

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AFGHANISTAN

This chapter is to show about how Afghanistan women experience great sufferings such as: violence and oppression for several decades. Violence and oppression against women and girls in Afghanistan are pervasive. Few women are exempted from the reality or the threat of violence. Women who live in big cities are educated so they have a better life. While, women who live in small villages are often become the main target of violence and oppression because they are uneducated and very poor. The violence against women and girls are based on the ethnicity. In Afghanistan, Pashtun is the largest ethnic, while Tajik is the minor ethnic. Since several decades ago, many of the Pashtuns were able to be the leader in the governmental parties. While the Tajiks were always be farmers or merchants.

Through the history of Afghanistan, the writer expects that the readers will not only understand about the sufferings and miseries of these women, but also know about the condition life of Afghanistan's women in different era.

#### **3.1 Monarchy under the King Amanullah Regime**

Afghanistan used to be a monarchy under King Amanullah Khan (1919 - 1928). During his reign, King Amanullah Khan worked with his father-in-law, Mahmud Tarzai and his wife, Queen Soraya, to improve the lives of women in Afghanistan. Zoya insists in his book that King Amanullah discouraged polygamy and prohibited women for wearing veil. He was the man of modern and secular

idea. He implemented the policy of modernization in Afghanistan. Elementary education was compulsory. Tribal custom such as veil for women was abolished. At public function, King Amanullah states religion does not require women to cover their hands, feet and faces or enjoying any special type of veil. Tribal custom must not impose itself on the free will of the individual (152). In the early 1920s King Amanullah's sister, Kobra, created *Anjuman-E-Himayat-E-Niswan* (Organization for Women's Protection). Her organization encouraged women to voice their complaints as well as pushed women unity and fought against injustices and oppression. During this time, Queen Soraya founded the first magazine for woman called *Ershad-E-Niswan* (Guidance for Woman) (Zoya 160). Amanullah became the king until 1928.

### **3.2 Republic of Afghanistan**

In 1973, Daoud Khan abolished the monarchy and declared Afghanistan as a republic. He declared himself as the first President and Prime Minister. Daoud was a strong supporter of *Pashtunistan* and worked toward reform and modernization. Daoud encouraged the abandon of the veil by Afghan women. Women started to enter the workforce and were able to become teachers, nurses, doctors and even politicians (Zoya 190).

In 1976, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was established. Once in power, PDPA implemented a liberal and socialist agenda. The government also made a number of decrees on women's rights, abolishing bride price, rising of marriage age, giving recognition of women's right to vote and introducing women to political life (Zoya 200).

In 1979, the Soviet army entered Kabul. This was the starting point of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. The Soviet war in Afghanistan was a nine year conflict involving Soviet troops supporting the PDPA government against the Mujahideen rebels (Zoya 220). During the Soviet War, many civilians including numerous women and children were killed. According to Zoya, the Mujahideen entered Kabul and burned down the university library and school (224). In 1989 the Soviet invasion has ended with a full withdrawal of the Soviet troops under the Geneva Accords. However, in the Afghan capital and in some big cities under the communist government's control, women did get to enjoy some basic freedoms (Zoya 230).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Najibullah government was overthrown in 1992. The leader of Mujahideen, Ahmed Shah Massoud took control of Kabul and declared the Islamic State of Afghanistan. During that year, the violence was based on the ethnicity between the Pashtuns and the Tajiks. Pashtun was the largest ethnic, while Tajik was the minor one. Political power in Afghanistan has always been in the hand of the Pashtun. Eventually, a civil war broke out and during that time, over 60.000 people were murdered and thousands of women were raped (Zoya 240).

Despite all of the chaos, women were still allowed to work and got an education under the Mujahideen government and Burhanuddin Rabbani. In fact, before the Taliban took over Kabul, about half of the working populations were women. They were employed as teachers, doctors as well as in other professional occupations.

### 3.3 The Taliban Regime

In September 1996, the Taliban took control of Kabul. Under this regime, the life of Afghanistan women was radically changed. Before the Taliban regime, Afghan women are 70 percent of school teacher; 50 percent of civilians in the government workforces; 60 percent of teachers at Kabul University; 40 percent of doctors in Kabul (Skaine 47). This regime immediately imposed some strict rules over women such as: women were forbidden go to school; women were forbidden to work, female teachers and lecturers were expelled from the schools and universities; women were forbidden to leave the house unless they were accompanied by their husband; women were forbidden to wear make up and to dress with a bright color; women were not allowed to seek medical treatment from a male doctor, women were forced to wear a *burqa*. Female doctors were prohibited to examine the patients; male doctors were prohibited to touch the body of female patients (Hosseini 270-271).

