The Latent Transformation

Challenges, Resilience and Successes of Pakistani Women

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INTRODUCTION

Freidrich Engels, to quote from his seminal work of the 19th century, *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State,* said that the first class antagonism is between man and woman and the first class subjugation is that of women by men.[1] One can actually deduce from this assertion that women participating equally in decisions affecting our collective political, social and economic life will eventually challenge the overall power structures which oppress the working classes and minority communities in any society, for there is an inherent link between oppression of all kinds prevalent in human society to the subjugation of women.

Pakistan is one of the successor states of British India formed in 1947. It is a predominantly Muslim society with huge resource deficits. What is unique about contemporary Muslim societies is that the richest of these nations, for instance of the Arab world, discriminate more against their women than some resource constrained nations elsewhere. Therefore, we find that in Muslim societies, it is not poverty alone, but dominant social norms in the name of culture and religion employed by powers that be to

[1] Engels, Friedrich (1902), *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and The State*

perpetuate absolute political control over the bodies and minds of girls and women.

Pakistani women have not only endured an incremental and significant increase in social oppression in community and public life at large, there also came a time when the state of Pakistan, supposed to be modern and neutral in theory, deliberately acted against its women citizens by creating discriminatory instruments of power through draconian legislation and encouraging social conservatism through syllabus and public media. The aftermath of that period in Pakistan's political history continues till day.

The oppression experienced by women in Pakistan is multi-layered, and ranges from stifling legal frameworks instituted by the state to forcible following of primordial social norms in the name of Islamic religious orthodoxy and feudal and tribal cultures. However, in the face of these adverse circumstances, women have shown remarkable adroitness, determination and resilience across the length and breadth of Pakistan in different shapes and forms and in different areas of human endeavour. Through waging civil struggles for the realisation of their human rights and succeeding persistently in increasing their participation and space in the public sphere, women are, in the opinion of some analysts, latently sowing the seeds for

transformation and ensuring a better status for women in society.

This paper, largely exploratory in nature, begins with briefly describing the socio-cultural, legal and structural, and economic constraints faced by Pakistani women. It then acknowledges and records the resilience and successes achieved by women by citing examples from the selected domains of educational attainment, limited but mentionable changes in social behaviour of men and communities brought about by their struggle through a couple of case studies, growing economic activity, improvement in legislation due to their struggle and increased political participation.

CONSTRAINTS FACED BY PAKISTANI WOMEN

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

There are two primary streams of socio-cultural constraints for Pakistani women. Firstly, the orthodox and restrictive interpretation of Islam, and secondly, customary practices against women embedded deep into primordial ways of living, i.e. the feudal and tribal systems. These two streams blend together at times and are consequently seen by common people in many parts of Pakistan as one and the same.

The restrictive religious codes establish subordination of women, impose segregation and their marginalisation from public life, discourage tolerance for any kind of personal or social freedom and promote a typecast role for women who should be confined to homes or traditional social spaces created within the family or tribe and as allowed by their men. The champions of orthodox religious codes declare man as the master, enforce veil/hijab/burqa as the dress code, sanction polygamy and consider a woman's testimony to be half that of a man, or even unacceptable in some cases. For women from the minority communities, these constraints are further exacerbated, both in terms of their day-to-day engagement with society, as well as in their dealings with the legal system.[2]

The customary practices against women, legitimised under different feudal orders or diverse tribal codes prevalent in large parts of the country, have resulted in extreme forms of violence against women, total subjugation and humiliation. Honour killing (Karokari), giving women and girls as a price for feud settlements (Wani/Swara), forced marriages of both adult women and the girl child, marrying women with the Quran so that the property remains with the

[2] Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *State of Human Rights (annual reports from 2002 to 2009);*

men in the family and denial of inheritance are commonplace.[3]

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

Both in feminist and development literature, women's empowerment remains a complex and fluid concept with multiple elements. However, their economic empowerment is invariably seen as a precursor to their ability to increasingly influence or solely decide about a host of issues that directly or indirectly affect their lives.

