



National Conference
on
“Extremism and
its Impact on
Society: Implications
for Women”

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National Commission on the Status of Women

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National Commission on the Status of Women

SESSION ONE

Symbiotic relations between State and Religion

Session Chair: Ms Asma Jehangir

Following the inaugural speech by Ms. Anis Haroon, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women, the deliberations were launched by a poem recited by eminent poet and women's rights activist **Ms. Kishwar Naheed**. The title of Kishwar Naheed's poem was *Mujhay bin paani machhli na bana*; the theme was based on women's resistance against patriarchy and religious extremism.

Construction of a theocratic mindset through education

By Mr. Khadim Hussain

(In the absence of Mr. Khadim Hussain, his paper was presented by Dr. Fouzia Saeed)

Mr. Khadim Hussain's presentation focused on how the curricula, method of teaching and learning environment in the mainstream public education system in Pakistan had contributed to shaping a theocratic mindset. He said that the curricula for the social sciences, history and Islamic studies was *-serving to 'glorify the concept of a Muslim ummah, 'encouraged a peculiar kind of jihad and 'stimulated hatred against other religions and beliefs'.*

It highlighted a particular construct of history in which people from Middle East were made heroes and the Muslim monarchs were glorified in the society of diverse religions. This resulted in demonization of the leadership of other countries. Not just in the history curriculum, but the religious and cultural stereotyping was carried out in Urdu fiction as well.

Mr. Hussain's paper suggested that the method of teaching in our educational institutions was devoid of analytical engagement and critical thought. In our classrooms, questioning was discouraged and difference of opinion was not given space- even the teachers lacked the skill for logical development of an argument.

Quoting the great Brazilian educationist, Paolo Freire, the paper suggested that the cultural of silence was appreciated in the educational system, thus compromising the space for creativity. Lack of tolerance and diversity boiled down to isolationism, marginalization of civic rights and responsibility. The perpetuation of the status consciousness, feudal behaviour and morbid individuality had been made part of the learning culture.

Finally, the paper emphasized that the education system as a whole was perpetuating dogmatic worldview that was prone to a theocratic mindset that presented and indoctrinated only one-dimensional reality and lacked analytical, critical and objective approach to State, society, universe and relationships among human beings in general.

The occupation of mainstream cultural space in Pakistani society by politico-religious parties and groups

By Ms. Farida Shaheed

Ms. Farida Shaheed (Shirkat Gah), human rights activist and member of Women's Action Forum, began her well researched paper by defining 'culture.' She said that culture was a prism through which we saw and reacted to the world around us, and through which others viewed and responded to us. As such, culture was inseparable from collective identity. But it needed to be understood that there was no accurate plural for the pronoun I; and even identical twins were different from each other because of differentiated experiences. The term 'we' only came into play to distinguish one set of individuals from another. It was a selective process that defined the boundaries of a particular group outside which were those who were not 'us' and constituted the Other(s).

She believed that it was a mistake to see extremism as an isolated phenomenon as it was only one end of a continuum, and unless the continuum was addressed we would not be able to deal with

extremism. Politicoreligious parties and groups, even if not extremist, had played an important role in this continuum, since they defined their *political* and societal agendas in religious terminology. Their main aim was not to make people good Muslims but to gain political power, as observed in the 1953 Report of the Court of Inquiry Munir Report while investigating the first religious riots in Pakistan's history.

'The ideology of the Jama'at-i-Islami....aims at the establishment of the sovereignty of Allah throughout the world...the establishment of a religio-political system which the Jama'at calls Islam. For the achievement of this ideal it believes not only in propaganda but in the acquisition of political control by constitutional means, and where feasible by force. A Government which is not based on the Jama'at's conception...is...a Satanic Government, and...kufr, all persons taking part in such Government, whether as administrators or otherwise, or willingly submitting to such system being sinners...The Jama'at was...professedly opposed to the Muslim League's conception of Pakistan, and since the establishment of Pakistan, which it described as Na Pakistan, has been opposed to the present system of Government and those who are running it.' (page 252)

Hence, the politico-religious groups, as represented by the Jamaat-i-Islami at the time, question the very concept of nation-states; and seek to seize political control not only by propaganda and constitutional means but also by use of force, she emphasized. But politico-religious groups had only managed to gain control and influence over the mainstream cultural space because of opportunities provided by secular and non-religiously defined political actors and power brokers, who had consistently used Islam in their own pursuit of power.

