

Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan - Actors, Debates and Strategies

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Historical transformations and the Women's Movement in Pakistan

In this paper, the trajectory of the women's movement, whether overtly feminist or not, is traced beginning from pre-partition times when the rudimentary seeds of political awareness were manifested in the context of religious and nationalist movements. The latter movements did not have feminist or women's rights components, but the active participation of large numbers of women in religious or national causes, ultimately led to an awareness of women's own subjugation and stirred the desire for personal and political emancipation.

Before embarking upon an exploration of feminism and feminist movements in Pakistan, it is important to explore some of the meanings of the terms 'feminism' and 'movement' as they are understood differently by various actors. It is difficult to provide a single overarching definition of feminism or women's movement because a proliferation of ideas, concepts, approaches, practices, principles, aims, goals and visions within both feminism and the women's movement were articulated. A brief account of some of the main approaches is presented here, but it must be kept in mind that this account is an oversimplification as there are nuances, complexities, variations and shades of feminist articulations that are hard to capture in a short space.

Most articulations of feminist thought are fundamentally *political* as feminism challenges the dominant material and ideological structures of power. The differences amongst the schools of thought pertain to focus, approach and conceptualization of society. Liberal feminism, the most widely practiced form, is based on the idea of equal rights within the nation-state system. This school of thought has several variations and articulations but is mainly concerned with issues of legal and political equality between men and women.

Marxist feminism is drawn from Friedrich Engels' seminal work on the family, private property and the state and focuses on the two main activities that order human relations, namely production and reproduction. [1] Production refers to the manner in which human societies reproduce themselves and meet their needs of self-preservation (political economy). Reproduction refers to the manner in

which human societies ensure the survival of the species through procreation, as well as the social organization and division of labor for the care and upbringing of the young. Production thus refers to the organization of the economy (tribal, feudal, capitalist, socialist or other), and reproduction addresses the system of patriarchy which relies on the family and the gender division of labor. Marxist feminists call for a change in the system of production to eliminate social classes which are based on the exploitation of one class by another.

The Radical Feminist School lays emphasis on the private sphere on account of the main focus of the liberal and Marxist schools on the public one. The main stress in the Radical school of thought is on patriarchy as a material and ideological system that oppresses women not only with regard to the political and economic spheres, but also in the home and family where sexuality, in particular heterosexuality, is the mainstay of patriarchal relations. Radical feminists focus mainly on the body, sexuality, family, reproduction, and the manner in which the oppression of women begins with the most intimate 'enemy' residing within the home and family.

The Socialist School of Feminism combines the insights of the Marxist and Radical feminists and addresses both the private and public spheres - reproduction as well as production. They demand a fundamental change in socio-economic structures, patriarchal institutions and practices as well as the state superstructure that further reinforces the institutions of inequality. These approaches may have been given a coherent ideological basis within the western feminist tradition, but the seeds of the growing consciousness within the Indian subcontinent lie in its own history and the cross-cultural borrowing followed later.

There are a number of other schools of thought such as post-structuralism and post-modernism, as well as Islamist feminism, most of which draw upon, expand or refute liberal, Marxist, Radical or Socialist versions of feminism. In Pakistan, feminists have belonged to various schools, sometimes knowingly and at other times unconsciously. The approach of most of the feminists is eclectic and they do not necessarily subscribe to any one school, as changes are needed at multiple levels involving both structure and superstructure, to transform societies.

With regard to what is meant by a 'movement' the current discourse is equally complex. In some cases only the visible, collective and continuous outpouring of resistance against injustice, inequality and discrimination is defined as a movement. In other cases, scattered demonstrations of anger and a sudden outpouring of rage over some atrocity also fall under the rubric of a movement. Occasionally, work of an oppositional nature carried out by a single individual in a particular moment of defiance is also regarded as being part of a movement. This is akin to the way in which works of art and literature, music and dance that speak dissent and express a voice of resistance are conceptualized as manifestations of a feminist moment.

However, a coherent movement requires a clear ideology, a concise roadmap or program, well-designed strategies and a vision of the kind of society to be created. Women's movements in Pakistan have, at one time or another, conformed to all these characterizations of a movement becoming vocal, active and visible at some moments in history, and quiescent in others. Whether or not a feminist movement currently exists in Pakistan is a debate which centers around what constitutes a movement.

For the purposes of this paper, a tentative working definition of feminism may be derived from the brief explication above: *A feminist movement consists in envisioning a just and equal world by transforming the social, economic and political structures and discourses of discrimination and exclusion, through individual and collective action and reflection upon the world.* This definition encompasses a vision, a roadmap, a strategy as well as individual and collective actors. It may not be comprehensive but is sufficient for this paper which explores feminism in Pakistan within its

parameters.

In the case of Pakistan, major global re-alignments of power have impacted the state which underwent its own reconstitution in the process. These global and national shifts have been pivotal in determining the direction of the debates, and creating the context within which the debates and strategies were framed by movement activists. It is important to remember, however, that there was no straightforward relationship between the transformations in the social, political and economic spheres with a corresponding response from the movement. The relationship between material changes in society and the response of the women's movement was often characterized by conflict, contestation and contradiction.

The different strands of the movement reacted differently to social change leading to debate, disagreement and alternative strategies. This dynamic aspect of the movement underscores some of the current tendencies toward ruptures, fractures and fissures right up to the present moment in history. It is, therefore, imperative to explore the historical genesis of the women's movement, and examine the meandering paths through which it coursed as it grew, developed and transformed.

The emergence of women's political consciousness, and its ultimate flowering into a full-fledged movement for women's rights, may be divided into six broad time periods when major shifts occurred in the political landscape: 1) Colonialism and the Education Reform Movement; 2) Rise of Anti-colonial Nationalist Movements in India; 3) Post-colonial Restructuring of State and Society; 4) Cold War Imperialist Conflict and the Reconfiguration of Islamization; 5) Democracy and the Rise of Neo-liberalism; and 6) Global War on Terror and the Post-9/11 Reconstruction of Identities.

It must be remembered that these major reconfigurations were not homogenous events; rather they were contested and resisted constructions of ideology and practice. The responses to these game-changing global and national events were contradictory, demonstrating the richness of response and the complex dialectical relationship between changing material conditions and diverse ideological reactions.

Colonialism and the Education Reform Movement

This paper situates the historical origin of the Muslim women's movement within the contradictory colonial context, which created the discourses of modernity while simultaneously reinforcing tradition where it suited the colonial state to do so. British colonialism in India did not have uniform effects. On the one hand, it brought Indians face to face with alternative ways of conceptualizing the world, different political and economic arrangements, and new visions of reality and knowledge based on science and a secular ethos. On the other, the British government in India reinforced traditional cultures and religions by maintaining religious law in the personal sphere while secularizing laws in the public one.

The British dual policy of ushering in modernity and reinforcing tradition was evident in the realm of law. By 1790, the system of law in India was anglicized but Personal Laws of each of the religions of India were retained and continued to govern relations between men and women. Customary and religious law that subordinated women was left untouched. The British law in fact deprived women of their right to inheritance recognized even in religious law. Nonetheless, the Muslim Personal Law of 1937 recognized the right of Muslim women to inherit property, with the exception of agricultural land due to an understanding reached between the large landowners in the Punjab and the British administration. The public/private divide was thus maintained and strengthened.

Education Reform Movement

The British replaced the traditional educational systems prevalent in India with their own, not with the idea of liberating the local population from the shackles of feudal and traditional arrangements; rather the express purpose was to create a class of loyal Indians schooled in British traditions who would owe their position in society to the colonial intervention. [2] Unsurprisingly, there was resistance against as well as accommodation with the colonial administration in the sense that certain social classes in India eagerly espoused an English education and English political ideas, while others resisted it as an imposition of an alien and antagonistic culture.

The Muslims of India were caught between the desire to retain a sense of continuity with the past and tradition, while simultaneously acquiring modern knowledge in order to compete in the re-ordered world of politics, commerce and the economy. The contradictory imperatives of preservation of the old order, while stepping reluctantly into the new one, were reconciled by a strict public/private division in which women would guard the symbolic frontiers of identity by maintaining tradition and culture, and the men would enter the fields of politics and commerce where transactions occurred with the colonial state and competing religious communities.

This tendency was clearly visible in the education reform movements of the time. Modernist leaders like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan fervently supported the education of Muslim males of the *Ashrafiya* (Muslim gentry) while warning against the polluting effects of a secular western education upon Muslim women. [3] For the latter, a traditional education, steeped in religious and domestic values, was considered appropriate. Similarly, while Nazeer Ahmad favored the education of women in secular subjects to make them rational, modern and moral mothers and housewives, he was also opposed to the insertion of western liberal values in the lives of Muslim women. [4] The need to maintain patriarchal control and domination in the home and family, even as the outside world of commerce and politics was slipping away rapidly, was a measure to ensure continuity with the past while stepping into an uncertain future created by an 'other' or outsider.

In the second half of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th, debates on the issue of purdah (veiling) raged between modernist and traditional Muslims. For instance, the poet Akbar Allahabadi in particular wrote a large number of poems on the loss of veiling among Muslim women which he saw akin to the loss of masculinity among Muslim men. [5] He viewed the aggressive intervention of the masculine colonial state as an emasculation of the Muslim nation which was unable to protect Muslim women from the gaze of the colonial outsider. One finds similar echoes of nostalgia for bygone Muslim masculinity in the poetry of Allama Iqbal who lamented the loss of Muslim male of the past who could defend his ideological and geographical boundaries. [6]

Nevertheless, one can discern a great deal of ambivalence among the Muslims of India with regard to the modernizing of Muslim women.* The woman question was first raised by men in 1886 at the annual meeting of the Muhammadan Educational Conference (MEC). Shaikh Abdullah of Aligarh was the principal advocate of women's right to education but he was opposed by a number of seemingly progressive men. However, in December 1899 a women's teacher training school was opened in Calcutta, especially because one argument used against Muslim women's education was that there were few women teachers.

The Begum of Bhopal took a keen interest in women's education and supported the Mohammadan Girls School of Aligarh started by Sheikh Abdullah. The management of the girls' school was looking for an acceptable curriculum, but was hampered by a lack of funds. The Begum of Bhopal donated generously to develop a curriculum for women's education. She developed an outline of the curriculum and presented it in her Presidential address at the women education session of the annual Muslim Educational Conference on 5th December 1911. She proposed the idea of Home Science in the curricula of women education to make it more palatable for conservative Muslims. In her visit to Aligarh in 1915, she inaugurated the Girls School building laid the foundation stone for a

girls' hostel.

Traditionally, Muslim education was imparted in *maktabs* and *madrassahs* from which women were excluded. Women's education was perceived as a way of loosening male control and, predictably, it became the basis of women's rights in India. The pressure exerted by the colonial state through its accusation of backwardness, forced the Muslims to extend education to women. However, since women are seen as the repositories of cultural and traditional values, their education was justified within the framework of Islam. In 1885, the Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam opened five girls' elementary schools in Lahore to preserve Islamic values and ideals.

Even the Begum of Bhopal, who advocated women's education and stirred a profound awakening amongst women, insisted that *purdah* be observed in schools. [7] The notion of 'upper class charity went a long way in making female education acceptable.' [8] Ayesha Khan rightly observes that Muslim women who championed the cause of female education 'made repeated compromises with institutions or ideologies other than women's emancipation. They made concessions to Islam, to Muslim nationalism ... and to the demands of their élite class ... the deepest current of their beliefs was subject to the demands of religion.' [9]

Gradually, women's education became acceptable among Muslim communities that had felt besieged by the imposition of an alien western culture. In 1903, at the annual meeting of the MEC in Bombay, Chand Begum presented a paper on education. Her paper was read out by a Parsi woman due to the constraints of veiling. Chand Begum criticized Muslim clerics and argued fervently in favor of modern education for women. At this session, the MEC passed a resolution for establishing a Normal School for female teachers which finally opened in Aligarh in 1913. The following year, the first Urdu journal for women, *Khatoon*, was published by Shaikh Abdullah. By 1904 the education reform movement had gained momentum and received the support of Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali.

A newspaper for women's rights, *Huquq-e-Niswan*, was started by Syed Mumtaz Ali and his wife Muhammadi Begum. This newspaper was widely publicized across large parts of India and came to be known as *Rahbare-Niswan*, the guiding light for women. A number of girls' schools were opened between 1904 and 1911 in Bombay, Calcutta, Aligarh, Lahore, Karachi and Patna. In Lahore, three newspapers emerged called *Akhbare-Niswan*, *Sharif Bibi* and *Tahzeeb-e-Niswan*. Although most of these were run by men, women contributed articles and stories. Over time, increasing numbers of women began to be educated. In 1922, Sultan Begum of Bengal became the first woman to receive her Master's degree in law.*

Around the same period, the Faizi sisters rose to prominence and went abroad for higher education. Subsequently, they played significant roles in furthering Muslim women's rights. In 1924, women were excluded from the annual session of the MEC. In 1925, Attiya Faizi traveled from Bombay to Aligarh, gate-crashed the annual MEC meeting and addressed an all-male gathering from behind a curtain. The presiding officer was so embarrassed that he escorted her to the dais from where she spoke breaking all the norms and taboos around women's appearance in public. Women were not excluded from MEC meetings that followed. The education reform, movement, though conservative in orientation, provided women with the knowledge and skills needed to speak up for their rights.

Women's Rights

Between the years 1886 to 1917, ideas regarding women's roles and status in society were transformed among Muslim communities in India. The spread of education among the Muslim elite classes gave further impetus to the breaking of traditional moulds. At that time, the first women's organization was born due to the efforts of Sir Muhammad Shafi, who lived in Lahore and was a strong advocate of women's rights. He was opposed to veiling and supported the right to

inheritance. In 1908, the Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam was founded in Lahore for the promotion of the rights of women in Islam. This organization also carried out social work among the destitute women living in villages.

In 1915, the first All-India Muslim Ladies conference was attended by a few select women from among the elite. In 1917 this organization passed a resolution against polygamy causing a major stir in Lahore. The same year, a delegation led by Begum Hasrat Mohani met the Secretary of State Montagu, demanding increased educational facilities for women along with better health and maternity services. The delegation also demanded equal franchise for women in the forthcoming Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. In 1918, both the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress announced support for women's franchise. However, in 1919 when the reforms were instituted, the colonial government refused arguing that conditions were not conducive in India for women's franchise and left the matter to the provinces. In 1921 Madras granted women's franchise and by 1925 all the provinces except Orissa and Bihar granted voting rights to propertied persons, men and women.

In the First Roundtable Conference in 1930-31 a memorandum was presented by Jahanara Shahnawaz, daughter of Sir Muhammad Shafi. It demanded rights for all, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex. In 1932, the All-India Muslim League expressed its support for women's demands. The Government of India Act of 1935 enfranchised six million women and, for the first time, reserved seats for women were allocated in both the Council of State (six out of one hundred and fifty) and the February Assembly (nine seats out of two hundred and fifty). The slow awakening and increasing consciousness which began with the right to education, was by then beginning to transform into a struggle for women's political rights.

Pan-Islamist Movement

The national debates of the time revolved around nationalist and religious struggles against a colonial regime. Women's consciousness raised over social and educational issues, did not remain untouched by the larger context within which the debates occurred. The Khilafat Movement of the early decades of the 20th century (1919-1924), mobilized Muslim identities across vast territories. A pan-Islamic movement, it called upon the British to protect the caliphate in Turkey, and for Indian Muslims to unite and hold the British accountable for this purpose. However, the movement ended with a secular Turkey abolishing the roles of the Sultan and Caliph.

In India, the Ali Brothers, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, were in the forefront of the movement motivating Indian Muslims to support the cause. Large numbers of Muslim women were mobilized politically for a pan-Islamic cause. Separate meetings were held by women in Delhi and Lucknow which were addressed by Bi Amma, the mother of the Ali Brothers. The wives and mothers of prominent men attended the meetings and became aware of the political realities of the time. Bi Amma addressed meetings across the length and breadth of India and the Muslim women were joined by Hindu women on several occasions. The women exhorted the men to join the non-cooperation movement and sought to instill patriotism and religious sentiments among Indians, particularly Muslims.

In 1917, when her son was in prison, Bi Amma addressed the all male meeting of the All-India Muslim League and spoke from behind the veil. It was the first time that a Muslim woman addressed a political meeting of men. In 1921, Bi Amma addressed a mass meeting in Lahore and lifted her veil for the first time, stating that all the men were her brothers and sons and she did not need to use the veil in front of them. Her age, status and respect protected her against criticism. Furthermore, Bi Amma belonged to India and was not a product of western influences. This protected her against the charge which was leveled at other women who appeared to be influenced by an encroaching

modernity. Although, she and her cohorts were not demanding women's rights, the participation in political action created a consciousness of justice which she wanted for her son. Men encouraged women's involvement in politics for religious and national causes, not for women's own rights.

While pan-Islamist religious and nationalist movements provided the impetus for women's education and led to the early consciousness of rights, such movements were also conservative and patriarchal. Both religion and nationalism tend to define women in traditional ways believing them to be the repositories of tradition, culture and custom. Syed Ahmad Khan was staunchly opposed to women's education wanting only Muslim males of the *Ashrafiya* educated in order to compete with Hindus in the arena of politics and commerce. [10] When he realized that women's education was inevitable, he proposed to control the content so that it would not deviate from religious instruction and household functions. Similarly, Nazeer Ahmad, while upholding an education in secular subjects, also emphasized women's education toward making them dutiful wives and good Muslim women. [11]

The Khilafat and nationalist movements were not liberating for women as they invoked cultural nationalism which reinforces the patriarchal ideas of masculinity and femininity. This cultural nationalism later fed into the discourse of the two-nation theory based on religion. Such agendas are ultimately conservative and merely created spaces for women's participation, which led gradually to an awareness of their own rights as women.

