

Indians' Perception of Afghanistan with a Special Reference to Punjab State

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Abstract: Apart from political all-weather alliance between India and Afghanistan, this study ascertains and finds out the Indians' perception of Afghanistan, for which the required data has been randomly collected in North India using probability sampling technique. The obtained data shows that the perception of Indians in whole has changed as compared to erstwhile and slots at average when it comes to the overall image of Afghanistan i.e. in terms of development, freedom to girls, education system, and economy, whereas about the war and terrorism in Afghanistan still many Indians think that war is going on in Afghanistan and the term "terrorism" is still connoted with Afghanistan. research work has limitations in terms of presenting the data limited to a specific population which is taken as a sample size, and does not represent the perception of Indians throughout India. The study further concludes that the perceptions of Indians about Afghanistan slots at average and somewhat below average, therefore, it suggests some disciplinary recommendations that need to be considered by both Indians and Afghans in order to clear up the cynicism and provide platforms for portraying the positive images of India and Afghanistan in the minds of both the nations so as to enhance the bilateral relationship.

Keywords: India-Afghanistan relation, Perception, culture, politics, mutual interests.

1. INTRODUCTION

India supports a democratic and a self-relied Afghanistan, assisting the country in terms of various developmental aspects i.e. construction projects, Military support, education, and Economic development, therefore people in Afghanistan positively perceive the role of India in Afghanistan and consider India as their second home, Whereas the Indians' viewpoint about Afghanistan varies. However, Indians consider Afghanistan as India's strategic ally, yet majority of the general perception of Afghanistan in India is traced back to the 80s and 90s, which means still many Indians think that Afghanistan is a conflicted country. Therefore, we have conducted a survey and randomly assimilated different viewpoints of the local Indians about Afghanistan that highlights the various opinions of the people living in northern India about Afghanistan.

1.1. Afghanistan-India's shared values and culture

India and Afghanistan have had a prolonged history of cultural connections. India's policy of seeing a developed Afghanistan cannot be overstated. Indo-Afghan cultural links and political relations have improved under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Afghan President Dr. Ashraf Ghani. Since 2001 India's engagement with Afghanistan has become multidimensional, there are two major factors bringing India and Afghanistan closer are; (1) Afghanistan-Pakistan territorial disputes, Durand Line in Particular and (2) Pakistan's influences in Afghanistan by supporting the insurgent groups. Kabul and New Delhi both suffer a common foe therefore, both the bond of the countries is becoming stronger both in terms of politics, and culture. (Kaura 2017)

Historians have found out that over 2000 years Afghanistan has been a significant commercial and craft hub linking the civilizations of Persia, and Central Asia with India South Asian countries. Although, the war taking place over the last 3 to 4 decades have increasingly undermined Afghanistan's unique culture, traditions of art and architecture. In today's

date, one of the biggest challenges for Afghanistan is to reiterate and sustain the obliterated assets. old cultural heritage with built-in connections in the areas of music, arts, cuisine, language and architecture. In the field of music, many Afghan musicians got special music trainings in the music centers in Patiala Gharana New Delhi. Nowadays, Indian songs, movies, and TV serials in particular are famous, also have a significant contribution to the popularization of Hindi language and familiarization of the populace with Indian socio-cultural values in Afghanistan. India was regularly aimed to take up projects that will render Afghanistan's cultural heritage sustainability, As a part of India's rehabilitation program for Afghanistan. the Indian cultural center has also been working for the development of a shared cultural heritage. (mea.gov.in 2017)

1.2. India-Afghanistan Political bond

The two nations have a sturdy political alliance based on historical and cultural connections. However, the Indo-Afghan relationship is limited to both the governments in New Delhi and Kabul, but has its foundations in the historical links and cultural exchanges between the people.

The strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan which was signed on October 04, 2011 was the first agreement that Afghanistan has officially entered into with India, the main purpose of that agreement was to reconstruct Afghanistan, help guarantee its security and is linked with the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. Whereas, Afghanistan perceives the strong ties with India as a tool for assuage the sense of insecurity and capability of assisting the war-affected nation to build the nation on account of the debilitating power struggle anticipated in the power before 2014 a year considered for the withdrawal of US and NATO forces. (Raipeha 2013)

Over the last 2 decades, India-Afghanistan relationship have been comparatively strengthened, the strategic partnership agreement has further strengthened the relationship, the agreement was signed between the two countries in October 2011. the main objective of the strategic partnership agreement (SPA) between the two sides is to provide assistance for rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions impacted by war. Also provides Education and technical assistance for the rehabilitation of indigenous Afghan capacity in various aspects with a focus on the encouragement of investments in Afghanistan's natural resources, Afghan-owned, broad-based and inclusive process of peace and reconciliation. And serving the requirement for sustainability and a long-term commitment to Afghanistan by the global community. (mea.gov.in 2017).

On June 4, 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Herat province, south Afghanistan along with the Afghan Counterpart President Dr. Ashraf Ghani and other diplomats, jointly inaugurated the Afghan-India Friendship Electric Dam, which was earlier known as Salma Dam. The completion of the dam project represents culmination of years of hard work by about 1,500 Indian and Afghan engineers and other professionals in tough situations. It shows India's continued commitments to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. Again on August 22, 2016, PM Modi jointly inaugurated the star palace in Kabul with president Ghani through a video conferencing. During his speech prime minister agreed that the 1.25 billion India people would always stand by Afghans in ensuring a lasting peace and prosperity in Afghanistan. On September 11, 2017 the second strategic Partnership meeting was held in New Delhi. the Afghan delegation led by the Afghan Foreign Minister Salah Uddin Rabbani comprising of senior Afghan government members. utilization of the freshly allotted US\$ 1 billion announced by the Indian prime minister, under which India and Afghanistan launched a New Development partnership. The Government of India worked with the Government of Afghanistan to identify top priorities and the projects wherein Afghanistan needed the Indian cooperation to be organized and guided. (mea.gov.in 2017)

1.3. Trade Relations

According to a reports from Indian Embassy Kabul, the bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan for the year 2016-17 was approximately \$800 million. and has a great potential and estimated to be expanded further. Although, the trade relations will realize its actual potential once the Wagah route is opened for the trade. The opening of the Air cargo corridor in June, 2017 between Afghanistan and India. The inauguration of air corridor has ensured free movement of freight despite the hindrances caused by Pakistan. During the strategic partnership council, it was agreed upon to further enhance the corridor and expand it to other cities in India too. Fortunately, over 1000 tones of cargo has already been transported in the air corridor since its inauguration. (mea.gov.in 2017)

Since 2001 a large number of Indian companies have invested in Afghanistan the approximated number is 100. India-Afghanistan’s joint contribution covers 80 joint ventures with a total initial \$20 million. Investment undertaken by India largely comes from public sector, but efforts have made to involve private sectors nonetheless.

The prominent Indian companies doing business in Afghanistan are as follows:

No.	Company name
1	KEC- (Electrical Transmission Lines)
2	Phoenix- (Consultancy in Electrical Transmission)
3	AIPL-(Establishment of Hydro power project in Helmand Province)
4	APTECH-(Computer & Management Education)
5	GAMMON INDIA-Power Transmission Line & Power Sub- Stations)
6	KPTL- (Power Transmission Line)
7	ANAAR GROUP-(Air India)
8	Spice Jet

Figure: 1.1. Indian companies in Afghanistan

Afghanistan’s social and economic development in Afghanistan is imperative for India for ensuring regional security. Therefore, in the year 2011 Afghanistan’s former President Hamid Karzai signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement during his visit to India, the (SPA) framed a framework for India’s cooperation in the following sectors:

1. Political and Security Assistance
2. Trade and economic
3. Capacity development and Education
4. Social and Cultural and
5. People to people relations

