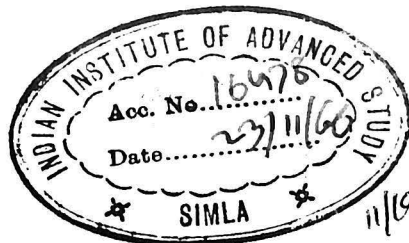


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PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN



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social development in Afghanistan have been studied by sociologists and anthropologists in such a study would logically rest. In the absence of an analysis in depth conducted by trained academicians, the present paper will attempt to outline broadly some of the problems which are evident to any reasonably alert observer residing in Afghanistan for a period of time. The writer quite naturally had a certain bias in observing social phenomena since he was primarily interested in the effects of social change on Afghanistan's domestic and foreign policies.

Observers who have looked into the problem agree that Afghan society is in a stage of transition. Although on the surface there appears to be great placidity and even stability in the Afghan social order, beneath the surface, significant changes are taking place. These changes, indeed, are fracturing the old social order in Afghanistan and bringing into play forces which may, in due course, result in profound alterations in Afghan social, economic, and perhaps even political institutions. The intensity of the changes taking place has been materially increased by the fact that for many years, indeed centuries, Afghanistan remained to a large extent isolated from the currents of world change. This paper cannot go into the reasons for this isolation other than to say that Afghanistan, traditionally jealous of its independence and caught between the upper millstone of a militant, Czarist Russia and the nether one of the expanding British Empire in India, tended to withdraw into its shell and to exclude foreign influence from its borders. Afghanistan therefore, for better or for worse, was largely free of the transforming experience of colonial rule and administration.

If we accept that the Afghan social order is in transition, the question naturally arises—transition from what to what? It is of course easier to describe what a society has been than to analyse what it is now or what it may become.

II. *Traditional Afghan Social Structure*

Until recent times Afghan society has been principally organized along vertical rather than horizontal lines. Social, economic, and even political affiliations were determined by the tribe, the clan, and the family of the individual rather than by loyalties to, or connections with, horizontal non-kinship groups with common economic ideological interests.

The principal vertical groups in the total estimated population of ten to twelve million were largely determined by ethnic and linguistic differentiation as follows:

| | | |
|--------------|-----|-------------|
| Pushtuns ... | ... | 4.5 million |
| Tajiks ... | ... | 2.3 „ |
| Uzbeks ... | ... | 1 „ |
| Hazara ... | ... | 1 „ |
| Turkmen ... | ... | .5 „ |
| Others ... | ... | 1.5 „ |
| <hr/> | | |
| Total ... | ... | 10-12 „ |
| <hr/> | | |

It will be noted that the Pushtuns were, and still are, numerically the predominant cultural group. This numerical preponderance has been reinforced by Pushtun personal and cultural characteristics which have traditionally emphasized courage, vigour and warlike prowess. These factors have tended to impart to Afghan society, as a whole, a distinctively Pushtun flavour, albeit seasoned by a long tradition of tolerance for other ethnic and linguistic groups in the country.

Let us now examine briefly the horizontal composition of present-day Afghan society. We can then attempt some comparison of the values and trends which characterize the old and the new.

III. *Present-day Afghan Society*

As could be expected of a society in transition, many present-day social groups in Afghanistan are a mixture of old and new affiliations. Although there is a clearly discernible trend towards the formation of "economic classes," such as professional, skilled labour, intelligentsia, etc., the individuals within any given "class" often find their personal loyalties pulled in different directions because of the persistence of strong attachments to family, clan, or tribal affiliations.

Many Afghans are themselves not aware of this inner conflict to which they are being subjected by the changing nature of their society. Those who sense a certain social *malaise* tend to ascribe this to inherent conflicts between oriental cultural values and occidental "modern" concepts. This feeling is justified only in so far as Western technological factors reinforce the pull and attractiveness of a new society organized more along economic than kinship lines.

