



LEGISLATIVE WATCH

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Religious extremism, women and the state

By Rubina Saigol

Colonial State, Modernity and Women:

Religious extremist groups and movements tend to exhibit inordinate levels of preoccupation with the regulation of women's lives, activities and bodies. Irrespective of the religious tradition to which such groups belong, the control over women and their actions is deemed vital for the group's survival. Ideologues belonging to nearly every religious tradition attempt to exert control over the minutiae of women's public and private existence.

Fundamentalists, among most religious groups, perceive a specific form of modernity as a threat to the basic values of the faith. While they accommodate themselves fairly easily to the consumerist modernity as manifested in the use of mobile phones, land cruisers, laptop computers, atomic bombs, tanks, fighter jets and fast

foods, they are mortified by its manifestation in the form of women's rights, women's equality and women's emancipation.

This contradiction may be attributed to the tendency within all national, religious and ethnic groups to regard women as the repositories of culture and tradition. Women are burdened with representing the continuity with the past that modernity has rudely interrupted.

During the colonial encounters, traditionalists and fundamentalists had to settle with men becoming modern for they needed to transact the business of commerce and politics with the outside world, and perforce had to interact with a modernizing public sphere. However, the private sphere had to be protected against the onslaught of an intrusive modernity so that the inner sanctum of the colonized would not be disturbed. Women, as the traditional occupiers of this sphere, were

expected to guard its four walls by rejecting the trappings of modernity. The role of women would thus preserve the illusion of control which was rapidly being ceded to the colonizer.

Post-colonial State, Modernity and Women

In post-colonial times the contradiction persists as the state has come to occupy the role of modernizer, while religious communities resist the impulse toward the emancipation of women. Nevertheless, it is precisely the level of women's emancipation that is defined as the signifier of modernity. In the constant battle between the forces attempting to create a modern, developed, liberal democracy, and those eager to retain the past against the forward march of history, women have become the battleground as well as the pawns and prizes. As a contested arena, the state itself has become contradictory - sometimes a reluctant

modernizer and at other times a hesitant traditionalist.

Unable to maintain control over the economy which is becoming integrated with global markets, Pakistan's rulers invariably capitulate on the rights of women when it comes to bargaining with religious leaders. With economic and political sovereignty having been ceded to Pakistan's creditors, the private sphere remains the only sovereign sphere. It is not surprising, therefore, that women's rights have been bartered away for political gains, not only by religious fundamentalists but also by ostensibly liberal and secular parties. In this process, the space for women's rights has shrunk considerably since the relatively freer decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Increasingly, orthodox and conservative ideologies have permeated deeply into society, and virtually no institution has remained untouched by the hegemonic presence of religious discourse.

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Nafisa for review of blasphemy law

National Assembly's Standing Committee on Minority Affairs has written to the Prime Minister to review the 'blasphemy laws'. Ms Nafisa Shah, member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Minorities, and General Secretary Women's Parliamentary Caucus, while participating in an e-discussion (SPN yahoo group, on 12.9.2009) on Gojra tragedy, wrote:

"I am member of the Standing Committee on Minorities and would like to inform this group that the Standing Committee on Minorities have written to the Prime Minister to review the blasphemy law in the aftermath of Gojra tragedy. We have stated that these laws have caused religious violence and have been used to settle personal scores. The laws have made minorities vulnerable but have also been used against people of the Muslim majority and several cases of public lynching and mob violence are incited on the premise of blasphemy. I hope now the civil society would follow up on this positive move by the Standing committees on Minorities."

Gojra tragedy bares several weaknesses

On 30 July, 2009, some local Muslims in Korian and Gojra village made allegations against Talib Masih, Mukhtar Masih and Imran Masih for burning the Holy Quran. The accused denied the allegation and yet angry Muslims crowd, led by their religious preachers, burnt down several Christian houses. The incident followed a series of further violence and allegations between the Muslims and Christians. The Gojra tragedy stirred the human rights organizations and their networks deep from heart. The response was quick and composed - press conference, demonstrations, rallies, discussions etc. The discussions and demands focused on the 'repeal of blasphemy laws' - the infamous laws introduced by military dictator General Zial-ul-Haq.

It was a planned attack: HRCP

(HRCP fact-finding report on Gojra incident was released on 4 August 2009)

Last week's attacks targeting the Christian community in Gojra were not a spontaneous reaction to allegations of blasphemy but were planned in advance, a fact-finding mission of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has found.

The mission's report, released on Tuesday, 4 August, 2009, said announcements made from mosques in Gojra on July 31 urged the Muslims to gather and "make mincemeat of the Christians". Witnesses told HRCP that when they informed the police about the announcements, the police officials had also confirmed hearing the announcements.

On the following day, August 1,

around 1,000 people gathered in the town and marched towards Christian Colony. A police contingent present in the neighbourhood did not try to stop the mob, which included a number of masked men.

Witnesses said the attackers went about destroying Christians' houses in a very professional manner, and seemed to be trained for carrying out such activities. They had brought along petrol and other inflammable substances and torched over 40 houses of Christian families in less than half an hour. Many of these houses were looted before being torched. Muslims' houses adjacent to the Christians'

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IHI demands exemplary punishment for culprits

Insani Haqooq Itehad (IHI), a network of human rights organizations in Islamabad-Rawalpindi, strongly condemned the attack on innocent Christians in Gojra by armed people that left behind 8 persons killed and 19 injured. The Gojra incident once again brings to limelight the notorious blasphemy law and its misuse for selfish gains by some members of Muslim community. The non-cooperation and negligence of the district administration and law enforcement agencies is regrettable who allowed armed groups to attack, terrorize and harass the Christian community. While appreciating government's action and institution of judicial enquiry, the IHI demanded exemplary punishment for the culprits and compensation for the victim families.

Legislative review of Domestic Violence Bill, 2009

By Maliha Zia Khan

The National Assembly of Pakistan made history on 4 August 2009 by passing the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2009. This Bill was introduced in the National Assembly by Ms. Yasmeen Rehman, an MNA from PPP, as a private members bill, in 2008. Its approval marks a monumental moment in the history of the National Assembly of Pakistan.

The necessity of a Domestic Violence Bill (DVB) has been high on the agenda of the civil society for a number of years. There has been a constant demand for a specific legislation to effectively deal with this deeply rooted and serious issue, in order to provide support and protection for victims, and to try to prevent such instances. Civil society is highly appreciative of the promulgation of this Bill and extends its congratulations not only to the movers of the Bill, but also to all participants on the 4th August 2009 vote, as well as everyone who has participated in the pushing for the promulgation of the DVB.

However, despite this appreciation, this celebration is tainted with the realization there although there are a number of good provisions within the Bill, there also remain a number of lacunas, which will seriously effect the implementation of the Bill. There are, therefore, some grave implications of this Bill is it passed in this form.

