



شیرکت گاہ

Shirkat Gah
Women's Resource Centre

 **HEINRICH
BÖLL
STIFTUNG
PAKISTAN**

Conference Report

**International Conference on “Women, Religion and Politics”
On the Occasion of 100 years of International Women’s Day**

**17-18th March, 2011
Lahore, Pakistan**

This report is dedicated to Roshan Dhunjibhoy who passed away on 24th April 2011 shortly after participating actively in this conference. As a seasoned journalist, esteemed scholar and activist and treasured friend and colleague, Roshan made an impact on everyone she came in contact with and changed the lives of many. She is credited with establishing the Heinrich Boll Foundation in Pakistan by opening its first office in Pakistan in 1993. She was an immense source of encouragement, enlightenment and energy. She will be missed sorely by the Heinrich Boll Foundation, its partners and various friends in Pakistan and across the world.

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Hotel Holiday Inn, Lahore

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Day 1

Welcoming Comments

Britta Petersen, Country Director, Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS) opened the conference by welcoming the participants, thanking in particular the international guests for gracing the occasion despite the challenging security situation. She stressed that the prevailing conditions create new challenges in the lives of women as battlefields of power and drive home the fact that giving up is not an option.

Ms. Khawar Mumtaz, Chief Executive Officer- Shirkat Gah, Women's Resource Centre in her welcoming note introduced the participants to Shirkat Gah's work in the background of International Women's day and its significance. She appreciated the unwavering support that HBS has provided its partners in times when NGO's were under great political and social pressure. This has led to a bond between HBS and its partners that is far stronger than a usual client/donor relationship.

She spoke about importance of the conference in the present geo political context as States increasingly find themselves becoming hostage to religious rights and groups. In this atmosphere, women must be constantly vigilant against patriarchy's use of religion to gain ground and remember that the glass is either half full or empty.

Research Findings of the UNRISD Study by Anne Jenichen

Ms. Jenichen presented findings of the "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality" Project carried out by the Heinrich Boll Foundation in collaboration with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) during 2007-2010. The project was inspired by the observation that in opposition to the predictions of theories of modernization and secularization, religion continues to dominate public and political life and has not been relegated to the private sphere. The intertwining of religion, state and politics has had diverse implications on women's rights and gender equality and created situations where women, have individually and collectively challenged and redefined hegemonic norms in different national contexts. The findings examine the functions religion assumes at different levels of the polity namely the level of the state, the level of 'political society' and the level of civil society. They also take into account the impact of democracy on women's struggles.

Religion provides a strong sense of identity and promotes cohesion by reinforcing ethnic nationalism and bolstering authoritarianism. This creates a sense of community which has immense exclusionary effects and leads to the marginalization of religious minorities. For women, there is much at stake in how religion becomes mobilized for ethno-nationalist struggles. A nationalist division of labor based on religious thought emerges that assigns men the role of governing the nation and women the responsibility of its biological and cultural reproduction. The state also "communalises" personal status laws by according

religious authorities and institutions semi-autonomy from the otherwise non religious national legal regime.

In cases such as Pakistan and Iran, religion bolsters authoritarianism as by declaring it as the law of the land, state power is exercised in the name of religion and its critique regarded as apostasy and heresy. This constrains democratic debate and suppresses forces for change.

Democracy can aid and regulate feminist and religious groups provided it is practically implemented as a participative process respecting and taking all citizens voices into account.

Key Note Speech “Reflections on the Refracted Dynamics of Gender, Politics and Religion” by Farida Shaheed

The address built upon the commonalities emerging from case studies of different countries as part of a collaborative research project on “Gender equality, politics and research” by HBS and United Nations Research Institute on Social Sciences (UNRISD). A common strand of thought amongst researchers on these issues is that religion per se is not the problem, rather the gender-politics-religion nexus stems from power dynamics rooted within socio-economic, political and historical contestations leading to the prominence and privileging of some religious institutions. These findings are generated through a study of religions belonging mostly to the Abrahimical tradition

Farida stated that any attempt to study the intertwining of women, religion and politics must focus on power dynamics. Even in countries where religion is distanced from the government through constitutional provisions, in reality state functioning is to varying extents, affected and manipulated by religious elements. This leads us to question what a truly secular state is and what are the parameters of the relationship between religion and state power?

