The benefits of active reading

A message by Murtaza Farjad, a senior instructor at Star Educational Society

Afghan teachers and students use a teaching-learning method called rote memorization. Students are expected to memorize the exact contents of the books they read. What is more catastrophic is that the answers to the questions on the test papers should contain the same words as the book. When students use their own words, they lose points. Many teachers are blind to the fact that demanding students to memorize the exact data given in a textbook may damage a student’s creativity when the purpose of education is to foster innovative minds.

Making learners passively memorize the content of a book can create passive thinkers and passive readers. Similarly, it discourages students’ potential of being creative. This may hamper students’ ability to grasp the themes of the book and discourages learners’ desire to think beyond the limits of what they read. Passive reading creates boundaries to understanding real life and current events. This prevents students from comparing the facts given in the books to real life issues. Passive reading also hampers students’ ability to challenge their mind and utilize what they have learned.

Compared with other countries in the world, Afghanistan has a very low academic standing. This is not because Afghans are mentally backward; rather it is because our educational system is passive. There is no attempt to change the old educational system and move towards development and invention. The current educational system will only lead students to data storage, but not to a creative well-educated generation.

We all know that creativity is the result of contemplation and meditation. Where there is no sense of contemplation, there is no sign of creativity. Active reading can elicit contemplation and meditation which may result in invention and creativity. Ideally, reading has three steps – reading, analyzing and giving feedback. Active reading, which leads to active thinking, begins with reading the text to gain an overall image of what we have read. The second step is analyzing the data one gains from the book and comparing and judging the data based on the clues one has. The last step is giving feedback; stating your own opinion about what you have understood. This third step may also result in developing new ideas.

The above mentioned steps of reading can train students’ minds to be active and critical. Critical reading and critical thinking simultaneously can hone our understanding of the subject and lead us to develop new theories and increase our qualifications in other ways.

All phenomena in the world have a sort of conscious connection, and these relations can only be perceived by keen minds which are sharpened by many years of active reading and thinking. Nothing will be understood if there is no desire for understanding. Similarly, information, facts and realities manifest when you are conscious. Through active reading you will be able to penetrate these relations in other ways.

It is all about how you read. In other words, the number of books you read can’t determine your qualifications and awareness, but how critically, actively and efficiently you read and think really matters.
The idea of organizing the Afghan Girls Leadership Program (AGLP) began when I was a participant in the Girls Leadership Worldwide (GLW) program in New York in the summer of 2015. That ten-day program affected participants’ leadership skills significantly. For example, we became better communicators, networkers and visionaries. I wanted to be a part of such a program and to help other Afghan girls who do not have access to such valuable programs. Shortly after GLW, I attended another leadership program called Women2Women (W2W) in Boston, Massachusetts. I created a general outline of the program I envisioned in Afghanistan and shared it with a couple of the other Afghan girls who were attending the W2W leadership program. W2W, like GLW, was a very successful program that gathered young leaders from around the world and improved their skills. Most of the Afghan participants agreed to volunteer to help me organize the Afghan Girls Leadership Program (AGLP). We chose the name of the program and divided the work to be done among the group members. I began fundraising, contacted potential sponsors, prepared a schedule, and completed many other tasks required to organize the program. The other volunteers were also busy doing whatever they could do from their various locations.

We were forced to cancel the first day of our program because of the twin explosions at the Enlightenment Movement’s peaceful demonstration. When I visited the scene of the attack, my enthusiasm for the program faded. I was grief-stricken by the tragic loss of each family, by the love and hopelessness, and by the pain and loss they endured. I performed the large Afghan flag stretched out on the pavement. I felt helpless and hopeless, but then I became determined to hold the Afghan Girls Leadership Program as a way to stand up to the armed opposition groups who were trying to prevent Afghan girls from improving their own lives.

The next day we greeted our fifteen teenaged participants whose eyes were beyond hopeful. We started the program with a Skype conference with Victoria Hudson, founder and Executive Director of the Women and Public Policy Program (WAPPP) at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She taught us ways to finding our path to success and getting coping with the ideologies of our societies as women. She also informed us about a scholarship program at Harvard and said that she would recommend our participants if they apply.

