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Taliban and Education in Afghanistan: Relevance of Bacha Khan's Legacy

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Afghanistan has been experiencing violent, armed conflict for over four decades now, which apart from inflicting human and material losses has left a deep social and psychological impact on the Afghan society. It has given rise to a "new normal," which is, a growing culture of violence at both the political as well as inter-personal and community levels. Moreover, this is also mirrored amongst others, notably in the educational curriculum of the country that ironically over years of conflict was moulded with the intention of condoning or justifying the systematic use of violence. The immense significance attached to the educational system to establish "ideological hegemony" can be gauged from the fact that regime changes were accompanied by drastic curricular changes, while the Islamist resistance opened several schools for Afghan refugees in Peshawar and in territories controlled by it in years of conflict.

This pattern appears to be unfolding yet again with the Taliban's return to power on 15 August 2021, with many of the fragile gains made in the field of education between 2001 and 2021 being steadily reversed. The Taliban have appointed mullahs to positions of leadership, sought to tinker with the curriculum to align it with their narrow interpretation of Islam, and have denied women access to education beyond grade six. Afghanistan has become the only country in the world to deny women access to education, defying calls by Islamic theologians and leaders to reverse the ban. These developments show that the Taliban's opinion on Islamic teachings and

Sharia law is inaccurate and it yet again drives home the challenge posed by the radicalisation of youth through educational curriculum.

The paper draws upon the legacy of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the first Muslim and Pashtun who became an icon for practicing non-violence and championing the cause of education for girls, and argues that a credible counter-discourse to the Taliban must be rooted in the local socio-cultural milieu.

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan or Badshah Khan or Bacha Khan, also famously known as the Frontier Gandhi and *Fakhr-e-Afghan* (Pride of the Afghans), believed that Islam preaches gender equality, peaceful coexistence with other faiths, and stands for social progress. In sharp contrast to it, the Taliban project a totally different version of Islam based on conservative ideas of banning women from work, education, and social mobility. The stark disparity between these two worldviews appears more striking since Bacha Khan came from the same ethnic background as bulk of the Taliban's core leadership.

Education System in Afghanistan

Up to the nineteenth-century, Afghanistan was a centre of developed civilisation, literature, and science in the region. The country produced great scholars and philosophers, such as, Ibn Sina Balkhi, Maulana Jalaludin Rumi, Khushal Khan Khatak, etc. These scholars used a combination of secular and religious expertise to promote learning. As observed by Mansory, 'Islam has been dominating most parts of the country for 1,200 years or more, which implied that Islamic education has reached great parts of the population, also rural people living in remote areas.'[1] Madrasas emerged as centres of religious learning and were promoted by communities and religious leaders through private funding.

Soon after Afghanistan got its independence in 1919, King Amanullah Khan paid special attention to education. He was in favour of supporting modern and secular education throughout the country, and for the first time sent female students abroad for studying. The king's reforms were considered one of the crucial developments in the education system in Afghanistan. When the king was overthrown by the conservative mullahs, he was replaced by Habibullah Kalakani in 1929. The first step Kalakani took was to ban the female education in the country. He also called back the female students who were sent abroad for education.[2] It was for the first time in the history of the country when women were not allowed to get education.

Following Kalakani's brief rule of nine months, Amanullah's reforms were continued by his successor, King Nadir Shah, in 1930. As noted by

Samady, 'A new constitution, adopted in 1931, made primary schooling compulsory for all Afghans, and placed all modern educational institutions under the control of the State. Education at all levels—primary till tertiary—was provided for free for all Afghans.'[3] Therefore, the 1930s is considered the era of educational reforms in terms of building schools in all provinces and unifying the educational system of the country by incorporating madrasas in the formal education system.

