#### 2. Contents are read more

There are significant production contents of users in social network which get forgotten. Although in many cases, news or parts of it that is written by a user may be shared frequently by other users, but this in fact is a very small part of production content of users. A big part of production content is only read and shared by the friends of the author who are part of that social network and since only new contents (written or shared by author), only could be seen in friends pages and because the means of access in social networks such as Facebook or Twitter has not provisioned, all or most of these information never gets to be read even by those on the friends list of the author. But in most weblogs there are platforms installed to facilitate the access of people to the older archived pages and therefore access to the older contents even years back in blogs is so easy.

#### 3. Writing in the weblog can be different for women

For women users in social networks being in the circle of friends and familiar has its advantages, the content can be more private and the writer could express her

opinions about social issues or political with less conservative view and in general we can establish the fact that writing in social networks are more of personal habits and content but this very fact will shape the writing style as well. Most of the women users in social networks are private writers and they are less willing to write long materials on serious issues in their social networks. But the perspective of a user in blogs is different from the user of social network. Unlike most of individuals in social networks who write for their friends and addressed their writings to them only, the audiences for blogs can be anyone, even in some cases the blogger may address his or her issue directly to the responsible government person since there is a possibility for them to read the content.

#### 4. Weblogs are content oriented and social networks are individual oriented

A brief look at the number of friends or follower on social networks shows that the number of friends and followers on them is in direct proportion of the person's fame, gender and published screenshots in profile, therefore a famous person or a celebrity attain thousands of friends or follow without even putting any special article or content; but things are quite different in blogging. Reading and following a weblog is linked to its content and its updates and readers are only concerned with the content of the blog. So those who planned for getting audience, have better exposure through weblogs.

#### 5. Weblogs are better hosts for content

The majority of social networks displays special format and are identical. Even the users of these networks are quite familiar with this and they rarely expect to see a change of profile or panel or change of color and shape each time they visit a friend's page. On top of this, social networks have many technical limitation in providing facilities in shape and color of their networks and clearly they cannot give any provision on changing the style and color as weblog platforms can provide (for example in many social networks, users cannot change font size or name or they have restrictions in shape of tables and links). Using powerful editor in blogs in its traditional form and other facilities in the selection of page and tables is another advantage to be explored once dealing with weblogs (Hewitt 2006: 65).

#### **5.4 The Role of Blogging in Changing the Quality of Women's Life**

Women bloggers are in fact leading women in "information and knowledge era". Women whom their presence in the intelligence community has lead them to produce and publish contents in the form of weblogs and brought the very first female whisperings into the age of virtual space. Many women have entered the world of internet with different aims and motivations and different level of education and backgrounds and allocated a majority of weblogs to their names just to announce that 'they exists' and want no more silence. They want to speak for themselves and not to let anyone talk on their behalf.

In fact internet has turned out to be the first place for the women of Afghanistan to share their personal experiences and concerns away from all judgments. Women here can open her mind to talk on issues without being concerned about the do's and don'ts and prejudices of society against them. This was the time in which women initiated to write about their daily struggles and entered to blogs alongside the other cultural import export manufacture such as short stories and poems, articles related to expert knowledge, evaluative and comment in different aspects of the society from political, cultural, and economic fields.

In this section we will discuss the issue revolving whether weblogs has started to be an affective new media communications platform for women in changing the position of women. The privilege to be in the cyberspace varies. With use of this media as a tool to reflect the presence of blogger in different forms of the person in the society like; presence as a woman, mother, friend, citizen, films audience, the traveler and etc. A blog is a feminine media, because it works like a tribune to express them and raise their confidence and let them grow and blossom away from other pressures to bring out their true potential.

Blogging for women is a method to exchange and express their point of views. Blogging plays a vital role in gaining confidence for women and this is a great positive aspects of a women's life (Majidi & Azari 2010: 87). Many experts believe that this itself removes the devaluation that especially housewives feel and empowers them.

Writing the personal experiences of a woman's daily life, women interact with few hundred and thousand views, comments and feedbacks from different people and all led to encourage them to continue blogging and it was an open invitation for all the women from various walks of life whether a young girls or elderly women to go to the cyberspace and get an identity for themselves.

It had been less than 12 years since the first publishing blogs started by women but the numbers are increasing every day and we witness the leading blogs by women from age 12- 50. Although, the detailed statistics of registered and active blogs by women cannot be measured (estimation of 10% of existence blogs (digiato.com), but a look at the cyberspace is showing the inflammatory presence of women author in the field of blogging.

With the new age of weblog writing by women, new research fields opens to researchers and sociologists as well. To observe and write about their daily life and comparison of various women in different background and classes and whom no one knew about their presence for years.

The author of the web log "The shout" writes, "When I started blogging, I had no confidence, but now I have found out that I can write, I can now take a picture and can give consultation, I now know that I can become a sociologist. So I decided to enroll in the Sociology course in the University" (faryad. Blogfa.com). Hence women have upgraded their skills to move from strength to strength.

In Afghanistan, "Autobiography" as a form of literature did not developed the way it did in west, and still there is no genre of writing biography and autobiography. Although, few of what exists in this regard are written by men and those by women have the male point of view. There are many reasons for that in Afghanistan such as, cultural issues, fear of judgment of others, honor and expressing and revealing the unsaid aspects of a women's life. Religious and traditional views made this type of literature in Afghanistan very limited and archaic, so we have incomplete picture of a women's life of Afghanistan. This view shows itself more in male perspectives. That is why till today whatever we have is from the stories told by men. Even when women author wrote about the life of other women they often had a patriarchal view and as a result we had stories which were indirect and dishonest.

With the spread of the weblog, we witness a great change in this field and for the first time we see the story of the women first hand and completely factual. Many of the women started to write that they had no knowledge and information about blogs. Among them were housewives, employees, students and religious practitioners but they soon picked this up. What is important is that at first what we see is not intellectual women and writers but the ordinary women. Although we do not know who is the writer and how much of the content is an absolute truth, but these blogs are all important because in writing a weblog, one must create an identity and shape it since we have access to their previous content of that blog.

What this freedom translates for Afghan women is non-existence face to face interaction. In fact the absence of this kind of interaction provides a freedom and type of security to allow a person to write whatever she wants and it is only made possible in virtual world.

Women use the opportunity provided for them in the cyberspace and express their presence and produce the content to reveal their feelings and opinions. They meet the people similar to them to interact and discuss and talk with them to find the solutions for their problems. This space had increased the level of awareness and knowledge of women. Virtual education with easy access to many sources will remove the economic, cultural and social obstacles for women and is considered the fastest and cheapest method of exchanging information, and providing a great potential to help women in solving their training and educational issues.

Knowledge and its derivatives like creativity is also an important notation in reducing poverty; women's empowerment is also an important factor to increase the presence of their activities in social and economic development. The network of knowledge and information can help women to share their experiences freely with each other in their fields of interest. To be a part of this chain of information, women also need to gain some kind of access to the outside world and that will put the idea of work and participation in the activities in social and economic fields. (ea.wenet.ir). Using cyberspace has made women very active in society. This has made women aware and it has lead to the creation a social movement.

Considering the restraints and limitations in social, economic sphere for women in Afghanistan, cyberspace is providing the best opportunity for them. As Hamelink

pointed out Considering the importance of education and spread of knowledge for women in variety of fields to enable them for the production of personal income and growth of scientific level, it seems that the importance of artworks virtual increases day to day and can be the most rapid and cheap method of the exchanging information, that would bring the great potential to help the women in solving problems and in education and reforming of the traditional culture. Women today can have access to research centers and organizations, therefor they can gather and reshape this information and use them. They remodel and redesign the data of varied size and create the different form of knowledge to be used (Hamelink 2000: 176).

Technology of information can create new forms of communication which enable the women to develop social status which they often confined to. It also may create new opportunities for the employment of women and help them in entering new career and learning new skills. The technology of information and communication can also enable women who have the responsibility of taking care of the children or those who are living far from the city to their advantage, which will give them an opportunity to work from home. (Hamelink1999: 23-45).

Social communications for women can be facilitated with the use of the public relations and it is possible once they create a network for social help. Sharing experiences and publishing information is the driving motor and the essence of social network. Identity is also considered as the main features of social network. In making an emails and weblog one can use an unreal identity but they gain their identity once placed in the network of social society. Society in social network leads men to a life in which they can be active and creative as an individual and share it with others. In addition, they can be in connection with others as well as being them self in the process of being with community.

According to Habermas media has the most important role in the atmosphere of the public. Internet among all is a tool to share all knowledge and ideas in which everyone can express freely and nobody is better than others. We can analyze what Habermas believes is that in these media, people can be their best form in all fields' of information exchanging their ideas and is the full justification of "Theory of communicative action" (Habermas & McCarthy 1985: 210-250).

He reveals that a field or public field may be formed in a space which includes sharing and discussion of public affairs. Habermas believes that an ideal communication condition only can form in a public field. The most important point in this process is that the behavior of individuals in this process of negotiation and dialog must be free of any pressure and dominance and the conditions must be fair, free, conscious and equal. The combination of these conditions will create a space that provides the most desirable result which is unfolding communicative action. Habermas made an attempt with the expansion of the theory of communicative action to revival of the public domain. To Habermas theory, the communicative action can be used as the basis of other general principles of expression (Habermas & McCarthy 1985: 210-250).

Communicative action has social status. In Communicative action, an individual agent has no weapon but logic and persuasion for understanding and agreement. People can be freer and more comfortable in achieving their solidarity aim without any direct concern and problems of material issues. The aim of this type of social action is the universal acceptance. This field is indeed a social ideal. The answer is not prepared but they will be ready through the exchange of views and opinions (Habermas 1981: 115-130).

In the network society, the audiences are not merely passive consumers of information but influential persons who create a mutual relationship. So perhaps the new media cannot be marked as the traditional word in which the limited numbers of news are allocated to a multitude of homogeneous audience. In fact because of the high number of infantry and the resources and publishing them, this is now the audience who has the power of selection. Users communicate from the safe environment of their home with all around the world. Communication in computers with ability of responding to individuals, and increasing their selection of desired choices has created the most vital revolution in all fields of culture, entertainment, training and education and has created a type of a stimulating social and individual. In this network of communication, every day the number of active audience increases and number of passive audiences declines (Castells 1996: 382-392).

In concluding the general result from this topic we can state that in Afghanistan, internet and blogging in specific had raised the presence of women by allocating a

personal space to them. It also has increased the sense of confidence, independence, presence of women in social activities, and the level of awareness and knowledge as well as decrease in the sense of social isolation, and change of traditional beliefs. Cyberspace created the public space for women's society, blogging reflected their personal life in society and most importantly it made it available for women with similar institution. With the presence in the cyberspace, they could discuss their interests and share their views without any concern (Harcourt 1999:124). Other advantages of blogging is finding friends across the globe, nurturing mind from sociological and other research areas based on consumer views. And to find out about situations that a person (was) never aware of them before (See Appendix, Table 9, page 269).

### **5.5 The Use of Cyberspace for Women's Movement**

It was not only women's movements across the world that used the web space for getting attention to their causes, but before them other people made use of this space to send forward their message for example the minority tribes or communities, political and sexual oriented people. But in Afghanistan this movement was created because the ownership of web is not yet on a special group. In this space, for publishing your comment, you don't need to own a newspaper that is sponsored by a financial independence or based on the traditional ritual. In Afghanistan the final decision should be taken by a society including generally an adult man who is religious, has income and of course well known, a person who is eligible to confirm the content of the topics to whether it is qualified to be published. In statistical analysis of media in Afghanistan we can see a few numbers of women leading the movement or even concerned about women's issues. The movement of women in fact had entered the cyberspace because there was no space for them in the actual world (mediaresearch. blogfa.com).

The point here is before the women's movement, these were actually normal women in Afghanistan that figured out the necessity of using the web space to understand and communicate their opinions. As an example we can see one of the earliest blog by a woman called "Amasangari". This weblog was created about eight years ago by a woman who had lived in Iran and Sweden and started to blog about her



daily living experience and problems of women in Afghanistan. (amasangari.Wordpress.com)

In fact web space had turned into a field for women to be able to write what is considered unworthy in all official media and at the same time receive feedbacks. A woman blogger who writes about herself and her environment is an independent media itself who makes the voice of Afghan women to be heard from different regions of the country and publishes articles and pictures related to women in small towns and far places ([www.weblogpagouh.Parsiblog.com/posts/6/](http://www.weblogpagouh.Parsiblog.com/posts/6/)).

The vast volume of feminine narratives in Afghanistan are in fact the sources of cultural and social base which are available without any cost to the governmental and public gathered and they are only based on "Developmental skills" and "Boosting life track" of the knowledge and information of Afghan women.

### **5.5.1 Achievements of Women Blogger**

The importance of a growing web by feminine has drawn attention of social support groups in national and international level for women. The women blogger of Afghanistan also has won several international awards such as Somaya Rezai, who writes under pseudo name of Amazon. She is the only person who has won the International prize of "Deutsche welle" in 2012 in Persian language. Along with blogging she is also a teacher and an activist in the field of women rights. She writes about the problems of women, Freedom, Democracy social and cultural conditions of women of Afghanistan in Persian Dari ([www.thebobs.com](http://www.thebobs.com)).

Masoumeh Ebrahimi, was born in 1981 in Bamiyan and she graduated with Master Degree in theater and management from the University of Ohio. She is one of the pioneers and member of home culture of Afghanistan and was director of home culture of Afghanistan for three years. She is also a very successful blogger and made blogging her official career. She writes about women, social, cultural and artistic aspects of Afghanistan. In addition to writing and the restoration of her independent cultural career, she trains other women to blog she writes in Persian Dari language ([www.waragirl.Persianblog.ir](http://www.waragirl.Persianblog.ir)). She is also one of the investors of the literary prize "thousand and one night" under the cultural institution and publications of "Tasnim" since 2011 who celebrate the work of Persian language from all over the world.

Besides women we also have a male blogger who also focuses on women at time. Nasim Fekrat is another Afghan journalist, photographer and a blogger in Afghanistan. He had started blogging from 2004 and it is believed that he served the vital role between the years 2006- 2009 in the scope of digital media and blogging in Afghanistan. He has conducted several training workshop of online journalism and blogging specially for girls with the sponsorship of cultural section of the American embassy in several cities such as, Kabul, Helmand, Herat, Kunduz, Bamiyan, Jalalabad and some other cities of Afghanistan. Also the weblog called "memories from Kabul" had been selected among the top seven blogs in an international blogging competition of "Reporters without borders" in Afghanistan and central Asia (tasnim-ins.com).

### **5.5.2 National and International Organizations for Support Afghan Blogger**

#### **5.5.2.1 Afghan Cultural House (ACH)**

"Afghan Cultural House (ACH) is a nonprofit cultural umbrella organization which was established in 2010 in Kabul as a dynamic cultural center offering different services. It provides unique opportunities for the Afghan people, especially for women and young generations who have been ignored or isolated from the community for many decades. This center aims to promote positive culture among Afghans and give an opportunity to them to express themselves, demonstrate their abilities and capacities through tools and services they provide. In fact, they consider themselves as a cultural ambassador between Afghan people and the other nations of the world to promote positive culture among Afghan people and give a positive picture of Afghanistan to the world outside.

University students, civil society association members, high school graduates and many others are interested in writing and have the capacity to run a blog, but the culture of blogging and writing does not exist among the people. They, here at the ACH, are doing their best to promote such culture in the country to promote positive change. It seems they see a huge potential of interest among these generations and believe they can lead this to practice and demonstrate to the world the young and emerging democracy of Afghanistan through soft power.

ACH organizes film events (Cinematheque), live music shows, story and poetry evenings for young writers and poets and everyone is most welcome to attend. Among many other initiatives, this center promotes citizen journalism and social media to enhance the capacity of local artists, civil and cultural associations as well as creating an informal atmosphere for everyone particularly for intellectuals, students, researchers, artists, poets, bloggers, journalists and many others.

Afghan Cultural House is led by a board of trustees who are its founders. The board of trustees appoints a Director General every year to manage the entire components and program operations” ([www.ach.af](http://www.ach.af)).

#### 5.5.2.2 Association of Afghan Blog Writers (AABW)

The center of Blogging community in Afghanistan established in Kabul with the aid of Afghan bloggers live inside and outside of the country. The Association of the weblog is called Association of Afghan Blog Writers (AABW) or (penlog) which started its activity from 28 April 2006.

This organization had announced that it will respect all religions and believed and declared the of freedom of speech as his plaque and would encounter any internet censorship that led to the lack of freedom of speech, also in the case of any threat and intimidation towards its authors and bloggers, they will officially take legal action and take it to the authorities and human rights organization. It will also defend the freedom of speech and support all bloggers and journalists. The center of Afghanistan community for bloggers puts all its efforts to get the support from all human rights organization and bring the attention to the rights of bloggers in Afghanistan.

The tasks of the center is to hold educational and training workshops in different regions of Afghanistan like Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Shibergan and Mazar-e-Sharif.

One of the aims of the Center is to hold training workshop from creating the web to form a chain of blogs in Afghanistan as a group in three languages: Dari, Pashtu and English from different parts of Afghanistan. In the next steps they create a communication bridge between Afghan bloggers and other bloggers from all over the world. Besides they encourage those bloggers who are capable of writing in English to add both languages in their blogs and to translate those blogs who might appeal to

English speakers and try to show a new image of the Afghanistan to the outside world (Afghanpenlog.com).

This association made a connection with Iranian bloggers as well, since same language had created the closeness of the two countries. The main website can be accessed with three different languages:

[www.afghanpenlog.com](http://www.afghanpenlog.com) (Farsi- Dari)

[www.afghanpenlog-pa.blogspot.com](http://www.afghanpenlog-pa.blogspot.com) (Pashtu)

[www.afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.com](http://www.afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.com) (English)

The regulations of The Center of Afghanistan community blog is for a blog to be active and at least once a week a new post should be added, at least a month should be past since creating a blog before a member can make a request for the membership and at least 5 articles should be there. Apart from bloggers, freelance journalists and writers too can apply and request for joining to the center.

The Association of the bloggers specifically supports female bloggers and the content of their blogs. They have announced that institutions and similar centers must support them as the role of female bloggers in the production of content is above others.

#### 5.5.2.3 The Association of Female Blogger of Afghanistan

It was established in March 2012 in the form of a weblog with the aim of tremendously enriching women in Afghan society by a number of students at the University of Kabul and Afghan women. It would provide job opportunities; important news related to women, support persons or organizations in the international platform and publish the ideas. It gives an honor mention to each woman's comment ([www.khabarnama.net](http://www.khabarnama.net)).

#### 5.5.2.4 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Since 2011, UNDP took the responsibility of supporting education, providing computer sections and cooperation with the universities of Afghanistan, and especially it had done a lot in support of the women ([www.af.undp.org](http://www.af.undp.org)).

## **5.6 Self-Censorship in Blogging**

With the increase in age, new positions in life, family relations, education and knowledge, Job and career, change in social and political conditions the blogger will be affected. For example, with the increase of human's age, his or her view and perspective of life differs and that will for sure influences the way he writes. Even the type of audience has an effect on writing style, when a huge number of audiences are interested in a particular topic; they expect their view to be honored. The political and social conditions of the country also influence a blogger constantly and these conditions push the blogger to self-censorship.

In conversation with many of the bloggers such as: The shout, Tea & Suitcase, The journey (Personal interview, 22 November 2014), they reveal that they write less of pain and sorrow when they receive the response from their audiences. In an interview with some of these bloggers they state that every day they feel more and more responsible towards their audiences since they know the majority of them are young people and women and they do not even write when they feel depressed and disappointed since they do not wish their writing to reflect their negative attitude and add any burden on their audiences.

A blogger called "Sahar" says: I deliberately and consciously write of positivity and great energy. I will broadcast it so when young people check my posts, it is my duty not to disappoint them (Personal interview, March 18, 2015)

## **5.7 Pseudonym and Creating New Identities**

There are many blogs where their author uses anonymous identity and hide their real name and this makes the analysis of the material published with restriction. But generally the airflow of web log writing has opened new doors to the researchers since before, due to fear of judgment and conditions of cultural and social space in Afghanistan, we didn't have a firsthand story of women life published but, with the spread of the weblog writing in Farsi we observed an important development in this area and now we have access to the stories written by women and other section of the culture of the society where previously it was oral. At the same time housewives, ordinary women and even women of religious career have started to blog and write about their life story.

Of course there is no certain scale on how much these stories are real and honest but if always start from the first post of a web log and then start to read the history of the web log right from the beginning, then the pseudonym has no importance, because during this process an identity is built which is coherence and we can see that identity clearly through the history and archived weblogs.

### **5.7.1 Reasons for Pseudonym**

We want to see that why pseudonym is spreading and is so popular. The main point is that the virtual world has never absolutely been apart from the real world and the social environment definitely affects the writing. Since in the absence of physical presence, begins the pseudonym, it can show the real image of the Afghanistan community in the complex condition of the country.

Different Factors such as age, sex, job, family relations, educational background, and political restrictions of social environment, cultural living and the audience will impact the writing in blogs. The issue of the self-censorship also influences the bloggers and therefore they start to censor their writing having in mind that who will read their blogs and what impressions they will carry.

Of course there should be a mention on a difference between the appearance and reality of Afghanistan community. The fact that there is a drastic change after the emergence of Taliban and the change of lifestyle. What people actually are in public is very different from their private one. In this culture, war, violence, economic poverty and engagement of ethnic groups has draw a sharp line between private and public space of people (avapress.com).

In a country where women and young people are facing continuous judgment and must follow many rules and regulations made by a minority, people learned to play a role in various positions and therefore they have lost the ability to be themselves. That is why the identity crisis is the major challenge in Afghanistan today.

Facing such social atmosphere and cultural limitations, women do not know how to present their real self. They are faced with hundreds of dos and don'ts that their identity is lost. With blogging even though they use pseudo name, but they can talk about their reality and who they actually are.

Having a pseudo name creates a safe place for the blogger so that without any concern and away from all the judgments, she can write what she wants. Although here also there is a danger of getting the judgment and harm, but this danger in comparison to the real world is far less.

The possibility of staying hidden creates shades of pseudonyms in the cyberspace and this will give security for women and youth to create and write about the deep layers of their life experiences and what they have suppressed so far. Web converts into a mirror for them to see their own reality as they are or how they desire to be or even see those parts of them that have been removed due to ethnic limitations and social and cultural restriction.

This new image of the "self" in web environment which has a history and archived place will gradually make an identity of that person. It becomes real and it will affect the reality of the person. The individual gradually affected by many images that she or he had created and displays for others and sometimes she has to get close to one of those personalities that she created.

In this arena, women can easily with absence of physicality and without communication introduce themselves to someone else and express their desire in the virtual space. Of course a lot of the pseudonym writers after a while turn to reality writing.

There were many women blogger who initiated with pseudo writing but the real self for them became so amusing that after a while they decided to embrace the real themselves and face the consequences. In this regards, blogging empowered them.

But those who live in small places in more religious areas are still submissive to this and cannot break free easily. They do most of self-censorship themselves since they are always afraid of what might befall on them if someday their real name is revealed to others and the fundamentalists would harm them and take some harsh steps towards them or their families.

So the range of this freedom in the cyberspace is dependent heavily on the reality of the society and its atmosphere. In other words physical space will affect completely on an individual. Women who live outside of Afghanistan in western countries have less rules upon them and no conventional rules and family pressures, therefore they

write freely and do less of self-censoring, most of them even do not have pseudo names.

One of the most important characteristics of virtual place and blogs is that we don't know exactly that who is the story teller and how factual he or she writes. But at the same time this point does not carry any significance because except very few blogs and some well-known blogger, usually we never know what are the names and designations of the authors.

In the virtual world what is important, is that how consistent and stable the identity is. This coherence and consistency of identities in the field of blogging will emerge as in web logs there is a date log (via archived), and coherence of materials and writing and subjects and finally type of encounter with the audience. This makes it possible for us to receive the identity of a blogger and its honesty and factuality in time.

Although in the past couple of years with emergence of Facebook, many decided to write with the real name, but there are many who still use pseudonym in the web log they also entered Facebook with this name and have found their followers.

One of the great differences between a weblog and Facebook is that a reader in a blog has no limitations in accessing the comments and articles and can read it at any time but in a person's Facebook page, one can customize the setting and make the articles and writings accessible only for limited number of people such as one's friends only. In Facebook one can make her page completely private, semi private or public. Maybe it is this freedom that makes women more secure in their page and they can write what they wish.

### **5.8 Writing in the Service of Democracy**

Writing about the daily life experience and emotion brought the new concept in cyberspace that Anthony Giddens mentioned about twenty years back called "Personal democratization". According to Giddens since women have the power and capabilities to talk about their personal life and relations more freely and with ease in comparison with men, so in the process of democratization of a personal life and bringing about a change in the relations, a woman can play a vital role. While for men



expressing of their emotions and sentiments is harder, especially when it comes to a public arena (Giddens 2000: 99).

This democratization of a personal life and relevant emotions of women in the virtual environment of Afghanistan is in fact considered as a violation of traditions.

Examples of violation in the both virtual and real society of Afghanistan are numerous. Even expression of simple and harmless concepts such as love or divorce is considered as shameless. In many regions of Afghanistan even a woman who had been a subject to domestic violence must remain silent about it and that consider as the rule of tradition but if she makes an attempt to complain, she is shameless and the cause blatant, even she deserve to die (hrw.org).

A woman blogger, who ignores the custom of her society by exposing her personal and private life to others, puts herself under the judgment and sometimes verbal violence against her would take place. In this case this woman has only a few ways ahead: stop blogging altogether, remove the violent comments or learn to fight back the violence she is facing.

What blogging had taught many of women in Afghanistan is to raise their threshold against criticisms on one hand and stand against violence to be their true self from other hand. One of the women blogger writes: "In war between blogging and commenting, a winner is the one who continues to write. When you are constantly criticized or attacked, you will learn how to fight back and defend yourself. Otherwise, you only have the option to block the comment section or close your blog" (soode61.wordpress.com).

Maybe that is the reason we can state that the custom of writing and giving speech in public space, discussion and learning how to deal with the criticisms and attacks finally turns the blogging to a strong weapon for women and to empower them.

