

## Ban on Girls Education in Afghanistan After the Re-emergence of the Taliban in 2021: Challenges and Way Forward



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**Abstract:** *The primary objective of this research paper is to present an in-depth analysis of the obstacles confronted in the field of girls' education in Afghanistan subsequent to the return of the Taliban in 2021. The resurgence of the Taliban has presented considerable challenges in terms of educational possibilities, particularly for girls. As a result, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted elements that impact their access to school within this dynamic socio-political context. The introduction provides an overview of the historical development of girls' education in Afghanistan, highlighting the significant advancements made in recent times. It also introduces the main emphasis of the research, which centers on the issues arising from the resurgence of the Taliban. The methodology section provides a comprehensive overview of the research technique, with a focus on maintaining transparency in relation to the criteria used for selecting participants and the ethical issues taken into account. In summary, this scholarly paper amalgamates significant discoveries, highlighting the necessity of cooperative endeavors on local, national, and global scales. The statement emphasizes the pressing necessity for nuanced and contextually tailored policies to address the stated concerns. It also affirms the significance of education as an essential entitlement that should be protected, regardless of changing geopolitical circumstances. This study aims to serve as a fundamental basis for well-informed policy development and advocacy efforts, so making a valuable contribution to the continuing dialogue around the advancement of inclusive and accessible education for all individuals in Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** Afghan Taliban, Girls Education, Reemergence, Afghanistan, Terrorism

### Introduction

The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021 has once again focused attention on the status of women there. There is mounting evidence that the present Taliban leadership plans to incorporate a rigid and limited view of women's role in society into its vision for the future of the country. Consecutive restrictions implemented by the leadership have already had

a devastating effect on women's basic liberties. The United Nations (UN) Security Council emphasised the seriousness of the situation. The activities of the Taliban have been highlighted by experts from both the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) as constituting gender persecution. These actions potentially fall within the scope of crimes against humanity

as defined by the Rome Statute, to which Afghanistan has been a signatory since 2003. International donors, particularly the European Union (EU), have been steadfast in their commitment to promoting women's empowerment in the country for the past two decades. However, they now face the challenge of addressing the severe erosion of women's rights while simultaneously assisting the people in fulfilling their fundamental necessities, considering the country's need on humanitarian aid. In order to comprehend the factors contributing to periods of gender persecution in Afghanistan, it is necessary to examine the historical context of the country, particularly in relation to women's suffrage. Despite women in Afghanistan gaining the right to vote in 1919, which preceded the majority of Western nations, subsequent events have led to challenges in the realm of gender equality. This briefing will provide an extensive historical overview before delving into the present state of women's rights in Afghanistan, as well as the international community's response to this issue (Jan, 2022).

The subject of education holds significant importance in contemporary societies, particularly in those that are in the process of development. The practical aspects of this study appear to be relatively straightforward, and it is evident that there is a significant value in women acquiring knowledge in the fields of science and education, regardless of the specific threats, physical and psychological risks, or the availability of time, opportunities, and adequate resources for learning (Paper, 2022).

The right to education is an inherent right of all individuals, with a specific emphasis on women, regardless of factors such as race, social background, language, or socioeconomic status. Education signifies a transformative and progressive enhancement in cognitive and sociocultural capacities for the purposes of inquiry, critical thinking, and practical application. As per the renowned Islamic scholar and physician, Abu Ali Sina Balkhi, education encompasses the strategic organisation of societal endeavours to promote the well-being of families and the holistic development of children, both during their lifetime and

afterwards.

It is widely acknowledged that education serves as the fundamental basis for the growth and development of modernization, similar to the nourishing soil that supports the growth of a vibrant green plant. The significance of education in the process of modernization is self-evident and does not necessitate further elaboration (UNESCO, 2023).

