Transforming The Traditional Societies Roots of Conflicts And Violence - I (Towards A Sociology of International Relations)

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Introduction

The demise of Cold war has brought the conflicts in the post-colonial traditional states to the fore. The globalization project coupled with the objective of ushering these states into a democratic framework has created its own dynamics. Thus, the initiatives of transforming the traditional societies have been generating a great deal of conflict and violence within these societies and beyond. These conflicts have grave ramifications for international peace and order. The turmoil in West Asia and Afghanistan provide the classic case studies in this behalf.

It is important to note that these conflicts can neither be analyzed or comprehended by adopting a conventional international relations approach alone. The social framework which developed in these states over the centuries provides clues to unravel the conflicts from within and without these societies. It is the combination of international factors and the internal dynamic of social structures which explains the present state of affairs in these very states and societies. In a broader context, it would lead us to take recourse to sociology of international relations to decipher the ongoing turmoil and conflicts in these states.

This hypothesis may be verified over a broad canvass of societies in Asia. However, an interesting classification may be made among these societies which include, South

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Asia, South-east Asia, West and Central Asia and Afghanistan. All these societies emerged as independent post-colonial entities except the Central Asian states which merged in the wake of Soviet disintegration and the demise of Communism. However, the reconstruction of these societies and resurgence of their traditional cultures and values provide an interesting spectacle.

CASE STUDIES

Central Asia

In view of a Muslim majority of people living in these societies, the Central Asian states now bear the mantle of Islam, which is gradually and slowly laying an impact on their social structures. It has equally an influence on their new alliances with the international organizations. For instance, they have assumed the membership of Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and there appears an earnestness on their part in forging closer relations with the West Asian states particularly Saudi Arabia. In order to promote and sharpen their religious identity, the Saudi government and the Saudi based missionary groups are playing an active role. Thus, the Central Asian societies are undergoing a phase of transformation. The course of this transformation would be determined by their domestic forces as well as international influences and pressures. Again, in a broader context, this state of affairs would goad these states to conduct their international relations in a specific direction. Be that as it may, it would need a comprehensive discourse to discuss the nuances of socio-political transformation in the West Asian states.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan provides another classic case study to decipher the intricacies of interplay of the internal social systems and international power dynamics. Afghanistan is located in the center of Asia and has the close borders with South and Central Asia. It is considered a part of greater West Asia. The isolated parts of Afghanistan were cobbled together to form a proper state in the modern sense of the term in the middle of 18th Century with the ascendency of *Hotaki* dynasty of *Pashtuns* when Ahmad Shah Durrani became the King of Afghanistan in 1747 A.D. However, it took about a quarter of a century for Afghanistan to adopt the contours of a modern state when Amir Abdul Rahman Khan became the ruler in the year 1881. He introduced the reforms and for the first time gave

some modest rights to women. He was succeeded by his son Mir Habibullah Khan in 1891 who established the first school for girls to promote the education of women. His son Amanullah Khan who succeeded his father after his assassination in the year 1919 gave the first constitution to Afghanistan in 1923 and carried forward the progressive agenda of his father. His emphasis was on the emancipation of women and their social empowerment. Amanullah Khan was forced to leave Afghanistan and live in exile. However, his exit from the social and political scene of Afghanistan underlines the influence of social forces represented by the traditional *Jirga* and cleric nexus in that society.

Traditionalists V/S Modernists: The Interplay

The Amanullah Khan era in Afghanistan provides enough clues to comprehend the perennial tussle between the traditionalists and modernists which is the bane for the entire society even today. This tussle has been dictating the foreign policy agenda of the country and is reflected in its conduct of international relations.

The first attempt in transforming the Afghan society was made by the father of Amanullah Khan, Mir Habibullah Khan, who dared to transform the social and political power base which is intricately woven around the social structures of Afghanistan. Afghanistan, being a tribal society, is divided on the lines of tribes and clans dispersed across the entire landscape. These clans have their hierarchical structures and represent a specific geographical area with village as a basic unit. The decisions on domestic, social, political and other related issues are taken by a representative collectivity called *Jirga*. The collectivity is strongly backed by religious clerics known as *mullahas*. Thus, the social system is controlled in all the spheres by the *Jirga-mullah* combine. It has two important implications for the society. One, a centralized authority which controls the entire landscape is an anathema to the people who find the concept alien to their ethos. Second, any initiative which disturbs the hierarchical structure is met with the resistance and ultimately results in a rebellion.

Mir Habibullah tried to create and strengthen a central authority to govern and administer the country. He attempted to give Afghanistan the semblance of a modern state by raising a disciplined army and formed an advisory council which had the contours of a modern

parliament. It is interesting to note that Habibullah displayed the courage of independent thinking by ignoring the appeal of *Jihad* which was issued by the Ottoman Caliph in 1914. However, he had to face many rebellions particularly from Mehsud and Afridi tribes and ultimately he was assassinated.

His son Amanullah Khan carried forward the transformation agenda of his father with much vigor. Again, he disturbed the local power structure and tried to dilute the tribal hierarchical order. In the year 1924 he introduced his new code *nizam nameh* which provided a new legal framework for Afghanistan. The chief characteristics of this code was aimed at changing the pathetic condition of women in Afghan society. The new code restricted child marriages, forbade marriages under coercion and gave the women inheritance rights. These rights, although endowed to women in Islam, were not allowed to them under strict tribal customs of Afghanistan in which the *Mullahas* provided the strength to enforce the local tribal customs and traditions. The army which was raised by his father, was further modernized by Amanullah with the military and technical support of the then USSR. The USSR was the first foreign power to recognize Amanullaha's government in 1919. Amanullah reached out to other countries in establishing the relations and signed the treaties of friendship with Turkey and Iran. He established relations with Germany, France and Italy.

Amanullah had touched the hornet's nest by challenging the traditional tribal authority supported by religious diehards. It was the first direct interface between the forces of modernization and traditionalists in which the former lost. Amanullah had to face the revolt launched by Mengal tribe which could not be quelled by his army. He had to hire Afridi, Wazir and Mohammand tribal armed groups or *Lashkars* (The term *Lashkar* literally means a large group of footloose soldiers and the Lashkars is the plural form of the term. These *Lashkars* were used by the neighboring countries decades later to achieve their strategic objectives) to deal with the Mengal rebellion. However, the peace remained elusive when other tribal groups also joined the rebellion. Amanullah was left with no choice but to abandon his throne and he fled to Italy. It is interesting to note that his successor Nadir Shah gradually started to roll back the transformation agenda under the social pressure and restored the traditional tribal social structures. ◼

(To be Continued.)