

***Reconciliation and Social Healing, Heela Najibullah,
Springer, 2017, 232.***

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The book, *Reconciliation and Social Healing*, by Heela Najibullah is an analysis of past-Afghan reconciliation processes namely those in 1986 and 2010 but with particular focus on the Afghan National Reconciliation Policy, initiated by the author's deceased father, Najibullah Ahmadzai, commonly known as Najibullah or Dr. Najib, who served as the President of Afghanistan from 1987 to 1992. The author talks about her father, Dr Najibullah's sincere efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan by focusing on his regimes' National Reconciliation Policy. The author states that the subject of her study is a personal account, and recounts the assassinations of her father and uncle, who were brutally hanged on September 27, 1996 by the Taliban. It continues to evoke the inner turmoil and memories of her past linked to her father, his assassination as well as his sincere efforts to bring about peace in Afghanistan.

By focusing on Afghanistan's tragic history, the author talks about attempts made from 1986 and 2010 to bring about peace in the country, such as peace deals, agreements and two reconciliation processes. She tries to highlight the key objectives of the National Reconciliation Policy, the challenges it faced as well as the loopholes that existed in its implementation. Furthermore, focus is also laid on the peace deals signed during the civil war from 1992-1996 as well as the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme and their differences. From her extensive study of all the attempts and process made to achieve peace, the author is able to conclude that the most critical component of the process has been the common Afghan people who have been missing from the equation, as a result, the Afghan peace process has not been 'people centric' and has been devoid of 'people centric practices' — hence its failure to date.

In this regard, the author extensively refers to the concept of social healing in John Paul Lederach's *When Blood and Bones Cry Out*, where

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she infers that social healing is a pre-requisite for sustainable peace. Hence, learning from previous attempts at peace, the author is of the view that more than ever, Afghanistan requires a people driven peace process. This observation holds weight, since the recent US-Taliban peace deal signed on February 29, 2020 in fact had the full support and involvement of the common people. Following certain breakthroughs towards a peaceful settlement, hundreds of common Afghans took to the streets to demand for an end to the war and push for a peaceful settlement which later on came to be known as the 'Peace March/ Helmand Peace Convoy.'

The author's analysis seeks to answer how "peace initiatives in Afghanistan bring sustainable reconciliation", by outlining the reasons behind the failures of these reconciliation processes, and addressing the factors that underpinned their foundations and shaped their outcomes. These factors include historical and geopolitical influences, involving both global and regional actors, and a failure to involve all levels of society in order to achieve peace. Two central concepts inform Najibullah's analysis — transrational peace philosophy and elicitive conflict transformation, and it is through these that Najibullah not only talks about her personal experiences as daughter of President Najibullah, but highlights the importance of 'social healing.' With the use of these concepts, Najibullah is of the view that the conflict is not rooted in ethnic and tribal based rivalries, rather a misunderstanding of the conflict, and presents a proposal for an Afghan peace process that is different to those in the past, one that will, as argued by her, be more successful at attaining peace and stability in Afghanistan.

While analysing geopolitical influences, the author is of the opinion that conflicting interests of various regional and global actors have impacted the peace process in Afghanistan. Najibullah argues it is the economic dependence of Afghanistan, in addition to its strategic location, on various countries that forces it to cede to their demands. After all, how can Afghanistan make decisions independently if the state's lifeline, i.e. the economy, is controlled by external actors?

Najibullah highlights the geographic centrality of Afghanistan, and how its position in the middle of Eastern and Western civilisations has been the source of interference in its affairs. She talks about the history

of Afghanistan and how its political structure changed from a Monarchy to a Republic in the 1970s, with a desire to see a multi-party system in Afghanistan. She further talks about the violent history — Afghanistan has faced due to external interference.

Among other issues, the author also discusses the UN Five Point Peace Plan (UN 5PPP) formulated in 1991, and how certain factions within the Afghan government and the Mujahideen sabotaged it. She also argues that competing global and regional interests also played a role in the initiative's failure. Najibullah asserts throughout the book that social healing is needed in Afghanistan in order to prevent conflict and ensure a successful reconciliation process — so far, all the initiatives and processes have been political as opposed to social. She uses Lederach's explanation of 'Social Healing' and his pyramid of peace actors to assess the reconciliation processes in Afghanistan. Najibullah begins by mapping out the social structures in Afghanistan — she asserts that the leadership in Afghanistan has its followers "on the basis of tribal, ethnicity, qawm or religious affiliation." What can be taken away from Najibullah's analysis is that there has and remains a lack of grassroots level involvement that has prevented reconciliation processes from succeeding, in addition to the competing global and regional interests. A successful reconciliation process, therefore, needs to be multilayered. This means it must involve all sectors of Afghan society, including the leadership, middle and grassroot level. Moreover, a conscious effort needs to be made towards national reconciliation and reintegration which will pave the way for social healing in Afghanistan.