### **Afghan law's protection of the right to education**

In the context of Afghanistan, it is noteworthy that there are now no legislative impediments that restrict women from pursuing educational opportunities. In accordance with the legal framework of Afghanistan, individuals are granted the opportunity to pursue education, with both genders being afforded equal rights in this regard, as stipulated by Islamic principles. Women are indeed afforded specific benefits. Based on the principles of Islam, an individual who successfully raises and nurtures three daughters or sisters would be rewarded with eternal paradise. As per Article 21 of Afghanistan's recently enacted constitution, any form of discrimination against individuals based on their gender is strictly prohibited (Nation, 2011). Moreover, the right to education is universally applicable to all people of Afghanistan, without any distinction. The Afghan constitution, including Articles 43 and 44, protects the fundamental right of all Afghan people to pursue education up to the attainment of a degree. The provision of educational opportunities, namely in the domain of teaching national languages, is a responsibility entrusted to the government for the Afghan populace. The subject matter of Article 44 in the Afghan constitution pertains to the domain of women's education. The responsibility for promoting education for women, enhancing educational programmes, and implementing effective measures to address illiteracy in Afghanistan lies with the government. Article 43 of the legislation stipulates the provision of publicly accessible services without charge (News, 2022).

It is evident that every individual in Afghanistan

possesses a right to pursue education, and nobody has the authority to prevent this fundamental right from them. Unfortunately, other challenges persist, notably the absence of adequate security measures, which significantly hinders the ability to exercise the fundamental right to pursue education. According to Article 35 of the constitution of Afghanistan, it is a crime to restrict women's access to education and carries a six-month prison sentence.

Nevertheless, women in Afghanistan face numerous challenges that impede their ability to fully exercise their rights, thereby contravening both the Afghan constitution and Islamic legal principles. These obstacles primarily stem from cultural practises that are incorrect and hinder women's empowerment. In the Afghan community, it is observed that over 90% of the people lacks literacy skills.

However, a significant proportion of these individuals are female, and addressing this issue requires collective efforts from the Afghan government, the international community, and educated women themselves. It is imperative for educated women to collaborate with their communities and provide assistance to their fellow women in need (Diplomat, 2022).

### **Women Education in Afghanistan In historical context**

Under the rule of King Amanullah (1919-1929), significant emphasis was given to the advancement of women's and girls' education. This materialised through the establishment of central and provincial schools, as well as the introduction of specialised educational institutions exclusively catering to ladies. In 1923, Afghanistan's first constitution was enacted, recognising the fundamental right to education for all Afghan residents. Additionally, the law mandated that education be provided free of charge to all individuals and made primary education obligatory (Khan, 2015).

During this specific time frame, significant emphasis was given to the role of women in social processes and progress, prompting the initiation of efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering women as full-fledged members of society. In pursuit of this objective,

the establishment of the school for girls and the Naswan Association for Married Women took place. The inaugural Naswan school was founded in the year 1921, under the administration of the King's sibling. The administration of the school in Kabul was undertaken by Queen Soraya, the wife of King Amanullah, who received assistance from a group of exceptional ladies. During this particular era, the magazine Ershadul Naswan was introduced (Sadat, 2004).

Queen Soraya, the daughter of Mahmoud Tarzi and wife of Emir Amanullah Khan, played a significant role in advocating for the liberation of Afghan women, particularly during the twentieth century. Alongside her husband, she initiated substantial reforms that granted women some kind of autonomy. Notable initiatives included the establishment of the Naswan Association, the publication of dedicated magazines for women, and the creation of educational institutions specifically for girls.

Following the downfall of King Amanullah, the progress of women's empowerment encountered numerous challenges, resulting in the closure of educational institutions for Afghan women and girls. The demise of contemporary education occurred in conjunction with the coup d'état led by Emir Habibullah, commonly referred to as "Bacha Saqaw" (the child of a water-carrier). Once again, the access to education for Afghan women and girls was restricted (Sadat, 2004).

Schools particularly for boys began opening in the 1930s. Girls were not allowed to attend school. In 1932, female schools reopened. Educational growth was incremental but imbalanced over time. On December 10, 1948, the Afghan government signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recognising the importance of education.

The 1950s witnessed a significant surge in opportunities for women. Individuals were integrated into the employment force, namely in roles that involved interacting with the general public and working within government offices. In relation to higher education, individuals had the opportunity to pursue university studies either within Afghanistan or outside.

Additionally, during this period, they were afforded the chance to participate in parliamentary activities, government ministries, and the formulation of the 1946 constitution, which ensures gender equality by granting women the same rights as men. Notwithstanding these initiatives, the process of modernization exhibited a sluggish pace. Nevertheless, the development that was achieved demonstrated considerable strength and effectiveness (Jan, 2023).

