

**Taliban Poses a Dilemma to the Muslim World**

**Jagdish P. Sharma\***

*\*Jagdish P. Sharma is a Senior Lecturer in Political Science in Delhi University.*

It is unfortunate that Afghanistan is consistently in turmoil. No nation has been left more ravaged than Afghanistan and none has suffered as much from direct foreign intervention and fundamentalist genocide as this country. The Afghans are in agony, caught up in a spiral of militant and fanatic violence that has almost brought the state to its knees. The emergence and capture of power by Taliban, a politico-military, radical Islamic force in the latter half of 1996 on 27 September, supported by Pakistan, has confused the already complicated struggle for power in Kabul. Since the Taliban took over, tyranny has ruled the roost in most parts of Afghanistan followed by military dictates, religious fanaticism, that is, imposing restrictions on women, forbidding them from appearing in public unless covered from head to toes and forcing men to grow beards and pray at mosques. Replacing communism with an Islamic ideology has not helped in healing the division.

Afghanistan has been the focus of worldwide attention for more than two decades now. It was the last staging post for the Cold War confrontation, and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan signified the end of the Cold War. While the end of the Cold War brought relative peace at the global level, peace and stability have eluded Afghanistan like a mirage. Of late, signals from the US indicate that American policy-making is reverting to Cold War policies in South Asian region which it seemed to have abandoned after withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Pakistan is again being armed discreetly to play the role which it had played during Cold War years, this time aimed at the oil reserves of Central Asian States adjacent to Afghanistan and also for cornering the Iranian regime which has been Washington's *bete noir* since 1979 when the pro-US Reza Shah Pehlavi was overthrown. The US administration has not taken kindly to the efforts of Tehran to establish close regional trade linkage between the Central Asian republics and India.

Landlocked Afghanistan, known originally as Ariana and then as Khorasan (the land of the rising Sun), was formed as a separate state by Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1747. Modern Afghanistan emerged between 1884 and 1919. Historically, it owed its existence to its geographical location. Its strategic position had saved it from absorption by Britain or Russia [1]. Afghanistan is situated in South West Asia and occupies an area of approximately 652,090 square kilometres. Afghanistan shares a border with the former Soviet Union, (2,384 kilometres long) in the north, with the People's Republic of China (75 kilometres) India (120 kilometres) with Pakistan (2,180 kilometres) in the east and south and with Iran (820 kilometres in the west). Even in the past, Afghanistan's strategic importance was so crucial that Abul Fazal (1551-1602), Persian scholar and famous writer patronised by Akbar, recorded that Kabul and Kandahar were two gates of India. "The custody of these highways secured India from foreign invaders and they are likewise the appropriate portals to foreign travel."

The Simon Commission in its report of 1929 also recognised the strategic importance of Afghanistan. “North-West Frontier of India is not only the frontier of India, it is an international frontier of the first importance.”

Afghanistan is a highly traditional and tribal-oriented state. It was only around the later part of 1940s and 1950s that the superpower aid began to make perceptible inroads into Afghanistan, in the form of setting up schools.

The US military designs and the subsequent closure of the Pak-Afghan border over the issue of the future of the Pushtoon tribe forced Afghanistan to re-route its trade through the Soviet Union and seek assistance to modernise its army. The eventual outcome of this move was Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan passed through a period of uncertainty during the regime of Lt. Gen. Muhammad Daud, who came to power after overthrowing King Zahir Shah in a bloodless coup on July 17, 1973. Daud, who became the head of state on August 23, 1973, seemed in full control of the situation and on good terms with the neighbouring country (the USSR). In the act of crushing the left-wing opposition, Daud was himself overthrown in a military coup (April 1978) which was led by army and air force officers who released the imprisoned leftist leaders to form a new government. The Soviet Union recognised the new regime.

The new government was dominated by civilians of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) founded in 1965 and its Secretary-General Nur Muhammad Taraki succeeded as Prime Minister. Taraki’s hopes of building a new society floundered quickly as his party split into two rival factions and the country drifted into civil war. In quick succession the chief figures of PDPA became presidents one after the other, after the murder of his predecessor—Taraki replacing Daud (as mentioned), Hafiz-ullah Amin replacing Taraki and after the Soviet intervention in December, 1979, Babrak Karmal stepping into the shoes of Amin and Maj. Gen. Najibullah replacing Karmal in May, 1986.

