

WOMEN UNDER HAMID KARZAI'S GOVERNMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN: HOPING INCLUSIVITY IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

MULHERES SOB OS GOVERNOS DE HAMID KARZAI NO AFGANISTÃO: ESPERANÇA DE INCLUSÃO EM UMA SOCIEDADE PATRIARCAL

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Azmat Ullah*

*Department of History, Government College University Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1421-6068>

azmatullah@gcuf.edu.pk

Khuda Bakhsh**

**Government College University Faisalabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1823-4468>

khudabakhsh@gcuf.edu.pk

Arousa Aman***

***Department of History and Pakistan Studies, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar (SBBWUP), Pakistan.

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8372-5558>

arousa.aman@sbbwu.edu.pk

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Abstract

The patriarchal orientation of Afghan society kept women limited to their homes and aloof from the public life of Afghanistan. This attribute was further wielded by the introduction of fundamentalist versions of Islam, misogynistic interpretations, religious political leanings and militancy and Talibanization. Only after the ouster of Afghan Taliban from power in 2001, the government of Hamid Karzai instilled a new hope of inclusivity among Afghan women by involving them in political, administrative, educational, cultural and social affairs of the country. The allocation of 25% seats in Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) under the constitution of 2004 encouraged women to also help shaping the future of Afghanistan. They provided their services in multiple spheres of the state machinery to ensure gender equality and women rights. Despite multiple cultural barriers, violence and limited resources, Afghan women played pivotal role in the affairs of the country. The existing literature about women's role during the governments of Hamid Karzai in a country like Afghanistan is very significant. It has extensively been utilized to connect the dots for objectively assessing women participation in Afghan affairs despite having patriarchal characteristics and societal constraints. An explanatory analytical approach is adopted in this research study for comprehending women

Resumo

A orientação patriarcal da sociedade afegã mantém as mulheres confinadas em suas casas e afastadas da vida pública do Afeganistão. Essa característica foi ainda mais reforçada pela introdução de versões fundamentalistas do Islã, interpretações misóginas, tendências políticas religiosas, militância e talibanização. Somente após a derrubada do Talibã afegão do poder em 2001, o governo de Hamid Karzai instilou uma nova esperança de inclusão entre as mulheres afegãs, envolvendo-as nos assuntos políticos, administrativos, educacionais, culturais e sociais do país. A alocação de 25% das cadeiras na Loya Jirga (Grande Assembleia) sob a constituição de 2004 encorajou as mulheres a também ajudarem a moldar o futuro do Afeganistão. Elas prestaram seus serviços em várias esferas da máquina estatal para garantir a igualdade de gênero e os direitos das mulheres. Apesar das múltiplas barreiras culturais, da violência e dos recursos limitados, as mulheres afegãs desempenharam um papel fundamental nos assuntos do país. A literatura existente sobre o papel das mulheres durante os governos de Hamid Karzai em um país como o Afeganistão é muito significativa. Ela tem sido amplamente utilizada para conectar os pontos para avaliar objetivamente a participação das mulheres nos assuntos afegãos, apesar das características patriarcais e das restrições



inclusion and participation during the governments of President Karzai. The research concludes that despite positive developments significant strides, political and cultural barriers coupled with security challenges limited the full realization of gender equality in Afghanistan. The question this research study deals is that how far the Afghan women succeeded in realizing their inclusion in the government of Hamid Karzai despite facing cultural and political barriers of a patriarchal society and fundamentalist religious threats?

Keywords: Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai. Governments. Women. Inclusion. Patriarchal Society. Political and Cultural Barriers.

sociais. Uma abordagem analítica explicativa é adotada neste estudo de pesquisa para compreender a inclusão e a participação das mulheres durante os governos do presidente Karzai. A pesquisa conclui que, apesar dos avanços positivos e progressos significativos, as barreiras políticas e culturais, juntamente com os desafios de segurança, limitaram a plena realização da igualdade de gênero no Afeganistão. A questão abordada por este estudo de pesquisa é até que ponto as mulheres afegãs conseguiram realizar sua inclusão no governo de Hamid Karzai, apesar de enfrentarem barreiras culturais e políticas de uma sociedade patriarcal e ameaças religiosas fundamentalistas.