During the reign of President Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan in the 1960s, there was significant progress made in the advancement of education that had been initiated in previous years. This resulted in a substantial increase in the enrollment of Afghan girls and boys in educational institutions. They engaged in collaborative academic pursuits during their time at the university and afterwards pursued further educational opportunities abroad. University students in Afghanistan were instructed in the fields of medicine and public health by female Afghan lecturers. A significant proportion of female individuals successfully completed their studies at the Kabul Faculty of Medicine.

During the rule of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan, Afghan women occupied a significant position, similar to their status during the government of Mohammad Daud and preceding periods. In addition to their male counterparts, women were able to financially contribute towards acquiring an education and actively engaged in a wide range of social, economic, cultural, and political endeavours, thereby exerting a significant influence on the advancement of diverse aspects of life. During this period, there was a significant emphasis placed on the significance of women's learning and education, and a clear roadmap for actualizing this vision was promptly established. Unfortunately, this was afterwards accompanied by unfavourable outcomes among the more conservative segments of the populace in this nation characterised by its adherence to traditional values (USIP, 2013).

During the period spanning from 1978 to 1992, women made significant contributions by

actively engaging in several sectors such as manufacturing, education, politics, and cultural endeavours.

When Islamist factions stormed Kabul, sparking an internal power struggle, women were subjected to the most heinous atrocities at the hands of armed men, reaching a level that words alone cannot express. Crates full of women's bodies were observed in several neighbourhoods of Kabul, particularly in the narrow and stony Khot-e-Sangi, Karta-e-Chart, Makroreyan, and Debory, where body parts were extracted and others were forced to consume them at gunpoint to instill fear in the community.

The Taliban were more fundamentalist than their predecessors, including Professor Rabbani, Professor Saiaf, Sheikh Alhadis Mohseni, the scholarly Professor Khalili, and the engineer Hekmatyar. After seizing power, the Taliban implemented the rules established during the Mujahideen's control in Afghanistan and made them even severer (News, 2022).

As a consequence of the implementation of the belief "amer bil ma'roof wa nahi anel munkar" (enjoining virtue and prohibiting evil), women encountered a deprivation of educational opportunities and access to academic pursuits, as schools and universities were inaccessible to them.

The Taliban implemented strict regulations that imposed restrictions on women, mandating that they could only leave their homes if accompanied by a male relative. Additionally, women were denied the opportunity to work in job within both governmental and non-governmental sectors. The regulations pertaining to the amputation of a hand and a foot thrived during the era of religious radicals, resulting in the transformation of sports arenas into sites of human dismemberment. The access of women to male physicians was restricted. Bus and taxi operators implemented a policy that prohibited the transportation of unaccompanied women, leaving widows particularly vulnerable and experiencing significant hardships (Paper, 2022).

## **Current challenges to female education in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan, having been identified as one of the five countries posing significant risks to women, currently stands as the sole nation globally where educational opportunities for girls and women are prohibited at both the primary and tertiary levels. The international community has expressed strong disapproval and apprehension regarding the prohibition on education in Afghanistan, since it signifies a notable regression in the realm of women's rights and gender parity. The growing number of girls enrolling in schools and colleges indicates that Afghan women's educational advancement has advanced significantly since the Taliban came to power. Despite enduring prolonged periods of violence and tyranny, Afghanistan has had a notable shift in the educational accomplishments of its female population between 2001 and 2021. The advancements achieved by women in Afghanistan in the field of education serve as a monument to their unwavering perseverance, strong resolve, and dedication to enhancing their own lives and the lives of forthcoming generations. The enrolment of Afghan women in educational institutions experienced a significant tenfold increase from 2001 to 2018, with primary school enrolment witnessing a remarkable rise from zero to 2.5 million. In 2018, the female student population in the country constituted roughly 38 percent, or approximately 3.8 million individuals. This indicates a significant increase in comparison to the enrollment of only 5,000 Afghan girls in schools in 2001. The progress made in the enrollment of females in educational institutions has been noteworthy throughout the last twenty years. A similar pattern can be noticed in the heightened presence of women at institutions of higher learning, with an approximate twenty-fold rise. In the year 2001, the number of female students was recorded at a very low count of 5,000. However, after a span of two decades, the figure has exceeded 100,000 (Pamuk, 2022).