In the Taliban regime's point of view, watching television, going to school, going to work, getting a better medical treatment, getting a better occupation, and getting a higher education are a symbol of western decadence (Skaine 60). Therefore, the prohibition toward those things symbolizes the rejection of modernization. In this sub-chapter, the writer will focus only on education, healthcare, and social life.

#### 3.3.1 Education

Under the Taliban regime, dealing with the educational field, many schools, and universities were closed and all of the teachers and lecturers were

expelled. The books, public libraries, paintings, and all of educational materials were burnt. The televisions were prohibited to be turned on. Museums were closed, et cetera. As the result, there was no more place and material to maintain formal education. Things that contained knowledge or education were prohibited to be published. Hundreds of girl's schools were established in homes and thousands of women and girls were taught to sew and weave. The only one education that was allowed at that time was reading the Koran, and the skills to prepare the Afghanistan girls into marriage life such as sewing, weaving, et cetera. Although television was prohibited, people who were able to buy televisions tried to keep those televisions in the house by hiding those televisions in the secret place. This condition also happened in Mariam and Laila's life. At that time they still had television and radio. Then, they buried them in the house before the Taliban's inspection to their house (Hosseini 298).

The author of the novel describes the Taliban's cruelty toward women through Mariam, Laila and Aziza's life. When Aziza lived in the orphanage, she got two kinds of education: formal and informal education. The principal of the orphanage, Zaman, gave the formal one when the Taliban troops were not in duty. Meanwhile, he gave the informal one when the Taliban troops were in duty.

“But we have to pull the curtains, so the Taliban don't see us, kaka Zaman had knitting needles and balls of yarn ready. We put the books away and pretend to knit when the Taliban's inspection coming” Aziza said (Hosseini 314).

This regime also forced many teachers to wear *burqa* while they were teaching. In the orphanage where Laila lived, her female teacher named Khala

Rangmaal often put her *burqa* off. She wore the *burqa* only if the Taliban did the inspection. She prohibited her female students to cover their face. She was saying that women and men were equal, and there was no reason for woman to cover herself if man did not do so. Formal education or any material containing educational devices were prohibited during the Taliban regime because it symbolized western decadence. With the prohibition to get the education, the amount of poverty progressively increased. The amount of Afghanistan's children who were not able to obtain the education was also progressively increased.

### **3.3.2 Healthcare**

Prior to the Taliban taking over Afghanistan, male doctors were allowed to treat women in hospital. They were not allowed to touch the body of a woman. Woman merely go to central polyclinic which has running water, no electricity in rooms, no laboratories or X-ray facilities and no medical equipment (Hosseini 282). The condition of the hospitals at that time was terrifying. When Laila wanted to give birth to her second child, she had to have a Caesar surgery. Because of the medical equipments were incomplete, she was finally operated without any anesthetic.

During the Taliban regime, many hospitals were closed because of the limitation on medical equipments. Therefore many patients were not getting a treatment. The Taliban also arranged the amount of hospitals that allowed treating patients. Many patients came there examining for their health. They should register in one place. It meant that they had to queue to get a treatment from the doctors. Besides the medical equipments, the medicines were also limited. The

worst thing was the Taliban did not supply or provide medicines for the next treatment. Therefore some people had to go to other province to get the medicines. The impact was that many hospitals were not able to accommodate and give their best treatment to the patients.

### **3.3.3 Social Life**

Besides controlling the educational field and healthcare, the Taliban also controlled women's social life. For example, women were restricted of being alone on the street unless they were accompanied by their husband. Women were forced to wear a *burqa*. Women were also prohibited to wear or use colorful dress or white shoes. White was the color of the Taliban. Since the Taliban limited women's social life, many of Afghanistan women stayed at home. Their activity was limited. Their responsibility is only in domestic spheres.

The Taliban also arranged the punishment as a symbol of power and authority. They have the rights to arrange woman's life. It was a symbol of male domination over woman. When a woman disobeyed the rule, she would get a punishment. The author of the novel also describes the Taliban's punishment toward Laila. The punishments are beating, kicking, and shoving even death. When Aziza lived in the orphanage, Laila intended to visit her everyday. Laila asked Rasheed to accompany her. Unfortunately, he did not want to. Laila's life suddenly revolved around finding ways to see Aziza. Half of the times, she never makes it to the orphanage. One day, a young Taliban beat Laila with radio antenna (Hoseeini 313).

The Taliban enacted laws aimed to persecute women specifically to mentally and physically suppress women and to deny women of the most essential and basic fundamental rights as human beings.