It is sometimes thought that stratification along economic lines is unique to "modern Western" societies, whereas, in fact, the structure of many older societies was rooted in economics. A classical example of this pattern is the traditional society of India which was based on horizontal economic classes. These classes eventually became frozen into castes by religious sanction. The important thing to remember, therefore, is that the stresses and strains within present-day Afghan society are not necessarily caused by a clash between "oriental traditionalism" and "Western modernism" but are basically the product of indigenous social forces which tend to reinforce horizontal class divisions and gradually to de-emphasize

vertical kinship and ethnic affiliations. This trend tends to fracture tribal, clan, and family loyalties in favour of ties with horizontal economic or political groupings. In other words, a carpenter's main interest, for example, gradually shifts from close loyalties to the family or clan and becomes more identified with the fate and interests of other carpenters. This process is just getting under way in Afghanistan and specific horizontal class divisions have not as yet completely settled. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is possible to identify certain principal horizontal class divisions within Afghanistan which are gradually emerging and becoming more marked and definite. These are set forth in the following chart:

HORIZONTAL SOCIAL GROUP IN AFGHANISTAN

| <i>Horizontal Group</i> | <i>Number of Individuals*</i> | <i>Who are Members</i> | <i>Vertical Elements Included in Horizontal Group</i> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Elite | 2-3 thousand | King, royal family and top government officials. Wealthy merchants, large landowners, tribal chiefs | Pushtuns, Sunnis |
| 2. Intelligentsia | 8-10 thousand | Higher ranks of government employees, professional men, teachers, students literati, top religious leaders, army officers | Mostly Pushtun, but substantial Tajik, predominantly Sunni but some Shiah, e.g., Qizilbash |
| 3. Urban Middle Class | 800,000 to 1 million | Lower civil servants, shopkeepers, scribes, accountants, artisans, literate religious leaders, etc. | Predominantly Tajik but many Uzbek and Pushtuns. Some Turkmen and even Hazaras |
| 4. Lower Classes | 8 million | | |
| a. <i>Urban</i> | | | |
| (1) Proletariat | 20,000 | Factory and semi-skilled workers | Tajiks, Hazaras and Pushtuns |
| (2) Military, police, etc. | 40,000 | Enlisted men in armed forces, police, and gendarmerie | Tajiks, Hazaras, Pushtuns; some Turks |
| b. <i>Rural</i> | | | |
| (1) Cultivators | 7 million | Small landowners, peasants, and semi-nomads | Pushtuns, Tajiks, Uzbek, Hazaras |
| (2) Nomads | 200,000 | Pure nomads, non-cultivators | Pushtun, some Turkmen |

**Note: All population figures are estimates—no census ever taken.*

Examination of the above chart confirms that, in the present stage of Afghan social evolution, horizontal and vertical groups tend to overlap and criss-cross. An example of this is the marked preponderance of Pushtun (vertical) ethnic elements in the horizontal groups comprising the elite and the intelligentsia. The persistence of vertical elements in the horizontal class structure is reinforced by the relatively slow mobility between ethnic and linguistic groups. Assimilation by inter-marriage is not

frequent between Pushtuns and Tajiks. It is probably highest within Turkic groups, *i.e.*, Turkmen and Uzbeks, and probably lowest between Hazaras and other elements of the population. These conclusions are, of course, tentative, since they are based not on statistical studies (which have never been made) but on observation and direct questioning of knowledgeable Afghans. In general, however, it can be safely asserted that low mobility between vertical elements of the Afghan population is a retarding factor in the formation of new polyethnic horizontal groups.

The structure of present-day Afghan society which we have just examined is generating changes in traditional social and cultural values which may have far-reaching implications for the future of Afghanistan. It would therefore be useful at this time to examine and compare the two value systems involved.

IV. *Traditional Social and Cultural Values*

In traditional Afghan society the individual is surrounded, as it were, by concentric rings consisting of the family, extended family, clan, sub-tribe, tribe, and major ethnic or linguistic group. From his earliest years these successive social layers determine his personal habits, his tastes, loyalties, and actions. To the kinship or ethnic group he gives loyalty, co-operation, personal service and, in times of danger, perhaps his very life. From these groups he derives protection, a livelihood and, above all, a sense of comfortable "belonging." These concentric rings confine him in bonds forged of custom and habit. On the other hand, they free him from the terrors of social "aloneness" and economic destitution. This arrangement makes for a fairly satisfied individual within a reasonably stable, albeit somewhat stagnant, society.