Rise of Anti-colonial Nationalist Movements in India

Women were massively mobilized in the Pakistan Movement. As increasing numbers of women joined the Muslim League, a women's section was formed. In the famous Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940, an unprecedented number of women participated. The same year saw them take out a procession for the Pakistan Movement. In April 1940, women took out a protest demonstration against the arrest of Muslim League leaders and the banning of the Khaksar Tehreek. This was the first time that women took to street politics clad in burqas (veils). Not surprisingly, the press condemned them as shameless women who would usher in the downfall of Muslims. But the women were not to be deterred and in June the Khaksar Tehreek women organized another demonstration led by eleven year old Saeeda Bano from Delhi, an eloquent speaker. On June 18, women joined men in another procession and the police made arrests when they defied their orders. The men asked the women to return to their homes but they refused and, for the first time in the history of the sub-continent, women were arrested for political action.

The nationalist struggle mobilized a large number of educated, upper class women. In 1941, it was decided that a Muslim Girls Student Federation would be formed and it was launched by Lady Abdul Qadir, Fatima Begum and Miss M. Qureshi. This group mustered support for the idea of Pakistan. They received an enthusiastic response and in a few months the Jinnah Islamic College had enrolled a thousand students for the cause. This organization was pivotal in the formation of the women's sub-committee subsequently in the Muslim League, which toured the country garnering support for the freedom movement. In 1942, Lady Maratab Ali commented that the days had gone when women were fit only for cooking food and minding children, and the time had come for them to take an equal share of responsibility with their menfolk in politics. [12]

In 1942, M.A. Jinnah expressed direct interest in the women's committees and addressed them. The women composed songs for the movement and went to the rural areas to gather support for the Pakistan movement. Jinnah was alive to the women's social conditions and addressed the issue. As a result, the Muslim League Central Committee formulated a program for women's social, economic

and cultural uplift. Over time, the woman question began to receive separate attention from the larger struggles. The sub-committee passed resolutions on housewives' problems and food shortages. The issue of women's inheritance was also raised. Women's deep involvement in the national struggle gradually led to an awareness of their own independent issues.

In 1943, when a devastating famine in Bengal disrupted lives, the Muslim League women organized relief efforts and collected funds and provisions for the affected families. Poetry recitations meetings were called to raise funds in Lahore. Over time, the wider struggle for liberation rendered women's social and political activism acceptable and respectable. In 1943, five thousand women participated in the All-India Muslim League annual session in Karachi. The newly-formed Women's National Guard, which later became Pakistan Girl Guides, was also present.

While women's collective participation in relief and social work became acceptable in the context of the national struggle, such activities were extensions of women's traditional and maternal roles of providing succor and comfort in difficult times. [13] Veiling and segregation enabled such activities because women were protected from the gaze of strange men.

In the 1946 elections, two women candidates from the Muslim League, Salma Tassaduque Hussain and Jahanara Shahnawaz, participated. When the Muslim League was not allowed to form the government, five hundred women demonstrated in Lahore. As the level of activity increased, the colonial government banned the Muslim League National Guard. Upon offering resistance, several League leaders were arrested including Jahanara Shahnawaz, and other women courted arrest in her support. Begum Kamal-ud-Din Ahmad from the then North Western Frontier Province was taken to a women's jail in Lahore. On the following day, a large number of Muslim women came out on the streets to protest. They were baton-charged and tear-gassed, the first time that such tactics were employed against women in the Indian sub-continent. Four of the women leaders were arrested by the colonial state and three girls were injured. As more and more women came out on the streets, they were arrested. In January 1947, sixteen League leaders, including Salma Tassaduque Hussain, were arrested and Section 144 was imposed which prohibits any public gathering of over four people.

One tactic deployed by the colonial government was that the arrested women would be taken to various places outside the city and forced to find their own way home. The arrested women were kept in Gora Barracks, and in February three young burqa-clad girls entered the criminal wards for women, climbed the building and hoisted the Muslim League flag, all the while chanting slogans of Allah-o-Akbar. The Superintendent Jails arrived and had them beaten up by other inmates before they were dragged out of the premises.

News of women breaking into jail and facing barricades and batons spread like wildfire and, towards the end of February, a large number of women marched towards the Secretariat Building. Thirteen year old Fatima Sughra climbed up the gate, removed the Union Jack and replaced it with her dopatta fashioned to look like the Muslim League flag. It was for the first time that the Muslim League 'flag' was hoisted on a government building replacing the government one.

In 1947 when the Civil Disobedience movement was launched, women from the North Western Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) were mobilized by the Khudai Khidmatgar and nationalist movements. Pathan women marched unveiled in public for the first time and scaled walls to hoist the Muslim League flag. They went to jails and were tear-gassed and baton-charged. On April 3, 1947 fifteen hundred Pathan women publicly protested in the form of picketing. They also formed the 'War Council' and set up mobile radio stations and an underground radio station called, Pakistan Broadcasting Station, which operated right up to the time of independence in August 1947. However, the records as well as schools of the Khudai Khidmatgars were burned soon after the

formation of Pakistan.

As Mumtaz and Shaheed observe, Indian Muslim women had radically altered the parameters of their own existence and emerged as vocal and active individuals. [14] Participation in the nationalist struggle led to an awareness of their oppression and rights as women. They had won the right to education, to vote and to own property in the course of the nationalist struggle. They became aware of their ability to mobilize, organize and provide services in crisis situations. However, their own struggle as women was subsumed under the larger nationalist struggle for independence. Nevertheless, the larger struggle created the space to break traditional norms, become politically active in the public sphere and violate the traditional boundaries of 'good Muslim womanhood'. They could cast off the veil, talk to strangers, enter politics, take out processions, shout slogans, hoist flags and face police brutality. The national struggle made it possible to transgress traditional boundaries, an act which otherwise would receive disapprobation.

The men were willing to grant the right to vote and get an education in the interest of the national liberation movement. However, the issue of polygamy was not taken up. As in other liberation movements across South Asia and elsewhere, women are called upon to participate and add to the numbers, and once the struggle is over and freedom won, they are forced back into traditional roles of motherhood, childcare and household duties, while men bask in the freedom so attained. The struggle to retain the few rights won is a continuous and ongoing one as in every subsequent era, there were attempts by the religious and conservative lobbies to undo the gains made by women during the national struggle. The Pan-Islamic and national liberation movements against colonial rule created spaces for women to emerge from seclusion and enter the public sphere, but this was not done in the interest of women's rights or empowerment. Rather, women were needed to add numbers to the nationalist movement. Nevertheless, the movement created a rudimentary awareness of women's ability to organize for collective goals. However, after the creation of Pakistan new forces assumed power with which women were forced to contend.

Post-colonial Re-structuring of State and Society

Once freedom was attained from colonial rule, new forces emerged on the political and global scene which directed the re-structuring of the state and society. In post-partition Pakistan, the religious forces that had opposed the idea of Pakistan because of the secular bent of mind of the Muslim League leaders became active. Even though Jinnah was secular in outlook and personal lifestyle, he resorted to the strategic use of religion in an effort to garner support among conservative Muslims. In his speech at the 1940 annual Muslim League meeting in Lahore, he reiterated the religion-based two-nation theory premised on irreconcilable, eternal and irrevocable Hindu-Muslim differences. [15] This set the stage for the move toward an Islamic state early on when, after Jinnah's death in 1948, the Constituent Assembly passed the Objectives Resolution in 1949 despite strong reservations expressed by the minority members. [16] Jinnah's arguably secular position, taken a year earlier in his address to the Constituent Assembly, was shunned under the pressure of the Islamic lobby that now gained strength.

In the early period of Pakistan's history, the struggle for women's rights was piecemeal, gradual and evolutionary. Progressive legislation was often resisted by the clergy, which perceived the steps in the direction of women's rights as western and antithetical to religion and culture. Nonetheless, women belonging to ruling families continued to struggle for inclusion in the political process and rights. The first legislature of Pakistan had two women representatives, Jahanara Shahnawaz, the Muslim League veteran who had been elected to the All-India Muslim League Council in 1937; and Shaista Ikramullah from the Suhrawardy family of East Pakistan.

In the early period of Pakistan's history, women began to make demands for their own rights now that the nationalist struggle was over. In 1948, the first attempt was made to secure economic rights for women during the budget debate. When the Shariat bill was removed from the agenda of the assembly, the women legislators were furious and took up the issue with the Muslim League Women's Committee. Thousands of women marched to the Assembly chambers shouting slogans, led by Jahanara Shahnawaz and other women leaders and finally the Muslim Personal Law of Shariat (1948) became effective recognizing women's right to inherit property. The first piece of legislation may have been for the propertied classes only, but women took a stand against their male colleagues in the assembly for their own rights as women.

The first Constituent Assembly had several special committees, including the Basic Principles Committee, Fundamental Rights Committee and Nationality Committee. In each of these, Jahanara Shahnawaz and Shaista Ikramullah countered male chauvinists and religious ulema. In the Zakat committee the ulema refused to sit with women members, arguing that only burqa clad women above the age of fifty should be allowed to sit in the Assembly, a demand that was to be raised again by the Ansari Commission in the decade of the 1980s. The earliest echoes of contestation and challenge between the women and the religious lobby had begun to be heard.

The women leaders had begun to make political demands also, for example, they raised issue of 10% reserved seats for women in the legislatures at the Round Table Conference in the 1930s. At that time, they could only get 3% reserved quota. In September 1954, at the final meeting of the Constituent Assembly, when the draft bill for the Charter of Women's Rights prepared by Jahanara Shahnawaz was discussed, the reserved seats remained at 3% for both the central and provincial assembly.

The other demands in the Charter included equality of status, equality of opportunity, equal pay for equal work and guarantee of inheritance rights for Muslim women under the Islamic personal law of Shariat. The Charter of demands was supported by members of minority communities and Muslim politicians, and was passed unanimously. Initially it was opposed by Sir M. Zafarullah, who was chairing the meeting, on the grounds that a new-born state could not afford justiciable fundamental rights. At this stage it seems that women were making demands for rights granted within religious law. They were working within a religious framework which enabled them to succeed without too much backlash. In 1951, the Muslim Personal Law of Shariat became effective and women received the right to inherit agricultural land for which they had been fighting since 1948. In an assembly full of males, women legislators pushed forward their agenda successfully

In 1955, women's organizations ran a campaign against Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra's second marriage and this was spearheaded by the All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), which was later to play a major role in legal reform. As a result of the campaign, the United Front for Women's Rights was formed under the leadership of Jahanara Shahnawaz. The combined pressure by United Front and APWA forced the government to appoint a commission headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Rashid, to examine laws of marriage, divorce, maintenance and custody of children. The Report was formulated in 1956 with a lengthy dissenting note from Maulana Ehtashamul Haq Thanvi. The orthodox reaction got the report shelved, but the seeds of the women's struggle against patriarchy and religious obscurantism were perceptible even in the absence of an organized and coherent movement for change.

In the 1956 Constitution, the principle of female suffrage for women's reserved seats was accepted on the basis of special women's territorial constituencies, thus giving dual voting rights to women for both general and reserved women's seats. This was a major achievement, given the conservative lobby that constantly militated against women's rights. Unfortunately, Ayub Khan's takeover and martial law in 1958 led to the abrogation of the constitution of 1956.

However, at this early stage of the country's history there was no coherent and organized women's movement to challenge the measures by the religious lobby and the clergy. Women, who had been mobilized by the nationalist movement prior to independence, became active in social welfare, particularly the rehabilitation of the refugees. The partition of the sub-continent led to mass influx of refugees across the borders and they required services and help. This task was performed by women related to Muslim League members, and others belonging to the well to do classes who could manage the time, resources and energy.

The Prime Minister's wife, Ra'ana Liaquat Ali, was the most outstanding woman who formed a large number of women's organizations and attended to many different areas that affect women, especially welfare and legal reform. In 1948, she started the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) which administered first aid to women, organized food distribution, dealt with health problems and epidemics, collected clothing for the needy, and provided emotional and moral support. The relief and welfare work was widely accepted as it was seen as an extension of the nurturing role that women were traditionally expected to perform. Apart from being seen as a maternal and domestic role, the work of WVS was voluntary with the result that it did not lead to the kind of threat that women's paid work poses.

However, the reaction to two other organizations set up by Ra'ana Liaquat Ali is a telling indication of the deeply patriarchal and gendered nature of society. [17] The societal reaction to the setting up in 1949 of the Pakistan Women's National Guard and Pakistan Women's Naval Reserve differed significantly from the response to the WVS which received support from the government. The National Guard and Naval Reserve were set up in response to the war with India and were respectively under the supervision of the army and navy, while Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was the Chief Controller of both. [18] This work brought women into contact with unrelated men, so it was not just seen as 'manly' but also threatening.

These two organizations trained women in military tactics including signaling, coding, marksmanship, use of weapons and defense. Upon criticism by conservatives, a dopatta was added to their uniforms. However, the training of women for purposes that deviated from the social and traditional norms, and their empowerment in what were believed to be masculine pursuits, raised many eyebrows. This violation of the patriarchal public/ masculine and private/feminine division was met with opprobrium and after Ra'ana Liaquat Ali left the country to serve as ambassador to the Netherlands, these two outfits fizzled out.

Women were acceptable in the public sphere in so far as they conformed to a traditional and conservative vision of housewives, mothers, welfare workers and service providers. The absence of a feminist or women's movement meant that the conservative lobby could overwhelm the government over such measures. Nevertheless, Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was the first woman ambassador of the country, and this appointment was not subjected to major criticism.

Based on the success of the Women's Voluntary Service and the interest of a large number of women, in 1949 Ra'ana Liaquat invited a hundred women to a meeting in Karachi and from this was born the All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) which, in the context of the time, made invaluable contributions not only to welfare but also in the arena of legal reform.

APWA was a voluntary non-political organization open to all women over sixteen years of age irrespective of class, caste, color or creed. The objectives were to be a welfare organization for Pakistani women. It focused on creating educational, social and cultural consciousness and improving the economic participation of women for national development. Urban women from well to do classes joined and it became an acceptable avenue for women's activities outside the home. APWA opened girls' schools, health centers and industrial homes, and imparted sewing and related

skills for income generation. Most of its activities were concentrated in Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar with district and divisional headquarters in other parts of the country.

APWA's relationship with the government was one of mutual accommodation and co-operation. It, therefore, received government funding as well as patronage. It was a non-threatening organization because of the focus on welfare and development. Its main work was on women's education, development skills and income generation. It opened schools, colleges, industrial homes and organized *meena* bazaars to market the products of needy women.

Apart from welfare and development activities, APWA made forays into the political and legal arenas. In 1953, APWA recommended ten reserved seats for women in the National and Provincial Assemblies. In spite of a predominantly non-political and welfare approach, APWA was not approved by religious clerics who chastised Raana Liaquat and others for not wearing the veil. The Majlis-e-Ahrar, a right wing orthodox party, labeled them prostitutes. The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) also looked upon them with disapproval, despite having opposed the very formation of Pakistan. The conflict and tension between the right-wing religious lobbies and women's rights campaigners goes way back in history, but at that point it did not become an open battle as it did in later years.

Ra'ana Liaquat Ali, a tireless campaigner, initiated many other organizations and the time period appears to be rich in terms of the sheer number of organizations of women that were formed. In 1954, the Karachi Business and Professional Women's Club was established to bring professional women together on a platform and later it established branches in Lahore, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. In 1956, the Federation of University Women was formed for women who did not enter the workforce after obtaining university degrees. A Degree College for women in Karachi was opened during that rich period which spawned a number of organizations for women's education and professional advancement.

Most other organizations were formed with specific objectives including, the Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP), The Pakistan Child Welfare Council (PCWC), The Pakistan Red Cross, The Pakistan Nurses Federation (PNF), The Housewives' Association, Girl Guides Association, and the International Women's Club. There was growing social awareness and each of these selected a specific area of expertise and worked on women's social and economic issues.

The Democratic Women's Association (DWA) formed in 1948 was unique in that it organized women at the political level and was established along Marxist principles. Led by the Marxist activist, Tahira Mazhar Ali, the DWA worked with working class women in factories and low-income areas, while focusing on political awareness and the creation of a socialist society. The DWA wanted equal pay for equal work, educational opportunities for girls and women, hostels and transport facilities for working women, crèches and nurseries at places of work and expanded employment opportunities for women. It appealed to working class women concerned for the emancipation of working classes and the creation of a socialist society. Its work was confined to low-income areas and it did not mobilize many women from other classes; however it is significant for being the only left wing women's organization in the country. The DWA was one of the most prominent organizations that staunchly opposed the military operation in East Pakistan in 1971, and vociferously campaigned against the mass rape of Bangladeshi women by the armed forces.

Some of the other organizations include the United Front for Women's Rights (UFWA) which was formed in 1955, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) that had been working since 1899. A few of these organizations have survived and are active to this day, while others fizzled out after brief periods of activity.

Ayub Khan (1958-1968)

APWA's warm and complementary relationship with the state continued through the era of Ayub Khan's military dictatorship. The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961, which gave women a few rights with regard to marriage, the custody of children, divorce and registration of marriages and divorces, was passed as a result of APWA's efforts. It was basically an attempt to discourage polygamy as the first wife's written permission became necessary for a husband's second marriage. The recommendations of Justice Rashid Commission (mentioned above) were not all embodied nonetheless some progress was made compared to before. Prior to this, the Child Marriages Restraint Act of 1929 recommended fourteen years as the marriageable age for girls, and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 defined the grounds on which women could seek divorce, for example, cruelty and non-maintenance.

