

Daughters of Afghanistan

Guidebook



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Historical Background -----

A small land-locked country located in the heart of Asia, Afghanistan is the size of Texas with a population of approximately 29 million. Once referred to as the Switzerland of Central Asia because of its high mountainous regions and cooler climate, Afghanistan's history extends as far back as Alexander the Great who crossed this land in 328 B.C. The Arabs introduced Islam in 652 AD. The Afghans are proud and independent people who are well known for their generous hospitality.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan has been entangled in warfare since 1978 with the coup d'état of President Daoud Khan by the Soviet-backed communist regime. The following year, in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan under the guise of aiding the fledgling regime to maintain its weak hold on the country. Ordinary Afghan citizens, called the Mujahideen (freedom fighters), began a resistance movement to protect their independence, culture and religion from foreign invasion. The brutal war lasted 10 years with the eventual retreat and downfall of the Soviets in 1989. Afghanistan was left completely crippled by a war in which over 2 million Afghans lost their lives.

The United States, who was the key ally during the war against the Soviets, discontinued its financial support to the Mujahideen. With the loss of U.S. support and the creation of a power vacuum, Afghanistan spiraled into a devastating civil war. Different factions of the country fought one another for control. The civil war introduced even more atrocities and chaos into the lives of innocent civilians.

Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, endured immense bombings. Longing for some kind of security and an end to fighting, the Afghan people welcomed a new group of religious students called the Taliban. Under the leadership of Mullah Omar, the Taliban quickly gained control over 90% of the country and established its theocracy in 1996. The once fighting factions of the civil war united against the Taliban and established the Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood.

Although the Taliban brought some sense of security to the people, they ruled with a heavy hand and their own interpretation of Islamic law. Only three governments recognized them as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan, including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Pakistan.

Afghan women have suffered throughout this period in history with the loss of their husbands, children, homes, and security. Many young girls were abducted and sent to work in brothels or they were left to beg on the streets. Little was done for the Afghan women since 1978. Under the Taliban rule, they were subjected to additional tribulations by being denied the opportunity to work or attend the small number of schools that were available for women. On the other hand, there were very limited economic and educational opportunities available for Afghan men, a problem which was exasperated by U.N. sanctions in 1999 trying to force the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden to the appropriate authorities.

After September 11, 2001 the US-led coalition bombed the country and ousted the Taliban regime with the help of the Northern Alliance. Hamid Karzai was established as interim President of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) until elections which are scheduled for Fall 2004.

Since the downfall of the Taliban, security in the country has gotten worse. The promised international aid of \$4 billion dollars is slow in coming. Afghanistan has returned back to being the largest producer of opium, the only cash crop that brings a less than decent wage to poor farmers. The future of Afghanistan is still bleak until real measures can be taken to establish security and rebuild the infrastructures needed to improve the health and well-being of the Afghan people who have suffered for much too long.

Key Dates -----

1747—Ahmad Shah Durrani founds modern day Afghanistan.
1839-42—British defeat in the first Anglo-Afghan war
1878-80—Second Anglo-Afghan war
1880-1901—official establishment of Afghanistan’s boundaries
1919—Third Anglo-Afghan war
1933— King Zahir Shah’s 40 year peaceful reign begins
1964—Constitution of Afghanistan ratified giving the same inalienable rights to men and women under Chapter 3.
1965—Afghan women participated in the Parliament
1973—King Zahir Shah exiled to Italy by Daoud Khan who becomes the first President of Afghanistan.
1978-89—Communist coup d’etat and Soviet-Afghan war
1989-96—Afghan civil war
1996-2001—Taliban rule
2001—U.S. sends troops to Afghanistan to topple the Taliban and Al-Qaeda
2001—Bonn Agreement establishing Hamid Karzai as interim President

Famous Afghan Women -----

Malalai is a famous 19th century Afghan woman who is credited with turning the tide in the battle of Maiwand, against the British. When the morning of the battle began with numerous casualties and Afghans began surrendering or running away, Malalai took up a sword to fight the British herself, singing an Afghan song, and inspired her countrymen to keep fighting. A hospital in Kabul is named after her.

Aisha Durrani was the daughter of YakobAli Khan Barakzai, and the wife of Timur Shah Durrani. She was the first person to open a girl’s school in Afghanistan and played a major role in the cultural and linguistic development of Afghanistan. She was well learned in Dari grammar, Arabic, geography, and Islamic studies. A woman’s high school is named after her.

Rabia Balkhi The first woman known to compose poetry in both Arabic and Persian was Rabi’a Balkhi, whose brother ruled Balkh during the tenth century.

Zarghuna is also a famous woman poet and the mother of Ahmad Shah Durrani, the founder of modern day Afghanistan.

Vocabulary Words -----

Shariah Laws—Islamic laws based on the Muslim holy book, the Quran, and teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

Burqa—a traditional garment covering the entire body and face. Worn by Afghan women for centuries, the burqa was periodically enforced as mandatory dress for women throughout Afghan history. Although Islam mandates modest dress, it does not dictate the covering of the face.

Loya Jirga—a Pashto word meaning “Grand Council”, is a meeting of tribal, political, military and religious leaders to discuss issues such as setting foreign and domestic policy, declaring war, and legitimizing rulers.

Things to Think About -----

Afghan women and their issues have been largely ignored during the past 25 years of war. Is having a single cabinet position for women’s issues the most affective way to deal with the problems of women’s rights, health, security, and poverty?

What are all the elements working against the advancement of Afghan women? Who is accountable for what happened to the women of Afghanistan? What can be done locally? Internationally?

What is the identity of Afghan women under the burqa?

Afghanistan has the highest maternal and child mortality rates in the world. There are more landmines in the country than people. How can the health indicators improve for women and children without a consolidated effort from the international community to help rebuild the country’s infrastructure, such as access to clean water and better healthcare, demining programs, training programs, and better employment opportunities?

Health Indicators ---

These are some of the worst health indicators in the world.

Basic Health Indicators	Maternal Mortality [Per 100,000]	Infant Mortality [Per 100,000]	Total Fertility Rate [Per woman]
United States	12	7	2
Afghanistan	1700	152	6.9
Least Developed Countries	1000	92	5.2

From WHO

- **Child Mortality Rate < age 5** = 276 / 1,000 live births
- **Access to good water source** = 13%
- **Healthy Life Expectancy**= age 35
- **Female literacy rate**= 21%
- **Male literacy rate**= 51%
- **GDP per capita** = \$800

Internet Resources ---

For additional information on Afghan women, history and culture, please visit the following websites:

www.academicinfo.net/afghanwomen.html
www.afghanland.com
www.afghandaily.com
www.afghan-web.com/woman
afghanwomensmission.org
www.countryreports.org/history
hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan
www.wapha.org
www.womenforafghanwomen.org

Other Resources ---

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