religion. Some time ago from the shelter of his western home he produced a highly readable, insightful and potentially dangerous article. Without a doubt there must be at least a few hundred websites online where similar material may be found. Writing from the Iranian Diaspora on obscure websites his work was bound to be looked over and forgotten just as fast as it was written, but the interesting fact is that now, that very article is in the eye of a storm, and the writer is not languishing in jail, the amazing part is that someone who read it is. Even more shocking is fact that the person suffering in jail because of an article he downloaded is now counting down the clock as he has amazingly been handed a death sentence, and all this over one downloaded article, forget the freedom of speech and expression that the bloggers wail for, his very freedom to think has been taken from him.

Hamid Karzai took to office with the promise of religious secularism yet he has constantly failed to live up to his promises, not even his American accent can save him from his promises, his lack of accountability bears a striking resemblance to that of his friend and partner in crime George W. Bush.



Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh

The incident was covered in innumerable blogs around the world when Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh was arrested on 27 October 2007 for allegedly downloading a "blasphemous" article that was "disseminating defamatory comments about Islam". The article in question was written by Bikhoda where he laid out his ideas that Muslim fundamentalists who claimed the Quran justified the oppression of women had misrepresented the views of the prophet. A seemingly innocuous topic to most of us and one might even say it was an article that would arouse heated discussion in some parts of the world. As it so happens that was exactly the reason behind downloading the article, 23-year-old Kambakhsh was a student at Balkh University and a reporter for the Jahan-i-Naw (New World) newspaper and he wanted to distribute the article to his classmates to encourage healthy discussion on the topic of women's rights. Things did not turn out as he planned within a few days of spreading the article amongst his friends he was warned that there would be dire consequences for his actions, a statement he should have taken more seriously because before the week was up he was arrested for disseminating defamatory comments about Islam.

The incident may have been shocking to bloggers around the world but none of the main media houses deemed it news worthy and was thus off the mainstream news landscape. There may have been a storm brewing online but it was not strong enough to garner any support for him. What followed next was a damning confirmation of the state of freedom in Afghanistan, it was not bad enough that he was arrested unconstitutionally, but he was also speedily tried in court for the charges trumped up against him. This is where the story gets a little hazy, it has been reported that throughout the process of his trial he was not afforded a lawyer, while other reports have claimed that when he was sentenced there was no lawyer present. Whatever the exact facts may be, every news source including the United Nations has confirmed that at many a time during the trial and his sentencing he was not given a lawyer and most importantly the trial was not conducted in a free fair and impartial manner, he was guilty till proven guilty.

While a hullabaloo is being created about the circumstances surrounding the trial some far more basic aspects of the judicial process have not come under the microscope. The best example is that Kambakhsh case should have been heard by the media commission and then if necessary should have been transferred to the judicial authorities, instead his case was heard by Shuraye-Ulema, the Council of Religious Scholars. This is yet another case of heavy handedness in a country that claims to have cleansed itself of its Taleban past, but now simply lives with the same repression under a different name. Hamid Karzai took to office with the promise of religious secularism yet he has constantly failed to live up to his promises, not even his American accent can save him from his promises, his lack of accountability bears a striking resemblance to that of his friend and partner in crime George W. Bush.