Another common finding is that it is not the political influence of religious actors that alone creates and reinforces gender qualities. Rather it is the alliances between different political and religious actors aspiring to power that determine the scope and strength of power of religious institutions.

Case studies also suggest that religious institutions gain ground with marginalised groups by signifying moral superiority evident in resistance of oppressive authoritarian regimes. Alternatively, religion may also be directly associated with an oppressive regime.

Another common thread is the bartering away of women’s rights for political expediency.

Two other commonalities include firstly, a concerted effort by political and religious groups to woo the youth particularly by targeting the education system and secondly the consistent focus on sexuality in terms of controlling women’s sexuality and propagation of heteronormative family structures.

However, the good news is that the fusing of religion and politics alters religion itself as well.

Some lessons learnt from the above commonalities are as follows:

- In the absence of a strong democracy, religious rites and ideology become tools for political parties and religious groups to suppress dissent.
- Conservative groups are better organised and have more resources as opposed to those fighting for gender equality. One of the reasons for this is the immense difficulty of forging effective links with political parties and becoming part of the party agendas.
- Political groups constituting the state choose to focus on social issues constraining the roles of women rather than the economic.
- There is a continuing need to be rigorous in our analysis of issues and be careful in adopting new language and positions just because they are commonly used.
- We need to decide what we want and what we are suggesting as an alternative through a clearly thought out vision and strategy.

“De-secularisation and re-domestication: The impact of politicised religions on women’s rights as equal citizens” by Vivienne Wee in response to Farida Shaheed’s key note address on “Reflections on the Refracted dynamics of Women, Religion and Politics”

Vivienne suggested that the main issues at stake when women, religion and politics are discussed are as follow:

- The concept of the secular state as a political ideal
- Gender equality premised on women as equal citizens
- The existence of the public sphere as a neutral arena shared equally by all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, including no religious affiliation
- The equal status of all religions in a multi-cultural state, because all religions are supposed to be equally distant to the state

She introduced the terms ‘de-secularization’ and ‘politicized regions’ into the debate to aid her analysis.

The term de-secularisation is used to refer to the impact of politicised religions in posing a particular challenge – that is, challenging the notion that the secular state is a political

ideal, a shared aspiration that all nation-states should strive to achieve. She agreed with the view point that there are different realisations of the secular state in practice. Vivienne suggested that in studying the impact of politicised religions it may be more useful to focus on de-secularization as a challenge to the political ideal, rather than on varied realizations of the secular state. This is because a common political ideal gives us a yardstick, enabling us to evaluate different political realities in terms of how they have realized or not realized this ideal.

The politicized religions are trying to debunk this political ideal. They are saying: “The secular state and all that it implies is not at all what we aspire to achieve.” This is precisely the difference between the states that have not completely realized the secular state as a political ideal and the politicized religions that do not adhere to this ideal.

In trying to determine what politicized religions consider as their political ideal, Vivienne described the term politicized religions as “non-political religion versus politicised religion.” This implies the active promotion of not just a particular religion by some as the basis for state laws and policies but also a particular interpretation of religion. This is inherently anti –secular and anti-multicultural.

In such a state, non believers become lesser citizens and the dominant mode of political legitimization becomes representation of other worldly powers.

This lead Vivienne to wonder, whether the contemporary politicization of religion should be understood as the re-politicisation of religion after a period of de-politicisation through secularization?

By this she meant that in the historical context of pre-modern absolutist regimes governed by divine rulers, religion was certainly politicised as a means of legitimising the power of these rulers. However, most of these divinely legitimised regimes came to an end in more recent times, often as a result of European colonisation.

The question is whether the increasing turn to religious legitimation as a way of legitimising political power signifies a return to the absolutist regime as a political norm. The answer lies in the study of historical trajectories of Europe and Asia. The monitoring of a number of variables such as education and technology through the ages leads to the conclusion that the experience of secularity without democracy and social justice is likely to generate a view that the lack of democracy and social justice derives from the lack of religiosity.