However, throughout history, education system in Afghanistan relied on foreign financial aid, mainly from Germany, France, United States (US), and the Soviet Union's financial aids applied through countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia during the periods of conflict. This dependency shaped Afghanistan's education curriculum to favour the type of education each foreign donor country supported. For instance, the April 1978 coup d'état, which was followed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, ushered in a period of "Sovietisation" of Afghanistan, including its education system. But 'the Marxist ideology...seems to have little effect either on the village people in the provinces, who are deeply rooted in their popular and religious traditions, or on the highly educated intellectuals, who have a good knowledge of Western culture.'[4] As a result, modern secular education faced resistance in the rural areas where people feared for their traditions and religious beliefs under an atheistic communist ideology.

In the first few years of the Soviet invasion, it was said that approximately six million people fled the country, more than a million were killed, and the enrolment in educational institutions fell from over a million in 1979 to around 700,000 pupils in 1985.[5] Among the people who left the country, the highly-educated Afghans mostly went to the West whereas the illiterate and poor ones became refugees in Pakistan and Iran, where often radical forms of religious education were provided for their children to promote Jihad against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

In 1992, three years after the withdrawal of the Soviet Army, the last communist government in Kabul was replaced by a Peshawar-based coalition of seven Afghan mujahideen parties that proclaimed Afghanistan as an "Islamic Republic" for the first time in its history. The new government faced an acute lack of resources, insecurity, and a unified curriculum for education. Moreover, in an ideologically charged environment, a high degree of external meddling in the country's affairs, priority was given not merely to religious education but one favouring a radical interpretation of the faith, largely not known to Afghans.

The undermining of the education system was facilitated by the anarchy and chaos that dominated the Afghan landscape in the 1990s. During the first

Taliban rule (1996–2001), women were strictly denied the right to education and work. However, there were some underground schools that tried to provide education to the young girls. Even after the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 and the establishment of a democratic system in 2004, schools and teachers continued to be targeted. In 2007, about 226 schools were burned down and 110 teachers assassinated.[6]

Politicisation of Education in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's political instability has damaged social constructs and lifestyles. The education system has always been manipulated by foreign donors and local rulers. That is why the dependency of the country's education sector on foreign aid opened doors for various political agendas to be propagated among young minds. Initially Sovietisation and then Islamisation affected the educational system and encouraged violence and use of children as instruments to win the war.

The communist governments considered education 'an important instrument for fostering the economic and social transformation of Afghanistan. Its educational policies, adopted in 1980 with the assistance of Soviet advisors, aimed at promoting literacy and basic education and the development of vocational training and higher education.'[7] However, the communists, as Yusuf Elmi believes, created an environment of distrust and lack of self-confidence among the people and the students. For instance, students were not allowed to speak against the government and air their grievances.

Though Kabul University had been a centre of political activity, during the initial years of communist rule, social gatherings and informal meetings among the students to exchange ideas had disappeared. Instead, politics became an important part of the student life. Students conducted violent demonstrations against the Soviets and disliked their compatriots who supported the Soviets.[8] The students were divided into two categories, ones who favoured the regime and the others who were in opposition.

On the other hand, Olivier Roy believes that the Soviets aimed to create a young generation alien to the past traditional Afghan society. They wanted the youth to adopt the modern "Soviet way of life," not necessarily politically but socially. Further, he mentions, the Soviets not only changed the curriculum but also the structure of educational institutions. He defines "Sovietisation" of Afghanistan as an effort to make the country look like a "Soviet Muslim Republic," focusing on urban society and youth, which was carried 'through institutions, educations and ideology'.[9]

