

The Politics of *Zan* from Amanullah to Karzai

Lessons for Improving Afghan Women's Status

SHIREEN KHAN BURKI

Women are just like roses: A fresh rose is a happy sight.

—Khushal Khan Khattak, Pashtun warrior poet,
seventeenth-century C.E.

Since independence in 1919, the Afghan state's gender policies have involved a bewildering series of missteps, corrections, and more missteps,¹ resulting in confusion, pain, and suffering for Afghan *zan*.² Since the ouster of the Taliban regime, conditions for Afghan women improved under the Karzai government, but if history is any guide, gender policies and approaches are most likely to fail in Afghanistan unless they incorporate into the process the well-entrenched social and cultural norms of a traditional, patriarchal, primarily tribal society. In short, the historical record suggests that a gender template characterized by cautious, incremental efforts at improving female status stands the best chance of improving women's lives in the long term.

A LESSON IN CAUTION—1919 TO 1929

Afghanistan's "modernization" process—including the improvement of women's status—was first set in motion by Amir Amanullah's grandfather, Amir Abdur Rahman (1880–1901) and continued by his father Amir Habibullah (1901–1919), albeit limitedly. During Muhammad Amanullah Khan's reign (1919–1929),³ ambitious efforts were made to

implement drastic social changes to improve women's status. Amanullah's views on women's role in society were not a response to widespread societal demands; rather they were influenced primarily by his in-laws (the highly intellectual Tarzi family) and by unfolding events in the region. Amanullah's gender policies, however, were completely divorced from the social realities of his extremely conservative, primarily tribal, and geographically remote country. Thus, under his father-in-law Prime Minister Mahmud Tarzi's tutelage, he undertook an ambitious and controversial program meant to transform Afghanistan into a modern state in the same mold as Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's Turkey.⁴

Amanullah's government began by emphasizing secular-based (that is, non-madrassa) education and established the first primary school for girls, Masturat School, in 1921 in Kabul, under the patronage of Queen Soraya.⁵ From 1920 to 1927, two primary schools and one middle school for girls were established in Kabul, with an estimated 700 students.⁶ These numbers, however, suggest that despite strong encouragement by the Amir, most Afghans were reluctant to send their daughters to obtain what was characterized as a secular education. Furthermore, the establishment of girls' schools was limited to urban areas such as Kabul and Herat and thus failed to benefit the provinces.

Although many members of the urban elite welcomed such schools for their daughters, Amanullah's promotion of a coeducational system—with the establishment of the Amaniya School in Kabul (named for the Amir)—was viewed with skepticism and/or disapproval. In 1928, fifteen female graduates of the Masturat Middle School, daughters of prominent Kabulis, were sent to Turkey for higher education.⁷ Sending young, unmarried girls out of the country was regarded with alarm in many quarters as yet another sign that the state, in its efforts to Westernize, was willing to push against social and cultural norms.

Queen Soraya, the Amir's only wife,⁸ was viewed by most Afghans as a controversial figure. She publicly campaigned for drastic change in women's roles and advocated for women's rights to education, employment, and divorce. Soraya's behavior, however, perplexed most Afghans and frequently was seen as alien and "un-Islamic." In a society where the dominant ethnic group, the Pashtun, adhered to the strictures of Pashtunwali,⁹ calls for women's rights made publicly by a woman challenged the embedded religious and cultural beliefs of a tribal society that did not view women as equals but only as property. Furthermore, the queen's advocacy on behalf of women impinged upon Afghan men's carefully nurtured *nang* ("honor" in Pashto), as members of a

khel (clan) or *qaum* (tribal group). Across time, due to proximity to the dominant Pashtuns, other ethnic groups adopted cultural mores that mirrored the tenets of the ancient tribal codes, valuing family honor and its protection as a true measure of a man's worth and status in society. Pashtunwali stressed the importance of protecting one's *zan* (women), *zar* (gold/wealth), and *zamin* (land), in order to maintain *izzat* (respect). Women were viewed as property whose protection was essential for the preservation of the clan's honor. The notion that women had "rights" was seen as a threat to the status quo and to Pashtunwali itself. Given the very limited support base for gender reforms—primarily concentrated in Kabul among the educated elite—it was indeed a courageous, but overly ambitious, endeavor by the royal entourage to attempt to implement controversial, foreign changes within a short duration.