Thus, the processes of re-domestication, often imposed by politicised religionists, are a coping strategy helping people to endure in a neo-liberal capitalist regime and, in this process, becoming a support to neo-liberal capitalism.

The compulsory heteronormative familialism demanded by politicized religionist dovetails with neo-liberal capitalism. The vision of the state and society being promoted by politicized religions is that of extended patriarchal families with the economy and technology viewed as instruments of a divine plan.

In contrast the political ideal being currently offered by alternative groups is based on a rights based approach emphasizing equal citizenry and accountability of the state. Vivienne ended her commentary by asking whether this pursuit of rights is enough to address the everyday realities that women face. She asks:

- Do these rights (international and national) address neo-liberal processes of restructuring state, market and society?
- Do these rights assure equal opportunities and rewards in a world of increasing inequalities?

Session 1: Women and Religion

Chair: Dr. Durre Ahmed

Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: Implications of a democratic paradox? By Yesim Arat

The paper traced the intertwining of religion and politics in Turkey and its implications for women's opportunities. The founding fathers of the Turkish state aimed to create a secular state and initiated reforms to secularize the educational, cultural and legal institutions. The 1950s saw Turkey move from a single party to a multiparty regime and gradually a series of Islamist political parties emerged. In 2007, the ruling party AKP was re-elected to power with half of the electorate behind it. This was the first time in Turkey that a political party with an Islamist background came to power with a clear majority.

The head scarf issue is the most visible manifestation of the intertwining of religion and politics in Turkey. The AKP's backdoor attempt to amend the constitution to remove the ban on headscarves preceded a series of actions taken by the state to restrict women's roles and opportunities. As part of this strategy, conservative party linebackers are being moved into the bureaucratic mainstream and the educational system. This creates a democratic paradox for the country that sees "the expansion of religious freedoms accompanying potential and/or real threats to gender equality." In the present context, women are susceptible to accepting the secondary roles prescribed by religion and promoted by the state at the cost of substantive secular choices.

Catholic Church: Implications for Gender Equality- A case study of Poland by Magdalena Mosiewicz

Ms. Mosiewicz presented a case study highlighting the impact of the Catholic Church's on women's lives and democracy in Poland. The Church's influence in Poland was strengthened during transition times through the propagation of the view that return to tradition was a solution to the prevailing situation. The church's influence has persisted and infiltrated various domains of life since then. The dominant conservative ideology is manifested in political, economic and social domains. For example official ceremonies start with mass, religion is taught in public schools and anti abortion laws persist. Hence,

the church is an active political force defending hierarchy and tradition and rejecting progressive change.

The church does not provide support to women's causes and imposes an oppressive and paternalistic order through platitudes such as 'respect for tradition' and 'morality in danger'. Opinion polls show that the majority of people do not share the church's views on issues affecting women's welfare but these constitute a silent majority.

As opposed to the church they are unable to voice their thoughts effectively and have limited outreach. On the other hand, the church has a well organized infrastructure in place which ensures that its agenda is promoted during elections and referendums.

In order to overturn the authority of the church, the opposition must mobilize itself by being present in the media, nominating its electoral candidates and voting for them and starting legal trails. Efforts along these lines have resulted in victories during the past three years and will hopefully continue to do so.

“Buddhist Women, Religion, and Politics: Ideals and Challenges” by Dr. Hema Goonatilake

The presentation related the Buddha's theoretical approach for social and spiritual transformation to contemporary realities in countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet and discussed the long debated issue of full ordination of women.

Buddha stated that all human beings are equal. Based on this women enjoyed elevated status in early Buddhism. Equal rights were accorded to women in various domains of life whether it be matters related to marriage, divorce, widowhood and remarriage or the right to inherit and dispose property. Women also had considerable authority in the home as her husband's helpmate and guardian. The ideal virtues as promulgated by Buddha were deemed equally relevant for both men and women and did not include any specifically female virtues. Women also had considerable authority over monastic affairs. Sex is seen as an expression of conjugal love and as a satisfying emotional experience for both men and women. Buddhist liberal attitudes were passed down the ages in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos and persisted well into the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, new forms of exploitation emerged with the advent of western colonialism and modernization. Gradually, introduction of factory style factory production exploited women with lower wages for similar work. These trends intensified with the emergence of transnational tourism engaging of women in the entertainment and leisure industry. The employment of women as bar girls, go-go dancers and masseurs constituted the prostitution trade. The trafficking of girls and women and the HIV/AIDS epidemic has added new dimensions to this exploitation.