On our second day, a very hot day, we had a creativity workshop where the participants built various motor fans and flowers with lights with mostly recycled items and no previous knowledge. The purpose of this workshop was to exemplify a situation where we suddenly face a problem and we have to find a solution from whatever is accessible at that moment. In this exercise we used water bottles and toy cars motors. On our first community service day, we cleaned the Peace Garden, which was built in the location of an explosion in Pole Sorkh, Kabul. Mason West, founder of Mason West group, son West, founder of Mason West group, conducted a talent workshop for our participants. The girls explored their own creativity with well-designed guidelines and discussions with Mason West.

We had two more community service days. One day was purchasing and distributing clothes to returnees from Pakistan. Another day we listened to the life stories of street workers and had refreshments with them alongside the Pole Sorkh River. We had a networking day with several guest speakers. Speakers from the Kabul Educational Advising Center (KEAC), Afghan Peace Volunteers (APV), and Fatima Hossaini, a well-known artist, shared their stories and resources. They spoke to us about volunteering opportunities, advising services, and scholarship opportunities. Fatima shared her personal work and struggles as a female Afghan artist with our participants. On the last day, we held a humble ceremony to congratulate our participants and present them with certifications.

Our fifteen participants were chosen from nearly thirty applications. We considered their activities and goals, and sought ethical and geographical diversity. It was extraordinary to see the girls from different ethnicities and provinces working together with enthusiasm and passion. Their hopefulness inspired hope in my and the other organizers. I know they will become future leaders in Afghanistan and the world and will help each other and the peaceful and just world.

The success of the Afghan Girls’ Leadership Program was another demonstration that the voices for good will not be silenced. AGLP is not alone. The leaders that we trained and all other members of Afghanistan’s generation of youth will march toward a peaceful and developed Afghanistan.

The dark shadow of hunger was cast over all Afghan families. The shopkeepers had no more flour to sell. The government also didn’t have enough flour for all the residents of Kabul City. I felt helpless and hopeless, and I couldn’t feed my family because they didn’t have enough money to feed them.

Children, chilled to the bone, stood in the bakery lines trying to get bread. However, the bakeries couldn’t sell more than five loaves of bread to each family and families who had more than five members, like our family, suffered from hunger. Therefore, my father and my four older brothers went to five different bakeries to bring twenty-five loaves of bread for our large family each day.

It was so cold and the way was filled with frozen mud and ice. The cold wind blew on our faces and hands. Our noses and cheeks felt bruised by the numbing cold air and our plastic boots and torn socks offered no protection. My fingers were painfully cold and tears fell from our eyes. In better days, we dreamed of playing with toys. But in those days we dreamed of warm clothes and food in our stomachs. The desperation of that dark and cruel winter made us all want to cry. But we remembered our father’s encouraging words, “Men don’t cry. If so, they are not zealous.”

One of those harsh days, my brother Ahmad Tariq was standing in line in front of the bakery. He was in the middle of that line, surrounded by men and boys who were much bigger than him. Because he was so small, nobody saw him clearly. When he reached the front of the line and it was his turn to get some bread, the whole line started pushing each other and my brother’s neck was pressed against the bakery counter. He started shouting and screaming. “Don’t push! Don’t push!” but the men didn’t hear his voice. The blood drained from his face and his voice became even weaker. I was also shouting at the men in line, “Hey! Don’t push! You’re breaking my brother’s neck!” Suddenly the baker noticed what was happening and jumped into the crowd, pushed aside, and yelled, “You all will get bread! But if you hurt anyone, I won’t give you a morsel.” Then he gave my brother the bread and

About the author: Basira Daqiq is a former Star student and current high school senior at the Oakwood Friends School in New York. She plans to be a doctor in the future.

Bread in winter

It was a hard winter. I was almost four years old. The weather was freezing and the Mujahidin had closed the roads in protest against the Afghan government. We had to get bread for our large family each day. The shopkeepers had no more flour to sell. The government also didn’t have enough flour for all the residents of Kabul City. Everyday, we witnessed the tragedy of famine. Families were selling their sons and daughters because they didn’t have enough money to feed them.

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we both went home, completely terrified by what had happened. When we were getting near our home, the sun was just setting from the dark sky in the second half of night and we began to feel hopeful that behind each darkness a sun is lying down with a happy face and bright hope. As the sun climbed higher into the sky, the people in the city got up with a hopeful vision of a new day. I listened to the birds singing, the ducks quacking, and the hens cackling. My brothers searched to see if the hens and ducks had laid any eggs while my mother tossed stale bread and seeds and wheat on the ground for them to eat. In the yard, the ice and snow was melting and dripping from the tree branches in the bright sunlight. Some drops splashed on my slippers and landed on my eyelashes. The snow glittered and sparkled and made my eyes squint in the brightness.