The DVB still has to be passed by the Senate if it is to become law of the land. Therein lies a window of opportunity for the nation to correct any mistakes in the current draft. If the Senate does not pass this version, it will thereby be returned to the National Assembly, with its objections to make the necessary changes.

This article highlights some of the major loopholes within the legislation passed by the National Assembly in August 2009. It focuses on the main points, rather than a re-examination of the whole legislation. The aim is to ensure that these gaps are dealt with effectively by the Senate, and thereafter the National Assembly in order to avoid a problematic and futile legislation.

The main loopholes and suggested amendments with comments explaining the rationale of these changes are given below (*the full article with original text of the relevant sections and suggested amendments can be seen on Aurat Foundation's website www.af.org.pk - Editor*)

Suggested Amendment 1:

The word 'man' has been removed from the definition of aggrieved person. While a number of people feel that men should be included within this legislation, as they too sometimes suffer domestic violence, there are a num-

ber of vital reasons why they should be excluded. Firstly, this is a women and child specific bill, focusing on a problem which is faced primarily by them. Even the name of the legislation reflects this principle. These, along with yet to be defined vulnerable parties, are the regular victims of different forms of domestic violence, and are particularly at risk due to their lack of access to justice, movement, freedom and other fundamental rights. Furthermore, due to the 'private' nature of the home and family, such abuses are not usually recognized by the police, court and other bodies supposedly providing justice. The point of view of such bodies is that this is a private affair and not their place to get involved. This is why a legislation specifically providing these vulnerable parties avenues for justice is promulgated in the first place and is vital!

Men on the other hand, on the most part, do have the freedom of movement and easier access to courts, police etc. Furthermore, when there is violence committed on men, the police, courts etc, are willing to recognize it as a punishable crime and willing to report it, without the issue of 'privacy of home and family' as an obstacle, as it does with women and children. Therefore, a specific bill for the protection of the rights, they by and large already have protected, is not needed.

Secondly, there is great danger of this being exploited to the disadvantage of women. Simply put, if a man can use this action against a woman, initiating a claim of domestic violence against her, it can be used as a yet another tool of blackmail, manipulation, torture and a method of 'easy' divorce without consequences, in cases of revenge etc. Mis-used, this could be a horrendous and dangerous tool against women.

Suggested Amendment 2:

The earlier definition of 'harassment' contained in the Government and civil society draft was more comprehensive and identified different forms of harassment, previously not specifically recognized. This definition was never thought to be objectionable by any party and was in fact appreciated. It is necessary to re-introduce the more detailed definition in order to attain the true sense of the word.

Suggested Amendment 3:

The provincial government has also been given the duty to implement this legislation in "Section 3. Duty of Government to ensure effective implementation of the Act"

Suggested Amendment 4:

It is important to include medico legal staff in the trainings (section 1. (b)), as they are very often the first persons to deal with the victims. The section 1. (b) would read as: 1. (b) - the government officers, the police, *medico legal*

staff and the members of the judicial service are given periodic sensitization and awareness training on the issues addressed by this Act; and

Suggested Amendment 5:

While the role given to the NCSW is applauded, it is also vital to not only give it a role as a recommendatory body but a body with actual powers and authority (section 2 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f). There should be clarity as to who reports to the NCSW; the powers the NCSW holds i.e. to call the investigating officers to report to them etc; and the mandatory inclusion of NCSW in implementation of this legislation in various capacities.

Suggested Amendment 6:

The words "or unintentional" added after the word "intentional" in section 4 that defines domestic violence. Retaining the word "intentional" only here could very well result in the dismissal of a large number of cases if the act of domestic violence is not proved to be 'intentional'. Excuses such as 'mistake', 'ignorance' and 'accident' could be easily used to counter any complaint of domestic violence, resulting in immediate acquittal. After the suggested amendment the section would read: 4. Domestic Violence-Domestic Violence includes but is not limited to, all intentional or unintentional acts of gender based or other physical or psychological abuse committed by an accused against women, children or other vulnerable persons, with whom the accused is or has been in a domestic relationship including but not limited to:

Suggested Amendment 7:

The definition in clause (m) of section 4, which explains "Emotional, psychological and verbal abuse", should be changed to be more detailed. In revolutionary acts such as this one, it is necessary to specify certain examples of behaviour that would be included in this act, rather than leaving it entirely to interpretation: After additions, the clause (m) would read: (m) "Emotional, psychological and verbal abuse"- means a pattern of degrading or humiliating conduct towards the victim, including but not limited to:

- a) repeated insults or ridicule;
- b) repeated threats to cause bodily harm;
- c) repeated threats of malicious prosecution;
- d) repeated exhibition of obsessive possessiveness or jealousy constituting serious invasion of the victim's privacy, liberty, integrity or security;
- e) entry into the victim's residence without his/her consent, where the parties do not share the same residence;
- f) damaging any property of the victim such that it causes psychological harm or otherwise violates the dignity of the person

Suggested Amendment 8:

The definition of domestic violence does not include 'abetting' i.e. persons who aid and assist others in commission of an act of domestic violence. It is important to include all participants in this definition as the violence may be subjected by one person, but there are others who implicitly or explicitly support the aggressor in different forms. Their role needs to be recognized and punished. The following two additions are suggested:

Addition: (q) *Abet-* means to instigate or intentionally aid by any act or omission the doing of a thing which may lead to an offence under this Act.

Addition: 4(1) a. *Offences under Section 4 defined by Pakistan Penal Code shall have the same punishments as provided for in the relevant sections of the Pakistan Penal Code.*

1 b. *Whoever commits domestic violence of any kind defined within this Section and not falling under the definitions given in Pakistan Penal Code, shall be punishable with imprisonment of either description which shall not be less than six months and/or a fine which may not be less than Fifty Thousand Rupees. The court shall order that the amount of fine shall be given to the aggrieved person*

Suggested Amendment 9:

Service providers and the Protection Committee/ Officer should also be allowed to present applications to the Court on behalf of the aggrieved party with or without authorized, written consent. The suggested amendment in section 5 Application to the court is: (1) An aggrieved person or any other person authorized by the aggrieved person in writing in this behalf, or a service provider or Protection Committee without or without authorized consent, if the situation requires it, may present an application to the Court within whose jurisdiction offence was Committed for seeking any relief under this Act.

Suggested Amendment 10:

An amendment as clause (3) is suggested in section 6. Counselling after clauses (1) and (2), where it is presumed that the reason by this counselling is the treatment of the accused. The addition reads: (3) *The report of the counseling made by the relevant authority will be submitted into court as evidence and may be used whilst making the final decision, but with the assurance that the plea of lunacy will not be acceptable for defense or mitigation purposes.*

The report of the counselor should also be included as evidence for the case and should reflect the behavioural patterns of the accused and the possibility of him committing another act of violence again.