Discussing the question of national identity, she said that with the migration of the non-Muslim population Pakistani nationhood came to be defined in oppositional terms to a far larger, hostile, 'Hindu India'. This too allowed the politico-religious elements to gain ground, although they had been opposed to the creation of Pakistan and initially enjoyed little support.

Illustrating the point she said: "Using Islam was convenient for entirely secular reasons...the arithmetic of democracy did not suit those acceding to central power. The Punjabis and Urdu-speaking Mohajirs from north India wielded considerable power in the new state by virtue of their presence in the military and civil bureaucracies. Nevertheless the majority of the state's citizens were Bengali-speaking East Pakistanis (now Bangladeshis). Considerable time and effort was thus spent finding ways to circumvent the logic of universal franchise. In a country created in the name of federalism, the invented parameters...of a 'Muslim nationhood' have been regularly flourished to deny a share in power to the ethnically diverse units constituting Pakistan and to reject the demands for autonomy articulated by Bengalis, Sindhis, Baluch, and Pakhtoons." This reluctance to institute a democratic system of governance and power sharing was masked by the language of Islam and a 'Muslim' national identity. Democracy became 'unsuited to Pakistan,' requiring abridging modifications to be "true democracy" or a "democracy suited to Pakistan" as often stated by the last military ruler, General Pervaiz Musharraf."

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Giving examples, Ms Shaheed said that adoption of the Objectives Resolution, as a preamble to the new Constitution in March 1949 was a first key victory of marginalized politico-religious actors in which Maulana Maududi, who had called Jinnah Kafir-e-Azam, played a pivotal role, although the religious groups were only nominally represented in the Assembly. Then, in 1952-1953, the western-educated Punjab Chief Minister, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, helped to convert what started as a secular issue of food scarcity into a religious crisis. The JI instantly seized this opening to demand that the Ahmedis be declared non-Muslims.

The Munir Report concluded that riots in Punjab were instigated by the Majlis-i-Ahrar, a marginal politico-religious group that '*consistently exploited religion for their political ends...left the Congress on grounds of religion, and...opposed the Muslim League and Pakistan.*'¹ It also blames Daultana for actively encouraging the inflammatory statements and actions made by these politically marginalized religious groups.²...the Report expressed concern that the Objectives

¹ Government of Pakistan 1953, Munir Report, p.256

² Ibid p.386

Resolution...was...being used by the *ulema* to argue...that non-Muslims could not be equal citizens. (Page 249) Also of concern to the judges was that when asked whether they accepted the Quaid's conception of a modern nation '*everyone one of [the ulema] replied in an unhesitating negative*'...They believe that '*a State based on this idea is the creature of the devil... confirmed in this by several writings of...Maulana Maudoodi, the founder of the jama'at. None of the ulema can tolerate a State which is based on nationalism and all that it implies...*'

The Report's recommendations were ignored by the authorities who did not even censure politico-religious elements for inciting people to violence in the name of Islam. Impunity for violating the law and challenging the writ of the state in the name of religion thus started long before the arrival of General Zia ul-Haq's military dictatorship, she pointed out.

The push by those in power to make Islam the central privileged reference point for state and society began in 1969 with General Yahya Khan, not known for any religious leanings, who promulgated Martial Law Regulation 51 that introduced 7 years RI for '*anyone publishing or in possession of any book pamphlet etc. offensive to the religion of Islam.*' He reinvented the military as defenders of '*the ideology of Pakistan,*' and '*privatized jihad*' by supporting religious militias to counter and undermine the Bengali independence movement.³

The transformation of the military cultural outlook, the state's most powerful institution that has ruled Pakistan directly or indirectly for most of its history, was a key element in the appropriation of mainstream societal culture, Fareeda stressed. The changed worldview of more than half a million people in the armed forces inevitably filtered into and permeated the society. Zia dismantled whatever secularist traditions the officer rank had had from the British Indian Army and instituted a conservative religious-minded officer corps: the army's creed became *Iman, Taqwa, Jihad fi Sabil Allah*; Islamiat became part of the curricula of the military training academies; and Deobandi preachers were appointed, who encouraged troops to attend *tablighi* gatherings. The influence of the Jamaat-i-Islami in all this was especially visible.