## **5.9 Movements Based on Blogging**

The constant presence of women activists in the virtual space, weblogs and websites and using the relatively secure atmosphere for connecting with the audience has its own disadvantages as well. Including access to limited number of women to Internet, especially in the villages and small towns. Moreover, the movement of

women was due to the ease of access to internet and computer not their audiences. That is why the gain of freedom of writing has never been enough in comparison with actual and real life confrontation. To reach this goal, there is a need of campaigning, protest and gathering of women from all over Afghanistan to address these issues

In the example of "Justice for Farkhunda ", that the next chapter will explore the evidence in more detail., active women of Afghanistan first started to reach out to as many people and other platforms via cyberspace first by putting images of Farkhunda in their pages and then by candle lighting and street walking they could reach out to global level and grab the attention of people to the incident. They made a protest to altering the law and bringing justice for her. That is how women inside Afghanistan and the civil society of people proved their support of Farkhunda and condemning this catastrophe with their presence in social media right from holding the coffin by women and their following up for the arrest of the criminal ([rahemadanyat.com](http://rahemadanyat.com)).

Another women's movements call "young women for a change" (YWC), has started from 2012 -2013, initiated by Noorjahan Akbar organized rallies and protested extensively in the virtual space and some major cities including Kabul city, launching under the banner -the street is my right-. With the call from all segments of society, a sustained correspondence with members of the Government, Parliament, and publishing articles in newspapers and interviews with various channels, they tried to draw public attention to the major issue of women harassments in the street and on social networks.

The group's continuous efforts were satisfying and successful in initiating a series of changes in Afghan society. A change began by people's considering the thought and then it has become stronger as it gained more support among different parts of society. It then suggested by the Commission of women's Affairs in assembly. And finally The House of the People or Wolesi Jirga has ruled for the law of prohibiting the harassment of children and women with the majority of votes on 9th November, 2016. Although in 2014, the Ministry of Justice issued a rule on the prohibition of women and children harassment, it didn't carry an execution weight like the rules of assembly.

The new legislative act of women's sexual harassment's prevention has three acts and 29 articles. According to this law, those committed the women and children's

harassment in public places and vehicles will be fined from 5-10 thousand Afghan Afghani, -approximately 70-140 dollars-, in the educational, academic and health centers the fine is raise to ten to twenty thousand Afghanis (140 to 290 dollars). Also, the recurring of women and children harassment would place the offender in the jail from three to six months. In this law, due to inappropriate conditions of prisons, the long process of handling the case and effective impact of fine on citizens, the punishments are majorly focused on penalty of fine rather than imprisonment.

Variation of harassments against women and children in Afghanistan that stems due to the population growth, immigration, the negative impacts of war, patriarchy culture and the lack of proper education have increased in the recent years. This has severely caused mental and physical damage to women and children and decreased their participation in the community. The main purposes of this legislative law are to prevent the women's harassment, protection of the victims of harassments, providing the appropriate environment for work and education, access to health services and creating awareness to the general public. Any form of harassment from actual, verbal, physical, written and video are considered as an act of crime in this law.

We can say that this has been one of the most significant achievements of civic activity in Afghanistan based on the efforts of women's rights activists and women's movement. According to the members of the Assembly for the formulation of this law, women's rights activists have also been consulted ([wj.parliament.af](http://wj.parliament.af)).

Women and children's harassment in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon but talking about it, protesting and complaining have been expressed recently. The first voices of women's protest started in blogs and by sharing these experiences of all sorts of it, women encouraged to go to the next level of gaining the courage to reach out to authorities and complain. By witnessing the support of activists, those families who prefer to tamper the harassment by keeping it quiet are now willing to backing their women officially.

Women's communication on social networks made up by creating a supportive network of friendly relations and they stand next to each other in sharing their experiences and give courage to women and girls to speak up about what has happened to them. In Soode's blog (rapture in the sidewalk), we can read that she has decided to establish a friendly relationship with her child by educating her to have the

courage of saying 'no', so she would be less harmed in the workplace or educational organizations. Soode, by writing in her blog has found the courage to share her negative experiences and harassments with her child. Such steps act as a model for other women (Personal interview, 11 July 2014).

It is certain that having a law doesn't guarantee of problem-solving, adjustment and implementation of laws are in the hands of people. Achieving such result from a movement will surely increase women's confidence to participate in other activities and movements.

In this research we express that whenever an issue in conjunction with Afghan women clearly expressed throughout society and spreading information occurred widely with the precise and focused aim, there was solidarity among women activists, people and institutions to achieve the desirable outcome. But in cases where women's activists have appeared weak in unifying the society or couldn't acquire the support of men, the heads of tribes, religious and community organizations leader, they have faced legal, cultural and economic challenges.

Hence to conclude the early period of Internet was primarily dominated by business interests and large corporations who had webpages, but with the rise of cheap publishing and cheaper browsing facilities combined with high network penetration, new ideas came to the fore. These ideas included amongst others the creation of a new social media landscape the world over powered by people from many different geographical regions, invisible but yet connected.

It is this transnational cooperation at a very fast pace at low cost and with high levels of a nonentity that has led to large participation of women the world over not only as individual participants but also as collectives. Unlike other collectives the peculiarity of these collectives is that they are composed of networks populated by nodes which are then disseminated and which continue to disseminate information from the world over. In short there is an interaction in the media-the new media where the consumer or the media is also at certain times a producer, in the sense that he or she is also replying and posting messages, comments and other interventions to the earlier posts. It is this interactivity and transnational connections coupled with felicity of expression empowered by using tools of technique in the own line wage through

the Persian script in the case of Afghanistan that has propelled the surge towards a new media.

Some of the immediately visible aspects of blogging in Afghanistan by the women are stories that are told and retold and the most important is the story of the survival of democracy as a fragile institution. The participation by a many women bloggers in the service of democracy has seen to it that the impact of these blogs has created a new audience. This audience is also composed of the same audience which is a consumer of the traditional media, but unlike the traditional media the political economy of the new media differs and therefore the narratives also differ and hear the narrative is of a democracy which is not statist but it flows from the people and that too with that gender spin.

It would not be out of place to highlight some of the most important achievements of blogging in Afghanistan, that is the rise of two women's movements whose names are as follows "justice for farkhunda" and "young women for a change" made a significant impact in civil society. This comes at a particular time in the whole question of civil society as an institution was debated whether it existed in Afghanistan. We see that among the contemporary legislations in Afghanistan by the Parliament, one of the pressure groups that influence the passage of bills against sexual harassment for women and advocacy of women's rights was predominantly an online movement. Because of the activity of this moment that gained its support largely from cyberspace and showed that the moment in cyberspace is not altogether diverse from the ground realities for the results are pictured on to the most important and powerful lawmaking body in Afghanistan namely the legislature.

By far the most important impact which is not directly visible is the impact of the everyday life of women in terms of their party's nation not as passive consumers of media but what as Alvin Toffler called the rise of -the prosumer-the producer and consumer combined together. Such a situation did not exist in the traditional analog media but has become a possibility only in the digital media and the lives of everyday transformation in gendered spaces have been made possible only by this particularly in delicious activities and also in their day-to-day activities in the consumption of news, participation in online forums and more importantly speaking out their mind. The spread of ICT in Afghanistan is considerable, the critique that women's

participation is less is underrated and there is a visible impact and also not so visible impact in everyday life which has brought about important transformations to the gender skip in Afghanistan. What is very important is that women have found a voice and an agency there and cyberspace.

## References

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. I. Blackwell, 1996.

Giddens, Anthony. *Runaway World*. London, Routledge, 2000.

Habermas, Jürgen, McCarthy, Thomas. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalization of society*. Beacon Press, 1985.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. MIT Press, 1991.

Harcourt, Wendy. *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, zed books, London, 1999.

Hamelink, Cees J. *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. SAGE, 2000.

Hewitt, Hugh. *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World*, Thomas Nelson Inc, 2006.

Majidi Gahrudi, Nasim. Azari Fatemeh. "Study the role of internet in elevation of women status." *Research journal for women*. Research Center of Humanity and cultural studies. First year. Vol II. Autumn and winter 2010.

Rodzvilla, John. *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs are Changing Our Culture*, Peruses Publishing, 2002.

"Word Communication and Information Report." UNESCO Publishing, M.Tawfik (chief editor), 1999-2000.

"Iranian Bloggers find freedom online."04 June 2005. [www.regimechangeiran.blogspot.in/2005/06/iranian-bloggers-find-freedom-online.html](http://www.regimechangeiran.blogspot.in/2005/06/iranian-bloggers-find-freedom-online.html) [Accessed on 12/01//2016]

[www.blogsky.com/](http://www.blogsky.com/) [Accessed on 13/01//2016]

[www.digiato.com/article/2015/05/10](http://www.digiato.com/article/2015/05/10) [Accessed on 14/01//2016]

[www.afghanistan-culture.com/communications.html](http://www.afghanistan-culture.com/communications.html) [Accessed on 15/01//2016]

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in Afghanistan  
[www.mcit.gov.af/en](http://www.mcit.gov.af/en) [Accessed on 16/01//2016]

Internet World Stats, [www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm) [Accessed on 17/01//2016]

[www.womenintechology.org](http://www.womenintechology.org) [Accessed on 18/01//2016]

Yousufzada, Munera. Weblog. [shiddokht.blogspot.in/](http://shiddokht.blogspot.in/) [Accessed on 11/07//2014]

[www.afghanpenlog.com/](http://www.afghanpenlog.com/) [Accessed on 19/01//2016]

[openasia.org/about](http://openasia.org/about) [Accessed on 20/01//2016]

[www.youngwomenforchange.org](http://www.youngwomenforchange.org) [Accessed on 21/01//2016]

[www.8mars.com/8MARS\\_KARZAR\\_ZANAN/index.php?p=1](http://www.8mars.com/8MARS_KARZAR_ZANAN/index.php?p=1) [Accessed on 21/01//2016]

[www.faryad. Blogfa.com](http://www.faryad.blogfa.com) [Accessed on 22/01//2016]

[www.mediaresearch. blogfa.com](http://www.mediaresearch.blogfa.com) [Accessed on 23/01//2016]

Rezaie, Amazon. Weblog. [amasangari.Wordpress.com](http://amasangari.Wordpress.com) [Accessed on 12/07//2014]

[weblogpagouh. Parsiblog.com/posts/6/](http://weblogpagouh.Parsiblog.com/posts/6/) [Accessed on 24/01//2016]

Deutsche Welle, [www.thebobs.com/english](http://www.thebobs.com/english) [Accessed on 25/01//2016]

[www.tasnim-ins.com/](http://www.tasnim-ins.com/) [Accessed on 26/01//2016]

[www.warasgirl. Persianblog.ir/](http://www.warasgirl.Persianblog.ir/) [Accessed on 27/01//2016]

Afghan Cultural House (ACH), [www.ach.af/about-us/general-information](http://www.ach.af/about-us/general-information) [Accessed on 28/01//2016]

[afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.in/p/about-us.html](http://afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.in/p/about-us.html) [Accessed on 02/02//2016]

[www.afghanpenlog.com/p/blog-page.html](http://www.afghanpenlog.com/p/blog-page.html) [Accessed on 03/02//2016]

Akbar, Sharzad. Weblog. [www.khabarnama.net/blog/author/shahrzad/](http://www.khabarnama.net/blog/author/shahrzad/) [Accessed on 04/02//2016]



[www.af.undp.org/](http://www.af.undp.org/) [Accessed on 05/02//2016]

[www.avapress.com/vdcaien6049nuy1.k5k4.html](http://www.avapress.com/vdcaien6049nuy1.k5k4.html) [Accessed on 06/02//2016]

Human Rights Watch, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) [Accessed on 06/02//2016]

[www.soode61.wordpress.com](http://www.soode61.wordpress.com) [Accessed on 13/07//2014]

[farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com/](http://farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com/) [Accessed on 14/07//2014]

[saqiya.blogfa.com/](http://saqiya.blogfa.com/) [Accessed on 15/07//2014]

“Justice for Farkhunda.” The pathway to civilization, March 30, 2015.  
[www.rahemadanyat.com/index.php/beyond-news/item/1215](http://www.rahemadanyat.com/index.php/beyond-news/item/1215) [Accessed on 07/02//2016]

National Assembly (Afghanistan), [wj.parliament.af/](http://wj.parliament.af/) [Accessed on 10/11/2016]

Personal interview located in Kabul, 22 November 2014 2014 on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Sahar, 18March, 2015, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Soode, 11 July 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

## Notes

\* An Internet café, also known as a cybercafé, is a place which provides Internet access to the public, usually for a fee. These businesses usually provide snacks and drinks, hence the café in the name. The fee for using a computer is usually charged as a time-based rat.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Analysis of Women's Issues Raised in the Blogs**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, we analyze seven major blogs along with some minor ones that are issue-based. Continuing from the analytical trend of the earlier chapters which analysed the mediascape of Afghanistan and pointed that the mediascape and the gender scale coalesce together when the issues of weblogs became an intervention in the Afghanistan civil Society and also in the law making, bodies and the legislature, we analyse the issues raised in these blogs.

Continuing this analytical trend this chapter uses the methods of data analysis and content analysis to understand ten issues raised in the blogs. The ten are chosen in terms of importance and also with respect to their impact on Afghan society and are namely concerned with Stoning to death, Domestic violence, Child Marriage, Mutilation, Ba'ad, Rape, Honor Killing, Cyberstalking, Street harassment and Bacha push.

This decision is a mixture of both universal and particular trends as we see that issues of cyberstalking is a universal feature of cyber media as is the issue of street harassment and similarly the issue of child marriage and rape is one of the issues confronting many societies throughout the world through rape is also an universal issue. Child marriage to honor killing and domestic violence in the form which are witnessed in Afghanistan are peculiar to this region and share a commonality with the South Asian and West Asian neighbors of Afghanistan, where a different type of masculinity and patriarchy is at play enforced by the cultural and legal codes.

Baad and Bacha push our typical incidents of Afghanistan that have a regional particularity and stoning is also adopted by certain other Islamic societies in the name of religion with some particular interpretation that is extreme and not followed by the majority of Muslims the world over. These issues have their own genealogy over the

centuries and many of them were taken up for public debate only during two or three times in the last century on a large scale, one during the period of the King Zahir Shah and secondly during the period of the Russian intervention by the Soviet Union and the Marxist program of social change and political change debated this issue set length. After the fall of Taliban and the reestablishment of democracy, the issues were not discussed in the media for fear of backlash from different sections of the society and were hushed up as it would upset the fragile peace that came after decades of conflict. Occasionally erupt again.

The analysis follows a database enquiry on the data presented with regard to the issue and secondly based on the content analysis which follows the idea of how the content is presented-the subject matter and its treatment. It, therefore, brings to us that there is a different understanding in cyberspace that is much more intense and detailed than in the regular media for many reasons including the problem of space and also the diverse audience. This is explored with regard to all the ten issues.

Therefore, cyberspace and weblog writing as its outcome for women in Afghanistan appear as an instrument giving the Afghan women active social role, a new identity and tremendous opportunity to struggle for their right. Accordingly, nowadays Afghan women activists are present and active in weblog writing. They attempt to approach various social and political issues through debates on religion, culture, ideology and women's right in particular. Furthermore, the milieu of their activity re-shapes through factors regarding religious, feminist, secular, cultural issue, and traditional system of society.

Therefore these issues could be seen referring actively on the issues such as weblog writing, the role of internet and cyberspace in these exchanges which are significant. The cyberspace is what enables the Afghan women to write weblogs for communication, learning and to discuss various social issues and political problems. In this chapter, the sample was analyzed based on the content analysis.

\* Note: All passages from the Afghan women weblogs in this research are translated from Dari and Persian into English by the author. They are fully cited for verification.

## **6.2 Issue: Stoning**

Manizha Bakhtari (1972) was appointed as Afghanistan Ambassador to the Nordic countries in September 2009. Prior to her ambassadorial assignment, Bakhtari was the chief of staff of the Afghan foreign minister and a part time lecturer at Kabul University. She holds a bachelor degree in journalism and a Master degree in Persian Language and Literature from Kabul University. In 2002, she was accredited as lecturer in the faculty of journalism in Kabul University.

She has written a number of stories which are influenced by her feminist views. Her stories reflect the challenges and problems of what Afghan women go through in day to day life and they analyze and interpret those challenges and problems. She has also worked for the Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA) which is a nongovernmental organization, specializing in gender, human rights and political training for Afghan women as well as providing vocational training for Afghan women and advocacy.

Furthermore, Manizha Bakhtari is the author of two journalistic books: “The interesting World of News” and “Ethics and Law in Journalism” which are currently taught in Journalism Faculty, Kabul University. On the other hand, she is the author of a researching book about the contemporary history of Afghanistan’s satire writing (Angabinneshkhand and sharing noshkhand). Also, she is the author of a collection of stories titled (Three Angels). Besides, Manizha Bakhtari was responsible for Parnian Magazine (A Cultural and Literature Quarterly Magazine) as editor in chief.

She has written in her weblog “shaharnosh” from 2008 till 2016 and she is one of the very first weblogger in Afghanistan. Her writings are about women in Afghanistan and include issues such as stoning ([shaharnosh.blogfa.com](http://shaharnosh.blogfa.com)).

On the 19th of March 2015, a 27 year old Afghan girl named Farkhunda Malikzada was murdered by ten angry Muslims at the Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque on the charge of burning the Holy Quran. Her lifeless body was then burned thrown in a river of Kabul (See Appendix, image 3, page 270). She was born in Kabul and had just finished her education in the field of religious studies and had started her career as a teacher. The Mullah of Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque of Kabul had yelled that a woman had burned the Holy Quran. After that the angry Muslim men ran inside the

mosque and started beating her up. Some brief moments of the attack captured through personal cell phones were published, which saw a huge reaction on the Afghanistan media and the whole world as well. The video clips showed her shouting that she had not burned down the Quran and pleading for help while her head broke and her entire face got covered with blood, but all those upset men assaulted her without listening and minutes later she lost her life due to the severity of the wounds (aljazeera.com).

It can be seen in the picture that as the mob of men increases, and so does the severity of the assault increases with none helping her. The police initially made an attempt to scatter the people by air shooting, but was unable to save her from the crowd that mobbed her.

Angry men dragged her motionless body to the street and then ran her over by a car. After a couple of minutes they set her body on fire. Images show that men use their own clothes to keep the fire alight. Police and fire brigade finally transfer her body from the site.

Kabul's police published the result of their investigation within three days of the incident. The minister of interior of Afghanistan Noorulhaq Ulomi announced that no trace of burning of the Quran was found in the premises of the mosque but it was all the misleading claim of a charm writer mullah at the mosque which provoked the emotions of people. This mullah used to practice the selling of charms in the premise of the mosque that Farkhunda used to teach. On that day Farkhunda had reminded him that practicing of charms and selling it to people is against the religious rules and ways, after a quick debate he became angry on her and started to accuse her. He calls up some of the rabble who were currently present at the place telling them that she has burned Quran (aljazeera.com).

Soon after the occurrence of the incident, the public reaction in Afghanistan turned into shock and anger. Many of the protestors, majority of who were women from various stratum and class began to protest on social networks. The information delivery on networks were fast and broadcasting videos and photos of the event soon invited the protesters to join in from different cities. A blogger called Farkhunda a martyr of freedom of speech and appealed to every woman to attend the burial

ceremony of Farkhunda. This call became a revolution called “Justice for Farkhunda” (nytimes.com).

Three days later on March 22nd, Farkhunda’s body was buried as only women held up her coffin and gave her the proper burial (See Appendix, image 4 page 271). According to the tradition of Islam especially in Afghanistan, carrying the coffin, prayers and burial can only be done by men and mullahs. But women broke the taboo and did not allow any men and mullahs to come close to Farkhunda and despite the criticism from religious leaders, women have completed the entire religious ceremonies (nytimes.com).

Call out for protests against the murder of Farkhunda was initiated primarily on social networks and shaped in various forms in different cities. For instance, on the burial day at Kabul, another ceremony cloned in Herat as well. A day after the burial, residents of Kabul formed a rally with the name "Solidarity Party of Afghanistan" in front of Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque and requested for change of street name to Martyr Farkhunda and their request was accepted immediately. They planted a tree at the point where she was set on fire and called it the “Tree of Farkhunda” (See Appendix, image 5 page 272). This party also had a meeting and called for a rally in the city of Jalaabad. The civil activists and the citizens of most of the cities of Afghanistan also gathered in protest. In Balkh and a few other cities of Afghanistan protesters made gatherings and protest rallies and demanded for punishment of the perpetrators of this murder. The length of these protests were so extensive around the country that even some groups formed in objections of excessive demands following up the murder in different parts of the world (See Appendix, image 6 page 273).

The protestors criticized the action of human rights organizations active in Afghanistan. In addition to these protests, there had been many gathering in America, Canada, Australia, Germany, Finland, India, Iran and Pakistan showing solidarity for Farkhunda. The protestors demanded the punishment of all the murderers of Farkhunda from the government of Afghanistan. Najie Afshari who is one of the organizers of the protests gatherings criticized the action of Human rights organizations in Afghanistan on Saturday, 28th March 2015 in Hamburg and accused the lack of sincerity of performance in fragile societies such as Afghanistan. She

pointed out that the international aids and actions should not be limited to conduct couple of conferences ([www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)).

The death of Farkhunda had become a turning point for women involvement and had expanded their activities in and outside of the country. She became the symbol of innocence of women in Afghanistan and the hash tag of “I am Farkhunda” was circulated around social networks as a sign of protest numerous since. President of Afghanistan ‘Asharf Ghani’ had personally ordered for resolving the issues and finding the culprits of the incident ([nbcnews.com](http://nbcnews.com)).

The Home Ministry later reported that all culprits involving with the incident were arrested and 13 police officers got suspended. Of 49 suspects who were arrested, three got twenty years of imprisonment, 13 people received sixteen years of imprisonment and one person sentenced to ten years in prison. After this declaration, Farkhunda’s mother disappointed from the result had sent out a video clip saying: Justice for Afghan woman buried with Farkhunda. The family of Farkhunda alongside with some irate women condemned police for their incapability. Many citizens and social activists denounced the administration for ignoring the justice and consequently the president had to order to revalue the results again ([8am.af](http://8am.af)).

The incident had many international reactions as well. European Nation had condemned the attack. The United States also condemned the murder of Farkhunda by issuing a statement and demanding to fulfill the justice for her from their embassy in Kabul so that these kinds of horrific act never occur in future.

Many women stated that the, we will support the Government of Afghanistan in preserving the gains of Afghan women over the past 13 years and continuing to promote rule of law, prevent gender-based violence, and take steps toward gender equality. Afghan women, like women around the world, have the right to live their lives free from fear of harassment, insecurity, and the threat of violence. They were committed to working with civil society, as well as the Government of Afghanistan, to make that vision a reality ([kabul.usembassy.gov](http://kabul.usembassy.gov)).

Even some Islamic figures in Afghanistan demonstrated their reaction and announced that killing people even in the pretext of defending religion is not acceptable. Following the murder of "Farkhunda" the process of removing charm

writers and witches from Kabul started, and the Ministry of Haj Afghanistan accompanied the religious leaders in doing that as well. But ultimately they announced that based on statistics of the Haj ministry, currently 160 thousand mosque are active throughout Afghanistan. Among them only 3,700 of these mosques are working under the supervision of the Ministry and the government has no control over the rest of the mosques and their Imams. Witches in mosques are practicing against the rules of Islam and trick people ([news.nationalpost.com](http://news.nationalpost.com)).

Roshan Siren, a former member of parliament, said “that the murder highlights violence against women in the country, and has become a rallying point for a younger generation of women to campaign for “the protection and progress of women” ([equaltimes.org](http://equaltimes.org)). She drew a line with her blood between those who want justice, rule of law, and those who are extreme in their views and who breed in lawlessness.

In popular blogs such as the ‘Afghan citizens’, ‘Shiddokht’, ‘Ashena’ and ‘Shahrnoosh’ they talked about Farkhunda with deep sorrow and the influence her words can be seen in the protests, memorials and even death anniversary of Farkhunda , also in banners on the street that simulate her death. In Shahrnoosh blog, Manizha Bakhtari wrote that her Farkhunda’s death was because of her gender only, because a woman stood against a man and defended the religion, so according to tradition she deserves the punishment. A summary of her blog reads as below:

In a war affected country that thirty five years of war and crisis took the life of millions of its citizens, and horrible experiences of invasion of the outsiders and civil wars has shaken its foundation, the murder a young girl because of apostasy and burning Quran by a bunch of educated youth and teenagers in the center of Kabul, just a kilometer away from the presidential palace and in front of the armed police, is the ugliest and most detested among all the other disasters that has happened before ([shaharnosh.blogfa.com](http://shaharnosh.blogfa.com)).

What should be the concern and point of serious worrying is the unspeakable violence and reaction of some young generation men and their participation in the cruel murder of Farkhunda . On the other hand, the deeper layers of this terrible murder is questioning the social, educational and training system of Afghanistan and the role of the family in raising them. Incorrect reading of Islam and religious training, economic ravages, poverty, unemployment and lack of healthy



entertainment, respect for other human beings, lack of value to women and the violence against them are the root cause of such events and must be dealt immediately.

Those who stoned Farkhunda were urban youth equipped with smart phones and were connected to the global village. The young generation on whom people of Afghanistan had high hopes for them in building the new Afghanistan, had ended the life of girl who believed in what they believed with extremism, fanaticism, judgment and ignorance by the claim of a lowbrow mullah. This bunches of youth that were following their entertainment, violence and display of sexual complex are in fact the young generation of Afghanistan. They used the torture of a girl as a scene to ridicule her and display their stand and power to the entire city.

The blogger points out that she did not want to make this painful episode to be a one way event and feminine and without a doubt any man could be in this position; but undoubtedly if there was a man instead of Farkhunda, he would be murdered differently. Basically attacking a man even being guilty cannot bring this passion and excitement to the mob. The gender of Farkhunda played a role to her tortures. The tendency of the mob to a women and feminine figure of a victim made them even more uncivilized to show their dominance in the framework of the religious feelings (shaharnosh.blogfa.com).

In analyzing these phrases and similar blogs of various authors regarding this issue, we can understand that maybe the religious feelings was not the initiator of the event but after a few minutes, what extended this tragedy was the deep rooted feeling of anti-women feelings, sexual feelings, dominance, willingness to torture and playing a hero by young males who were just the regular citizens of Kabul and these deep anti female emotions are deeply rooted in the society.