A combination of socio-cultural constraints and structural impediments caused by laws biased against women increased the insecurity of women in the public space and limited their participation in productive and wage-earning economic activity. However, women have traditionally participated in various sectors like agriculture, forestry and fisheries etc., but their labour remains either hidden, is seen but unpaid, or is grossly underpaid. In addition, extensive effort and labour put into child bearing and rearing, homemaking and taking care of the family's livestock were not even considered work, leave alone monetised and documented.[4]

[3] Sustainable Development Policy Institute (2008), '*Pakistan: Country Gender Profile*'

[4] USAID – Aurat Foundation (2011), '*Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: A Scoping Study*'

In an agrarian economy like Pakistan, where agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries and related services that emerge from these sectors provide the bedrock of livelihood for a majority of the population, women's land rights, including their right to ownership of other fixed assets and immovable property gains primary importance. Historically, under colonialism, women in Punjab for example, were not allowed to own land till as late as 1937. The codification of customary (or tribal) law ensured that the land passed on only to the sons/brothers, and not to the daughters/spouse. Despite the conversion of customary law into Shariah Law, under which women were allowed to inherit and control land, the pervasive practice of excluding females from land continues unabated.[5] Rhetorically, a majority of men support the inheritance right of females under Islamic stipulations, yet this verbal support never translates into practical action. The issue of female ownership was neglected and did not feature in the land reforms of 1959, 1972 and 1975. Over the past decade, this has gradually become a part of the rights and development discourse, but there is little action on the ground.[6] Some gains in this area will be discussed

[5] Nelson, Matthew J. (2011) *In the Shadow of Shari'ah: Islam, Islamic Law, and Democracy in Pakistan.* New York: Columbia University Press

[6] USAID – Aurat Foundation (2011), '*Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: A Scoping Study*'

later in this paper but women's access and right to land and assets remain dismally low.

LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Pakistan has a unique political history when it comes to the role of religion in defining the nature of the state and its cascading effect on the society. While the country has remained under martial rule for more than half of its existence, whenever the populace got an opportunity to vote freely, they elected moderate and progressive political parties to run the government. But with the passing of the Objectives Resolution in 1949, after the death of the founder, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Pakistan has witnessed a continuous drift towards becoming a theocratic state. The ideologues and practitioners of conservative Islam led by religious political parties and various pressure groups have influenced both legislation and public discourse even without ever having a significant presence in the parliament, let alone ever obtaining a majority. But the defining period was that of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88), who comprehensively changed the character of Pakistan's legal structure. During that period, either new laws were promulgated or additions and amendments were made to the Pakistan Penal Code that widely discriminated against women and religious minorities. The Hudood Ordinances (1979), the Law of Evidence (1984) and the amendment to the

Blasphemy Law (1984) are significant. Earlier, the Citizenship Act of 1951 also discriminated against women by not giving their non-Pakistani spouse and children born out of such marriage, the right to Pakistani citizenship.[7] There were certain positive changes brought about in some of these laws and procedures, which will be discussed later in this paper, but they still remain far from satisfactory.

RESILIENCE AND SUCCESSES

EDUCATION IMPACTING SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS

While overall indicators for Pakistan present a bleak picture in the education sector, girls (or women) are far more disadvantaged than boys (or men) in terms of basic access to education at all levels, from pre-primary to tertiary. They have to struggle many times as hard as their male counterparts to get educated. Studies show that the dropout rate for females between primary and secondary education is much higher than for males. Currently, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for primary education is 0.82, while the same statistic for secondary education is 0.77.[8] This is mostly due to socio-cultural restrictions and customary practices enforceable in large sections of

[7] SDPI (2008), '*Pakistan: Country Gender Profile*'
[8] *Ibid.*

society where conservatives operate under the cover of religion. Despite the persistence of these patriarchal mores, women have defied all such constraints in a most remarkable fashion, consistently, quietly and exhaustively.

According to several reports, including the Country Gender Profile published by SDPI in 2008, urban education attainment levels, specifically at the elementary and secondary level, of boys and girls are now almost equal. Looking at trends over the last 20 years, the attainment gap has been decreasing fairly rapidly (almost 1-2% per annum). In fact, as the 2011 Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) reports, the urban gross enrolment rate of males and females in higher secondary education is now equal. Similarly, the gap in rural areas at the secondary and tertiary level, while objectively speaking still fairly wide, has narrowed at an average rate of 3.45 % per annum over the last 20 years.[9] The major reason behind progress towards gender equality in the education sector is increased outreach, growth of private education facilities, and gradual shifts in perceptions about the importance of women's education. In addition, another important factor has been an increase in the availability of

[9] Govt. of Pakistan, Federal Bureau of Statistics, *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2011*

women teachers at every level, largely as a direct consequence of higher female enrolment rates.