Since 1979, there has been an almost complete breakdown of the Central government administration over its 28 provinces. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan since December 1979 was defended on the basis of November 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Article 51 of the UN Charter. It was claimed that Amin, who was accused of plotting with foreign imperialist powers to partition Afghanistan had been overthrown by an internal revolution and that military support from the Soviet Union had been requested by the new regime. World opinion, however, was sceptical of such claims and a Soviet withdrawal was demanded by the UN General Assembly, the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as well as by Western powers.

Since the spring of 1979 the Soviet Union began to play a greater role in Afghanistan. Evidently alarmed at the extent of the hostility to the regime and the prospect of being drawn into a protracted civil war and concerned about the possible international implications of Afghan disputes with her neighbouring countries, Islamic Republics of Pakistan and Iran respectively, it began to argue for less radical policies, conciliation of the oppositions and the formation of a broad-based

government. But at the same time a steady built-up of Soviet military presence in Afghanistan had been felt. The US State Department has issued a series of diplomatic warnings and protests since then.

However, for the first time since the Soviets intervened in Afghanistan in December, 1979, they made determined diplomatic efforts to try and bring about a peaceful settlement there. The year 1987 also saw widespread intensification of the war between the Soviet troops and the Afghan Islamic guerrillas (operating from Pakistan and Islamic Iran). The war and unrest in Afghanistan both have largely wiped out three decades of development and progress there. Besides the costs of this war were considerable for Soviet Union and mounted rapidly both in casualties suffered and losses incurred in military hardware.

Moreover, foreign interference in the region took a serious turn with the US's espousal of the theory of an "arc of crisis", in the wake of the fall of the Shah of Iran. The developments in Afghanistan came as a blessing in disguise for then Pakistan President, General Zia-Ul-Haq, who used the pretext of a "Soviet threat" to obtain enormous US military and economic aid. The Soviet Union and the Babrak Karmal and Najibullah regimes in Kabul repeatedly expressed their readiness to pull out the Soviet troops the moment an international agreement was concluded on cessation of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. India supported this position.

Accordingly, after the Geneva Agreement reached on April 14, 1988, the Soviet troops started pulling out from Afghanistan and completed the same on February 15, 1989, after eight turbulent years of undeclared war there.

Internationally, the Geneva Accord gave the US an equation with the Soviet Union in the region for the first time. The Soviets lost even if they had everything in their favour in Afghanistan. They could not afford to continue as they realised the cost was higher in terms of international good will[4].

After Soviet troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan in February 1989, the Islamic Mujahideen, who had waged nearly a decade-long war of resistance, turned their guns on the Soviet installed regime of President Najibullah. But it was not until the fall of the communists in the USSR in August, 1991 and the end of Soviet aid that they were able to deal a decisive blow to the Najibullah regime in Kabul. The interim Mujahideen government under President Burhanuddin Rabbani was sworn in 1992. Many were hopeful that with the fall of Kabul, work would begin on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the repatriation of refugees, and the installation of an elected government. This proved wishful thinking. With the fall of communist regime in Kabul the last threat that had united the Mujahiddeen was gone. The political divisions that had been suppressed in the name of Jihad re-emerged. The war had dramatically shifted the balance of power among the different Afghan ethnic groups. Meanwhile, a new force emerged in the South. In late 1994, a group of Pushtoon Islamic radical students and their leaders, allegedly trained in Pakistan, began to seize power from local Afghan warlords. By March, 1995 they were at the gates of Kabul. Since then, the fighting in Afghanistan has marginalised the country. Afghanistan no longer exists as a single country but is divided into separate areas controlled by different Militants.

However, a continuous conflict in Afghanistan affects regional stability in Russia, Central Asia, Iran and India. Russia has warned the Taliban that should they succeed in getting their conflict to northern Afghanistan bordering Russia's southern neighbouring states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, Russia's role in the region would become inevitable. The Taliban occupation of Kabul made the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan come together in Alma Ata. However, the leaders of the CIS states found it unwise to enter into war against fundamentalism immediately. The Russian advocates of a strong state see the execution of the former Afghan President Najibullah and fall of Kabul to Taliban militia as a fresh geopolitical defeat for Moscow after the decision of NATO's expansion to the East and the withdrawal of Russian federal forces from Chechnya[5].