Although the MFLO of 1961 was by no means radical, and the punishment for the second marriage was minor (an easily ignored small fine) with annulment not being an option, it was nonetheless a small step in the direction of women's rights. Such achievements were possible because APWA did not challenge the military dictatorship which defined itself as benevolent, moderate and modern. Even though the law was relatively weak, modest and moderate in relation to expectations, it was vehemently opposed by the *Ulema* who spoke against it from pulpits and condemned it as tampering with the Qura'an. Women retaliated by launching a movement in support of the Family Laws Ordinance, and in Lahore Begum Nasim Jahan led a march against the clerics which ended with the burning of the effigy of Maulana Abbas Ali Khan, a virulent opponent, in front of the Punjab Assembly.

The absence of a vibrant women's rights movement or feminist struggle was one of the reasons that when Fatima Jinnah stood in the elections against Ayub Khan in 1965, he used the *Ulema* to declare that a woman could not be the head of state in a Muslim country. Ayub Khan's accusations that Fatima Jinnah was an Indian and American agent, and an unfeminine and un-motherly figure were not met with indignation and anger, unlike the effect of such accusations against Benazir Bhutto decades later, when they were met with scorn, anger, and uproar. Ironically, in an attempt to remove Ayub Khan and gain power, the Jamaat-e-Islami supported Fatima Jinnah and radically altered its earlier position that women could not become heads of state in an Islamic country.

There was a proliferation of women's organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, some concerned with welfare, others with economic and professional aims, and still others based on economic empowerment. Some of these include the Behbud Association formed in 1967 for social welfare and income-generation activities, and the exclusive Soroptimist Club, also established in 1967, which worked with women in senior managerial and administrative positions. The women's organizations worked together co-operatively and many had the same members on their boards, for example, Miriam Habib, the first recognized woman journalist in Pakistan, served on the executive boards of many organizations. The shared visions and common concerns led to a great deal of mutual interaction and collaboration.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1972-77)

Ayub Khan's regime ended in 1968 after massive street protests against his dictatorship. However, power was grabbed by another military dictator, Yahya Khan during whose tenure national elections were held and won convincingly by the Awami League, a party based in East Pakistan. However, the West Pakistani civil and military rulers failed to transfer power and initiated a military operation in East Pakistan which ended in 1971 with the secession of the province which became Bangladesh. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) that had won the general election of 1970 in West Pakistan assumed power in 1972. The transformations in the state and reconfiguration of power did not

change the relationship with women's groups and the mutual accommodation and collaboration of the Ayub era continued during the brief period of democracy.

In the 1970 elections, it was widely believed that women, for the first time, voted independently of their male kin on account of being attracted by Bhutto's rhetoric of equality and justice for the oppressed. Nasim Jahan, a founder member of PPP, mobilized educated women in Lahore as in other cities and spread the PPP ideas in various localities and neighborhoods. Women, who had participated in PPP election campaigns, became a part of PPP's *mohalla* committees. Women from low-income areas as well as educated middle class were drawn to the dream of a just and socialist society. Nasim Wali Khan was the first woman to win the election on a general seat but did not take oath as many of the parties seeking provincial autonomy were labeled 'traitors' by the PPP government, and the National Awami Party government in Balochistan was dismissed. In spite of such undemocratic measures, the PPP government was regarded as more womenfriendly than its predecessors.

In 1972 the PPP formed a constitution-making committee which had two women, Nasim Jahan and Ashraf Abbasi. The 1973 Constitution gave more rights to women than in the past. Article 25 of rights declared that every citizen was equal before law and Article 25 (2) said there would be no discrimination based on sex alone. Article 27 of fundamental stated that there would be no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex for appointment in the service of Pakistan. Article 32 of the Basic Principles of State Policy guaranteed reservation of seats for women, and article 35 stipulated that the state shall protect marriage, family and mother and child. The constitution was unanimously ratified in the Assembly and later Article 228 was amended to accept the principle of at least one woman member on the proposed Council on Islamic Ideology. In spite of women's efforts, however, the idea of female suffrage for reserved seats for women was rejected, both in the constitution committee and the National Assembly.

In the 1973 constitution women continued to be indirectly elected members of the Assemblies. The PPP government took other measures to raise women's status and a cell was set up to evaluate the status of women. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was made Governor of Sindh and Kaniz Yousaf was made the Vice-Chancellor of a university. Begum Ashraf Abbasi was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and all government services were opened to women through administrative reforms in 1972. Women could enter the services from which they were hitherto debarred, such as the Foreign Service and management groups. Women could now be Prime Minister, Governor or Cabinet minister. A massive induction in the Foreign Service through lateral entry led to 121 entrants and the first ever women Foreign Service cadre came into being.

In 1975, the International Women's Year (IWY) was launched. The Prime Minister's wife, Nusrat Bhutto, went to Mexico to represent Pakistan and signed the Mexico Declaration. Following this, a semi-autonomous Pakistan Women's Institute was set up in Lahore to mark the IWY. In 1976, a thirteen-member Women's Rights Committee was set up chaired by Yahya Bakhtiar, the first Attorney General of Pakistan. It included nine women some of whom had been pressing for a commission to determine the status of women to make recommendations to improve their situation. This demand was mainly pushed by Nasim Jahan, Miriam Habib, Rashida Patel and Zari Sarfraz. The commission's task was to consider and formulate proposals for law reforms to improve the social and economic conditions of women. It presented its proposals on law reforms in July 1976 and made recommendations shortly after. However, it was neither ratified nor implemented and never made public.

The PPP set up a Women's Wing under Nusrat Bhutto and provincial wings were formed which educated women in the philosophy of Marxism and socialism. The women's wing held elections leading to the emergence of new leadership from among the middle class and low-income groups.

Various trade unions and students' organizations emerged and were aligned with the PPP. During the PPP tenure, APWA continued to work without interference and the United Front for Women's Rights was revived to struggle for women's reserved seats through female suffrage but fizzled out when this endeavor failed.

In the 1970s, women's organizations such as Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation and the Women's Front arose. The Women's Front, based in Lahore, was a small group of aggressive and radical Left-wing Punjab University students, but it petered out after the students graduated and moved on. This group contested union elections and won both seats for women and organized chapters in other cities such as Sargodha and Multan. Their slogan was, 'women and politics are one.' Aurat, based in Islamabad, was composed of Left-wing university teachers and students and worked in low-income neighborhoods for the depressed classes. The organization brought out a newsletter which focused on the class struggle and wrote about male domination. However, lack of funding and human resources meant that it could not be sustained. Some members of the organization later founded the Aurat Foundation which focused on a range of women's issues. Several organizations for women began to emerge in various cities, however some became pivotal in launching an active and vibrant women's movement.

Shirkat Gah was also established in the 1970s and became central during subsequent decades as the Women Action Forum emerged from this organization. The idea arose from the International Women's Year and in 1976, educated urban middle class women formed Shirkat Gah as a publication and resource center for women. It promoted the social and economic development of women and carried out research and 'consciousness-raising' activities. Shirkat Gah set up a women's hostel and day-care centers for working women.

Beginning from the post-partition period to the end of the PPP's rule in 1977 through a military coup, the relationship of the women's movement with the nascent state remained devoid of conflict and confrontation. The governments, whether civil or military, supported the women's organizations in so far as they remained within the confines of traditional norms and engaged in welfare work. The women's organizations remained concerned with women's economic uplift, development and consciousness-raising and did not offer political resistance. They gained a few rights and concessions from both the civilian and military governments with which the relationship was characterized by collaboration and mutual accommodation.

The women's organizations of the time did not challenge the legitimacy of the military government or its attitude towards Fatima Jinnah. Similarly, they failed to question or resist the Islamist provisions of the 1973 constitution, the lesser status of non-Muslim citizens, the declaration of Islam as the state religion, and the forcing out of Ahmadis from the pale of Islam in 1974. These steps and other measures, such as the banning of alcohol and gambling, the declaration of Friday as the weekly holiday, all done to appease the religious lobby, set the stage for the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) movement against Bhutto which culminated with military takeover and aggressive Islamization. The women's organizations operating at that time appear to have been quiescent and willing to ignore the larger questions of democracy and justice as long as women received a few rights. However, the few rights that they achieved during the Ayub and Bhutto periods were also subjected to continual challenge from the religious orthodoxy bent upon taking Pakistan in a theocratic direction from its inception. These efforts gained momentum in the ensuing period of General Zia-ul-Haq's military rule when the orthodoxy gained ascendancy thereby rudely awakening women's groups into mobilizing to defend the few rights they had won.

Cold War Imperialism and the Rise of Islamization

The year 1979 was a watershed in the history of Pakistan as well as globally. The orthodox revolution in neighboring Iran, and the Soviet Union incursion into Afghanistan, foreshadowed massive reconfigurations of power globally, along with the radical reconstruction of the state in Pakistan. Pakistan became the frontline state in the Cold War contest between competing imperialisms in Afghanistan. While the Soviet imperialism was based on a communist perspective, the competing US one sought an ally in a specific version of Islam to fight against 'ungodly' communism.

For the Pakistani military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, who had seized power in an illegal coup in 1977, the Cold War competing imperialisms provided a perfect opportunity to gain legitimacy by wrapping himself in an Islamic garb. The Islamization agenda that had been initiated by Bhutto's 'Islamic Socialism' was now intensified. Zia proceeded straightaway to Islamize Pakistan based on the Deobandi/Wahabi version derived from Jamaat-e-Islami and Saudi Arabian articulations of Islam. Radical changes were made in the school curricula, educational policies, the media and the judiciary to strengthen the tenuous Islamic credentials of the regime. Harsh punishments, such as flogging and stoning to death, were borrowed from the Saudi model and journalists as well as lawyers were not spared in the drive to 'cleanse' society of all the evils of socialism that Bhutto had propagated. Only the economy was exempted from so-called Islamization as it was based on an international fiscal system in which interest had to be paid. However, *Zakat*, *Ushr* and Islamic banking forms were introduced to justify the resort to religion.

General Zia's Islamization drive was not confined to the public sphere as he wanted to restructure and regulate the private one also. *Salaat* Committees were constituted to ensure that people prayed regularly and observed other Islamic injunctions. With a relentless focus on piety in the private sphere and control over the personal lives of citizens, an inordinate amount of attention fell upon women who were seen as the repositories of culture, religion and tradition. The veil and the four walls were emphasized, piety in dress codes was imposed by vigilantes operating in the public sphere, and violence was used to ensure compliance with official measures.

The entire legal structure was reconstructed to institutionalize discrimination against women and non-Muslim citizens. A number of discriminatory laws including the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, the Qisas and Diyat Ordinance and the Law of Evidence of 1984 were promulgated. The Qisas and Diyat law privatized the crime of murder and saved the perpetrators of 'honor killing'. The Law of Evidence reduced women's testimony in a court of law to half that of men. In 1983, the Ansari Report of the Council of Islamic Ideology recommended that women's participation in politics should be limited to nominated women over the age of fifty. In 1985, the Shariat Bill (9th Amendment) threatened to abolish the Family Laws Ordinance of 1961.

In the early years, women belonging to various organizations watched with incredulity the spate of laws and measures to control and order their lives in accordance General Zia's vision of religion. There were dress code restrictions, coupled with restrictions on participation in spectator sports, and enhanced segregation with a proposal for a separate women's university. By that time, a new generation of middle class women, which had studied in western universities and was exposed to the feminist movements in those countries, had entered the workforce in various fields. They were seriously perturbed over the continuous attacks on a relatively tolerant and diverse culture of previous decades. Dr. Israr's lectures on a TV show in which he advocated the exit of women from the economy, threatened the loss of livelihood of a large number of women who worked at universities and other places.

However, it was the Fehmida and Allah Bux case, filed under the Zina Ordinance (one of the five Hudood Ordinances) that motivated women to protect and preserve the few rights they had achieved in the two previous dispensations. From that point on, the relationship between women and the state transformed radically from the mutual accommodation of the earlier decades to conflict, confrontation and contestation.

The Zina Ordinance of 1979 conflated adultery with rape and erased the distinction between them. This law made it virtually impossible to prove rape and, upon failure to prove it, the woman was transformed into the culprit while the rapist went scot-free. The punishment for adultery was stoning to death. The harsh punishments in the name of Islam mobilized the women into taking action. Following the year of its promulgation, a large number of rural and urban women from the economically marginalized groups were booked under false cases of Hudood and languished in jails for years.

In 1981, a group of women met in Shirkat Gah Karachi and formed the Women Action Forum (WAF). In a short span of time, there were chapters in Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar. For the next decade, WAF became the face of the women's movement in Pakistan, although the Sindhiani Tehreek in Sindh was a radical organization which used direct action as a method to fight not only the military regime but also patriarchy as articulated in interior Sindh. [19] WAF used picketing, demonstrations, processions, rallies, signature campaigns, consciousnessraising, telegrams, writing and other strategies to register protest and oppose the regime's draconian measures. Each chapter functioned somewhat differently, depending upon the local context and ethnic mix, nevertheless WAF fought against the discrimination in law, spectator sports, educational segregation, media regulations, dress codes, and the steady march towards a theocratic state.

In 1983, when the Pakistan Women Lawyers gave a call to march to the High Court with a petition against the then proposed Law of Evidence, a large number of WAF members joined the demonstration and were batoncharged and tear-gassed on the Mall Lahore. WAF's profile was raised internationally and it made headlines in the national press as well as the international media. Subsequently, there was no turning back and WAF frequently resorted to pickets, demonstrations and protest rallies. The resistance to military rule and fundamentalism was not mounted only through the traditional methods of protest but also manifested itself in cultural forms such as poetry, literature, music, dance, theatre, films, art and painting. Kishwar Naheed's *Hum Gunahgar Aurtain* (We Sinful Women) and Fehmida Riaz's poem *Chaadar Aur Chaardivari* (the veil and four walls) became anthems for the movement, along with Habib Jalib's famous poem read out at the February 12, 1983 demonstration in Lahore. The work of Salima Hashmi in painting, Madeeha Gauhar in theatre, Sheema Kirmani in dance and theatre, Sabiha Sumar in filmmaking, Sherry Rehman in journalism, Attiya Dawood and Azra Abbas in poetry, and Zahida Hina and Khalida Hussain in Urdu literature testifies to the multi-dimensional nature of the resistance.

However, the success of WAF came with a price in that the differing voices within the WAF platform led to some of the most seething debates over strategy, aims and goals. [20] At one point the debates led to a split in the Lahore chapter which was resolved after an acrimonious public controversy. The main debates in the WAF movement were the following: 1) Secular or religious framework; 2) focus on feminist issues only or larger ones that have an impact upon women; 3) a broad feminist approach or a narrow one on women's rights. There were three other debates which were of less import as they had more to do with functioning and terminology than an ideological disagreement. These include 1) nonhierarchical functioning versus a hierarchical structure; 2) non-political versus a political orientation, and 3) Open versus closed membership. It is important to lay out the main contours of these debates within the socio-political context of the time.

Secular versus a Religious Framework

Initially, WAF had no clear position on Islam although several of the founding members were secular and socialist in personal orientation. However, since WAF was a lobby cum pressure group consisting of individuals and organizations, there was wide variation in beliefs and sentiments. Many of the members were believers, while some were practicing Muslims. WAF, as a platform was diverse, therefore ambivalent with regard to Islam. Islam was a class-based issue as women from the urban lower middle classes were relatively more conservative and religious.

The regime was justifying its measures by invoking its preferred version of Islam which was being imposed uniformly on all sects and all citizens. Hence the laws were made to appear divine and not open to challenge. Some of the members felt that that WAF would have to engage with Islam as it was being relentlessly imposed. Additionally, it was felt that women from the lower middle and conservative classes had to be mobilized, since it appeared to become a matter of the word of God versus the word of women. [21]

In 1983, WAF Lahore used the strategy of inviting religious clerics who espoused liberal interpretations of religion and rejected the official state version being imposed across the board. This pragmatism was merely a strategy since many of the women in their personal lives had a secular outlook. Some of the members believed that the regime had to be contested and resisted on its own turf with competing interpretations. There was a need to emphasize that what constituted 'true' Islam was ultimately a matter of interpretation. Additionally, as Mumtaz and Shaheed pointed out, a large number of customs, traditions and cultural practices which in fact violated Islamic injunctions were being justified by recourse to Islam. [22] It was, therefore, vital to sift culture, tradition and custom from religion. It was necessary to separate other versions of Islam from the homogenized singular one emanating from the regime. Furthermore, it was argued that WAF would have to function within the social, political and ideological context of the country and ideologies, such as secularism, would alienate the more conservative element within the movement.

Opposed to this perspective was the one forwarded by secular and socialist women within the movement, who argued that the strategic use of Islamic arguments would become self-defeating as women would be 'playing on the *mullahs*' wicket'. There were differing shades of opinion among the more secular women, which ranged from a strong belief in the human rights framework to those who envisioned a socialist society. However, liberal feminism was the dominant strand as the human rights discourse seemed less threatening than socialist or communist ideas.

Those on the secular side of the debate argued that the country does not have a singular and monolithic reality; rather there were multiple realities and Islam constituted only one of those realities. Beyond religion, there was ethnicity, class, caste, gender and linguistic and regional identities. The majority of the people were not so focused on the supposed danger to Islam as on bread and butter issues. In any case, there was no threat to religion as Pakistan was an overwhelmingly Muslim country with a miniscule minority, especially after the break-up of the country in 1971. The minorities could never become equal citizens as long as the state remained defined by one religion, especially a monolithic interpretation of it. There was a palpable fear that if WAF framed its arguments within a religious framework, it would not be able to emerge from it. For every liberal and modernist cleric, there were scores whose interpretation was fundamentalist, orthodox and literal.

However, there were all kinds of complications as there have not been movements, such as the Reformation, in Islam since there is no Church from which to separate the state. In western countries, secularization has a long history going back to the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, urbanization, industrialization and capitalism. [23] The secularization of Christianity was steeped in social, political and ideological movements and did not arise suddenly. In post-colonial states like Pakistan a modern secular democratic state had to be constructed from scratch.