The enthusiasm from touching a female's body, looking at the body for the first time, taking out her veil, touching her body and having her and controlling over her were among the main factors of attacking her in the first place. What excited the mob of twenty to forty wild men to throw stone to a girl and touch her was not blasphemy and burning Quran but the excitement of watching a woman and displaying psychological projection of deep violence rooted in the layers of their social life and private life.

Entertainment, mocking and fulfilling the inner violence had made the mob so charged and wild that they kept stoning the lifeless body of Farkhunda ran over her body by car and finally setting her body on fire. This made women very angry and they spoke about it in the blogs. Which the men involved in this murder found this exciting. Women found a lot of freedom through their blogs to question the men and patriarchy at large.

One of major issues of Afghanistan is conducting field trial by religious mullahs that happens in small cities and villages as soon as a suspect caught is without an investigation and even informing the higher authorities, the verdict is issued by the mullah or the most powerful man on the region and the verdict is acted upon immediately at that place. This form of executing the law prevailed more often after the Taliban regime, announcing the death of many in every city and any street. Lack of authorities' power over the far distant regions had given the opportunity to the armed men and Taliban to rule the region as they wish (aihrc.org).

After the murder of Farkhunda, a big question rose from the social activists for women and when that was followed by all bloggers and justice seekers for Farkhunda, the question turned into a nationwide question mark. The question was that can Afghan citizens use the religious sentiments, and proceed with conducting the law without a witness or a judge even if the person is accused of blasphemy or even burning Quran? Can a citizen issue the apostasy verdict?

The religious Authority and some religious fundamentalist who in fact hasn't any scientific or official education about religion and taking advantage of common man's illiteracy and lack of knowledge were challenged by this question. Other demands of the movement were for revisiting religion, proper education of Islam by those educated in the same field and removing superstitions that must be in the priority agenda of the internal policy of Afghanistan. But by and large there was a focus on women's right.

After the incident, Farkhunda turned to a collective voice of the nation. A voice that invites Afghanistan to reading and re-reading of religious, Institution of law, respecting the regulations of the state, respect for women and observed the principles of the citizen.

The murder and stoning of Farkhunda did not have a unified reaction in all cities of Afghanistan although it raised the reactions of cities and civil societies. In some smaller cities protests and reactions converted to writing memorial songs and collective mourning and praying. However, the activities and achievements of the main body of nuclear movement in Kabul, demonstration in protest to the violent murder of Farkhunda and reactions of intellectuals and public, ultimately didn't lead to a national and civil movement throughout the country; in other words the new discourse in political campaigns of the field and the women studies which aimed to employed more women did not occur.

Because in a conservative society like Afghanistan that a systematic discrimination against women is engrained in social and economic development and discrimination based on gender is an accepted principle and most of the women openly display the patriarchal values, women's movement ideology cannot shape easily. The movements initiated from top and prosperous classes of women cannot reach to lower, uneducated and poor classes easily due to many reasons and difficulties. The top part of the pyramid shows significant movements and is strong but the body of that pyramid stays empty and cause the position to be unsustainable and many of the illiterate rural women did not even have the space to question this.

The history of Afghanistan had always witnessed many movements especially about the situation of women and empowering them but the aspects of economic, cultural and social life that is required for any movement are not coordinated with the freedom revolutions and simultaneous with it and this slowed the awareness process (Hashmat 2001: 210).

Changing anti feminine laws, balanced political participation, and equality and receiving equal points in social and economic works are the fundamental axes of women's movement. The women's movement basically does not stem from authorities but they are mainly spontaneous and start within the small communities based on requirements and awareness; the awareness which give birth to any revolution is sometimes national and regional and sometimes international. Government support and legal gatherings, women's participation, the academic centers for women and women in political power with authorities are effective factors to stabilize the movements. The movement of women has an orderly and scientific

structure and awareness is inherited in all its layers and this awareness intermitted from top to bottom and from bottom to the top. This is in a situation that in Afghanistan, the logical and organic link between the institutions of civil society that works for the benefits of women and other women who are active in other parts is weak and just most recently the only thing caused the connection between the two is the culture of blogging among women in the country. Writings bring women closer and create a line of communication between the women in the virtual space (Nikki 2012: 263). Considering the changes and its achievements many reforms had occurred in the past fifteen years but still they are not enough.

The women of Afghanistan at this age of transition from tradition to modernity simultaneously face benefit and damage. From one side, the facilities of education, comfort, social and individual freedom, participation in politics and economic fields had offered them more authority in the area of family and society, on the other hand, lack of adapting the law, established customary law, cultural sensitivity, lack of balance in the production lines and lack of balanced division of facilities in villages compared to cities had made them strongly susceptible.

Development, democracy and technology in Afghanistan are providing them the possibilities of education, travel and work and from the other side there is a lack of legal tools or their execution to support them from the traditional thoughts and paternalism. As a result, women should bear the expenses of social pressures and psychological forces to take care of their education and work. When a young educated girl like Farkhunda receives the legal license to study, go out and take up a career, there should be some legal tools to support her against the conservative and traditional society outside.

Although justice for her was accomplished in many ways but Farkhunda is not the first and the last victim of extremist and religious groups against women. Thousands of women and girls all over Afghanistan are getting victimized and stoned and the issue still continues.

Culture and culture making as a base and an influential factor in political and economic interactions is a process which still is in shadows in Afghanistan. And this occurs when the national media is still airing the serials and other superficial television shows from other countries that keep emphasizing on the domestic role of

women in the family and its base structure and display the image of a working woman as a violent, inappropriate symbol as a cliché of “bad women” and that is how the circle of reproduction of traditional thoughts and patriarchy continues in Afghan society.

Organizing and concept giving to movements involving women and training and increasing the awareness needs the legal support, political aid, structuring governmental and nongovernmental organization to not only remove the discrimination against women but to inform and educate about the women who are active in various social, economic and cultural fields. Whenever the strong foundation of women’s movement in Afghanistan is formed and it gets logical and organic connection to all levels and classes of the country especially the women who are so detached from it and when it all gets supported by the legal system and authorities, Farkhunda or any other woman will not be the victims of pre judgments and prejudices.

Since it is not appropriate to make all the movements of women similar, given the similarities of their main demands, the way in which different social groups of women choose different approaches and since women has various ways to achieve their demands and choose different paths to gain their freedom, it would be suitable for all these energies to unify and then it will turn into a powerful movement.

To understand the demands of various classes, the voice of women should be heard from each corner and the best way to hear the voice of an Afghan woman is through the cyberspace and through their writings.

### **6.3 Issues: Forced Marriage and Domestic Violence**

Munera Yousofzada has an educational background of Political Science and is a civil society activist with experience of working with street children, women and youth. She also had worked extensively with the government. She currently serves as a civil society engagement adviser with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). Additionally, she had been involved with various publications; writing on the role of women, human rights, democracy, civil society efforts and had been promoting art through her writings. She had been serving as the Director of Asayesh Organization for the People of Afghanistan. Yousofzada has currently

established an arts gallery with her own funds to enable artists to exhibit their works so that the artists are encouraged both materially and psychologically. The gallery known as Shamama Contemporary Arts Gallery is the first of its kind in Afghanistan.

Through her activism in civil society, writings and participation in various mass media programs, she has become a known face in Afghanistan. To overcome various social ills in the society, she had organized and led numerous peaceful protests with good results (Personal interview, 13 April 2014).

Last but not least, as a government employee Yousofzada has developed anti-harassment policy guidelines. The guidelines which have become part of recruitment contract of civil servants in IDLG and subnational governance entities has created a favorable working environment for women and youth to better perform in subnational governance entities.

Sahar Gul was born in rural north of Baghlan, a province of Afghanistan. She had lost her father in childhood and her mother married again and Sahar Gul was sent to her brother's home. When she attained fourteen years, her brother and his wife forcefully married her to a thirty year old man in exchange of ten thousand dollars in 2011. Sahar Gul was imprisoned for about seven months and subjected to torture and abuse by her husband and his family.

In first January 2012 Police officers found "Sahar Gul" in the basement of her home after the report of the neighbors and noticed that her nails and hairs were pulled out and some parts of her skins picked out by tweezers. The family of Sahar Gul forced her to prostitution. Police announced at that time that the torture and injuries were because she was fighting back against their will and struggled not to give in to their demand. All the members of the family including her husband were arrested.

After the media coverage of this event and the arrest of the accused, many women started to reveal the stories from domestic violence and forced marriage. These women sent their stories to newspapers or weblogs. Private Bloggers who wrote about their own stories requested for sharing the personal experiences, to post them and suggest anything to prevent them. One of these web logs called "Daughters of Rabia" that began to collect feminine stories and alongside the posting of them, she educated the ways of confrontation and aiding home violence in her blog. The author of the

blog (Noorjahan Akbar) is an active women rights activists in Afghanistan, started to train and educate women in a series of organized YouTube videos that were visited by several hundred thousand people and also Facebook page. She invites all women to write about their experience and reflect them in her pages (noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com).

There is a note on violence against women written as ‘St. Marry was too virgin’ on the blog ‘Ecstasy on pavement’, and the user of that blog, Soode had written about all the domestic violence experiences she had witnessed in the society. She portrays an image of a working woman of Afghanistan abroad on her blog and narrating the daily experience of a patriarchal culture and its reflection on the society in a way that women could be both the victims of it or projecting it themselves as well (soode61.wordpress.com).

The ‘Ama Sangari’ web log also has a note of forced marriage of girls named ‘Sahar Gul, behind the fact’ and explains on those women that face domestic violence shows no reaction to it.

The writer of this blog ‘Amazon’ states the people of Afghanistan had many years of war and experienced being homeless,, therefore protecting the rights of women doesn’t carry the importance for them anymore. He even accuses the journalists who writes about those women suffering but do nothing about it. And that is how Amazon tries to reflect the pain and sorrow of Afghani women through the notes and interviews and provide them with solutions (amasangari.wordpress.com).

In the blog of Shiddokht, Munera who is the writer of the blog criticize the long history of ignorance and domestic violence towards women having sociological perspective to Afghanistan society. She wrote that Afghanistan is a land that throughout the history witnessed many wars and violence. Amidst the war, women and children are more susceptible to harm. Even after war their position hasn’t changed since the one achievement of war for them is just ignorance.

Because of this ignorance, girls are forced to be married at early age or the marriage turns into some kind of business exchange and cutting ears, nose and lips are included among common) violence against them. In the society where beating a wife by her husband is his right and even before marriage the family suggests the girl that

being beaten is the proof of the affection of her husband, witnessing such violence is not surprising. Only a few numbers of families suggest that the girl shows some courage and go to the court. In the case of SahaGul, with all the fear she exhibited from her husband's family, she went to the court and said nothing but truth the whole time (shiddokht.blogspot.in).

The protesting voices of women after that against the exploitation and violence for women reflected on all parts of the society of Afghanistan especially in case of Sahar Gul and brought about a law banning violence against women executed in 2009 by President Hamed Karzai. Human Rights Watch in Afghanistan also made an appeal to all institutions and individuals with influence in the government to make an effort to provide a proper field for the laws on banning violence against women to be acted out.

Since the society of Afghanistan is a combination of tradition, superstition, excise, cultural and tribal conventional and since it is also a product of mechanism in social, material and spiritual relations kept under rear dominated system of master – slavery, certainly abandoning the rights of women, captivity, slavery that includes "selling their daughters" is considered a principle that had been accepted culturally.

For example, in the system and culture of Afghanistan that more than 90 percent of the population is in the villages and remote areas far from urban civilization and they are at least about a century away from any civil rights, economic, political, cultural values, people of these villages sometimes couldn't maintain the education and other supply to for their children especially due to repeated drought, hence, they put forward their daughters for sale in the name of marriage and gave them away to the first buyer. At the custom of the rear villages of Afghanistan, it was common to name the price of the girl as 'gift', 'cattle' or 'payment for mothers breast feed. And since the trade of good – money hasn't grown fully then, and people dealt with agriculture completely, the good on good trade was more popular among them. They price the girl along with cattle, sheep, horses, goats, and even dog. So a girl is always valued with "domestic animal" and unfortunately this had been accepted in the traditional society of Afghanistan. So the order of society, continuous poverty and social culture of tribes caused any injustice, captivity, rape and even killing women in



all areas of Afghanistan. These had happened from the time when Taliban was not in power and not even the previous ideologies and dominance.

Having understood all these aspects, we realize that even legal battles take much time to get results. Authorities in Afghanistan had many other issues such as drug, trafficking, Taliban or Al-Qaeda terrorists groups and official corruption of the system to fight and therefore they had become ignorant towards women issues except the time that social activists and civil society pressurize them to act.

#### **6.4 Issues: Mutilation and Ba'ad**

Noorjahan Akbar is a co-founder of Young Women for Change, an inspiring organization that works for gender equality in Afghanistan. She had just been chosen as one of the recipients of the 2012 Women of Distinction Award by the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders.

“Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1991, Noorjahan Akbar has had the rare opportunity of receiving an education, something not available to the majority of women in Afghanistan. She earned scholarships to attend two years of high school at the George School in Pennsylvania, and she is currently a sophomore at Dickinson College.

Akbar learned English and computer skills when her family moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, after the Taliban entered Afghanistan. In 2001, her family returned to Afghanistan and started an English-language center for about 400 women in the Qala-e-Fatullah region of Kabul.

At a very early age, Akbar started working with Radio Azadi (Radio Free Europe) as a writer for children's programs. In the ensuing years, she worked as a writer and a translator at several organizations. Through her job at a German education program, she worked with children to write a book of six short stories for kids. The collection, which was printed and distributed in Afghanistan, inspired Voices for Hope, an effort focused on teaching children to write and think creatively. She later designed a program called Stories to Heal, which worked with 100 Afghan orphans on creative writing projects.

In summer 2011, Akbar co-founded Young Women for Change (YWC), an organization of volunteers who work for gender equality in Afghanistan. Since then, YWC has gained nonprofit status, formed a male advocacy group, organized monthly lectures on gender and women's studies, collected books to build libraries in Kabul and Helmand, and began conducting research on street harassment in Kabul, thanks to a new grant" (afghanvoice.org.uk).

Noorjahan Akbar is an out-spoken woman and human right's advocate from Afghanistan. She had worked with several Afghan and global organizations focusing on women's social and economic empowerment and ending gender-based violence. She had also led nation-wide campaigns and protests in defense of human rights and continues to write and advocate for equality. Noorjahan had published on Al Jazeera, and New York Times among other outlets. In the summer of 2013, she published a collection of Afghan women's writings in a book that was distributed in several provinces in Afghanistan. Currently, she runs a national blog with over 100 Afghan contributors who advocate for gender equality and social justice. Noorjahan is also a keynote speaker on issues relating to the rights of women and girls, education and sustainable global development. Noorjahan has a BA in Sociology from Dickinson College and a Masters in Journalism and Public Affairs from American University. Noorjahan had been recognized for her efforts for gender equality at home and internationally. She was Glamour Magazine's College Women of the Year in 2013, had been named one of Forbes's 100 Most Powerful Women of the World and one of The Daily Beast's Women Who shook the World.

Also Free Women Writers was originally a collection of Afghan women's writings in defense of their human rights. The book, published in 2013, was created by two Afghan activists, Noorjahan Akbar and Batool Muradi. Later, Noorjahan Akbar created a blog to publish women's writings in Persian, Pashtu and Uzbeki. Since then, the blog had expanded to include hundreds of articles, poems, narratives and essays about women's health and issues, environmental issues, economic inequality, democracy and other social justice issues and reached tens of thousands of Afghans (freewomenwriters.org).

In 13th December 2013, lips and nose of a 23 years old woman named Setara had been cut with a knife by her husband, she has four children and is a resident of Darbe

- Kandahar of Herat. The husband escaped from home after that. Relatives of the woman say that her husband was addicted to drugs and always forced her to provide money to cover the expense of his drugs (af.Shafaqna.com).

Previously around 2009 another girl named Aisha of age 12 was forcefully married by her father to one of Taliban men and her nose and ears got cut by him. The marriage was an end to a tribal fight, according to the custom of Ba'ad that is common in Afghanistan since Aisha's uncle murdered a relative of the man who later became her husband.

"Ba'ad is an old custom in all regions of Afghanistan but more so among Pashtu's. When a man steals, kills, rapes or is suspected of having an illicit affair, a council of elders called Jirga decides the punishment" (hrw.org).

The punishment for small crimes is in the form of a few sheep or cattle. But other punishment for the family or the tribe of the guilty one is to gift a virgin girl of the age of 4 and 14 years old. In theory, a girl had to compulsorily marry a man but in reality the girl exchanged in Ba'ad can be treated like a slave; she could be beaten or be abused even murdered. This marriage won't be officially registered and the right to meet with her family also ceases after marriage (refworld.org).

After getting married with similar style, Aisha received intense violence and abuse from her husband and his family; she then decided to run away but she got caught and was convicted for dishonoring her husband by Taliban field court. In spite of the claim of Taliban fundamentalist groups to follow the real Islam, it is strictly against the laws of Islam to mutilate even animals, let alone doing that to a human which is considered a huge sin. (Noori 1986: 148).

The trial verdict was to cut Aisha's nose and ears and her husband personally took the task and afterwards left her in the range of one of the mountains around the city of "Urozgan" so that she will bleed to death. A group of American soldiers patrolling around that area found Aisha and took her to a clinic. After that, she got transferred to a safe house in Kabul run by charitable organisation for Afghan women and from there to the United States to live and study (See Appendix, image 7, page 274).

Aisha was featured on the August 2010 cover of Time magazine (See Appendix, image 8, page 275), and in the corresponding article, "Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban" (Baker 2010:71).

"The photo was taken by the South African photographer Jodi Bieber and was awarded the World Press Photo Award for 2010. The image of Aisha is sometimes compared to the 'Afghan Girl' photograph of Sharbat Gula taken by Steve McCurry" (ngm.nationalgeographic.com).

Noorjahan in her own blog (Hamisheh Bibi Mahroo) which always deals with mutilation of women, writes that the main accused of these crimes are all the members of the society who stand silent against such crimes. She writes: 'Stand against violence you see in your family, neighbors and work place no matter how small that is. Don't be silent if you see a man is hitting a woman. Don't pretend to be asleep if you hear the scream of the women in your neighborhood. Don't celebrate when your fifteen years old cousin gets engaged, do something against it. But don't do it just for the star as our historical memory is solid evidence that these also be forgotten, instead do it for all those women and men who suffer the violence, rape and harassment day and night since they don't have anyone to support them and they are afraid of your judgment. If you are doing something for real, go and sit in front of the ministry of justice to get an answer. Don't just leave a post of your Facebook page to soothe your conscience and tomorrow she will be forgotten like Sahar Gul, Ensiye, Mumtaz and Aisha (noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com).

While the number of institutions for defending the rights of women in Afghanistan is not less but during the past few years' small changes in the status of women had been observed. It is necessary to mention that the coverage of United Nations in recording instances of violence against women does not mean that violence against women has increased but the publication is based on the perception of increasing it. Crime specially the honor killing form of it exists since ages but families were not willing to reveal it due to what they thought of as family shame (www.un.org).

Cases like mutilation report to police and other women's right organization immediately as it is difficult to hide the fact for long. The main point here is that many of the reports don't take place by activists women or women who are by profession working for human rights institutions; these are the women who inform

other active members through Internet and email and other relevant sources and tell about the events and provide a direct intervention of the government, associations and women's support commissions in Afghanistan. Writing and informing through media of these cases and the support of institutions caused women in Afghanistan to put aside their fear and ask for help.

Observation of the statistics based on 'the Independent Human Rights commission of Afghanistan' has shown that the numbers of Ba'ad girls has reduced in the year 2014. But this tradition still is practiced in some far provincial of Afghanistan. The independent commission of human rights and religious leaders had intervened between some families to prevent the Ba'ad girls and in some cases this commission had put a lawsuit for the sacrificed girl in court. Commission also took some measures in recording all marriages in government official registration and the official document of marriage must be issued because in the Cabala marriage points such as dowry, satisfaction of the both parties and eyewitnesses will be recorded and that itself will act like a strong point to reduce the number of Ba'ad marriages ([www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)).

Other measures taken by this commission is holding educational workshop on human rights and women rights throughout Afghanistan. In these workshops different cases are trained such as: child rights from the viewpoint of Islam, law and personal rights, right to education and training, rights and responsibilities of citizens in the constitution, democratic concepts, human rights of Islam's perspective, law banning violence against women, violence and its domain and also Islamic human rights banners. The participants include scholars, journalists, activists and employees of various institutions ([aihrc.org.af](http://aihrc.org.af)).

One of the goals of holding workshops organized by the education commission of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights is introducing the capacity of legal system. The legal system of Afghanistan is more modern an ahead of existing custom of society; as in the constitution and other laws of the country there are lots of capacity for realization of equality exists for all citizens, but since the cultural level of society is low, this prevents citizens from accessing many aspects of constitutional provisions. For example, equality between woman and man also the right of education is reserved for all people and it is mentioned in the constitution of the country but

dipped level of awareness of people, conservative customs in society had prevented many especially women not to realize and be informed about these rights. Also this lack of awareness of women causes them to be silent and obey any decision made for them by the tribe elders or family member. The independent commission of human rights workshops are helping to promote awareness and educate women in all levels of society (aihrc.org.af).

So based on the necessity of promoting human right, there is a need to make awareness of law and promoting them for citizens on their rights, freedom and responsibilities in society. Promoting awareness to parts of citizens about human rights and their duties for application of constitution is gradually allowing people to get familiarized with the legal system before and slowly. Women bloggers have played an important role in highlighting this issue.

### **6.5 Issues: Rape and Honor Killing**

Batool Mohammadi was born in 1982. She is married, undergrad in philosophy and she is an American citizen since August 2015. She started blogging from 2005 and now on her fourth blog (Tea and Suitcase) she blogs weekly. Every time there is some interruption between her and writing therefore she had to create a new blog but never quit writing. The links to her previous blogs are available on her new one. Batool had won the first prize in short story writing in Afghanistan on 2016 and her book of short stories is also published. A major part of this achievement is due to her frequent writing in her blog (Personal interview, 26 October 2014).

She is among a few bloggers who writes with their true identity. Of course writing under real name was never away from danger and in some cases she faced problems, she says: "when I was in Bamian in Afghanistan, I frequently wrote about the events around me on my blog. I had received threat from people who believed they were responsible for application of law when I once wrote about local government, simple notes on prisoners of Bamian and one time when a few people thought that I had insulted Islam". She talks about her short stories and blogs also: "whenever I see a pain in a woman. Whenever I see discrimination and violence against women and that tormented me so much that I can't help but to write about it" (Personal interview, 27 September 2014). Batool is dealing with rape and honor killing.

In May 7th, 2015, a twelve-year-old girl in Badghis district convicted in a field trial run by her own uncle who was also head of committee of the village to be raped and killed for allegedly running away from home. Her uncle issued the verdict of rape and killing her. Eight members of family including father, brother, uncle and some cousins of the girl are accused of first gang raping her and then killing her by kicking and punching; then they cut her in pieces and dumped her in inside a plastic bag and buried her in her uncle's house (fa.rfi.fr).

Molavi Seyed Abdol Rahim Sheikh- al-Islam, the president of the Badghis Haj and donation office said: "conducting fields court are against religious legitimacy and such assemblies are strictly opposing with the legal criteria and value of the Islamic Republic". These sorts of events are still practiced in areas far from the central government and mostly where Taliban still has some influences (istaqlal.com).

Batool was one of the first weblogger to report this on her blog and states her critical view on that: "Everything gradually is heading towards catastrophe".

Description on details of the murder is more like a film script and it could be coming from the imagination of its reporter. The news of kill and rape became so normal in Afghanistan that reporters don't get satisfaction from a simple killing, murder or rape and they like to kill their victim under worst condition and write the details with full juicy twists so that the readers treated the news with same level of excitement and then feel the pain. This situation of reporters and readers expectation alarmingly heads towards occurrence of a terrible disaster in the society where everybody wants to tear apart each other and wants to murder one another in the worst possible way (batoolmohammadi.blogspot.in).

Batool does not deny that these incidents are happenings in society but broadcasting the news with such graphic details is not an appropriate way to find the solution. She emphasizes in her blog that instead of broadcasting such catastrophic crimes, there must be attempts to create awareness and fight the culture of patriarchy system. A culture where honor killing holds a special place.

Honor killing is known as perpetration of violence against women and often murder of women by men of the same family (father, brother, uncle, etc.). These women are punished because of "dishonoring their family's honor". This shame

includes many different cases such as: Denying from a mandatory marriage, Being the victim of a sexual rape, getting divorced even from an inappropriate husband, having relations with the opposite sex, committing adultery and even non-rationally worse, because of the suspicion to her, and in many cases because of the marriage out of the scope of formal and traditions or the religion or family. Women sometimes are killed just because of excuses like the smiling at a strange man, falling in love, or objecting to mandatory marriages.

Sense of honor in many societies is sexual exploitation and complete legal ownership and domination of a man over a woman; this means that If, for any reason, a woman at any time regretted her previous choice or chooses somebody else as her current owner or sexual partner (in some cases, even just as someone to talk), punishment for her and her new partner is death. However, betraying a covenant of trust deserves fine, but this fine at least in this case can never be death and is far from the boundaries of humanity. The main feature of this kind of murders is that local tradition believes it is allowed. So killing these women brings no regret and sometimes even it is said that they deserved such fate. These kinds of murders that most of them are done by beheadings, using a knife or gun and choking women are very heinous, because it is generally believed that if wrongdoer woman is killed in a more tragic disgrace, the dignity and honor of the family is better and faster to return to the previous position. There is a very strong notion in this society that male honor rests in women and if a woman does not keep up this honor they have every right to kill her and avenge this.

The murderer does not escape and easily turns himself in and the victim's families usually do not demand punishment. Important reasons for this tragedy include: Familial and religious severe prejudices, less educations and illiteracy, tribal life and conservative environment, institutionalized violence, mandatory marriages and the lack of implementation of laws.

Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission has recorded sixty cases of honor killings in the country during seven months in 2012. Notes from an Afghan refugees blog also mentioned honor killing: 'the attitude is deeply rooted in social and economic relations and is widely common among the people of Afghanistan. Most men look at women just as a tool to satisfy their sexual desires. Various interpretation



of Quran and other Islamic sources by its advocates not only prevent these anti-women feeling but it also gives them a religious legitimacy. This attitude permits the man to do whatever he feels like to a woman. In such anti women domain, the only principal and value of a woman in her nobility and since men have learned that the woman is his property, any contact with a strange man will remove that dignity in a woman (vebbikas.blogfa).

The roots of honor killing are coming back to the society and to its women. Because of reproduction and entrepreneurship values from patriarchal moralities, the presence of women in the society always brings out the doubt and suspicious about them. In this situation, any form of contact such as talking, laughing or any communication with other men gets interpreted differently. The severe patriarchal culture of Afghanistan has such influence on its people that it will display itself in any other country as well. In the most recent reports from immigrants Afghan to Iran, an Afghan immigrant family with four sons and a daughter who lived in Iran for over ten years; two brothers beheaded their 16 years old sister just because they got suspicious (Personal interview, 18 November 2013).

In a similar event which took place in Sweden, Afghan immigrant family killed a boy who was interested in their daughter (expressen.se).

Honor killing in Afghanistan has another style which was so common at the time of war between the former Soviet Union and Afghanistan in the 1970s and 80. During the war, every family would select a member to kill all the women so that their sisters, girls or mothers be out of the reach of enemy. The person was usually the youngest member who was not eligible to fight or the eldest one who couldn't fight. These individuals were asked to explode the entire house when enemy approached so everybody dies, or since there used to be a well in every house, the women gets thrown into the well to drown and no enemy could touch them. The main issue on this style of honor killing is that sometimes women step in willingly since there was no other way out (vebbikas.blogfa.com). Hence women suffered double the violence, one at the hands of their own kin and other at the hands of the enemy.

The social system in Afghanistan is deeply ethnic- tribe structural and this system has its own characteristics:

1. Forced marriage: From their perspective, internal marriages keep the traditions and beliefs of the tribe intact. One of the prime examples are the pre decided marriage between cousins. This faulty belief has rooted into the culture so deeply that even today it can be seen among parts of society with modernity and high cultural level and also creates problems. Death is the penalty for cousins who disobey the rule.

2. Circling wrong habits and cultures: In a deserted culture, due to lack of its accessibility to other cultures and societies, the wrong impression of habits and cultures has transferred from one person to another, one generation to another generation and this cycle fixate and increase the practice of such erroneous thoughts.

3. Limitation in geographical status of a tribe: In societies which are limited to its tribe and small community, people must follow its rules. The rules that are dictated by its men to establish their domain. Basically in such societies, the personal goals have no place and the need of tribe is always a priority even that means an individual sacrifice his or her own life for that. In this situation a boy or a girl have no power to decide for their own destiny and choose, and going against the rule means they deserve to be punished (Cook 2012:101)

In the phenomena of honor killing, the murderer is as victimized as the person he is killing. Imagine a father killing his own daughter due to a thought or custom of the tribe he is living to save the dignity of the family. The incident is a non-reversible tragedy in his life and his family. So to solve the challenge of honor killing, we must put all the elements and factors of the occurrence together and women bloggers are doing this successfully.

Although an attempt to change the traditional system and continuous struggle for gradual patriarchal arrangements had always been the agenda of women rights activists, but these activities must form a more practical exercises and activists should participate more to fight discriminations. Especially in Afghanistan, the local non activist must be employed more since native people have more confidence in them and they play more positive role in this area.

Doctor Sima Samar, is the head of commission Independent Human Rights in Afghanistan is providing various methods to reduce honor killing. She stressed that where at the time the researching literature is expanding and theory and political

debate in Afghanistan has created, it is also a necessity to support women that had been threatened and raped by creating a refuge and safe house. And in fact the ideology and theoretical campaign for confronting violence against women, upgrading their position, freedom from honor killing must be merged with the duty of the government to protect the dignity and the rights of women must be at the top priority of the campaigns (drsimasamar.blogspot.in).

### **6.5.1 Solution to Prevention of this Crisis**

In societies where religion is mixed with sense of ownership on women which is inherited from brutal era and giving priority to religious customs instead of humanity and human lives, humans are deprived of social contractual achievements and wisdom resources.

A way out of this crisis is to impose respect in social and human conventions to establish society and achieve welfare and greater prosperity. We must cross over the religious barriers which are opposed with human and social conventions to achieve more inflexible and non-resilient position. Crossing the barrier of religion is a necessity but not sufficient. This is because problems such as "honor killings" have become a culture that penetrates into minds of people in various ways since childhood and they will fixate in the subconscious.

First step is to create a safe environment for women and their NGO activities to establish fields of criticism and questioning the community. Second step is to educate all levels of society with various cultural backgrounds with an emphasis on human rights along with attempt to reform Judiciary systems and constant struggle to transform the patriarchal structures. It is also important establish institutions to support women and girls who are at the probable risk of violence. In these fields, activities of lawyers, judges, lawmakers, social activists, writers and even artists can be very effective.

The more information on this phenomenon and awaking the public will be more effective than before with discussion and dialogue, more discussion and debates on subject matter would be more efficient in solving problems.

For instance, it is necessary first to comprehend that in any society, there has to be a feeling of freedom in lifestyle, not everyone should know about other's emotional or

sexual orientation. In this context, there are many reasons to be outlined but since this issue is something else, the questions are not raised. The main problem is to cross the barrier of religion, we must be over the barrier of theocracies, promoters of such ideas. Possession of wealth and power is to meet the decayed origin of religion. So the only way out of the crisis, is to use modern technology to spread awareness and challenge people's minds of human intellectual achievements in order to switch from deliberation to legislation. However, some Islamic scholars refer to the Quran mentioning that the punishment of adultery for women is 100 lashes. There should also be a court to decide on these matters and the judgment shouldn't fall on the spouse or relative; honor killing reflects more of the cultural assumptions instead of Islamic values.

But as we can observe the implementation of these rules by Taliban, Islamic republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, etc.

However, as previously mentioned, religion is not the only obstacle. Crossing the barrier of religion is a necessity but not sufficient. This is because problems such as "honor killings" have become a culture set in the mind set of people in diverse ways since childhood and they are active subconsciously.

On the other hand, although the increase in these kinds of murders rooted in the negligence of law in dealing with culprits and it is assumed that killers have the right to murder their wives, but it is not the only issue. Unfortunately, political, cultural and social structures are also formed based on patriarchal structures and these structures have made the way to apply any discrimination and violence against women's rights (rawanonline.com).

In addition to honor killing, rape is another major issue for women in Afghanistan. Rape and honor killing in Afghanistan have a close relation together. Most of the women murdered by their close relatives for chastity are being raped by one or many members of their family or tribe prior to that. Even if women hadn't committed any crime, there is a high chance to be murdered based solely on suspicion. Afghan men who seek to defend the honor of their family, act upon it even if they change their geographic location. Patriarchal culture and religious laws teach men to be the guardian of women's honor and to protect that, they have the right to violence (geocities.ws).

Sexual violence against women is prevailing throughout the society mostly for women aged between 7 to 30, but the records are not precise as women are afraid of revealing the information and according to tradition ruling in Afghanistan, publication of such violence is considered as shame for the entire family and painful social sorrow which follows that. In Afghanistan the word 'rape' hasn't been defined yet and that is why girls are forcefully being married and mostly they are under 18 years old, they are forced to have sex and although according to the international human rights law this is an act of rape, in Afghanistan it isn't. Afghan women are at the risk of getting raped at home, street and even at work if they are alone.

Refrain of punishment for rape is quite common in Afghanistan. In 2009, two accused of raping a minor girl were forgiven unexpectedly since they belonged to an important tribe with important affiliation to Taliban and their punishment would possibility trigger the revolt in the region and there was a high chance of damaging the property of government and its employees.

Lack of supervision and application of law and following the traditional and extremist in many regions has increased the dominance over women immensely on this country more. A majority of women, who have been raped, are murdered by members of their family or local authorities without any investigation. This is prevailing mainly in rural and south-east areas and they are rarely reported. For example, in 2008, only 96 case of murder and on 2009 only 35 cases had been reported; it is clear that the numbers of the victims are way above it. Immunizations from crime and violence are also very common. Research from human rights organizations show that 39% men accused of rape and violence are sponsored by influential local persons (hrw.org).

On the other hand, punishments for rapist are common as followed in Afghanistan: marry the victim, offer money as compensation, accusing the rape victim for having impure relation or killing the rape victim to save the dignity of the family.

Insinuating to rape is almost common for all the working women and any woman who participates in social life. Among all, women who works in parliament or other commissions, police officers, working women in united nation and other private or government sectors, women activist for women's right, actresses, singers and

journalists constantly receive rape threat from Taliban groups, head of tribes, religious leaders, society and even some authorities. Death threat in the worst possible ways are written in letters by Taliban's member and other people and reached out to their families. Attack and destruction of their office and home, accusation, threat and character assassination are parts of the life of any woman in Afghanistan who wants to have her share in the society.

Sima Samar announced in a report: "The union Commission of the human rights in Afghanistan has started a program named 'National research' since 2012 to uprooting the violence against women and attracting the public opinion and governmental and non-governmental sector to the issue" ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)).

Based on reports of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) since 2011 till end of July 2013, 386 cases of honor killing and rape had been recorder in the offices of the independent commission of human rights in Afghanistan. Of this record 243 cases are honor killing and 143 cases are rape cases. In an analytic report, it turned out that 35% of rape cases occurred from close relatives and ten percent of women had said that they have been raped by their neighbors. Four per cent of the women by their fathers, two percent brothers and one percent of women by the uncle. This report also indicates that 21 percent of honor killing were committed by the husbands, 14 percent by relatives and about seven percent of it were committed by the hands of brothers. About 5 percent of the source of honor killing initiated by father, 3 percent by husband's brothers and 2 percent by mother- in- law. One percent of sexual assaults happened by the marriage ministers.

The most common reason for honor killing according to previous factors and beliefs is due to an external marital affair. Reports on these murders show that about 50 percent of these incidents happened as the woman had some sort of communication with a strange man.

But sometimes being raped led to honor killing. About 3.8 percent of honor killing happened because of this reason. Women who have been raped were usually judged based on normalcy and traditional criteria of the land they are being considered a disgrace for their tribe and their presence is the continuous reminder of the shame for society and their family. So murder of that woman is considered as a solution for

removing the stain and reviving the dignity of the tribe. Research shows that in many of the cases, the judicial institutions of Afghanistan also accused the victims of rape as guilty and sentenced to punishment. This is common in most of the country and everyone consider it normal.

Sometimes, other reasons which has no direct link to “external marital affair” or “rape” may lead to honor killing just based on a mere suspicion, personal opinion and without any proof. For example, running away from home, though according to the laws of Afghanistan it is not a crime, but sometimes it may lead to honor killing. About 15.4 percent of documented honor killing in the National Research were for escaping from home. Also 3.8 percent of them are for rejecting force marriages and 1.9% for expressing a desire to marry someone else.

Customs and cultural rules are extreme and harsh towards women but for men, due to perspective of the society that put those above women and prior to them are soft and forgiving. Any mentioned issue with regards to men rarely lead to murder. These findings have shown the high susceptibility of women and their extremely fragile position in the society.

Extreme tendency to hide whether complete or in partial reference has made access to these finding very rigid. As proof, in 57% of these findings the relation between the rapists with victims didn’t mentioned and in 8% of them they suffice to refer to them as doers. Most probably, these incidents which are more than 65% of reports committed by people whom the victims didn’t know.

But most importantly, 35% of crimes were committed by relatives of the victim. Honor killing would be done by family member and due to sensitivity of issue it is best for them to be forgotten and avoid any broadcasting.

Honor killing with its direct connection with sexual relation and external affairs arouse the sensitivity of husband and his family the most. The dominant nature of husband for his wife and low status of the wife in her family and among her in-laws had made her place extremely fragile. That is why the victims of honor killings are mainly married women and in most cases the killer is either the husband or one of the relatives. Honor killing for unmarried girls are usually committed by their father.

Maybe there is no direct relation between honor killing and rape with age but the leveling graph indicates that this problem is mainly among youth. The research of (AIHRC) shows that graph of rape and honor killing is high in youth and middle age people about 82 percent of total cases. Based on the results of this investigation, 46.4 per cent of rape cases and 34.9 per cent of honor killing took place among people in the age group of 19 to 30 years. The age group of 31- 45 are reasons for 30.2% of honor killing and 27.4% rape. The age group of 18 and below has no role in honor killing but they have 10. 7% of rape cases. The age of 10. 7 % rapists and close to 21% of honor killers are unknown which indicated the lack of tendency in society for revealing the details and expressing the incident ([aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports](http://aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports)).

Comparison of youth and middle aged in this report indicate a contradiction in the behavior of these groups also. They form a widest range to rape from one side and honor killing from other side and that shows how sensitive and extreme they are in regard to sexual situations when it comes to their wives.

The accused rape and murderer usually belong to low-income and lower classes of society. About 17.6 per cent of the rape cases and honor killing are committed by men inside town or other countries they are working, 5.14% are shopkeeper and farmers and driver rank 7.6% and 4.7% respectively. Around 11% of them were unemployed.

Among all reports of (AIHRC), about 14.6% of honor killing and rape were committed by local police. This is happening in spite of the fact that the responsibility of security and support of the vulnerable is their main duty. This subject can harm the trust of people to national police. Profession of almost 21% of culprits is unknown.

The results of this research also show that poor families are more prone to rape and honor killing. As indicator of 58.2% of rape and honor killing victims collected by national research team belonged to poor families. Close to 38% of them belonged to middle class families. This statistic considers the high vulnerability of women in poor families ([aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports](http://aihrc.org.af/home/research-reports)).

Close to 91% of cases of rape and honor killing registered in this research had referred to the authorities and other judicial departments. Among these, the legal actions taken for 64.5% of cases had satisfactory results for victims and in the case of other 35.5% it is the chance that the influence of government and local leader or other



influences from tribes had hindered the process or the culprits couldn't have been found or they might have escaped the punishment (bokhdinews.af).

The head of Independent commission of united nation in Afghanistan, Dr. Samar reported in her own weblog that for collecting these reports they discussed with more than two thousands of social activists, judicial departments, leader and head of tribes and in charge of safe houses. Women living in poor levels of society been tormented more and are the victim of rape and honor killing. Even though the sensitivity towards revealing the incidents and other restrictions caused many limitations in spreading the records to public but the available reports and statistics itself is an alarming indication of rape and honor killing in Afghanistan (drsimasamar.blogspot.in).

#### **6.6 Issues: Character Assassination of Active Women in Cyberspace (Harassment in the Cyberspace or Cyberstalking)**

Noorjahan Akbar also in her documentary clips in YouTube which deals with the status of women in Afghanistan and ways in empowering them, emphasizes that as an Afghan girl and a women rights activist who has more than twenty thousand follower on her Facebook and YouTube channel, she is determined to show that women in Afghanistan really possess power and how education can bring the significant change in their life. She says "the world pictured the Afghan women as isolated and secluded and inside Afghanistan tradition and religion has made a wrong image of Afghan women. I want to challenge this image" (Personal interview, 07 May 2014).

As a human rights women activist who has so far been one of the entrepreneur for more than hundred and fifty women and helped many in learning to read and write in Persian, Pashtu and English and also teaching many to master computer skills, she wants to show that unlike what it seemed often from outside, girls and even boys in Afghanistan want to changes their rough and traditional lifestyles. She wants to prove men of Afghanistan that how any violence against women may damage the youngsters who are slowly reforming the society and how such acts will only benefit radicals and Islamic fanatics (www.youtube.com).

In the weblog of "Dokhtaran-e-Rabia" more than 20 girls and women from every corner of Afghanistan have been writing, majority of them prefer to be Anonymous or

under an alias. But from their narratives, we can understand common life in Afghanistan.

One of the narratives is about cyberstalking by Farzana Akbari “Being an Afghan Woman on Facebook” on August 30, 2015, she writes, that: It has become so easy for people to have access to social media that even in Afghanistan you often see youth buying mobile phones to be connected to the virtual world. Social media, especially Facebook, has given people the ability to share their thoughts, dreams and interests with the world and has opened a new door to information to many, but being a woman on Facebook is not without its problems (Akbari, facebook.com/freewomenwriters 2015).

In the real world of Afghanistan people struggle with poverty, ethnic discrimination, lack of employment, suicide attacks and many other problems on a daily basis, but in addition to all these major issues, women also have the burden of misogyny and spend most of their time fighting back. Many women face inequality and violence at home, even those who have not faced a tide of gender discrimination the moment they leave their homes. Every time I leave home feel like a soldier who is prepared to defend her life because I am a woman. I have learned to ignore nasty comments, looks and cars honking on my way. I have learnt to be quiet and move past because I know I will be blamed if I dare to say a word back. Even at work I am supposed to keep quiet at how my male coworkers talk to me with a smirk on their face As if the real world does not put enough burden on me with my soldiering duties, I now have to also breathe carefully online (Akbari, facebook.com/freewomenwriters 2015).

First of all, in order to conceal their identity and not to receive threats for speaking out their mind many have to use a photo that is not of themselves, but this is just one of the many ways in which Afghan women have been silenced and censored online. Often if women dare to speak about social or political issues, they will receive backlash that leaves them regretting having opinions. Even those who claim to be open-minded and keep their Facebook pages crowded with quote from Che Guevara and Gandhi, have the audacity to call women by names you would only hear on streets. Others show women the way to the kitchen and write: what do women have to say about politics? (Akbari, facebook.com/freewomenwriters 2015).

Degrading treatment on social media leaves women hopeless at a society where the educated minority who post beautiful quotes immediately regress to a patriarchal notion that do not see women worthy of having opinion and abuse anything, including religion, to silence them. Within minutes, they change from being progressive poets and writers, to the most conservative teachers of Islam and claim that anyone who disagrees with their interpretation of the religion is an infidel worthy of punishment, even if the accused is of better character than themselves. If they are not able to debate, they often proclaim that real Muslim women have no business being on Facebook.

I urge some men who claim women and their human rights are respected in this country to read Facebook comments about women. If our educated youth write about women with such ignorance and obscenity, what can be expected of the general population?

I am humbled and inspired that despite all this, women of Afghanistan continue to write their opinions, speak up, debate, and exist publicly. Without doubt, we are the ones who are pushing this country forward. I am proud to say: I am a woman. I have independent thoughts and opinions and I will not refrain from speaking of them. Unlike many men, I will not use obscenities or threats to silence those I disagree with. I will use logic and decency to fight discrimination. I will continue to ignore anyone who tells me I am less than men and I will prove my worth as a human being and my human identity” (freewomenwriters.org).

After the fall of Taliban, improving the status of women, awarding them with civil freedom and equal gender opportunities has become the goals of the constitution in Afghanistan and the ministry of women was created in the government’s body to provide fields for women to present them in society.

However, patriarchy and traditional customs are way deeper in the society of Afghanistan than all these outer activities and an Afghan woman is still surrendered by threats and terror; character assassination of women in Cyberspace such as Facebook and tweeter and other social networks is another obstacle on the way for women of Afghanistan.

Character assassination is an attempt to stain the fame and image of a person and commonly has been used throughout the history. Historically, this act used to be a replacement where physical removal of a person was not an option. In modern time and cyberspace however this has changed into various forms such as trolling, spam and hacking. This action is including proliferation cases of misleading and exaggerating or providing false image of the target in order to sending wrong image of her/him. Character assassination is a kind of libel which in addition to the individual may affect the family or relatives of the target as well. In this method, those individual or groups that endanger the benefit of some will be under attack by them either by defamation or isolation (Torrenzano & Davis 2011:9).

Character assassination of women especially those who are more exposed to society like authors, poets, journalists and human rights activists has deep roots in cruel Afghan society. This also can act as a robust power for isolating women with tendency to have a more active presence in the society of Afghanistan but mostly prohibited by their concerned family. These types of assassinations, news and other related threats have become the biggest phobia for women in Afghanistan. Some of weblog writers who closed their blogs shortly after their activities are stating that bringing positive changes in society does not worth of all the persecution, torture and victimization. Sometimes these reactions even results in murdering of women, for instance the case of Zakieh Zakki, 35 years old and mother of six children in 2007. She was the manager of a private radio channel called 'peace' in Jabal Saraj from Parwan district in North Kabul. She has started her work since 2000 when Kabul was under control of Taliban. Jabal Saraj is located sixty kilometers far from north of Kabul and at that time it was under the control of forces against Taliban by leadership of Ahmad Shah Massoud; therefore Zakieh was the first the first voice of a women whose sound could be heard in the country under the rule of Taliban.

United National of Journalism in Afghanistan condemned such attacks and express their deepest concern of consequences of such acts and reflection of media in Afghanistan and at the same time requested the responsible forces particularly the security guards to supply more serious security for reporters. Character assassination in the Cyberspace will have serious damages of isolation and wrong comprehension of women if neglected by government ([www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)).

Social networks and cyber medias has turned into the strongest foundation for discourse and criticism in Afghanistan in such a short span of time that a lot of people in Afghanistan especially youth from different class of society consider having a user account in one of the virtual networks as necessity and consider what they publish and what has been published as the actual facts and truth and their reactions are mainly the mirror of what they read.

Although, Easy and cheap access to Internet in Afghanistan compare to other countries in the region is considered as a big achievement, but absence of right culture of using this new technology and lack of laws to protect this modern phenomena has caused low share of women. The lack of defined crime, absence of appropriate culture of using Cyberspace, sexual complexions and most importantly wrong interpretation of religious views, has made it easier for every male user to present a hostile view and bring a negative wave and full of violence against women.

Every time a woman stands against an individual or a group and complaint on same matter, she either faces total ignorance or false accusation of an attempt to build up a case for refugee purpose. This silence and false view has created more opportunities for extremism and established a better space against women and more pages has been dedicated in opposition to them.

The most crucial demand of the civil society of Afghanistan from their government is to bring reform in religious training and replace traditional and fanatic missionaries from mosques, with decisive, material and spiritual support to give strength to all institution and organizations who are active in women empowerment and reduce the violent and rough traditions against women and adjust them in a parallel sympathetic route; also define virtual crimes and by punishing the breakers of those laws reduce the character assassination to the least. ([www.8am.af](http://www.8am.af)).

On the other hand, presence of extremist ideology alongside many followers cannot be coincidental and random without financial support and regular programming. Based on the research and information obtained by the Independent commission of Human Rights in Afghanistan, great number of pages belong to unofficial employees who are antigovernment and members of Taliban and ISIS who are opposed to any kind of freedom for women ([ir.Sputniknews.com](http://ir.Sputniknews.com)).

By increasing awareness of women bloggers, their reflexes grew more mature. For example Noorjahan Akbar writes in her web log "Hamisheh Bibi Mahroo " that wrong ideas will make us more intelligent and raise our confidence, hate speech and trolls could be useful in many ways. Two of the most important reasons of their efficacy are:

I. Disparaging comments will make us aware of social folly. Before Internet, measuring the depth and scope of public ignorance was too hard or even impossible. But now we can figure out psychological and political status of society and now we can work more precisely to change it. In better words: 'Knowledge is power'.

II. Negative views of others raise the confidence. A lot of people in the Cyberspace cannot survive the hate speech and insults. But, we are not like them; since we have not entered this war of words with disappointment and anger (noorjahanakbar. wordpress.com).

The insulting virtual comments, unawareness of cultural and tribal from one another, also display itself in the real world. This war is not only between women and anti-woman, but when news or notes related to any ethnicity in Afghanistan spread in cyberspaces, the Social networks in Afghanistan turns into a stage of embattled and racial comments between tribes. They are hyped and excited debates between groups which in fact are aimless and often question the original news.

Usually vast volume of insult comments and offensive views in cyberspace are belonging to ethnic clashes, racial or cultural prejudices and religion. While if the author of the matter is a female the engagement of conflicts are higher. With reference even to the smallest issue which in most of the cases is socially rooted, without any hinge of insult in that note with just a minor criticism it can be an initial to a battle of insults and threats that itself is demonstration of public ignorance and political - psychological status in the society.

Sending negative views and hate comments in internet pages related to women rights activists and civil movements and women's blogs often skyrocket. Insult, treat, blame game, unrelated comments and hurtful views have become the daily tasks of many internet users.

An example of such case and among countless victims is Munera Yousofzada a civil rights activist has not been spared from the harshest attacks on her blog 'shiddokht'. The volume of harassment towards her had increased so that level which forced her to react to it by sharing a post on her Facebook page. A brief summary of what she titled 'Facebook harassment' as follows:

These days I am scared to respond to any comment or message on my page since women harassment upgraded from their home, street, school, university, workplace, shopping centers and telephone to new virtual domain and all social networks including Facebook. I even hesitate accepting any new friend request. Although in Afghanistan, Internet is still in the hands of educated and upper society people but unfortunately what comes from these resources are perspectives and culture of anti-women which indicate their sexual complex; the treatments of these diseases are above our comprehensiveness of scientific level and it must be taken care of by higher revolution of thoughts and culture in society (Yousofzada, facebook.com 2016).

In spite of having grand commemoration for women's day every year and celebrating them with just slogans and spending the huge budget in solidarity with women in Afghanistan, still scientific research on limitations of using Cyberspace and defined criminal acts are yet to be traditions. We still witness activities of many Facebook pages who are dedicated to women's character assassination particularly those who are active in social and political fields by providing view and opinions, judgments in various form of 'like', 'comment' and 'share'. Although for many users this is mostly an act of entertainment and others are just displaying their sexual complex and feeble personality, but what becomes clear is that the victims here are women in this unleashed society of Afghanistan (shiddokht.blogspot.in).

This and similar notes of authors shows many types of pressures, insults, and threats that activists of the civil society and bloggers are facing in cyberspaces and it's the reality of their life, but this mostly turns to a position in which negative views of others encourage women even more to write burdened and spread their message.

In Facebook there is a page with the title "Speak Up" dedicated for this. The 'Speak Up' campaign will reward and motivate people to take action in Afghanistan. Civil society groups will work with ordinary citizens and media to express their views on governance issues. The Speak Up campaign will be branded through TV / radio

slogans and billboards. All the products will be tagged by Speak Up slogan so the campaign is recognized and people are motivated to take part in "Speak Up" campaign. This page also provides videos about 'Facebook harassments' and methods of handling them, interviews with women activists and feminists in two languages of Persian and English and share them with its 800 viewers (facebook.com/gapbezan2012).