Numbers, while important, are only part of the picture that shows the resilience and success of girls and young women in the education sector. This year the results of most Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education show a consolidation of a trend that has emerged over the last decade or so. Female students took most of the top positions in both Matriculation and Intermediate education results (secondary and higher secondary). The average passing rate for female students appearing in the 2011 exams was at 74.3%, while it was only 51.4% for male students.[10] At the tertiary level, some estimates place females at 65-70% of all students currently enrolled at public sector medical colleges in the country. Karachi and Punjab universities, the two largest public universities in the country, have had a female student strength exceeding 75% for the past many years.[11]

Having established that, no one can deny that there are multiple problems that plague the education sector as a whole and women's education specifically. One particular problem is inter-provincial disparity, specifically in terms of gross enrolment rates in rural

[10] Express Tribune, *Lahore Board Results: 59 percent succeed in secondary school exam* – August, 3, 2011

[11] Data obtained from Higher Education Commission

areas. Apart from Punjab, and to a lesser extent in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where rural numbers are comparatively strong, Sindh and Balochistan have not shown strong progress on the gender-equity front in rural areas. Even to this day, female gross enrolment in secondary education in rural Balochistan is at a paltry 5%, and a slightly better 14% in rural Sindh. Socio-cultural norms, and the continued presence of patriarchal social structures, tribal and feudal, act as significant hurdles to overall progress. Even in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where the corresponding number is 31%, the threat of militancy and the discourse peddled by extremist groups continues to undo the successes achieved in expanding female educational outreach over the past two decades.[12] But young women refuse to give up. Two case studies from the two least developed provinces of Pakistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan are given at the end of the paper (annexure A) to elicit the point.

PERPETUALLY GROWING ROLE IN ECONOMY

Economic empowerment of women remains an important target, not just to enhance total labour force participation rates, but also as an end goal in itself. Complete gender equality is partially premised on the empowerment of women to access, manage, and

[12] Govt. of Pakistan, Federal Bureau of Statistics, *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2011*

generate economic resources, either through control of productive capital or through greater participation in the labour market. In recent analyses, it has been seen that participation of women in the Pakistani economy is not satisfactory, but has increased considerably over time.

The World Bank defines empowerment as 'the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes'. Pakistan, as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), is required to move towards implementation of Article 13, which deems that there be no discrimination against women with regard to economic and social rights. Similarly, the Constitution of Pakistan, in Article 34 under its Principles of Policy section, declares that 'steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life'. These formal commitments, both at global as well at domestic level aside Pakistan's real record in terms of women's economic empowerment historically remains poor. Since Pakistan employs the greatest number of people in the primary agriculture sector, exclusionary practices with regards to land ownership, and control over productive capital have

persisted. This is despite the fact that females are an important part of the agriculture workforce.[13]

However, the past decade has seen some promising trends in terms of bridging the gender gap, and the credit for this goes to women for exhibiting resilience and determination in the face of adverse circumstances. By 2008, approximately 21.9% of all working-age women were employed. The vast majority of women, however, are still employed in their traditional occupations, i.e. home-based informal work or in the agriculture sector. It is only in the last two decades that women have begun to compete for white-collar jobs in the formal sector – a phenomenon that can be attributed to being a consequence of higher urbanization, greater female educational attainment, and the compulsions of an increasingly services-based economy. The labour force participation rate has increased by almost 6.5% per annum over the last decade.

Agriculture continues to provide the vast majority of jobs for women: 7 out of 10 women (73.8 per cent in 2008) worked in the agricultural sector, mainly as contributing family workers under tough working conditions with little or no economic security. This share has frequently increased over the last couple of

[13] USAID – Aurat Foundation (2011), '*Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: A Scoping Study*'

years (from 64.5 percent in 2002 to 73.8 per cent in 2008). Although at a very slow pace when compared to men, more and more women find jobs in the industrial sectors. Since 2000, the proportion of women employed in industry increased by 3.8 percentage points from 8.4 to 12.2 %, compared to a 2.8 % growth for men. Employment shares for women in the services sectors decreased from 2000 by 3.9%; but absolute numbers have increased. Also, data for informal services-based employment is not fully available.[14]

While the numbers are still sub-par in contrast to South Asian averages, the progress made over the last decade or so cannot be ignored. Several success stories have emerged of women in Pakistan making a name for themselves in various fields. As high court judges, two-star generals in the army, flying cadets in the Air Force, CEOs in large national and multinational businesses, academics and prominent media anchors and journalists, women have excelled. As recently as the 7th of October, 2011, Ms. Helena Saeed became the first female Deputy-Inspector General of Police.