Within this society the individual is expected to adhere strictly to orthodox Islamic tenets. If he encounters problems of a personal, political, or economic nature, he looks for their solution to his kinship or ethnic group. His status in the community depends largely on his family connections, enhanced, of course, by personal attributes such as his reputation for wisdom or piety. Formal education is not highly prized *per se*, whereas learning and knowledge, however acquired, add to a man's stature. His prestige usually rises with advancing age and is increased by family wealth and direct or indirect political power.

Traditional society tends to be rural in outlook with its roots in the land. It is characterized by a high degree of economic self-sufficiency. Class distinctions are not sharp and relations between superior and subordinate are characterized by paternalistic concern for the less fortunate and corresponding deference and respect of the latter for the patron.

In this type of society cultural emphasis is on historic and heroic themes, specially those which glorify the kinship or ethnic group. "National" feelings and loyalties are filtered through the successive layers surrounding the individual and tend to become meaningful to him only to the extent they happen to coincide with the interests of the sub-national groups. Literary and other artistic accomplishments are highly regarded. The tendency is to stress mysticism and romanticism, particularly in poetry and in song.

V. "Modern" Social and Cultural Values

Since Afghan society is in transition, old and new values coexist, and it is sometimes difficult to sort them out. Certain trends and features, however, stand out in bold relief. One obvious characteristic is the urban outlook of the new social forces. While ties to the land or village are often preserved, these bonds tend to become attenuated and less binding on the individual. He finds himself imperceptibly more and more part of the horizontal occupational class, and his loyalties to the vertical kinship and ethnic group become correspondingly less pronounced. The rugged self-sufficiency of the vertical group gradually gives way to the interdependence which is so necessary in relations between horizontal classes.

In this urban-oriented environment the individual tends to develop a broader outlook on religious matters. Dogma becomes subject to exegesis and interpretation. Religion becomes more intellectualized and less dependent on revelation as the sole source of authority. Formal education assumes greater importance and with it comes an emphasis on factual knowledge, scientific and technical accomplishments, and on the "real" and "practical" as opposed to the "mystical" and the "romantic." The status and prestige of the individual in this type of society is enhanced by his formal school education, especially higher degrees from foreign universities. He can increase his stature further by engaging in the "status" occupations, preferably government service.

This "modern" society is competitive rather than co-operative. Within his own economic group, the individual must struggle to acquire wealth and power. At the same time he must support his group in its struggle for recognition and supremacy over other economic classes. This makes for a restless, dynamic society in constant flux. It is full of uncertainties, problems, movement, change. The individual, having divested himself wholly or partially of the protective coloration of the traditional society, feels exposed, insecure, rootless, and disoriented. At this stage he may be attracted to extremist causes which offer the comforts of ideological orthodoxy and make him feel that he again "belongs."

The contrasting values of the traditional and the "modern" societies are summarized in the following chart:

COMPARISON OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

Afghan Traditional Society

1. Primary loyalty to vertical group.
2. Strict adherence to orthodox religion.
3. Look inward for solution of problems to family, clan, or tribe.
4. Status depends on ancestors, wisdom, piety, age, wealth, power.
5. Class distinctions not very sharp.
6. Outlook is rural and self-sufficient.

Afghan "Modern" Society

1. Growing loyalty to horizontal group.
2. Broader, interpretative attitude towards religion.
3. Look outward to government authority for solution of problems.
4. Status depends more on education (degrees), occupation, position in government.
5. Class distinctions become more pronounced.
6. Outlook is urban and interdependent.

Afghan Traditional Society

7. Cultural emphasis is on national historic and heroic themes—mysticism, poetry, romanticism, informal education.
8. Social order tends to be safe, static, orderly.
9. Individual is centre of concentric kinship rings and feels secure.
10. Emphasis on co-operation with family, clan, tribe, etc.

Afghan "Modern" Society

7. Cultural emphasis is on knowledge of world—science, technical accomplishments, formal education.
8. Society is in flux—uncertainty, movement, change.
9. Individual on his own—feels rootless, insecure.
10. Emphasis on competition between and among economic groups.