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Suggested Amendment 11:

The word 'may' has been replaced by the word 'shall' in section 8. Passing of protection orders and residence orders. If there is evidence of domestic violence, the victim needs immediate protection and the court needs to ensure this protection. There should not be a question of whether or not a protection order SHOULD be passed, it MUST be passed in order to protect the victim. The clause (1) would read after the amendment as: 1) The court on being satisfied that domestic violence has taken place shall pass a protection order in favour of the aggrieved person and prohibit the accused from-

Suggested Amendment 12:

Land revenue arrears have been included in section 9. Monetary relief, as possible alternatives to payment of monetary relief to the victim.

Suggested Amendment 13:

The Interim Order under Section 11, also needs to have a time limit. The court hearing will be heard within 3 days, but often there is an immediate need for the Protection Order for continuing or immediate apprehended domestic violence. Therefore, section 11 (2), after amendment (in italics) reads: (2) If the court is satisfied that an application prima facie discloses that the accused is committing, or has committed an act of domestic violence or that there is a likelihood that the accused may commit an act of domestic violence, it may on the basis of affidavit, *grant an immediate interim ex-parte order, restraining the accused from contacting the aggrieved party, complainant and engaging in any act of domestic violence, subject to confirmation after hearing the parties;*

Suggested Amendment 14

The only forms of 'punishment' for the commission of an act of domestic violence lie in Sections 8 - 10: a protection order, residence order, monetary relief or a custody order. The only penal punishments are in Section 13 for the breach of a protection order. In effect, domestic violence has therefore not been criminalized, nor is it being treated as a criminal act!!

The suggested amendments in section 13 have increased the lower and upper ceiling of punishments.

However, in order to effectively deal with this social evil it is vital that an act of domestic violence be punished with imprisonment and/or fine at first instance. It MUST be treated as a criminal act and the punishments MUST be meted out accordingly.

Suggested Amendment 15:

Section 14 of the Bill is about formation of Protection committees: and it reads: (1) The Provincial Government

shall, by notification in the official Gazette constitute a Protection Committee in every Tehsil for the purposes of this Act.

(2) A Protection Committee shall comprise of one Police Officer male or female of the rank of Sub-divisional Police Officer, a female SHO and two women councilors from the Tehsil Council concerned and the Protection Officer who shall also act as the Secretary of the Protection Committee.

There are very few, if at all any female SHOs in the country, much less in all the tehsils. If the Protection Committee does not have the necessary members, it will not be formed and therefore become redundant. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that where women are not available, committees should be formed with male police officers. Also, with regard to Sub-divisional Police Officers, a clear preference will be given to a female.

Therefore, the changes suggested to this section are reflected in italics; and it would read after amendments as: 14. Protection Committee.- (1) The Provincial Government shall, by notification in the official Gazette constitute a Protection Committee in every Tehsil for the purposes of this Act.

(2) A Protection Committee shall comprise of one Police Officer, preferably a female, of the rank of Sub-divisional Police Officer, an SHO, *a female wherever available*, and two women councilors from the Tehsil Council concerned and the Protection Officer who shall also act as the Secretary of the Protection Committee.

Suggested Amendment 16:

The word 'may' be replaced by the word 'shall', in section 15. Duties and functions of Protection Committee, thereby obligating the Protection Committee to perform the role under Section 15, rather than giving them the choice to do so or not. Giving them a choice may result in arbitrary choices of when to act and when not to, resulting in the already existing bias against proceeding in cases on domestic violence to be continued where the Committee has a choice to act. Members of committees may hold such biases and without the obligation to act, they may continuously choose to perpetuate the bias and refuse to act, thereby not providing protection to victims and potential victims.

Suggested Amendment 17:

Section 19 is about Duties of Protection Officers. It is necessary to give the Protection Officers powers of independent investigation. Most domestic violence cases do not come in the form of an official complaint. The requirement that the Protection Officer can only make a domestic incident report and then investigate incidents of violence means that without an official 'complaint', s/he cannot look

into the matter even if there is unofficial information.

The suggested amendment here is to add a new Section 19(a), which would read: *(a) enter upon a place where he has been given credible information of domestic violence or imminent domestic violence likely to cause physical harm to the victim, and shall take all steps necessary to ensure that the victim is protected to its satisfaction;*" The current section 19(a) will be re-numbered as Section 19(b), and the rest will change accordingly.

Suggested Amendment 18:

Section 25 of the bill is about Penalty for filing a false complaint. It reads: "Whoever gives an application to the court containing information about the commission of domestic violence which he knows or has reason to believe to be false, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months or with fine which may extend to fifty thousand rupees or with both."

This section is the most disturbing and harmful section in the legislation. It is important to note in all previous Government bills, this section was not in existence.

The effect of this section is simple: it makes the legislation null and void. It means that if anyone files a complaint of domestic violence and is unable to prove it for whatsoever reason - also noting that this will be difficult to prove in the first place - they will in turn be punished for false accusation. This would mean that practically no aggrieved party/victim/complainant will ever file a case in fear of reactionary punishment to them.

This is an arbitrary clause and it is vital that it be removed entirely!! The success of the Government accepted domestic violence as an illegal act and a crime is completely negated by this clause. If this section goes through, it reflects a hypocritical perspective of the parliamentarians and senators who on one hand claim to work for protection of women and provide them that through this legislation, and on the other hand take away the protection through this clause!

This section needs to be removed and no other similar clause should be in this legislation.

Suggested Amendment 19:

Section 27 is about Power to make rules. It is necessary to add a time limit to the making of the rules. If no time limit is prescribed, then the implementation of the legislation could be held up for years. The amendment suggests: (1) The Federal Government shall by notification in the Official Gazette make rules *within a period of three months*, for carrying out the purposes of this Act.—*The Author is a legal expert on AF's panel of lawyers.*

NCSW rejects CII stance on DVB

In a statement issued to the press, the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) strongly reacted to the reservations expressed by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) over the recently passed domestic violence bill (DVB) saying that there is no possibility of it shooting up the divorce rate. The NCSW said:

- A major cause of divorce is domestic violence, which is endemic in Pakistan, and, it is hoped, that giving women means of redress will serve to decrease violence and abuse. Family problems, including divorces, occur because of violence against women and not because a solution is being sought.
- The Commission stressed that the divorce rate was bound to go down, if men were to stop beating their wives.
- The CII's concern that old and weak men can also suffer violence in a domestic situation has been addressed by the bill, but it needs to be recognised that largely the women were the victims of such crimes.
- The Commission recommended that the clause relating to the punishment of six months' imprisonment and 50,000 rupees fine, for the victim, in case she was lying, should be removed. Every law can be abused and there is already a punishment on the books for perjury, but the Commission fears that this clause will serve as deterrence for women who may wish to report violence.