In addition, Zia brought about a virtual paradigm shift by actively engaging in the social sector. He reconfigured all state institutions, the social arenas and the legal landscape. The infamous Hudood Ordinances, Blasphemy Laws, *qisas* and *diyat*, the Law of Evidence were a few of the worst laws. Human rights were suspended; political parties banned, except the Jamaat-i-Islami; all student unions were banned, except the JI's student wing the Islami Jamiat-Tuleba. Religiosity propagated through the only TV channel, heavy censorship of the print media, the re-writing of textbooks and history, and the political repression, all served to silence dissent and diversity. At the same time, the state directly supported *madrassahs* through financial infusions, land endowments, and the conferring of the status of a bachelor's degree to *madrassah* graduates. Political patronage transformed the social standing of the average mullah who was suddenly better resourced and linked to circles of influence.

Zia's regime coincided with the US's proxy war with the USSR in which 'mujahideen' were promoted as freedom fighters, giving an international stamp of approval to religious discourse and actions in the political sphere regardless of how violative of human rights they were. The support entailed big money and arms. Groups armed and trained by the US and Pakistan never handed in their weapons, and after the defeat of the Soviet Union, far from giving up their agenda for Islamisation, expanded it to encompass the state of Pakistan (Stern). We were experiencing the impact of a full blowback today, she said.

Zia insidiously appropriated and reconfigured the cultural spaces in society, education and politics, by seemingly small insertions in everyday life that eventually ended up making citizens complicit in what the state wanted to impose. State sanction in the form of legal changes and official propaganda unleashed the basest instincts of marginal elements, whose increasingly rampant acts of wanton violence, bigotry and intolerance were granted impunity.

³ Yahya declared that the "duty of self-defense (jihad) which Islam ordained" justified the creation of 'irregular forces,' quoted in Haqqani, page 56.

According to Ms Shaheed, "Overt religiosity became the newly minted political coin for entrance, appointments and promotions...text books re-wrote history to project politico-religious groups as the champions instead of the opponents of Pakistani statehood; recitations of the Quran a mandatory prelude for all public functions. By the time Zia died in 1988, the forced impositions in the name of Islam had transformed into cultural norms, forever changing the social, political and cultural landscape...'true' citizens were male, Muslim, and largely Punjabi, leaving citizenship of all others, especially women and minorities, somewhat suspect and needing to be proved."

Focusing on women, she regretted that Islam was particularly used to control women, and sexual mores became a focus of state campaigns, gender segregation and female seclusion a central pillar of the new ethos, with many measures lifted directly from the party agenda of the Jamaati-Islami. "The notion of culturally diverse Pakistani women was replaced by an *Islamic woman*. As the state tried to push women back into the confines of *chador aur chardiwari*, the harassment of women in public spaces grew enormously...A campaign to eliminate obscenity and vulgarity (a favourite topic of the religious right) managed to suggest that women *per se* were somehow obscene...An entire generation grew up imbibing the ideas propagated by the military regime and its junior partners in government, the JI...many internalized propaganda suggesting that women's only place was in the home, their role that of reproduction and motherhood, and their status and rights in all aspects subservient to men..."

Fareeda questioned why society was not able to resist and bounce back after the Zia years? Why did the state allow itself to be held to ransom by those who act violently, violate the law and challenge the writ of the state under the pretext of religion? Why were such elements continuing to be granted such wide impunity?

She asserted that politico-religious groups were able to advance their agenda because of active support or collusion of state authority and others. Ayub Khan promoted Islam as a barrier to communism in the international arena (Jalal) and told the US "[o]ur army can be your army if you want us,"⁴ and Yahya Khan initiated the idea of *jihadi* militias as a response to internal conflicts. "Under Zia the most long-term damage...was not the laws, but those seemingly small insertions into everyday life...(such as) making the issuance of national identity cards and passports...for all Muslim citizens dependent on signing complicity with the state's ex-communication of an entire sect from Islam." The airing of Quranic recitations at government venues, later adopted by private shops and enterprises, became 'culture' and was internalised almost subliminally.

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She emphasized that gender relations were critical ingredients in all collective identities and cultures, and all societies set rules for interactions between males and females. Politico-religious groups used gender relations, with a focus on controlling women, to occupy cultural spaces. They stressed collective cultural identity perhaps because they did not have a political economy agenda. "I would posit that it is the manifestations of this cultural identity that link extremists and others in the continuum through similar religious idiom and discourse, even when they differ in the degree to which the messages and actions would be classified as extremist," she concluded.

