

Fighting for Their Rights: Women in the Taliban

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Introduction:

Mehri was in a tough situation. Her child was sick, and she needed to get the child to the doctor as soon as possible. But it was not allowed. Mehri could not leave her house without the company of a male relative or her husband's. She knew that she could not allow her child to die without at least trying to get her to the doctor. She wrapped the child in some clothes and cautiously looked out the door of her house. It was getting to be later at night and no one was outside. Deciding once and for all that she could not wait for her husband to return from where ever he was she left the house. The doctor's house was only a few minutes away so she hurried through the silent streets. It had been about two minutes and so far no one had noticed her. But she breathed a sigh of relief too soon. Suddenly one of the officers of the Taliban caught sight of her. The doctor's house was in her sight! Perhaps if she could get inside before the officer reached her she would be safe... she started to run; not only for her life but also for her child's life. She heard a sound behind her, the sound of a gun, but she continued moving. A gunshot pierced the air. Mehri had been shot. She had only been trying to protect her child and it had cost her life. This is the fear that many women in Afghanistan live with. They never know if they will be subject to a so called "honor killing" or if they will be beaten or stoned for something as simple as having their ankle show beneath their burqa (the dress that all the women are required to wear). The women daily live in fear of the rules that the Taliban has instituted and used to suppress the women. The Taliban use the various rules as a way to ensure that the women of the country will not become too powerful. The women have been stripped of many of their rights as women and have become nothing more than slaves.

Part 1: Before the Taliban

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1971 with the intent to take it over. In 1989, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan defeated. This was an amazing victor for the people of

Afghanistan and their fighter; they achieved this win with the help of the United States especially after 1981 when Charlie Wilson became involved in the effort to help the Afghan people. After the Soviets left the country was in chaos. The country, mainly southern Afghanistan, was being ruled not by the government in Kabul, the capital, but by local leaders and their militias. At first people welcomed the Taliban because they opposed the local leaders and their oppressive rule. Mullah Omar was the first leader of the group and one story is often told of how they originally became popular. The story, which many sources agree is credible, says that a local governor had kidnapped two girls and was holding them in his house and raping them repeatedly. Mullah Omar and only 30 men with 16 rifles went into the home, rescued the girls, and hung the governor. Later that year they again freed a child who was being abused, this time a young boy, and hung those who were attempting to harm the boy. This made the Taliban seem very powerful and a force of good that the country might need in the disorder that had followed the Soviets leaving. The Taliban's first military action occurred in 1994 when they marched captured Kandahar City and forced the leaders there to surrender. In 1996, they also took over the capital, Kabul, and they instituted the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. In the beginning many people welcomed the new order that the Taliban had brought. A new strict version of the Islamic law and order were put into action but the people felt that they had no reason to fear it. However before long the Taliban's extreme rules came to light.(2009)(2004)

The women could no longer go out in public without wearing a burqa and being accompanied by a male relative. Singing, dancing, playing music, watching television, sports, and having a women's voice or image on the television or on the radio was prohibited. The people also had to pray five times a day under the strict new laws. Those who did not follow the new rules faced dire consequences. They were hanged, beaten, executed, or had a body part amputated and these sentences were often carried out in public for everyone to see.

Part two: Women under the Rule of the Taliban

Immediately after coming into power new rules were instituted by the Taliban. The majority of these rules had to do with the treatment of women and what they could or couldn't do. Their rights were basically eliminated and they could do very few things. Some of the strict edicts included:

1. Women could not work
2. Women and girls could not go to schools and they were forced to leave the universities that they taught or went to school at
3. Women were not allowed to leave their homes without the company of a close male relative
4. They could not be treated by a male doctor
5. They could not be viewed through windows so all the windows in their homes were blacked out
6. They had to wear the burqa in public
7. The voices of women were banned from the radio and TV
8. Flying kites, singing, dancing, playing music and other such things were prohibited

Women also began to be subject to "honor killings" and their husbands, fathers, brothers, or any male figure that they had in their lives now had complete control over them.

Simply having a bare ankle show from beneath a women's burqa, the dress that all the women are required to wear, can result in a whipping, if one of the women is accused of adultery by her husband she can be stoned to death, or and a family can kill a women in order to protect their "honor". Families do not even need to go to the authorities of the country to do any of these things. As long as the head of the household agrees to it these things are justified. Many of the freedoms that the women had once enjoyed were immediately restricted after the Taliban came to power. The women could no longer freely move about the cities, they now had a strict dress

code, and they were forced to quit their jobs or to drop out of the universities and schools that they were a part of.(2010)

Before the Taliban came to rule, the women of Afghanistan had many powers and protections. One of the many powers that the Afghanistan women were given was the right to vote in the 1920's. In the 1960s, the Afghan constitution also gave the Afghan women rights that were equal to the men's. Women became very important in the development of the country. The women of the country occupied a good portion of the jobs such as school teachers, government workers, university students, and many women were also doctors. In Islam, the faith of the majority of people in Afghanistan, the women and children's rights are protected. The Islamic faith has specific instructions that define what the rights of the women are in regard to their marriages, divorce, and their property rights. The Taliban goes against many of the teachings of Islam and has greatly reduced what the women can do. The Taliban had deprived the women of their right to an education by limiting their rights; they had also taken away the women's healthcare thus greatly reducing their health and the children's, and also put many of the women and children in poverty.

Part three: End of the Taliban's rule and the Re-Emergence of the Women

The Taliban were finally defeated in 2001 and since then the women have emerged and started to rejoin the society. Today many women are seen walking the streets without a male relative and free of the restricting burqa. About 38% of the women have returned to work and 35% of the school age children are girls. Many of the universities are once again allowing women to enroll and there are huge strides being made toward the equality of women in the country.

However there are still issues from when the Taliban ruled that are evident in the country. Many of the women in the country still live in poverty, and are still oppressed by their husbands. Over 1,000 girls's schools have been attacked since 2002 so there are still many things that need to be improved. The progress may be slow but it is happening and with the help

of many of the citizens in the country. Robina Muqimyar Jalalai, one of Afghanistan's first two female Olympic athletes, says "We have women boxers and women footballers. I go running in the stadium where the Taliban used to play football with women's heads. If the Taliban come back, I will lose everything that I have gained over the past nine years." Muqimyar, along with the rest of the female population in Afghanistan, reports that she will never take these changes for granted. The Afghanistan constitution promotes gender equality and provides for girls' education. Many have said that the women have no need to fear for their rights again; that they will never be taken away again.(2010)

Part four: What Needs to be Done to Preserve the Rights of the Women

In order to ensure that the rights of the women will not be taken away again the Taliban needs to be completely eliminated from the country. There also needs to be provisions in the country's constitution that makes sure that nothing of that sort will ever happen again. The government needs to help the country move toward complete and total gender equality so that there is no discrimination. The women need to be re integrated into the society by all the people. The government needs to help to enforce all the new rules and regulations that are happening. The United Nations involvement will help to ensure that of the women's equality and the involvement of the Unites States is also helping. There has to be a shift in the minds and hearts of the people however to make the transformation to including the women and girls into the society complete.

Conclusion

The women suffered greatly under to rule of the Taliban. They were oppressed and often times treated as little more than slaves. They had their rights and furthermore, their dignity taken away from them. Now that the rule of the Taliban is over, women are gaining rights like that had before the Taliban's rule. Great strides toward equality have been made and we can only hope that someday soon the women and children will fully be emitted into the society. We can only

hope and pray that the actions that have been put into place will help to eliminate all the fear that the women have felt since the Taliban came into power.

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