

Afghanistan - Kabul Diaries Part 13: Not without my sister

Tuesday 21 September 2021, by [AFGHAN Yasmeen](#) (Date first published: 20 September 2021).

The Taliban last week announced that all male students and male teachers should be present in schools from Saturday, September 18. The statement of the Education Ministry did not mention girls' education.

In response to the announcement, a Twitter user under the name of "From the Afghan women" tweeted: "As it seems that Taliban hate Afghan women and girls so much and keeps excluding them and depriving them. Maybe all the 17-18 million women and girls should just leave this country and leave the Taliban with themselves and the gunmen. They don't deserve us."

Bamyan, another Twitter user, commented: "The Taliban's hostility to women, women's education, women's work, and women's financial independence goes beyond what most people think. This vision and plan of the Taliban does not only harm women, they also want the future and destiny of the next generations to be black like ours. Because a woman's education is equal to a generational change."

A Kabul resident, who does not want to be identified told me: "I have three children. Two sons and one daughter. My daughter is in 9th grade and the sons in grades 8 and 10. My sons went to school Saturday and my daughter stayed home. I cannot see eye to eye with my daughter. I am feeling guilty as a father who had promised his daughter on her birth that he would fight for her rights. But now I feel like I am in chains and I cannot do anything for her."

Pashtana Zalmai Khan Durrani, an education activist, tweeted: "If the problem is no resources, there is already a solution in place for that, if the solution is lack of teachers, we have a solution for that too. But if the problem is that your whole group does not agree that girls should be in school then you are at war with daughters of this land."

Samira (not her real name) lives in Kabul and is a grade-12 student. Trying to be strong, her voice was breaking as she told me: "First, due to COVID we were not able to attend our schools properly, now this uncertainty. I have these big plans for myself. I want to become a doctor, if the Taliban do not allow us to go to school, how will I or other girls become doctors or teachers or be in any other profession."

Her aunt, who is a teacher by profession added: "I have twin-daughters, both in grade 7, but now they cannot go to school. I can see how broken they are at the moment. I told them that I would teach them at home. But they say they will miss their classmates and teachers. One of them has cried since morning and at times I break down too as I have no words to calm them down or to tell them that all will be well."

Aisha Khuram, who was Youth representative to the United Nations for 2019, tweeted: "One month on since Taliban takeover: All male cabinet formed, all male civil servants are back, all male students are back. It's all male Afghanistan now. That's their whole idea."

The last time the Taliban were in power, women were systematically barred from education and work. When the group came to power in 1996, Afghan women were not told that they could never have access to education or to work. The Taliban said that when the situation would allow it and security had improved, girls could return to their schools and women to their work. But it never happened.

The present stance of the Taliban sounds familiar. Afghan girls and women cannot be optimistic as at the moment there is an undeclared ban on their education and work.

After the Taliban announcement that only boys and male teachers should resume their studies and work, a trend went viral on social media. Children are posting their pictures, holding placards with slogans against the unofficial ban on girls' education.

One Twitter post with a student's photo says: "For what crime are we banned from education?"

In another post, a girl is holding a placard that reads, "Don't eliminate us, flying with one wing is impossible."

In another post, a placard held by a boy reads, "I will not go to school without my sister. I support my sister."



The placard reads: "I am not going to school without my sister!" Image: @saxotrombone on Twitter

In one of the posts on social media, four brothers and a sister are holding a placard that reads, "We will not go to school without our sister."

It is worth mentioning that government schools were never co-educational and boys and girls had separate schools throughout Afghanistan. Only female teachers would teach in girls' schools. Meanwhile, the education ministry — in a new statement — is calling its male staff back to work from Monday. Based on statistics, in July this year, women were 45% of the education ministry workforce.

In 2018, girls made up almost 38% (3.8 million) of the students in Afghanistan. In comparison, there were only 5000 in 2001.

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Part 12

Afghan women defying Taliban by posting colourful dresses

The online campaign of Afghan women's traditional dress started after the Taliban introduced a strict dress code for female university students.

For centuries, Afghan women in rural areas have worn the traditional Afghan dress with vibrant colors, and each region of Afghanistan has had its style of sewing it. These dresses are in bright colors, in stark contrast to what the Taliban have introduced now, which is a head-to-toe black hijab with black gloves.

Khatol Momand, who is a writer/satirist, has posted a photo of herself in the traditional Afghan dress on Twitter, and wrote, "This is [the] women's outfit in my tribe of Momand. Don't bring home extreme Arabic Hijab.

The photos posted by Afghan women journalists and activists are in beautiful bright colors. Some are wearing the Pashtun traditional dress, some the Hazaragi traditional dress, while others have donned Badakhshi, Balouchi, and Nourstani traditional attires.

Sana Safi, a journalist at BBC, has posted her photo on Twitter and wrote, "So how do Afghan women dress then? They ask. This is how. If I was in Afghanistan, then I would have the scarf on my head. This is as conservative and traditional as I/you can get."

Peymana Assad posted on her Twitter, "This is Afghan culture. My traditional dress. Our cultural attire is not the dementor outfits the Taliban have women wearing."

Spozhmay Maseed, a human rights activist, posted from her Twitter, "This is our Afghan authentic dress. Afghan women wear such colorful and modest attires. The black burqa has never been a part of Afghan culture."

Homira, a civil and human rights activist, has posted her photo along with a caption, "This is Hazaragi traditional clothes. The colorful Hazaragi dresses are from my culture. The long black hijab does not represent all women of Afghanistan."

Maryam Stankazai has also posted a photo of herself on Twitter in a red and green traditional dress, "No one can reduce my existence to one color. Not today, not tomorrow."

Many women inside Afghanistan have reacted to the imposing of the black hijab.

Shazia (not real name), a resident of Khairkhana told me, "Our traditional dresses are bright and beautiful and represent the beauty of Afghanistan."

Huma (not real name) another resident of Khaira says, "The previous Afghan government didn't force women to dress in a particular way. We have dressed according to our traditional society. I have always covered my head with a scarf but some women in my family were wearing the blue burqa."

Waheeda (not real name) added, "Nobody can impose the black hijab on Afghan women. The Taliban want to suffocate Afghan women with their strict dress codes. They want to dehumanize us, but we will not give in but rise like phoenix."

Over the years, I have heard from my grandmother and others in the family that women in rural areas have always gone out and worked in the fields with only headscarves, while the traditional Afghan dress was reserved for special occasions such as weddings, Independence days and so on.

This campaign was started by Bahar Jalali, who is a historian. She was the first to post her photos in the traditional Afghan dress.

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