### **6.7 Issue: Street Harassment**

Zahra Tavakoli writes constantly under the pen name of Soode in her blog and Facebook page under the title of 'rapture in the sidewalk' of her daily memories, social conditions, cultural problems of women and stories of prior women. With a follow up on her notes we can get a clear image of atmosphere and environment of Kabul where she lives. She was born in 1982; her family was immigrants in Iran for about 20 years during Taliban. Now she is living in Kabul. She has graduated with Persian literature at the international University of Ghazvin and is employed in one of International section of Afghan ministry in one of the embassies (Researcher interview, 27 September 2014). She has a history of cultural activities including storytelling, poem and writing daily stories of Afghan women especially in Kabul. Her Stories of her daily life from her working place or social interaction with men and women all exhibits a complete life and concerns of a middle class female writer in Afghanistan.

One of instances of the most prevailing act of violence against women in Afghanistan happens on the promises of roads. The lifestyle of tribes in which everybody knows each other or they have some kind of relation doesn't encourage such behaviors in them compared to the big cities, but this issue especially in Kabul being the capital city of Afghanistan is more. Soode writes about one of these incidents that happened to her and the impact it has left on her on November 26 2013 on her page. The title of this is 'For all of us who cried in our solitude' it can bring the feeling of solidarity which is engraved and is the essence of all the women in the similar position.

I should write something for 25 November for International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, I even prepared my note. I wrote it months ago when my friend told me about the first days of her arrival in Kabul and how



disturbing it was for her when a man put his hands down onto his pants and followed her all the way in an empty street, but I didn't post it. Even today morning I wanted to take pictures of the newspapers about the stoning, or post a photo of Shakila or Sahar Gul, sixteen and seventeen years old brides that their bridal house turned to a hell. One with the face which half of it is now gone and other with continuous nightmares of tortures she suffered (soode, facebook.com 2014).

Violence here is broken hands and feet, broken head and missing tooth; when they hear about violence, naturally they picture Aisha with cut off nose and her husband who abandoned her on desert to die. They don't consider anything less than that level of violence and this is just painful. It is a tragedy that in the face of death, pain loses its meaning. Be happy that you are not Shakila, Aisha or Sahar Gul, be glad that you are not Faeizah who they have stretch her mouth so much to die of bleeding and how close the tragedy is to us. It is probably around us and we just comforting ourselves, we are those women here, we all comforting ourselves that catastrophe is just around us. Someone harassed each and every one of us on the day we left for work interview. When on a trip our male companion left us for some time to go to public restroom, somebody has reached out and touched our body. All of us who didn't say anything then, we just cried and kept it to ourselves. I wish the catastrophe wasn't this close (soode61.wordpress.com).

The volumes of street harassment were that much in Afghanistan for girls and women that on October 2012 women conduct a huge rally in Kabul. This movement was organized by women's networks and civil institutions in cooperation with the United Nations' organizers. Women wore orange veils and demonstrate their anger by slogan "We want immunity, enough of harassment". Women in social networks speak about types and forms of these harassments which are varying from eavesdropping till physical aggression. In the past, the reaction of young women was often silence, but lately women especially young girls' starts to stand against them.

Sociologists state the essential reason of street harassments are due to the patriarchal system that has inclines by presence of women in the society and also newly formed media.

Ama Sangari also deals with this issue on her blog under the note of 'All women of my land', she was one of the first people who showed her support of a young girl

name Kobra Khademi who put up eight minutes performance by wearing an iron shield and published her pictures on her website (See Appendix, image 9, page 276).

Ama Sangari writes about her memories and her first attempts in order to start her campaigns: This land where international media continuously calls its women the most miserable women on earth, women who are chained to illiteracy, ignorance, physical power of man, tradition and religion and women here have no way out but sometimes unlike the general prediction of people and contrary to all the bitter facts existing in the country, amongst the darkness some powerful women are emerging and questioning all of them. A lot of successful women in Afghanistan although haven't been a victim of physical abuse but they have been the one under psychological violence and suffered from its effects for a long time. The type of abuse primarily enforced on them by their own family for just breaking the norms and traditions of family. In fact all of these pressure and abuses were because their families were scared of the wrong judgment of society.

I have started my battle with society by refusing to wear veil. Just because my father considers himself as an influential person and the definition of a good girl is summarized in wearing the long veil. But the fact was that I was a total different individual from my father. I wanted to be a specialized at that time in genetic science and I couldn't see any relation with genetic and the question of choosing or not choosing to wear a veil. It may sound ridiculous but I was in real battle at that time. I may have done other great things later in life but no matter how I review them, none of them was more challenging and hurtful as this one. People start their struggle at some point in life and then they procure their support from others. When I stand for my rights, my family started to support me on my decision and later on they have become my main motivation in life and upcoming battles. Society works like family too, one day all those who stand on your way will support you and those who frown upon you become your admirer (fa.euronews.com).

She further writes, Kobra Khademi is a theatre actor and in protest against street harassment she wore iron armor and walked around Kabul streets for eight minutes. People started to throw their baseless judgments again; some said 'she is a prostitute', another said 'It's a west project here', some says that she just wants to be famous and

finally one said “It’s an innovative protest and it’s above the understanding of people”.

The main point of the protest has lost among the comments on her clothes and the size of her chest and posterior. Nobody mentioned that ‘I am sorry for this society who forces a girl to initiate such act, that men should feel embarrassed of themselves and that they must encourage girls who attempt to break traditions like this and empower others’ (amasangari.wordpress.com).

Kobra Khademi is a 27 years old artist who performed an act called ‘armor’ on February 26, 2015 in the city of Kabul in Afghanistan. This young artist covered her breast and posterior with iron armor and walked in Kabul. She said in an interview that when she was a child, for the first time in the city of Mashhad in Iran she went out to shop and a man has touched her hips. She said she has never encountered such thing before, she felt guilty and therefore she hid somewhere away from her family and cried. She said she kept asking herself ‘why?’ and wished her panty was made of iron. She added that when she grew older and immigrated first to Pakistan and then Afghanistan, she faced this more and more.

This Afghan artist says that exactly in the same place that she made the performance of "armor" (Koote Sangi neighborhood in Kabul), she first had her street harassment experience. "When the man in the street touched me I screamed and all the people in the street returned and looked at me. Some spit on me, some swear me and said shame on you for screaming. Nobody said shame on the person who touched and harassed you and while all those people were blaming me the harasser was standing among them and laughing at me”.

Kobra said that at the day of performance I took a taxi and went to koote-Sangi Street and as soon as I got out of the taxi and start walking, people at sight came to her immediately and took their cell phone to take photo of her. She said that day many insulted her and some threw stone at her (Personal interview, 12 February 2015). But the main attack against her came after completion the performance and its reflection on social networks and medias both positive and negative reactions. Bloggers support her furiously and some Facebook pages opposed it harshly.

Kobra Khademi demonstrates her protest to street sexual harassment towards women in form of a performance by walking on the street; because of that, the content of her message may better understand in domain of 'street art'. She conducted an open performance in the city with a chance for everyone to watch and participate. Kobra Khademi came to the streets and included male citizens in her performance without even feeling that now they are part of her performance. Men who were there in fact were playing their real role as harassers and sexual predators. She succeeded to grab the attention of many citizens to her surprising act, but the height of her performance was the point when she made the streets her own. Kobra Khademi 'interfered' in a city and 'changed' the situation in a street that is a hot spot for sexual harassments and women are supposed to commute as less as possible. Kobra announced to every man that she has come to the field, even though it's with the armor but she is there to stay.

Kobra wears armor besides clothes in her performance. A wishful presence with confidence is her critic in the city. She presents herself and forced others to see her. She simply turned her childhood and personal experience of sexual harassment of men into an artistic and political act. The kind of performance Kobra chose –the body performance- has been the most popular option of women in portraying fear, restrictions and sexual harassments since the end of sixty and seventy decade and it was supposed to face Freud's proposition of "Gender is Destiny". From the body performances of Hannah Wilke and Carolee Schneemann in seventy century till the performances of Kobra in Kabul in 2015 there is still the same motive: "It's not personal, it is just political".

Unfortunately, for suffering of Kobra in unsafe streets of Kabul and her turbulent childhood, there is no personal solution. Whatever it is, it is such as political issue and it needs to be in the center of attention and solve this problem exactly on the street.

Considering the medium and the time in which Kobra took advantage of it for turning in her performance, it is understandable to witness all the political oppositions through social networks and media. She employed the most powerful medium to pass her message: the medium of her body and a handmade armor that feminine figure shaped in it prominently and displaying the feminine body even though made of iron and putting in streets of Kabul has turned the city in confusion.

In an interview she said that her goal was to create awe and be part of that experience herself. She is very well aware of her art and what her performance could be interpreted into. In response to the conservative media or the angry mob who leave her upsetting comments, she cannot tell the exact goal of her performance since unlike the traditional political-artistic views she doesn't believe that the goal of her act was to a direct political and social change.

The exact result of her artistic act is to create "public discussion", online or offline participation, media and debate to convert the art to a "public domain", a space in which people discuss a topic or an idea in any form.

The fact is that this move has created discussion and attention. Maybe many men have never looked at this issue from a point of view of a woman or many women never dared to expressed and talked about it before. But this move caused a new wave in daily conversation especially in Facebook and weblogs.

Understanding the core of these performances and artistic works and following originality of ideas pushed Kobra to create a masterpiece, a moment, a jiffy, a look into the emotion of the artist and her audiences. What Kobra achieved with her walk in Kabul was a creation of situation that was irreversible. With her weird and surprising presence on the street, using sarcastic methods and by wearing an exaggerated armor and unexpected visual she created a wonderful political message and that is why she create curiosity and harsh reaction. This was exactly what she has planned and expected by its perfect execution.

This young artist of Kabul is the most courageous phenomena that occurred recently in Afghanistan. The message she sent is probably heard by the artist women of Tehran, Cairo and Delhi. Maybe the way to deal with harassment of women would be more practical by such designed tricks. Jacques Rancière a French philosopher says: "the type of an art will motivate us to revolt and art is capable of displaying revolting issues" (Ranciere 2013:48).

## **6.8 Issues: Bacha posh ("Dressed Like a Boy")**

Somaya Rezai Also known as Amazon, born in 1985, Married, Journalist, living in Sweden from 2014. She says about how Blogging and social media changed her life: "In 2013 I was awarded the global best blog Persian by "Deutsche welle". Beside

blogging I got involved into the community and start social activities in Kabul. Everything started by blogging, a simple daily report of the world around me! Still I write because I believe in change.

I start blogging in 2009 and was one of the first Afghan women who had blog in a society a very small percent of youths (mostly men) used Internet. For long time my blog had no viewer but now readers from all over the world check it. By blogging not only I connected to other blogs but also their thoughts, dreams and information.

I remember when I started using Internet; US Embassy donated five computer systems to national library of Herat city. After hours waiting we could use half an hour 128 kb/s Internet for searching about an article in Google or open the yahoo mail or chat by yahoo messenger. I had a high passion to change my life and people around me; also I was very happy that I could show a real feature of Afghan women life to my readers who mostly were not living in Afghanistan (Personal interview, 22 October 2014).

After a while blogging was my weapon to fight, the best tool to amplify my voice from inside of Afghanistan and point the reality of our society on basic rights of Afghan women and children, injustice against minorities and corruption inside the government system. Blogging was a window through professional life for me. I passed online courses in freelance journalism and start professional work in journalism.

I am happy that nowadays Life gets very easier day by day, smart phones come to the market and made the world connected. New platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and twitter made us more social, aware and open-minded. Internet is also very cheaper because many different companies provide Internet service, so Girls can easily use the social media everywhere they are living ([amasangari.wordpress.com](http://amasangari.wordpress.com)).

However the Stoning, murdering number of wives, marriage under the age of 18, forced marriage, being deprived of right of education and specially Bacha posh are what we often hear about Afghan women life situation in media but on the other hand we have women who are the symbols of resistance and fighting for better life based on human standards” ([afghanhumanrights.org](http://afghanhumanrights.org)).

She is writing about Bacha posh in Afghanistan and related issues. Bacha posh is a tradition which is common in parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan and it refers to the custom for families without a boy to choose one of their daughters and dress her as a boy and let her live like one. Some families start this custom right from birth. The tradition is also supported by religious propagators who believe that this will increase the fighting spirit of the girls and makes them stronger. Being a Bacha posh gives more freedom to a girl and provides her more opportunities that are not available for common girls. She can now go to school and finish her education, she can accompany her sisters going out and even work outside. The family also is protected of society's taunt for not having a male child. But social activists and institutions of human rights in Afghanistan believe that in fact this has drawn of lack of respect to the female gender.

On Thursday, 1st September 2010, the term "Bacha posh" coined in social media for the very first time by Azita Rafaat. She was born in 1978 in the family of Morteza Badghisi who is a reputed author and a professor of history. She finished her undergraduate studies in 1995 but despite having a medical scholarship, she couldn't continue her studies as the civil war broke out in Afghanistan. She has tried different jobs experience; at the first three years volunteer for women health during Taliban government and after that as active civil society, first woman translator in English, founder of the first computer and English training center for women and seven years of teaching for children in Badghis province. She is the first woman in parliament, representative of woman from Badghis province for member of the Loya jirga and the member of rights and immunization of lawyers and the chief of legislative committee of the parliamentary assembly to support the youth of Afghanistan. She could also manage to get two other undergraduate certificates in Math and economics ([besoshafiullah.blogfa.com](http://besoshafiullah.blogfa.com)).

Azita Rafaat used to write short stories and poems when she was in school but since 2010-2011, she began to talk about the personal life and problems of women in Badghis in particular about her own individual life. She has talked about many issues on her Facebook page and through series of YouTube videos which she published from her own life and it was for the first time she mentioned the tradition of Bacha posh ([openasia.org](http://openasia.org)).

In short documentary videos of her own personal life which she published in YOUTUBE, she shows us that how every morning she prepares her four daughters to go to school and how the attire of one of the girls is entirely different. She puts on white gowns for her three daughters and covers their hair with tents/scarf but fourth girl is dressed in a suit just like a boy. Once they are outside, the fourth girl Mehrnush (Afghan female name) is no longer a girl and even her name changes to Mehran (Afghan male name). Mehrnush turns into Mehran by macular cloth and short hair so that people don't frown upon and insult her parents as people who are deprived from the "The world's joyful blessing" means having a boy (See Appendix, image 10, page 277).

Azita says:" In Afghanistan, if you have a good position and a good life, people look at you differently with special respect and this life can't be complete and blessed thoroughly if you don't have a boy among your children". According to her husband, 'Ezzatollah Razaat' having a son in Afghanistan is a sign of prestige and dignity of a family, he says: "when my wife became the representative of the people in parliament, we had to continuously socialize with people who kept coming to our house for five years. In Afghanistan you get taunt if you don't have a son that is why we had to Bacha posh one of our daughters". The act of tradition of Bacha posh in Azita's family was just an escape from all the taunting.

The families in Afghanistan who follow this tradition are not few but there is no exact statistics about it. In fact Azita Razaat was the first person to share the term on social Medias using her real name and by showing her own family. The important point is that Azita herself was Bacha posh from the age of 9 to 16 and according to what she says, she has gained her self-confidence and independence from the time she was a Bacha posh. Being a Bacha posh at that age has provided her the freedom that wasn't available otherwise. She says: "when I was a Bacha posh I used to work with my dad in his shop and I feel I have lived two lives and experienced both being a man and woman" (bbc.com).

Jenny Nordberg having read upon the story of Azita Razaat published the pictures of Mehrnush- Mehran in her book called (The underground girls of Kabul) and writes: "In Afghanistan, where society is ruled almost entirely by men, the birth of a son is a



reason for celebration and the arrival of a daughter is often mourned as a failure" (bachaposh.com).

In Afghanistan, "Bacha posh" is the literal term for a girl who is dressed up, and disguised as a boy. These children are part of a hidden practice in which parents disguise daughters as sons. Instead of wearing a headscarf, and a skirt or a dress, a little girl will get a short haircut and a pair of pants, and she'll be sent off into the world as one of the boys. The Bacha posh look like boys, they learn to behave like boys, and to those around them who don't know, they are Afghan boys" (bachaposh.com).

In Afghanistan, change of clothes is not just for the reputation of family; many families do it only for abundance. A lot of families who do not have sons, Bacha posh their daughters so they will be able to work in busy markets and earn to pay their living expenses. There are a lot of girls in boy's attire in markets of Kabul who are Bacha posh not to protect the honor of their families but to work and earn money. Many of these girls are between the age of 5 to 12 and roaming with boys name and selling water bottles, chewing gums and mobile recharge but none of them is willing to talk about their real identity.

Another reason for Bacha push the girls is rooted in religious beliefs. Mulla Atighollah Ansari, who is the warden of Roze-sharif (A tomb affiliated to Imam Ali in Mazar-i-Sharif) has different theory on why people Bacha posh their girls. Mulla Ansari says that many people who Bacha posh their daughters are attempting to have the luck of having an actual son, he adds that people who are living in northern parts of Afghanistan come to this place before the ceremony of Bacha posh as pilgrim and pray to God to give them an actual son. Those children who are Bacha posh without their own will since childhood, may continue to wear the boy clothes until they are grown and matured and not wearing hijab is not a religious issue for them (www.youtube.com).

Amazon also mentioned the terms in a note –The sworn virgins of my homeland– on her weblog "Ama Sangari" on 20 January 2013 and state the tradition of Bacha posh in Afghanistan is because of war. Amazon wrote: "I saw a report on national television of Sweden talking about Albania women during the civil war in 1997-1998 and how honor killing increased back then so much that women were forced to dress

like men to hide their identity to support their families during the war. These women hide their true identity and worked hard outside their homes. Even after many years of that war, there are still many of those women are out there living their life in peace and their presence is substantial in the society. Many have their own family and became the head of the family. Some even did not married to be the sworn virgin of their homeland, they are called as masculine and they are called by Sir or Uncle in the society! That was interesting news to me but at the same time I am aware of the presence of such women in Afghanistan as I heard a lot about them from my friends and other people specially during the civil war in Kabul. Women and girls who changed their clothes in the time of war due to economic pressures and lack of men around such as father, brother or husband, to put bread for on the table for their families. They worked hard and didn't trade their dignity and returned to their skirts once the war was over. But their situation is different of those Albanian women. It is not clear what will happens to them after detection of their identities from the society and they will be looked at. Will they be able to play a role of a woman after several years of being a man? Will they have a choice to be either an uncle or an aunt? Sometimes I think these girls had made the best decision for themselves. Instead of just sitting on the corner of the house and sewing up with needle and constantly be worried of their fate under bombing and attack and end up in debris of Kabul, they changed their clothes and dig bodies from ruined buildings, they worked so hard alongside men whom they wouldn't even trust to walk with them in an empty street if they were girls (amasangari.wordpress.com).

Although the tradition of Bacha posh has a long history in Afghanistan, but there are no civil laws written to support them. Recently there have been many people from various organizations in relation to human rights in Afghanistan raised their voice that this custom is lack of respect for women and the gender. The Human rights activists in Afghanistan are trying to give the Afghan girls the same type of freedom without changing their clothes.

Bach pushes doesn't remain like that all their life. They return to their own clothes once they reached the age of seventeen or eighteen year old but this time the change isn't as easy as the first time. The dress might go but the habit of being accustomed to certain freedom which is only available for boys in Afghan society remains. In a society which practices, habits and personality of woman and man is defined

accurately in regards to their gender and any disobey and wrong step will be considered a crime or sin, these Bacha poshes lead two separate identities. The opponents of this custom consider it as violence against children which could cause psychological issues for them after puberty. They state why a mother should hide the identity of her own daughter and why a girl can enjoy her human rights when she disguise as a boy.

A number of Bacha posh girls have bitter experience from this. They say acting like boy has cost them their childhood joy and memory and also there is another shock when they return to be a girl since now they must take the personality that their mother has.

Elaheh who lives in Mazar-i-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, was wearing boy dress approximately for twenty years and had to quit it on 2014. She still has not been able to completely change her character to an expected girl behavior from the society of Afghanistan. She says that she is so different from the regular girls around her and do not wish to get marry at all. She is the eldest daughter of the family and since she had no brother, her family made her a Bacha posh. She was easily gone out any time she wished and played outside, she used to help his father and was a real boy. Now Elaheh wears girlish dress again but she says she is not comfortable with them but had to do it due to her family and society pressure (Researcher interview, 12 July 2014).

But for some this experience is sweet, living two different worlds. Experiencing the freedoms that would never happened if they were girl. Girls like Azita Razaat who became a parliament member or Fariba Majid who is the chairman of women at Balkh province, are the supporters of this tradition. Fariba Majid once was a Bacha posh called Vahid and says: "I was the third daughter of my family and when I was born, my family decided to raise me as a boy. I was a boy till the eighth grade and my friends called me Vahid and I used to work in my dad's shop. But later I had to shift back as the school opposed that. Fariba believes that being a Bacha posh has helped her to have the opportunity that in a patriarchal society of Afghanistan isn't allowed for girls and therefore she took advantage of this chance and that is why she is a supporter of tradition. Supporters believe that this experience will increase the girls' confidence and once she is back to live in feminine skin, she can live like a real human life, not like a half identity entity in the society of Afghanistan who can barely

talk. These girls who surpass the gender barriers, can switch the borders of personality and socially and can be a real human with their right position in life. The view of their friends also differs as now they can be more trusted in decision making.

To sum up the ten issues have made an important impact and these are selected based on the thematic importance they have in the Afghanistan of today. One of the points that need to be made here is that it is not only the ten issues that form the core issues in Afghanistan and it would be wrong to say so particularly speaking from a point of view of examining cyberspace. One of the premises on which this thesis is based is that cyberspace does not limit the large media or the print media as it is derisively termed because the print media as the policy of one size fits all whereas the cyberspace caters to small and multiple audiences. This is all the more so in Afghanistan which is a multi-ethnic and a metalinguistic state. In keeping with these migrant identities that not only confirmed to linguistic and ethnic roles but also to larger national projects and also certain ideological affiliations like liberalism of various strands, but also to certain ideological persuasions among the religious segments and certain feminist viewpoints. Therefore there are also a large number of other issues which are not been taken up for reasons of space but this is only one of the limitations of the thesis and therefore it does not in any way mean that they are not important. These issues were never discussed earlier but now with the writing of many blogs women are creating an awareness which can go along way in changing the society.

## References

- Baker, Aryn. "Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban." *Time* (magazine). Archived from the original on 2010-08-16. Retrieved 27 November 2010.
- Cook, John L. *Afghanistan: The Perfect Failure: A War Doomed By the Coalition's Strategies, Policies and Political Correctness*. Xlibris Corporation, 2012.
- Hashmat, K. *Afghanistan in the Course of History*. Gobar, Kabul, 2001.
- Keddie, Nikki. *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Noori, Hossein. *Wholeness of Islam*. Hosseinieh- Ershad, Tehran, 1986.
- Ranciere, Jacques. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. 1st Edition, Verso, 2013.
- Torrenzano, Richard, Davis, Mark. *Digital Assassination: Protecting Your Reputation, Brand, or Business against Online Attacks*. Macmillan, 2011.
- Bakhtari, Manizha, Weblog. shaharnosh.blogfa.com [Accessed on 07/03//2015]
- [www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/afghan-Farkhundeh-family-demands-justice-150402201946987.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/afghan-Farkhundeh-family-demands-justice-150402201946987.html) [Accessed on 07/03//2015]
- [www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh-woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh-woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?_r=0) [Accessed on 08/03//2015]
- [www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh-woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh-woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?_r=0) [Accessed on 08/03//2015]
- [www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-18349639](http://www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-18349639) [Accessed on 09/03//2015]
- [www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-buries-Farkhundeh-woman-beaten-set-alight-mob-n328011](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-buries-Farkhundeh-woman-beaten-set-alight-mob-n328011) [Accessed on 10/03//2015]
- Soheili, "Farkhunda after one year." March 16, 2016. [8am.af/1394/12/26/justice-farkhonde-afghanistan-kabul/](http://8am.af/1394/12/26/justice-farkhonde-afghanistan-kabul/) [Accessed on 18/03//2016]
- The U.S. Embassy, [kabul.usembassy.gov/pr-032515a.html](http://kabul.usembassy.gov/pr-032515a.html) [Accessed on 12/03//2015]

National Post, “Afghan women carry coffin of 27-year-old woman beaten to death by mob over false reports she burned a Qur’an”.  
[news.nationalpost.com/news/world/afghani-women-carry-coffin-of-27-year-old-woman-beaten-to-death-by-mob-over-false-reports-she-burned-a-quran](http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/afghani-women-carry-coffin-of-27-year-old-woman-beaten-to-death-by-mob-over-false-reports-she-burned-a-quran) [Accessed on 13/03//2015]

Khan Saif, Shadi. “What’s the future for women’s rights in Afghanistan?” 14 April 2015. [www.equaltimes.org/what-s-the-future-for-women-s#.V0yPvfl97IU](http://www.equaltimes.org/what-s-the-future-for-women-s#.V0yPvfl97IU) [Accessed on 14/05/2015]

Statement by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, 07 September 2015. [www.aihrc.org.af/home/press\\_release/5119](http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press_release/5119) [Accessed on 15/10/2015]

Tavakoli, Zahra. "For All of Us." Weblog.