Sherry defends legislation

Commenting on the reservations expressed by the Council of Islamic Ideology on the recent legislation on the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2009, Ms Sherry Rehman, a PPP MNA and former Information Minister, who had authored the original bill on domestic violence in 2004, said that unjust criticism of the law is a disservice to those who suffer abuse in their private relationships.

The PPP Parliamentarian said that the CII's objections regarding the possibility of violation of the sanctity of home ignores the fact that domestic violence takes place within the confines of home. Ms Sherry Rehman also criticized the CII's reference to increase in divorce rates as a result of this law.

'Does this mean that we should let our citizens suffer in silence because taking a stand against rights abuse could lead to separation from the person who violates the sanctity of a relationship? Surely, no association could survive in any way if it is characterised by imbalances, abuse, and unfair domination of one person over the other.'

WPC for parliamentary debate on CEDAW report

The Women Parliamentary Caucus held its Sixth General Assembly on July 4, 2009, in the Parliament House with Ms Nafisa Shah, Secretary General (WPC) in the chair. Ms Navamane Ratna Patten, Regional Expert on CEDAW (Mauritius) and Member of the United Nations CEDAW Committee, also attended the General Assembly as a special invitee.

Ms Navamane Ratna Patten apprised the WPC about the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). She said that CEDAW Committee was an expert body established in 1982, composed of 23 experts on women's issues from around the world with a specific mandate to oversee the progress for women made in those countries that are the States parties to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She said "it becomes legally obligatory for a country when it ratifies or accedes to the Convention to counteract discrimination against women".

She said that last session of the CEDAW Committee deliberated for



Ms Nafisa Shah, Secretary General of the Women Parliamentary Caucus, chairing her meeting at the Parliament House.

evolving the role of parliamentarians in the gender specific issues. The committee recommended that the CEDAW Report should be placed before the parliament prior to submitting it to the UN. She also suggested for inclusion of parliamentarians, representatives of private sector organizationa, NGOs and other stakeholders in the government delegation to CEDAW Committee.

Ms Nafisa Shah in her remarks said that establishment of WPC was a giant leap towards achieving the goal of women's emancipation and protection of women's rights in wake of the grow-

ing challenges towards women's empowerment and massive women's rights violations. She agreed with Ms Navamane Ratna Patten for dilating upon the CEDAW Report in the parliament before submitting it to UN.

The members of the WPC also expressed their views on the women specific issues and stressed for gender sensitization and gender budgeting to achieve the long-term objectives of the women empowerment and protection of their rights. They suggested for involvement of women parliamentarians in the preparation of CEDAW reports for political ownership.

Cases of violence against women in Pakistan

(Reported during January to June 2009)

A total of 4514 incidents of violence against women were reported in the four provinces of Pakistan and in capital territory Islamabad during January to June 2009. Of these, 3067 violence cases were recorded in Punjab; 835 in Sindh; 327 in NWFP; 175 in Balochistan and 111 in Islamabad. Almost all these cases are reported cases. Among these, FIR of only 3099 cases was registered, 759 cases were not registered while there is no evidence found in media regarding the FIR status of remaining 656 cases.

This was stated in a bi-annual report of 2009 on the "Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan", released by Aurat Foundation, Islamabad. Senior members of the Violence against Women Watch Group, Dr Mustafa Solangi and Ms Arifa Mazhar presented the findings of the six-monthly report.

Out of a total of 4514 cases of violence against women in Pakistan, the offence-wise and province-wise breakdown is as follows. There were 691 cases of murder (393 in Punjab, 135 in Sindh, 111 in NWFP, 26 in Balochistan, 26 in Islamabad), 293 cases of 'honour' killing (119 in Punjab, 132 in Sindh, 0 in NWFP, 41 in Balochistan, 1 in Islamabad), 1046 cases of abduction/kidnapping, (901 in

Punjab; 79 in Sindh; 31 in NWFP; 4 in Balochistan; 31 in Islamabad), 332 cases of domestic violence, (149 in Punjab; 75 in Sindh; 93 in NWFP; 7 in Balochistan; 8 in Islamabad), 388 cases of suicide, (253 in Punjab; 103 in Sindh; 21 in NWFP; 7 in Balochistan; 4 in Islamabad), 466 cases of rape/gang-rape, (412 in Punjab; 47 in Sindh; 2 in NWFP; 1 in Balochistan; 4 in Islamabad), 148 cases of sexual assault, (129 in Punjab; 18 in Sindh; 0 in NWFP; 0 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad), 37 cases of stove burning, (24 in Punjab; 8 in Sindh; 3 in NWFP; 1 in Balochistan; 1 in Islamabad), 27 cases of acid throwing, (21 in Punjab; 6 in Sindh; 0 in NWFP; 0 in Balochistan; 0 in Islamabad), whereas 1086 cases of violence were of miscellaneous nature (vanni/swara, custodial violence, torture, trafficking, child marriages, incest, threat to violence, sexual harassment, attempted murder, suicide & rape) in the four provinces and Islamabad.

The number and percentage of the cases of abduction/kidnapping are 1046 (23.71%), murder 691 (15.31%), rape/gang-rape 466 (10.32%), suicide 388 (8.60%); and 'honour' killing of women 293 (6.49%) among all the recorded/reported cases in first & second quarter of 2009, followed by cases of sexual assault 148 (3.28%); stove burning 37 (0.82%); acid throwing 27

(0.60%); and offences of miscellaneous nature around (24.06%).

The report is a compilation of statistics on the incidents of violence against women during January to June 2009 under its national programme 'Policy and Data Monitor on Violence against Women' for the elimination of violence against women in Pakistan.

Violence against women is a persistent and ongoing problem in Pakistan and around the world. It affects women's social and economic equality, physical and mental health, well-being and economic security. Decision-makers require a clear understanding of the nature and severity of social problems in order to develop effective responses.

The report "Situation of Violence against Women in Pakistan" identify the number of cases of violence against women in Pakistan and aims to create a more informed and supportive environment, mobilize social pressure. This data of violence against women would in the long run provide policy and law reform input to federal and provincial governments, political parties and legislators through consultative processes on developing policy framework and institutional mechanisms for ending violence against women.

It was a planned attack: HRCP

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houses were spared.

Witnesses said a number of attackers were from the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan and other militant organisations. The Regional Police Officer (RPO) told HRCP that many of the attackers had come from outside the district, possibly from Jhang.

Amid the brutal killings and destruction in Gojra, the Commission also noted that some Muslims in the neighbourhood provided shelter to Christian women fleeing the violence.