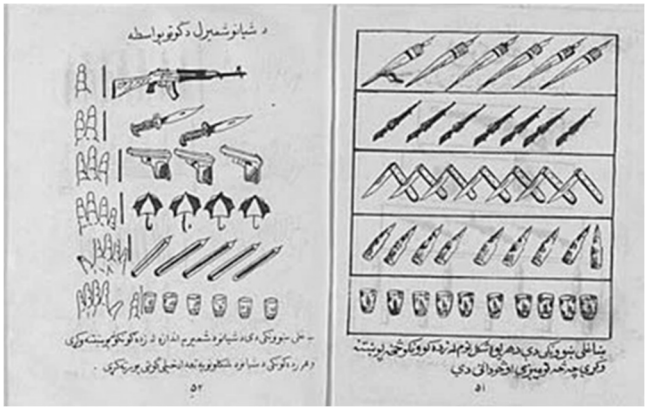
The French model of education system was replaced with the Soviet model and young students were sent for education to the Soviet Union, East Germany, and India. The amendments took place notably in the middle schools, colleges and universities where Russian language became mandatory and religious education was replaced with new subjects such as 'historical materials, dialectical materialism, and history of working-class movement'.[10] Though, they also built kindergartens (for working women's kids) and nurseries (for orphans), which was a new concept for the Afghan education system. Finally, in the whole process, orphans became more Sovietised than others as they lacked parental care and family protection, rendering them more vulnerable to propaganda.

Additionally, since Sovietisation took place mostly in the cities, the growing gap between rural and urban people not only divided Afghan society but also increased resistance against the communist regime. The rural population that lived in total isolation had no access to governmental facilities and thus was influenced by the mujahideen to stand against the communists who were projected as a threat to their religious beliefs and social norms. Therefore, many families left the country as they did not want to live under the communist rule, nor did they wish to pursue jihad against them. Among all, poorer families' children and youth who immigrated to Iran and Pakistan have suffered the most because in refugee camps they neither had access to food, housing, and health nor to proper education. The children in refugee camps in Pakistan attended schools run by international organisations that provided traditional and religious education. According to Samady, '…The curricula of these schools have varied in quality and scope and have not been based on a unifying national vision for Afghan society and culture, as a reaction to communist ideology.'[11]

To further strengthen the resistance against the Soviets, the mujahideen parties in Iran and Pakistan ignored the importance of national agenda in the schooling at refugee camps and instead emphasised the religious dimension of education. Sayyid Bahaouddin Majrooh states that the mujahedeen parties either 're-opened the old religious Madrasas' or built 'institutions to train militants for revolutionary Islam' that were also funded by Saudi Arabia. Also, 'the host country Pakistan having been found in the name of Islam, officially undergoing the process of Islamization and also having had trouble since its creation with Afghanistan' was not keen to promote Afghan national education.[12] Moreover, Pakistan hoped to create a new breed of Islamists ruling Kabul who would be friendly to Pakistan considering Islamic affinity and give up the demand for Pashtunistan and be less close to rival India.

In fact, Islamisation as a response to communism was funded by the West, particularly the US, to be undertaken in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. Afghan children were taught in the schools to kill infidels and fight for the country's freedom from un-Islamic rulers. In other words, 'in the twilight of the Cold War the US spent millions of dollars to supply Afghan school children with textbooks filled with violent images and militant Islamic teachings.'[13] These books, published in the Nebraska University at Omaha in US, were used for ideological propaganda. Pages from one such book taught to children in Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan are given below.

Image 1: Pages from Textbook Taught in Refugee Camps in Pakistan



Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/AfghanCivilwar/comments/q9wukz/in_the_80s_usaid_funded_militarized_children/.

Similarly, the Taliban used the American-produced books to teach children in madrasas and to promote anti-American sentiments. They focused mainly on orphaned and refugee children to be educated as extremists since they themselves had been exposed to US books earlier. In contrast, Pia Karlsson and Amir Mansory stated, 'Taliban aimed at educating students with a correct and strict view on Islam [based on their ideology] while simultaneously training them in modern subjects and thus making them able to compete with what was called the secular school students.'[14] However, the bitter reality is that the Afghan children and youth have over the years been indoctrinated with violence through textbooks, which has contributed towards inculcating among them a culture of violence and aggression.