Another conundrum for the women's movement was that while feminism is premised on the idea that the personal is political, secularism separates the personal from the political because it separates the private from the public. It bans religion into the private sphere (usually associated with women) while making the public masculine sphere of politics and commerce free of religious constraints. For feminists, it is contradictory to assert that the personal is political while simultaneously demanding a secular state. [24] After a long and obstreperous debate which lasted into the early 1990s, WAF declared that it stands for a democratic and secular state.

Women's Issues or All Issues

Another debate that occupied WAF in the early years was whether to keep its focus on strictly women's issues or widen its scope to other related ones. The issue came up when some women were wrongly dismissed from their jobs in a private industry. Those insisting on a strictly feminist framework argued that since the women were not being oppressed on the basis of their gender but their employment, this discrimination does not fall within a feminist approach. Others argued that the discrimination against women in the workplace is as much a feminist issue as any other and, ultimately, some WAF members did take up the issue of labor and employment rights.

However, the larger issue that incited a heated debate within WAF was whether or not to participate in the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD) against General Zia's illegal takeover and the end of democracy in the country. WAF Karachi was already active on the issue as Sindh was the most affected province in terms of the regime's backlash against the PPP, and the Karachi chapter had been actively developing bridges along ethnic lines, as well as addressing the larger political questions of the time. In WAF Lahore, however, some of the staunch feminists believed that involvement in the larger political issues would lead to women becoming subsumed as the history of Left movements indicates. They argued that although democracy was an issue for women, nonetheless it was not specific to women. Furthermore, they felt that womanpower, time and energy to work on specifically women's issues were already in short supply so there was a danger of the few active women spreading themselves too thin.

On the other side were those believed that women's issues cannot be addressed in isolation from other social and political issues, and that democracy was one of the necessary conditions for the existence of women's rights. While discussing the intersections between class and gender oppressions, and underscoring the necessity of forming alliances with groups engaged in other struggles and simultaneously retaining the autonomy of the women's movement, Shahnaz Rouse ruminates:

I would argue that it is essential that women retain an independent organization so that their cause does not become subservient to other issues. While retaining their relative autonomy, however, women can and should enter into a principled alliance with other political groups and parties whose struggles are not in contradiction to them. By forming such an alliance, women can put the women's question on the agenda of other political formations. [25]

In the long run, this debate was resolved when WAF openly declared that all issues, including democracy and federalism, are women's issues as they have an impact upon their lives. WAF subsequently challenged all forms of discrimination whether based on sex, gender, class, caste, religion or ethnicity. For example, Women Action Forum was one of the first organizations in Pakistan to publicly apologize to Bangladeshi women for the atrocities committed during the 1971 war.

Feminism or Women's Rights

Women Action Forum was composed of individuals as well as organizations subscribing to differing perspectives on many issues. This diversity was at once WAF's richness as well as its pitfall. Some of the staunch feminists were academics who had studied feminism seriously and believed in deep structural change in society wherein tribal, feudal, capitalist and other structures that reflect patriarchy would be challenged.

On the other hand were women who felt comfortable with the narrower focus on women's rights but were uneasy about the word 'feminism' as it seemed to imply hatred, exclusion or rejection of the male altogether. This was the result more of lack of understanding than any real or deep disagreement. A narrow focus on women's rights constitutes liberal feminism, which is less radical than socialist feminism in terms of challenging socioeconomic and political structures, but demands equality for women within the given framework of the nationstate. Marxist and socialist feminisms challenge the class divide and demand a fundamental change in the social and economic structures of exploitation and extraction. On the other hand, Radical feminists point to the ideological and material structure of patriarchy and its specific articulation within tribal, feudal and capitalist forms.

A number of women's rights activists found feminism to be too radical and often perceived it to be anti-men, even though this was not the case. WAF, which had come to be dominated by lawyers in Lahore, became a women's rights lobby rather than a strongly feminist organization even though many of its founder members had a distinctly feminist and socialist outlook. In Lahore, WAF remained preoccupied mainly with discriminatory laws and practices.

Two of the other lively and energetic debates revolved around the issues of functioning and nomenclature. WAF was initially conceived as a platform that would function in a non-hierarchical manner, that is, it would not have a president or other offices, and a Working Committee of around ten to twelve members would carry out the day to day work. The idea was to avoid what were seen as masculine forms of hierarchical functioning and distribution of power. However, the speed of the work was such and the spate of anti-women measures so relentless that WAF became centrist and often had to respond very quickly to measures by the regime. [26] Even though WAF had a policy-making General Body, the Working Committee was constrained to take action quickly sometimes bypassing the General Body. This, apart from the issue of whether or not all issues are women's issues, became the basis of the split in Lahore which led to an acrimonious debate.

The issue of terminology revolved around WAF's initial declaration that it was non-political. This led to confusion as some of the members believed that an organization on social and women's issues cannot possibly remain non-political. However, by non-political the founders did not mean that any issue can conceivably be separated from politics, but that WAF was not affiliated with any political party. Most of the founder members were politically aware, schooled in Left politics and deeply political in their commitments. They strongly averred that WAF was not a-political and believed that life in society is by definition political because people are embroiled in relations of unequal power. As Shahnaz Rouse pointed out in an early article:

The elements in the Pakistani women's movement that continue to support the necessity of maintaining a non-political posture must, at some point, realize the absurdity of this position. The demand for women's rights is itself political. And if it is to be achieved, it will only be through political means. [27]

The use of the term 'non-political' was a strategy to allay the fears of some women who did not want to be openly identified as political, especially since there was a massive backlash against politics and

politicians by a vindictive military regime. This vocabulary also served to protect WAF from being banned, like other political outfits of the time. The confusion was cleared in a short span of time as it had more to do with terminology and strategy than reflecting real or deep disagreement.

One other heated debate that became acrimonious at one point was whether or not to open the membership of WAF to all women or to keep it restricted. Those who wanted greater mobilization and a wide outreach insisted that WAF membership should be opened to all women otherwise it would remain elitist and limited. Some of the founder members were concerned that opening up the membership to large numbers of women carried the danger of WAF's basic principles being subverted. The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) had a large and highly organized women's wing and the fear was that if membership was opened, the JI could hijack WAF and impose its own agenda against which WAF had been founded in the first place. The founding members had imagined WAF on the basis of feminist principles and norms which made them wary of those very principles becoming overturned by an agenda steeped in patriarchy. This was a palpable fear, and understandable given the political and social environment of the time and the already small number of women willing to work on feminism. Ultimately, this dilemma was resolved by ensuring that those joining WAF agreed with its charter and its basic ideology and principles, even if they differed regarding minor details.

On account of the contentious debates within WAF it was subjected to criticism by some of the more academic feminists. Fauzia Gardezi pointed out that there were two main problems with the Women Action Forum approach: one, the attempts to work within an Islamic framework and two, failing to incorporate feminist principles and analysis sufficiently into the movement. [28] Gardezi holds that the Islamic framework is inherently detrimental towards women's rights and equality and an approach based on it can be selfdefeating. In 2002, filmmaker Sabiha Sumar wrote a highly critical article on the women's movement which, according to her, had failed in challenging the power of the clerics and feudal forces. However, Sumar was unable to substantiate her charges with solid evidence. [29]

Another critique of the WAF movement by the famous historian, Ayesha Jalal, was centered on class aspects. [30] In essence, Jalal argued that middle class women's subservience reflects social convenience. Recognizing that women are not a uniform social group but are divided by social, cultural and class disparities, Jalal contended that for the poor and uneducated women there is no choice for their voices of resistance, if any, are muted. However, for the relatively well to do and educated women, submissiveness is socially rewarding, and women belonging to the better off families are not such helpless and unsuspecting victims of 'Islamic chauvinism' as certain secular critics and feminists claim. Jalal stated that the role of the well to do women in reinforcing social subservience due to the convenience of the patriarchal bargain needs to be acknowledged. Nevertheless, it must be stated that while WAF's membership consisted mainly of middle class educated women, the positions taken, especially on the Zina laws, addressed the issues of the urban poor and rural women.

Sindhiani Tehreek

During the martial law regime of General Zia, WAF was generally recognized as the formal face of the women's movement. However a lesser known but vibrant peasant movement, the Sindhiani Tehreek (ST), was simultaneously active in Sindh. [31] Sindhiani was initially born in the towns of Thatta and Badin and soon gained supporters from large parts of rural Sindh. Sindhiani Tehreek formed the women's wing of the Awami Tehreek, a political party, but took major stands against patriarchy as well as dictatorship.

Basically a Sindhi nationalist movement, Sindhiani mobilized a very large number of peasant women at its gatherings. The four main issues addressed by ST were the following: 1) Sindhi nationalism

and provincial autonomy, 2) social class distinctions and conflict, 3) patriarchy and the subordination of women, and 4) the struggle for democracy. From its inception, ST believed that all issues are women's issues and those of democracy and nationalism cannot be separated from the issues of women. From the beginning, it was aligned with other movements as Sindhiani believed that all those who are oppressed on the basis of class, caste, gender, nationality or religion have the right to a just society.

While struggling for the restoration of democracy, ST raised a number of the issues of the women not only at the political level but also at the personal one. ST challenged some of the ancient customs such as *Karo Kari* (murder in the name of honor), *Haq Bakhswana* (marriage to the Qura'an) to retain family property, and cultural practices that reduced women's status and violated their basic rights. While ST held meetings where women were told about the ills of dictatorship, the need for democracy and justice, it also resorted to direct action in case a woman was being forced to marry against her will or was in danger of being killed in the name of 'honor'.

Apart from raising slogans in favor of democracy, demonstrating and marching, ST women would carry out a *gherao* (surrounding) of police stations where their leaders would be taken upon arrest. In such direct actions, girls as young as fourteen years of age were involved. They would not leave until their arrested men folk were released, even if this meant taking on the martial law authorities.

ST raised the issues of women's share in property, polygamy, the right to marry and sought an end to cultural and customary practices and norms that discriminate against women. Sindhiani Tehreek struggled against *Waderas* (feudal lords) and demanded the distribution of land to *Haris* (peasants). Apart from political and structural issues, ST also raised community issues such as the provision of electricity, roads and medical facilities for children. Traveling by day or night in buses, vans and wagons, ST women would cover long distances for mass mobilization.

The Sindhiani women were strident, confident and much more courageous in terms of taking direct action than WAF, which failed to touch the personal sphere of the family and sexuality because of middle class sensibilities. A great deal of resistance arose among men against the ST for mobilizing women and teaching them about patriarchy and, as a result, they were called *Kafirs* (infidels), and the daughters of Raja Dahir, the Hindu Raja who fought against Muhammad Bin *Qasim*. However, the ST would circumvent the restrictions imposed by men by going to various houses in the guise of doing community work traditionally performed by women at marriages, births and deaths. They would use the occasion to take direct action if an injustice was about to occur.

ST used traditional Sindhi songs and composed songs for the movement and rejoiced and celebrated each time they succeeded in an endeavor. However, Sindhiani also tried to persuade the men that women's oppression was linked to the oppression of Sindhi peasants in order to convince them to support the movement. ST operated primarily within the religious framework to avoid alienating believing women in the movement. Historical symbols of defiance, such as Bakhtawar, the peasant woman who stood up to power and was killed, were invoked to give strength to the struggle. Powerful ancient Sindhi princesses were resurrected to inspire women to action, and the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai and Shaikh Ayaz was employed for mobilization.

The main critique of Sindhiani Tehreek pertains to its reliance upon Sindhi nationalism, as it aligns their interests with those of oppressive landlords rather than with other peasants, thus creating a class contradiction. Secondly, the decision to work within a religious framework, because of the context and the need to mobilize women, can become self-defeating as was the case with WAF. In spite of such criticisms leveled at the movement, ST has been one of the most dauntless, strident and remarkable women's movements, not only because of its rich content of democratic beliefs, and an unconscious feminist outlook, but also the capacity for direct action irrespective of the

consequences.

Democracy and the Rise of Neo-liberalism

The decade of the 1990s was a game-changer at both the global and national levels. The last years of the 1980s saw the end of the Cold War and the breaking down of the Berlin wall. The US heralded the New World Order and the era of neoliberal ideology became ascendant. One of the outcomes of neo-liberal globalization, and the ascendancy of the Bretton Woods Institutions, was the mass proliferation of non-governmental organizations funded by western countries, ostensibly for development but also for the more insidious purpose of rolling back the state for trade liberalization, and opening borders for goods and services though not for labor. For an understanding of the manner in which states were restructured and non-governmental organizations created to provide services in place of the state, it is important to briefly understand the ideology and practices of neoliberal ideology, which is premised primarily on three major tenets: privatization, trade liberalization and de-regulation.

Neo-liberalism, the State and 'Civil Society'

The close interrelations between neo-liberalism and the rise of all kinds of organizations loosely called 'civil society' were observed in many countries across the globe. [32] As Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce observe:

For donors, civil society is a force for and ingredient of democratization, as well as a natural component of a market economy. In legitimizing civil-society strengthening programs, donors make frequent reference to the potential of civil society, to hold in check the state, to serve as the moral pulse of society and to further democratic value. By reducing the power of the state and increasing the role of the market, it is assumed that civil society too will flourish and will in turn encourage further economic liberalization. [33]

In the former Soviet republics, as indeed elsewhere, there was a push to create a 'civil society' to diminish the power of allegedly authoritarian states. The idea was extended under the rubric of 'global governance' to become a global civil society. [34] These good governance measures, promoted by the World Bank, became the political face of economic globalization. As Vivienne Taylor insightfully observes:

Global Governance and efficient management have become the new mantras of international agencies and institutions at the same time as the power of states and the capacity of states to govern is being reorganized and redirected away from public interests to secure conditions for private interests... The international debate on governance has been reduced to what kind of government is needed for the global market. The emphasis is on efficiency and engagement with the market forces in a competitive environment. Government's attention has been diverted from providing for its citizens to how to secure foreign investments and markets. [35]

The idea was to diminish the state, which was now seen as an impediment to open borders and trade liberalization and, at the same time, to promote the idea of 'civil society' as the motor of development, bypassing the state. Taylor illuminates the manner in which the notions of

transparency, accountability, rule of law and anticorruption, which in the past were oriented to the citizen as the object of democracy, have now been redirected towards private interest and the protection of multinational capital. The latter interests, argues Taylor, do not coincide with those of the dispossessed and 'the power of the state is being eroded in relation to public interest...and governance is being marketized and depoliticized under the guise of democracy.' [36] Ironically, the powerful global financial powers and institutions that promote the agenda of economic liberalization and set the terms are not transparent, democratized or open and are not amenable to the aspirations and needs of the majority of the poor or open to their inclusion. [37]

As civil servants were re-trained and re-oriented towards market efficiency, this redirection of the state has in some instances led to the enforcement and 'reinforcing of repressive legislation and policing to contain and stamp out resistance to the economic violence inherent in the market.' [38] Taylor adds that while the extent to which the mainstream debates on governance have coopted the language of transformation is arguable, 'a disturbing trend is the homogenization of the concept of good governance without a critique of the impact it has on the lives of women.' [39] Taylor's analysis has immense relevance for Pakistan, where massive state restructuring was carried out in 2001 and, according to the Interim Poverty Reduction and Strategy Paper, prepared by the Policy Wing of the Planning Commission

Sustained pro-poor economic growth, based on sustained private sector activity and enhanced investment, are the main elements of Pakistan's poverty reduction strategy...the essence of Pakistan's poverty reduction strategy is to maintain an environment conducive to trade and investment. [40]

Explicating the role of non-government organizations and civil society in the context of what he calls 'imperial neo-liberalism' Maximilian Forte underscores the idea that the military is one arm of the imperialist order, and the other arm is made up of NGOs though often these two arms are interlocked. [41] In his extensive critique of neo-liberalism, David Harvey associates the explosive growth of the NGO sector under neo-liberalism with the rise of the belief that 'opposition mobilized outside the state apparatus and within some separate entity called 'civil society' is the powerhouse of oppositional politics and social transformation'. [42] Yet, many of these NGOs are headed by non-elected and elite actors, who are accountable primarily to their sources of funds, which usually include government and corporate donors and private foundations. It is important to note that this rise of NGOs under neo-liberalism is also the period in which the concept of 'civil society' has become central, not just to the formulation of oppositional politics, as Harvey argues, but also 'central to the modes of covert intervention and destabilization openly adopted by the US around the world...we need to pause and focus on this emergence of 'civil society' as a topic in the new imperialism.' [43]

Forte cites examples from Haiti and other countries to show that NGOs serve the purpose of privatizing state functions, and providing legitimacy to neoliberal globalization by filling in the 'gaps' in the state's social services created by structural adjustment programs - a neoliberal solution to a problem first created by neo-liberalism itself. [44] David Harvey argues that 'the rise of advocacy groups and NGOs has, like rights discourses more generally, accompanied the neoliberal turn and increased spectacularly since 1980.' [45] NGOs have been called forth, and have been abundantly provisioned in a situation where neoliberal programs have forced the withdrawal of the state away from social welfare. As Harvey puts it, 'this amounts to privatization by NGO'. [46] The case of Pakistan is discussed below in the light of the critiques presented here.

The State in Pakistan in the Era of Neo-liberalism

In Pakistan, the ascendance of neoliberal ideology coincided with the revival of parliamentary democracy. In 1988, General Zia's plane mercifully crashed and a new era of democratic governance emerged, along with an increasing number of foreign-funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some NGOs had been established in the 1970s and 1980s such as Shirkat Gah, Simorgh, ASR and SAHE. However, in the 1990s there was a mushroom growth of NGOs working on various issues ranging from women's rights to labor, environment, sustainable development, child rights and so on. A large number of NGOs on women's rights were created including Rozan, Bedari, Aurat Foundation among others, and this contributed to the fragmentation of the women's movement. The new mantra of the time was development, in particular human development.