Looking at possible future action to reverse the occupation of mainstream cultural spaces, she proposed the following actions: Any impunity granted and all blackmail exercised in the name of religion must be dispensed with; linkages between extremist groups and those considered more mainstream must be exposed, as the discourse of less extremist politico-religious groups provided an entry to those who were more extreme; The financial sources of support for *madrassahs* and politico-religious groups must be identified and exposed. In Vehari district alone 187 *madrassahs* had opened up between 2001 and 2007, many receiving direct funding from Saudi Arabian sources.⁵ People objected vehemently to the undue influence exercised by the US, but remained curiously silent on the negative influences of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

⁴ General Ayub Khan cited in Abbas 2005, p. 26.

⁵ Shirkat Gah- Women's Resource Centre component of the Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender, poverty and democratization from the inside out

Also, the state must deliver justice and educate people about laws and rights, as the inability to do so "has enabled traditional adjudication systems to continue to operate outside state structures, and (had) created a vacuum into which discourses of 'Islamic justice' have been inserted by the religious right wing, including fanatical virulently misogynistic and anti-democratic extremist groups outside the democratic political party set up;" a pluralistic territory-based concept of nation (Alavi) must replace the extremist politico-religious version of a collective cultural identity that has supra-national ambitions, hence progressive forces must have a counter proposition for a national identity and a clearly articulated proposal for a suitable political economy. They must demand that the State assume full responsibility for all its citizens without discrimination, and ensure education, health and economic opportunities and equality before the law, regardless of gender, religious or other identities. The objective of education must be to nurture critical thinking.

History must be retrieved from the stranglehold left by Zia, starting with the widespread reading of the Pakistan Resolution, the Quaid's inaugural speech in 1948 and the 1953 Munir Commission Report, she stressed, and quoted George Orwell's statement, 'He who controls the present controls the past and he who controls the past controls the future.'

Finally, decision-makers must stop seeing dissent as a challenge to authority, and understand that dissent, diversity, and pluralism were essential ingredients for the survival and growth of any society. She emphasized the point by stating, "We need to replace binaries by cultural diversity and take a lesson from ecology, which is that when you insist on monoculture, the crops, and eventually the very land itself dies. We have to take cognizance of the fact that as a culture we are dying and our only hope is to actively reject the false binary choices being imposed and to celebrate our diversities, which include differences of opinions and points of view."

Islamisation of State and Constitution of Pakistan

By Mr. Abid Hassan Minto

Mr. Abid Minto, Secretary General of the Pakistan Workers Party and senior lawyer, focused on two points in his presentation: 1) 1940's Resolution-the foundation of Pakistan, and 2) Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947

Sharing his opinion on the origin of the State of Pakistan Mr. Minto said that if we referred to the Pakistan Resolution 1940 and Mr. Jinnah's speech to the first Constituent Assembly, we would find that the theoretical groundings of Pakistan were quite liberal and tolerant.

Mr. Minto, while narrating an example told the audience that on the Independence Day, 14th August 2009, the Chief of Army Staff in his speech to the nation said that the army was the defender of Islam. Criticising this statement Mr. Minto said that according to the Constitution of Pakistan, the army is not supposed to defend the religion but the State. He pointed out that army itself had been killing Muslims and General Zia ul-Haq, a military dictator had killed Muslims in Jordan.

Highlighting the significance of Pakistan's Constitution Mr. Minto said that it talked about how to run the affairs of the State and described the nature of the State. He reminded the audience that the 1940 Resolution ensured autonomy of the Constitutional Units, safeguards for the minorities, and protection of all religions but it did not talk of a State based on religion or an Islamic State. He asked as to how and for what purpose the idea and concept of Islamic State emerge.

While quoting the speech of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Mr. Minto said, "On 11th August 1947 in the first session of the Constituent Assembly he said, I cannot emphasize too much, we must begin to work, all the angularities of minorities and Muslim communities. You have to attain the freedom and independence... You are free to go to your temples... or to any place of worship... religion has nothing to do with the business of the State"...

Despite the strong theoretical grounds, Mr. Minto deplored that Mullah Board was made to put their views in legislation.