The barbaric attacks are an embarrassment for any society or people who call themselves civilised.

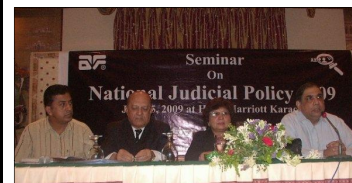
HRCP believes that the local administration's inaction ahead of the riots was intriguing.

HRCP said the tragic incidents of Gojra are a comprehensive failure by the government to protect minorities either through administrative measures or legislative ones. The culprits, including the local administration, must be brought to justice in an expeditious and transparent manner, HRCP said.

The government must act to prevent any attack based on a person's faith, instead of belatedly reacting through award of compensation. It must also ensure that its vows of ensuring inter-faith harmony move beyond rhetoric, the HRCP report concluded.

Dialogue on National Judicial Policy 2009

Legislative Watch Programme of Aurat Foundation held a dialogue on 'National Judicial Policy 2009' on 15 July 2009 at Hotel Marriot, Karachi, to share the views and recommendations on the National Judicial Policy 2009 with politicians and parliamentarians of mainstream parties, state functionaries, legal community, civil society activists and media personnel. Apart from judicial personalities, Justice (R) Nasir Aslam Zahid and Prof. Akmal Waseem, Humera Alwani, Farheen Mughal, Kulsoom Chandio of PPP, Ms Shahnaz of MQM also expressed their views on the occasion.



Professor Akmal Waseem, speaking at the dialogue. Next to him, Ms Noor Naz Agha Advocate and Justice (R) Nasir Aslam Zahid.

EDITORIAL

Local government system, the bastion of local democracy, is facing a serious threat by some influential sections of political elite and bureaucracy on different pretexts. The system, also called the nursery of democracy and the primary tier of governance for service delivery at the grassroots level, opened the door for citizens' participation in politics and self-governance, at a wider scale throughout the country when it was initiated in 2000.

The 33% proportion of representation of women at all tiers of local government, i.e. at union, tehsil and district level, in fact, resulted in a paradigm shift by providing women the opportunity to enter into a new role of public representatives, which they had never ventured into before, at least not at this scale, where a critical mass starts creating impact on institutions, policies and attitudes. This is what has actually happened. The system created numerous opportunities for socially marginalized groups, particularly for women, workers, peasants and minorities, who otherwise had little or no space available to them to make a mark on the local political and administrative set-up.

Thousands of women came to local councils in local government elections 2000. These women councilors, with the support from civil society organisations, later worked actively to draw a political career for themselves. Women and other marginalized groups also returned to local council in elections 2005, though these elections were marred with a number of irregularities, unethical practices and flagrant abuse of authority by the then incumbents to maintain control of the local constituencies.

However, several studies have shown that after gaining political experience and confidence at the local level, a number of women councilors, also contested national elections in 2002 and later in 2008. Members of the religious minorities also received the right to joint electorate under this system in 2000, and they became part of the mainstream political process.

There is no denying the fact that the current local government system has a number of loopholes and serious drawbacks, but these deficiencies must not be cited as a justification for wrapping up a system crucial for the devolution of democratic governance to the lowest tier. Since, there are issues of accountability and transparency, the local government system should be continued with necessary amendments to increase transparency, accountability and service delivery. Changes and reform must be made, but the local government system must also be retained.



**LEGISLATIVE
WATCH**



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Terrorism downs women's turnout in Afghan election

The second Presidential election in Afghanistan, in the post-Taliban era, were held on 20 August 2009. The shocking aspect of the recent elections, as compared to last election in 2004, was the low turnout of women voters on election day.

Five years ago, with the country at peace, traditional taboos easing and Western donors pushing for women to participate in democracy, millions of Afghan women eagerly registered and then voted for a presidential candidate. In a few districts, female turnout was even higher than male turnout. But on August 20, when Afghans again went to the polls to choose a president, that heady season of political emancipation seemed long gone. This time, the turnout appeared weaker because of continuing violence, fear and disenchantment. Among the most affected by the security threats are the women of Afghanistan. In many areas women's mobility was limited due to strict cultural impositions. They received threats for dishonoring their families in case of participating in elections and claim any public power.

"We were very willing to vote but then Taliban provocation started. We heard that they would kill people, cut off people's fingers and cut off their heads," said Naseema Naseri, who works for an aid group in the southern city of Kandahar. "The Taliban stuck up (fliers) making these threats. We were too scared to come out of our houses to vote," she said.

In the Pashtun belt of south-eastern Afghanistan, women running for office were forced to campaign in public wearing burkas -- addressing microphones on podiums and outlining their manifestos with their faces completely shrouded. A quarter of seats on provincial councils were reserved for women and while the number of women candidates generally

was up on the last election in 2005, in the southern provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan there were fewer women candidates than seats. "There are a lot of economic problems, especially among men. If men are sitting around doing nothing in the house -- in Afghanistan, in Kandahar especially -- they won't let women work (outside of the house)," Zarghona Kakar, who stood for re-election.

European and US election observers said poor security and cultural opposition to women in public life all prevented women participating in the presidential and provincial elections last week. "Womens civil and political rights as Afghan citizens are enshrined in the constitution but in practice their participation as candidates, voters and administrators of the elections was severely limited," said the EU mission.

However, some provinces, such as central Bamiyan, which is home to the Hazara ethnic group and run by Afghanistan's only woman governor, saw a strong turnout but it was the exception not the rule. "Aside from Bamiyan and provinces in the north, the turnout of women for this election was notably low. In certain polling stations in the south and southeast, almost no women voted," said the US-based group.

However, it is observed that women were now more deeply involved in the political process than in the previous elections and more likely to follow their own inclinations when it comes to voting, rather than taking direction from their husbands. They are also becoming more focused in their own priorities for change in a country considered the fifth poorest in the world, where 85 percent of women are illiterate and life in remote areas has changed little in years.

Sources: [website:www.feministsforchoice.com](http://www.feministsforchoice.com)

Women's voices brave Radio Khyber FM

The brave Radio Khyber FM station based in the town of Jamrud has made history by employing three women as journalists, to present its chatty mix of news and infotainment. This in itself constitutes of revolution in the tribal areas where women lead restricted lives. The space available to them had in many ways diminished under the Taliban, who of course ruthlessly used illegal radio stations to drive home their message. Ironically, one of their prime targets was women within homes. Accounts now emerging from Swat speak of the fact that a big proportion of donations collected by Maulana Fazlullah indeed came from the ordinary women of Swat.

Radio Khyber, set up with a licence and backing from authorities, does not on the surface pursue a radical agenda. Indeed, it is acutely conscious of the potential risk its women employees face and attempts to ensure their safety by keeping them well away from any programmes that could be construed as calling for women's rights or raising other issues. Taking part in such programmes could mean death

for the women. But despite this, the presence of the women on air marks a huge stride forward. The music programmes and other shows they host are reported to be especially popular with other women.

