While lovers around the world prepare for a day filled with roses, chocolate, poetry and songs, the fate of Valentine’s Day in Afghanistan, remains uncertain. Young people have grown up under the Republic that was established after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, had taken up Valentine’s Day as a new space to express their emotional and romantic feeling, loosening the boundaries of control over youth. But I, like thousands of other Afghan youth wonder, if we will hear such a hopeful and public celebration of love in Afghanistan again before long.

Although the celebration has roots in medieval Christian Europe, it has traveled across the globe, with lovers around the world embracing the tradition. Yet it has not always been welcomed in many Muslim cultures such as Afghanistan, Iran, Malaysia, and beyond, where the youth who have embraced Valentine’s Day are subject to the wrath of religious conservatives and at times even the nationalists who continue to live in their glorified imagined past.

After the fall of Taliban’s regime (2001), young people of Afghanistan embraced Valentine’s Day as a way to loosen the rigid control imposed on them and a new space to express their romantic sentiments. During the short-lived Republic of Afghanistan (2004-2021), when there was hope for a gradual expansion of social and political liberty, Afghan youth began, with some cost to themselves, experimented with public displays of affection.
Historically, and culturally in Afghanistan, love belonged in the pages of books and verses of poetry—not to be openly expressed in public. This belief was further exacerbated by decades of war and insecurity followed by the Taliban regime in the 1990s; as if, love was completely suppressed under the nation's heavy burden of stressful emotions. It was in this context, that the youth initiatives went beyond a personal expression—a budding ground for a new Afghanistan, as it was exemplified by the love songs song as reflected in the song, ‘I kiss you amid Taliban and you are not afraid’ that went viral when it was published on the singers Facebook. The truth was that it was more than a mere expression of love... in fact, it was a courageous break away from the established oppressive values and practices. Today thousands of young Afghans and I, while hoping to see the end of these dark days; also wonder if we will ever again experience a hopeful and courageous public celebration of love in Afghanistan.

About the author:
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