These circumstances have led scholars such as Khin Thitsa to speculate whether the Buddhist emphasis on merit making facilitates prostitution. Others categorize it as the socio-economic situation resulting from global trends which have been embraced by the power structures in these countries.

Gender power differentials persist within religious organizations as well. While Buddha reluctantly allowed ordination of nuns, eight special rules to be adhered to by nuns were formulated. The first of these rules stating that even the most senior of nuns pay respect to the most junior monk sparked a male-female confrontation in the Buddhist order. This row persists in the even today. In Sri Lanka there are 1,000 fully ordained nuns who are yet to be recognized by the monk's hierarchy. There is clear politics of denomination to keep the nuns in a subordinate position. Hence, Buddhist ideology advocating intellectual equality has been changed practically by the formation of new rules by political interest groups.

Discussant: Roshan Dhunjibhoy

Roshan Dhunjibhoy opened the discussion by commenting upon the acknowledgement of all three genders in Thailand. She said that it was worth noting that 98% of transgender people are men who have become women and not vice versa.

She said that religion in our times has become a potent weapon. In reality, there is no such thing as secularism. Even in secular states, family laws are based on religion. She lauded the state of Thailand where the proposition of making Buddhism the state religion was rejected by the majority.

Today we are fighting a battle of ideas-ideas for control. In this context one wonders why humanity moved from female to male God's? One also wonders what are we fighting for? Are we fighting for equality with men? One possible answer is that we are fighting for whatever will make societies more encompassing and less violent.

Control is perpetuated through religion by instilling fear in people. It is the ultimate weapon because once you reach the supreme deity there is no other authority to refer to. The buck stops there.

We must utilize this occasion to generate new ideas and clarify what we want and what we need.

Question & Answers

The audience asked Farida about what she meant when she said that religious institutions have links across the polity.

She answered by referring to the extensive network of schools, hospitals, hostels and other institutes run by religious institutes. She highlighted how religious institutions exploit all levels of discursive and political space by establishing religious discursive linkages with

many TV networks (religious), businesses and political parties. On the other hand, other groups are divided and not leveraging strategically.

She said that when you talk about religion there is the promise of something beyond your personal life. It is intensely personal but also collective. Religion has become 'sellable'. What can we offer that will sell?

Political parties are very important but the process of our forming links with them has been slow. We have to generate either social movements or political parties.

Farida raised the question that in our otherwise so called democratic society: Why is it that our religious leaders are not elected?

The panelist from Turkey was asked whether religion has gradually permeated politics and the state due to the widening urban/rural divide, state interference in people's private lives or is it in some way correlated to Turkey's inclusion in the EU?

Yesim Arat answered saying that secularism was not able to deliver the results that people wanted to see. The head scarf issue has become the most visible manifestation of these feelings. However, these issues are multilayered and can be attributed to various factors such the states handling of the migration, and disparity in distribution of results of economic growth.

In response to a question about the freedom of wearing head scarves in secular societies, Farida responded saying that we need to observe how much choice a women actually has. Furthermore, those urging women to wear hijab's should call just as loudly for women to wear miniskirts.

The political economy of religion was highlighted and the dampening of ideological discourse and debates was lamented. Magdalena commented that 'Pluralism' is a key word in such a scenario.

Session 2: Women and Politics

Chair : Shahnaz Wazir Ali

Mobilizing women for Electoral Politics in Iran by Homa Hoodfar

The paper reviews Iranian Party politics since 1997 to examine the strategies used by various religious conservative, reformist and neo-Islamist political parties to reach out to women's groups, the motives underlying these actions and the importance imparted to women's votes.