What is even more astonishing is the fact that following the toppling of the Taliban regime by the US and its allies in its "war on terror," the same books continued to be in print and circulation in many Afghan schools. In 2002, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

provided $6.5 million to print textbooks for Afghan schools. These were the same books used in the Afghan refugee camps 'forcing Islamic fundamentalist texts on Afghan kids for 20 years'.[15] After much discussion among the US policymakers and the people, the public opinion in the US weighed in, arguing to the effect that it is illegal to promote religious education with taxpayers' money. In response the USAID removed its logo and references to the US Government from the books and said that they 'left the Islamic materials intact because they feared Afghan educators would reject books lacking a strong dose of Muslim thought'.[16] Eventually the circulation of old schoolbooks by USAID came to an end in early 2003.

Even though education became the top priority of the Afghan Government, the establishment of a common school programme lagged. Instead, education remained limited to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) making efforts to use diverse curriculum to teach children, but most of them used the syllabus adopted by the mujahideen focusing on religious and traditional teaching.[17]

Finally, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan adopted a new unified national curriculum in 2005 to be implemented in all schools throughout the country. Yet, the new curriculum, though much improved from the past, lacked peace education to effectively replace violence depicted in textbooks taught to children for so many years.

Taliban and Education in Afghanistan

Following the toppling of the Taliban regime by the US in late 2001, boosting education was one of the most significant achievements in Afghanistan. Despite challenges, female enrolment showed a secular increase across the board. It rose from nearly zero to 2.5 million at the school level and registered a phenomenal 20-fold increase in higher education from 5,000 girls' students in 2001 to 100,000 by 2021.[18] The focus on education, particularly girls' education to enhance women's rights in the country was a top priority of international community. However, the recent developments have demonstrated that the hard-won gains made over the past 20 years by Afghan women remain reversible. Following their return to power and contrary to the phony promises made earlier, the Taliban have moved swiftly to orchestrate a systemic elimination of Afghan women and girls from all spheres of public life, including education. Afghan girls were initially denied access to education beyond grade six but soon the ban extended to women at the university level. The Taliban sought refuge for the decision in the name of Islam and what they perceived to be "Afghan culture".[19]

However, this is not borne out by empirical evidence. Consider for instance the fact that data for women's participation in the national university entrance exams known as *Kankor* show a steady increase in female participation from a measly 1,000 female aspirants in 2003 to 78,000 by 2013. Notably in provinces such as Herat, female participation in the entrance exams outpaced that of males by the ratio of 53 to 42 per cent.[20] It clearly demonstrated the desire and legitimacy in Afghan society for access to education cutting across the gender divide. If anything, the Taliban's ban on education for women reveals that not only their decision is not in sync with the Afghan socio-political milieu but it also shares uncanny ideological similarities with the likes of Habibullah Kalakani, who after toppling Amanullah Khan from power in 1929 sought to undo his educational reforms by banning women from accessing education.

Historically speaking, it would be fair to argue that Afghanistan has always been a traditional society but not a conservative one bound by strict religious dogmas. Consider for instance, the Taliban's claim that co-education system promotes vice. Nothing could be further from the truth as historically co-education has been followed only until grade five under regimes of various hues, barring the initial period of the communist rule. From grade five onwards, female and male students have studied in different sections and/or shifts. Apart from that, girls' school uniform always remained the same with black dress/skirt and a white *chadar* (a cloth to cover the head). In the school curriculum too, religious subjects were always present even during the communist era. Therefore, there is no evidence to support the Taliban's fallacious claim that schools in Afghanistan did not follow Islamic standards.