The medium of radio of course takes these right into the hearts of homes, allowing them to be heard in kitchens and living rooms. As such there is a possibility that the example set by Radio Khyber will encourage the women of the tribal areas to take up more unusual careers and to provide a voice for those who are themselves hardly ever heard. The irony of their situation is that while they are expected to haul water from wells and undertake equally strenuous physical chores in the fields, they cannot visit a hospital, a market or an office without a male escort. Literacy rate for tribal women too remain the lowest. Maternal mortality figures are in contrast high. Radio Khyber alone may not change their. But it can help alter the mindset in the tribal areas by allowing the voices of women to be heard. (*Daily DAWN, 19 September 2009*).

Women magistrates appointed in Punjab

The Lahore High Court chief justice has appointed six women civil judge-cum-judicial magistrates in different districts of the province.

According to notification issued here on 19 September 2009, civil judge-cum-judicial magistrates Sadaf Liaquat has been appointed in Multan, Nibza in Lahore, Uzma Ahsan in Rawalpindi, Nadia Mushtaq in Faisalabad, Nazia Rashid in Muzaffargarh and Mehrun Nisa in Sargodha.

The newly appointees were directed to submit their declaration of asset along with documentary proofs duly signed by them to the district and session judge. They were also directed not to deal with any case independently and that they would receive training in civil / criminal work for 15 days at the district headquarters to acquaint them with the practical functioning of the court. (*Daily DAWN, 20 September 2009*).

Religious extremism, women and the state

From Page 1

Religious Discourse and Violence against Women

The ubiquitous presence of religious discourse has generated both direct and structural violence against women. Direct forms of violence include the beating, maiming, bodily mutilation, murder and abuse of women on a regular basis. Structural violence comprises the systemic discrimination against women which has been institutionalized through legal, political and other means. It ranges all the way from denying women education, health, recreation and access to resources, to subjecting them to institutional discrimination in the legal, political and economic structures. Structural violence inheres in the family, community and state systems that are premised on the inequality of women.

It is imperative to comprehend the manner in which institutionalized and state-sponsored versions of religion have acted to diminish women's status in society leading to various forms of structural violence. In a later section, the actions of non-state societal actors will be discussed to understand the way in which direct forms of violence against women have also been spawned, encouraged and promoted by the policies pursued by the state.

Structural Violence against Women

The state in Pakistan has been heavily influenced by the orthodox Deobandi brand of religion which is stern, harsh and literalist in terms of interpretation. One manifestation of this form of discourse is Bahisthi Zewar, written by Maulana Ashraf Thanvi for the guidance and instruction of women. The entire long treatise by the Maulana is focused on the detailed control of every aspect of a woman's life, from how she should carry herself in front of others to how to serve her husband and run an efficient home. Although this is not a sacred book, as it contains recipes for jams and jellies as well as indigenous remedies for illness, it is revered as sacrosanct by people who gift it to daughters at the wedding. Discourses such as this one establish the secondary status of women and reject the notions of gender equality or women's liberty. The widespread tendency to provide women with less food, less education, less recreation and less freedom of movement and speech than men, that is, endemic structural violence, is premised on the idea that women are less important than men and have fewer or no rights.

In the 1980s, the specific version of the state that was envisioned by General Zia-ul-Haq to legitimize his illegal rule was drawn from the writings of Maulana Maududi, founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Maulana Maududi strongly believed in the idea of sepa-

rate spheres for men and women, and complementary roles and responsibilities. He supported a separate assembly for women which would make recommendations to the assembly of male lawmakers regarding women's issues. Women's issues were defined as specific rather than as a part of general interests and he did not consider women suitable for political and administrative work. Maulana Maududi believed in the strict segregation of the sexes including separate educational institutions and the strict observance of purdah. He opposed the registration of Muslim marriages which was designed to protect women against the arbitrary pronouncement of triple Talaq and the subsequent denial by the husband leaving a woman at his whim and mercy.

Following Maulana Maududi's conservative views on women General Zia chose to prove his Islamic credentials by instituting a number of measures that led to systemic violence against women. The discriminatory laws that reduced the status of women's citizenship and laid the basis of systemic gender inequalities created an environment that encouraged violence against women. In particular, the Zina Ordinance (a part of the Hudood Ordinances of 1979), the Law of Evidence of 1984 and the Qisas and Diyat Ordinance (which later became an Act of Parliament) served to intensify violence against women. The Hudood laws conflated rape and adultery and made it impossible to prove rape until a minor change was instituted through the Criminal Law Amendment 2006 so that rape could be subjected to the criminal procedure code and be brought within the ambit of the Pakistan Penal Code. The Law of Evidence rendered women's testimony in a court of law half in value as compared to a man's evidence thus reducing women's citizenship equality. The Qisas and Diyat Law privatized the crime of murder so that killing in the name of honour no longer remained a crime against the state but became a crime against person. This law enabled families to murder women and, subsequently, forgive one other for the crime. A large number of those who murdered their daughters, sisters or wives on the dubious accusations of honour, often based on pecuniary motives, were able to go scot-free after the introduction of this legislation. The latter law, drawn from ancient tribal customs, led to the state itself taking on tribal characteristics.

In the name of a facile Islamization, the women of Pakistan were subjected a number of patriarchal controls such as Chadar and Chardivari (veiling designed to control their freedom), prevention from participation in spectator sports and all kinds of restrictive dress codes that functioned to curtail their freedoms. Television priests recommended that women should be

stopped from paid work even though the entire agricultural sector of the country depends on the labor of women. Women's freedom of movement and the right to work were severely attacked during the time of General Zia. The state-led Islamization agenda encouraged vigilante groups to enforce Islamic dress codes leading to physical attacks on women in public spaces. Long after Zia's flight into oblivion in August 1988, the effects of his hegemonic ideology persist and have penetrated deeply into society.

Direct Violence against Women

Apart from structural violence that subjects women to systematic legal, economic and political discrimination, women are often the victims also of direct brutal violence in both the private and public spheres. Newspapers carry almost daily reports of the beating, murdering and maiming of women. They suffer bodily mutilation in the form of their noses, ears, lips or limbs being cut off for minor infractions. They are killed on the mere suspicion of engaging in illicit relations and are burnt to death over petty disagreements. Such acts appear to have the tacit support of religious leaders for they seldom condemn acts of rape, murder and mutilation but exercise all their energies against laws that provide women a modicum of protection. A leader of a militant outfit traveled cross-country to collect thousands of signatures against the Women Protection Act of 2006, yet he never uttered a word against sexual and other forms of violence against women.