Palavras-chave: Afeganistão. Hamid Karzai. Governos. Mulheres. Inclusão. Sociedade Patriarcal. Barreiras Políticas e Culturais.

1 INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy or male dominance in Afghanistan particularly among Pashtuns is as old as the country itself or the Pashtun themselves. That is why very little is heard about women participation in public affairs in the past. It is not to infer that women role is totally negligible because they look after the household and assist their guardians in the household affairs. They enjoy freedom of happiness and joy or mourning inside the four walled houses. While in public affairs they have surely no role at all. Even in Pashtun *jirgas* (councils), participation to women is denied according to Pashtun cultural requirements and injunctions of Islam while their males represent them in those forums (Sajjad, 2013).

Women's role in Afghanistan was shaped by shifting political, administrative, cultural and social affairs from the times of the progressive reforms of *Amir* (Leader or King) Amanullah Khan to the transformative challenging era of President Hamid Karzai. *Amir* Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) and his wife, Soraya Tarzi (daughter of Mahmud Tarzi) launched progressive reforms to protect the rights of Afghan women. Suraya Tarzi as a vocal advocate of gender equality encouraged women education and their public participation. She not only accompanied her husband during his visits and tours by challenging patriarchy but also founded schools for girls. Subsequently, King Zahir Khan played a pivotal role for women participation in political and educational platforms. His

efforts of pushing the urban modernization efforts to rural areas attracted opposition which resulted in an upheaval of December 1959, causing the death of many women trying to challenge the taboos (Villeneuve, 2024). In 1963, women were given the right to vote that was embodied in the 1964 constitution while in 1965, they were for the first time elected as members of parliament (Graham, 2015). Schools, colleges, universities and other public institutions were opened for women not only in the capital but in rural Afghanistan as well where women became teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers and lawyers (Nemat, 2005). Nevertheless, when women started dressing in clothes of western style that again resulted in bloodshed (Hartley-Blecic, 2000). Sardar Daud who as Prime Minister during the rule of King Zahir Khan ensured women participation also continued his efforts for the rights of women once he became President of the republic (Villeneuve, 2024). The later Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan from 1978 to 1992, pushed for women education, participation in administration and politics. However, the ensuing civil war and the *Mujahideen* (the term used for holy Islamic warriors) government imposed strict laws for limiting the public roles of women (Villeneuve, 2024). *Mujahideen* imposed veiling on Afghan women and those who refused were raped and killed. They were only allowed to buy food and to meet with lady doctor with mahram.

The major setback women inclusivity received was during the Taliban (in Pashto the term is used in literal for the students of religious seminaries but in Afghanistan, a militant group contextualized it as radicalistic social and political ideology) rule from 1996 to 2001. They intertwined Pashtun cultural traits with religious knowledge and blended it with *Wahabbi* (Jihadi mindset and ideology pleaded by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab of Saudi Arabia) *Madrassah* ideology. They proclaimed strict Islamic Shari'a Law in Afghanistan, the major wrath of which was faced by women as they were banned from education and banished from public life. Wearing shuttlecock veils were declared compulsory for women while leaving home without a male heir except for food was prohibited for them. They were given zero representation in public sphere (Bokhari, October 2001). Nevertheless, the situation altogether changed after the fall of Taliban government in 2001. Hamid Karzai government with the backing of North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) troops and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) supported Afghan women and their participation in politics, administration, education and social affairs.

According to June 2001 Global survey, Afghanistan was ranked first as the “world most dangerous country in which to be born a woman” (Bowcott, 2011) but after the US-led intervention and fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, gender discrimination, social injustice and suppression has ended and a space was created for republicanism, equality, liberty and democracy. The shift created opportunities for Afghan women marking a significant turning point in their struggle for rights and participation in state and public affairs (Dawlat, 2024). They began attaining important political, economic, administrative, educational and social gains during Hamid Karzai government. Women like Nasrine Abou-Bakre Gross not only worked in education in Afghanistan since the fall of Taliban but also wrote about the culture of war in that country. Similarly, Dr. Sima Samar who headed the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission also wrote about the Afghan society and human rights situation there (Skaine, 2008).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Women of Afghanistan in the post-Taliban Era: How Lives Have Changed and Where They Stand Today is an account by Rosemarie Skaine that exactly deals with the first era of this current research work. The background chapter provides some very important information about the women struggle and their participation in Afghanistan’s public life (Skaine, 2008) but then in the subsequent chapters the book changes its stance towards the nature and character of Afghan society particularly Islamic and focus less on women contribution in national life of Afghanistan except their presence in education and health. The current research mainly focuses on women contribution during the two governments of Afghanistan which this book fails to cover.