In yet another controversial move, in August 1924, Amanullah introduced the *Nizamnamah-ye-Arusi* and *Nikah wa Khatnasuri* laws regarding engagements and marriage. Although Amanullah's father had instituted marriage reforms, these were considered far more radical. Whereas the *Nizamnamah* stressed gender equality and established the minimum age for marriage, the *Nikah wa Khatnasuri* specified certain conditions within the marital agreement that were meant to ensure legal protections for brides. The state's encouragement of Afghan women to take legal action if mistreated by their husbands was considered revolutionary and threatening to the cultural status quo.

Both these measures were unpopular, but the provision in the *Nizamnamah* that encouraged girls to choose their own marriage partners without their parents' interference was regarded as pushing the boundaries of modernization at the expense of both tradition and religion. "Love marriages" threatened the alliance mechanism between families or clans, which was the key consideration in strengthening the clan or family's position within the social, tribal structure.

In more traditional provinces, especially the Pashtun belt, which included Kandahar, Nangahar, Khost, Paktia, Paktika, and Ghazni, the new laws fell on deaf ears. They were also viewed with distaste by some of the more secular and better educated urban populace, who were the government's only loyal constituency. Yet the state appeared to be oblivious to the social pulse and continued its ambitious social reforms. These reforms were increasingly seen as the whims and fantasies of elites disconnected from, and oblivious to, mainstream society. In its apparently overzealous stance, the Amanullah-led government sought societal changes that would ultimately fail because they were forced upon the

populace without consultation or regard for the tenor of the times. Although the leaders sought to replicate society along the lines of Ataturk's Turkey by advocating for ambitious social change, they did not appreciate the inherent dangers of such precipitous efforts. They did, however, wisely invoke Islam and advocated Islamic due process as delineated by Shari'a courts, which would have jurisdiction over such matters as they sought to transform women's position in society. Thus the *Nizamnameh* stated:

If the wife of a polygamist man feels that her husband has failed to treat all of his wives fairly and equally, she can file a complaint against her husband in a court of Shari'a, so that the unjust husbands should be punished accordingly. Moreover, punishment will be prescribed for husbands who would prevent their wives from petitioning against them. . . . Article 18 of this document prohibits a forced marriage between adults; it calls the arranger of such a forceful marriage *jabir* (tyrant) and states that the *qazi* (judge) who presides over this contract is to be reprimanded.¹⁰

Notwithstanding these attempts to rely on Islamic jurisprudence to make the case for female emancipation, the reality in Afghanistan's Pashtun belt was clear: social interaction was first and foremost delineated by the stipulations of Pashtunwali, which took precedence over any Islamic tenets. However, Pashtunwali did not contradict Islamic strictures in matters related to preservation of "modesty," which was, and is, leveraged by Pashtuns in restricting female interaction with the outside world, whether for purposes of attaining education, employment, or marriage. From the perspective of most Afghans, the efforts under Amir Amanullah were considered irresponsible and unnecessary meddling in the internal (social) affairs of an independent people who resented intrusion by the Amir in the best of times. Afghanistan as a "state" still had a very brief history and was essentially a loose confederation under a weak central government that had extremely limited influence in its far-flung, relatively inaccessible provinces. The inability of Amanullah's government to exert control over the periphery all but ensured that efforts to replicate the Turkish social model would fail.

The first wake-up call came in the form of a major rebellion in the province of Khost in March 1924. It was militarily suppressed, but the challenge brought home the threat posed by rapid reform measures that, coupled with the reduction of tribal subsidies, had become untenable. Historically, what little influence any ruler in Kabul was able to exert over the periphery was due to the annual payments dispensed to individual tribes to maintain their allegiances. Amanullah was so caught

up in the importance of his social and economic plans, he believed that cutting the subsidies to pay for his programs would be understood, and accepted, by all Afghans.

Widespread, growing discontent in the provinces finally convinced Amanullah of the need to temporarily halt some of his reforms and to modify others. Girls were suddenly directed to receive their educations at home, religious studies were encouraged, and men were once again allowed to have four wives without having to obtain the approval of the original spouse as stipulated in the *Nizamnameh*.¹¹ This rapid back-pedaling on gender policy by Amanullah's government served only to embolden those who sought to ensure the traditional status quo, while dashing the hopes of many young girls in the urban areas. Nevertheless, although the modernization program never resumed the same pace, the seeds of female empowerment certainly were planted, and credit for this must go to Amir Amanullah and Queen Soraya.