Just at that moment, I heard my father’s voice calling me for breakfast. When I entered the room there was only tea, mint and bread - no sugar or milk. During breakfast, everyone was talking about how hard they tried to change bread. Then my father looked at my brothers and I with his kind eyes and prideful look and said, “I am proud of you boys - the men of my family and the arms of my body.” Then he hoped for a better future for us all.

About the author: Ahmad Mortaza Ahmad graduated from Kafez University with a degree in Political Science in 2011 and works at the Ministry of Higher Education. He studied English at Star from 2006 to 2008 and began teaching for Star in 2009. You can follow his blog here: https://kabuldreamseller.wordpress.com/
The Kabul Model United Nations: The second Model United Nations Conference in Afghanistan

The Kabul Model United Nations (KMUN) Conference held in Kabul from August 19-21, 2016 was a prestigious program which simulated the United Nations. The conference was initiated, led and organized by an independent group of youth who are committed to bringing changes in Afghanistan. It would not have been held without the hard work of this group. I would like to use this opportunity to warmly thank everyone who helped the KMUN, especially Star Educational Simulation Program. There were Damborah, Qarsak, Jarajo, Athan and theatre. It was one of the most exciting and interesting parts of the conference.

The opening ceremony was held on Thursday, August 18th in Marmarin Palace and included special guests from embassies of several countries, UNAMA, high ranking officials of the NUG and other well-known figures. Speakers during the opening ceremony addressed different global issues and expressed their appreciation for the organizers of the program.

Ehsan Safdari, on behalf of the KMUN team, thanked and welcomed the participants and guests. He talked about the history of the Model United Nations, KMUN, the goals and objectives of KMUN and briefly explained the agenda and the schedule of events. He said, “KMUN is an educational simulation program. There will be more than 200 participants. This conference is mainly designed for students, researchers, and other people who are interested in international diplomacy, international organizations and especially the United Nations.”

Mr. Font, the Senior Political Officer at the UN mission in Kabul, addressed the participants and said, “To be effective, countering terrorism and building peace need to be inclusive and representative processes, which command the active participation of young men and women.”

Ms. Hanae Boughdad, representing the Human Rights Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), spoke at the Kabul Model United Nations Conference. She highlighted the importance of MUN conferences as a great opportunity to learn about the function of the United Nations General Assembly.

After the opening ceremony, the participants who were representing a country in the United Nations divided into four committees. They went to their committees for further discussions on the titles shared with them before the event. The committees included the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Women (UNW), United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The committee members worked on and discussed different global issues related to the UN, while following the exact Rules and Procedures of the committees in the real United Nations. Their meetings took place over three days and at the end each committee came up with position papers and resolution papers. The resolution papers went for voting, and the delegates voted as representatives of their assigned countries.

In addition to simulating the United Nations, the KMUN created a unique opportunity for the participants to show and share their cultures. At the end of the second and third days, the KMUN organized a special program called the Cultural Night. The cultural night included drama, music, dance and other fun programs. The conference ended after the third day with a closing ceremony where high ranking officials and speakers participated and gave speeches. Amrullah Saleh, the former president of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), spoke and said, “Knowledge, Wealth, and Power are the keys to a powerful government.”

The program ended after the third day by appreciating and awarding the best delegates, best position papers and the best committee. A final cultural night and entertaining programs were held and were warmly received by the participants.
Accessibility to Information Campaign Officially Started

Translated by: Zakaria Kheliqi
Source: Hasht-e-Subh

According to Helmand governor’s office, five Talib insurgents affiliated to Qari Feda Mohammad, a commander of the Talib, were killed in the operations. Ministry of Defense did not provide any information about those who were released from the captivity of Talib, but Helmand governor’s office said that among the released prisoners, civilians, Afghan National Army soldiers and Afghan National Police are also included.

In order to maintain the martial stability, the Afghans should become more professional. Existing among the security forces to learn the society. In order to reduce the Afghan security forces’ casualties, these forces should become more professional. Existence of limited NATO advisors, trainers and troops have provided the security forces with an unprecedented opportunity to become more expert.