Afghan Women: Voices of Hope is an another informative account by the George W. Bush Institute with an “introduction” by Mrs. Laura Bush that is exclusively looking at the Afghan recent history with lenses of Afghan women. The book covers the stories of various women inside Afghanistan and those in Washington. The stories were mostly regarding the Taliban rule and their atrocities against women (George Bush Institute, 2016). However, the book gives little space to the later period despite being published 17 years after the Taliban rule. The women voices are recorded but their struggle is not made part of the book. Even women role during Hamid Karzai governments have not been made part of the book.

The edited book, *Afghan Women and Education* of S. Behnaz Hosseini contains the chapters of different scholars on the education of Afghan women. The book mainly focuses on the plight of women under the Taliban and highlights the challenges and opportunities that were available to Afghan women in Iran and also their empowerment, education and life expectancy in Iran. It also discusses the viewpoints of women regarding human rights and girls' education under the Taliban. The book also covers the Afghan women diaspora in Austria as refugees and highlights the role of Afghan women in the intra-Afghan talks. Although the book is a comprehensive account but is somewhat disjointed for missing many topics and aspects (Hosseini, 2024). The book is totally devoid of the previous position of women inside Afghanistan. The most important Era of President Hamid Karzai is not even touched when women hoped for their inclusion in public and state affairs despite the patriarchal orientation of the Afghan society. Besides, the book only focuses education while other fields are totally ignored.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs explanatory analytical approach for comprehending the complex issue of women inclusivity in Afghan affairs during Hamid Karzai governments despite the fact that it is predominantly a patriarchal country with women only allowed to live their lives inside their four-walled homes and houses. It describes the success of women in gaining prominence in public affairs and analysis their role and contribution to Afghan society. This research work is based on primary and secondary sources like books, reports, research articles, newspaper articles and internet sources to have a better picture of the phenomenon dealing with Afghan women.

3.1 Women politicians during the First Karzai Government

Although patriarchy is the most expressive feature of the Afghan society which has kept women abounded and submissive but the progress of the country is not possible without their participation. Even for the growth and flourishing of democracy in Afghanistan, the participation of the 60% population of Afghan women population is necessary. It was this reason that at the time of Bonn agreement in 2001, emphasis was made on the protection of human and women rights in Afghanistan. The Bonn agreement

made possible women participation in politics. The Special Independent Commission of the interim government was instructed to include a significant number of women in the Emergency *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council) (Skaine, 2008) and their numbers were kept at 12% of the total. Many women member felt ignore and only few managed to speak while many others complained about the cutting of their mics. Only participants succeeded in giving their inputs in the presence of previous war criminals. Masouda Jalal, a Physician by profession and UN staff member from Kabul contested for presidency against Hamid Karzai despite pressures to withdraw and vote for the later. She won 171 votes as a second candidate to Karzai who received 1, 295 votes (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

In Constitutional *Loya Jirga*, women participated with greater freedom amidst of life threats and harassments because most of the male delegates were the previous commanders who had money, weapons and have killed people. The women feared them and could not express themselves freely. One woman, Malalai Joya when demanded the trying of warlords in courts was threatened with life threats. Subsequently, women took part in the 2005 elections but they were again intimidated despite the introduction of articles 22 and 44 of the 2004 Afghan Constitution which proclaimed equal rights and duties before the law for Afghan women and also equal educational opportunities. The Constitution also mandated that the National Assembly must comprise 24 percent of women. As the National Assembly was modeled to consisted two houses, *Wolesi Jirga* (House of the People) and *Meshrano Jirga* (House of Elders), Simultaneously, The Afghanistan constitution specified 64 reserved seats for women in the *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House of the People) while on the 186 general seats in all the 32 provinces, both sex were allowed to contest. It was also decided that the women reserved seats and general seats may change with the creation of new provinces (Norris, 2004).