The ultra-conservative Taliban Islamic militia has taken almost total control of Afghanistan in a matter of months, with former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and his key military commander Abdul-Rashid Dostam being forced to flee country. Pakistan, followed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, is the first country to recognise the new Taliban government losing no time in extending its support. This was to be expected considering the deep interest Pakistan has been taking in the activities of the Taliban. A counter-offensive by the Tajik guerilla commander Ahmad Shah Masood and other supporters of the Rabbani regime, however, drove back the Taliban from Mazar-e-Sharif and some north areas of Kabul. India is concerned about Pakistan's growing involvement in the Afghan region, which is seen as a threat to its national security. This is the reason, which has brought India and Iran, closer to each other. Iran has an ancient rivalry with the Pushtoon Afghanistan from which the Taliban is drawn and is concerned that Sunni Taliban may dilute Iranian Shia influence in the region. The other reason for concern is the oil, gas and mineral resources in the Central Asian states. Pakistan wants a route through Taliban-controlled Afghanistan to Turkmenistan and other Central Asian states, which would be independent of Russia. Incidentally one more consequence of the Taliban's victorious advance on Kabul apparently was upsetting the peace-making plans for Afghan settlement, which were initiated by the Iran's foreign ministry. Not long ago Mr. Vayazi, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, made a tour of the Central Asian capitals and invited their representatives to Tehran where an international conference was held in October 1996. Here both Russia and India were also invited.

The October, 1996 Tehran conference criticised the recent flagrant violations of human right in Afghanistan, particularly the rights of women. It called for an immediate end to such practices in conformity with the relevant provisions of the UN Charter. Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, announced that Iran would continue to stress a regional initiative to resolve the Afghanistan dispute. But he also made it clear that it could not be an isolated effort. "It has to be reinforced by active international efforts and should be connected to them", he said[6].

Compared with other neighbouring nations, the Iranians have greater affinity with Afghans. A common religion, history, culture, and especially language tie these two nations together so that the slightest socio-cultural or even political development in either of these countries makes an inevitable impact on the other. Since the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, Iran denounced the occupation of the Afghan territory and called for the unconditional withdrawal of the Russian forces. After Soviet withdrawal (April 1988-February 1989), Iran was among the first countries to recognise the Mujahideen government there. Along with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan

and the six Central Asian states, Afghanistan was included in the Economic Cooperation Organisation in 1993.

Drug trafficking is a major factor that has affected Iran as a result of Afghanistan's instability, which has inflicted serious economic and psychological damages on the Iranian nation. Iran is seriously committed to her policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's integrity and unification. The neighbouring countries, in turn, must prevent the intervention of outside powers. The persistence of the status quo, Iran feels, would drive Afghanistan towards disintegration and cause heavy damage to the Afghan national resources. It is in this context that Iran feels seriously threatened[7]. Hence, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's keenness to promote close economic, political and strategic alliance with India goads the Indian foreign and defence policy planners to give a thought to the above arrangement.

India and Iran need to intensify coordination to get the warring factions in Afghanistan to the negotiating table, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Mr. Nateq Noori opined in his last visit to India. The visiting leader praised India for its contribution and participation at last October's (1996) conference on Afghanistan held at Tehran. Both India and Iran were also present at the subsequent UN sponsored conference on Afghanistan at New York. Mr. Noori, who held wide ranging discussions with former Indian Prime Minister, Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, the External Affairs Minister, and new Prime Minister Mr. I.K. Gujral, and other leaders, said India and Iran are coordinating to bring the warring factions together in Afghanistan to end the hostilities which would help usher an era of peace in that country[8]. "Whenever there is crisis it does affect the neighbouring areas. Any unsettled condition in Afghanistan is bound to affect Iran, India, Pakistan and Central Asian republics. If the crisis drags on, it will harm Pakistan more than anything else in terms of political stability and economic development," says Naseer Saghafi-Ameri, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, New Delhi. In the opinion of the Iranian ambassador to India, Mr. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, "Afghanistan is a sensitive and vital issue for both India and Iran. India is a major player in Asian affairs. Hence it has the potential to establish peace in Afghanistan."[9]