Besides curtailing women's access to education, the Taliban has imposed restrictions on women's dress, mobility and employment. Consider for instance the new morality law, called "Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice", enacted in July 2024 that forbade women's voice to be heard in public, explicitly prohibiting women from singing and reciting poems. The new law thus is 'effectively attempting to render them into faceless, voiceless shadows'.[21] The codified law, receiving ratification from the Supreme Leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, justified the harsh treatment of women under the Taliban's rule. Another article of the new morality law states that women must cover their bodies, including their faces, and requires women and men to avoid eye contact. The attempt to police women's body and sexualise them is further attested to by the law which prevents women from '…. befriending non-Muslims, sex outside of marriage, lesbianism, anal sex, paedophilia, and missing one's religious prayers and fasts.'[22] These measures have effectively erased half of the population from public life,

disproportionately impacting a society where a large number of households are run by single women who lost their male members in the long years of war.

A critical discernment of both Islam and Afghan history tells us that in reality the Taliban's treatment of women finds no precedence and justification in either Islam or Afghan culture that have been perversely used to justify such measures. Traditionally, women in rural Afghanistan enjoyed social mobility and participation in public life. This is seen in women's role on the battlefield, embodied most potently in the legend of Malalai of Maiwand, who took on the British in the second Anglo–Afghan War (1878–1880). It shaped oral traditions through folk poems known as *Landay* and singing of songs in the community festivals. Afghan women also had the liberty to leave home without a male companion and bring water from *Godar* or "water places" in the villages of southeast Afghanistan.[23]

The fact remains that in practice the socio-cultural and religious milieu in Afghanistan has been far removed from the Taliban's worldview, which draws on a narrow Sunni-Deobandi interpretation of Islam as taught in conservative religious seminaries of Pakistan. This ignores the diverse and syncretic schools of theological thought that have thrived in Afghanistan. The Taliban seek to bring about a socio-political and cultural re-engineering of Afghan society for which education provides the most potent and effective tool. They seek to use the educational curriculum to preach violence and hatred. This is evident by the recent establishment of the suicide museum in the country, which showcases the materials used for destruction by the group in the recent years.[24] It reiterates the long-held view by many critics of the Taliban, including the author, that the Taliban normalise and encourage violence. Consider for instance the fact that Sirajuddin Haqqani in the opening ceremony of the suicide museum with the family members of suicide bombers '… congratulated the men for their loved ones' divine sacrifice and gifted them with clothes, cash, and the promised allocation of land plots.' And in October 2021, amid increasing tensions with Tajikistan, the group announced the deployment of 3,000 suicide bombers to the border between the two countries.[25]

In addition, Taliban's assessment board for the modification of education curriculum has already published its version of the revised school curriculum in 26 paragraphs. Among other things, the committee emphasised that textbooks should talk about the Muslim world only, disregarding the West and denouncing importance figures such as Amanullah Khan, Faiz Mohammad Kateb Hazara, and Abdul Ghani Khan. Moreover, the Taliban recommendation on curriculum focuses on their interpretation of Islam, the

importance of jihad and stresses that 'the sharia rules of killing in war, retaliation in kind, stoning, and other cases should be explained'.[26] These developments are contradictory to what Bacha Khan, a devoted Muslim and a Pashtun leader, advocated to his followers. His ideological legacy teaches peace, co-existence, tolerance, non-violence, equality, and non-discrimination.

Bacha Khan's Legacy and its Relevance

Bacha Khan's background as a Muslim and a Pashtun made his non-violent struggle unique since he was able to challenge the conventional discourse, which portrayed the Pashtuns as "wild" people pre–disposed to violence. Hailing from the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of British India, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province of Pakistan, Bacha Khan promoted the creed of non–violence and the cause of girls' education in a culture that privileged patriarchy and martial qualities. He argued:

> We would have fared ill if we had not learnt the lessons of non-violence. We are born fighters, and we keep the tradition by fighting among ourselves… [thus]…this non-violence has come to us as a positive deliverance.[27]