VI. *Problems of the Changing Society*

A transitional society, with conflicting cultural and social values such as now exists in Afghanistan, inevitably brings in its wake a host of problems. For one thing, significant dichotomies are created—urban *versus* rural, modern *versus* traditional, etc.—and, as time passes, these gaps tend to become wider and less susceptible to compromise. These dualisms are only now becoming apparent in Afghanistan because the country is still predominantly rural (it is estimated that only about 1 million of the 10-12 million population live in towns of 10,000 or more). "Modernism" is still, of course, a largely urban phenomenon, since the rural areas which comprise most of the country continue to be tradition-oriented.

Judging from history it seems fair to conclude that with the growing cleavage between urban and rural groups, or to put it another way, between "traditionalist" and "progressive" forces, a certain amount of friction will be generated. Points of difference will probably revolve around conflicting viewpoints regarding strict religious practices, literature, education, political attitudes, and economic policies. The trend against such things as rugged individualism, tribalism, and nomadism is likely to cause social *malaise* and a feeling of personal insecurity. These developments may well be reflected in the dissatisfaction of certain groups with government policies, such as relaxing the seclusion of women and the sponsoring of liberal, scientific education, which appear to threaten traditional values.

The growing power of the central government, backed up by a loyal army, and its laudable efforts to unite the country along national lines, may be viewed by some as a threat to tribalism and regional autonomy. A period of social transition is usually a difficult one for political stability. The problem is to provide suitable conditions under which there can be an orderly transfer of individual and group loyalties from vertical kinship-ethnic relationships to broader horizontal class structures and ultimately to the national government. The danger point in this process occurs during the period when citizens have largely relinquished their traditional loyalties but have not as yet formed new national ones. It is in this critical period that the individual, finding himself without an anchor, is most susceptible to having his loyalties subverted by anti-national doctrines.

The basic problem, therefore, which the Afghan Government is already facing, is whether, in the midst of the social and economic transformation which is under way, it can direct the orderly assimilation of vertical kinship-ethnic groups into a plural society, predominantly Pushtun in

character but with "modern" values of tolerance, mutual respect, and equal opportunity for all its citizens. It will not be a simple problem to de-tribalize the militant semi-autonomous Pushtun tribes and incorporate them into the body politic. The Turkic and Hazara tribes present a somewhat simpler problem, and, indeed, under the impact of economic forces, are already largely sedentary and to an extent urbanized. Another significant problem for the nation is that of harnessing the talents and enlisting the loyalties of the rising powers of the middle classes and of the intellectuals. These groups may generate pressures for economic progress and political reforms which the government could find difficult to satisfy or suppress.

Along with the socio-political problems generated by a transitional society, there come also special economic burdens. Growing urbanization brings with it problems such as housing, schools, sanitation, taxation, etc. At the same time, significant population shifts from the land to the cities may threaten food supplies and export crops which, in Afghanistan, are both crucial and marginal. These and many more related problems call for sophisticated management of the economy by substantial numbers of highly trained personnel. But one of the unpleasant realities which underdeveloped countries face is the fact that economic programmes and planning can be accelerated, but it still takes a fairly fixed number of years to educate an individual to any given degree of competence. The basic problem, then, is that social change and economic progress feed on each other, often creating a rising spiral of demands which may have grave implications for political stability. Unless the economic pace can keep ahead of needs, the "revolution of rising expectations" may become the expectation of rising revolutions.

VII. *Summary Conclusion*

This paper has attempted to show that Afghan society is in the beginning stages of a transition from traditional to "modern." The traditional society is characterized by vertical organization, along kinship-ethnic lines, while "modern" society follows horizontal economic lines. At present these organizational lines overlap and criss-cross. The traditional and the "modern" lines have differing and often conflicting cultural values which tend to generate social friction. In this fluid environment the individual, having given up old loyalties and not as yet having acquired new ones, tends to feel rootless and disoriented. This is the danger point which the Afghan Government must capture and turn to national advantage in order to ensure a smooth transition towards constructive national goals.