Moreover, India also agreed to contribute \$2 billion to Afghanistan. Besides India spent around \$1 billion more to become Afghanistan’s fifth largest donor. Most of the India’s contribution is categorized into three aspects; (1) Humanitarian (2) Infrastructure projects and (3) Capacity building. Following are the six major Indian projects in Afghanistan:

1. Food assistance to primary schools and reconstruction of the destroyed schools (\$321 million).
2. Supply of 250,000 tones of wheat.
3. Construction of a power line from Pul-i-Khumri to Kabul (\$120 million).
4. Construction of the Salma Dam also known as India-Afghanistan friendship Dam, Power Project (\$130 million). (Price 2013)

1.4. India’s Interest in Afghanistan

Ever since, the Taliban regime collapsed, which was considered as Pro-Pakistan, the India-Afghanistan strategic ties have been strengthening, the alliance between both the countries were revived and therefore Bollywood music again clamored in the streets of Kabul, still Indian TV serials and movies are incredibly popular across Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have generally had genial relations at the strategic level. Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai who has obtained his higher education in Simla, India, served both the nations to have a friendly relation. Afghanistan welcomed India’s decision to open an embassy in Kabul along with four consulates in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Mazar-e-Sharif.

India's strategic objectives in Afghanistan crop up from its domestic and regional interests particularly averting Pakistan's influence is evidently one of India's major political objectives, therefore this is one of the key drivers behind the Indo-Afghan strong relations.

2. METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

A small group of people aged 18 to 45 year has been selected, yet the maximum number of the respondents were 22 years, for collection of the primary data has been randomly collected using probability sampling technique in Northern India.

2.1. Research Design

The research is descriptive in nature, describing the general perception of Indians about Afghanistan, the data collected by the researcher is primary.

2.2. Objective of the Research

The key purpose of conducting this research study is to find out the Indians' perception of Afghanistan, and to recommend the disciplinary measures to be taken in order to enhance mainstream a positive image of Afghanistan in the minds of Indians.

2.3. Data Resources and Samples

For this research only the primary data has been collected.

2.3.1. Primary data

The primary data for the research has been collected through:

1. Questionnaire
2. Personal interviews

3. SAMPLE SIZE

Chandigarh Group of Colleges has been taken as the sample size, Mohali and Ambala as sample, North India has been taken as the Population and India as the Universe. The sampling method used is simple random method of probability sampling.

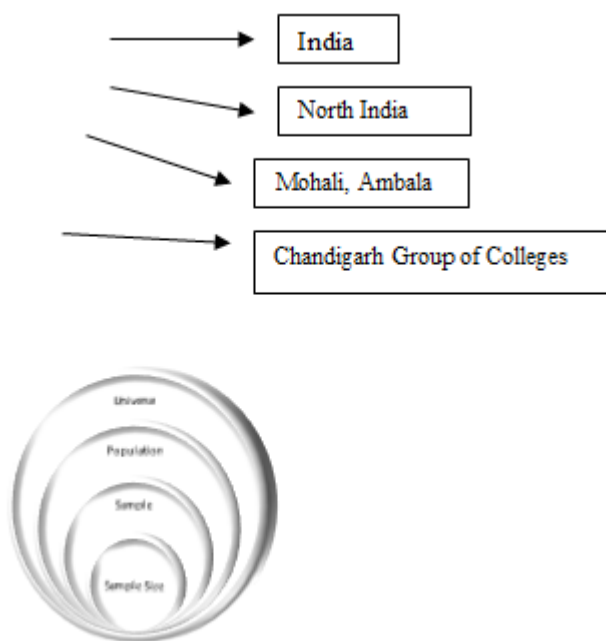


Figure: 3.1. Sample Design

The study takes into consideration the collection of the required data from the respondents living in Mohali and Ambala, whereas the selected sample size is Chandigarh Group of Colleges.