A notorious incident in August 1928 highlighted how detached the royal family had become from the social pulse. Amir Amanullah, presiding over a Loya Jirga, a Grand Assembly of Tribal Elders (who had been forced to wear European clothes provided by the government), brought Queen Soraya to the event along with nearly 100 other women, mostly wives of government employees who supported her. They removed their veils in the presence of the tribal elders, who were shocked, whereas proponents of modernization applauded.¹² This theatrical and provocative act, which had been preceded by unpalatable economic demands, was the last straw. The elders at the Jirga reluctantly endorsed Amanullah's proposals at this public forum but wasted no time mobilizing public opinion against him once they returned home.¹³

The countryside began to take up arms against Amanullah even as elements within the government turned against him. The Amir abruptly shelved his modernization program. Girls who had been sent to Constantinople were recalled and schools for girls in Afghanistan were closed. Women were again prohibited from appearing unveiled in public and from cutting their hair. The center was dissolving. Afghanistan was reverting to its original state as a loose tribal confederation by the time Amanullah was overthrown in March 1929 by a Tajik tribal leader, Habibullah Kalakani, called Bacha-e-Saqqaw ("The Water Carrier's Son").¹⁴ Amanullah's fall from power can be directly attributed to the government's overbearing demands for additional taxes and its reduction of tribal subsidies in order to implement controversial political, social, and economic reforms. These controversial demands in turn led

to violence throughout the country, during which Amir Amanullah and the royal family managed to flee into exile.¹⁵

SLOW AND STEADY PROGRESS—1929 TO 1978

The state's gender policy during the period prior to the communist takeover in 1978 initially reflected a pragmatic, cautious approach to progress for women. Although Muhammad Nadir Shah (1929–1933), who took power from Bacha-e-Saqqaw, was cognizant of the repercussions of inciting the tribal populace and the mullahs, he nevertheless reopened some urban girls' schools, but only after first seeking approval from the tribal and religious leadership. Nadir Shah removed any symbols of Amanullah's era by renaming girls' schools and converting one to a nursing school, all the while justifying his actions as not being contrary to Islamic precepts and with the tacit support of the clerics, mullahs, and tribal leaders. Oversight of school curricula was returned to the clerics in order to ensure that the curricula were in accordance with Islamic teachings. However, members of the royal family and the elite sent many of their children abroad for school. The Sunni Hanifi School of Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) became the arbiter for civil and criminal laws and repealed Amanullah's ambitious marital and gender relations reforms.

When Muhammad Zahir Shah (1933–1973) assumed the throne after Nadir Shah's assassination in 1933, he continued his father's approach of slow progression on gender and social issues, which would, by and large, remain the blueprint for matters related to female status until 1978. Social, economic, and political conditions for all Afghans improved during the forty-year reign of Zahir Shah. This period was one of development and progress for Afghanistan as a whole, thanks in large part to relative internal tranquility and the absence of foreign aggression. A pragmatist like his father, Zahir Shah began empowering Afghan females by improving access to education through the establishment of elementary schools for girls throughout the country. In 1950, the first women's college was established in Kabul on the premises of Malalai School, formerly called Masturat. In 1957, the first girls' high school was established in Herat.¹⁶ In 1964, women were granted the right to vote and to run for office under the third constitution. In January 1966, Kubra Nurzai became the first female cabinet minister of public health, followed in 1969 by Shafiqah Ziyai. Meanwhile, three women—Dr. Anahita Ratibzad, Ruqiyyah Habib Abu Bakr, and Masumah Ismati

Wardak—became members of parliament, and Humaira Malikyar, Saljuqi Gardizi, and Azizah Gardizi were elected to the Senate.

Employment for women, however, was only encouraged in fields such as education and health care where contact with males could be curtailed. When Zahir Shah's cousin and brother-in-law, Muhammad Daoud Khan, was appointed prime minister in 1953, he accelerated the pace of social reforms. Nevertheless, it was a far cry from Amanullah's precipitous efforts in the 1920s. Thus, in the 1950s began a period of female empowerment that continued until the Soviet-sponsored People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was forced out of power in 1992. Also, starting in the early 1950s, thanks to large-scale external funding for developmental projects from the United States and the Soviet Union, Afghanistan began to experience unprecedented levels of infrastructure and non-infrastructure development throughout the country. As part of their economic packages to Afghanistan, both superpowers expected "progression" in women's status and funded girls' schools and educational programs that would include females.