In recent times, the rise of the Taliban has exacerbated direct, as well as systemic, violence against women. The word 'Taliban' is used here to cover all the groups from Southern Punjab, NWFP and FATA who subscribe to a particular ideology derived from a distorted and grotesque version of religion. Almost all militant groups and a number of other sectarian and fundamentalist outfits are the products of state policies, especially ones that arose in the context of the Afghan Jihad when the state repositioned itself in response to competing and rival imperialisms in neighboring Afghanistan.

In recent years, the Taliban burnt, torched and bombed over two hundred girls' schools in the Malakand Division and other parts of Pakhtoonkhwa. The Swat Taliban, led by Maulana Fazlullah, ordered all girls' schooling to be closed by January 15, 2009. The Tehreek-e-Taliban spokesman, Muslim Khan, threatened violence if girls' schooling was not ended in Swat on the given deadline. Around 40,000 girls of private schools and 84,248 of the state-run schools would have been affected by the militants' threat. Recently, militants bombed the Islamic

International University in Islamabad where both male and female students were killed.

Maulana Fazlullah forbids women from working for a living at the risk of severe punishment. One widow, the sole supporter of three minor children, begged the Taliban commanders to allow her to teach or else her children would have nothing to eat. She was shot dead by them. A seventeen year old girl, accused of illicit relations with her father-in-law, was publicly flogged by the Taliban for allegedly transgressing moral norms devised by them in the name of religion. In a country where young, powerless girls are often raped and subjected to cruel treatment by their close male relatives, women are doubly punished, first by the aggressor and then by the self-styled leaders of a virulent version of religion. The Taliban, all their religious protestations notwithstanding, have not been averse to rape through forcible marriage and kidnapping of women.

The State's Responsibility towards Women

It is not sufficient merely to defeat the Taliban and cleanse Pakistan of the presence of murderous militants and misguided zealots. The state has a much greater responsibility towards its female citizens if the effects of years of retrogressive ideology are to be countered and ultimately erased. Some of the answers can be found in the constitution itself. The Constitution of Pakistan states that all citizens are equal before law and entitled to equal protection of the law (Article 25). All discriminatory legislation must be removed to ensure the equality of women. Article 25(2) further states that there shall be no discrimination based on sex alone. Again all gender-based discrimination is against the fundamental rights granted in the constitution.

The Eighth Constitutional Amendment protects the discriminatory laws, orders and measures taken by General Zia. This amendment should be repealed as it conflicts with fundamental rights. Anything against fundamental rights can be repealed for Article 8(1) of the Constitution states that any law, custom or usage that contravenes or conflicts with fundamental rights will be declared null and void. Article 8(2) states that the state will not make any law that abridges the rights conferred in the chapter on fundamental rights. Removal of internal contradictions within the constitution, partly the result of dictators' mutilating the document at whim, must be removed if women are to begin their journey towards becoming full, equal and responsible citizens in a democratic state. —*The Author is an independent researcher on social development.*

Local Government - an opportunity at stake

The future uncertainty about the local government system, as created by the government and political parties, gave rise to a series of activities from protest rallies, public discussion and consultations by several stakeholders, including councillors, nazims and civil society organisations. In response to a call from Aurat Foundation, regional offices and district partners planned provincial seminars on the 'future of local governments', as well as, staged rallies at different places.

A seminar in this regard was held at Lahore on 15 July 2009 along with a group of panellists which included Mr Ijaz Mahrvi, Member Local Government Commission, Punjab, Mr Naveed Chudhary, Local Government Commission, Punjab (ex-minister for information PPP), Dr Samia Amjad, Member Provincial Assembly (PML-Q), Mian

Mehmood-u-Rasheed, Senior leader & ex-MPA (PTI), Mr Salman Abid, Regional Director SPO, Punjab, and Mr Saif Anjum, Consultant USAID, Planning & Development Department, Punjab.

The panellists praised the local government system as local democracy which can accommodate marginalized population like women and masses at large. Women councillors, elected in 2000 played an effective role in politics and public affairs. The participants, which included MPAs, office bearers of political parties, women councillors, civil society organizations, and electronic and print media, resented against any plan of reducing union council seats and putting administrative.

They demanded public-private partnership in the proposed Local Government Act, 2009. The concerns and demands on the future of local government as agreed upon by the participants included:

- Local government elections are held under supervision of Election Commission without any further delay.
- Union councils, the basic unit of the system, are strengthened financially and administratively.
- The developmental funds of MPAs and Local MNAs are released to be spent through union councillors.

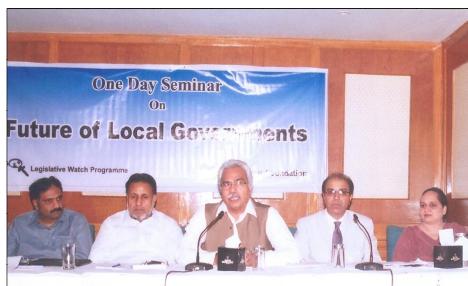


Members Citizens' Action Committees and women councillors, Chakwal (above) and Sialkot (below) demanding urgent elections of local government in protest rallies in Chakwal and Sialkot.



● Women's representation in the local government should be increased from 33% to 50% and in the parliament from 17% to 33%.

● Women are given effective representation in all government departments and are provided with appropriate offices, staff and allowances.



Mian Mehmood-u-Rasheed, Senior leader (PTI) addressing the seminar on 'Future of Local Government', on his left are Mr Ijaz Mahrvi, Member Local Government Commission, Punjab, Dr Samia Amjad, Member Provincial Assembly (PML-Q), while on his right are Mr Naveed Chudhary, Local Government Commission, Punjab and Mr Salman Abid, Regional Director SPO (Punjab).

Women Councillors Association NWFP (WCAN) formed

Aurat Foundation, Peshawar, formally launched Women Councillors Association of NWFP (WCAN), during its foundation convention on 23 July 2009 at Peshawar, in collaboration with The Asia Foundation. The convention was, in fact, part of the process of forming local councillors' associations at provincial level. Local Council Association of Punjab (LCAP) is already in place in Punjab province. Apart from a large number of women councillors, the participants of the convention included women members of Provincial Assembly, Nazims, Naib Nazims, lawyers, members of print and electronic media and civil society organizations. Mian Iftikhar Hussain, Minister for Information, NWFP, participated as Chief Guest.