The reason why these, and other cases, stand out is that they are examples of females doing well in new

[14] Federal Bureau of Statistics, Govt. of Pakistan, *Household Integrated Economic Survey 2011*

professions. Even within urban educated women, social norms have historically dictated that females work as teachers or, at most, as doctors. This particular perception is changing because of a number of reasons, including, but not limited to increased globalization, growth in the corporate sector, and a greater demand for educated human resource. Since the 1990s, women have been entering the workforce as receptionists, secretaries, telephone operators, draftswomen, designers, and computer operators. Though, as mentioned earlier, medicine and teaching still seem to predominate other professions, now law, marketing, and banking and human resources are also considered viable careers. For lower-income women, hawking at upscale shopping areas, and working at beauty salons are all career options.

The compulsions of inflation have played a part in ensuring that more and more women from middle and lower-middle class backgrounds become involved in the services sector. A report by the New York Times from last year, covered the effects of 14% inflation on lower-middleclass households, and how, as a consequence, educated women from this strata were tackling the situation head-on.[15]

[15] Ellick, Adam. B. *Necessity Pushes Pakistani Women into Jobs and Perils* – The New York Times, 26/12/2010

This must be recognised that several governments have made significant efforts to increase urban women's access to credit through formal institutions like the First Women Bank (FWB), which was established about 20 years ago. The bank is controlled and run by women, and caters specifically to gender-specific banking needs. It also offers traditional and non-traditional credit and banking facilities. Through a special fund provided by the government, the bank offers a special low rate of mark-up and no collateral for loans up to PKR 50,000. Approximately, PKR 30 million from the special fund had been disbursed by 1995.[16]

The freedom of movement granted by participation in the labour force has effects on participation in other forms of public life. Adolescent girls in rural areas are increasingly engaged in paid work, not only for the income, but also for the relative freedom that it affords. Around 80 percent of women say that they would do paid work if opportunities were available and mobility concerns could be overridden. A study of urban women in the manufacturing sector found that despite their limited control over their own earnings, working women exercised greater authority in household decision-making than those who had no source of income.

[16] SDPI (2008), '*Pakistan: Country Gender Profile*'

GAINS IN THE LEGAL SPHERE DUE TO A ROBUST WOMEN'S MOVEMENT[17]

Pakistan is one of those countries in the world where a Pakistani Women's Day is celebrated on 12 February apart from the International Women's Day on 8 March. This was the day in 1983 when the activists of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) and the Punjab Women Lawyers Association protesting against discriminatory laws were brutally attacked, baton charged and tear-gassed by the police in Lahore. Subsequently, women took to the streets in Karachi and other cities of Pakistan and launched a social movement that lasts even today. Many specialised women's rights organisations doing research, campaigning, advocacy and economic development work were formed and continue to function. Due to their persistent struggle, changes are being brought about incrementally into the legal system of Pakistan. The changes still needed are also listed but the following changes should be seen as examples of successes:

- The Citizenship Act, 1951, was partially amended in 2001 to enable the children of Pakistani women married to foreign nationals to have Pakistani citizenship. One discriminatory provision still

[17] Aurat Foundation (various) *Legislative Watch Newsletter*

remains in the law that the foreign spouse of a Pakistani woman is still not entitled to Pakistani citizenship. Exceptions are few and far between.

- A law, namely, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2004 was enacted by the Parliament to address 'honour' crimes/killings. The law, as part of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), defined the crimes committed in the name of 'honour' (sections 309, 310, 311, 338E of PPC), and prescribes punishments for such crimes through amendments (section 311) in the PPC. Giving women as "Badl-i-Sulah" i.e. as compensation for crimes committed by their male relatives has also been specifically forbidden and punishment prescribed (section 310 PPC). The law provides some remedy to women, but since murder remains compoundable under the Qisas and Diyat provisions and waiver of Qisas is still there, the law is not very effective.

- The Federal Government amended two ordinances of the Hudood Ordinances 1979, i.e. the offences of Zina (fornication and adultery) Ordinance and Qazaf (wrongly accusing someone fornication) Ordinance through amendments in the PPC and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) under the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendments) Act, 2006. The offence of rape has been shifted back to Pakistan Penal Code along with several other offences; and procedure for complaint of Zina and

Qazaf changed from police interrogation to judicial investigation. The human rights and women's movement continues to ask for repealing the Hudood Ordinances in full, particularly the possibility of flogging and stoning to death.