Under Prime Minister Daoud Khan (1953–1963), the state again began to encourage women to seek out less traditional opportunities. They were offered positions confined to urban centers as air stewardesses for the national Ariana Airlines, receptionists in government offices, and telephone operators with the national service.¹⁷ With no large-scale public protest, Daoud felt confident the time was right to implement a more ambitious modernization program, à la Amanullah. In what must have seemed like *déjà vu*, Daoud and the ruling elite, convinced that Afghanistan had reached the point when the social climate was conducive to the abolishment of veiling, began a campaign to end the practice. At the country's independence celebrations on August 24, 1959, wives of military officials and women from the royal household appeared at the review podium of the military parade unveiled. Those military officials who refused to allow their wives to attend unveiled were relieved of their duties and some were even arrested.¹⁸

Support for Daoud's policies by women of the urban upper and middle classes, coupled with the absence of dissent, led Daoud's government to expand the implementation of "empowerment" initiatives. As in Amanullah's time, Daoud faced stiff opposition when he tried to replicate urban modernization efforts in the rural areas, especially in the eastern and southern Pashtun tribal belt. In places such as Pul-e-Khumri, the capital of the northern province of Baghlan, the predominantly Pashtun population was incensed when the government pressured local taxi

and horse-drawn carriage drivers to refuse to transport veiled women. Failure to adhere to this stipulation resulted in fines. Meanwhile, wives of Baghlan factory workers who would not unveil were penalized by being prohibited from shopping at the factory's cooperative society.¹⁹

Rebellion broke out in December 1959, led by the *maliks*, *khans*, and *mullahs*—tribal and religious leaders—in places such as Kandahar, Jalalabad, Khost, and Wardak. The factors attributed to this outbreak of violence at the local level included the elimination of tribal subsidies and/or taxation and the central government's efforts to impose gender “equality.” The level of animosity and the social blowback took the government by surprise. Demonstrations and protests increased, especially in the Pashtun-dominated areas of the east and south. Government buildings were attacked and destroyed and some women who dared to venture out unveiled were killed by mobs. It took lethal methods—the military against its own citizenry—to crush the uprising. Opposition leaders were executed and many others, including prominent clerics, were imprisoned.

Although the state managed to crush any signs of overt rebellion, the experience, so reminiscent of what had transpired under Amanullah, rattled the royal family and the ruling elite.²⁰ Daoud’s stubborn determination to humiliate the clerics and tribal elders in the Pashtun belt only exacerbated the deep schism that had emerged between Kabul and the provinces over modernization schemes involving female empowerment. The state’s version of empowerment, modernization, and development had morphed into an ambitious social agenda that included a vision of female rights that challenged the embedded social mores of the majority of the primarily rural populace. Such policy formulations—which reflected an eagerness to get onto the regional Westernizing bandwagon led by Turkey and Iran—once again reflected the whims and ideals of the educated urbanized elite at the expense of those outside of their social strata who struggled to make ends meet.

Daoud’s unrelenting stance, in particular his refusal to back down on controversial issues involving *zan*, created ruptures and tension within the royal household and was a primary reason behind his dismissal in 1963 as prime minister by his cousin, Amir Zahir Shah. Daoud’s dismissal, however, had to do with more than just controversial, ambitious social policy,²¹ so Zahir Shah continued the process of female empowerment, giving women the right to vote and to hold public office. In stark contrast to Daoud’s bullying tactics, Zahir Shah’s conciliatory and respectful stance toward the tribal *maliks* and *khans* in the Pashtun belt

helped mitigate the animosity toward Kabul that had emerged under Daoud's leadership.

When Muhammad Daoud Khan overthrew Zahir Shah in 1973 in a bloodless coup, regime consolidation concerns precluded a more ambitious gender program to end what he saw as extreme inequality. By 1975, a new constitution was enacted that stipulated gender equality.²² Whereas Afghanistan's first constitution had been ambiguous in its declaration that all *Afghans* were equal before the law, this document went one step further. Article 27 specified that both women and men are equal. Significant legislative changes were enacted again in 1977, in the civil code relating to relations between men and women, including the controversial legal stipulation that women would now be free to choose their spouses regardless of their families' wishes or choices. In reality, however, the enacted laws that specified women's rights were only implemented and/or adhered to among the small elite population of Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, outside the conservative Pashtun belt. The government had neither the means, nor perhaps the resolve, to implement the new laws, so tribal customs regarding marital and child-rearing issues remained in place.²³

