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Hands Covering the Bruises: The Consuetude of Afghanistan.

Abstract

The world is a place of multiple cultures and different traditions. Every nation have different cultures and traditions of their own. All these traditions, rules and norms are created for the wellbeing of people in a society. But these man made cultures and customs often injures the feeling of mankind. One such atrocious act that is imposed upon small male children is called Bacha Bazi, the famous custom of Afghanistan. Bacha Bazi is widely protested by people due to its ill treatment of male child. But this technology world is still

witnessing the brutality of this traditional practice in many parts of Afghanistan. On one side the country is facing privation because of continuous wars and on the other side they are further tormented in the name of traditional practices. In a patriarchal society like Afghanistan, having a male child is considered a prestigious gift, but the country is losing its precious heirs in the name of Bacha Bazi.

Key words: Bacha Bazi, child abuse, traditional practices

The world is a place of multiple cultures and different traditions. Every nation have different cultures and traditions of their own. All these traditions, rules and norms are created for the wellbeing of people in a society. But these man made cultures and customs often hurts and injures the feelings of mankind. Different religions preach different gods but all religions insist one concept that is love towards mankind. Hence it could be said that humanity should be the lone religion in the world. But these man made traditions and cultures have often affected mankind mentally and physically, hurting their feelings and act lethal for their survival. This paper talks about a similar tradition which is practiced to keep the legacy of a particular clan and exploit a certain section of humans in order to enjoy lives. One such cruel tradition that is practiced in Afghanistan is Bacha-Bazi or Boy play. Bacha Bazi is exposed to the world in the recent past.

Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa states that a society's soul can be easily judged by the way it treats its children. Children are innocent, pure and they are filled with vibe, freshness, unadulterated love, fun, appreciation and excitement. These beautiful children adorns the world into a beautiful garden. But the savage world is crushing, persecuting, abusing and tormenting these flowers mercilessly. Children are born to fly, but their wings are clipped, their innocence are misused, their vibes are misapplied and their laughs are turned to screams. In

Afghanistan small boys are harassed in the name of Bacha-Bazi. It is the sexual act on boys by powerful and influential people in the country. It is very popular in the country even though it imbibes exploitation and child slavery. In the recent past after the downfall of the Taliban in Afghanistan Bacha-Bazi has revived its past glory and have become exceedingly popular that literally poses a concerned look on the future of the male children in Afghanistan.

Bacha-Bazi is an old deep rooted central Asian tradition. Researchers believe that this tradition is introduced and exported to Afghanistan from Russia or Turkey. Eugene Schuyler in his book *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian, Turkistan, Bukhara and Kuldja* mentions about dancing boys. He tells about the respect and affection received by the boys.

These batchas are as much respected as the great singers and artistes. Every movement they make is followed and applauded, and I have never seen such breathless interest as they excite. for the whole crowd seems to devour them with their eyes, while their hands beat time to every step. If a batcha condescends to offer a man a bowl of tea, the recipient rises to take it with a profound obeisance, and returns the empty bowl in the same way, addressing him only as 'Taxis,' 'Your Majesty', or 'Kulluk' 'I am your slave'. Even when the bacha passes through the bazaar all who know him rise to salute him with hands upon their hearts, and the exclamation of Kulluk! And should he deign to stop and rest in any shop, it is thought a great honour. (228)

But as ages passed on these respect and honor diminishes and the boys are misused for sexual exploitation. In Bacha-Bazi young boys from the age of 10 are taught to dance and make them perform dance dressed like women. These boys are dressed in women's clothing with fake breasts and bells around their ankles and they have to perform provocative and sensuous moves

like a female dancer. The boys are forced to drink alcohol and the duration of their performances can extend up to three hours and once the music stops and the guests leave they are raped by a single or number of men. Many powerful and influential people in Afghanistan took interest in this tradition and behave barbarically with young boys.

This tradition of torturing young boys is still active in Afghanistan. Not many people are found who are willing to talk about it openly but the acknowledgement of its presence has been done by many people in the country itself. It is seen as a taboo in the country, but the government does not legally ban or take any immediate action to stop this injustice of male children. The Taliban are famous for the various terrorist atrocities in Afghanistan, but during their reign Bacha Bazi was considered a sin and serious punishments were given. They strongly against this pedophilia act and believe that is against the Islamic law and took severe steps to eradicate this problem from the country. It has been seen in the records that Bacha-Bazi grew exponentially with the decline of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan in 2002 and since then Bacha-Bazi has grown not only in remote villages but also in the top cities of the country like Kabul and Kandahar. The agents who mainly control the young boys to do Bacha Bazi are called Bacha Baz and the children talking part in Bacha-Bazi are called Bachaberesh or a beardless youth. These children are mainly from poor families who either sell the children for money, land, food and for clothing or in some cases kidnapped from the close ones and the families. This custom has been going on in the country for a long time and the government hasn't been able to do anything on this.