- The National Assembly passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2009 but the Senate did not. The bill remained in the Senate for more than 90 days and eventually lapsed. It was returned to the NA and handed over to a "Mediation Committee". But after the passage of the 18th Constitutional Amendment several subjects have been devolved to the provinces, including the Ministry of Women's Development. The provinces and the Centre will now have to pass their separate bills against Domestic Violence. The bill that lapsed was a good piece of legislation, but had a major flaw in that it did not criminalize the offence in the first and second instance. Efforts by women to have a comprehensive law passed are continuing.

- The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010, addresses the issue of sexual harassment of women at the workplace. The law will protect women working in the formal sector. It provides for the management of offices and organizations to adopt a code of conduct and notify an in-house inquiry committee. A new section, Section 509, introduced in the Pakistan Penal Code

has criminalized sexual harassment outside the formal sector, such as brick kilns, agriculture and domestic workers, and also in public places.

INCREASED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In Pakistan, the avenues open to women for negotiating their rights and influencing state policies are fairly limited. Patriarchal values, dominating a largely rural polity at the time of independence, were further fortified by the decade long dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-88). Amendments to the Constitution and the penal code, in the shape of the Hudood Laws, and the enforcement of ritualistic observances of religion, such as covering of the head by women on television, ensured the entrenchment of discriminatory attitudes towards women throughout society, but more specifically, within state institutions.

The conservative interpretation of Islamic texts and its conversion into a code of public morality under the Zia regime has, sadly enough, created large-scale obstacles in enhancing female political participation. The decade following the death of the dictator (the 1990s), saw some positive changes with respect to this particular area, but the bulk of progress has been made over the last ten years. Women from all walks of life are now engaged in attempts to carve out a

space for themselves within the socio-political fabric of the country.

One very basic form of political participation has been the reservation of seats for women in the National and Provincial Assemblies. In the initial years the number of reserved seats for women was fixed at 6 (under the 1962 constitution). This was later on expanded to 10, under the 1973 constitution, with a time-limit of 10 years or 2nd general election (whichever was later). The provision for reserved seats for women lapsed in 1990, and was not renewed for the next three elections.[18] Ultimately, under various amendments by the regime of General Musharraf, in 2002, women were given 60 seats in the National Assembly, (17% of total), and similarly 17% of all seats in the provincial assemblies and the senate were reserved for women as well. The current democratically elected government has upheld the amendment stipulating provision of reserved seats for women.[19]

At the local government level, the Local Government Ordinance 2001, that saw the creation of devolved councils at the Union, Town, and District level, had provisions for the reservation of 33% seats for

[18] Shaheed, Farida (2001) *Imagined Citizenship: Women, State, and Politics in Pakistan,* Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Center

[19] Data obtained from Election Commission of Pakistan

women. Subsequently, the elections held under the new local government system saw 32,000 women elected directly at the union council level. One of the biggest reasons why female political participation has been a success at the local level is because the personalized nature and small-scale constituency for local government elections are conducive to female social engagement. In Pakistan, at the neighbourhood level, women are often more active in civic affairs, and in activities involving collective mobilization.

Another area of success for women has been their participation, and victory, as candidates in general elections. The 1977 election was the first occasion when women were elected on general seats. Since then, the trend has generally been upwards. There were 3 women legislators on general seats in 1997, 12 in 2002, and 16 in 2008. In total, 64 female candidates contested on National Assembly seats, and 116 candidates contested for provincial assembly seats in the four federating units.[20] The presence of women in such historically high numbers enabled women to play a more dynamic role and seek offices beyond the traditional "welfare oriented" jobs. It was thus for the first time that Pakistan's National Assembly elected a woman Speaker, Dr. Fehmida Mirza. Sherry Rehman served as Minister for Information. The cabinet of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani included Dr.

[20] *Ibid*

Firdaus Ashiq Awan, Samina Khalid Ghurki, Hina Rabbani Khar, Mehreen Anwar Raja, Hina Rabbani Khar, Shahnaz Wazir Ali and Shagufta Jumani as ministers. They may not all be serving right now but some of them, very competently, held important portfolios.