4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The required data has been collected based on the overall image of Afghanistan, economic system, terrorism, education system, freedom to girls, India-Afghanistan relations, India’s assistance with Afghanistan, and the government system of Afghanistan. The gained data has been better elaborated in the following figures and charts;

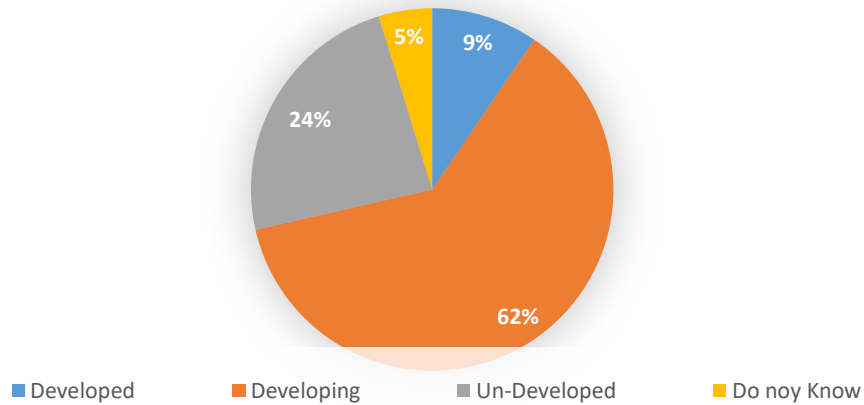


Figure: 4.1. Overall Image of Afghanistan

The figure shows that 62% of the Indians living in north India think that Afghanistan is a developing country, while 24% remains on the belief that Afghanistan is still an un-developed country, whereas 9% of them think that Afghanistan is a developed country which is interesting though.

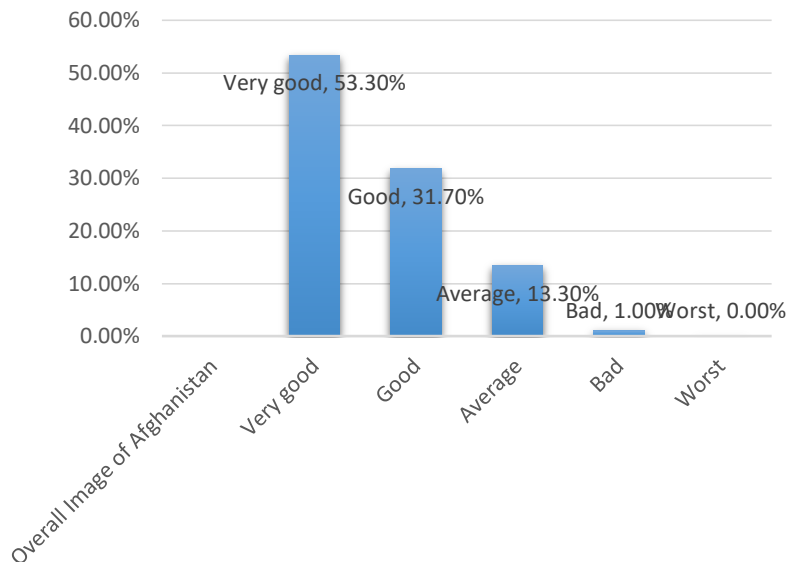


Figure: 4.2. Afghanistan-India Alliance

About the India-Afghanistan Alliance, 54% of Indians are on the belief that the alliance between both the nation is very good, 32% of Indians’ perception remains at good, which means that a large percent of the people of India are positive about the relationship between both the nations.

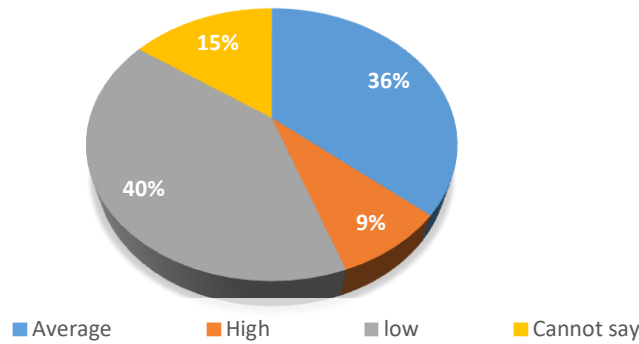


Figure: 4.3. Government System in Afghanistan

40% of Indians believe that the government system in Afghanistan is not stable which means their perception stays at low level about Afghanistan, while 15% have no idea about it, and 9% other think that the government system is high which means they believe that Afghanistan has comparatively a stable government than the past.

