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Afghanistan

Afghanistan's bravest woman: Sudaba organized first anti-Taliban demo

- IV Online magazine - 2021 - IV559 - August 2021 -

Publication date: Saturday 28 August 2021

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16 August. As the world was watching, in horror, the Taliban victory march on Kabul, residents of the town had literally locked themselves in. Next day, while the Kabul airport was thronged by terrified Afghans trying to escape the Taliban, elsewhere it was a pin drop silence in a sprawling town of five-million. "This silence is more scary than that of the familiar bomb blasts we used to hear in the last 20 years," commented one acquaintance.

Amid this fear and panic, four Afghan women decided to protest as an act of resistance. They spontaneously decided to hold a demonstration.

This first act of resistance, on 17 August, was embarrassingly minuscule in size when these four women, all in their mid-20s, gathered outside of the Presidential Palace.

In the [video footage](#) that immediately went viral, one can watch them flashing placards in the face of the Taliban. They are chanting: "We exist. We are half Afghanistan. Don't conceal us. Don't harm us. Support us."

https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/png/afghan_image.png

The gun-toting Taliban, visibly nervous appear at a loss as local and global media cover the event.

Small in size but Himalayan in courage, this protest began to dominate the TV screens and blogosphere. Conspiracy theories gained currency equally fast. 'The Taliban themselves sponsored the manifestation,' detractors commented in disbelief. Regardless of disparaging conspiracy theories, the action had electrified many across the country. In the next two days, demonstrations were held in many towns. In two cases, the Taliban responded by firing at the agitators. In Jalalabad the death toll was 3, in Asadabad, 16 [exact death toll remains unverified].

Who were these four brave women? It was a question on everybody's mind in Afghanistan and perhaps beyond. Sudaba Kabiri, the motivator behind the spontaneous demonstration, happened to be the friend of a Kabul-based journalist. Though underground since the fateful demonstration yet she readily agreed to reply my questions on whats app. "Will send you voice notes," she told me in a brief whats app call. Her matter-of-fact replies were as brief, but to the point, as her call.

Read on:

Tell us something about yourself.

I am a university student. I was born during the period of first Taliban rule (1997-2001). I work with a private-sector employer as well.

Where was this protest organized? How did the idea of protest came to your mind and how many more friends were involved?

It was held outside of the Presidential Palace. We were a group of students. We were very upset. Our decision was sudden. It was not any pre-planned act. All the men and women are afraid of the Taliban. They were not ready to step outside of the homes. We want to demand our rights [through this action] and to encourage others to demand

their rights.

The Taliban gunmen were present. What did they say?

Yes, there were the Taliban gunmen. They did not respect us. They were very angry. They snatched our papers and mobiles. However, when the national and international media crew started arriving, they changed their behavior. Earlier, they were pointing their guns at us.

Are you underground after the demo? Any threats after the demo?

We are underground. Every day, we move to a new place. Our families, however, are staying on in their respective homes. They are afraid. We are all in big trouble. Understandably.

Do you think your protest led to more protests that started next day on?

This demonstration had significant impact on the Afghan society. Specifically, it encouraged the women to come out of their homes and lead the demonstrations.

What next? Are you planning to escape Afghanistan?

We plan to stay on until they are not threatening to kill us.

How have your families responded, were they aware of your action in advance?

Our families did not know anything. They did not even know that we had stepped outside of the homes. When they watched the demonstration on television, they were angry at us. We can understand them. They want us to be safe. But it is critical time. We cannot stay silent.

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