Current developments in Afghanistan are of considerable long-term relevance to India. The Taliban militia has threatened neighbouring countries with severe consequences if they attempt to help the embattled alliance fighting them. Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and India have been accused of providing aid to northern-based rival forces led by General Abdul Rashid Dostam, the ousted Rabbani government of Kabul and Shiite faction. Further, fighting in Afghanistan would continue to pose a risk not only to Afghanistan but it has a potential of spreading out to the whole South-West Asian and Central Asian region. It is likely to affect Indo-Pak relationship quite adversely. It has become one more source of discord because what worries India is the possible impact of the Afghan conflict on Kashmir. India has expressed concern over reports that terrorist training camps are being run in the Khost area of Afghanistan. Without naming Pakistan, Indian ambassador of UN, Prakash Shah, warned that the "consequences of imparting training to terrorists would only recoil on the societies which promote such activities." Afghanistan was the focus of attention in India's External Affairs Minister I.K. Gujral's recent talks with the Iranian leaders, especially the role of the Taliban militia. India has also told Iran that the elements backing the Taliban militia in Afghanistan are the same, which have been trying to destabilise Kashmir through terrorism. Mr. Gujral said that India and Iran had common perceptions on the necessity to

maintain the unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. “We believe that peace and stability in Afghanistan is essential for peace and stability in the region”, Mr. Gujral asserts[10].

According to Mrs. Gillane Allam, Egyptian ambassadress to India, Afghan crisis has its fallout on the Arab world, Iran, Pakistan and South Asia. Arab countries, Mrs. Allam feels, are basically supportive of President Rabbani’s government. It is only the Pakistani government, which has got direct links with the Taliban militia. The assessment at Cairo now is that both the Rabbani and Taliban factions are losers in grasping power in Afghanistan. There is no winner and no loser in that country except the innocent Afghans. The crisis there led Afghanistan to be the centre for the export of terrorism and fanaticism directed towards Kashmir, Central Asian republics, Egypt, Algeria and neighbouring Gulf. The Taliban projection of Islam seems to be very negative. It hurts Islam in terms of its image, in terms of Hindu, Christian and other world religions. The Indian, Egyptian and Algerian intelligence services are also uncovering evidence that a large number of skilled Muslim guerrillas waging bloody campaigns in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and other North African states were trained in Afghanistan. Since 1980s, hundred of Arabs went to Afghanistan to fight alongside the Islamic guerillas against the Soviet Union.

For nearly two decades, the frontier city of Pakistan, Peshawar, became the home and gateway to Afghanistan for thousands of fervent Islamic militants from Libya, Algeria, Iraq, Egypt and Sudan. “*The Afghan Jihad*” (holy war), became the international projection of the Muslim world, according to Hamid Gul, a retired ISI Pakistani general. It became an ideological obsession among Islamic youth who were studying in the United States and Europe. They had liberal ideas, but they saw that the western liberalism was not the answer for what they were looking for. They tried to re-discover themselves. The instrument for re-discovery was the Jihad. Twice in May, 1992, Egyptian intelligence and military officials came to Peshawar looking for Islambouli and other Egyptian fundamentalists. On both visits, although they interviewed many Egyptians living in Peshawar, they were unsuccessful in their search. Indeed, Afghans living there have said that Islambouli had moved across the border to Jalalabad.<sup>11</sup> “All these fundamentalists have been trained in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” says Mr. Abdul Hamid J. Bereksi, Algerian Ambassador to India. He adds, “They have a great network serving in the Arab world. The link of Afghanistan with what is happening in Europe and Arab world is direct. Many youths have been brain-washed, trained, armed and financed. The implications of the Afghan crisis on Algeria are very much direct. Our people were trained and used in Afghan drama. I see no difference between the Algerian GIA (Armed Islamic Group), Jamaite Islami in Egypt or Taliban in Afghanistan. What is happening in the name of the religion in Afghanistan will open the eyes of Muslim nations. Taliban is using the religion of Islam as a political and military weapon. In a Muslim country one must have the courage to say that this is religion and this is politics. Islamists represent only the past which is totally dead.”