Yet, it seems too heavy for Afghan security forces to maintain the martial stability. As American generals adduced, the level of victims from Afghan security forces were very high. Annually, thousands of Afghan security forces lose their lives defending public authorities and the society. In order to reduce the Afghan security forces’ casualties, these forces should become more professional. Existence of limited NATO advisors, trainers and troops have provided the security forces with an unprecedented opportunity to become more expert.

He also added that freedom of speech and press was the most notable achievement of Afghanistan after Bonn conference. According to Mr. Murtazawi, media and journalists in Afghanistan are in better condition than most of the countries in this region. He said, “We don’t have imprisoned journalists, having no pre-publication or post-publication censorship and we don’t have any monitoring program on media of Afghanistan based on what should be published or what should not be published.” These statements arise when Nai, the supporting open media administration in Afghanistan, released the results of a survey of self-censorship by more than 90% of the journalists in social networks. According to this administration, the main reason for self-censorship by reporters is fear of threats and having no hearing ears.

In recent years, Afghanistan has had important achievements in the free circulation of information and currently there are 75 TV channels, 200 radio stations and more than thousand printing publications in this country.

101 people released from the captivity of the Talib in Helmand

Translated by: Jumakan Bahyah
Source: Isam.of

As a result of a joint operation of Special Forces, 101 people who were imprisoned by Talib in Helmand province were released.

The Ministry of Defense announced that the operations had been conducted in the areas of Nahr Saraj, Marja and Nawrod districts. Meanwhile, Helmand governor’s office said that the operations were carried out over the prisons of the Talib.
Generación 9/11: Growing Up Under U.S. Invasion’s Shadow

By Fazul Rahim, Mushaq Yousafzai and F. Brinley Bruton
Republished from NBC News

He was too young to remember how a U.S.-led coalition invaded his country only weeks later to topple the Taliban, which had sheltered bin Laden. But the aspirational urge is unflawed.

"If the September 11 attacks did not happen and the United States had not come to Afghanistan, most likely I would have been sitting at a religious madrasa reciting verses of the Quran," he told NBC News. "I would never would have had the opportunity to get the education I am getting today... the Taliban would not allow any other books except for religious texts."

The Taliban had brutally imposed its strict interpretation of Islam on a population already scarred by decades of conflict. Life under the Taliban had been particularly hard for Madadi and his family, members of the long-oppressed Hazara minority who live in Kabul. The Hazara are predominantly Shiite Muslim — revered as apostates by fundamentalist Sunni such as the Taliban.

But freed from the constraints of the Taliban, Madadi was able to pursue his passion: Literature.

"I was introduced to books by my classmate Mahmood when I was 10," he explained. "I convinced my mom to pay library fees... This opened my way to books and ever since I read at least one book every week."

Madadi is mindful of the contrast between his childhood and his parents’:

"I have big plans for my future, I want to go to literature faculty after finishing school and get my master’s degree," he told NBC News. "I always have this fear and worry that all that we have today could be taken from us and we have Taliban come back," he said.

That’s because despite the billions of aid and security assistance that poured into Afghanistan since the invasion, record numbers of Afghan civilians are being killed or maimed by violence. The Taliban today controls more territory now than since it was toppled — and is encroaching on Kabul.

The violence has prevented some 40 percent of Afghan children from going to school. Madadi is one of the lucky ones to get an education — for now.

"My friends and I live in a state fear, because we’re always watching news about the war and districts falling to the Taliban," he said. "I also fear losing what we have, not just our home, but the opportunities we have — our school, our city and our way of life."

While the anxiety is constantly with him, youthful optimism is not far behind.

"The Taliban will never be able to enforce their backward ideas on people," he said. "Even if they manage to take over all of the country, the people will rise against them — the new generation’s awareness is much higher and will fight for the way of life they have been brought up with."

IRAQ

When President George W. Bush’s administration set its sights on Iraq, Ruqaya Ali’s family had every reason to be optimistic.

Saddam Hussein’s brutal regime had persecuted the teen’s father and executed her uncle — one of some 250,000 Iraqis believed to have been killed during the dictator’s 25-year reign.

When the U.S. ultimately invaded in 2003 and toppled Saddam, Ali’s father was hopeful for positive change.