The conservative factions while in disagreement on a number of issues agree broadly on two points. These include the supremacy of the theological structure of the state under the guidance of the ulema over the republican part of the state and the idea that an Islamic society is a gender segregated one. The conservative factions have through a well thought out strategy appealed to young females through measures such as the formation

of female theological schools and women only sports facilities. While some may see these measures as deepening gender apartheid, low income women welcome these actions and accept them as genuine attempts to promote women interests. Conservative factions under the leadership of radical Islamists have consciously courted women in segments of society they view as potential constituents.

Reformists have also addressed women's needs through reforming family law and creating more open public spheres. However, these efforts have not had a discernable impact on bettering women's lives.

Homa concluded that "the parties act as if women's issues will have to wait until the dawn of democracy". Debate continues on whether democracy can be cultivated in an atmosphere where patriarchy is the dominant social institution.

Women Politicians: Challenges and Achievements in Public Sphere and Political parties in Pakistan by Bushra Gohar

Bushra Gohar commented upon the difficulties faced by women parliamentarians in Pakistan. She stated that religion plays a significant role in Pakistani politics. Pakistan was created for Muslims and the state religion is Islam. Since 1947 we have allowed and appeased religious groups.

Speaking about difficulties faced by women parliamentarians, she said that they are accepted if they conform to widely accepted norms. If the women parliamentarians in any way challenge these norms they are informed that they are getting out of their limits and a process of gentle coercion and dissuasion and outright threats starts.

However, Ms. Gohar stated that if women push enough the space is there. After the recent blasphemy related assassinations the right to speak freely has been ceded. In the aftermath of the violence only the women in parliament spoke out and it is feared that many will pay for that.

Women in parliament are moving things. Some of the most important issues have been brought forward by women. The Working Council of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus as a representative body is working well. For the first time women from PML-N have started speaking about gender issues. The caucus has given confidence to women who have never been allowed to speak out in their own parties.

Ms. Gohar spoke about conditions within parties where women are generally used. If there is a protest women are called upon to come onto the streets but when it comes to decision making women are usually sidelined. For example, no political party nominated a woman for being part of the Constitutional Review Committee.

She was of the view that separate women's wings within the party tend to marginalize women and that it is better to work within the party rather than through a woman's wing.

Women parliamentarians have put women issues on the parliaments table. Women bringing up issues related to religion are often hushed up because and if women question this then they are considered a “kaffir” (non believer) even in progressive liberal parties. Discussion on religion is discouraged and a quick fix is to send issues that have to do with religion and women to the religious council. Parliamentarians often do not get support from party on raising certain issues which makes it much more difficult to generate change.

Discussant: Magdalena Mosiewicz

Magdalena observed that the one common factor across all contexts discussed was the power of manipulation and how easily and expertly it is wielded. They win because they manipulate!!!

She was of the view that politicized religions will not change and that they do not bring anything good, not for the poor, not for children and women or the weak, only for those in power. She felt that one of the problems of the women’s movement problem is that they prefer to be a movement, they don’t want to go to the other side.

Question and Answers:

Ms. Arat from Turkey asked the panel about the extent and nature of changes being brought about by women parliamentarians and whether women in parliament represent women or just their own political parties.

Ms. Bushra answered that now for the first time women are chairing committees in parliament such as the finance, defense and public accounts committee. The speaker of the assembly is also a woman. If there is an issue relating to women, they get together and discuss it and lobby for it. Furthermore, all women protest against derogatory remarks made against women.

Ms. Shahnaz Wazir Ali added that women in politics can often not get together on women’s issues due to ‘Ideological differences’. There is a need to separately study ‘women in politics’ and ‘women and politics’.

Session 3: Women and Media

Chair: Britta Peterson

Role of the Media: Religion and Politics: Implications on Gender Equality in Pakistan By Sheen Farrukh

Ms. Farrukh traced the expansion of various mediums of media in Pakistan and there ‘Flirtatious’ non serious attitude towards empowerment of women. She stated that despite the hype created about the wonders of Information Communication Technologies, the fact remains that these are just tools and their impact is determined by who uses them and to what end. Therefore, the key to understanding the media’s coverage lies in knowing who has access and control over technology. She used newspaper headlines and coverage

of International Women's Day 2011 to get a sense of the media's stance on women's issues. She appreciated in particular the coverage given by Sindhi newspapers. She pin pointed that almost none of the newspapers mentioned that it was the 100th Anniversary of International Women's day.