During the decade of the 1990s, Pakistan witnessed rapidly changing elected civilian governments which were repeatedly dismissed by non-elected and nonrepresentative institutions. Two tenures of Benazir Bhutto and two of Nawaz Sharif were cut down half way through the terms. At the beginning of the new century, both popular leaders had been forced into exile. The weak and unstable civilian governments were not given much power or room to maneuver by Pakistan's powerful establishment nevertheless a few positive steps were taken at that time.

During Benazir Bhutto's two stints in government (1988-1990 and 1993-1996) some women-friendly measures were taken such as the setting up of Women's Studies Centers in various public sector universities. Furthermore, the First Women Bank was established in part as a development institution for women as one of its functions was to provide loans to women entrepreneurs on easy terms. Separate women's police stations were set up although it is difficult for women, due to mobility issues, to reach even the nearest station, let alone one in a central place. Additionally, it is virtually impossible for women to register the First Information Report (FIR) with most police personnel reluctant to register complaints. While these modest measures alleviated some of women's chronic problems, the government did not have the required majority to amend any of the draconian laws passed by General Zia as they were protected by the notorious 8th amendment inserted forcibly by him into the constitution.

However, the big change for Pakistani women was that the general atmosphere in the country was far more open and liberal compared with the suffocating vigilantism of the Zia era. Women were not forced to observe a dress code, and could participate in spectator sports as well as move around freely without being hounded by Zia's violent vigilantes. During her second stint in power, Benazir Bhutto represented Pakistan at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 which led to Pakistan acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). While the government was not given the time or freedom to do much, there were no negative measures against women's right to education or work and their rights were reiterated and upheld by the government even though the parties in parliament could not agree on many issues owing to the presence of religious and conservative parties in the National Assembly and Senate.

However, it was during Benazir Bhutto's second stint that the Taliban acquired power in neighboring Afghanistan and the Pakistani establishment regarded them as its 'strategic assets' protecting the country's 'strategic depth', a theory that was to lead to much bloodshed in Pakistan in the following decades. The Interior Minister, Naseerullah Babar, who called the Taliban 'our children', facilitated the Taliban in becoming a unified force and taking over power from different factions of the Mujahideen and their warlords. The government had to recognize the Taliban regime even though Benazir Bhutto personally was strongly opposed to their worldview and practices.

Nawaz Sharif's two stints in power (1990-1993 and 1997-1999) were characterized by the dominance of the religious right, along with a renewed stress on General Zia's unfinished agenda of Islamization. Although the government endorsed the National Plan of Action (NPA) in 1998, it was only in the areas of education and health that there was to be implementation. There were no major

measures taken for the advancement of women even though lip service was paid to the cause. The discourse of NGO regulation and control became ascendant at the time. It was during Sharif's tenure that his minister, Pir Binyamin Rizvi, rabidly attacked ASR, the most avowedly secular and socialist feminist organization in the country.

However, when Sharif attempted to become a ruler with absolute and unbridled power through the proposed Shariat Bill (15th amendment), women rose up and knew that if the amendment was passed the government would decide upon their vice and virtue, and any autonomy or rights attained during other times would dissipate. The abhorrent amendment was passed in the National Assembly, but before the Senate could pass it, Nawaz Sharif developed differences with the Chief of Army Staff, Pervez Musharraf, over the Kargil adventure and in October 1999 was removed by the army in a bloodless coup.

In the decade of the 1990s, Pakistani women's relationship with the state vacillated between co-operation and collaboration with Benazir Bhutto, and confrontation and contestation during the time of Nawaz Sharif. After the revival of democracy, the women's movement became quiescent and seemed to have lost its steam as the steady spate of discriminatory laws and measures stopped, although the ones passed during the Zia regime were not reversed. During the second stint of Bhutto, women activists helped the government to write the National Report for the Beijing conference in 1995. The relationship, characterized by bonhomie and the spirit of mutual accommodation, was strong.

During Nawaz Sharif's second stint, women's groups and NGOs were out on the streets in the hundreds protesting against the proposed 15th amendment. Sharif's policies were in many ways a continuation of the era of General Zia. Fauzia Gardezi, in her work on neo-liberalism, Islamization and state formation, observes that the Zia government's policies, including the attack on middle class women and the project of Islamization, along with processes of reforming and responsabilizing the individual, are deeply inter-linked to denationalization, and to a dismantling of social government accompanying neo-liberalism. [47] Gardezi's contention is spot on because each time that Nawaz Sharif has been in government, neo-liberal policies and the agendas of privatization, liberalization and de-regulation have become hegemonic ideologies accompanied by a conservative religion, although neo-liberal policies and economic agendas were also pursued by the PPP and General Musharraf aggressively. Overall, the relationship between the state and women during the decade of the 1990s may be described as ambivalent - periods of co-optation and collaboration, followed by times of friction, unease and confrontation with remnants of the Zia era state.

In 1994, a Commission of Inquiry for Women was constituted by the Government and asked to review all existing laws with a view to removing discrimination, and to suggest appropriate measures for improving the status of women in the society. Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid, a Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, headed the Commission, which had ten other members. The Commission presented its report in 1997, recommending the repeal of certain discriminatory laws, amendments to others and setting up institutions for monitoring the enforcement of laws. [48] It was also during the time of Benazir Bhutto that the report prepared by Zari Sarfaraz during the Zia years and suppressed by him, was released.

Procedural laws and rules in the country have been reviewed, from time to time, and appropriate recommendations suggested to the government for law reform as well as reform of the civil and criminal justice system, with a view to ensuring the speedy disposal of cases. The lack of any action on the recommendations of the Commission shows that successive governments, civilian and military, were not enthusiastic about accepting or implementing the recommendations of various commissions to ensure gender equality.

By the 1990s, NGOs had become widespread phenomena globally and in Pakistan. A large number of donors and NGOs began to talk about gender (gender training, gender sensitization, gender mainstreaming or gender awareness). Initially a socialist feminist articulation to show how patriarchy affects both men and women by constructing the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', 'gender' soon became a buzzword, and no project or program was sanctioned unless it had a strong gender component. Gradually, and almost imperceptibly, women began to disappear from the discourse and 'gender' became a euphemism for women.

The notion of social structure disappeared from the development-oriented discourses. The word 'gender' implied that the oppression of men and women was equal and that each one suffered equally because of the social construction of gender identities. The knowledge that patriarchy is a material and ideological system in which men and women are not equal, and the former exploits the labor and reproductive capacities of the latter, disappeared. Politically 'gender' became a neutral term bereft of politics, structure or meaning, unlike patriarchy which addressed the systemic unequal relations between men and women in the division of labor. Gradually, the discourse has become about 'men and women, girls and boys.'

The de-politicizing project succeeded to the extent that it later spawned 'masculinity studies' underscoring the injustices committed by the system against men. While critical masculinity studies played a role in highlighting the position of men within unequal systems, the subject matter of masculinity had always been an integral part of feminist study. Women came to be subsumed as gender became a neutered basket category. The NGOs played a major role in this transformation which equalized oppression, and the narrative of patriarchy as a system that subordinates women was virtually catapulted out of the discourse. Added to this was the problem that some donors, especially USAID, were insistent upon speaking about gender equity rather than equality and the program was named Gender Equity Program. This is especially true in the case of funding for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and to some degree Balochistan, where misogynists within the bureaucracies continued to construct a conservative society that wanted equity rather than *equality*, even though Pakistan's constitution refers to equality. There seems to be a displacement of the women's movement by 'gender issues' from which feminism is excluded. The injection of funding seems to weaken movements, as was witnessed in the peasant movement for land rights in the Punjab which split up because of donor funding.

The ideology of development, as packaged and promoted by donors and NGOs, harmed the women's movement and activism in a number of ways. Gender training and sensitization sessions became a popular pastime. While some of the sessions, especially by ASR, addressed serious structural issues of patriarchy, others included a number of party games called 'energizers' and 'ice-breakers' that completely de-politicized the issue. In any case, the word 'training' implies lower-order mental functioning (like learning to operate a computer) and it seems inconceivable how someone could be trained in gender-sensitive living. A large number of highly-paid gender consultants emerged who carried out gender training despite intellectual and ideological leanings that contradicted feminist principles. [49] Other approaches were premised on the idea that once men were convinced to engage in more housework and childcare, they would automatically be more gender-sensitive. This was not borne out by facts as patriarchy remained alive and kicking vigorously. The integration of gender into all projects and programs became a mechanical, robotic exercise in a process of 'add women and stir'.

The combined effect of the proliferation of NGOs on gender and development and women's issues, and the technocratic straightjacket ideology of 'gender training' was that the political and critical edge of the women's movement diminished. A number of middle class feminist activists formed their own NGOs and received substantial funding. [50] As a result they were able to hire women to work on the projects designed along donor lines. Gender issues thus became a business and a profession,

a nine-to-five job with a steady diminution in the passion and deep commitment that characterized unpaid early feminism. In many cases, the donors dictated the agenda while the recipient organization implemented it. Freeing women was to be done towards a 'free market economy' in which cheap and flexible labor was required. Traditional shackles had to be removed, not for the women themselves, rather to enable them to enter a flexible and exploitable workforce. Even now, the focus on better conditions of home-based workers rather than the challenging of the idea that women should work at home, shows the extent to which issues had become de-politicized.

In the place of women's rights and an ideological and intellectual understanding of patriarchy, the focus was on Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and finally, of course, Gender and Development (GAD) which reflected a de-politicized agenda of development sans politics. A new feminism, focused on the UN conferences and liberal to the core, virtually catapulted other feminisms such as Marxist, socialist or radical schools out of the developmentcum-gender industry. It became difficult to reclaim women from the morass and debris of gender. Saba Khattak reflects that the NGO-ization of the movement and dominance of the development discourse have depoliticized the concept of gender itself. [51] As a member of the Planning Commission she insisted upon a chapter on women instead of gender so that women could be brought back into the center of the discourse.

Despite all this, it is pertinent to mention that some organizations, though very few in number, kept feminism alive in the period of neo-liberal globalization by constantly referring to the elephant in the room - patriarchy. There were significant exceptions such as ASR, Simorgh, Shirkat Gah, Rozan and similar organizations, which remained focused on the political notion of patriarchy and an equally political approach to feminism. Similarly, there were individual feminists working within non-governmental organizations who retained a strongly political approach and critique of patriarchy and capitalism as the two main contradictions in society.

Despite the 1990s being to an extent a period of desertification for the women's movement, individual women and some women's groups made substantial and serious contributions to feminist theory. A great deal of self-reflection was carried out regarding the direction of feminism, its visions, goals and impediments. Ironically, this was possible because of the same donors and NGOs which de-politicized the movement. The sudden availability of a large amount of funding and other resources, made it possible for women to pursue academic and research interests. A substantial body of literature on nationalism, militarism, the state, human rights, ethnicity, religious domination, informal economy, globalization and neo-liberalism was produced from a feminist perspective. This is one of the positive outcomes of donor funding and NGO formation which otherwise contradicted feminism since activism became nine-to-five and sterile.

In recent years, donor funding acquired the characteristics of the corporate business model, in the process creating large conglomerates which monopolized funding. As a result, not only was competition created among recipients for donor funds, elements of corruption also set in as very large amounts of money became available. For example, in Lahore a family theater enterprise was accused of massive misappropriation of donor funds. In Islamabad, a major NGO think tank was blacklisted for financial irregularities. The idea that the NGO sector would be the model third sector, free of the profiteering of the private sector and corruption of the public one, proved to be false. The NGO-ization of feminist politics and the corporatization of social sector development both served to weaken a focus on patriarchy and capitalism as the two main systems that subordinate women and engender inequalities.

The de-politicization that occurred in the decade of the 1990s served the global and national powers well. When an elected government was removed illegally by the military and yet another military dictator took over in 1999, a number of the NGOs served their global masters well by supporting

both the coup and failing to challenge the transfer of power from civilian into military hands. Although WAF was a major exception and did not support the military coup, and some individual feminists strongly opposed it, there were many among the NGO femocrats who hailed the military government as a savior against tyranny. [52] As Ayesha Khan observes, there was a debate among women's rights and feminist activists over whether or not to collaborate with an undemocratic government, or work with the state at one level, yet critique it on another. [53] In many organizations, this became a hotly debated issue.

Global War on Terror and the Post-9/11 Reconstruction of Identities

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the US symbols of military, political and economic might became a defining moment in world history, changing the way the world thinks about justice, right and wrong, death and life itself. It was another watershed moment as massive reconfigurations of power took place globally, and had a significant impact on Pakistan, turning it once again into the frontline state, this time in the Global War on Terror (GWoT). This war quickly turned into a racist war defining virtually every Muslim as a terrorist or suspected terrorist. Muslim countries were attacked and millions of Muslim civilians - men, women and children - were massacred by states which had claimed to be based on human rights.

In Pakistan, the global war on terror coincided with the military's takeover of the country. As in the Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq eras of dictatorship, billions of US dollars poured into Pakistan, and General Pervez Musharraf became entrenched as the self-proclaimed Enlightened Moderate warmly embraced by the liberal intelligentsia as a savior. In an article on the political economy of military rule in Pakistan, Akbar Zaidi raises a question regarding how can one be 'enlightened' or a 'liberal' without subscribing to the political philosophy which embeds these concepts. [54] Musharraf nonetheless was embraced by what Zaidi calls 'lifestyle liberals' and the westernized elite. According to Zaidi, the Chief Executive's early cabinet, before the politicization process began, included a number of prominent civil society and non-government organization (NGO) activists who had previously struggled against an earlier and different military regime. It included technocrats who were 'lifestyle liberals.' In Zaidi's words

The largest and most public support for Musharraf in October 1999 came from the socially and culturally liberal and westernised section of Pakistan's elite, who embraced Musharraf as one of their own, which he very much was. Activists in the NGO movement in Pakistan were also vociferous in their support for Musharraf, precisely because he was seen as a 'liberal' and westernised man and some prominent members of the NGO movement who had struggled for a democratic order in Pakistan under General Zia, actually joined Musharraf's Cabinet. Employers associations, trade bodies, women's groups and other such groupings which are all part of some acceptable notion of 'civil society', also heralded the overthrow because Musharraf was a modernising man. Some intellectuals and peace and anti-nuclear activists also celebrated the arrival of a liberal head of state. Clearly, for the westernised sections of civil society in Pakistan, the military general, who had overthrown a democratically-elected prime minister, was seen as Pakistan's latest saviour. [55]

Zaidi contends that for civil society in Pakistan, whether it is the westernizing, modernizing kind, or the more fundamentalist Islamic form, the question has not been one of democracy versus non-democratic norms, but of 'liberalism' against the perceived and variously interpreted Islamic

symbols and values. Unlike the traditional concept of civil society, the pursuit of democratic ideals is not a necessary and defining requisite. In classical political philosophy, the autonomy and independence of civil society from the state is a necessary condition for there should not be identity between the two.

However in Pakistan, development groups which emerged as a result of government failure and became contractors in the form of NGOs, were often co-opted by institutions of the state to become the latter's 'advisors', winning lucrative contracts and getting the publicity they needed to further their credentials. As Zaidi elaborates, 'human rights activists and advocacy groups become 'partners' with other 'stakeholders', particularly government, and try to redress problems created by the very institutions of the state that they now are partnering. The essence of Pakistan's politics - very broadly defined - is one of compromise not confrontation, and of cooptation. Civil society in Pakistan is very much part of that political tradition.' [56] Within WAF too there were debates about whether or not to accept donor funding, but the idea was resisted vehemently for fear of cooptation and loss of substantive autonomy.

Donor funding, argues Zaidi, further reduces the political edge of non-governmental organizations which are heavily dependent and accountable to the donors. For civil society in Pakistan, a westernized, socially and culturally liberal agenda is far more palatable and preferable than the messy politics essential for democracy. In fact, one of the main consequences of this ideology, concludes Zaidi, has been the de-politicization of public life in Pakistan. For the Pakistani liberal elite, compromise and accommodation are better than confrontation with a powerful military state, as long as personal lifestyles remain relatively tolerable. There was a genuine fear among some members of the women's movement that the conservative and religious politics of Nawaz Sharif threatened their rights, and this led them to support the military regime with reservations.

All military governments in Pakistan have found willing partners among the civil and political forces which have enabled them to continue in power. As earlier dictators like General Zia found legitimacy in partnering with religious groups, Musharraf was able to legitimize his rule by engaging the liberal elite. Although General Musharraf was an authoritarian ruler to the core, he was a 'lifestyle liberal' while being politically completely illiberal. In the elections of 2002, he managed to keep the two main political forces, PPP and PML (N), out of the contest without receiving too much disapproval from his 'liberal' supporters. One of the strange anomalies of his rule was that in the Local Government elections, while political parties were officially absent because the elections were held on non-party basis, non-governmental organizations, were in the forefront of mobilizing people for the exercise. The National Reconstruction Bureau which carried out the exercise was donor-funded as were the 'People's Assemblies' and other 'political' initiatives. The choice of 'lifestyle liberalism' over democracy and its twin, political liberalism, was an unfortunate one as civil society was to discover when General Musharraf dismissed the entire judiciary in November 2007, and the lawyers' movement was able to mobilize the civil society in favor of *political* rather than *social* and *cultural* 'lifestyle liberalism'.

The NGO claim of being ground-up, participatory and democratic organizations has not been borne out by experience and observation. Rather NGOs, particularly welfare-oriented ones that did not challenge the state or government, were seen as an alternative to the state, which alone can guarantee fundamental rights.

