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Preserving Cultural Heritage

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Afghanistan is one of the countries that is blessed with mineral resources and historical monuments. However, it has not been able to benefit much from both of them. The historical and cultural sites and monuments have not been preserved well and there are serious concerns about them as the insecurity, instability and government negligence seem to be on the rise. Bamyan is one of the provinces in Afghanistan that is known world-wide for historic Buddha statues that were believed to be carved out thousands of years ago. However, the people of Afghanistan have not been very much careful about them. Recently cultural activists in the province have voiced out their concerns that the historic sites are in dilapidated condition and government authorities are negligent about their protection and maintenance. They warn if proper attention is not paid, the sites may extinct.

Ali Raza Hussaini, a cultural activist, claims that heavy rains, natural disasters and the lack of maintenance and care has caused damages to historic sites in the province and the sites face the danger of extinction. He said in a statement, “The Qul Akram locality where some ancient caves exist is registered with the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* UNESCO, but local residents keep their household animals in the carves.” Moreover, to make things worse the local officials claim that the number of tourists declined in recent years due to growing insecurity in Bamyan and neighboring provinces. It is unfortunate to note that the government response in this regard is really disappointing.

The government authorities fail to understand that the initiatives to safeguard Afghanistan's cultural and historical heritage are really important for the feeling of national splendor in the members of Afghan society, which at the moment are non-existent. The cultural heritage and historical treasure can play a tremendous role in uplifting national sentiments. However, it is also a fact that many years of civil wars and clashes have had severe impacts on Afghanistan's socio-political scenario.

These wars and clashes have influenced the country in so many different ways. There have not been losses only in life and blood but in culture, tradition and values, as well. It is believed that for a civilization to flourish, it is necessary that there should be peace, tranquility and stability. Unfortunately Afghanistan has suffered in this regard.

Though there has been relative peace and stability and there have been efforts to reestablish the Afghan society after the downfall of Taliban, a lot more has to be achieved to make a real difference in the society. It is necessary, at the present scenario, that Afghanistan must have a sense of national integration and harmony.

It must be reiterated for the people of Afghanistan that they once had a rich culture and civilization and they had times in their history that knew nothing of violence and terrorism and a relatively peaceful and rich civilization flourished on their land.

Moreover, this should be insisted for them that they have to preserve the traces and remains of their rich history that should help the new generations realize the worth of their history and tradition. Unfortunately such insistence is very rare to see in the society where most of the discussions are centered on clashes and terrorism.

It is really unfortunate to find that the members of Afghan society themselves have not been very much careful about the rich traditional remains and artifacts. There have been culprits even from within Afghan authorities who have been involved in the filthy business of selling their traditional treasures. It is impossible to imagine that the artifacts that are sold illegally could reach to the Black Market without the support of the responsible authorities. Moreover, the instability and the absence of a particular system to take care of such treasure also help in their smuggling.

It is truly tragic to note that Taliban, during their rule in the country, played a negative role regarding the preservation of the rich Afghan tradition. The destruction of the Buddha of Bamyán in this regard was clear indication that Taliban had not respect for the historical wealth and they considered them to be the remains of the non-Islamic civilization. However, they forgot the fact that they depicted the truth about the history of Afghanistan and they also depicted a more peaceful and tranquil era.

Though it may seem contradictory, the foreigners have been more helpful for Afghanistan to keep alive its tradition and history and have assisted Afghanistan in this regard to a great extent. International community and international organizations have made efforts every now and then to safeguard the cultural heritage of Afghanistan and at the same time attract the investors and visitors for their revival and promotion.

On the other hand, the insensitive attitude of the Afghan authorities themselves is unfortunate and requires to change quickly. It can never neglect such issues, particularly at a time when the country requires a strong integration to stand on its own as a nation.