In this deeply conservative part of the world, women are not allowed to dance in public. Young boys are forced to fill this vacuum. Strict gender discrimination and lack of good close relations with women have contributed to the spread of Bacha Bazi. A popular saying in

Afghanistan is "Women are for child rearing, boys are for pleasure". Powerful warlords, commanders, politicians and other members of the elite group keep bacha's as a symbol of authority and wealth. Bacha's are used by these powerful men as dancers at private parties and are sexually exploited.

Afghan contemporary writers like Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi throws light on these cultural cult that spoils the life of young boys. Hosseini in his book *The Kite Runner* makes reference to Bacha Bazi through the character Sohrab, a 10 year old boy was abused by a commander name Assef. Rahimi in his *The Patience Stone* tells about a young orphan boy of sixteen who was kidnapped by a commander when he was a small child and he tortures the boy sexually and beats him. "He keeps the poor boy for his own pleasure...kidnapped him and put a Kalashnikov in his hands and bells on his feet in the evening's....The boy's body is black and blue! He has burn scars all over- on his thighs, his buttocks.....That gay burns him with the barrel of his gun!" (Rahimi, "The Patience Stone" 119). Several books and article have been published about the act of Bacha-Bazi and child trafficking in Afghanistan. In additions, many documentary films expose the horrific practice of Bacha-Bazi in Afghanistan. The Award-winning Afghan journalist Najibullah Quraishi made a documentary film *The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan* to expose the horror of this tradition to the whole world.

Bacha-Bazi is a social problem in Afghanistan. Many of the homeless children have been exploited for sexual pleasure and other malicious purposes. This affects the future young generation of the country. Over the last few years this has grown rapidly posing serious threat to young boys and their families in Afghanistan. Bacha-Bazi has grown in the country in the recent decade. The reason could be lack of awareness about the exploitation of children or may be

reluctant to respond protest for the fear of life. The constant kidnapping of the young boys have left a strong negative impression on the families of the children.

The Boy play or Bacha-Bazi has misled a lot of young males and they are traumatized both physically and mentally. These poor boys are helpless and they considered themselves as cursed, dirty and sinful creature. In *The Kite Runner* Hosseini explains the wounded and painful mind of the boy Sohrab. "He buried his face in his hands and wept a long time before he spoke again...I'm so dirty". He sucked in his breath and let it out a long wheezy cry. "I'm so dirty and full of sin" (Hosseini, "The Kite Runner" 278). They are forced to perform dancing in front of the father aged men that often ends up in rape or sexual exploitation. There are number of problems that these young kids face, when they grow up and becomes a man they are thrown into the streets. Some cling on to this for survival and train other bacha's and becomes a Bacha Baz, others addicted themselves to drugs and many of these children acquire psychological disorders that makes the future unfit to live.

Bacha-Bazi is a problem that affects the future generations of Afghanistan and it will never allow the country to come out from its evil days. The child abuse coming from this act has become a serious issue in the country. Even though holding a dancing boy or participating in Bacha-Bazi is illegal in Afghanistan there have been no serious problems for the people getting involved in it.

Musa Khan Jalalzai points out that Afghan children, women and unemployed young men are kidnaped and trafficked to local and international markets for prostitution. Warlords have been heavily involved in child trafficking and Bacha-Bazi practices. Jalalzai mentions that even though Bacha-Bazi is not legal in Afghanistan but thousands of wealthy people, business men

and criminal gangs are involved in Bacha-Bazi. He mentions the recently released WikiLeaks cable reveals that United States funded DynCorp Company responsible for training Afghan police force is involved in Bacha-Bazi business. The company has spent part of its budget on Bacha-Bazi parties and child trafficking in Afghanistan to meet the sexual need of Afghan police officers.

Afghanistan has been slashed apart after the war. This war has resulted in increasing number of orphans. Once the rich and powerful men buy the teenage boys, they are kept alive as companions throughout their lives. The powerful and rich men who has bought these children, expects all the sexual favors and dance from these children. These boys are not allowed to go to schools. After these boys had turned too old and 'bearded' these boys were then sent away or even treated as untouchables for the rest of their lives. A number of these boys even get addicted to drugs for the rest of their lives. After a certain point of time, the rich and powerful men might kill the teenage boys if they object to any activity. The teenage boys can also get killed if they try to lodge any complain regarding any man or any activity. If the boys do not perform at the functions, the powerful men can even harm the boys in many other ways. The boys can be even put to jail for life time or they can be harmed in many other ways by these powerful men. If they try to notify the security officials that they have been kidnapped and raped they have to suffer for their entire life time. Rest of the male community enjoys their life with celebration, dance, music, food and possible sex. Overall the male community of Afghanistan leads a good life excluding the dancing teenage boys. Men of all ages are invited at such functions. These men consider it to be an honor to attend such events as these events are hosted by powerful wealthy men of Afghanistan which may also include few political influential people. The warlords of Afghanistan are even more satisfied with the fact that keeping the teenage boys as slaves and

demanding sexual favors from them is considered to be a status symbol in public. At the time of interview, many of these powerful men have showed loving and caring emotions towards these boys kept as slaves and these boys have no other option apart from acting in front of the interviewers that they enjoy dancing and are in a happy state in their individual lives. The young male children observe the glamour and lifestyle of these children and receive in a wrong way that the dancers are happy in their lives and this is socially acceptable.