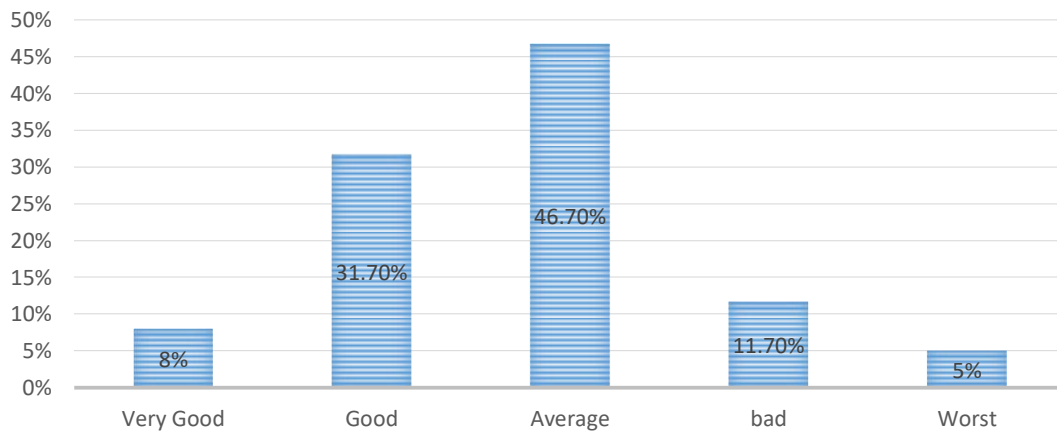


Figure: 4.4. Education System in Afghanistan

About the education system in Afghanistan almost 46.70% people's perception lies at average, while 31.70% other think it is good, whereas 12% other are still on the belief that the education in Afghanistan is bad, and they suggest that it should be developed, on the other hand 8% think that the education system is very good in Afghanistan.

■ Average ■ High ■ low ■ Cannot say

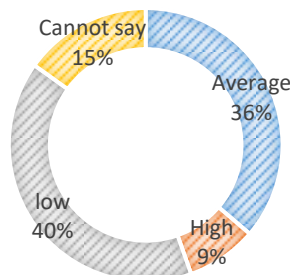


Figure 4.5. Freedom to Girls

Freedom to girls is believed to be very low which is 40%, 36% people are on the belief that freedom to girls in Afghanistan is on average level which shows their positive perception, whereas 15% others do not have idea about it, and fortunately 9% others think that freedom to girls is on a high level, but the reality is that in Afghanistan girls in far-flung regions still face challenges with being freed, and awareness regarding this issue should be spread.

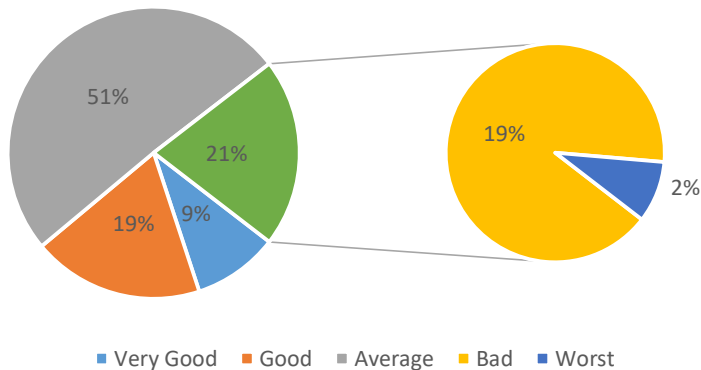


Figure: 4.6. Economic System

it has been concluded that a large number of Indians think that the economic system in Afghanistan is good, whereas 9% think that it is very good which is quite less, on the other hand 51% of the Indians are still on the belief that the economic system in Afghanistan is neither good nor bad which means it is average, and they recommend more development to be made in economic sector, while it is unfortunate that 21% of the Indians claim that the economic system of Afghanistan worst and it drastically needs to be revived.