However, NGOs differ with regard to some being more rights-based rather than welfare-oriented and a few, such as HRCP and ASR, consistently challenged the state and government. In the 1990s, the government attacked NGOs like ASR for pursuing a radically transformative feminist agenda. On the other hand, bureaucrats and the military seldom attack welfare organizations which take on a part of the state's welfare functions thus relieving it of its responsibilities, and enabling it to focus on

its repressive aspect rather than service delivery aspects. Nevertheless, Akbar Zaidi rightly raises the issue of 'NGO failure and the need to bring back the state' as the latter is responsible for ensuring basic rights and service delivery for it demands taxes and allegiance from citizens in return for ensuring basic rights. [57]

It has become increasingly difficult to critique liberals, and there is enormous silencing of those who attempt a critique from an intellectual standpoint. Afiya Shehrbano Zia discusses this silence and argues that there is a spirited lack of tolerance amongst liberals, which is especially true when they are challenged, not by the religious right, but by their peers. She laments that there is an unwillingness to accept critique which is very different from criticism. The fear of critiquing inevitably leads to mediocrity and 'any questioning of the purpose, the framework, or the politics of liberal activism, raises their status quo sensitive hackles.' [58] This is an unfortunate development and seems connected with turf protection, but it reduces the critical ability to locate one's presuppositions and assumptions in the larger global context and manifest social, economic and political realities.

General Musharraf's was a time when increased donor funding became available to women's organizations, such as Aurat Foundation, for programs to train newlyelected women councilors under the Women's Political Participation Project (W3P), which ran from February 2002 to March 2004. More than 80 percent of elected women councillors from the local government elections of 2000-2001 were given training under the W3P project. Due to his eagerness to present himself to the world as an enlightened, liberal and modern leader, Pakistani women made a few significant gains. In the local government, their representation was a historic 33% while 17.5% seats were reserved for women in the provincial and national assemblies. For the first time there were around 60 women on reserved seats in the National Assembly. Furthermore, General Musharraf appointed Shamshad Akhtar as the first ever Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan. While WAF remained strongly opposed to a military government, it was relatively muted and ambivalent about the reforms with the result that one does not find a strong voice of dissent at the time.

WAF's demand was for 50% of the seats for women, but even 33% was better than before. General Musharraf touted his flagship devolution plan as a great 'silent revolution', although the elections were to be held on non-party basis. This was a major de-politicizing move but the NGOs were very active and received massive amounts of funds by forming consortiums. With astronomical amounts of money available, there was an overnight mushroom growth of NGOs and CBOs. Only the pliant ones received funding and those who questioned the dictator's local government plan were sidelined. NGOs thus became entrepreneurship enterprises. The women's movement (in whatever form it existed at the time) remained largely silent on these developments. The irony of donor-driven NGOs participating heavily in local government elections in terms of training of candidates and advocacy, while political parties were officially absent, was lost on those who claimed to believe in democracy.

In 2002-2003, the Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) proposed a coherent gender reform agenda to align policies, structures, policies, programs and projects for enabling governments to implement promises, both national and international, on gender equality. GRAP was based on the idea of political, administrative, public sector employment policy and fiscal reforms. A number of major gender equality goals were achieved under the GRAP. These included the setting up of a Provincial Gender Mainstreaming Committee in Punjab, amendments in the Rules of Business for Women Development Departments, the Restructuring of Women Development Departments, Career Development Centers in Universities, establishment of Gender Mainstreaming in eight departments of the Punjab Secretariat and electronic and print media campaigns to create awareness about women's rights. However, GRAP was heavily critiqued by donors and NGOs, and some donors showed complete disillusionment with its implementation. It has been alleged that the political will

for gender equality among politicians and the bureaucracy only exists because of international pressure. To many stakeholders, GRAP policies seemed made for a foreign country and not Pakistan.

In 2003, the National Commission on the Status of Women, constituted as a statutory body in July 2000, brought out a report recommending the repeal of the Hudood Ordinance as it degraded women and deprived them of their rights thereby making the law iniquitous. [59] The Commission recommended not only the repeal of the Hudood laws but also the removal of sections of the Penal Code that carry enabling provisions. The Chairperson, Justice (Retd) Majida Rizvi, along with most of the other members strongly supported the suggestions with only two members dissenting. One of the dissenting members was Dr. S.M Zaman from the Council of Islamic Ideology whose task is to ensure that all laws comply with Islamic provisions, even though there is no agreement over such provisions. However, right up to 2005 before her term ended Majida Rizvi campaigned for the repeal of the Hudood Ordinances.

In 2006, the Women Protection Act was passed and the crime of rape was taken out of *Hadd* (maximum) punishment and placed in *Taazir*, Pakistan's criminal procedure. Rape would now be investigated in the manner done in other countries and the conflation between rape and adultery would end. General Musharraf, aiming to reinforce his credentials as an enlightened and moderate leader, thus proceeded to undo the most grievous harm inflicted on the women of the country by his predecessor, General Zia. In the Musharraf era, the women's relationship with the state was once again characterized by quiescence, silence, frequent collaboration and co-operation. Aside from a condemnatory statement by WAF, there was hardly a voice to challenge the illegal transfer of power to the military.

By that time, the massive spread of NGOs and the induction of Left-leaning women into lucrative paid work, had taken the steam out of the women's movement. WAF had become dormant since the mid-1990s, barring a few press releases and statements. As a result, when the peasant struggle led by the Anjumane-Mazareen broke out in ten districts of the Punjab, WAF was conspicuous by its absence. A few organizations and individual women activists supported the movement, especially since peasant women were at the forefront of the land rights movement, but there was no women's *movement* to take up the cudgels for the peasant women defending their land, produce and men folk. In fact, when the tenant movement was funded by an INGO, it split up over who would manage the funding. The peasant struggle was led especially by the strident and forceful women carrying *thappas* (batons for washing clothes), fighting with the police and rangers, and challenging the forced eviction orchestrated by the army. The peasant movement and its legendary women became projects and programs for the NGOs. The 'Enlightened Moderate' Musharraf crushed the movement vigorously using full state force, but hardly a whisper was heard from the women's movement.

A number of contradictions characterize the entire period of dictatorship led by General Musharraf, who received legitimacy because of western countries using him in their so-called war against terror. When the General, while referring to Mukhtaran Mai's gang rape case, remarked that Pakistani women get raped in order to go abroad and get millions of dollars, many women's NGOs and groups were up in arms, but the resulting furor died after a few days of indignant anger. However, an NGO, Pattan, provided support to Mukhtaran Mai to enable her to pursue her case. The NGO phenomena appears to be contradictory because on the one hand NGOs have taken strong stands and the funds have helped with research and advocacy; on the other, welfare-oriented NGOs seemed to be a part of the roll back of the state from the provision of basic rights to citizens.

Despite being all-powerful, Musharraf was unable to reverse any of the laws passed by his predecessor in the name of religion and they remained protected by the 8th amendment. His deals with the religious right in terms of their support for his continuance in power led to women's rights becoming the bargaining chips. The clerics supported his Legal Framework Order and 17th

amendment in return for their governments in NWFP (now KP) and Balochistan, and his agreement to not repeal the retrogressive laws against women.

Pointing out the internal contradictions within religious discourse in NWFP, Nazish Brohi, in her study of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Aml (MMA), a six-party religious alliance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa notes that while the MMA failed to condemn violence against women, including sexual violence, its response to rape, gang rape, and harassment was to severely limit and minimize women's interactions with men, thereby reproducing patriarchy, segregation, and division. While Musharraf posed as the champion of women's rights and human rights, his allies in the former NWFP were passing the Hisba Act and blackening women's faces and bodies on billboards rendering them invisible in the public sphere. [60]

General Musharraf's duality appears to be evident in another incident of his time involving Jamia Hafsa. In this case, large numbers of women students, who carried batons, occupied a madrassa and kidnapped allegedly 'immoral' women, threatened those who in their view were committing sins, and indulged in other acts of violence in Islamabad, all in the name of religion. This violent 'empowerment' eventually ended with 'Operation Silence' in July 2007 when the state used unbridled violence of its own to end their siege of the *madrassa*. Farida Shaheed, while noting that women do not constitute a homogenous group and are separated by class and culture, points out that this was seen as empowerment:

A significant number of women themselves subscribe to the views of religiously defined groups. Indeed, many women are active proponents of such views. And, as seen in the Al-Hafsa case, a number of women experience activism that seeks to control women as a group, as a personally empowering process. [61]

General Musharraf initially used the Jamia Hafsa incident to persuade his western benefactors that if he were to be removed, Pakistan would fall to extremists. However, there was tremendous pressure from the Chinese government to take action as Chinese citizens had been kidnapped by the students. When the incident became prolonged and got out of hand, Musharraf sensed the danger and launched Operation Silence in July 2007, murdering the students brutally and mercilessly. By the time the curtain fell on Pervez Musharraf's nine-year regime, non-state actors (birthed and nurtured by the security state), had begun to threaten women's rights more than the state itself.

Extremist outfits of varying hues and shades and their sectarian affiliations threatened the very existence of the state. The siege of Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa led to massive retaliation by religious extremists, and suicide bombings were carried out in all the major cities of the country killing scores of people.

By 2007, Musharraf had become widely unpopular and in 2008 he resigned as president and left the country. The elections of 2008 were won by the Pakistan People's Party which formed the government in alliance with the Awami National Party and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement. The democratic dispensation of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari inherited the war-on-terror induced problems of religious extremism and terrorism from their predecessor, General Parvez Musharraf who, in turn, had inherited these from his predecessors. For Pakistan, terrorism was not a new phenomenon as the policies pursued during the Afghan war in the 1980s had spawned militant outfits to carry out *Jehad* in India and Afghanistan. When democracy returned to Pakistan in 2008, religious terrorism was targeting women and their rights with a renewed ferocity. In one case, the Taliban kidnapped women after murdering their husbands, and the residents of Upper Dir revolted against the Taliban when they tried to acquire for themselves the women they had widowed. [62]

In April 2009, a video of a 17 year old girl, Chand Bibi, accused of illicit relations with a neighbor, surfaced in which she was publicly flogged by the Taliban for allegedly transgressing moral norms devised by them in the name of religion. [63] She was subsequently forcibly married off to the man who had entered her house to fix an electrical problem. In 2012, Malala Yousafzai was shot in Swat for claiming her right to education. The lethal combination of an authoritarian state, unscrupulous ruling classes, ancient tribal customs, and a seriously distorted view of religion, led to untold violence and perpetual insecurity of citizens as the writ of the state declined in the territory controlled by the Taliban.

What began as a reconstitution of state policy in 1979 in response to global pressures and the military's need to entrench itself in government, became a nightmare in 2009. The ruling alliance comprising liberal and secular parties like the PPP and ANP followed a policy of appeasement of the religious right, often giving in to their demands at the cost of women's rights. The *Nizam-e-Adl* agreement with Sufi Muhammad of the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e- Muhammadi in 2009 was one such case. The *Nizam* was based on *shariah* law and no woman was involved either in its negotiation or as a judge once the system began work. It was not until Sufi Muhammad rejected democracy, the constitution, the parliament, and the judiciary that the agreement was called off and operation *Rah-e-Raast* was launched by the military to flush out the Taliban from Swat.

The *Nizam-e-Adl* agreement, concluded in April 2009, between the Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi's Sufi Muhammad and the Awami National Party government of NWFP, essentially ceded sovereignty to the Taliban and acknowledged the end of the writ of state. As the state disintegrated through a policy of appeasement, women - already diminished citizens - were left at the mercy of the inhuman Taliban. Feeling the betrayal by avowedly secular and liberal parties, Saba Khattak wrote:

The silence of the women MNAs and MPAs — a majority of whom entered the assemblies on women's seats — is yet another betrayal. They voted in a system that will render all women of Malakand Division unequal citizens. Their failure to condemn the Taliban treatment of women, and the ANP-PPP government's attack on women activists, shows that these women are too grateful to their male-dominated political parties for their appointment, for them to question misogyny. [64]

The relationship of the women's movement with the Zardari-led PPP government was also somewhat ambivalent. Although the PPP-led alliance was primarily considered liberal and secular, members of parliament from the ruling parties made statements that negated women's fundamental rights. For example, Israrullah Zehri, minister for postal affairs, defended the burial alive of five women in Nasirabad, Balochistan, on the pretext that the practice corresponded to Baloch tradition and culture. Women's groups across the country were up in arms against his statement and demanded his removal. Incredibly, the Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, while explaining the severity of daily target killings in Karachi, stated that only 30% of the dead were victims of target killings and, investigation had revealed that 70% of the killings were at the hands of wives and girlfriends. [65] The statement left the women's groups incredulous and they would have been extremely incensed were it not for the hilarious absurdity of the statement.

In 2010, the PPP-led government appointed Maulana Muhammad Khan Shirani of JUI (F) as the head of the Council for Islamic Ideology. The Women's Action Forum protested against this appointment as the Maulana had taken strong stands against pro-women legislation. He objected to the law against sexual harassment on the basis that provocatively dressed and immodest women were themselves responsible for inviting harassment. Maulana Shirani walked out of the assembly during

the passage of the law. He objected to the domestic violence bill on the grounds that it is not a problem in Pakistan and has been created by Western-educated women. The Maulana regards domestic violence as a private family matter and opposes the state's intervention. [66] The Domestic Violence Bill was passed in the National Assembly in 2009 but fell prey to political bargaining in the Senate.

In December 2010 the Federal Shariat Court declared the Women's Protection Act of 2006 as being contrary to Islamic injunctions thus expanding its jurisdiction and reinforcing conservative trends. Despite a long-standing demand by women's groups that the parallel Islamic judiciary and the Council for Islamic Ideology, created by Pakistan's first dictator to legitimize his agenda should be abolished, the ruling alliance did not take any steps to do so. Women Action Forum filed a case against the ruling and awaits verdict to date.

The PPP, ANP, and MQM, were all considered secular and liberal parties and more women-friendly than any available alternative. Nevertheless, they had no qualms about signing deals with religious and right-wing parties to limit women's voting rights and political participation, especially at the Union Council level. Patriarchal norms, values and practices were thus evident among these parties, even though their official party positions claimed to be supportive of women's rights.

The relationship between the women's groups and the PPP-led ruling alliance since 2008 was characterized by accommodation and cooperation, but was not always or entirely free of friction. Afiya Zia contends that while women have been motivated by dictatorship, they have been muted by democracy. [67] She wonders whether democracy, especially as presently constructed in Pakistan, can deliver on women's rights given the lethargic and apathetic attitude of the current governments.

It is an irony that women have historically gained more rights during military regimes than in periods of democracy, for example, the Family Laws Ordinance was promulgated by Ayub Khan and the Women Protection Act by General Musharraf. Saba Khattak attributes this to the class character of the military officers influenced by British traditions and the 'modernist' culture inherited by the post-colonial officers, which was later transformed. [68] She points out the need to study the military as an institution to understand the paradox. It is also helpful to remember that military dictators were able to impose their will on the people with much greater ease than elected civilian governments, whose hands were often tied by the unelected institutions giving them little room to maneuver.

Since the state constructed and designed by General Zia was not dismantled, even by the PPP government, its manifestations keep appearing. The trumped up case of blasphemy against a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, led to the murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in January 2011, by his own security guard, a religious fanatic. In 2012, the case of a Hindu girl, Rinkel Kumari, caused uproar among civil society activists. Rinkel was kidnapped and taken to Mirpur Mathelo where she was forcibly converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim. All this was done by a PPP member of parliament, Mian Mitho. Many young girls belonging to minority communities are similarly kidnapped, forced into marriage, and then prevented at gunpoint from speaking up to the media or the court. The Anti-Women Practices Law of 2011 addresses the problem of forced marriages, but implementation of the law remains a historically weak part of the state apparatus.

On the other hand, some very positive and prowomen legislation was accomplished during the tenure of the PPP-led alliance, thanks mainly to the Parliamentary Women's Caucus and the National Assembly Standing Committee on Women which worked closely and tirelessly with women's groups to get the laws passed. Some of these measures include a law against sexual harassment in the workplace (2010). [69] There was a long standing demand by women activists for such a law however, AASHA (Alliance Against Sexual Harassment), while capitalizing on the support garnered

by women's groups, played the major role in getting legislation passed. A law was passed against anti-women practices and ensuring inheritance rights (2011), [70] and an act of parliament created the National Commission on the Status of Women (2012) which is an autonomous body but lacuna persist which affect its functioning. [71] In 2012, a domestic violence bill was passed which will apply only to the Islamabad Capital Territory but serve as a model for the provinces which can now legislate on women's issues. With PPP's Fehmida Mirza as the Speaker of the National Assembly and strongly vocal women such as Nafisa Shah, Bushra Gohar and Sherry Rehman as members of the assembly, pro-women legislation was passed despite opposition from the clergy.

When the Constitutional Reforms Committee was constituted for the proposed 18th amendment, a major controversy arose regarding the failure to induct a single woman member. Feminists strongly protested at this blatant and discriminatory omission and sent written recommendations to the all-male committee insisting upon the repeal of the 8th amendment which protected all of General Zia's laws, measures, orders and ordinances. In spite of the majority of progressive parties in the committee, the 8th amendment remained intact while bargaining with the religious forces. All discriminatory legislation against women thus remained constitutionally protected.

With the passage of the 18th amendment in 2010, women's issues became a provincial subject and the Ministry of Women's Development at the federal level was devolved to the provinces where Women's Development Departments are now responsible for addressing their concerns. However, the women's movement raised concerns regarding a minimum universal standard for all provinces to prevent anti-women legislation being introduced in the name of religion, culture, or ethnicity. The Federal Human Rights Ministry was made responsible for ensuring that Pakistan's international commitments on women are upheld and the federal government does not shirk responsibility in the name of decentralization. Furthermore, the NCSW would be the watchdog for women's rights at the federal level.