To Dr. Khalid el-Sheikh, Palestinian Ambassador to India, “the Afghan people are victims of international conspiracy. Their territory is an important transit point for Central Asia, West Asia and South West Asia. The US wants to control the resources of the region to protect its economic interests. The Taliban militia is there to stay as it may be used by the US as a base against Iran.” On Pakistani role, Dr. Khalid said, “Pakistan has its own interest in building bridges with Central Asia. Everybody is trying to extract his own bit in order to exploit this region. There won’t be

much scope for stability in the region. The Taliban's fanatic impositions are un-Islamic prejudiced and backward. The religion of Islam has a humanist appeal. It is against oppression in the name of religion. The primitive approach of Taliban is distorting the picture of Islam. It is very sad and tragic to learn about the uncivilised execution of President Najibullah. India has reasons to express its concern." The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), was among those which played an important role in working out a peace plan for Afghanistan. It mediated between the different Mujahideen factions, the late Najibullah regime and Pakistani government. Mr. Abu Khalid, a special representative of PLO chief Yasser Arafat, met the then Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Afghan Mujahideen leaders in Islamabad during the days of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989.

To the Jordanians, the Afghan crisis is complicated. The main issue at one point of time was the presence of foreign troops there. But now the main issue is the intervention of foreign powers directly or indirectly. It's time for Afghan factions to find out national consensus. This can be possible only by restricting intervention of foreign powers like Pakistan, Tajikistan, Saudi Arabia and others. All warlords in Afghanistan are controlled by different powers. The Jordanians say that the use of religion as an instrument of power is unacceptable. "Leave the language of guns and tanks. Who pays the price? It's the people's development that suffers. People also suffer. It is disastrous. A valid regime with Afghan people's mandate should take control of Afghanistan. We still recognise the legitimate government of President Rabbani. When the Afghan problem started in 1979 with Soviet intervention it encouraged young Arab people including from Jordan to join the holy war against foreign intervention. The US role in promoting Islamic military camps is also deplorable. The superpowers, particularly the US, have their own strategy, and interests in promoting arms, drugs, money and all other issues," says Dr. Mazen I. El Tal, counsellor of Jordanian embassy in India.

The financing of the Islamic militant movements has played a significant role in their success. In Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, and Afghanistan, large amounts of external money, especially from Saudi Arabia, contributed to the strength of these groups. Money has been regularly and lavishly distributed by Saudi Arabia to world-wide Islamic movements for many decades, especially after 1980, in an effort to influence and strengthen Saudi claims against "Iranian pretension to the leadership of Islam." Some 2,000 Algerians were recruited by the Saudi-based World Muslim League and they transited Jeddah on their way to training camps in Sudan and in Pakistan before taking on Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan. By 1992, most of them had been repatriated to Algeria[12]. A Dhaka-based Bengali daily *Janakatha* (voice of the people) has claimed that about 3,500 Bangladeshis were fighting in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban. The daily also claimed that Bangladeshi Mujahideen, who were earlier motivated to fight against Indian forces in Kashmir, were taken to Afghanistan where they joined the Taliban.

Neither the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) nor Syria recognises the present Taliban militia in Kabul. Syria does not want the religious conservatives to take Afghanistan five hundred year's back into history. "We are all for the peaceful settlement of the Afghan crisis. The only solution to the turmoil in Afghanistan is to have all factions come and sit together rationally to think about a situation of peace. If there is any justification for the forces to counter during Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, this is history now. They are killing themselves and their brethren.

There is no justification for such killing of brothers, children and women in the name of Islam,” says Mr. Ali Mansour, Syrian representative in India.

“The Taliban is the most extremist Islamic movement in the world. Their success to overthrow Kabul’s Islamic government has reduced the country to rubble. Afghans of all persuasion find it difficult to understand why their country has been forgotten by the world. It was once a piece on the international chessboard, and now the game has been changed. All the geopolitical rhetoric about being at the crossroads of Asia, and the praise that was heaped on them by their western friends has gone. Asia, however, has found other crossroads and the world has found other crisis to worry about. What happens in Afghanistan is no longer relevant. Afghanistan served its purpose in the 1980s, as far as the West is concerned. It helped to bring down communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Now it does not matter. It can be abandoned to cynical warlords, to the agents of outside power to ultra extremists who hang human beings at their sweet will.”[13]

Reacting to the response of the Arab world, Mr. Masood Khalili, Afghan ambassador to India says, “the Arab world helped us during the war against Soviet occupation. Now they have passively reacted to the emergence of Taliban militia. While the Arab world (52 countries) follows the policy of wait and watch only one non-Arab Islamic neighbour Pakistan is behind them. Common people, especially the women in the Arab world, see the Taliban imposition as going back to pre-Islamic era. Out of all the Islamic countries, it is only Iran which still recognises the Rabbani government and reasserts its position regarding Afghanistan.” “Our formula to the resolution of Afghan crisis is very clear,” he reiterated. “We always kept open the doors for peaceful negotiation. Let us solve the problem politically, that is,

(a) Taliban must leave Kabul, we also withdraw from Kabul.,

(b) Demilitarise Kabul,

(c) We both work on a broad-based formula of ceasefire, elections and elected government. In this interim period a neutral hand or third force or the UN should take over the administration of Kabul. The peaceful political negotiations should include all ethnic groups in Afghanistan (Pushtoon, Taziks, Hazarachs, Uzbeks). Military conquest and destruction is no solution to the present crisis in Afghanistan,” concluded Mr. Khalili.