DISPARATE APPROACHES TO ZAN—1978 TO 2001

During the period of communist rule from 1978 to 1992, under the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the state actively sought the support of women in its desperate quest for legitimacy. In its efforts to enact—and implement—what were viewed as un-Islamic social reforms, the state resorted to the use of force to compel females to attend literacy classes in rural communities.²⁴ Fearing the curriculum intended to convert their daughters to communism and was therefore antithetical to Islam, tribal and rural elements burned schools and other government buildings. Again, the state's use of repressive and autocratic methods only aggravated a volatile situation and led to rebellion in the provinces. Alarmed at the level of hostility, the government backed off and exclusively focused on implementing its version of "female empowerment" policies in the cities of Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif, where the PDPA retained an iron grip. During this period, urban women became essential for the continued functioning of the state. Women comprised more than 70 percent of the teachers, 40 percent of doctors, and 50 percent of university students; they were also prominent in other traditionally male careers, such as law and engineering, because many

urban males had either joined the Mujahedin (from the Arabic, *mujahid*, meaning struggler) or had been conscripted into the Afghan National Army.

Meanwhile, the social status quo in rural areas remained firmly in place. The PDPA was unable to mobilize adequate financial and human resources for its social reform agenda. Furthermore, life in the rural areas was characterized by large-scale disruption due to internal displacement and forced immigration, as the Mujahedin-led insurgencies against the PDPA and its Soviet allies. It is estimated that a quarter of Afghanistan's population (around 5 million people) were forced to flee their homes due to Soviet military tactics that made no distinction between combatants and noncombatants.

In 1992, with the overthrow of the PDPA's Muhammad Najibullah, urban women witnessed an overnight reversal of their status. As the country drifted toward failed-state status, the various Mujahedin militias and the warlords (regardless of their ethnic affiliations) battling each other in Kabul, *all* targeted women. In August 1992, Burhanuddin Muhammad Rabbani of the Tajik-led Jamaat-i-Islami party gained control of the Mujahedin-coalition government in Kabul and began instituting a series of measures designed to "Islamize" an already conservative society. In December, when Rabbani's term ended, his Jamaat-i-Islami party refused to turn over the reins, leading to a brutal civil war between ethnic factions that lasted until the Taliban gained control of Kabul in September 1996.

Rabbani's rule was defined by large-scale violence toward women. Rape and killings were commonplace. Furthermore, draconian policies restricted female mobility, dress, and the ability to work outside the home. Urban women's fortunes were dramatically reversed almost overnight. Under the PDPA rule, women had experienced unprecedented freedom that had advocated—at least conceptually—a more egalitarian, and inclusive, role for the Afghan women within their physical sphere of influence. Now, under Rabbani's Mujahedin regime, urban women's gains vanished overnight, causing them and their families considerable economic hardship.

Although not as impacted, women outside the cities also experienced large-scale violence and rape in conditions that reflected the complete breakdown of law and order. In 1996, a relatively unknown group of Islamic madrassa students, calling themselves Taliban (plural of *Talib*, which in Arabic means "student" and implies those who seek Islamic knowledge), took over much of Afghanistan. They drove Rabbani's gov-

ernment from Kabul into the northern Panjsher Valley, where Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks formed the United Islamic Front for Salvation of Afghanistan, known as the Northern Alliance in the West.

The Taliban, whose leadership is exclusively Pashtun, adhere to an austere version of Sunni Islam, influenced by Salafi-Wahhabi, with origins in Deoband, India. Once in charge, they immediately enacted gender policies that were oppressive even by the standards of Pashtunwali and were based more on the rejectionist ideology of Arab “guests,” such as Osama bin Laden.

Under the Taliban, girls’ schools were closed; women were prohibited from working and forced into seclusion. Adultery was punished with stoning to death. Widows with no male relatives were unable to venture outside, let alone seek work in order to feed their families. Many resorted to illegal work such as tutoring girls in their homes or prostitution at the risk of execution. The Taliban justified such misogyny—and based their legitimacy—on an argument that they were bound to protect women’s sexual honor, which thereby also protected Pashtun male honor, a cornerstone of Pashtun culture. Their denial of any rights specific to women was designed to consolidate power and to control their young and impressionable rank and file, many of whom were orphans raised in Wahhabi-funded madrassas in Pakistan.²⁵

Although the Taliban brought a kind of order to a lawless country, their measures (increasingly restrictive with time) were considered oppressive by most segments of society. Many of their cruel, brutal tactics were considered alien to Pashtunwali, which advocated acting to preserve honor. In their zeal to reverse what they saw as corrupting influences of socialists and communists, the Taliban expanded upon Rabbani’s already regressive gender policies as they embarked on tactics that were genocidal in nature by targeting those ethnic groups that supported the United Islamic Front.