"My father told me there was an attack on America one month before I was born, and because of that the U.S. decided to get rid of Saddam Hussein," the aspiring dentist said, explaining the course of events. "Saddam was a part of an attack there, and Saddam was killing Iraqi people."

The reality was more complicated. The U.S. contended Saddam was hiding weapons of mass destruction.

"I don’t understand why we are paying for the terrorist attacks in the U.S.," the 16-year-old told NBC News.

The invasion of Afghanistan drove militants and fighters across a porous and war-ravaged border with Pakistan, where they’ve waged an insurgency under the mantle of the Pakistani Taliban.

The government estimates some 23,000 people have been killed since 2002 — with civilians suffering the most — and sponsored a series of offensives to root out the militants, to mixed reviews.

Mahmood was born in Miranshah, the capital in the mountainous North Waziristan region home to much of the militant splinter. He was only eight when a suicide bomber detonated in front of him at a school. "There was a huge explosion in the parking area where dozens of cars had arrived to pick up the students," he said. "There was a thick black smoke all around us. Then loud firing by the security forces."

While unharmed, Mahmood said he was terrified and stayed home from school for two weeks after the Taliban attack. But he eventually had to return to classes.

"It was a difficult decision for our family because some of the family wanted me and my cousins to continue our studies in my hometown, while my father and some family members wanted to send us away to Peshawar," he said, referring to the provincial capital some 150 miles away.

School administrators and local officials struggled to keep the kids safe, changing dress codes and drop-off routines while stepping up security.

But a 2009 mortar attack that hit his school changed everything. His father later moved the family to Peshawar.

Mahmood had trouble adjusting to his new life and has had difficulties making friends. He frequently remembers classmates who also fled the violence.

"I’m still haven’t seen or heard from my friends Zahair, Ibrar and Aawis," Mahmood said. "I wish I could visit my home-town and see my house."

Even the relative safety his family sought in Peshawar has been shattered: A December 2014 attack on the a school killed 41 people, mostly students.

While Miranshah is no safer, Mahmood longs for it. He repeatedly asks his father if they’ll ever return home.

Hassan Madadi, 15. Fazul Rahim / NBC News

Ruqaya Ali. NBC News

Azhar Mahmood. Mushtaq Yousafzai / NBC News

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Page 5 of 5

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Starian shines on Afghan TV programs

About the author: Adela Khurrami began teaching at Star in 2012 after studying English Literature and Accounting at Iqra College in Karachi, Pakistan and teaching in Quetta. About the author: Adela Khurrami began teaching at Star in 2012 after studying English Literature and Accounting at Iqra College in Karachi, Pakistan and teaching in Quetta. About the author: Adela Khurrami began teaching at Star in 2012 after studying English Literature and Accounting at Iqra College in Karachi, Pakistan and teaching in Quetta.

Recently I was a guest on two television programs - TOLO TV’s program called “Bamdad Khosh ښاریان” and Raah Farda TV’s program called “Saya سایه”. They were eager to have young women as guests on their shows to help inspire their female audience. In front of the camera, I was feeling very excited that all the world could see me talking on TV. I want to share this experience with the readers of the Interstellar Bulletin, especially young girls. It was one of my greatest dreams to talk on media, express my self-confidence and my dreams to talk on media, express my self-confidence and my dreams.

I was invited to be a guest as an English instructor and a young, active Afghan woman. I knew when I was scheduled to do the interviews that it was important to share the things I have learned in my life, the mistakes I have made and the experiences I have had. When I was growing up, I learned to work hard, have self-confidence, be honest and show concern for others. I was asked questions like, “What is the importance of English language in today’s life? What is your idea about women in Afghan society?” I explained that English is an international language and it is spoken over the entire world. It is an important language for everybody to learn. Many people learn English to compete for scholarships at universities around the world, some learn it to improve their chances of employment at home or abroad, and many learn it for better access to quality educational resources and wealth. As I explained, knowing English is very important in every aspect of life, wherever you are. In some cases, it is more important than our two other international languages (Dari and Pashto).

When I talked about women in Afghan society, I mentioned that women are suffering from many hardships and challenges in Afghanistan. The presence of women everywhere is accompanied by problems. For example, there is violence against women. Whether you have a very high position or not, there is no equality. Related to education of Afghan women, fortunately, studying and learning has become easier for women. There are many educational institutions in every part of society and there are opportunities for them to study. Women can study and learn what they have not learned yet by having a suitable daily timetable and with cooperation from their family. I suggest for women to practice and review their lessons daily to improve their learning. It is not important how many mistakes they make, but by practicing every day they can learn from their mistakes and increase their knowledge. That’s why TV programs want young women to be on their shows to share everything very openly and present themselves.