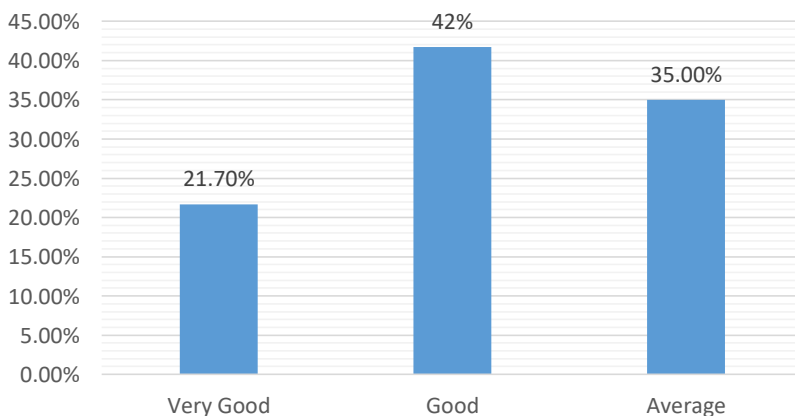


Figure: 4.7. Terrorism in Afghanistan

The very term “terrorism” abruptly comes up when the topic is on Afghanistan, and this perception must be vanished, because Afghanistan is one of the biggest sufferers of this disease and it should be perceived as a common problem for everyone, and ultimately must be resolved.

The collected data shows that 42% of the Indians think that terrorism is still existing in Afghanistan, which means their viewpoint traces back to the 80s and 90s times when Afghanistan was confronting disputes.

Study shows that 35% of the Indians think that terrorism is somehow exists, means they lay on average, whereas 21% other think that currently there is no terrorism in the country and Afghanistan has become a peaceful country now.

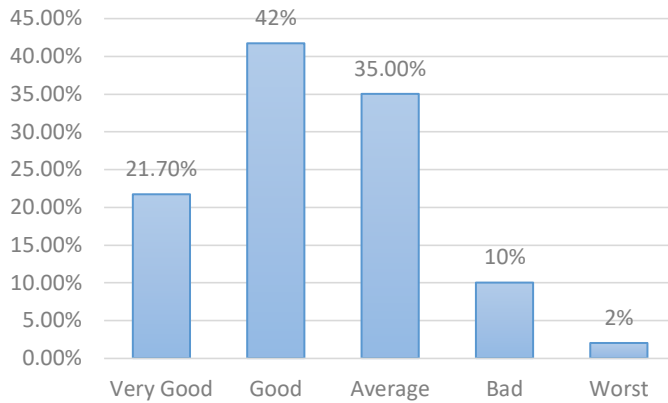


Figure: 4.8. India’s political Assistance with Afghanistan

When it comes to India’s assistance with Afghanistan, 38% Indians believe it is good, whereas 32% lies at average, while 19% others think it is very good which is quite good, but 9% think it is bad and 2% claim that it is worst. when the provided data is analyzed it can be concluded that a large number of Indians are on the belief that the India’s cooperation with Afghanistan is pretty good.