A member parliament, Farzana Raja, heads the biggest-ever welfare project in Pakistan's history, the Benazir Income Support Programme, and enjoys the status of a Federal Minister, while another member, Dr Nafisa Shah, is serving as Chairperson of the National Commission on Human Development. Perhaps the most telling statistic at this point is that female parliamentarians have been responsible for the introduction of nearly 60 percent of all bills in the National Assembly, showing that increased female political participation has had a positive effect on the functioning of parliament in terms of legislative issues.

A permanent and statuary National Commission on the Status of Women was established in 2000 by the Federal Government fulfilling a long over-due demand of the women's rights movement; the commission undertook several pro-active initiatives, e.g. the recommendations for the repeal of the Hudood Ordinances, and suggestions for the reform of inheritance law; Justice (Retd.) Majida Razvi led the commission during its first term, followed by Dr Arifa

Syeda Zehra. Currently, the commission is headed by Anis Haroon, a renowned human rights activist and one of the pioneers of the women's rights movement in Pakistan.

It is also important to note that the resolve shown by the ruling party's parliamentarian and former Federal Minister, Sherry Rehman, to bring amendments to the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan and the controversial clauses of the Penal Code sets an example for many. After the assassinations of Salmaan Taseer, Governor of Punjab, earlier this year, and later Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minority Affairs Minister, who wanted to save the life of Aasia Bibi, a Christian peasant woman charged for blasphemy, women parliamentarians spoke out, irrespective of their party affiliations, to challenge the rabid religiosity and sheer ignorance that caused these murders. It was Marvi Memon who tabled a resolution to condemn the murder of Taseer in the National Assembly. Senator Nilofar Bakhtiar led prayers in the Senate for the departed soul, when men claiming to be otherwise progressive refused, or were too afraid, to stand up. Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Farah Naz Isphahani, Bushra Gohar, Nafeesa Shah, Fauzia Wahab, Nosheen Saeed and some of their other women colleagues in both the parliament and provincial legislatures were unequivocal in their condemnation of these murders. They made public appearances, wrote articles and took upon themselves to represent sanity and forbearance in Pakistani

society. These women have kept the debate around the Blasphemy Law alive and were supported by some dynamic women in both print and electronic media. This happened when their colleagues, the men parliamentarians, were silent out of fear of a violent backlash if they spoke out.

In terms of voting trends, the percentage of women coming out to vote has also increased since the first general elections by nearly 12%. Other than the countrywide awareness raising work done by women's and human rights organizations, the presence of female candidates and female councillors at the local level also contributed in mobilizing female voters. In 2008, the average participation of women was 40% of the total, the highest being in the Punjab at 48%, with Balochistan 40%, Sindh 34%, and Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa 30%.

THE QUESTION THAT REMAINS

Celebrating the successes of women is as essential as lamenting what has gone wrong over the years in the society and polity of Pakistan. The question remains, nevertheless, that whether this increase in participation in public life and gradual expansion of space also means a stronger voice and viable potential for bringing about fundamental changes in both state and societal structures, i.e. same social status as men, equal citizenship in the eyes of the state, and deserved

political representation according to their population. Only time can tell, but the threat of rising religious extremism does have the potential to roll things back for women. The Pakistani state and its dominant institutions have to be categorical and decisive in their dealings with violent conservatism by taking short, medium and long-term measures in terms of curbing extremist outfits without discrimination, modernising the public school curriculum, and secularising the affairs of the state.

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Annexure A

CASE STUDY 1

RABIA JAN

Nowshera is a relatively affluent town situated between the historic and prime city of Peshawar and one of Punjab's major cities, Rawalpindi. Nowshera has a major military garrison and somewhat advanced health and educational facilities, but its rural and low income areas remain underdeveloped and as ossified as ever. Rabia Jan, 22, lives in Dheri Katti Khel, a village in District Nowshera. She is the youngest child among three siblings, one brother and one sister. Rabia belongs to a lower-middleclass family where women are rarely permitted to attend school, and disallowing them to attend school has both financial and cultural reasons. She was the first girl in her whole extended family who went to school and reached 10th Grade. Rabia completed her matriculation in 2004. She was then told not to study any further by her parents and other family elders. Although Rabia desperately wanted to continue her studies but she never had the courage to speak to her parents for studying beyond secondary school level. Since she was the only girl in the whole family who had completed her matriculation, she was not supported by anyone. She was told that she had already gone much beyond the accepted traditions of the family. Rabia had another problem too. She was engaged to one of her cousins when she was in the 5th

Grade of school. Her fiancé, who himself was literate in the sense that he had studied up to 6th Grade, disliked her interest in college education and declared that he would not marry a college girl.