The prohibition of education has resulted in significant psychological consequences for Afghan women and girls, as well as economic ramifications for the nation. During an

educational panel organized by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, Belquis Ahmadi, a Senior Program Officer at the United States Institute of Peace, affirmed that girls who are denied access to education are encountering various mental health challenges, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and contemplation of suicide. The aforementioned individuals experience a lack of purpose and confront a state of ambiguity over their forthcoming prospects. Educators have documented challenges encountered by pupils in the process of acquiring knowledge, as well as instances of despair and anxiety. Certain female individuals may opt to engage in self-isolation as well as substance abuse, thereby intensifying the pre-existing drug crisis. The dearth of female professionals specializing in mental health, in conjunction with the travel limitations enforced by the Taliban, results in a lack of essential assistance for these young girls, endangering their mental welfare to a significant degree. Based on UNICEF's findings, the deprivation of secondary education for females in Afghanistan led to a substantial economic deficit of \$500 million, which corresponds to nearly 2.5% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). According to the paper, it is anticipated that Afghanistan's ability to regain the lost GDP and achieve optimal productivity will be hindered if measures are not taken to guarantee girls' rights to access and successfully complete secondary education (Omari, 2023).

## **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The resurgence of the Afghan Taliban in 2021 has given rise to a complex and diversified terrain of problems for female education in Afghanistan. Upon doing a thorough analysis of the numerous challenges encountered by females in their pursuit of education, it becomes apparent that a comprehensive and collaborative approach is essential in order to traverse this unpredictable landscape.

The implementation of stringent laws and the potential establishment of enrollment obstacles by the Taliban give rise to significant apprehensions regarding the inclusivity of educational opportunities for girls. The presence

of conventional gender roles and societal standards exacerbates the difficulties, establishing a context that potentially dissuades families from granting their daughters the opportunity to pursue school.

Female students are directly threatened by security concerns that have a historical basis in attacks on educational institutions. The apprehension over probable retaliation and adverse outcomes from the Taliban might considerably impede family choices regarding the enrollment of their daughters in educational institutions, so continuing a cycle of limited access to education.

The intricacy of the situation is exacerbated by the impact on educational infrastructure, shortages of teachers, and economic restrictions. The scarcity of resources, combined with the possibility of displacement caused by conflict, hinders the uninterrupted progress of girls' education, so presenting a formidable obstacle in the effort to prioritize learning under pressing adversities.

The recognition of potential Taliban reprisals serves to emphasize the precarious condition of women's education. Families facing economic challenges and security issues may encounter a dilemma when it comes to balancing their desire for their daughters' educational attainment with the constraints imposed by the changing socio-political landscape.

Given the imminent possibility of modifications to educational policies and curricula, it is imperative to exercise caution in safeguarding the advancements achieved in women's education during recent years. International assistance programs encounter several challenges, necessitating the crucial involvement of the global community in upholding ongoing support for female education, notwithstanding the changing political realities.

In the context of this ambiguous landscape, it is imperative for stakeholders, encompassing both domestic and global actors, to engage in collaborative efforts aimed at preserving the fundamental entitlement of Afghan girls to get education of high caliber. In order to address the

obstacles and offer a source of inspiration for young women pursuing education and empowerment, it is imperative to coordinate advocacy initiatives, engage in diplomatic dialogue, and implement strategic interventions.

The endeavor to ensure the educational entitlements of young Afghan females following the rebirth of the Taliban is replete with obstacles. However, it is an undertaking that necessitates steadfast dedication, perseverance, and a collective international endeavor to navigate the ambiguous trajectory that lies ahead. It is through collaborative efforts of this like that we may strive to surmount challenges and establish a more promising and equitable future for female students in Afghanistan.