When the elections were held in 2005, total 2,753 candidates contested for the *Wolesi Jirga* and out of these figures 328 were women, making 12 percent of the total (Ahmadi, 2015) and 247 out of 3025 or 8 percent women contested for Provincial Councils. Out of the 281 withdrawals from the candidacy of *Wolesi Jirga*, 51 were women while these numbers were in high proportion from the candidacy of Provincial Councils (Watch, 2005). The reason was the refusal of representation by the radical elements. Even during the elections of 2005, bomb blast took place and as a consequence many women politicians and workers died. As a result of intimidation and murders, many women

refused to take part in elections. Thus they were deprived from their freedom of expression by the radical patriarchal mindset of the Taliban (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Besides all these, the Afghan women still achieved huge progress and success in a short span of time as they demonstrated their perseverance and determination. They faced bravely the social and cultural problems of patriarchy, religious extremism and political hurdles. Female literacy rate increased with access to education and economic possibilities. Their selection in civil services resulted in more autonomy and independence. Women political life started thriving as they gained greater voice in the decision-making and could better plead for their rights and interests. They received share in business which made them independent and could contribute to the economic development of the country. Their presence in civil society and media enabled them to speak for their rights and hold the government accountable for its actions. The commitment of Afghan women compelled the international community to support women empowerment in Afghanistan, prioritize their rights and include them in all aspects of the Afghan society (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).constitution

Subsequently, Dr. Sima Samar became the first vice-chair of women affairs in the interim administration of Afghanistan. She chaired the Afghanistan independent commission for 17 years (2002-2019) and played a pivotal role in protecting women rights in Afghanistan (Skaine, 2008). She also founded the *Shuhada* (Martyrs) organization in 1989 along with Mr. Abdul Rauf Naveed, initially for the healthcare of Afghan women but then expanded its scope by including in it; “education, humanitarian aid, women’s economic empowerment, child protection (orphanage), human and women rights and gender inclusion, democracy, good governance and capacity building. She helped established 55 schools and numerous clinics (Shuhada Organization, 1989). Throughout her career, she served the United Nations Organization (UNO) rapporteur for the situation of human rights in Sudan from 2005 to 2009 (Partlow, 2016).

Another women who served as minister of martyrs and disabled was Sediqa Balkhi who was previously a school teacher for Islamic Studies. She also participated in Bonn Conference of 2001 (Katzman, 2005). Habiba Sarabi was another leading woman who served in the first Karzai cabinet was appointed as the governor of Bamiyan province, and she became the first Afghan woman governor in Afghanistan in 2005. She worked for the advancement of women rights and their participation in public affairs. She

also addressed issues like violence against Afghan women and access to girls' education (Fleschenberg, 2009).

Fawzia Koofi was elected by *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower House of the People of Afghanistan National Assembly) to represent Badakhshan province. She became the first woman in Afghanistan to serve as second Deputy Speaker and the first female Deputy Speaker of the *Wolesi Jirga*. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, she started a school campaign "Back to School" to promote girls education and their participation in social affairs. Koofi founded the political party "Movement for Change in Afghanistan" to promote girls education and protect their rights (Koofi, 2012).

Similarly Amina Afzali who participated in the Bonn Conference and who served at the independent Human Rights Commission that drafted the new Afghan constitution was appointed as Minister of Youth Affairs (Skaine, 2008). Last but not the least, Shukria Barakzai, a former journalist of Afghanistan also entered politics and pushed for more open discussion on women issues. She also raised voice for the education of Afghan girls and played a pivotal role in Afghanistan democratic future (Fairweather, 2014).

3.2 Educational services by Afghan women

During the Afghan interim government from December 2001 to June 2002, during the transitional government from June 2003 to December 2004 and finally during the first government of Hamid Karzai, the three prominent Afghan politicians, Dr. Sima Samar, Suhaila Siddiq and Massouda Jalal played their significant roles for the restoration and promotion of education, particularly for the education of Afghan females. They served in a country overtaken by fragile conflict environment but they kept their focus on policy advocacy, infrastructure rebuilding and access to education (Uwe H. Bittlingmayer, 2019).

Dr. Sima Samar as education minister of the *Loya Jirga* of Afghanistan made a notable impact in the Afghan education. As human rights activist, she always pleaded and advocated for the education of Afghan women and raised her voice for the reopening of girl schools which had been closed from 1996. Her ministry collaborated with foreign organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to secure funding for school rehabilitation, teacher training and curriculum activities including gender sensitive

materials. Dr. Sima Samar's efforts helped the reopening of 100 schools by mid-2002, while enrollment of girls rose up to 1 million by 2003 (Pathak, 2018).