[soode61.wordpress.com/2015/04](http://soode61.wordpress.com/2015/04) [Accessed on 10/06//2015]

af. Shafaqna.com [Accessed on 19/03//2015]

[www.afghanvoice.org.uk/avfm/inpictures.php?picture=56&lang=eng](http://www.afghanvoice.org.uk/avfm/inpictures.php?picture=56&lang=eng) [Accessed on 21/03//2015]

“Afghan Women's Activist, Noor Jahan Akbar”  
[www.refworld.org/docid/49dc4b201c.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/49dc4b201c.html) [Accessed on 22/03//2015]

National Geographic, “Afghan Women.” December 2010.  
[ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/afghan-women/rubin-text](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/afghan-women/rubin-text) [Accessed on 23/03//2015]

Akbar, Noorjahan, Hamishe bi bi Mahroo, Weblog.  
[noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com/2013/12/13](http://noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com/2013/12/13) [Accessed on 24/03//2015]

UN news Centre, [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU) [Accessed on 24/03//2015]

[fa.rfi.fr/20150508](http://fa.rfi.fr/20150508) [Accessed on 25/03//2015]

“Rape in Badghis.” [www.istaqlal.com/?p=12403](http://www.istaqlal.com/?p=12403) [Accessed on 26/03//2015]

Mohammadi, Batool. Weblog. [www.batoolmohammadi.blogspot.in/2015/05/blog-post.html](http://www.batoolmohammadi.blogspot.in/2015/05/blog-post.html) [Accessed on 27/03//2015]

[vebbikas.blogfa.com/post-20.aspx](http://vebbikas.blogfa.com/post-20.aspx) [Accessed on 28/03//2015]

[www.expressen.se/nyheter/abbas-innan-mordet-jag-ar-av-folket---hon-ar-religios-overklass/](http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/abbas-innan-mordet-jag-ar-av-folket---hon-ar-religios-overklass/) [Accessed on 29/03//2015]

Ismaeil, Darman. An autopsy of honor. July 22, 2012. Online spirit, <http://www.rawanonline.com/analysis-of-the-concept-of-ghairat-htm> [Accessed on 01/04//2015]

Kaveh, Omid. "Honor Killing in Sweden." 06 December 2005. [www.geocities.ws/goftmaan/GHtNAM.htm](http://www.geocities.ws/goftmaan/GHtNAM.htm) [Accessed on 02/04//2015]

Report of Union nation, July 13, 2010,

[www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/13/ten-dollar-talib-and-womens-rights/afghan-women-and-risks-reintegration-](http://www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/13/ten-dollar-talib-and-womens-rights/afghan-women-and-risks-reintegration-) [Accessed on 02/04//2015]

Human Rights Watch, "The Ten-Dollar Talib and Women's Rights." 13 July 2010, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) [Accessed on 03/04//2015]

Crime in Afghanistan, "Afghanistan, War and Rape." 20 August 2013 [www.facebook.com/notes/373644472765356/](https://www.facebook.com/notes/373644472765356/) [Accessed on 04/04//2015]

BBC News, quoted by Sobhrang Soraya,, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, October 8, 2012. [www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/10/121008\\_k02-afg-women-violences.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/10/121008_k02-afg-women-violences.shtml) [Accessed on 05/04//2015]

Young Women for Change, [www.youtube.com/user/YOUNGWOMEN4CHANGE](http://www.youtube.com/user/YOUNGWOMEN4CHANGE) (YWof) [Accessed on 08/04//2015]

Iraj, Shahbaz, "Zakieh Zakki", [bbc.com](http://bbc.com), 06 Jun2007.

[www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/story/2007/06/070606\\_s-zakki-killed.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/story/2007/06/070606_s-zakki-killed.shtml) [Accessed on 10/04//2015]

Soheili, Farkhunda after one year, March 16, 2016.

8am.af/1394/12/26/justice-farkhonde-afghanistan-kabul/ [Accessed on 18/03//2016]

amasangari.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/how-social-media-changed-afghan-women-life/ [Accessed on 18/04//2015]

Rezaie, Somiya, “How social media changed Afghan women life?” 18 September, 2014.

afghanhumanrights.org/2014/09/18/how-social-media-changed-afghan-women-life/[Accessed on 19/04//2015]

Imagh, Shafighollah, “Interview with Azita Rafaat”, Weblog.

www.besoshafiullah.blogfa.com/post/139 [Accessed on 20/04//2015]

www.openasia.org/item/9199 [Accessed on 21/04//2015]

Ghaderi, Taher, “Bachaposh girls in Afghanistan”, bbc.com, 01 September 2011.

www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2011/09/110901\_l09\_taher\_afghan\_girls\_changed\_to\_boys.shtml [Accessed on 22/04//2015]

Rafaat, Azita, Bachaposh, 26 December 2012.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=73RYUliScQw [Accessed on 23/04//2015]

www.bachaposh.com [Accessed on 25/04//2015]

Nasih, Najibollah, “A report about rape in Afghanistan”, 09 June 2013.

bokhdinews.af/human-rights/13903 [Accessed on 06/04//2015]

Samar, Sima. Weblog. drsimasamar.blogspot.in [Accessed on 07/04//2015]

www.freewomenwriters.org/being-an-afghan-woman-on-facebook/ [Accessed on 09/04//2015]

“Status of women in Afghanistan”, ir.sputniknews.com/world/20150605331917/ [Accessed on 12/04//2015]

Yousufzada, Munera. Weblog. www.shiddokht.blogspot.in/2012/11/blog-post\_21.html [Accessed on 14/04//2015]



'Speak Up", facebook page, Afghanistan.

[www.facebook.com/gapbezan2012/](http://www.facebook.com/gapbezan2012/) [Accessed on 15/04//2015]

Rezaie, Amazon. Weblog. [amasangari.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/how-social-media-changed-afghan-women-life/](http://amasangari.wordpress.com/2014/09/19/how-social-media-changed-afghan-women-life/) [Accessed on 18/04//2015]

Khademi, Kobra. "Street is my Right." 16 October 2016. [fa.euronews.com/2015/10/16/interview-with-kubra-khademi](http://fa.euronews.com/2015/10/16/interview-with-kubra-khademi)

Personal interview located in USA, Batool Mohammadi, on Skype, 18 November 2013 & 27 September 2014. [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Mazar-i-Sharif, Elaheh, on Skype, 12 July 2014. [Recorded]

Personal interview located in USA, Noorjahan Akbar, 07 May 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Sakina Mohammadi, 26 October 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Kobra Khademi, 12 February 2015, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Sweden, Amazon Rezaie, 22 October 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Munera, 13 April 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Akbari, Farzana. "Being an Afghan woman on Facebook." facebook.com. 30August 2015.

[www.facebook.com/freewomenwriters/photos/a.610717822306285.1073741828.605706749474059/1004146146296782/?type=3&theater](http://www.facebook.com/freewomenwriters/photos/a.610717822306285.1073741828.605706749474059/1004146146296782/?type=3&theater)

Soode, "Elimination of Violence against Women." facebook.com 26 November 2014. [facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4825799899553&set=a.1614513779407.50357.1733210108&type=3&theater&notif\\_t=like&notif\\_id=1480181724339972](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4825799899553&set=a.1614513779407.50357.1733210108&type=3&theater&notif_t=like&notif_id=1480181724339972).

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

The present thesis *Negotiating Virtual Realities: Afghan Women's Movement in Cyberspace with Special Reference to Weblogs*, looks at how women engaged with cyberspace in Afghanistan, the moment we talk of women in Afghanistan that image comes before us is of a dis empowered women behind Burqa , ravaged by years of war, living in patriarchal and tribal society with no rights. However though restricted to urban areas a small percentage of women are engaging with cyberspace and creating a social movement and showing agency.

In developing countries, such as Afghanistan, the issue of patriarchy still is a matter of concern which regards men being the total authority in society having all responsibilities for all affairs. The Afghan women had almost no social role in economics and social activities due to culture gap, traditions, preconceptions and poor social system, which adversely affected the women's right. After Taliban regime, entering the cyberspace in Afghanistan enabled women to make a women's cyberspace association and conduct a movement protesting against the social injustices and claiming their rights.

The hypothesis of the present study is that the weblog writing and internet use by Afghan women could be the first and essential instrument in improvement the women social roles, providing them right movement, giving them the equal opportunity of education and employment which consequently leads to economical and situational better condition. In this process, women in Afghanistan have created a women's movement in cyberspace and raised many issues and brought about a change in society. However small, but women in urban areas are using cyberspace especially weblog writing immensely. Hence, for the past couple of years they have managed to shape this activity into a movement. Big portions of bloggers connection that live in different countries are via link exchange on the weblogs and it opens up a possibility for exchanging ideas from far distance and necessary arrangement of an statement and

cooperation for translation in order to gather information related to the event or issue and broadcasting that news or the theoretical debates over it. The blogs atmosphere demonstrates the intellectual, geographic and age scope of its users and offers a possibility for them to participate and cooperate. Constant writing and receiving continuous feedback removes the shyness of expressing one due to age and experience differences. Also, this interactive space in comparison with tangible space reduces the social complexes that exist in Afghanistan in expressing and listening to various thoughts. So blogging has played a vital and affirmative role in organizing and planning for women in Afghanistan.

Another important issue is how does the Afghan women's weblogs represent Afghan women's issues and how might that affect the perception and role of the Afghan women in Afghanistan from a theoretical perspective , hence security issues, ethnic and tribal problems, the geographic distribution of social activists outside the country and of course the technical knowledge of activists has turned the internet into a significant instrument for creating awareness, disseminating information and debates and the cyberspace ( with special reference to weblog writing) is an instrument to contribute the women's social movements in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the volume of analysis and evaluative criteria in the related field of women's movement has been far fewer in comparison with the theoretical materials.

As a result, women are able to change their social condition in the traditional society of Afghanistan through cyberspace and if the cyberspace empowers women, we discussed that cyberspace is a platform for resources, advocacy, innovation, partnerships and collaboration around women. Even economic empowerment. For more than 10 years social movement groups in Afghanistan have been using the internet to accomplish organizational goals. It has been argued that the cyberspace helps to increase the speed, reach and effectiveness of women's social movement, related communication as well as mobilization efforts and as result, it has been suggested that the cyberspace has had a positive impact on the social movement in general.

The present study aims to look at weblogs as an alternative arena of struggle for women movement in Afghanistan in which public sphere of organization and activism is tightly controlled. One of the important aim of this research was the better

understanding of the interaction between women's movement and the cyberspace with special reference to weblog writing. Researcher puts an effort to scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages of blogging in Afghanistan, to rise to the challenges of using cyberspace especially about weblogs and to offer a practical solution for them.

One of the best accomplishments of blogging could be the fact that the part of debates which previously occurred only within emails and were only accessible for those active women in particular field, now with the aid of blogging, attract the public audience. This transformation has at least two hidden results: activities towards woman's rights grabbed a bigger network of audiences initiating feminism concern and brought a broader network of citizens whom their concern was not necessarily around women. This can be a constructive perspective in raising public awareness towards women issues and encourages the readers to contemplate and consequently take action.

Many women, for various reasons who have less social ties with communications can use weblogs to communicate with society. Some women may not want to share their real identities such as (name, age, occupation, etc.) Cyberspace has opened the public space for women and has provided a possibility for presence of women without any limitation of time and space constraints and it has been a cause for independency feeling and more self confidence in them. Women with the presence in weblogs reflect the personal aspect and events of their life and this reduces the social isolation and finally, their interaction becomes more equivalent and similar.

There is a dearth of literature in two areas, women in Afghanistan and the new technological developments in Afghanistan. There are a large number of studies on Afghanistan but most of them are primarily concerned with military and strategic affairs and this fall in the domain of a statist approach. Other studies focused largely on politics, though informing the study continue to exclude women. This literature and women are scattered and one only has to glean from many sources to build a narrative. Secondly, the idea of a technological effect on society is also lacking in the case of Afghanistan and neighboring regions and there is a paucity of literature in this area also. A large number of materials is therefore utilized both in English and other languages like Persian, Dari and Pashtu to build up a coherent narrative. Additions have also been made by incorporating latest data from websites and weblogs and the

others dealing with two types of sources, one linear set of texts and another is a hyperlinked set of information.

There is a large amount of material, though in scattered form on women and technology in Afghanistan and they need to be combined and only then can a narrative on women's participation in cyberspace be understood. It is thus viable to embark on a work of the scale as the teams discussed also have the material and there is a dearth of research in this area and this chapter, therefore, makes the case for research on this theme.

We also focus on Afghanistan and takes up the challenging task of trying to integrate cyberspace and the penetration of new technologies commonly known as ICT arena formation and communication technologies in a particularist cultural setting, that of Afghanistan and the case of women. The themes explored show that cyberspace is neither positive nor negative nor is it neutral and it is created a new sense of reality and space that is both virtual and also real. Normal people engage through these networks unlike other networks with a sense of anonymous identities, sometimes fully active and sometimes only partially articulated. How these networks are invisible and therefore are prone to many different types of association and it is done on medium speed of these associations that has changed the rules of the game. Women in Afghanistan have only begun to have a fleeting presence particularly on account of the role of the government to promote the ICT and secondly the role of the Afghan telecommunications in spreading this technology.

While the women of Afghanistan are newcomers to the Internet and cyberspace, they have been engaging and also have faced reprisals as seen by the operation of patriarchy in cyberspace. These include cybersquatting, disruption, day nail of access and many other such techniques. Globalization and the spread of ICT, there is sameness to the technological dissemination throughout the world that was particular in the pre-modern period. The disruption of this regional particularity and the emergence of sameness have therefore brought about a universal language and universality of experience articulated through cyberspace. It is in this domain that women also have become latecomers in Afghanistan and have engaged in the cyberspace by creating certain small communities through weblogs. It is not a one-way process and the socially embedded mess of this technology in Afghanistan

largely privileges the men as the ownership of assets and access to technology is largely in the hands of men. It would be prudent to say that the case of Afghanistan's women and their experience in cyberspace is not a case of have not but of being connected or not connected.

If we look at the history of Afghanistan and its evolution over the millennia, one of the important aspects that were highlighted was that over the centuries, no durable government was possible at the Centre for a long period of time and this conceiving of Afghanistan as a unitary state on the western model or a monarchy in the traditional usage of the term does not fit neatly. It was a tribal society with centrifugal pulls towards the centre allowing for a loose monarchy as long as the centripetal forces of tribal loyalty did not dissolve it.

Women's life, therefore, was largely conditioned by the immediate realities, the tribal and the local context in which they lived. These were the durable entities in the long journey of Afghanistan from the early period to the period of Alexander, and then to the period of the later dynasties and even outlasted the two competing gunpowder empires on the neighborhood, the Safavids and Mughals. Daoud Khan continued in the modern period and thus exemplifies the truth that the primordial category in Afghanistan is the tribe and the family Stone of the most important building blocks of this tribal identity. The large-scale developments over the world like the great game in the imperial chessboard which is known as Central Asia and other forces of modernity only loosely impacted this tribal setting as the cohesion of the village was not disturbed. It was only in the urban areas like Kabul and other important cities that changed were brought in.

However, the use of Persian language and Persian high culture from neighboring Iran aided in the administrative mechanism and it led to a sense of unity how fragile it may be. Thus, the Afghan monarchy attained a sense of prestige, but its weakness was the inability to deal with the ethnic and other divisions.

The position of women, waxed waned with not much difference. However, the structural change came about after the Soviet invasion and sometime before that with the establishment of a Marxist regime that brought women into the public domain. This large-scale visibility of women in the public domain and their entry into the workforce and other production related activities also had its cultural and religious

effects. This visibility also provoked a sense of patriarchal reaction as it was too sudden. During the period of disorder and the rise of the Taliban and other militant groups of commonality was seen in day fact that women were now relegated and this disorder again made the networks of militants armed with weapons the Paramount fighting force. As this fighting force was the prematurity in the society, force became an important element of the Society of Afghanistan. With the rise of force, those who did not legally and culturally have the sanction to exercise force were subordinated. It is only the Army that was legally entitled to use force and also the militant fighters who had weapons. Women were therefore not allowed to exercise any force directly or through any other agency and were thus relegated more to the background. This relegation of women happens after the excesses of the militants and the evolution of new discourses on patriarchy.

The media is very important in today context, social media and cyberspace such as Facebook and online radio has played a major role in empowering women. Media representation of Afghan women's image through online media is an exercise of power to build a powerful image of new Afghan women in the post-Taliban regime. The rules governing media and as well as how people deal with media including cyberspace space also were important factor for spread of IT.

In the early period of Internet was primarily dominated by business interests and large corporations who had webpages, but with the rise of cheap publishing and cheaper browsing facilities combined with high network penetration, new ideas came to the fore. These ideas included amongst others the creation of a new social media landscape the world over powered by people from many different geographical regions, invisible but yet connected.

It is this transnational cooperation at a very fast pace at low cost and with high levels of a nonentity that has led to large participation of women the world over not only as individual participants but also as collectives. Unlike other collectives the peculiarity of these collectives is that they are composed of networks populated by nodes which are then disseminated and which continue to disseminate information from the world over. In short there is an interaction in the media-the new media where the consumer or the media is also at certain times a producer, in the sense that he or she is also replying and posting messages, comments and other interventions to the

earlier posts. It is this interactivity and transnational connections coupled with felicity of expression empowered by using tools of technique in the own line wage through the Persian script in the case of Afghanistan that has propelled the surge towards a new media.

Some of the immediately visible aspects of blogging in Afghanistan by the women are stories that are told and retold and the most important is the story of the survival of democracy as a fragile institution. The participation by a many women bloggers in the service of democracy has seen to it that the impact of these blogs has created a new audience. This audience is also composed of the same audience which is a consumer of the traditional media, but unlike the traditional media the political economy of the new media differs and therefore the narratives also differ and hear the narrative is of a democracy which is not statist but it flows from the people and that too with that gender spin.

It would not be out of place to highlight some of the most important achievements of blogging in Afghanistan, that is the rise of two women's movements whose names are as follows "justice for Farkhunda" and "Young Women for a Change" made a significant impact in civil society. This comes at a particular time in the whole question of civil society as an institution was debated whether it existed in Afghanistan. We see that among the contemporary legislations in Afghanistan by the Parliament, one of the pressure groups that influence the passage of bills against sexual harassment for women and advocacy of women's rights was predominantly an online movement. Because of the activity of this moment that gained its support largely from cyberspace and showed that the moment in cyberspace is not altogether diverse from the ground realities for the results are pictured on to the most important and powerful lawmaking body in Afghanistan namely the legislature.

By far the most important impact which is not directly visible is the impact of the everyday life of women in terms of their party's nation not as passive consumers of media but what as Alvin Toffler called the rise of -the prosumer-the producer and consumer combined together. Such a situation did not exist in the traditional analog media but has become a possibility only in the digital media and the lives of everyday transformation in gendered spaces have been made possible only by this particularly in delicious activities and also in their day-to-day activities in the consumption of



news, participation in online forums and more importantly speaking out their mind. The spread of ICT in Afghanistan is considerable, the critique that women's participation is less is underrated and there is a visible impact and also not so visible impact in everyday life which has brought about important transformations to the gender skip in Afghanistan. What is very important is that women have found a voice and an agency there and cyberspace.

Some of the issues of Afghan women which are highlighted in the blogs include Stoning, Domestic violence, Child marriage, mutilation, Baad, Raping, Honor killing, Cyber stocking, street harassment and Bacha posh”.

These ten issues have made an important impact and these are selected based on the thematic importance they have in the Afghanistan of today. One of the points that need to be made here is that it is not only the ten issues that form the core issues in Afghanistan and it would be wrong to say so particularly speaking from a point of view of examining cyberspace. One of the premises on which this thesis is based is that cyberspace does not limit the large media or the print media as it is derisively termed because the print media as the policy of one size fits all whereas the cyberspace caters to small and multiple audiences. This is more so in Afghanistan which is a multi-ethnic and a metalinguistic state. In keeping with these migrant identities that not only confirmed to linguistic and ethnic roles but also to larger national projects and also certain ideological affiliations like liberalism of various strands, but also to certain ideological persuasions among the religious segments and certain feminist viewpoints. Besides these ten issues the bloggers also take up many other issues like education of women, political participation of women, glass ceiling, immigration and refugee status which are very important but we have not focused on these aspects and limited our study to the ten evil practices in Afghani society.

One of the important achievements of these issues is that they have been highlighted not only in Afghanistan where a collective has emerged with strong views out the same and the intervention of important powers including the then president of Afghanistan; Ashraf Ghani also had to intervene. Like the Pres Afghanistan, many other important stakeholders also intervened in this aspect. Further, the issue did not rest only here as it had also certain international ramifications both in the world and also in the Islamic world with many key theologians condemning certain practices as

un-Islamic. Therefore not only international political pressure but also an international reinterpretation of sacred texts that led to different forms of understanding have surfaced because of the intervention and publicity these issues derived from the cyberspace encounter.

It is also at this particular time that certain feminists not only petitioned the United Nations but also came to public limelight shedding the near nonentity that they were enclosed in. It, therefore, lead to the evolution of not only a new type of politics but also a minor shift in the politics of Afghanistan with women being their own agents of change not through mass mobilization at influencing mass mobilization and the political agenda through their works in cyberspace to a large extent. Certain issues which are peculiar to Afghanistan and have regional particularity is the issue of Bacha push in which cross-dressing by males as women is enforced. This is not out of free will but one in which power relations are embedded and therefore this issue which has not spoken of in the public for fear of certain societal disapproval was brought to the fore. It thus acknowledged for the first time, certain failings in the masculinity of the men in Afghanistan and some shortcomings and therefore was a very bold intervention. The ten issues in terms of coverage constantly changed as the content analysis reveals and the change was largely in the form of a presentation by clarifying and adding more materials to elaborate the points. These changes are also mandated by the immediacy of the needs and the audiences and therefore their mediation had a side effect.

Therefore, women in Afghanistan today are interacting in cyberspaces and raising issues and creating a social movement which is challenging patriarchy. Women thus however small in number, and being educated and urban based are creating agency for themselves, it is hoped that soon this nu would expand and more and more women would be brought in to the ambled of cyberspaces.

## Bibliography

### Books:

Akbar, Noorjahan, Muradi, Batool .*Daughters of Rabia*. wordpress. Com, 2013.

Agneta, Jacobson Söderberg. *Security on Whose Terms? If Men and Women Were Equal*. Introduction, Kvinna till Kvinna Report, Women's Empowerment Projects, 2009.

Asante, C. E. Press, *freedom and development: A research guide and selected bibliography*. Westport and London, Greenwood Press 1997.

Barnett, Rubin. Dawud khan, Moḥammad, Ehsan Yarshater. *Encyclopædia Iranica*. (Online Ed, United States: Columbia University. Retrieved January 2008.

Barfield, Thomas. *Afghanistan A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press, 2012.

Bahgam, S, Mukhatari, W. *Study on Child marriage in Afghanistan*. Medica Mondiale, Cologne, May 2004.

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of One self*. Fordham University Press, 2009.

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. I. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell.1996.

Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. II. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 1997

Castells, Manuel. *End of Millennium, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. III. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell. 1998.

Castells, Manuel, Haraway, Donna. *Cyberculture Theorists*. Ed. David Bell, New York: Routledge, 2007.

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Vol. I. Blackwell, 1996.

Cook, John L. *Afghanistan: The Perfect Failure: A War Doomed By the Coalition's Strategies, Policies and Political Correctness*. Xlibris Corporation, 2012.

De Matos, Christine, Ward, Rowena. *Gender, Power, and Military Occupations: Asia Pacific and the Middle East since 1945*, Rutledge, 2012.

Downing, J. *Internationalizing media theory: Transition, power, culture: Reflections on media in Russia, Poland and Hungary, 1980-95*. London and Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications 1996.

Diamond, L. *Developing democracy toward consolidation*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Dupree, Louis. *Afghanistan*. Princeton University Press, 1973.

Elo, Satu, Kyngas, Helvi. *The Qualitative Content Analysis Process*, JAN Research Methodology, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Escobar, Arturo, Walter Greene, Ronald, & others. *Redeveloping Communication for Social Change; Theory, Practice, and Power*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000.

Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. Routledge, 2007.

Fuchs, Christian. *Internet and society (Social Theory in the information age)*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Feenberg, Andrew, Barney, Darin. *Community in the Digital Age: Philosophy and Practice*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

Flanders, Laura. *The W Effect: Bush's War on Women*. Feminist Press at CUNY, 2004.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*, W.W. Norton and Co, 1963.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books, 1984.

- Gittler, Alice. *Mapping women's global communications and networking*. In: Harcourt, Wendy. *Women@ Internet. Creating new cultures in Cyberspace*. London, Zed Books, 1999.
- Grace, J, Pain, Adam. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. AREU (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit), Synthesis Paper Series, Kabul. 2004.
- Gregorian, Vartan. *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*. Stanford University Press, 1969.
- Gross, P. *Entangled evolutions: Media and democratization in Eastern Europe*. Washington, D.C, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Runaway World*. London, Routledge, 2000.
- Habermas, Jürgen, McCarthy, Thomas. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the rationalization of society*. Beacon Press, 1985.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. MIT Press, 1991.
- Harcourt, Wendy. *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, zed books, London, 1999.
- Hashmat, K. *Afghanistan in the Course of History*. Gobar, Kabul, 2001.
- Hamelink, Cees J. *The Ethics of Cyberspace*. SAGE, 2000.
- Hewitt, Hugh. *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World*, Thomas Nelson Inc, 2006.
- H. Jones, Rodney. *Cyberspace and Physical Space: Attention Structures in Computer Mediated Communication*. 2010.
- Houdart-Blazy, Véronique, European Commission, *Age becomes her: older women in the European Union*, Information for Women, Directorate-General X, Information, Communication, Culture and Audiovisual Media, 1997.
- Hawley, John Stratton, Proudfoot, Wayne. *Introduction In Fundamentalism and Gender*, edited by John Hawley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Henry, Frances, Tator, Carol. *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-language Press*, University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Hunte, P. *Women and the Development Process in Afghanistan*. 1978. Project: Regional Training for Women, July 1978.

Hume, Ellen, *The Media Missionaries: American Support for Journalism Excellence and Press Freedom Around the Globe*, Knight Foundation, 2004.

Hartenberger, Lisa Anne. *Mediating Transition in Afghanistan, from 2001 to 2004*. University of Texas at Austin, 2005.

Huntington, S. P. *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

Joseph, Suad, Slyomovics, Susan. *Women and Power in the Middle East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

Katz, Mark N. *Lessons of the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*. Middle East Policy Council, 2016.

Karam, Azza, *Women; Islamisms and the State (Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt)*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998.

Kamal, Sarah. *Cultured men, uncultured women: an exploration of the gendered hierarchy of taste governing Afghan radio*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dept. of Comparative Media Studies, 2009.

Kazim, Seyed Abdullah, *Afghan women under the pressure of tradition and modernity*, Afghanistan: Maiwand, 2005.