The provinces are, however, still working on legislation for women's rights, although the Sindh Assembly has taken the lead in raising the minimum age at which women can marry. The Sindh provincial assembly passed legislation on domestic violence in March 2013. [72] Similarly, the provincial assembly of Balochistan passed the bill on domestic violence in February 2014. [73] The Domestic Violence law of the Punjab is a weak document that takes a welfare-oriented rather than rights-based view of crimes against women. The current bill evidently borrows heavily from the Sindh and Balochistan Domestic Violence Acts, but despite official claims, it does little to really protect women. There are no provisions for what happens to a perpetrator, but several on what women should do post abuse. The focus appears to be on remedies rather than prevention and cure. Farida Shaheed points out that the bill has several issues including definitions that could leave young girls out of the protection umbrella, the limitations of Family Courts, the vague definition of violence committed against a woman, no mention of sexual abuse and it excludes emotional, psychological, verbal and economic abuse from the definition of violence.

It is too early to make an assessment of the Nawaz Sharif government since 2013, but so far no significant legislation or measure for women's rights seems evident. The Women's Caucus in the parliament was fairly active during the PPP's tenure when Fehmida Mirza and Nafisa Shah were members of parliament, but under PML-N's Shaista Pervez, it seems almost dormant. The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) has, however, recommended significant measures towards ending discrimination against women. In order to ensure compliance with the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961, the NCSW has developed a training manual for Nikah Registrars. Consultations are being currently carried out to pressurize the government to withdraw proposed amendments to the law on protection against sexual harassment in the workplace.

The NCSW is also currently engaged in carrying out consultations to review the Qisas and Diyat law

in order to protect women from being murdered in the name of 'honor'. The Anti-rape bill was reviewed and inputs were provided with references to the practices in other Muslim countries. The Juvenile Justice System Bill, 2015, is being reviewed to make it compatible with the requirements of justice. Additionally, recommendations for electoral reforms have been given to the Election Commission of Pakistan to ensure that women are not prevented from voting. The NCSW has also reviewed other legislation including the domestic violence bill, 2014, Reproductive Health bill, 2014 and the Christian Marriage and Divorce Amendment bill, 2014.

The NCSW has commissioned a research to study the impact of Jirga decisions on women and is in the process of recommending a ban on illegal jirgas. The body is also examining measures to increase access to justice for women by removing the recurring impediments. A national baseline survey on the social and economic well-being of women is being carried out. It remains to be seen if any positive steps are taken by the government on the measures recommended by the NCSW. Currently, there seems to be an absence of a vibrant and forceful women's movement of the kind observed in the 1980s on the horizon. Scattered groups take to the streets over specific issues in different cities but a coherent movement seems to be absent at this point in time.

Contemporary Debates and Narratives

Post 9/11, the rampant racism and xenophobia in western countries, named Islamophobia by some, created its own dynamics. As a counter to the western orientalist narrative of the backward, savage and butchering Muslim, many people in Muslim countries reinforced a Muslim identity rooted in centuries of history, civilization and culture. Apart from the ideological and intellectual counter-narrative that underscored the terrorism of industrialized countries, and the subjugation of Muslims especially during colonialism, Muslim men and women acquired the visible symbols of a Muslim identity such as the *hijab* (head scarf) and *Abaya* (full-length body covering).

In Pakistan these dress symbols were more common in the newly-affluent class that had recently returned from the Middle East and was influenced by its culture. However, increasing numbers of indigenously born and raised Pakistani women also began to use these symbols to express identity and to make a political statement of resistance against blatant and unrelenting western racism. Identity politics was sharpened by the farcical and mendacious war on terror, which engendered new identities and narratives on both sides of the divide.

Over time the entire complexion of society changed and middle-class families began organizing *dars* (Qur'anic lessons) in their homes in the major cities. Farhat Hashmi and the Al-Huda phenomenon became increasingly popular among young women who began to take to the *hijab* and *abaya*, unheard of among the generations of the 1960s and 1970s. There was a general shift towards conservative and right-wing ideologies, especially among the upwardly-mobile trader classes represented by PML (N). The focus of young people was mostly on bettering their economic lot in life and becoming a part of the global consumerist elite. This class of people was generally de-politicized, but in some cases educated young men from liberal and well-to-do middle classes were drawn to the project of global *Jehad* and militancy. Enhanced religiosity, literalism and ritualism characterize the current ascendancy of a specifically Saudi Arabian brand of Islam in Pakistan.

A number of feminists reclaim feminism within a religious cosmos of multiple meanings. Mumtaz and Shaheed have argued that as Islam is the overarching reality within which most Pakistani women live their lives, it is a context that cannot be ignored or bypassed in any analysis, understanding, or activism. [74] Others like Asma Barlas, who work within a religious paradigm, have engaged in a process of un-reading patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an. [75] Yet others, such as Riffat

Hasan, have provided alternative theological interpretations in an effort to reconcile Islam and the modernist human rights discourse. [76] Feminist psychotherapist, Durre Ahmad, applies a postmodern Jungian framework to argue that religion has been denigrated by positivist thinkers because of its deep connections with the feminine, emotional, and subjective, as opposed to the purportedly masculine world of scientific objectivity, rationality, and valuenutrality. [77]

In her work with the women of Jamaat-i-Islami, Amina Jamal discerns agency and autonomy among them, and warns that secular feminists fail to grasp that women belonging to faith-based organizations negotiate with modernity on their own terms; they are not merely subordinate and oppressed women. [78] In a similar vein, Humaira Iqtidar, in her study of women associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Daa'wa concludes that religion is a valid category for political analysis and that women's agency is perceptible, even if not expressed as a conscious feminist position. [79] Borrowing from the work of Saba Mahmood on the politics of piety, these feminists refute the notion that agency must be informed by feminist consciousness and argue that far from being coerced, women find agency and liberation by joining religious political parties, and that this provides space for activism and political engagement. [80]

However, Neelam Hussain interrogates the ambivalent and uncertain 'empowerment' that such organizations claim to engender. In her study of Al-Huda and AlNoor women's *dars* organizations in Lahore, Hussain concludes that:

It can be argued that if the women's *dars* encounter does not lead to systemic and long-term change, it does open up spaces where agency is exercised, choice made and battles fought and that in itself is a gain. However, it must also be remembered if choice is fraught with ambiguity, and empowerment is uncertain and elusive, the consequences of these choices can be far-reaching and certain...they are experienced within the intimacy of the family circle where they set up patterns of the licit and illicit, of exclusion and control as well as in public spaces where the *dars* message is carried on the myriad tongues of participants, teachers, listeners; that it gains strength as it intermingles with countless other voices generated by the power nexuses that draw inspiration from the same Wahabi agenda of exclusion and control that informs and justifies religious bias and extremist actions. [81]

It is important to explain the context within which some of the feminists concerned with Muslim identity conceptualize the world. Most of these researchers are located within western countries where the post-9/11 politics of identity have been sharpened. The racist construction of Muslims as terrorists and backward savages has led to counter-narratives that seek an empowering identity in the symbols and practices of Islam which is interpreted differently. The politics of location has led some among them to perceive Pakistani feminists as siding with the racist imperialism and hegemonic feminism of western countries, while feminists located in Pakistan have a divergent perspective on the issue. Those attempting to reclaim a Muslim identity within an alternative Islamic discourse tend to perceive themselves as more indigenous and home-grown than 'westernized' feminists living in Pakistan.

The approach of the mostly new generation of feminists who seek to reconcile their feminism with faith-based politics, or work within a religious framework, has been challenged by a different generation of feminists functioning within a secular feminist tradition. Fauzia Gardezi offered an early critique of the WAF movement in Pakistan by arguing that the women's movement encountered problems in attempting to function within an Islamic framework inherently opposed to women's interests, and by failing to sufficiently incorporate feminist knowledge and principles into

the movement. [82]

The new 'piety movements' such as Al-Huda and AlNoor seem to focus more on personal piety than a political interrogation of the politics of religion. A closer look at the content of their education reveals the deeply patriarchal and gendered nature of the messages they are expected to internalize. [83] Afiya Zia, while discussing the new identity politics and cyber activism, laments that the post-modern feminist consciousness, particularly visible among a new generation of young cyber activists, threatens the project of secularization and democracy through rendering the women's movement irrelevant and outdated. [84] In her view, the debilitating identity politics is not just a reflex response to post 9/11 consciousness, it is the reconfiguration of post-colonial identities located in modernity and tradition in newer ways.

Among the new generation feminists, Zia stands out as a voice staunchly opposed to the political use of religion and the location of resistance politics within a religious worldview. She argues that the ascendancy of a new feminism in Islamic discourse which is 'nonconfrontational, privatized and personalized', the aim of which is to 'empower' women within Islam, is not a post-9/11 development as is often assumed. Rather, it is the consequence of 'unresolved debates on the issue of religion within the progressive women's movement'. [85] It is the accommodation of religion-based feminist arguments by the primarily secular feminist movement of the 1980s that paved the way for legitimizing such voices and, in the process, marginalizing its own agenda. Zia asserts that the new re-constructionist politics of feminism that seeks to separate negative cultural practices from 'pure' religion, eventually pays a price for 'such a project is willing to sacrifice if it does not fit the cultural, spiritual or political requirements of an increasingly conservative and anti-women agenda of the religio-political forces in Pakistan'. [86] In a scathing critique of Islamist feminist activists, Afiya Shehrbano Zia argues:

In fact, many Islamist activists now out-rightly challenge the very notion and definition of women's equal rights altogether, insisting on protection rather than rights. Such 'culturally sensitive' and 'nonoffensive' awareness campaigns do not aim to change the social relationships within communities; they do not disturb the current patriarchal binds that control women's sexualities; and they do not empower women to activate any choice over their bodily rights or, indeed, decision-making over personal matters. [87]

Zia points out that although Islamist feminists themselves are often Western-educated, they 'question the relevance of liberal women's rights activism and invest a hope (like international donor agencies) in the authenticity of religious political actors, however conservative, oppressive and restrictive their agenda may be for the majority of citizens, especially minorities and women.' [88] There is ample evidence to show that the agenda of religious political actors is conservative and restrictive, yet some donors insist on going through the religious-cultural approach to development through the medium of faith-based organizations.

Other feminists point out internal contradictions within the religious discourse on women. In her critique of the Al-Huda movement in Pakistan and internationally, Sadaf Ahmad concludes that while this organization has been successful in highlighting and redefining women's Muslim identity, and associating it with Pakistani identity, the movement aims at creating a monolithic culture and instills particular values and behavioral patterns that may be at variance with other ways of being Muslim for which it provides no space. [89] Ahmad does not appear to question the legitimacy of using an inherently patriarchal religious discourse to promote women's rights; rather, she finds Al-Huda's narrative inadequate for dealing with the vast array of religious articulations, and challenges the

fact that the discourse of such organizations is monolithic leaving no space for alternative versions of being religious.

Al-Huda and Al-Hafsa may be two very different kinds of women's religious movements, but both appear to reproduce and reinforce deeply conservative cultures of patriarchy that ultimately seek to subordinate women. In spite of the deep suspicion of faith-based politics among secular feminists, Nighat Khan outlines some of the dilemmas of working in an environment where Islam is the dominant religion of the majority community, and the state is defined within its parameters. [90] It is difficult to argue that the personal is political, while upholding a secular position that strictly separates the private from public and personal from political, and particularly so in a context where there is no organized Church from which to separate the state. [91]

The interpenetration of the public and private is much greater in Pakistan than in other countries where the two are kept relatively, though not completely, separate. In fact, Amina Jamal argues that the modernizing state and secular nationalism have strengthened patriarchal control over women by recreating the private and public domains, with the former representing culture and tradition, and the latter the legal-political arena. [92] Farida Shaheed argues that everyday life blurs the lines that divide the conceptual separation of the political from cultural, social, and economic, and religious groups actively support and collude in inserting religion in the legal apparatus. [93] She cautions against the use of the 'faith-based' versus the 'non-faith based' binary as it 'feeds into the agenda of the selfappointed guardians of religion (in this case Islam) who promote themselves as 'faith based' to the exclusion of all others as non-believers'. [94] It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the religious and non-religious domains in a country where religion has become a hegemonic discourse, not only at the political level but also in civil society. [95]

The rise of racism and ubiquitous Islamophobia in western countries has led to a debate over whether the interests of the Pakistani feminists coincide with those of the imperial state and its war-on-terror. Saadia Toor, a Marxist sociologist, claims that the imperial power is using the narrative of rescuing Afghan women from the 'brutal' and 'savage' Muslim men even though a decade of war has shown that the conditions of Afghan women have worsened as a result of the occupation. [96] She accuses liberal feminists of collaborating with the occupying power in condemning Muslim men and seeking their extermination. Toor decries what she perceives as the liberal feminist authorization and legitimization of military operations against the Taliban in Swat and South and North Waziristan. She rejects the notion that secularism is the answer to the ravages wrought by the specific version of religion imposed on the people.

Afiya Zia strongly contests Toor's views and challenges the idea that Islamophobia has become some kind of a permanent condition of existence. [97] She defends Pakistani feminists, basing her arguments on the reign of terror unleashed by the Taliban and other extremist groups in the country. Zia points out that the WAF statement on military operations was extremely cautionary and nuanced because of the basic mistrust of the military and the inevitability of civilian casualties. Whether it was operation *Raah-e-Raast* in Swat, *Raah-e-Nijaat* in South Waziristan or *Zarb-e-Azb* in North Waziristan, WAF has been extremely skeptical of military intentions and circumspect in its opinion. While wanting those responsible for the bombing of girls' schools, Imambargahs, mosques and *dargahs* of revered saints (Rehman Baba, Data Gunj Buksh and Abdullah Shah) to be brought to justice, Pakistani feminists have never supported or legitimized unbridled military operations. Feminists in Pakistan have never supported unqualified violence by any arm of the state.

It is instructive to remember that Pakistani feminists were vehemently opposed to the use of religion in politics and for decades resisted the onslaught of a fundamentalist religion by the state as well as political parties, arguing that this would lead to the division of society along sectarian lines and an increase in violence against women and minorities. WAF was staunchly opposed to the creation of

the Taliban by the Pakistani state and the US at a time when religious clerics were completely in league with US imperialism. Forgetting this history makes it appear as though feminists jumped on the US bandwagon after 9/11 for personal gains. The reality is that feminists warned of the dangers of creating terrorists at a time when the US, the Pakistani state and the clergy were busy educating and arming them, up until they lost control over them. The Taliban are not a departure but a consequence and continuity of imperial intervention beginning with the Afghan Jihad of 1979. Feminists were opposed to US imperialism long before the religious clerics, and several feminists have written about the rapacious US war against Iraq and other countries. [98]

The debates between religious and secular feminists, a reflection of the national debates on a religious or secular state, continue and the issue is far from resolved. As Pakistan's constitution declares that Islam is the state religion, such debates are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. However, they have been sharpened with the advent of the Taliban and lately the Daish (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS/ISIL). There has been an alarming rise of religion-based and sectarian violence, initially spawned by the fraudulent 'war on terror'.

One of the problems is that secularism has not been defined in Pakistan and there is little serious research on the genesis and development of the concept. As a consequence, most conservative critics define it as the total absence of religion from life and find that this would usher in immorality.

Secularists, on the other hand, usually define secularism as the exclusion of religion from state law and policy, arguing that a state that is multi-religious must not make reference to any religion while formulating law and policy. A state defined by one religion would automatically exclude those adhering to other faiths, thus reducing them to the status of lesser citizens. Equality of citizenship, a prerequisite for democracy, requires the state to be secular. Secularism is a necessary but insufficient condition for social emancipation. The debate about the state positioning itself as equidistant from every religion, neither favoring nor disfavoring any, insofar as that religion does not violate any basic rights, has not even begun in Pakistan. Such a debate seems nearly impossible given that the constitution declares Islam as the state religion and sovereignty belongs to Allah.

Is there an autonomous feminist or women's movement in Pakistan?

The above heading is framed as a question because there seems to be a deafening silence, a pregnant pause, a disquieting quiet in the women's movement today. It seems as if there is a pause - a hiatus as the heady activism and passionate engagement of yesteryear seems to be missing. There are murmurs, disquietude, occasional rumblings of protest, of anger from different corners. But the raging passion of earlier decades and collective action across the country seem to be absent. There are issues but few debates, problems but little engagement. What seems to be seriously missing is a common collective vision of a better world, agreed upon strategies to create such a world, and shared understandings of the world in which we live and work. It is important to briefly explore how feminists tend to see the women's movement in the present moment in time. This section is based mainly on the responses of the feminists interviewed for the country paper.

Pakistani Feminists differ on what constitutes a movement and whether, at the current juncture of history, a financially and ideologically autonomous feminist movement exists. There seem to be strands and fragmentation instead of a coherently articulated movement reminiscent of the decade of the 1980s. It is useful to look at how feminists conceive the issue in our contemporary era of widespread cooptation and decline of politics globally and nationally.

Feminist activist, Tahira Abdullah, thinks there is not even one such movement although there are several groups, platforms, networks and coalitions. [99] Some of them, she argues, purport to be

'women's movements' but are not necessarily feminist. In her view, Women's Action Forum was conceptualized, created and functioned along feminist principles. However, WAF is no longer very active in Lahore and Islamabad but in Karachi, Hyderabad and Peshawar it is still functioning actively. Welfare and service delivery organizations are generally believed to be neither rights-based nor feminist in orientation. Movements, such as Sindhiani Tehreek, which espouse certain feminist principles, exist in small geographic pockets. It appears that the founding mothers of earlier movements have failed to mentor or inspire a second or third generation of young women with the kind of passionate commitment witnessed in earlier decades.