One of the very memorable moments I had from that experience was what happened after my appearance on TOLO TV. After the show in the studio, everybody stood around me and asked questions about me. They wanted to know how they can learn English quickly and they became very interested to learn English. On Raah Farda TV during the show, they asked me how I could accomplish so many things and be very active at such a young age. Many things surprised me about this experience. The day after the program on TOLO TV, I went to Pol-e-Sorkh and while I was crossing the road, three guys standing on the road looked at me and said to each other, “Hey, wasn’t she on TOLO TV yesterday?” The next one said, “Exactly, she is the same girl.” At that time, I was feeling very proud and until now I am receiving calls and messages from friends and colleagues praising me. I have been contacted by other TV channels asking me to be a guest on their programs. The other day, I received a call from Negah TV asking me to be their guest. It is a very good feeling! I only wish my father could have seen me on TV and could hug me too.

My message to readers is, “Dream and Follow.” Be optimistic about your abilities, build your self-confidence and inspire others. If you are consistent in all of your work, are involved in different activities, and can spread your voice to other people, you can accomplish many great things.
My Grandmother Told Me

S

haykh brother died because something happened to his heart. Aatay Saadiq died after he was viciously beaten up by his own son. Appendicitis killed Aatay Khadimsayn, and loneliness killed Aatay Rasheed. Aabay Mandyaqoob is half alive. May Aatay Abdulhsayn live long.

Shaykh brother was the eldest. He died when we were still in Watan. He had been ill. In those rugged mountains there were no doctors or medicine. They had given him everything they could get their hands on. I went to see him. He lay in the corner. He sounded drugged. We sat and spoke for a short time.

My sister approached him, sat next to him to comfort him, and placed her hand on his heart. He instantly sat straight up.

He he

ut out a sigh:

Aghay! You killed me!

He turned pale, his head tilted back and he breathed no more. No motion, no sign of life. He died.

Aagah! You killed me!

I went to see him. He lay in the hospital bed in Quetta. I had not been told that he was in town. He had been so ill, they had had to take him across the border, straight to a hospital. I was taken to him. He lay on the bed but his stare did not look normal. I stood there and then walked up to him. I asked if he recognised me. He held my hand, and whispered:

I can tell from your voice that you are my sister.

He held my hands, but he kept staring at the ceiling. The bed he was on was wet. I asked his wife for the reason. He said the stitches from the surgery had gone off. Yellow puss had been oozing out of the cuts. And that was my last ever conversation with my sweet brother. I was returned home. The next time I saw him, he was wrapped in a white shroud, lifeless, gone forever.

Aabay Mandyaqoob was almost killed by Hemiplegia. She lives on half of herself, on a bed all day and all night, all the time, needing help to do even something as basic as rolling from one side to the other. She can not go around, be about and do what she likes. She spends her days crying, recalling names of her children and trying to identify the relatives visiting her.

I had two brothers left. Aatay Rasheed was left all alone. His children abandoned him, abandoned the country. He had a whole village, empty of people, to roam around at his age. Loneliness killed him.

I have a brother left – the only heir to my father. May god keep him safe and alive for his children and grandchildren.

I Will Not Break

I sprouted from the blood of Rabia.*

Even if they cut my stems and leaves a hundred times

I still rise up and blossom.

I am from love.

When I write about love

I am not silence me, break my head and cut off my hands.

They confine me between four walls and a dark ceiling.

But I still write my pain

With the last drops of my blood.

Under repression and torture,

I write as Rabia did

With the last drops of her blood

And she wrote and wept.

Her blood still screams through the cement.

I am from Rabia's blood.

I am the same powerful Afghan woman

Who fights and refuses to give up.

The world has seen what I have to offer.

Alas, I am hidden behind a burqa,

Behind tall walls.

Because of honor,

I can’t free my face from this prison

To take a breath of fresh air.

I am from the burning drops of blood,

I soar despite being knocked down by their ego,

Defying the damage to my soul.

I am from words:

Words of power, struggle and love.

Weak minds may call me weak

Frail thoughts may humiliate me

But I will neither break nor remain in captivity.