Sexual exploitation of male children in Afghanistan is like buying and selling of commodities. Maximum number of these children usually belongs to poor families, the children are basically hired by rich people to do various jobs like home servants, hotel and restaurant helpers and many menial jobs, later becomes victims of Bacha-Bazi. The small boys are either threatened, intimidated, enticed or tricked to do this. This was quoted by the Afghan independent human right commission report in the year 2014. The male children are often used as women dancers and are forced to dance at wedding ceremonies. If permitted by the owners, these children are allowed to be taken by other high profile men to guest houses and gang raped at the end of the ceremony. Families in North Afghanistan are generally affected regarding their male children as the practice of Bacha-Bazi has reached a peak. The male children of Afghanistan are not safe since more than two decades. The practice of BachaBazi became a profitable business in Afghanistan after the decline of Taliban regime in the year 2001. A sixteen years old boy was forced to commit suicide in the year 2015 after being raped repeatedly by Taliban soldiers. The name of the boy was recognized as Bilal. In order to put an end to such activities involved with Bacha Bazi, the governing bodies of Afghanistan and the local police officers have to start acting on such situations and take legal actions against all the powerful and rich men practicing such

phenomena. The neighboring countries must also come forward in order to support and save the male children of Afghanistan

One most important factor which is considered to be the reason for the increasing practice of Bacha-Bazi in Afghanistan is illiteracy. According to recent surveys it is observed that almost 81% of the parents of the children who are victims of Bacha-Bazi are illiterate and that is why they are not able to claim for the justice. According to recent survey 68% of the Bacha-Bazi victims within the nation accepted the fact that they took money in return of the sexual abuse and exploitation done by their respective perpetrators. According to recent survey, Bacha Bazi becoming common in Afghanistan and even some parents are selecting it as a profession for their children because of severe poverty. According to the recent surveys almost 87% of the children within the nation who are victims of Bacha-Bazi never attained school in their lives. The increasing poverty and illiteracy within the nation and lack of proper education are identified as the reasons.

Afghanistan is considered as one of the most religious country in the world, where men and women do follow the Islamic religion very carefully. But, behind this dedicated peripherals, the country of Afghanistan do have a deep secret that is Bacha-Bazi or child abuse which the government of the country have tries to forecast in order to abolish this illegal activities.

The poverty level of Afghanistan is one of the most important driving force that is leading to a rise of child abuse for the last 15 years. Lack of guardianship, rate of literacy in the country as well as domestic violence proves to be main reason behind the expansion of Bacha-Bazi. This are making the children reduce their level of confidence in a fruitful manner and undergoes psychological trauma and stress in life.

For abolishing this illegal practice of Bacha-Bazi in Afghanistan UNICEF organize campaigns for the protection of children from "boy play" or any other forms of child abuse activities. UNICEF and different NGO partners as well as the local and national government look into the ways that would subsequently bring a reduction in the rate of child abuse within Afghan culture. UNICEF practices all its safeguard strategies into action by making use of tools like community based dialogues to provoke the minds of the people who have got involve into dangerous homosexual activities for meeting their own sexual gratification

From the year 2003, UNICEF is notice to provide strong social support to the government of Afghanistan for developing and implementing a Child protection and Action Network in order to provide different types of services to the children of the country of Afghanistan so that they are able to protect themselves from this type of harmful and dangerous child abuse. Most importantly the child rights unit at the AIHRC is found to focus on monitoring activities on the children who are at risks.

Today report suggest, that UNICEF child protection have made huge achievements in developing a strong legislative framework for the complete protection of the children of the country so that they experience a perfect childhood period. The situation of Afghanistan children has improved to some extent after the implementation of the different legislative rules and regulations in perspective of child abuse. To some extent fear have got into the powerful men of the country who mainly carried out this activity of homosexual abuse fearlessly in the Afghan society. Change in the legislative rules, spread of education, improved form of guardianship within the Afghan families to reduce domestic violence has brought a reduction in the rate of losing their own children. AIHRC organizes national program to provide high level of awareness

for those vulnerable families about the harmful consequences of child abduction especially Bache-Bazi. Good protections over the human rights have now been imposed in order to save the male children from the risk of violence, abuse as well as sexual exploitation at any time in future. The initiation of extensive advocacy along with proper technical training support initiated by the UNICEF, a child protection network is developed in Afghanistan to provide services to children in violence, abuse and exploitation.

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