There seems to be general agreement that the nongovernmental organizations, irrespective of the substantial amount of work done by them, do not constitute a movement let alone an autonomous one. Tahira Abdullah holds that even effectively functioning coalitions and networks do not conform to the idea of a movement. According to her:

NGOs are not movements (autonomous or otherwise) as they are mostly donor-funded with donor-driven agendas, and they are usually not free to select either their geographic areas or thematic sectors of work... movements are run with passion, commitment and dedication, and with the spirit of volunteerism - not as a salaried nine to five project. Internally, Pakistani women's movements are scattered, fragmented, divided, competitive and inclined to rivalry, turf wars and territoriality, and are neither organized nor cooperative. Many activists succumbed to NGOisation, some out of need. [100]

However, a few comparatively autonomous and independent NGOs, for example, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, ASR, Shirkat Gah and Simorgh which challenge social, political and economic structures of inequality and patriarchy, are seen as 'unacceptable' by the state and have been subjected to all kinds of retaliation by governments. This is one of the major constraints and impediments for the movement, and ASR had to virtually shut down because of the refusal to compromise with statist, governmental or donor agendas. Feminist activist and researcher, Ayesha Khan recalls that there was an ongoing debate over whether or not 'our activism was being diluted through our work in NGOs? Should we be doing political activism only, ie joining or forming a political party?' [101] This debate continues to the present day.

Feminist Researcher, Saba Khattak, takes a similar though a more nuanced view. She believes that there is small and subtle change in the manner in which women's issues are conceptualized, for example, in the media. The enormous work that NGOs have accomplished has had an impact, but to call them a movement would not be right unless funded movements are movements. [102] In the case of NGOs, the positions and institutions are funded and without the availability of funds many of these NGOs would wither away. The NGO movement is certainly not autonomous either financially or in terms of the agendas and ideologies reflected. In contemporary times, the NGOization and projectization of women's issues has led to all kinds of initiatives being defined as a movement. Various human rights and women's rights organizations seem to incorporate feminist values in varying degrees. Khattak points towards an important contradiction when she says:

Feminist principles can inform an autonomous women's movement so long as the movement with its autonomy does not threaten the larger system. This is why micro-credit or bringing/integrating women into the market is not contested but the right to abortion or even a survey on domestic violence becomes highly contested.

As long as the empowerment of women remains non-threatening, and even serves the interests of capital to an extent, it is welcomed and accepted. However, when there is a threat to the patriarchal and capitalist state, governments appear to be much less amenable to change. Due to donor funding and the manner in which the government's male-dominated bureaucracies function (resonating with many donors/multilaterals), the feminist discourse has lost its edge as only a handful of feminists raise political and social development issues with a feminist lens.

The institutions that need to raise feminist issues, like the commissions on the status of women, are deliberately made ineffective through bureaucratic controls, red tape and scarce funding. Other institutional positions, such as the Ombudspersons for sexual harassment, are kept intentionally vacant. There are many other reasons including the lack of connection between academia especially women/gender studies centers and the women's movement. There is a need to examine the power relations game into which both men and women buy, and which is one of the reasons that there is no cohesive women's movement in Pakistan or indeed regionally and globally.

Feminist and Human Rights activist, Nasreen Azhar, believes that there is an autonomous women's movement in the country in the sense that women activists respond to issues and developments concerning women's rights and human rights and also confront challenges. [103] In agreement with Khattak, she argues that women in general are now more aware and willing to stand up for their rights. However, Azhar agrees that these movements are not informed by feminist principles and lack an understanding of the larger political picture. In her view, the decline of politics of the Left globally has contributed to de-politicization and the weakening of movements of all kinds.

Feminist artist, Lala Rukh points out that the discourse on patriarchy has been weak even within WAF, perhaps due to the presence of a number of conservative and religious women uncomfortable with the term 'feminism'. [104] While it may be true that secularism has not eliminated patriarchy, it is essential for non-Muslim citizens and women to be equal citizens of the state. While WAF remained a liberal organization/ umbrella owing to a diversity of members and member organizations, it has managed to place women's rights on the national agenda and no political party or government can afford to ignore these anymore. With regard to whether or not NGOs constitute a movement Lala Rukh opines:

Funding activity muted the movement and many NGOs do feminist work, but since it is a job there is less of the passion and anger of the early WAF years; paid activism is not really activism, it is just a job.

Feminist activist and researcher, Afiya Zia, thinks that WAF comes closest to being an autonomous and committed women's movement. [105] In her view, 'NGOs have become the sanctuary for paid rights-based activism'. Zia does not believe that the NGOs constitute an autonomous movement as they are dependent upon media amplification of their work and donors. As she says:

I think Aurat Foundation is the saddest example of the collapse and ultimate compromise of the women's movement in Pakistan as it sits outsourcing the work of and in the lap of USAID pretending it's still an NGO...a sad legacy to its dynamic founders. Ironically, its workers still do some fantastic work even if I don't define that as a feminist cause or even as working for the ends that an autonomous women's movement does/should. Interestingly, many of the staff members bring rights-based cases to WAF for action!

The past decade has been defined by debates on religion versus secularism and the theme of the

War on Terror as an imperial war, and the collaboration of women's movements with dominant global actors. Zia argues that while diasporic activists have romanticized FATA and the militants, Pakistani women activists have been preoccupied with resistance against the imperial and local patriarchal nexus which produces acts such as the shooting of Malala Yousafzai, the murder of polio workers and the bombing of schools, mosques, churches, imambargahs and shrines. In contemporary times the state, governments, non-state actors and global imperial pursuits are not the only impediments for the feminist agendas; rather, the choices made and identities chosen by some of the women leaders who capitulated to Islamist discourses, also constitute a major constraint. If they had been more resilient in their secular outlook, believes Zia, the state and non-state actors would not have been able to impose their agendas so belligerently.

Feminist researcher and activist, Ayesha Khan, thinks that there is a women's movement in Pakistan which includes a range of views on women's oppression, and the activists who participate in it agree that structures which oppress women must be changed. [106] However, unless participants are self-consciously feminist, they cannot be a part of it. Activists have differing political views or approaches to religion and understanding of feminist theory depending upon their exposure and education. Women's issues are so serious in Pakistan, and the violations so grave that the very act of uniting to resist them is an important feminist statement, and women who do so are a part of the growing women's movement which may refer to localized issues such as land rights or specific issues such as that of Lady Health Workers. Khan believes that while women's rights activists have supported these uprisings, they have not been able to form sustained linkages with them. The class composition of the movement is largely based on middle and upper class women who head the networks and NGOs that carry out advocacy to secure women's rights. One of the paradoxes of the woman question in Pakistan is that the state is seen as a contributor to the oppression of women, unlike the early years of Pakistan when the expectation of the state and judiciary was of ultimate fairness.

Interviews with a cross-section of activists and feminists living and working in different cities, reveals that there are multiple, diverse and varying perspectives on whether or not a cohesive and organized feminist movement, as defined in the early sections of this paper, exists in Pakistan. To recapitulate, a movement needs to have at least four basic features: namely, a concise vision of the desired world, a clear analysis of the problem, a consciously thoughtout strategy, and collective agreement over its goals and aims. There are individuals and groups, albeit very few in number, which engage in active resistance against the state, governments, non-state actors, feudal, tribal and capitalist elites regarding manifestations of patriarchy. Many among these are unpaid activists who continue to reflect the passion and commitment that a movement seeks. Currently, no movement seems to strictly fit the definition used here, however, pockets of resistance and dispersed actions do constitute feminist activism. Whether or not there is a feminist *movement* currently in Pakistan depends heavily on how a movement is defined, articulated, conceived and understood.

At present there are few seething debates like the ones in the 1980s and 1990s, and little if any, sharing or cross-fertilization of work, ideas and thoughts. There seems to be a fragmentation that began with the proliferation of non-governmental organizations, each one focused on one small part of the issue, without any underlying structural framework within which to understand the subjugation of women. The concept of 'gender' displaced the far more political notion of patriarchy, thereby de-politicizing the discourse. It may be concluded that at the present juncture in history there is an absence of a cohesive women's movement with a common understanding of issues, shared strategies, and a collective vision of the kind of world to be created.

Conclusions, Constraints and Silences

Conclusions

From the discussions in this paper, four tentative conclusions may be drawn:

1. Feminist and women's rights consciousness in Pakistan has historically been shaped in response to national and global reconfigurations of power including colonialism, nationalism, dictatorship, democracy and the Global War on Terror (GWOt).
2. The relationship between the women's movement and the Pakistani state has undergone significant shifts, from mutual accommodation and a complementary ethos to confrontation and conflict, followed by collaboration, co-optation and, finally, collusion depending upon transformations in the nature of the state at particular moments in history.
3. The strategies of the women's movement reflect significant shifts, from a focus on education and welfare to legal reform, and ultimately to women's political and economic rights.
4. A historically consistent and sustained tension between the women's movement/feminism and the state, as well as between the movement and 'civil society' consisting of non-state actors, has resulted from specific articulations of religion at different times confronted by the impulse toward a secular ethos.

It seems that Pakistan's origin within a religious nationalism constructed in opposition to Hindu-India, has been the fountainhead for the inability of the state to emerge from that fictional paradigm. The mythologies crafted at the origin of the state have empowered those wielding power to use specific versions and articulations of religion to undermine democracy, secularism and women's rights. This is the reason that through most of the decades discussed in this paper women's rights were most seriously threatened and diminished in the name of religion. Oftentimes culture and tradition were also invoked to deny women's rights and equality, but the most intransigent discourse on women was the one produced from a religious point of view.

Constraints

In contemporary times, the movement is confronted by a host of impediments, constraints and opposition that occasionally takes a violent turn. In the past, the movement was faced with patriarchy in the form of the state bureaucracies, governments and feudal, tribal and capitalist patriarchies. In recent years, a new dimension has been added which consists of violent extremist, terrorist and sectarian militants whose viewpoint on women's issues is deeply rooted in conservative and patriarchal norms and values. The mushroom growth of sectarian and religious militant outfits threatens not only women's rights but also minority and human rights more generally. Women belonging to religious minority are threatened even more than the women of the majority community.

The increasing religiosity of a violent, imposing and narrow nature, concerned with personal piety and literal interpretations of religion, seeks to destroy diversity, tolerance and the right to believe or not believe. First, the rise of the Taliban and now the ascendancy of the Da'ish (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS/ISIL) are worrying developments as their articulations of religion are based on a severe, harsh, punitive, violent and completely intolerant brand of *Salafi* Islam.

In 2014, the madrassa students of the Jamia Hafsa, led by Lal Masjid in the heart of Islamabad, openly announced their allegiance to Abu Bakar Al-Baghdadi, the leader of the *Da'ish*. [107] Jamia Hafsa women were shown in a video tape urging Pakistani militants to join the ranks of the Islamic state. The women's movement is no longer pitted only against the patriarchal social, economic and political structures; there is now palpable danger from non-state actors who challenge the writ of

state. The dilemma that this situation poses for women is that on the one hand they must challenge the state for its denial of their rights, and on the other they have no choice but to support the state against those who seek to overrun it and impose their own system. How feminists negotiate their path through these complex situations remains to be seen.

Another major constraint, which continues from the past, is that in certain parts of Pakistan women are not allowed to vote during national, provincial and local government elections. Such reports have been received from across the country where several political parties, including the ones believed to be liberal and secular, have made pacts with one another to exclude women voters. Although this is against the law and rules of the Election Commission of Pakistan, not all the cases are necessarily reported. Whenever such reports have been available, women's groups and the National Commission on the Status of Women have protested to get the election results annulled. Nevertheless, this is an impediment in the women's exercise of their political rights and activists need to address it every time there is an election. This is closely related to the attitude of the majority of male political party members and legislators who actively participate in such pacts with religious parties.

The traditional problems that women face with regard to violence, health, education, environmental degradation, legal discrimination, discriminatory cultural and customary practices continue, although they are now much more highlighted in the media than before, thanks to the tireless efforts of women's groups. The struggle is long and there are many roadblocks along the way. Women's groups need to develop a clear vision and coherent strategies to deal with these issues as a *movement* rather than in a scattered and fragmented way.

Silences

A final point needs to be made about the deafening silences, absences and elisions within the middle class women's movement in Pakistan. What is not articulated, suppressed or absent is as much an issue as the actions taken, positions articulated and issues highlighted. The silences and absences briefly touched upon below do not cover the entire spectrum of the not spoken, but reflect some of the key issues not touched upon within the movement owing to various reasons. The purpose here is to draw attention to these with a view toward exposing the gaps so that in the future women's groups can turn their attention to them.

The most important silence is around the issues of family and sexuality, the mainstay of patriarchy and women's subjugation. The Pakistani women's movements have remained preoccupied with the state, law, customary practices, citizenship, identity, ideology and the economy, but have refrained from touching the issues of sexuality especially Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) even though there is increasing awareness of such issues globally. Questioning the family comes too close to home and seems to make women uncomfortable as they would then have to deal with representatives of patriarchy at home - fathers, brothers, husbands and sons - as well as older or more traditional women who comprise the bulwark of patriarchy. [108]

Middle class morality and norms, the 'convenience of subservience' in the patriarchal bargain and the deeplyheld notions of privacy have held members of WAF from exploring the forbidden territories of sexuality and heterosexual marriage. The fear of appearing westernized and alienated from the indigenous culture has also kept middle class women from expressing themselves even as stridently as Sindhiani peasant women who are able to articulate issues of sexuality and family explicitly.

Furthermore, the women's movement had to respond quickly to the relentless spate of discriminatory laws and measures designed to reduce their status and undermine their basic rights.

There was often little time for deeper reflection on the issues of patriarchy where it is most strongly articulated – in the home and family. WAF particularly was reactive in the early period as there was a need to respond speedily to state measures, therefore, little time was left for a deeper reflection on patriarchy. However, such reflections were abundant in the feminist literature produced during the 1990s and onwards, with the return of democracy and a reduction in the barrage of attacks on women’s rights by the state.

The subterranean stirrings of the forbidden within sub-conscious levels does make its way into private conversations; such sharing never sees the light of day in meetings where there is a constant fear of annoying the more conservative women who refuse to challenge the personal. The stifling self-censorship and silencing has been deeply wounding for many who have a need to engage at the level where patriarchy is most in control – family and body – but are often afraid to violate the genteel sensibilities of ‘respectable’ women.

Dr. Rubina Saigol

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] Friedrich Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in the light of the researches of Lewis H. Morgan*, New York: International Publishers, 1942.

[2] Minute by the Honorable T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835; according to Macaulay, ‘I feel with them that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, —a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.’

[3] Khutbaat-e-Sir Syed (Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan) compiled by Panipati, S.M.I. (Lahore: Majlis-e-Taraqqi-e-Adab, 1973); also see Rubina Saigol, ‘The Gendering of Modernity’, in Hussain, Neelam, Samiya Mumtaz & Rubina Saigol, *Engendering the Nation-state*, Vol. 1, Lahore: Simorgh, 1997.

[4] See Gail Minault, *Secluded Scholars: Women’s education and Muslim social reform in colonial India*. (Delhi/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[5] Akbar Allahabadi, *Kuliyat-e-Akbar Allahabadi* (Complete Works of Akbar Allahabadi) (Lahore: Maktaba-e-Shair-o-Adab. n.d).

[6] Muhammad Iqbal, Sir, *Kuliyat-e-Iqbal*, compiled by Kamran Mukhtar Khan (Lahore: Union Publications, n.d.).

[7] Ayesha Khan, *Rhetoric and Reform: Feminism among Indian Muslims: 1900 - 1940* (Lahore: ASR, 1999).

[8] Ayesha Khan, *Rhetoric and Reform*, 1999, p. 40.

[9] Ayesha Khan, *Rhetoric and Reform*, 1999, p. 44-45

- [10] Rubina Saigol, 'The Gendering of Modernity', in *Engendering the Nation-state*, Vol. 1, Hussain, Neelam, Samiya Mumtaz & Rubina Saigol (eds), Lahore: Simorgh, 1997.
- [11] Rubina Saigol, 'The Construction of Muslim Womanhood: Syed Ahmad Khan and Dipty Nazeer Ahmad', in *The Pakistan Project: A Feminist Perspective on Nation and Identity*, New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013, chapter One.
- [12] Quoted in Khawar Mumtaz & Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1987, p. 45.
- [13] Khawar Mumtaz & Farida Shaheed, 1987.
- [14] Khawar Mumtaz & Farida Shaheed, 1987.
- [15] At the Annual Session of the Muslim League in Lahore in 1940, Jinnah said in his speech: 'It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religious in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, literatures. They neither intermarry nor inter-dine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions.'
- [16] The debates over the passage of the Objectives Resolution and the protest of the minority members of the Constituent Assembly, especially the Hindu members from East Pakistan, have been outlined by Mubarak Ali; see Mubarak Ali, *Pakistan in Search of Identity*. Pakistan Study Centre, Karachi: University of Karachi, 2009.
- [17] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1987.
- [18] Rana Liaqat Ali's Naval reserve and Women's National Guard were probably a continuation of the British World War II effort at recruiting women to serve on the war front. Both Congress and Muslim League had agreed that they would cooperate in return for freedom and many young women joined the British Indian army as nurses and auxiliaries.
- [19] A brief history, methods and ideology of Sindhiani Tehreek have been outlined in an essay by Nighat Said Khan & Rubina Saigol; see 'Sindhiani Tehreek: Rural Women's Movement in Sindh', in Nighat Said Khan (ed), *Up Against the State: military rule and women's resistance*, Lahore: ASR, 2004.
- [20] The extensive and contentious debates within Women Action Forum have been outlined by as well as by Nighat Said Khan & Rubina Saigol, 'Women Action Forum: Debates and Contradictions', in Nighat Said Khan (ed), *Up Against the State: military rule and women's resistance*, Lahore: ASR, 2004; for a different perspective on these debates see Khawar Mumtaz & Farida Shaheed, *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back*; 1987.
- [21] Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1987.
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- [23] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century: The Gifford Lectures in the University of Edinburgh for 1973-4*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
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Palestine reveals their inherently negative proclivities. This is just one example but one has come across a number of 'liberal' men and male gender trainers whose misogyny was clearly evident.

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[52] See 'Military Takeover Divides NGO Opinions', Rights Pakistan, IPS, November 30, 1999.

[53] Interview with Ayesha Khan, September 18, 2015.

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- [73] The Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, (Act No. VII of 2014).
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