Sohaila Siddiq, a former minister of public health supported education through public health initiatives. She collaborated with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the establishment of health center in schools and provided for nutrition, vaccination and basic medical care to students and teachers. She also supported training programs for females and teaching of basic literacy alongside with healthcare education. According to World Health Organization (WHO), her ministry contributed 30% in child mortality by 2004 (Mills, 2007). Beside her, Massouda Jalal as a pediatrician and professor and also a vocal advocate for women rights focused on the primary and secondary education. Her participation in the 2003 constitutional *Loya Jirga* was pivotal for raising voice for the equal educational rights of both genders, which were clearly enshrined in article 44 of the 2004 constitution (Silva, 2014).

3.3 Role of Afghan women in social welfares

The Afghan women also made a notable contribution and debut for the social welfare of Afghanistan and Afghan women particularly. Their efforts reflected in education, healthcare, legal reforms and political advocacy, often in the face of significant cultural and security challenges. Nevertheless, they care little for threats, harassments and intimidation. Their firm resolve, missionary zeal and dedication compelled the patriarchs to accept their presence at least during that particular period of time. Their voices became voices of hope for those who wanted their sisters and daughters to excel in life and play their roles for the betterment of the Afghan society. The list of such voices is not very long but still the women who voiced were heard in faraway lands. These Afghan women actively participated in social welfare works. The social services of these women are worth consideration and worth discussing.

Malalai Joya was elected to the *Wolesi Jirga* in 2005. She strongly and firmly advocated for women rights and social justice and also criticized the warlords and conservative policies. She spoke against violence against Afghan women, child marriages, forced marriages and had drawn attention to the weak enforcement of the articles 1 to 6 of the UN regarding Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) in Afghanistan. She was expelled from the house in 2007 for her outspoken criticism but it

could not stop her from advocating for women rights and criticism of the warlords which she continued through public speeches and by utilizing international platforms (Joya, 2009). In the same vein, Fauzia Gailani who was also the member of Afghan Parliament from 2005 to 2010, advocated for girls education and women's economic empowerment. She also pressed hard for the implementation of EVAW articles and pushed for women inclusion in peace processes, the effort which was often ignored. Her resilience helped in the improvement of social welfare work for women in both urban and rural areas (Rina Amiri, 2004).

The work of Suraya Parlika was, however, different from other Afghan women rights advocates. She was a famous Afghan women activist and also a leader of the All Afghan Women Association who emphasized the economic independence of women and opened various training centers for them in and around Kabul and also in some other parts of Afghanistan. She raised her voice against gender based violence on women and launched awareness campaign for the rights of women among rural communities (AbiRafeh, 2009).

3.4 Hamid Karzai Second Government and the representation of women

The total numbers of *Wolesi Jirga* and *Masherano Jirga* during the 2009 elections were 351, out of which 102 were specified for the lower house and 249 for the upper house, out of which 24 percent for women would mean 85 seats (68 seats or 27.3 percent in lower house and 17 seats or 16.75 percent in upper house) in total. In each Provincial Council, about 25 percent of seats were reserved for female candidates. In total they were holding 121 seats or 28.8 percent in the total 420 seats of the Provincial Councils (Brummet, 2009).

About 400 women out of 2500 candidates contested the elections for *Wolesi Jirga* amidst of threats of death, violence and intimidation. Thirty-one percent valid votes were casted by about 4.6 million people out of 15 million of the total population. While the women voters were 38 percent. Despite barriers in registration, casting of votes, proxy votes by male candidates, the women succeeded on wining over 69 seats of *Wolesi Jirga* (Brummet, 2009).

3.5 Afghan women as part of cabinet and Government of Karzai

In the second government of Hamid Karzai after 2009, women were also made part of the cabinet and government as members of *Loya Jirga* and cabinet ministers of Afghanistan. They whole heartedly and devotedly served their country particularly they promoted women rights in order bring them at par with dominant male members of the society. Following is a discussion on the services of women in various fields during the second tenure of President Hamid Karzai.