In 2005, Rabia got a chance to attend a seminar in the government school of her village. She was taken there by the lady councillor, Shahnaz. Shahnaz was not only a lady councillor but also a social activist associated with many civil society organizations. She used to organize and gather women for different seminars and orientation sessions with the support of NGOs. As soon as Rabia heard the speeches in the seminar, a case of Swara which had recently happened in their neighbourhood flashed in her mind. After returning from the seminar, Rabia asked her father about the decision of Swara which took place a few days back in their area. Her father snubbed her and asked her to keep quiet. He did not forget to ask what had urged her to raise this question. She told him about the seminar. Her father did not say anything, but he certainly disliked Rabia attending the seminar and asking him about the tradition and incidents of Swara. Rabia was silent but she was worried about the girl who was recently exchanged in Swara. It always frightened her whenever she thought about that girl. She tells the story of that Swara case as follows:

"Since formal female education is not liked in our society, so the girls are sent for religious teaching to different houses where there is someone to teach them. Once we heard of a small girl raped in one of such houses. She was a young girl of 14 or 15. She was raped by the teacher's son. The issue was then taken up in the Jirga and the Jirga decided to exchange money and girls between the two parties."

Rabia started feeling that this was not a good practice at all and further increased the miseries of women. A few days later, Musarrat Shah Kakakhel, who is the president of a local NGO, came to her home along with Shahnaz, the lady councillor. They both knew her father and asked Rabia about her studies. They pleaded with her father that she should be sent to college. Rabia decided to convince her parents to get her admitted to college and raised the issue again and again. She finally went on hunger strike. She did not eat anything for a couple of days. When Rabia's fiancé came to know that she was again insisting on being allowed to study in college, he threatened the family with breaking off the engagement. Her father finally relented and took admission in the girls' college.

Rabia's brother and mother were also against this decision because they were under pressure from cousins and family elders. Her own brother's fiancée was also confined to her home after finishing middle school because of the same family traditions. But

Rabia supported her as well. When she found out that the girl wanted to continue her studies, she talked to both her father and brother and convinced them that she should also be given the right to study.

In 2008, Rabia came to know about Citizens Community Boards (CCBs)[21] through an activist friend. By then, Rabia had also participated in various training and orientation programmes on women rights and gender based violence. She formed a CCB and worked with the financial support of Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment (DTCE)[22]. The CCB aimed to implement welfare activities in the area. Rabia formed a network of CCBs and conducted orientation sessions on Gender Based Violence and women's issues for them. She also worked with the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD)[23] and opened 10 literacy centres, 5 in her village *Dheri Katti Khel* and 5 in a neighbouring village *Khatkalay*. Rabia had completed her 12th Grade

[21] Citizens Community Board is a group of non-elected citizens which works for energizing the community for development and improvement in social service delivery. The concept of CCB was introduced in the Local Government Act, Pakistan, of 2000.

[22] DTCE is a non-governmental organization working to strengthen local government systems at district, tehsil and union level.

[23] NCHD is a not-for-profit semi-government organization working to achieve the dream of universal primary education across Pakistan. It also works in the areas of health and community volunteerism.

and was studying for her graduation by then. It was never easy for Rabia to work in these organizations. Her family proved very hostile. Her maternal and paternal relatives stopped coming to her home. Her brother was teased by his cousins and mother by her aunts. Sharing her painful story she said:

"We were isolated from the whole family. My paternal and maternal relatives stopped coming to our home. They would tease my brother and call him beghairat (without honour). He would be hated because his sister worked with men, unknown men. Sometimes, my mother and elder sister would get frustrated and angry and ask me to leave this work, but my father had now started supporting me. I knew that my family were taunted, but I could not stop."

Rabia has completed her graduation and now intends to study law. Rabia defines 'change' as a process wherein the self is changed as a result of an informed decision and its effects are spread to our surroundings. This change can be manifested in one's attitude, action and practice. She says:

"I can see a substantial change in my life. I could never think of studying in college, practicing as a lawyer or travelling with men to Islamabad or Karachi a few years back. Now it seems possible. I knew that my family members would be taunted and disturbed for a while, but it was an informed decision to move ahead. Studying in college, working with various NGOs and attending out-of-

city training workshops were difficult but these were all informed decisions. My engagement has finally broken up, and there was another onslaught on my family and my character as a result. It was painful, but I stood firm. This is change and this is how I feel myself to have changed."