PROSPECTS FOR EMPOWERMENT UNDER KARZAI AND BEYOND

Afghan women—especially the non-Pashtun—witnessed an overnight improvement in their quality of life following the ouster of the Taliban from power in 2001. Under President Hamid Karzai,²⁶ the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan took major steps to restore the dignity of its female populace and improve their quality of life with the ratification of a constitution that to an extent mirrors Afghanistan’s

first constitution of 1964. Article 44 of the new document affirms, “The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women.”²⁷

Conditions for Afghan women (especially urban dwellers) have somewhat improved since 2001, but the resurgence of the Taliban has cast serious doubt that this can be sustained.²⁸ At the provincial level, the situation remains unchanged and/or is deteriorating notwithstanding the influx of billions of dollars of foreign aid to the Afghan government. Lack of security and few “respectable” employment opportunities hinder the pace of progress in gender matters. The failure of an increasingly predatory government to eradicate rampant corruption at all levels, as well as the government’s inability or unwillingness to tackle the poppy cultivation industry, which encourages warlordism, criminal mafias, and the insurgency, only emboldens the Taliban and their supporters. These developments are a growing cause for concern among many Afghan women.²⁹

A comparative examination of the gender policies of varying Afghan governments since 1919 is a lesson in caution: controversial and/or unpopular social measures have never succeeded unless applied with brute force, as during the Daoud, PDPA, and Taliban eras. In some cases—notably Amir Amanullah and the PDPA—they contributed to the overthrow of the regime. The first lesson for bolstering the position of Afghan women is to no longer construct or attempt to execute social policy as it relates to female empowerment without the agreement of a broad social base. Second, the government must acknowledge cultural, ethnic, urban, and rural dichotomies in gender issues and bridge these gaps by identifying common, unifying goals, such as provision of elementary education and access to health care. Government must be seen as an honest broker in its provision of social services and aid to urban and rural parts of the country. Third, it is essential to understand what the realistic needs of most women are and to address these, rather than mandate incendiary policies such as unveiling, dress codes, coeducation, and other hot-button issues that are destined to fail at the outset and/or may be leveraged for propaganda purposes by those who resist such changes as being un-Islamic. Finally, if efforts toward gender justice are to be sustainable over the long term, they must be primarily homegrown, integrating external assistance only as needed—not the other way around.

The process of abolishing entrenched cultural traditions that limit women’s capacity to lead fuller, more productive lives must include

much internal, inclusive discussions among Afghans. An empowerment road map for females is needed that incorporates the culture, traditions, and religion of the Afghan people with one important caveat: certain embedded cultural norms that are cruel, inhumane, and widespread, such as domestic violence and child marriage, must be abolished culturally, legislatively, politically, and through effective law enforcement measures, however slowly.

Afghan women are not a monolithic bloc. Since Amanullah, the gender policies of a Westernized elite based in Kabul have been completely disconnected from the issues and concerns of rural women, who have different social/cultural/tribal narratives and limited comprehension of the issues that concern their urban sisters. Furthermore, the empowerment of Afghan women is seen as being a commendable, even essential, endeavor by outside observers in the West, who may never have visited an Afghan village, where there may be no access to, among other things, potable water, schools, or medical care. Destitute women and their men-folk in dire circumstances, more often than not, have different visions of what constitutes “empowerment.”

Historically, the gender policies of Kabul have reflected the perceptions, attitudes, and traditions of those in power. Whether the head of the Afghan state has been a Westernized Amir (Amanullah) or a mullah from Uruzgan (Mullah Omar), policies have always reflected the ruler’s own social milieu at the expense of the wishes of the larger populace. The notion of compromising on sensitive gender policies has been notably absent amongst these leaders until, and unless, threatening social forces have challenged or confronted the implementation of specific social policies.

Without tangible improvements in both the security and economic realms, Afghan women will continue to be pawns in endless cycles of violence and suffering. As history has repeatedly shown, pragmatic considerations must take precedence over pure self-interest if there is to be a gradual but consistent move toward prosperity and opportunity for all Afghan women.