To promote his cause, he set up *Azad* schools in the NWFP region, inviting the ire of the British who saw empowerment through education as a threat. Notably, Bacha Khan and his *Khudai Khidmatgar*'s political philosophy dealt with the ideas of jihad in a way that would appear inconceivable to many modern political movements of the day. He regarded dealing with the internal "greater jihad" (jihad-i-akbar) as indispensable to embarking upon the external "lesser jihad" (jihad-i-asghar) against colonial oppression. The former in Bacha Khan's conception was seminal to cultivate virtues of service, restraint, and patience.[28]

Bacha Khan's followers held on to their vow of non-violence even when Mahatma Gandhi's followers dithered. Essentially, for Bacha Khan, preserving the non-violent protest was much more important for Afghans than the Indians because 'the Pathans had been characterised by the British as wild, ungovernable and uncivilised and hence it was doubly important that their protest demonstrate political maturity and fitness for self-rule'.[29] For that reason, Bacha Khan and his followers were able to challenge the British stereotype and uphold moral high ground in the history of the region.

Bacha Khan said: 'to me non-violence has come to represent a panacea for all the evils that surround my people…. therefore, I am devoting all my energies towards the establishment of a society that would be based on its principles of truth and peace.'[30] Mukulika Banerjee argues that Bacha Khan

though very much inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, had adopted a non-violent dogma before Gandhi '… through his own reflections on the needs and short comings of Pathan society'.[31] To achieve that aim, he initially started a non-political organisation, *Anjuman-Islah-ul-Afghania*, aimed at encouraging 'economic, social and educational improvement in Frontier' as he wanted his people to take professions other than agriculture only.[32]

Bacha Khan realised the potency of education as a medium to not only uplift his people but also to help realise his goals of inculcating maturity, restraint, and service amongst the Pashtuns. His propagation of gender equality was firmly rooted in the framework of Islam. He fervently believed in men and women being granted equal rights under Islam, arguing '…in the Holy Quran, you have an equal share with men. You are today oppressed because we men have ignored the commands of God and the Prophet'.[33]

Bacha Khan's respect for women sourced from his close attachment to his mother. He valued his mother's views and never liked the concept of *purdah* in his society, which meant 'isolation of women from men'. His mother also had high expectations and trust in him. She would say, 'he is a strong man…and he will be Badshah, a king.'[34] And he proved to be the king of non-violent resistance in the Subcontinent's northwestern region. However, seeing today's political situation both at the Afghanistan–Pakistan frontier and the region, his efforts to promote the philosophy of non-violence, the education of women, and women's involvement in efforts for justice appear to have been overshadowed by forces of radicalisation and Islamisation triggered by regional and international geopolitics.

It is imperative that to counter the challenge of radicalisation through education, as well as to bridge the gender divide in education, interventions must draw on the history and legacy of figures such as Bacha Khan who envisioned non-violence as a means of social and political change. Unfortunately, his legacy has been either forgotten and/or has been deliberately suppressed in contemporary narratives. To not repeat the mistakes of the past and have a brighter future, work in rehabilitating the history of non-violence in the educational, social, and political discourse of Afghanistan is seminal. Such interventions will be sustainable, socio-culturally hard to challenge and help in the long run to build societies based on values of tolerance and equity.

The political scientists divide non-violent resistance into three kinds: Hindu pacifism, Christian pacifism, and secular pacifism.[25] But Bacha Khan based his idea of non-violence action on Islam. Given Afghanistan's socio-political context, the country is not yet ready to adopt a secular form of non-violent protest. Instead, a practice closer to the local realities needs to be

applied to achieve the expected results. For this reason, Bacha Khan's work and experiences that could be called Islamic pacifism will be successful if incorporated in the curriculum since it matches the local context, language, religion, and the culture of the country. Students should be taught that social and political change can also happen by non-violent means as Bacha Khan wrote about. Particularly, Bacha Khan's ways of dealing with non-Muslims, raising social awareness on the importance of education for all, especially for women, and of encouraging people to avoid negative cultural practices and work for the betterment of their community voluntarily, need to be passed on to future generations.