Many of the experts, who came together at a seminar on the future of Afghanistan organised by the US Institute of Peace, felt that Pakistan’s moves were detrimental to a resolution of Afghan crisis. Dr. Marvin Weinbaum, senior fellow at the Institute, warned, “Pakistan in its support of the Taliban is playing with fire” and predicted that, “the worst possible outcome for Pakistan would be an incomplete Taliban victory.” Dr. Ashraf Ghani, senior anthropologist with the World Bank, warned that the war in Afghanistan is “likely to assume an increasingly ethnic and sectarian shape producing psychological scars to render a compromise less likely.”[14]

Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi recently warned that political systems based on religion were dangerous, particularly for women. In a speech in *Sabha* to mark a declaration of the rights and obligations of women in Libya, Mr. Gaddafi said the recent experience of rule by the fundamentalist Taliban movement in Afghanistan showed that the first victims of religion-based rule were women. “Any political system which is based on religion or has justified being in power with religion, is one of the most dangerous systems for women’s freedom,” the Libyan leader said. Mr. Gaddafi, accused fundamentalist groups of being bankrupt and of wanting only to control the

masses, saying that they used religion to achieve this because religion could not be debated or opposed. "This is the worst exploitation of religion. These systems which are based on religion are the most dangerous of systems and the most atheistic, hypocritical and bankrupt, from the economic, political and scientific point of view," Mr. Gaddafi said."

To Mr. K.M. Singh of Delhi University, the emergence of Taliban fundamentalist militia in Kabul is ominous. It is a reversion to the worst form of obscurantism. The piteous state of the women especially in Kabul can be imagined. They have to cover themselves fully as per Taliban's dictates. They are not even allowed to pursue their jobs or studies. This means depriving them of the benefits of civilisation."

The situation in Afghanistan still remains fluid. The whole country is teetering at the edge of a precipice. If it falls, it will plunge the Country into greater agony than it has known before, and the consequences for the region, as a whole can be far-reaching and tragic. There is little prospect of any one faction succeeding in gaining control over the entire country and providing the peace, stability, security and prosperity that its people desperately need. Absence of a unified setup will lead to destruction. Over a period of time the fundamentalist Taliban is bound to provoke popular reaction against it, even if it is the dominant faction.

#### REFERENCES

1. Ram Rahul, *Afghanistan, The USSR and the USA*, Delhi: ABC Publishing House, 1981, p.53.
2. *Oxford History of India*, Vincent A. Smith, London 1923.
3. "Broken Window in Central Asia: Afghanistan" Richard Aspinall, *Australia an Outlook*, vol. 10, no. 1, March 1956, p.47.
4. J.P. Sharma, "Uncertain future ahead of Afghanistan" in *National Herald* (Delhi) Friday, March 3, 1989.
5. Arkady Dubnov, "Where will the Taliban stop?" in *New Times*, November 1996, p.56.
6. N.C. Menon, "US, Iran, Afghan policy" in *The Hindustan Times*, November 4, 1996.
7. Ali Khorram, "Afghanistan and the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran: in *Amu Darya* (Tehran) vol. 1, No.2, Summer-Fall 1996, pp.225-230.
8. *National Herald* (Delhi) November 18, 1997.
9. Quoted in *The Asian Age*, Delhi & London, February 18, 1997.
10. Quoted in *The Asian Age*, February 24, 1997.

11. *The Hindu* (Chennai) Aug. 19, 1993.
12. Graham E. Fuller, *Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State?*, Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation 1996, p.38.
13. John Simpson, "Afghan cockpit" in *Index on Censorship*, 4, 1996, London, p.164.
14. *The Statesman* (Calcutta) Nov. 25, 1996.
15. Quoted in *Asian Age* March 18, 1997.