Kellner, Douglas, Kahn, Richard. *Oppositional Politics and the Internet: A Critical/Reconstructive Approach*. UK: Berg, Chapter 37, Technopolitics and Oppositional Media, 2005.

Kellner, Douglas, *Media and Cultural Studies: Key works*. Meenakshi Gigi Durham, John Wiley & Sons, 2009.

Keddie, Nikki. *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*. Princeton University Press, 2012.

Khinjani, Shaima, *Afghan Women: A Guide to Understanding an Afghan Woman's Role in Her Society*, Defense Critical Language/Culture Program, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Center at the University of Montana, 2012.

Lau, M. *Afghanistan's Legal System and its Compatibility with International Human Rights Standards*. International Commission of Jurists, Geneva, 2002.

Lahr, J, Azerbaijani-Moghadam, S. *Afghanistan, education*, Report of the EC Rapid Reaction Mechanism Assessment Mission. European Commission Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit, Brussels, 2002.

Misdaq, Nabi. *Afghanistan: Political Frailty and External Interference*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.

MacDonald, Laura Zahra. *Islamic Feminisms*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2007.

Marsden, Peter. *The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan*. London: Zed Books, 2002.

Mansfield, David. *The economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production: Myth and Reality*. Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan, International Conference on the Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development, Cooperation. Munich, January 2002.

Merskin, Debra. *The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman*, The Howard Journal of Communications, School of Journalism & Communication, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, USA, 2010.

McQuail, D. *Mass communication theory: An introduction*, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1987.

Miller, Noah. *Media assistance post the Taliban regime and the implications for transforming the Afghan social system*. Unpublished Dissertation, London School of Economics, London, 2003.

Myfanwy, Franks, *Women and Revivalism in the West: Choosing 'Fundamentalism' in a Liberal Democracy*, London: Palgrave, 2001.

Mainwaring, S, O'Donnell, G., & Valenzuela, J. S. *Democratic consolidation: The new South American democracies in comparative perspective*. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

Nunes, Mark. *Cyberspaces of Everyday Life*, upress, 2006.

Noori, Hossein. *Wholeness of Islam*. Hosseinieh- Ershad, Tehran, 1986.

Ottis, Rain, Peeter, Lorents. *Cyberspace: Definition and Implications, Cooperative Cyber Defense*. Centre of Excellence. Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, Tallinn, Estonia, 2012.

O'Donnell, G, Schmitter, P. C. *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Olsen, S. *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan*. Khalil Ali Az-Zumar, Denmark, 1999.

Price, M. E., Thompson, M. *Forging peace: Intervention, human rights and the management of media space*. Edinburgh University Press 2002.

Reinharz, Shulamit, Davidman, Lynn. *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York and Oxford University press, 1992.

Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community. Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. MIT Press, 2000.

Rahim, T. An identity of strength: Personal thoughts on women in Afghanistan. International Rice Research Institute 84, 2002.

Rodzvilla, John. *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs are Changing Our Culture*, Peruses Publishing, 2002.

Ranciere, Jacques. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. 1st Edition, Verso, 2013.

Segre, Sandro . *Introduction to Habermas*. University Press of America, 2013.

Sherry, Turkle. *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of Internet*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996.



- Spender, Dale. *Nattering on the Net*. Melbourne, Spinifex Press, 1995.
- Schuler, Doug. *New community networks: Wired for Chang*. Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1996.
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. *Four theories of the press*. Urbana University of Illinois Press, 1956.
- Sundquist, Asebri Pocahontas. *The Fictional American Indian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Literature: A Study of Method*, Solum Forlag, 1987.
- Stewart, Rhea Talley. *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929: Faith, Hope and the British Empire*. Garden City, Doubleday and Company, 1973.
- Tofts, Darren. *Parallax: Essays on Art, Culture and Technology*, Craftsman House, 1999.
- Tomsen, Peter. *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*. Public Affairs, 2011.
- Torrenzano, Richard, Davis, Mark. *Digital Assassination: Protecting Your Reputation, Brand, or Business against Online Attacks*. Macmillan, 2011.
- Virilio, Paul. *The Art of the Motor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Wahab, Sh. *A Brief History of Afghanistan*. New York, 2007.
- Wahab, Shaista. *A brief history of Afghanistan*, Infobase Publishing, 2007.
- Wilding, Faith, Critical Art Ensemble. Notes on the Political Condition of Cyberfeminism, *jstor*, College Art Association, Vol. 57, No. 2, Web. summer, 1998. [www.jstor.org/stable/778008](http://www.jstor.org/stable/778008)

#### **Articles from Journals/Magazines:**

- Ahmed-Ghosh, Huma. "A History of Women in Afghanistan: Lessons Learnt for the Future or Yesterdays and Tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 4, No. May 2003. Print.

Bahadori, Atoosa. "The Social Participation of Muslim Women in Cyberspace in Contemporary Society." Associated Asia Research Foundation (AARF), International Research Journal of Human Resources and Social Sciences (IRJHRSS), Volume 1, Issue 5, Web. October 2014.

Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang, Shannon, Sarah E. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis", *Qualitative Health Research*, Sage Publications Vol. 15, No. 9, November 2005. Print.

Khalidi, Noor Ahmad. "Afghanistan: Demographic Consequences of War: 1978–87." *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1991. Print.

Rostami, E.P. "Women in Afghanistan: Passive Victims of the Burqa or Active Social Participants." *Development in Practice*, Vol 13, Issue 2-3, 2005. Print.

Baber, Zaheer, Khondker, Habibul. "Sites of resistance: Alternative websites and state-society relations." *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.53, Issue 1. Web. March 2002.

Bahdi, R. "Analyzing women's use of the Internet through the rights debate." *Chicago-Kent Law Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3, 2000. Print.

Batty, Michael. "Virtual Geography, Futures." *Elsevier Science*, Vol.29, No.4/5, 1997. Print.

Baker, Aryn. "Afghan Women and the Return of the Taliban." Time (magazine). Archived from the original on 2010-08-16. Retrieved 27 November 2010.

Carothers, Thomas. "The End of the Transition Paradigm". Journal of Democracy, Johns Hopkins University Press and the National Endowment for Democracy Vol 13, Issue1, 2002.Print.

Canfield, Robert L. "New Trends among the Hazaras: From 'The Amity of Wolves' to 'The Practice of Brotherhood.'" *Iranian Studies*, vol. 37, no.2. June 2004.Print.

Consalvo, Mia. "Cyberfeminism. Encyclopedia of New Media." Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2002, Web.4 Apr. 2012.  
[study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17\\_Cyberfeminism.pdf](http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17_Cyberfeminism.pdf)

Diamond, L, Morlino, L. "The quality of democracy: An overview". *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 15, Issue 4, 2004. Print.

Deibert, Ronald. "The Growing Dark Side of Cyberspace (...and What To Do About It)." *First Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*. Volume 1, Issue 2, Web. November 2012. <http://elibrary.law.psu.edu/jlia/vol1/iss2/3>.

Dubrovsky, Vitaly, Siegel, Jane, Kiesler, Sara and W McGuire, Timothy. "Group processes in computer-mediated." communication *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Volume 37, Issue 2, Web. April 1986.

Ford, N, D. Miller. "Gender differences in Internet perceptions and use." *Aslib Proceedings*, Vol. 48, No. 7/8, 1996. Print.

Giles, Keir, Hagestad II, William. "Divided by a Common Language: Cyber Definitions in Chinese, Russian and English." 5th International Conference on Cyber Conflict, *NATO CCD COE Publications*, Tallinn, Estonia, Web. 2013. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA479060>

Goulding, Anne, Spacey, Rachel. "Women and the Information Society: barriers and participation." Information Center Japanese Society for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (JSRPD). Web. 2007. <http://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/2007>

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper." International Monetary Fund, 2008. Print.

Kellner, Douglas. "Intellectuals, the new public spheres, and techno- politics." *Education & Information Studies*, University of California. Web.2011. [www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner)

Kerr-Wilson, Alice, Pain, Adam, "Three Villages in Alingar", Laghman: A Case Study of Rural Livelihoods. *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) Case Studies Series*, November 2003. Print.

Lough, Oliver and others. "Equal Rights, Unequal Opportunities (Women's Participation in Afghanistan's Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections)." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit Synthesis Paper*, UN entity for gender equality and the empowerment of Women in Afghanistan, Web. March 2012.

[www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Synthesis%20Paper%20copy.pdf](http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Synthesis%20Paper%20copy.pdf) [Accessed on 16/02/2015]

Moghadam, Valentine. "Nationalist Agendas and Women's Rights: Conflicts in Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century." New York: *Rutledge*, Lois A. (Ed). Feminist Nationalism. Web.1997.

[news.newamericamedia.org/news/mobile\\_cats.php?view=article&article\\_id=263](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/mobile_cats.php?view=article&article_id=263)

Mir Ghobar, Mohammad Gholam. "Afghanistan in the course of history." USA, Vol 1, *Communist Party of Afghanistan*, 1999. Print.

Majidi Gahrudi, Nasim. Azari Fatemeh. "Study the role of internet in elevation of women status." Research journal for women. Research Center of Humanity and cultural studies. First year. Vol II. Autumn and winter 2010.Print.

National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, "The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future." *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*, March 2005.Print.

Osman Tariq, Mohammad and others. "Afghanistan in 2012; A Survey of the Afghan People." *The Asia Foundation*. Web. 2012, [asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Surveybook2012web1.pdf](http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Surveybook2012web1.pdf)

Piela, Anna. 2010. "Muslim Women's Online Discussions of Gender Relations in Islam." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 3, September 2010. Print.

Peters, Gretchen. "A city trembles at ethnic fault line, war's front line." *The Christian Science Monitor*, vol. 93 issue 228. 22 October 2001. Print.

Phillips, Denise. "Hazaras' Persecution Worsens: Will the New Government show Leadership by lifting the Suspension on Afghani Asylum Claims?" Web.28 June 2010. [aph.org.au/hazaras-persecution](http://aph.org.au/hazaras-persecution)

Poulsen, Kevin. "Warspying' San Francisco." *SecurityFocus*. Web. 28 January 2004. [www.securityfocus.com/news/7931](http://www.securityfocus.com/news/7931)

Poulsen, Kevin. "Wi-Fi Honeypots a New Hacker Trap." *SecurityFocus*. Web. 29 July 2002. [www.securityfocus.com/news/552](http://www.securityfocus.com/news/552)

Singh, Iesha. "Exploring issues of violence within the recent context of the Hazarajat Afghanistan." *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 20, no 2, 2001. Print.

"Silence is Violence (End the Abuse of Women in Afghanistan)." *Human Rights*, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, Kabul, 8 July 2009. Print.

Silva, Adrina de Souza e. "From Cyber to Hybrid: Mobile technologies as interfaces of hybrid spaces." SAGE, North Carolina State University, Web. 2006. [sac.sagepub.com/content/9/3/261](http://sac.sagepub.com/content/9/3/261).

Gharji, Roya. "The Media Representation of Afghan Women in Post-Taliban Afghanistan: A content analysis of women's media in Afghanistan." *Department of Gender and Feminism*, University of Ottawa, 2015. Print.

Hyman, G. "Tilting at straw men". *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 13, Issue 3, 2002. Print.

Herrmann, Joshi. "How social media is empowering young Afghan women: The Facebook effect." *The Independent*, London, England 11 July 2015, [www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/how-social-media-is-empowering-young-afghan-women-the-facebook-effect-10375022.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/how-social-media-is-empowering-young-afghan-women-the-facebook-effect-10375022.html) [Accessed on 02/03//2015]

Hasrat, M.H, Pfefferle, Alexandra. "Violence Against Women In Afghanistan." *Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission*, Afghanistan, Web. 2012. [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/VAW\\_Final%20Draft-20.12](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/VAW_Final%20Draft-20.12)

Kaufmann, D, Kraay, A, Mastruzzi, M. "Governance matters III: Governance indicators for 1996-2002." *The World Bank*. Web. 30 June 2003.

[siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/govmatters3\\_wber](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/govmatters3_wber).

Price, M. E, Noll, B, Luce, D. "Mapping media assistance." *University of Oxford, Centre for Socio-Legal Studies*. Web. 1 February 2002.

[pcmlp.scoleg.ox.ac.uk/archive/mappingmediaassistance.pdf](http://pcmlp.scoleg.ox.ac.uk/archive/mappingmediaassistance.pdf)

Shah, H. "Modernization, marginalization, and emancipation: Toward a normative model of journalism and national development." *Communication Theory*, Vol 6, No 2, 1996.Print.

Taylor, M, Kent, M. "Media transitions in Bosnia: From propagandistic past to uncertain future." *Gazette*, Vol 62, Issue 5, 2000.Print.

"Telecommunication and Internet Policy." Final Working Draft, *Islamic Transitional Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Communications*. Web. November, 2003. [mcit.gov.af/en](http://mcit.gov.af/en)

"Word Communication and Information Report." *UNESCO Publishing*, M.Tawfik (chief editor), 1999-2000. Print.

Wark, McKenzie. "Cyberspace and the virtual public". Australian Humanities Review, Web. July 1999. [www.australianhumanitiesreview.org](http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org)

[www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=show\\_mesg&forum=389&topic\\_id=3655930&mesg\\_id=3656143](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=show_mesg&forum=389&topic_id=3655930&mesg_id=3656143)

Yaseen, Reehana. "Women in Afghanistan: A Historical Study." The International Asian Research Journal, issue 3, No 1. Web. 2015. [www.tiarj.com](http://www.tiarj.com)

Zabriskie, Phil. "Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders." National Geographic. February 2008.

### **Online Sources Websites/Weblogs:**

"Afghanistan, From Transition to Transformation II.", *worldbank.org*. The World Bank Report. July 2, 2013. [www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/SAR/afghanistan/SOM-WorldBank-July2013.pdf](http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/SAR/afghanistan/SOM-WorldBank-July2013.pdf) [Accessed on 28/02/2015]

Azizi, Makhfi. "Afghan Media." *mtholyoke.edu*. [www.mtholyoke.edu/~azizi22m/classweb/afgmedia/Radio.html](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~azizi22m/classweb/afgmedia/Radio.html) [Accessed on 03/03/2015]

“Afghanistan. OpenNet Initiative”, 8 May 2007, [opennet.net](http://opennet.net). Retrieved 16 January 2010. [opennet.net/research/profiles/afghanistan](http://opennet.net/research/profiles/afghanistan) [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

[afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw](http://afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw)[Accessed on 18/02/2015]

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and industries, [www.acci.org.af/da/](http://www.acci.org.af/da/) [Accessed on 14/02/2015]

“Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.” Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education. Strategic Plan- Program Five: Education Management. [moe.gov.af](http://moe.gov.af). July 2013 [moe.gov.af/en/page/2016](http://moe.gov.af/en/page/2016) [Accessed on 22/02/2015] & [/www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Information%20Mapping.pdf](http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Information%20Mapping.pdf)

Afghan Cultural House (ACH), [ach.af/about-us/general-information](http://ach.af/about-us/general-information) [Accessed on 28/01//2016]

[asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGWEP4Pagerfinal8.5x11](http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/AGWEP4Pagerfinal8.5x11) [Accessed on 21/02/2015]

Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14, [cso.gov.af/Content/files/Abstract%20Dari,%20Pashto%20%26%20English.pdf](http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Abstract%20Dari,%20Pashto%20%26%20English.pdf) [Accessed on 24/02/2015]

“Afghan Recovery Report, produced by the Institute of War and Peace Reporting”, November 5, 2003. <https://iwpr.net/> [Accessed on 26/02/2015]

[af. Shafaqna.com](http://af.shafaqna.com)[Accessed on 19/03//2015]

[aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/afghan-Farkhundeh-family-demands-justice-150402201946987.html](http://aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/afghan-Farkhundeh-family-demands-justice-150402201946987.html) [Accessed on 07/03//2015]

“Afghan Women's Activist, Noor Jahan Akbar”  
[www.refworld.org/docid/49dc4b201c.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/49dc4b201c.html) [Accessed on 22/03//2015]

Crime in Afghanistan, Afghanistan, “War and Rape.” [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com). 20 August 2013  
[www.facebook.com/notes/373644472765356/](https://www.facebook.com/notes/373644472765356/) [Accessed on 04/04//2015]

Demographic Yearbook, United Nation, [un.org](http://un.org). 2013.  
[unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2013.htm](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2013.htm) [Accessed on 12/02/2015]

Deutsche Welle, [www.thebobs.com/english](http://www.thebobs.com/english) [Accessed on 25/01//2016]

ezine (electronic magazine), [searchsoa.techtarget.com/definition/ezine](http://searchsoa.techtarget.com/definition/ezine) [Accessed on 29/10/2014]

[fa.rfi.fr/20150508](http://fa.rfi.fr/20150508) [Accessed on 25/03//2015]

Few, Robert, Kasaat, Jalal. “UNDP Re-equips Women and Youth Radio Stations in Kunduz for International Women’s Day.” Mar 8, 2016. [www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/03/08/](http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/03/08/)

Ghaderi, Taher, “Bachaposh girls in Afghanistan”, [bbc.com](http://bbc.com), 01 September 2011. [www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2011/09/110901\\_109\\_taher\\_afghan\\_girls\\_changed\\_to\\_boys.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/2011/09/110901_109_taher_afghan_girls_changed_to_boys.shtml) [Accessed on 22/04//2015]

Hardware and Software, [www.azwardriving.com](http://www.azwardriving.com) [Accessed on 21/10/2014]

Human Rights Watch. “Afghanistan: Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan.” 1 February 2001. [www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/afghanistan/](http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/afghanistan/) [Accessed on 06/02/2015]

Human Development Report 2015, [hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr\\_theme/country-notes/AFG](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/AFG) [Accessed on 23/02/2015]

Human Rights, Peace and Elections, [www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org](http://www.afghaninstituteoflearning.org) [Accessed on 05/03//2015]

Human Rights Watch, The Ten-Dollar Talib and Women’s Rights. 13 July 2010, [www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) [Accessed on 03/04//2015]

Internet World Stats, [www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm) [Accessed on 17/01//2016]

Increase of female staff in Kunduz media, April 3, 2012. [www.bokhdinews.af/social/8644](http://www.bokhdinews.af/social/8644)[Accessed on 09/03//2015]

“Iranian Bloggers find freedom online.”04 June 2005. [www.regimechangeiran.blogspot.in/2005/06/iranian-bloggers-find-freedom-online.html](http://www.regimechangeiran.blogspot.in/2005/06/iranian-bloggers-find-freedom-online.html) [Accessed on 12/01//2016]



Ismaeil, Darman. An autopsy of honor. July 22, 2012. Online spirit, [www.rawanonline.com/analysis-of-the-concept-of-ghairat-hm](http://www.rawanonline.com/analysis-of-the-concept-of-ghairat-hm) [Accessed on 01/04//2015]

Iraj, Shahbaz, “Zakieh Zakki”, [bbc.com](http://bbc.com), 06 Jun2007.

[www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/story/2007/06/070606\\_s-zakki-killed.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan/story/2007/06/070606_s-zakki-killed.shtml)  
[Accessed on 10/04//2015]

Imagh, Shafighollah, “Interview with Azita Rafaat”, Weblog. [www.besoshafiullah.blogfa.com/post/139](http://www.besoshafiullah.blogfa.com/post/139) [Accessed on 20/04//2015]

“Justice for Farkhunda.” The pathway to civilization, March 30, 2015.  
[www.rahemadanyat.com/index.php/beyond-news/item/1215](http://www.rahemadanyat.com/index.php/beyond-news/item/1215) [Accessed on 07/02//2016]

Journal of Information Warfare, Vol. 13 Issue 2  
[www.nsa.gov/public\\_info/speeches\\_testimonies/5may09\\_dir.shtml](http://www.nsa.gov/public_info/speeches_testimonies/5may09_dir.shtml) [Accessed on 13/11/2014]

Khademi, Kobra. Street Is my Right.16 October 2016.  
[fa.euronews.com/2015/10/16/interview-with-kubra-khademi](http://fa.euronews.com/2015/10/16/interview-with-kubra-khademi)

Khan Saif, Shadi. “What’s the future for women’s rights in Afghanistan?” 14 April 2015. [www.equaltimes.org/what-s-the-future-for-women-s#.V0yPvfl97IU](http://www.equaltimes.org/what-s-the-future-for-women-s#.V0yPvfl97IU) [Accessed on 14/05/2015]

Kaveh, Omid. “Honor Killing in Sweden.” 06 December 2005.  
[www.geocities.ws/goftmaan/GHtNAM.htm](http://www.geocities.ws/goftmaan/GHtNAM.htm) [Accessed on 02/04//2015]

Local Radio in Kunduz, 12 December, 2015. [da.azadiradio.com/a/27604262.html](http://da.azadiradio.com/a/27604262.html)  
[Accessed on 07/01//2016]

[mcn.gov.af/fa/page/1836](http://mcn.gov.af/fa/page/1836) [Accessed on 05/03//2015]

Nasih, Najibollah, “A report about rape in Afghanistan”, 09 June 2013.

[bokhdinews.af/human-rights/13903](http://bokhdinews.af/human-rights/13903) [Accessed on 06/04//2015]

National Assembly (Afghanistan), [wj.parliament.af/](http://wj.parliament.af/)[Accessed on 10/11/2016]

National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction, “the Role of Women in Afghanistan’s Future.” Afghanistan Gender Report March 2005. [www.scribd.com/document/78633268/Afghanistan-Gender-Report](http://www.scribd.com/document/78633268/Afghanistan-Gender-Report) [Accessed on 26/02/2015]

National Post, “Afghan women carry coffin of 27-year-old woman beaten to death by mob over false reports she burned a Qur’an”.  
[news.nationalpost.com/news/world/afghani-women-carry-coffin-of-27-year-old-woman-beaten-to-death-by-mob-over-false-reports-she-burned-a-quran](http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/afghani-women-carry-coffin-of-27-year-old-woman-beaten-to-death-by-mob-over-false-reports-she-burned-a-quran) [Accessed on 13/03/2015]

National Geographic, “Afghan Women.” December 2010.  
[ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/afghan-women/rubin-text](http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2010/12/afghan-women/rubin-text) [Accessed on 23/03/2015]

“Obama’s War: US Involvement in Afghanistan, Past, Present & Future.”  
[www.thebellforum.com/showthread.php?t=9543&page=2](http://www.thebellforum.com/showthread.php?t=9543&page=2) [Accessed on 10/02/2015]

[openasia.org/about](http://openasia.org/about) [Accessed on 20/01/2016]

[paywast.af/about](http://paywast.af/about) [Accessed on 07/11/2014]

Razaagh, Hamed. “Employment situation of women in Afghanistan.” *jobportal.ir*. 30 April 2008. [www.jobportal.ir/s3/Default.aspx?ID=9\\_2\\_7413\\_9\\_514](http://www.jobportal.ir/s3/Default.aspx?ID=9_2_7413_9_514) [Accessed on 15/02/2015]

Rape in Badghis, [www.istaqlal.com/?p=12403](http://www.istaqlal.com/?p=12403) [Accessed on 26/03/2015]

Report of Union nation, July 13, 2010, [www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/13/ten-dollar-talib-and-womens-rights/afghan-women-and-risks-reintegration-](http://www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/13/ten-dollar-talib-and-womens-rights/afghan-women-and-risks-reintegration-) [Accessed on 02/04/2015]

Soheili, Farkhunda after one year, March 16, 2016. [8am.af/1394/12/26/justice-farkhonde-afghanistan-kabul/](http://8am.af/1394/12/26/justice-farkhonde-afghanistan-kabul/) [Accessed on 18/03/2016]

Statement by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, 07 September 2015. [www.aihrc.org.af/home/press\\_release/5119](http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press_release/5119) [Accessed on 15/10/2015]

Search engine, [www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/search\\_engine.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/search_engine.html) [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

Shirmohammadi, Reza, Hassan, Zarghuna, “A woman could change the life of so many women.” *dw.com*. Jun 2015. [www.dw.com/fa-af/18514367](http://www.dw.com/fa-af/18514367). [Accessed on 02/03/2015]

Soraya, Sobhrang, “Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.” *bbc.co.uk*. 8 October 2012. [www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/10/121008\\_k02-afg-women-violences.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2012/10/121008_k02-afg-women-violences.shtml) [Accessed on 05/04/2015]

Trescott, Jacqueline. “What bell hooks had to say about the state of feminism in 1999”, Feb1999.

The Office of Transition Initiatives OTI, “USAID Afghanistan field report Afghanistan.” Kabul, *usaid.gov*. 15 August 2005. [pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pdacf383](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pdacf383) [Accessed on 04/03/2015]

“The Constitution of Afghanistan 2003-4.” Afghanistan, Kabul. *aihrc.org.af*. 2003. [www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Laws/afghan\\_constituion\\_\(1\).pdf](http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Laws/afghan_constituion_(1).pdf) [Accessed on 15/02/2015]

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), [reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/new-start-afghanistans-education-sector](http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/new-start-afghanistans-education-sector) [Accessed on 25/02/2015]

The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology in Afghanistan [www.mcit.gov.af/en](http://www.mcit.gov.af/en) [Accessed on 16/01/2016]

The U.S. Embassy, [kabul.usembassy.gov/pr-032515a.html](http://kabul.usembassy.gov/pr-032515a.html) [Accessed on 12/03/2015]

UN news Centre, [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU) [Accessed on 24/03/2015]

UN news Centre, [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46685#.V1cziPI97IU) [Accessed on 24/03/2015]

[unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport\\_1.html](http://unesco.org/wef/countryreports/afghanistan/rapport_1.html) [Accessed on 26/02/2015]

“Violence against Women Primary Database Report.” UNIFEM Afghanistan. *unifem.org*. March 2008.

[afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw\\_primary%20database%20report\\_EN.pdf](http://afghanistan.unifem.org/docs/pubs/08/evaw_primary%20database%20report_EN.pdf).  
[Accessed on 19/02/2015]

[www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/1999/02/09/what-bell-hooks-had-to-say-about-the-state-of-feminism-in-1999/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/1999/02/09/what-bell-hooks-had-to-say-about-the-state-of-feminism-in-1999/) [Accessed on 24/10/2014]

[www.instpundit.com](http://www.instpundit.com) [Accessed on 02/11/2014]

[www. Internationalanswer.org](http://www.Internationalanswer.org) [Accessed on 09/11/2014]

[www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org) [Accessed on 08/11/2014]

[mcit.gov.af/Content/files](http://mcit.gov.af/Content/files) [Accessed on 05/11/2014]

[www.bachaposh.com](http://www.bachaposh.com) [Accessed on 25/04//2015]

[www.unicef.org/afghanistan/health\\_nutrition](http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/health_nutrition) [Accessed on 11/02/2015]

“Women’s Empowerment Programs in Afghanistan.” The Asia Foundation Report, *asiafoundation.org*. November 2011.