1. Policy and Legislation: Promote the Implementation and Enforcement of Gender-Inclusive laws: Advocate for the adoption and enforcement of laws that expressly endorse and support gender-inclusive education. It is imperative that these rules be implemented to ensure the protection of girls' right to equitable access to high-quality education, free from any kind of discrimination.
2. Security measures are implemented to ensure the safety and protection of educational institutions. It is imperative to give precedence to the safeguarding of educational institutions, with particular emphasis on schools that serve to female students. Engage in partnerships with international organizations and peacekeeping troops in order to establish secure surroundings that foster optimal conditions for educational pursuits.
3. Community Engagement: Initiate community-based awareness programs aimed at addressing and rectifying misconceptions surrounding female education. Involve religious and community leaders in the promotion and endorsement of girls' education, thereby garnering their advocacy and support.
4. Enhancing Educational Infrastructure: Allocating Resources for Infrastructure Development The proposed course of action is the allocation of resources to facilitate the

construction and enhancement of educational institutions specifically catering to the needs of female students, with a special focus on rural and marginalized regions. It is imperative to ascertain that the educational institutions had sufficient infrastructure, encompassing well-equipped classrooms, comprehensive libraries, and proper sanitation facilities.

5. **Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Training and Recruitment:** Advancing the Representation of Women in the Teaching Profession. It is imperative to actively promote and facilitate the recruitment and training of female educators. The aforementioned phenomenon not only contributes to the improvement of educational standards, but also serves as a means of offering commendable examples for young females.
6. **Economic Support: Implementation of Financial Assistance Programs:** Propose the introduction of financial assistance programs aimed at providing support to families experiencing economic difficulties. Scholarships, provision of school supplies, and implementation of incentives have the potential to alleviate the financial obstacles hindering girls' access to education.
7. **Displacement and Support for Refugees: Education Provision in Refugee Camps:** Establish and execute educational initiatives targeting displaced communities, with a particular emphasis on facilitating educational opportunities for females in both formal and informal contexts, including inside refugee camps.
8. **International Collaboration: Diplomatic Engagement:** Foster diplomatic engagement with the global community to get backing for the advancement of female education. Engage in collaborative efforts with foreign governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international entities to acquire financial assistance and specialized knowledge.
9. **Media Campaigns: Advocate for Positive Narratives:** Initiate media campaigns that highlight the achievements and accomplishments of educated women

hailing from Afghanistan. Emphasizing favorable storylines has the potential to facilitate a shift in public perspectives regarding the importance of girls' education.

10. **Monitoring and evaluation** are essential components of effective program management. Regular assessments are conducted to systematically gather data and assess the progress and impact of a program. Developing systems to provide consistent monitoring and assessment of educational programs is crucial. This include the evaluation of policy effects, identification of obstacles, and the modification of methods to facilitate ongoing enhancement.
11. **Programs for the Empowerment of Women: Moving Beyond Education** Develop and execute comprehensive women's empowerment initiatives that encompass a wide range of dimensions beyond formal schooling. This encompasses several endeavors aimed at promoting holistic empowerment through efforts targeting health, economic opportunity, and leadership development.
12. **Crisis Response Plans: Establishing Contingency Plans:** Developing comprehensive crisis response plans is essential for effectively addressing disruptions in education that arise from conflicts or other catastrophes. These plans should be designed to mitigate the negative impact of such disruptions and ensure the continuity of education for affected individuals. It is imperative that these strategies place utmost importance on ensuring the uninterrupted continuation of girls' education under difficult conditions.
13. **Ensuring Accountability in foreign help: Conditional Provision of Aid:** It is imperative to establish a linkage between the disbursement of foreign help and the safeguarding and advancement of human rights, encompassing the universal right to education, irrespective of gender. It is imperative to ensure that aid beneficiaries are held accountable for complying with the terms that have been mutually agreed upon.
14. **The Importance of Inclusive Curriculum Development: Integrating Diverse**

Perspectives. The objective is to design and execute a comprehensive curriculum that demonstrates regard for a range of viewpoints and advances the principles of gender parity. This practice guarantees that educational material remains pertinent, impartial, and empowering for every student.

15. Enhancing Capacity Development: Promote the development of local educational institutions by allocating resources towards enhancing their capacity to autonomously administer and maintain educational initiatives. This include the provision of instruction and guidance to educators and administrators within the local community.

When these guidelines are collectively implemented and consistently upheld, they have the potential to foster an atmosphere that safeguards and promotes the right to education for all girls in post-Taliban Afghanistan. The active involvement and cooperation of local communities, official entities, international organizations, and the global community are imperative for the implementation of these proposals and the promotion of constructive transformation for the prospective well-being of Afghan girls.

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