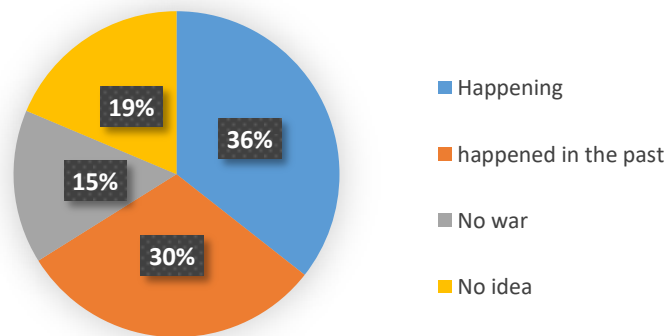


Figure: 4.9. Wars in Afghanistan

The above figure shows that still a large percentage of Indians are on the belief that war is going on in Afghanistan, here war refers to the miseries of 80s, although USA war of Afghanistan is going on but it cannot be considered as war.

Hence, from the above data it can be stated that 36% of Indians think war is going on, while 30% others think that war happened in the past. 15% of Indians are on the belief that there is no war happening in Afghanistan which means that they are positive about Afghanistan.

5. CONCLUSION

Apart from all-weather strategic alliance between India and Afghanistan, the research ascertains and finds the general perception of Indians of Afghanistan. the required data collected from the respondents are from the age group of 18 to 45 years, yet the maximum responses came from the age group of 22 years which is 20. we have found that most of the Indians’ perception of India-Afghanistan relations places in very Good and Good. on the basis of the survey, 66% of Indians living in north India think that Afghanistan is a Developing country, followed by 26% who think that Afghanistan is an un-developed country. 54% people think that the Government system in Afghanistan is based on Democracy, whereas 32% do not have any idea regarding this.

However, about war in Afghanistan many of the respondents had no idea, but the collected data shows that 36% of the Indians believe that conflicts are still happening in Afghanistan, 30% other are of the belief, that war only happened in the past, 15% say there is no war and 18% others have no idea regarding this, hence concluded that still a large percentage of Indians think that war is going on in Afghanistan and others think that the country is comparatively peaceful now.

On the other hand, half of the responses slot at Average regarding the Afghanistan's education system, followed by 32% as Good, which means that Indians are on the view that education system is pretty good in Afghanistan.

About the 'freedom to Girls' in Afghanistan, 40% of Indians believe that the rate of freedom is Low, which means that the Afghan government still needs to pay attention to girls' empowerment. the 'Economic Conditions' of Afghanistan is viewed as average, whereas, the opinion of other 30% of places at Good and 20% as bad. being an Islamic Country, which has always been falsely co-related with Terrorism, 25% people claim that Afghanistan; somewhat supports Terrorism', yet 45% others believe that Afghanistan is against terrorism, whereas 28% have no idea regarding this. It means there is still a need, to clear the doubt and make the general perception of Indians more clear to mainstream terrorism as a religious-averse phenomenon. it's evident that India's political assistance with Afghanistan is good and is further expected to be even stronger in the future.

Based on our findings the general Indians' perception of Afghanistan is positive when it comes to the outright image of the country, in terms of development and the political relation between India and Afghanistan. the various opinions given by the Indians from different areas in North India are appealing and concludes that Indians' viewpoints about various aspects of Afghanistan slot in an average.

Thus concluded that there has been a considerable positive change in the viewpoints of Indians about Afghanistan as compared to erstwhile, because of the notable progress in the India-Afghanistan relations.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings there is a need for a general awareness regarding Afghanistan, as many Indians' viewpoint links terrorism with Afghanistan, indeed Afghanistan is itself one of the biggest sufferer of this disease, and freedom to girls is perceived negatively but over the last one decade remarkable changes have been made regarding this issue.

Therefore, the study suggests some disciplinary measures that need to be taken by officials of both the nations in order to change the negative perception of Afghanistan.

1. Social activists should conduct workshops and seminars both in Afghanistan and India targeting the young generation, which will enhance the mutual understandings between both the nations.
2. The image being depicted in the movies picturing the 90s image of Afghanistan is thought to be still the same, but the reality is that over the last one decade Afghanistan has been transformed substantially, that many Indians still are not aware of therefore it is necessary for the people in India to be updated of the regional affairs.
3. Afghanistan being a democratic country should be perceived an independent, and a nation based on democratic perspectives and a conflicts-averse country.

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