I am from Malalai who raised the flag of freedom**

And carved the power of being a woman in history books.

My headscarf is the flag of my nation,

Red like Rabia's blood,

Black like Nadiaa’s death,***

Green like Malalai’s martyrdom.

*Rabia: First recorded poetess in Afghanistan region. She was killed by her brother for falling in love with a slave and writing poetry. She died while writing poetry on the walls of the bathhouse she was confined to using her own blood.

**Malalai: A legendary Afghan woman who is believed to have joined Afghan soldiers fighting off British colonizers. She is a folkloric hero who urged her fiancé to fight for freedom and lost him in the war.

***Nadiaa Anjuman: An Afghan poetess killed by her husband for writing poetry in 2005.
An interview with Ahmad Murtaza Ahmadi, Instructor at Star Educational Society

Could you introduce yourself please and tell us about your education? I am Ahmad Murtaza Ahmadi and I am 29 years old. I have my bachelor’s degree in political science from Kaze University in 2011. I got my English Language Diploma from Star Educational Society in 2009. I work as a secretary of Quality Assurance in the Ministry of Higher Education. Furthermore, I have a part time job as an English instructor at Star Educational Society.

How long have you been teaching at Star? I joined Star Educational Society in 2009 and it is about seven years that I am teaching at Star Educational Society. Star is unlike other educational centers. It is not a business center or just a simple place for teaching lower classes of English. It provides us a lot of opportunities, motivates and guides the students to use those opportunities which are available and not familiar to most of the people who are not at star. I have found Star as an opportunity and platform to success for all generations especially for the young generation. I found star like a bridge from where most of my friends crossed and gained their goals and still they are having their expertise and Master degree or PhD in civilized countries. Therefore, Star is a goal and an opportunity.

As you said, you studied political science, how do you evaluate the condition of Afghanistan? As we all know, political science is a field through which we study political principles, different diplomacies and governmental systems that have been written by famous theorists and political thinkers. We just studied the theories and diagrams of political science about which most of the educated and expert people have written articles. Factually, Afghanistan is a country which suffered three decades of civil war and all its infrastructures have been destroyed thoroughly. There was nothing left for the new government. The new government started operating from zero with a generation that grew up amid war. Due to that fact that Afghani-stan is in a complicated and mysterious situation, we need to try hard and struggle to enhance our self-awareness and social awareness to educate the uneducated generation and pave the way for disabled people who live in Afghanistan. Then, Afghanistan will be a better place for Afghans to live and have a better life.

Are you pessimistic or optimistic about security in Afghanistan? As I mentioned before, Afghanistan has suffered three decades of civil war. The war damaged all systems and infrastructures of Afghani-stan. Therefore, our country still confronts dangerous wars which are occurring daily in different provinces. Afghanistan suffers different wars like wars on drug, terrorist wars and fundamental wars, but the most dangerous war is the proxy. Our neighbors don’t let us make our country as standard as we want. Therefore, they are interrupting and interfering in our very strategic plans like social, political, economic and even security plans. They don’t want our country to have peace and development. We still hope that our country can develop and have peace but that can be possible only if our people are united and well educated. So, I hope that one day Afghanistan will prosper and Afghans will live in peace with dignity and love.

What do you think about teaching quality, materials and teachers at Star? Teaching is an intrinsic value for me. I don’t teach because teaching can provide me money. I teach because teaching brings me true happiness. Thus, intrinsically, I love to teach because teaching itself is a value and it gives me true happiness. Star as an academic center has its own criteria. Star managers bring changes corresponding to the needs of students and update its materials and system as required. In addition, Star provides the best and up to date materials for students. Furthermore, Star has the best quality among other English institutions because teachers at Star work hard and there we have a special team to evaluate the whole curriculum and teaching quality in all branches. The team is responsible for quality assurance in every aspect of teaching they bring changes if required. Star has its own system and procedure of hiring teachers. Anyone willing to be a teacher at Star should take the tests to real his qualification for the job. If they can succeed, they will get the chance to be hired at Star.

What is your future plan? I want to have my expertise in leadership and political science in a standard and civilized country. Then, I will come back to my own country and start teaching in different institutions. I really want to be a change because I always dream of a positive change in my country. Therefore, I will try my best to get my master and PhD. I will try my best to serve my homeland in educational and social terms to create a brighter future for my generation.