The major motive behind establishing WCAN is to increase women's effective participation in governance, by strengthening leadership and advocacy capacity of women representatives in NWFP. So far in NWFP, Women Councillors' Association (WCAN) is formed in five districts namely Charsadda, Mardan,

Swabi, Haripur and Mansehra. The WCANs at district level are comprised of women councillors at all three administrative levels, District, Tehsil/Town, and Union. Thus, each district WCAN has three tiers of elected representatives from the three levels of local government. This bottom-up approach will provide political participation opportunity to women at grassroots level. The



Mian Iftikhar Hussain, Information Minister NWFP, along with district councillors Ms Gulnaz Shah, Ms Gulnaz Rashid, Ms Baitilharam and Ms Samina Naz at the Foundation Convention of women councillors at Peshawar.

WCANs also have representation of one TMO, one union secretary, one member from CCB and one CAC member from the district. Mr. Anwar Hussain, Director Local Councillors Associations of Punjab (LCAP), which is working in 35 districts of Punjab, said that LCAP will provide WCAN all the technical assistance required for starting their work effectively.

local governments must be retained

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said that local government system should not be wound up or made a mere administrative appendage of the provincial government set-up. According to a press statement issued by HRCP in September 2009, the participants of a consultation said some changes in the present order might be considered but the local government system must be retained because it gives representation and a share in public affairs to the common citizen at the grassroots.

They said any reform that reduced the financial and administrative authority of the local government institutions would effect service delivery at the grassroots and go against the very rationale of decentralization of power. It was argued that any attempt at reform must be based on sound reasoning and widest possible consultation. Retaining representation for women, minorities, and working classes was emphasised.



Ms Shabina Talat, Resident Director, AF Peshawar addressing Women Assembly along with Ms Nasreen Azhar and Ms Anis Haroon, NCSW.

Women councillors assembly

For an in-depth discussion on political and constitutional rights of women, Aurat Foundation in collaboration with Local Council Association of the Punjab (LCAP) and Oxfam GB, held a women's assembly on September 28 at Margalla Hotel, Islamabad. The assembly was attended by women leaders of 35 Punjab and 3 NWFP districts and representatives from national and international NGOs. Mr Daniyal

Aziz, Chairman DTCE, said that the decision to appoint administrators in local government is unlawful and a petition under Article 140A of the Constitution of Pakistan, 268 (2) Misaq-e-Jamuriat section No. 10, has been filed in the court

Earlier, Mr Naem Mirza, Acting Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation, welcomed the guests and shared with the participants that AF has prepared five year plan to raise the issues of marginalized women and work for women's social rights and their effective participation in decision making. Ms Rukhshanda Naz, Project Advisor, speaking on the occasion, said that credit of success of the local government system goes to women in the remote areas who took bold step to come out of their houses and sit in the councils and work for the betterment of women.



Mr Daniyal Aziz, Chairman DTCE addressing Women Assembly

National Consultation on DVB, 2009

The passage of the DVB was welcomed by the women and human rights organizations, activists and civil society at large. Charged with success, the civil society organizations and their networks planned further strategy to mobilize women senators for its final passage through the Senate of Pakistan. Aurat Foundation held a consultation with women senators on Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2009, on 20 August 2009, at Marriot, Islamabad.

Ms Yasmin Rehman, MNA and mover of the bill was the Chief Guest while Ms Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) chaired the consultation. Panel of discussants included Ms Saeeda Iqbal, Senator from PPP, Begum Najma Hameed, Senator from PML-N, Ms Nilorfar Bakhtiar, Senator PML-Q, Ms Farah Aqil, Senator ANP,

Ms Kalsoon Parveen, Senator BNP and Ms Shirala Malick, Senator from MQM. Ms Maliha Zia, Aurat Foundation, presented a civil society perspective on the Bill.

The participants were of the view that although legislation was necessary for protecting rights of women, but at the same time effective implementation of laws was also important. A mere law cannot change society's attitude toward gender-based violence if the political will for its implementation is not there. They widely criticised Section 25 of the Bill, which suggest punishment for the applicant in case of false statement, as it would discourage women to report the violence cases. They suggested that the duties of the Protection Officer (PO) under Section 19 need to be enhanced. The senators categorically offered their full support for lobbying of the bill in the Senate.



Ms Yasmeen Rehman, mover of the bill on domestic violence, addressing the consultation. Ms Anis Haroon, NCSW, Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar, Mr Naem Mirza, and Ms Rukhshanda Naz, are also present.

'Gender-based critique on budget: challenges and opportunities for women parliamentarians'

In order to initiate a gender based critique of the provincial budgets, Aurat Foundation planned a series of consultation in all the provinces. The consultation focused on the challenges and opportunities for women parliamentarians. Participants of these consultations agreed that women parliamentarians need to enhance their abilities to understand the budget thoroughly so that they can analyze the budget.

Mr. Tanveer Ashraf Qaira, Finance Minister of Punjab, during a consultation on 'Gender Based Critique on

Post Budget: Challenges and opportunities for Women Parliamentarians', held on 7th July 2009 at Lahore, said that programs of health and education of women were given priority in this budget. There are 21 schemes for women in current budget which includes Child Protection Bureau, and women vocational training centers.



Mr Tanvir Ashraf, Minister for Finance, Punjab, Mr Qais Aslam, Senior Economist, Ms Mumtaz Mughal from AF and Mr Sohaib Murghub, Senior Columnist, daily Jang.

parliamentarians in the budget committee next year.

Women's Right to Vote

In order to discuss the 'Challenges and Obstacles in Women's Right to Vote', Aurat Foundation held a series of dialogue with parliamentarians at provincial level. At Punjab level, a dialogue with parliamentarians was held in Lahore on 24th July 2009. The Provincial Election Commissioner, Mr Qamar-u-Zaman participated in the dialogue as Chief Guest. A dialogue, under the same title was held in Karachi on 17th July 2009, to review the situation of women's right to vote in Sindh. Ms Shahlia Raza, Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly, Touqir Fatima Bhutto, Minister for Women Development, Sharmila Farooqi, Advisor to CM, Sindh, were the key speakers.



(Left) Ms Huma Baqai, Researcher, speaking during the consultation. Next to her, Ms Sharmilla Farooqi, Advisor to CM Sindh, Sardar Ahmed, ex Finance Minister, Mr Jam Madad Ali, Leader of the Opposition, Mr Mohammad Sabir, Gender Budget Analyst and Senior Economist at SPDC and Ms Rubina Brohi from AF.

The budget consultation at Karachi, titled 'Provincial Budget 2009-10 - As per Gender Lens', was held on 10 July 2009. The chief guest Ms Sharmilla Farooqi, Advisor to Chief Minister Sindh, while responding to the concerns expressed during the consultation said that she would recommend the Chief Minister Sindh to include more women



Ms Sajida Mir, MPA-PPPP is addressing the participants; next to her Ms Maiza Hameed, MPA PML (N), Mr Qamar-u-Zaman, Election Commissioner, Punjab, Ms Mehnaz Rafi, Senior Leader PML (Q) and Ms Yasmeen Rehman, MNA, PPPP.