Dr. Husn Bano Ghaznafar was included in the cabinet of the second government of President Karzai as Minister for Women Affairs where she worked for ensuring women participation in politics, legal protection and economic empowerment. She played a key role for the implementation of the articles of UN resolution regarding Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW). Mrs. Ghaznafar raised voice against the domestic violence on women and forced marriages. Under her leadership, the ministry collaborated with foreign donors to launch training programs, literacy projects and public awareness campaigns for women rights (Bakhtar News Agency, 2020). Another woman rights champion, Amina Afzali was nominated as the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled during the Karzai second government. She worked for the social welfares and policies and labor rights of women (Aljazeera, 2010). Politically, she was a strong voice in cabinet for integrating gender considerations into labor and social protection laws (Spanta, 2017). Beside these women, Dr. Suraya Dalil was nominated the Minister of Public Health who focused on improving health services and for promoting vaccination campaigns to reduce preventable diseases. Dr. Dalil also worked to extend healthcare services in rural areas, ensuring that more women could receive safe childbirth services and essential medical care. Her tenure strengthened the Afghanistan public health system (Price, 2010).

3.6 Women in *Loya Jirga* (Upper house)

Sediqa Balkhi elected was a senior Afghan politician in the *Loya Jirga*. She continued to play a key role in advancing Afghan women political participation and social development. She served as a Minister of Martyrs and Disabled. She worked for the disabled families, such as services to families of war victims and in providing pensions

to them. Sediqa Balkhi was once threatened by someone saying that she would die if she went to school again (Armanshahr Foundation, 2014). Another prominent figure of *Wolesi Jirga* was Dr. Sima Samar. She served as the chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), where she played a pivotal role in reporting and monitoring women rights' condition across the country, serving productive healthcare and promoting women education by engaging with international bodies (Skaine, 2008).

3.7 Women in *Wolesi Jirga* (Lower house)

Fawzia Kofi re-elected in 2010 of Badakhshan province. She served as a deputy speaker and a prominent women rights advocate and author. Kofi also raised voice for the gender equality, violence against women and the educational and political rights of women, especially in rural areas (Coburn, 2011). Beside her, Shukria Barakzai served as a member and became a strong voice for the political, administrative, educational and social rights of the Afghan women. She used her parliamentary platform to campaign for the enforcement of the Elimination of Violence Against the Women (ELAW) law. Her fearless stance in parliamentary debates made her one of the most influential female voice in Afghanistan (Larson, 2010). Kunduz Province sent Fatima Aziz to the Parliament. Her focus was on security challenges, political, and educational and socio-economic development of her province. Her speeches were directed against the deteriorating security situations in northern Afghanistan, which had an impact on Afghan women mobility, education and participation in public affairs (Samimi, 2012). From Herat, Naheed Fareed as the youngest Parliamentarian reached *Wolesi Jirga*. She was a strong voice for youth and women's empowerment and she worked for ensuring the political participation of Afghan women. She really inspired the new generation of Afghan women (Shalizi, 2012).

Another women who made debut in *Wolesi Jirga* was Noorzia Atmer who was elected from the Province of Nangarhar. She strived for women rights including protection of women from violence and improvement in girls' access to schools. She also worked for governance and security issues in her area and advocated for greater government attention to the need of rural and far flung communities of Afghanistan (Harrison, 2014). The woman who joined parliament in 2010 from Faryab Province was

Rangina Kargar. She sat on opposition benches and played a key role in promoting women participation in politics and also pleaded for the development of northern Afghanistan. She supported legislation regarding the protection of women rights including the law of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law. Mrs. Kargar also raised various other issues like violence on women, gender equality, governance issues and the need of infrastructure in Faryab Province (Partlow, 2016).

3.8 Afghan women educational role

Husan Bano Ghaznafar during the second term of President Hamid Karzai worked for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA 2008-2013), which promoted girls education and female literacy. Her ministry developed the female literacy from 12% in 2001 to approximately 25% by 2014 (Baiza, 2014). Beside her, the Member of Parliament from Herat Province during 2010-2015, Naheed Fareed worked for education reforms in her province. She always supported girls' education and tried to protect them from early marriages. Her support helped girls' education in Herat Province and more than 50% girls succeeded to attend primary education by 2014 (Shalizi, 2012). The marvelous work for education was done by another woman politician; Dr. Sima Samar who remained Senator and Chairperson of AIHRC. She helped protect girl schools from the Taliban attacks and was given the Right Livelihood Award or Alternative Nobel Prize by the Charity Foundation of Sweden in 2024). Her voice and reports secured international funds for the Afghan girls education (Uwe H. Bittlingmayer, 2019).