However, the task at hand is excruciatingly challenging given the Taliban's intention to mould the educational curriculum in line with their political worldview. This is seen for instance, among other things, in the disparaging statements made about the secular education by the Taliban minister of education, as also in their opening of a suicide bombing museum.[36] It will rear a generation committed to violence. Public education curriculum offers to the Taliban a potent tool to brainwash and control younger generations for their political agenda. Thus, while banning women from access to education is a matter of grave concern and needs to be challenged, what is equally if not more alarming are changes being made to the education curriculum as it will have reverberations well beyond Afghanistan. As Gandhi said, 'If we are going to bring about peace in the world, we have to begin with the children.'[37] Thus, the right to education, not physical presence in schools but provision of quality education to enable a competent and peaceful individual, can play a key role in building children's personalities to avoid violent and discriminatory behaviour.

A useful starting point in this context is provided by the strategies adopted by the Pashtun *Tahafuz* Movement (PTM),[38] which has emerged as the only force that is able to challenge the Taliban effectively on its own turf in the frontier region through non-violent mass mobilisation. It is worth mentioning that the PTM has gone a step further, and under very challenging circumstances, by mobilising people in the tribal areas. Receptivity for interventions along these lines exists at the grassroots level in Afghanistan. This can be gauged from the work being done specifically in the field of education by activists such as Matiullah Wessa through his organisation, Pen Path, which remains steadfastly committed to propagating girls' education through grassroots mobilisation.[39]

Conclusion

Education can serve as a powerful tool to work towards establishing a society that is based on the principles of social justice and equity, which is key to realising sustainable peace. To achieve this end, it is imperative that the education system be protected from political manipulation for it to be able to inculcate among the younger generations social values and morals that contribute towards peace and inclusivity.

Unfortunately, in Afghanistan, regimes of various political hues have used education to fulfill their ideological and geo-political agendas and those of their foreign patrons. In this context, it is worth drawing particular attention to the fact that while the Taliban's decision to deny women access to education is deplorable, what is even more concerning is the concerted attempt to re-engineer the curriculum to reflect their regressive and narrow interpretation of Islam. The active and passive resistance against these attempts being led by women needs to be supported. The ramifications of this attempt at social re-engineering through education will be felt beyond the borders of Afghanistan. The voices of Afghan women, as well as religious scholars and grassroots activists resisting such attempts, need to be adequately and effectively amplified.

The socio-cultural milieu of the region offers sufficient socio-cultural capital to effectively challenge the discourse of the Taliban on religious and cultural grounds and produce legitimate counter-narratives rooted in the philosophy of non-violence. The preaching and practices of figures like Bacha Khan provide an anchor for actions to this end. The strength of his teachings lay in his ability to ground his radical ideas within the framework of Islam and the cultural setting of the region. His advocacy for access to modern education for all, based on values of equity and tolerance, resonates to this day, as seen in the struggle of the likes of Malala Yousafzai and Matiullah Wessa.

The only force in the region that has managed to muster a counter-narrative to the violence whipped up by the Taliban and the excesses of the Pakistan Army has been the PTM, which like Bacha Khan draws on the philosophy of non-violence. The potency of the PTM's message can be gauged from the scale of mass mobilisation it has managed to achieve in the notorious tribal areas of Pakistan, despite an unofficial media ban on covering its activities. It is time for the international community to invest in grassroots movements of such nature. Otherwise, one is likely to see history repeat itself, as the Taliban were raised in madrasas in Pakistan funded predominantly by the Saudis and on a curriculum designed and disseminated earlier by the US. If steps are not taken to intervene in the unfolding situation in Afghanistan,

one is likely to see another generation being raised on the same ideology, propagating what they perceive to be traditional values. Thus, the international community must intervene urgently and effectively to challenge the revisionist curriculum being implemented by the Taliban as a means for social and political re-engineering of Afghanistan.

NOTES

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