NOTES

1. Afghanistan is considered to have attained complete autonomy from foreign intrusion officially when it signed the Rawalpindi Treaty, which recognized sole Afghan jurisdiction over its foreign affairs, with Great Britain in 1919.

2. *Zan* is the Farsi, Dari, and Pashto/Pukhto word for “woman.” In Pashto/Pukhto it is singular and plural.

3. Muhammad Amanullah Khan (1919–1929) was a Barakzai from the Durrani confederacy.

4. Amir Amanullah and Queen Soraya visited Turkey and were impressed by the determined efforts of Turkey's founding father, Mustafa Kamal, to enact precipitous social reforms that would disallow Muslim customs such as the veil, arranged marriages, and so forth, in order to establish a modern, secular Turkish state.

5. Prior to this period in Afghanistan's history, the only form of education for girls was religious based at local madrassas or at home and focused on learning the Qur'an and Islamic history.

6. Hafizullah Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women in Afghanistan* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 63.

7. Ibid.

8. The fact that Amanullah took only one wife was unprecedented amongst the ruling elite of Afghanistan. His predecessors not only had up to four wives (as allowed according to Islamic precepts) but also had harems full of concubines. If there was one aspect of his life/behavior that bolstered his progressive social tendencies, it was his marital status and his treatment of his wife, Queen Soraya.

9. For more about Pashtunwali (or Pukhtunwali), see Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 126–127. Pashtuns—variously called Pushtuns, Pakhtuns, Pukhtuns, and Pathans—are historically the dominant ruling ethnic group in Afghanistan, although they do not have a large majority. Afghanistan is a mosaic comprising Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Kirghiz, Qazilbash, Balouchis, and the Farsiwan.

10. Helena Malikyar, "Development of Family Law in Afghanistan: The Roles of the Hanafi Madhab, Customary Practices, and Power Politics," *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 3 (1997): 393.

11. Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women*, 63.

12. Ibid., 64.

13. Ibid., 65.

14. Habibullah Kalakani, known as Bacha-e-Saqqaw, was a non-literate Tajik who held power for nine months in 1929. Along with Burhanuddin Rabani (1992–1996), he is the only Tajik to have ruled Afghanistan.

15. Amir Amanullah and Queen Soraya were exiled in Rome, Italy, where he died in 1960 and she died in 1968. They are buried side by side in Jalalabad next to Amanullah's father, Amir Habibullah.

16. Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women*, 69.

17. Fahima Rahimi, *Women in Afghanistan* (Liestal: Stiftung Foundation, Stiftung Bibliotheca Afghanica, 1986), 74.

18. Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women*, 71.

19. Andrew Wilson, "Inside Afghanistan: A Background to Recent Troubles," *Royal Central Asian Journal* 47, nos. 3–4 (July–October 1960): 287–288.

20. Hafizullah Emadi, "State, Modernization and Rebellion: US-Soviet Politics of Domination of Afghanistan," *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 4 (January 26, 1991): 176–183, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4397249>.

21. Although Prime Minister Daoud's social reform policies were not the litmus test that led to his removal from office in 1963, they did contribute. His

stoking of the “Pukhtunkhwa” (Pashtun State), due to the irredentist connections with Pakistan, were also a factor.

22. For more details on Daoud’s rule, see Martin Ewan’s “The Return of Daoud and the Saur Revolution,” in *Afghanistan: A New History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 128–137.

23. For more on Daoud’s efforts to reduce gender inequality, see Shireen Burki-Liebl, *The Politics of State Intervention: State Policy and the Status of Women in Pakistan (1947–2006) and Afghanistan (1919–2006)* (dissertation, University of Utah, 2007), 177–180.

24. Emadi, *Repression, Resistance, and Women*, 102.

25. Burki-Liebl, *Politics of State Intervention*, 217–218.

26. Hamid Karzai is a member of the Popalzai Durrani Pashtun clan based in Kandahar.

27. “Between Hope and Fear: Intimidation and Attacks against Women in Public Life in Afghanistan” (Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, October 2004), 10.

28. Jerome Starkey, “Under Taliban Rule: How Insurgents Run Shadow Government in Helmand,” *London Times*, October 3, 2010; <http://freedomsyndicate.com/fairoooo/times0036.html>

29. Bula Devi, “Afghanistan: The State of Women’s Rights Is Still a Concern,” *The Hindu*, September 13, 2010, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/interview/article627560.ece>.