3.9 Social welfare role of Afghan women

Amina Afzali remained engaged in social welfare work. She as a minister of labour and social affairs strongly advocated for the welfare of workers and artisans. Her focus was also on women participation in politics (Wimplemann, 2017). Along with her, Palwasha Hassan was also picked as Minister of Women Affairs in 2010 but she could not receive required votes in the house, due to which she stand out from cabinet. Although she could not become a cabinet member, but she closely worked with government and political bodies for the participation of Afghan women in politics and social affairs. She

was also the founder and leader of the Afghan Women Education Center (AWEC) that closely collaborated with women affairs and other institutions to work for literacy programs and training projects of Afghan women, both in urban and rural areas (Joya, *Raising My Voice*, 2010).

3.10 Hamid Karzai downplaying women

Despite the advances made in women empowerment the whole picture as public representatives was not encouraging. The Afghan government had not always supported women rights. At times, the government has used women rights as a pretext and a bargaining chip with the international community, rather than prioritizing their inclusion and empowerment (Nehan, 2022). Even in the High Peace Conference with Taliban in 2010, women were downplayed by Hamid Karzai and they were kept in the dark by not keeping them updated about the development despite pressure from international community. The fundamentalist elements began to criticize women rights and participation in government affairs (Harrison, 2014). President Karzai even endorsed the “Code of Conduct” for women that were issued by the influential council of *Ulema* (Islamic Scholars) for bringing the Taliban to the negotiations. The code demanded veiling, polygamy, violence by husbands in certain conditions and the segregation of sexes (Associated Press in Kabul, 2012).

4 CONCLUSION

Patriarchy and the Afghan version of Islam, both remained a threat to the women rights in Afghanistan. They always enjoyed a subordinate status but were never encouraged to play a leading role in public life at least for their very own selves. A ray of hope was seen by the Afghan women, when Queen Suraya Tarzi, the wife of Ameer Amanullah Khan broke the shackles of tribal conservatism and religious misogyny. She encouraged women and promoted girls’ education by staying on the side of her King husband. This inspiration led many girls to challenge their societal taboos and come out openly against the prevalent conservative socio-cultural norms. Many girls joined modern education school and succeeded to complete their education from abroad. It helped a lot in latter periods of Afghan history, particularly, during the Presidential period of Sardar

Daud because women like Anahita Ratebzdad joined the communist cadres. Afterwards these women created association for women that finally culminated in the formation of a Ministry of Women Affairs. Anahita Ratebzdad was joined and followed by many other young girls who by the turn of the century competed with men in the governments and cabinets of President Hamid Karzai and later on President Ashraf Ghani, after a long break of *Mujahideen* and Taliban rule.

The burden of patriarchy and misogyny persisted but still Afghan women should a great struggle and resilience to play their role in the uplift of the society after the fall of Taliban in 2001. They at least succeeded in overcoming such traits and positively contributed by not only wining hearts inside Afghanistan but also created their international postures. They worked hard for human rights, especially for women rights and in their respective roles as members of parliament and cabinet ministers promoted education, demanded the implementation of the law of the EVAW, advocated for control over violence against women at domestic level, pleaded for the punishment of warlord ministers and encouraged greater share of women in public and political life of the country. They particularly emphasized on girls' education and women healthcare and strived hard to ensure such facilities by making education accessible to all girls and health care available to all women.

As harbingers of change the women in response to their inclusivity served the two governments of Karzai with dedication by working sincerely for their own kind but yet they were not without challenges. They not only faced threats from the conservative and fundamentalist elements but also liberal people like Hamid Karzai himself downplayed them for his own political necessities. They were ignored sometimes and were even left vulnerable to the verbal and physical attacks of religious misogynists but despite all such hurdles, Afghan women played their positive role in changing the cultural landscape of Afghanistan. They with the same vein served the later governments of President Ashraf Ghani with a hope to achieve greater inclusivity till the returning of Taliban in August 2021.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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