**Women in Afghanistan**

In the late 20th century, prior to the rise of the Taliban, women in Afghanistan were making strides toward equality as they enjoyed the right of education and employment (PBS.org). Kabul was the epicenter for women's advancement in Afghanistan prior to the Civil War and Taliban control" "50% of the students and 60% of the teachers at Kabul University were women, and 70% of school teachers, 50% of civilian government workers, and 40% of doctors in Kabul were women" (Feminist Majority Foundation).

However, after the Civil War when the Taliban came to power in 1996, they instituted a system of gender apartheid,which put women in a state of constant house arrest unless accompanied by a male relative. Women's progress in education and employment was crushed with the harsh laws imposed by the Taliban. "Under Taliban rule women have been stripped of their visibility, voice, and mobility" (Feminist Majority Foundation). In addition to restricting the advancement of women, the Taliban enforced laws that any windows of a woman's house that were visible to the public must be painted black. Women could not leave the house without a burqa, which covered their bodies entirely, leaving only one mesh area in order to allow the woman to see (PBS). Women's health care was also put into jeopardy during the Taliban's reign, as women were prohibited from seeing male physicians. Yet, the majority of female doctors were prohibited from going to work, except for a select few who were stationed in women only wards (Feminist Majority Foundation).

Additionally, women were no longer in control of their life decisions. The Taliban encouraged girls under the age of 16 to enter into marriage. "Amnesty International reported that 80 percent of Afghan marriages were considered to be by force" (PBS). The Taliban appointed a violent religious police force, who often would beat women who violated the Taliban code which regulated the behavior of women. Some of the violations which warranted a beating included a woman exposing her ankles, laughing too loud, wearing shoes that made noise when walking, and/or wearing the wrong type of burkha. No due process was followed when these violations were punished, and the beating often occurred on site as soon as the police officer recognized the violation (PBS).

Women suffered violence not only from the Taliban forces, but from their biological relatives and their husbands. This violence was only reinforced by the powers in authority. Often militia forces would contribute to the violence. "In some instances, female members of the family have a role in upholding patriarchal structures, and may also commit violence" (Amnesty International). When alleging rape, women found it extremely difficult to convict a suspect. As a plaintiff, a woman had to find four male witnesses to provide testimony corroborating the story of the woman. "If they failed to provide this testimony, they faced flogging or even stoning in the case of adultery" (PBS).

The fall of the Taliban brought hope to many in Afghanistan that the situation would improve for women. However, violent acts toward women have perpetuated in Afghanistan even after the Taliban's reign had ended. "In 2006, more than 1,650 cases of violence against women were registered with Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission" and over 100 women are documented as having committed suicide (Integrated Regional Information Networks).

Violence against women does not come down to the citizens of Afghanistan from those who accept it in the government. This sort of violence is widely accepted and practiced in the community. "Abusers are rarely prosecuted; if cases are prosecuted, the accused are often exonerated or punished lightly" (Amnesty International).

Those that attempt to defend the women who have fallen victim to violence in Afghanistan have found great difficulty themselves. Human rights advocates and teachers of women continue to face harassment, intimidation, and even violence, with greater danger for minorities and women. "For example, in June 2007 two gunmen opened fire on schoolgirls outside of Kabul, shooting six and killing two, in what was apparently a politically-motivated attack against female education" (Amnesty International).

Subraya Subhrang, of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission theorizes, “There are likely to be numerous unregistered cases of violence against women." Women often do not risk speaking out about the violence they have suffered for fear of violating social codes(Integrated Regional Information Networks).

The Integrated Regional Information Networks point out that in 2007 "Every 30 minutes, an Afghan woman dies during childbirth, 87 percent of Afghan women are illiterate, 30 percent of girls have access to education in Afghanistan, 1 in every 3 Afghan women experience physical, psychological or sexual violence, 44 years is the average life expectancy rate for women in Afghanistan, and 70 to 80 percent of women face forced marriages in Afghanistan."

Changes have been made to increase the rights of women in Kabul, but the rest of Afghanistan has not seen much change in the way of women's rights. "Fawzia Aminiy, head of department for legal affairs at Afghanistan’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs, is working towards an ambitious Millennium Development Goal on gender equality by 2020." However, she remarks that a 50-year plan would be far more realistic (Integrated Regional Information Networks).