CASE STUDY 2

TAHIRA JABEEN

Tahira Jabeen is a resident of the town of Sibbi, in the heart of Balochistan. She is 30 years old and has six brothers and three sisters. She was born and brought up in Dhadhar, her ancestral village, but the family shifted to Sibbi town when she was studying in school. Like other parts of Balochistan, Sibbi is very conservative about women's education and mobility. Tahira's parents were not opposed to literacy, basic or primary, or even secondary education for girls, but they were dead against college education and women seeking paid employment. Tahira's elder sister was the first girl in the family who reached the 10th Grade. As soon as she had completed her Matriculation, she was stopped from moving to the next stage of college education. Tahira too, was told by her brothers that she should go study only up to the 5th Grade and then stay at home. Like her sister, she was able to complete her secondary school without giving much importance to what her brothers said. But just after high school she was firmly told to stay at home.

After almost two years of staying home after her Matriculation, a family friend, Humaira Rabail, came to see her. Humaira is older than Tahira and an advocate by profession. She also runs an organization

called Mishal Women Development Society[24] in Sibbi. When she got to know that Tahira could not continue her studies because of family pressure, Humaira felt sympathetic and offered her help. She urged Tahira to talk to her parents again and motivated her to try to get admission in college, though she had taken her high school degree two years ago. Tahira was once again interested, but her brothers were in no mood to let that happen. Humaira convinced her mother. Her mother was not averse to the idea, but was not able to support her because of the brothers. As a result of Humaira's interaction with the family, Tahira's elder brother allowed her to continue her studies as a private candidate. Seeing this flexibility from her elder brother, Tahira decided to talk to her father directly. She went to her father and sought permission for her college education. She asked him why she should ask her brothers to decide about her future when the father, the head of the family, was alive. This trick of sorts worked, and her father not only permitted her to get admission in college, but also advised her brothers to cooperate.

Since the only degree college for women, in Sibbi was not fully equipped and the teachers were rarely present because they had to come from Quetta, Humaira requested her parents to get her admitted to a college in Quetta. She went with her mother and

[24] Mishal Women Development Society is a local NGO.

joined the Government Degree College, Quetta. When her younger brothers came to know about this, they threatened that they would lock her up in a room and would never allow her to go outside when she came home for the Eid holidays. Tahira decided not to go home for Eid and quietly stayed back in Quetta. But on the third day of Eid, her brothers called her and requested her to come. They gave up their opposition and compromised with the situation.

By 2007, Tahira was successful in completing her graduation and returned to Sibbi. After passing through such difficult circumstances herself, Tahira became interested in working for women's education, but she did not have the courage and confidence to convince her family, or people around her, even after having lived on her own in a hostel for four years. The only way to do something, she decided, was to join Humaira in her social work.

She then managed to join the Army Public School as a teacher and worked there for a few months, but soon left to work for those who really deserved support. She knew of a village called Khajak, which is 60 kilometres away from Sibbi. There was no school in that village for girls. With the help of a friend from that village she established a primary school. Her friend's husband, who was a government official, helped them to get some furniture and teaching material from the education department. Talking

about her school in Khajak and the progress it has made, she says:

"I was very happy on the day when this school started. The school is called Sir Syed Primary School. I could have never have thought of establishing a school 60 kilometres away from my home. The response of the people was good, but they were only sending their sons to school. I wanted the girls to come too. Although I had been successful in opening a school here but the real challenge was to bring in girls. I had dedicated myself to female education, so I started making efforts for getting parents to send their daughters to my school. It was a difficult task, but I was confident that I would be able to do it."

After extensive efforts for several months, Tahira succeeded in convincing three girls to enrol. All of them were more than 12 years old. Although they came, and were interested in continuing their studies, they faced fierce opposition from their neighbours. The girls told Tahira that the neighbours taunted them and said that girls were sent out of the home only for immoral acts. The tribal elders were also very unhappy. Tahira met with the families of these girls and convinced them to continue sending their daughters to school.

Tahira took great pains in establishing and running this school. She faced a very tough time in finding women teachers. Eventually, people started sending

their daughters to her school. A day came when a tribal elder, who was initially opposed to Tahira and the whole idea of girls going to school, came to her accompanied with his son, and apologized for his impolite behaviour. Tahira says:

"Once I was not able to speak to my father and brothers for my own college education, but now I am confident that I can convince anyone about the importance of female education. This was my dream, and I am approaching its fulfilment."

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