[www.afghanstangov.org/resources/itsa/ig-april/NDF\\_Revised\\_Draft.pdf](http://www.afghanstangov.org/resources/itsa/ig-april/NDF_Revised_Draft.pdf),  
2002[Accessed on 25/02/2015]

[www.blogsky.com/](http://www.blogsky.com/) [Accessed on 13/01//2016]

[www.digiato.com/article/2015/05/10](http://www.digiato.com/article/2015/05/10) [Accessed on 14/01//2016]

“Communications in Afghanistan.”

[www.afghanistan-culture.com/communications.html](http://www.afghanistan-culture.com/communications.html) [Accessed on 15/01//2016]

[www.womenintechology.org](http://www.womenintechology.org) [Accessed on 18/01//2016]

[www.afghanpenlog.com/](http://www.afghanpenlog.com/) [Accessed on 19/01//2016]

[www.youngwomenforchange.org](http://www.youngwomenforchange.org) [Accessed on 21/01//2016]

[www.8mars.com/8MARS\\_KARZAR\\_ZANAN/index.php?p=1](http://www.8mars.com/8MARS_KARZAR_ZANAN/index.php?p=1) [Accessed on  
21/01//2016]

[www.mediaaresearch. blogfa.com](http://www.mediaaresearch.blogfa.com) [Accessed on 23/01//2016]

weblogpagouh. Parsiblog.com/posts/6/ [Accessed on 24/01//2016]

www.tasnim-ins.com/ [Accessed on 26/01//2016]

www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-18349639 [Accessed on 09/03//2015]

www.lib.utexas.edu [Accessed on 08/03//2015]

www.unesco.org/webworld/com\_media/development [Accessed on 04/03//2015]

www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia/term/42214/e-book [Accessed on 26/10/2014]

www.socialbakers.com [Accessed on 22/10/2014]

Web Log (Blog), www.techopedia.com/definition/5207/web-log-blog [Accessed on 25/10/2014]

www.unitedforpeace.org [Accessed on 10/11/2014]

www.usaid.gov/sites [Accessed on 06/11/2014]

www.avapress.com/vdcaien6049nuy1.k5k4.html [Accessed on 06/02//2016]

www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh-woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?\_r=0 [Accessed on 08/03//2015]

www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/asia/Farkhundeh -woman-killed-in-kabul-transformed-from-pariah-to-martyr.html?\_r=0 [Accessed on 08/03//2015]

www.nbcnews.com/news/world/afghanistan-buries-Farkhundeh -woman-beaten-set-alight-mob-n328011 [Accessed on 10/03//2015]

www.afghanvoice.org.uk/avfm/inpictures.php?picture=56&lang=eng [Accessed on 21/03//2015]

www.expressen.se/nyheter/abbas-innan-mordet-jag-ar-av-folket---hon-ar-religios-overklass/ [Accessed on 29/03//2015]

Women for Women International, “Stronger Women, Stronger Nations.” womenforwomen.org. Afghanistan Report 49, 2009. www.womenforwomen.org [Accessed on 03/02/2015]

World Bank report, "Afghanistan - Country gender assessment: national reconstruction and poverty reduction - the role of women in Afghanistan's future.documents.worldbank.org" Report Number 35606, Volume No 1, Washington DC, US, 2005/03/01. [www.documents.worldbank.org/](http://www.documents.worldbank.org/) [Accessed on 05/02/2015]

Akbar, Noorjahan. Hamishe bi bi Mahroo, Weblog. [noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com](http://noorjahanakbar.wordpress.com) [Accessed on 06/03/2015]

Akbar, Sharzad. Weblog. [www.khabarnama.net/blog/author/shahrzad/](http://www.khabarnama.net/blog/author/shahrzad/) [Accessed on 04/02/2016]

Bakhtari, Manizha, Weblog. [shaharnosh.blogfa.com](http://shaharnosh.blogfa.com) [Accessed on 07/03/2015]

Mohammadi, Batool. Weblog. [www.batoolmohammadi.blogspot.in/2015/05/blog-post.html](http://www.batoolmohammadi.blogspot.in/2015/05/blog-post.html) [Accessed on 27/03/2015]

Rezaie, Amazon. Weblog. [amasangari.Wordpress.com](http://amasangari.Wordpress.com) [Accessed on 12/07/2014]

Samar, Sima. Weblog. [drsimasamar.blogspot.in](http://drsimasamar.blogspot.in) [Accessed on 30/03/2015]

Salam, Where is raed? Weblog. [dear\\_raed.blogspot.in](http://dear_raed.blogspot.in) [Accessed on 24/10/2014]

Tavakoli, Zahra. "For All of Us." Weblog.

[soode61.wordpress.com/2015/04](http://soode61.wordpress.com/2015/04) [Accessed on 10/06/2015]

Weblog, [www.faryad.blogfa.com](http://www.faryad.blogfa.com) [Accessed on 22/01/2016]

Weblog. [www.warasgirl.Persianblog.ir/](http://www.warasgirl.Persianblog.ir/) [Accessed on 27/01/2016]

Weblog. [afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.in/p/about-us.html](http://afghanpenlog-en.blogspot.in/p/about-us.html) [Accessed on 02/02/2016]

Weblog. [www.afghanpenlog.com/p/blog-page.html](http://www.afghanpenlog.com/p/blog-page.html) [Accessed on 03/02/2016]

Weblog. [farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com/](http://farzaneh-afg.blogfa.com/) [Accessed on 14/07/2014]

Weblog. [saqiya.blogfa.com/](http://saqiya.blogfa.com/) [Accessed on 15/07/2014]

Weblog. [vebbikas.blogfa.com/post-20.aspx](http://vebbikas.blogfa.com/post-20.aspx) [Accessed on 28/03/2015]

Yousufzada, Munera. Weblog. [shiddokht.blogspot.in/](http://shiddokht.blogspot.in/) [Accessed on 11/07/2014]

Soode, "Elimination of Violence against Women." *facebook.com* 26 November 2014.  
[facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4825799899553&set=a.1614513779407.50357.1733210108&type=3&theater&notif\\_t=like&notif\\_id=1480181724339972](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4825799899553&set=a.1614513779407.50357.1733210108&type=3&theater&notif_t=like&notif_id=1480181724339972)

Akbari, Farzana. "Being an Afghan woman on Facebook." *facebook.com*. 30 August 2015.

[www.facebook.com/freewomenwriters/photos/a.610717822306285.1073741828.605706749474059/1004146146296782/?type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/freewomenwriters/photos/a.610717822306285.1073741828.605706749474059/1004146146296782/?type=3&theater)

Young Women for Change, *youtube.com*.

[www.youtube.com/user/YOUNGWOMEN4CHANGE](https://www.youtube.com/user/YOUNGWOMEN4CHANGE) (YWoF) [Accessed on 08/04//2015]

Rafaat, Azita, Bachaposh, *youtube.com*, 26 December 2012.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=73RYUIiScQw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73RYUIiScQw) [Accessed on 23/04//2015]

### **Personal interview:**

Personal interview located in USA, Batool Mohammadi, on Skype, 18 November 2013 & 27 September 2014 & 22 November 2014. [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Munera, 13 April 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in USA, Noorjahan Akbar, 07 May 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Soode, on Skype, 11 July 2014. [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Mazar-i-Sharif, Elaheh, on Skype, 12 July 2014. [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Sweden, Amazon Rezaie, 22 October 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Sakina Mohammadi, 26 October 2014, on Skype [Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Kobra Khademi, 12 February 2015, on Skype  
[Recorded]

Personal interview located in Kabul, Sahar, 18 March 2015, on Skype [Recorded]

**Note:**

\*All Afghan women weblogs in this research are translated from Dari and Persian into English by the author.



## **Appendix I**

**Table 1.** Education and Illiteracy in Afghanistan

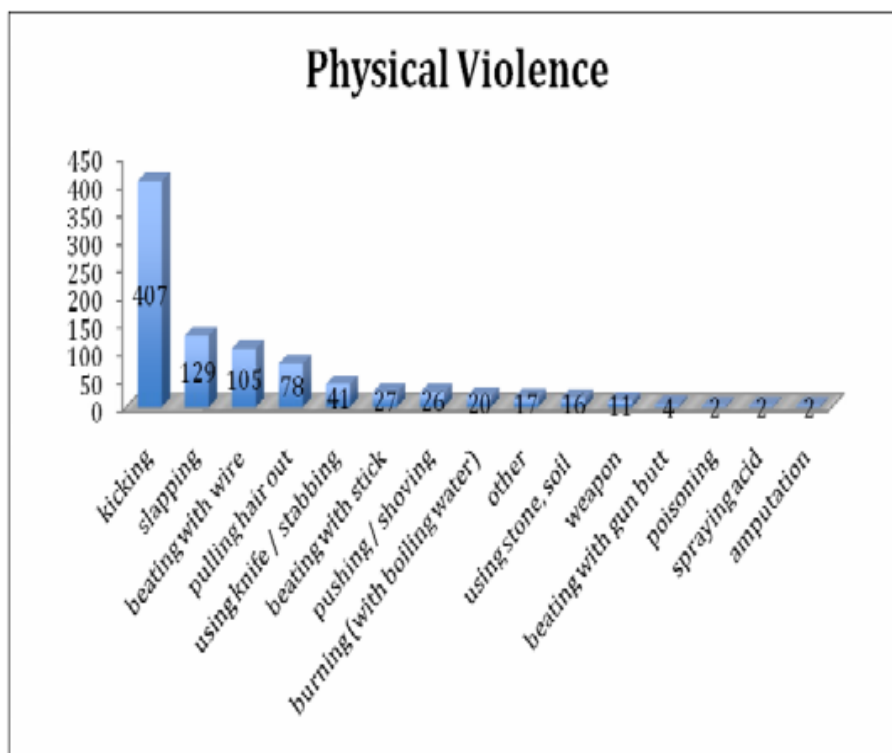
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
	<b>1462</b>	<b>4828</b>
<b>Base: All Respondents 6290</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Never went to school</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Primary school, incomplete (Classes 1to 5)</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Primary school, complete (Finished Classes 6)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Secondary school, incomplete (Classes 7 to 8)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Secondary school, complete (Finished Classes 9)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>High School (Classes 10 to 12)</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>University education or above</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Refused</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Don't Know</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>

**Source:** The Asia foundation, 2012 survey in Kabul, Respondents 6290.

asiafoundation.org

## Appendix II

**Table 2.** Physical Violence

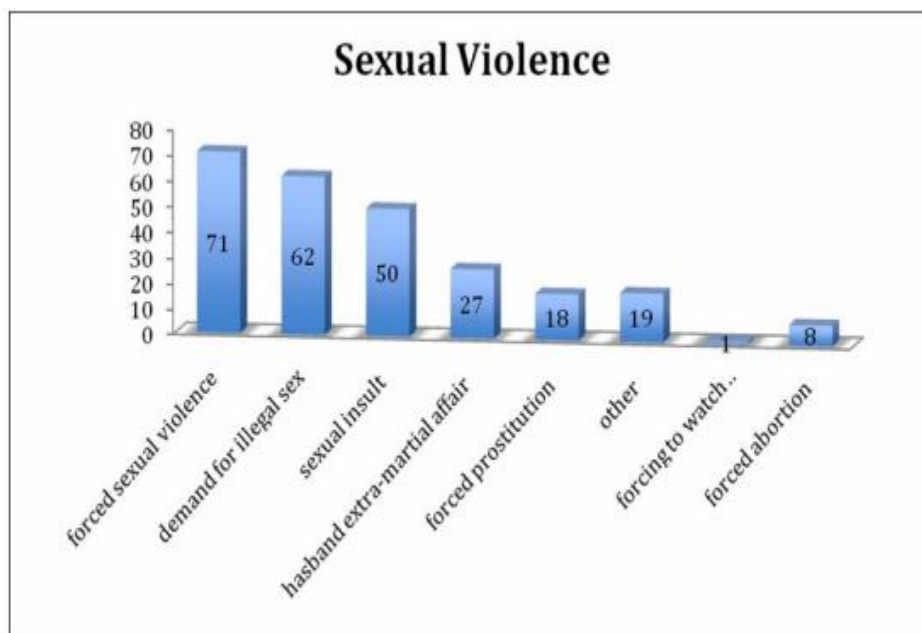


**Source:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2012.

[www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

### **Appendix III**

**Table 3.** Sexual Violence



**Source:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2012.

[www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

## **Appendix IV**

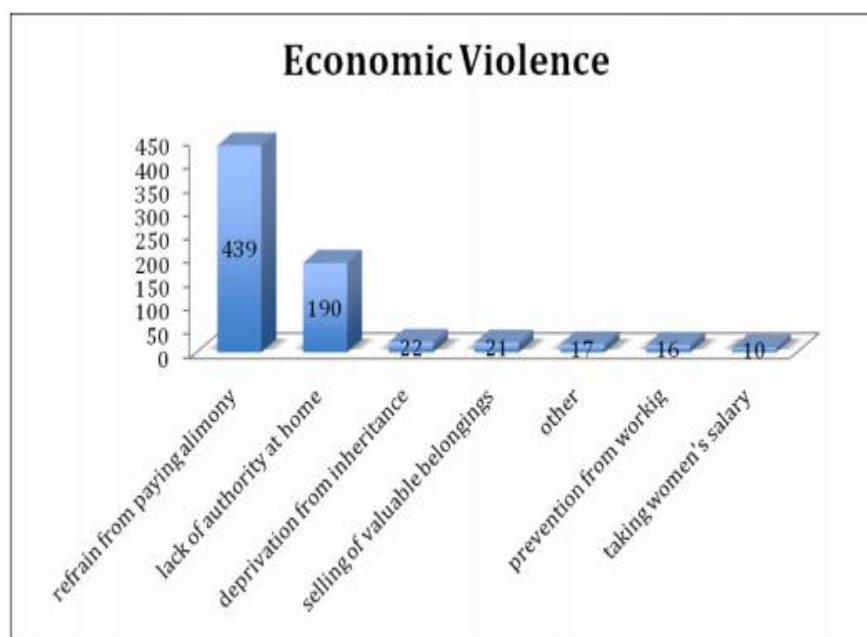
**Table 4.** Verbal & Psychological Violence

<b>Verbal &amp; Psychological Violence Reported by the <i>AIHRC</i></b>	<b>Cases</b>
<b>Insulting &amp; Humiliating</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Condemning Women's personality or Behavior</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Threats to Kill</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Threats to Divorce &amp; Taking the Child</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Threats to Abandon</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Insulting for not having Child</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Threats to expulse from Home</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Threats to remarry or take another Wife</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Playing a prank or Mocking</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Threats to rape her Relatives</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Insulting for not having more Children</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other cases of verbal and psychological violence</b>	<b>7</b>

**Source:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2012. Total case 808. [www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

## Appendix V

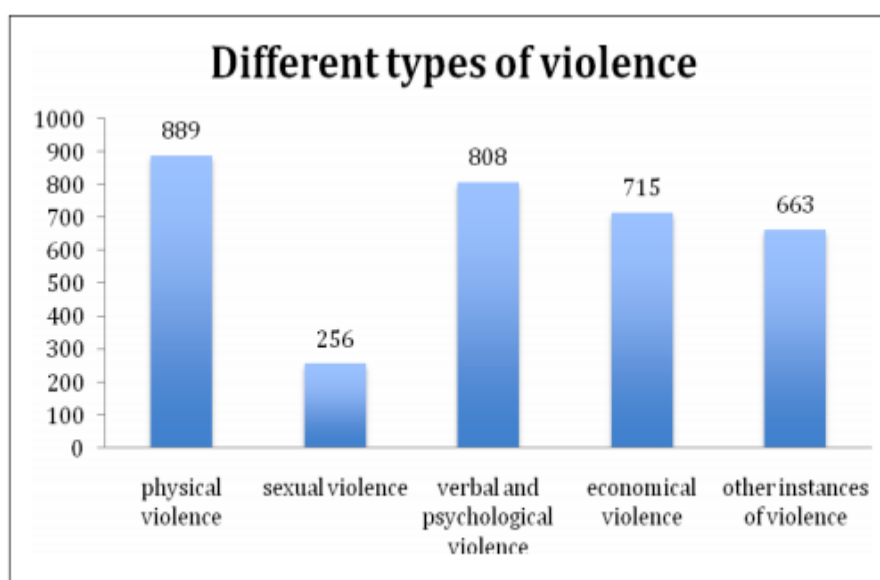
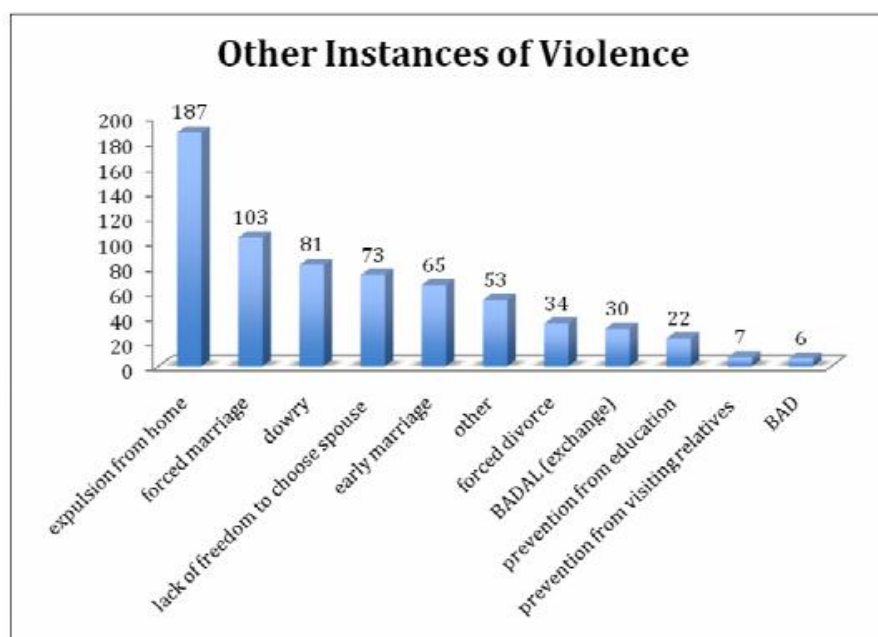
**Table 5.** Economic Violence



**Source:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2012.  
[www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

## Appendix VI

**Table 6.** Other Instances of Violence



**Source:** Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), 2012.  
[www.aihrc.org.af](http://www.aihrc.org.af)

## **Appendix VII**

**Table 7.** Comparing salary between women, Men and Children

<b>Objects</b>	<b>Making Handicrafts (Weaving) Wages (Per day)</b>	<b>Gathering wood Fetches Wages (Per day)</b>	<b>Domestic Work Wages (Per day)</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>100 % = 1.17\$- US</b>	<b>100% = 1.54\$- US</b>	<b>100% = ~1.81\$ - US</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>53 % = 0.62\$- US</b>	<b>53 % = 0.81\$- US</b>	<b>28%= 0.50 \$- US</b>
<b>Children</b>	<b>NIL</b>	<b>NIL</b>	<b>41%= 0.74\$-US</b>

**Source:** Afghanistan Gender Report. The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) March 2005. [www.scribd.com](http://www.scribd.com)

## **Appendix VIII**

**Table 8.** Media and Internet Users in Afghanistan

<b>Media Users</b>	<b>Urban (%)</b>	<b>Rural (%)</b>
<b>Radio</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Mobile Phone</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>TV set</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Computer</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Fixed phone line</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>

### **ASIA INTERNET USE, POPULATION DATA AND FACEBOOK STATISTICS- JUNE 106**

<b>ASIA</b>	<b>Population (2016-Est)</b>	<b>Internet User (Years 2000)</b>	<b>Internet user 30-June- 2016</b>	<b>Penetration (%population n)</b>	<b>Users % Asia</b>	<b>Facebook (30-June- 2016)</b>
<b>Afghanistan</b>	<b>33,332,025</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>4,005,414</b>	<b>12.0 %</b>	<b>0.2 %</b>	<b>2,600,000</b>

**Source:** [Internetworldstates.com/stats3.htm](http://Internetworldstates.com/stats3.htm)



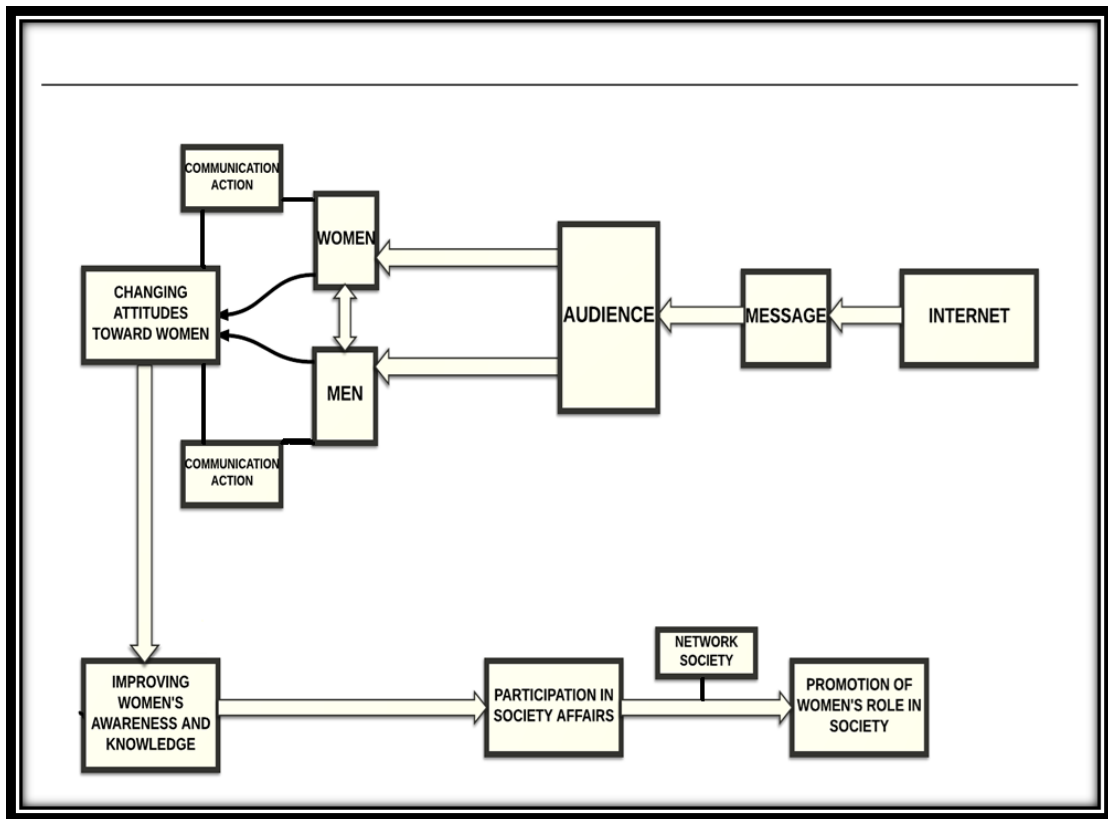
## Appendix IX

**Image 1-2.** Sahar Gul and Kabul's first women only Internet café



**Sources:** [www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com) - [www.asafeworldforwomen.org](http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org)

## Appendix X



**Table 9.** This table shows how women in Afghanistan have created place for themselves through the use of internet and blogging.

## Appendix XI

**Image 3.** Farkhunda Malikzada, Issue3: Stoning and burning



**Source:** [www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org)



## Appendix XII

**Image 4.** Women held up Farkhunda coffin and gave her the proper burial



**Source:** [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

### **Appendix XIII**

**Image 5.** Planted a tree at the point where she was set on fire and called it the  
“Tree of Farkhunda”



**Source:** [www.dawn.com](http://www.dawn.com)



## Appendix XIV

**Image 6.** “Justice for Farkhunda”



**Source:** [www.dawn.com](http://www.dawn.com). The protests were so extensive around the Afghanistan that even some groups formed in objections of excessive demands following up the murder in different parts of the world

## Appendix XV

**Image 7.** Mutilation Aisha, 2009



Source: [lifeexamples.blogspot.in](http://lifeexamples.blogspot.in)

## Appendix XVI

**Image 8.** Aisha was featured on the August 2010 cover of Time magazine



**Source:** thehealthculture.com



## Appendix XVII

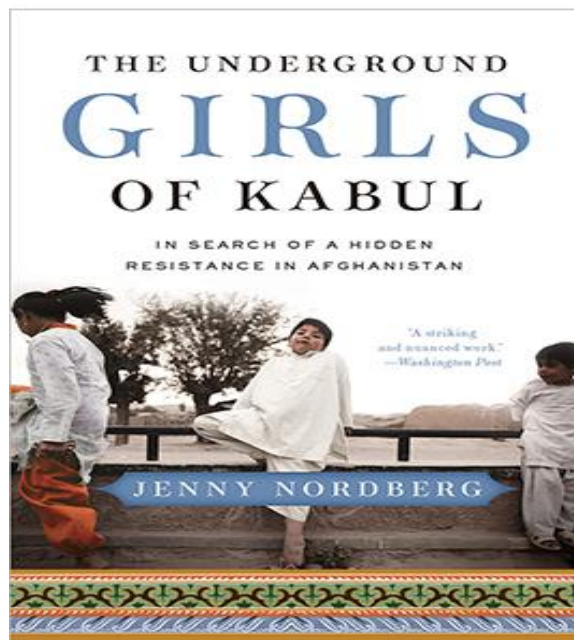
**Image 9.** Kobra Khademi who performed an act called ‘Armor’ in Kabul, 2015.



**Source:** feminist.org

## Appendix XVIII

**Image 10.** Bacha posh, Mehran (Mehrnoush), (Jenny Nordberg Book) 2014



Source: bachaposh.com

## Appendix XXIX

### Map of Afghanistan



Source: [www.mapsofworld.com](http://www.mapsofworld.com)