Talking about the strengths of various mediums she said that the on-line social media is the only independent forum at present. The print media has managed to survive the onslaught of satellite television. The broad cast media has failed to utilize its potential for betterment of common man due to unprofessional amongst its cadre. Women tend to be the victims of tabloid reporting and the issues surrounding their lives sensationalized to a damaging extent. A prime example in this regard is the Veena Malik episode.

Democracy in Pakistan still wobbles but Anchorocracy flourishes. The hosts and male politicians in talk shows display unbridled biases on air towards women guests

Women tend to be featured in incidents of accident, violence and natural disasters implying that stereotypes still thrive. Media does not project women as serious partners in decision making. Media is a vehicle that carries material produced by the society. The upheaval in Pakistani society is manifested everyday in the media and no relief is in sight. Therefore, the fight to bring women's issues to the forefront must persist relentlessly despite the odds.

Understanding the Ideological Paradigms conveyed through Religion oriented Television Programs in Pakistan by Sahar Gul

Ms. Sahar Gul presented a research conducted through the platform of the National Commission on the Status of Women, on the ideological positions being conveyed in religion-oriented TV programs so that the 'NCSW – and the other governmental entities within Pakistan – can recognize the messages being conveyed, as well as form strategies on how to counter any irredentist hate speech, which may emerge from such transmissions.'

The research was conducted over a period of four months from end 2009 to mid February 2010 in Punjab, Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa through a study of content of religious programs on television, interviews with think tanks and a review of existing literature on the subject.

The main themes of the research were as follows:

1. **Programs can be “a boon and a bane”:** How the content can potentially segregate/harmonize Muslims?
2. **Can Islam Coexist:** How Islam can coexist in a changing socio-political environment?
3. **Woman's rights on media:** How the views on the position and rights of women in society held by Islam are portrayed through religion-oriented TV programs

Ms. Sahar Gul presented findings on one particular strand of the research entitled “Women’s Position in Society: the roles/rights Islam gives to Women”

The channels presented views conveyed by the Muslim scholars on the position and rights of woman in society as prescribed by Islam. In most of the programs, the speakers eulogized Islam for considering women equal to men in rights and duties; they often tried to prove the supremacy of Islam by comparing Islamic codes of life with those of other religions. They did this often through denunciation of the codes of the Western and European societies. However, there has also been a manifestation of Islamic ways of life shown in some programs without comparing Islam with other religions or cultures.

The research found that certain virtues are prescribed for women and advocated for. For example , a true Mo’mina in Islam (A true Muslim woman) wears Hijab, covers her body completely , her eyes are bowed down, hides her beauty from Ghair-mahram and never wears western attire. Rules and regulations guiding every aspect of womens lives are laid out, explained and propogated. For example, with regard to work and profession:

- “Men are the agents of women’s choices
- The day when all the Muslim men will die or get incapacitated only then a Muslim woman can appear on TV, otherwise they should not do so.
- *(For a Mo’min he said that he could be covered from umbilical cord to knee.)*
- *Professions permissible in Islam*
- *Women cannot live alone in city for job purposes (Security)”*

Similarly, strict restrictions regarding fashion/decoration and women’s relation to men are identified and advocated for.

Overall the research findings dictate that TV programs on women’s role in society often contradict each other, try to prove the superiority of Islam sometimes, in relation to other religions, ignore historical circumstances and project men as protectors thereby nourishing patriarchy.

Discussant: Ayesha Tammy Haq

Ms. Haq sharing her views on the findings of Ms. Gul’s study wondered about where the ideas projected in these findings come from. She introduced Pervaiz Hoddhoy’s concept of ‘Meams’. Meams as opposed to genes are ideas generated through cultural evolution. Over the past 40 years our minds have been programmed to get certain meams through the media. She spoke about the need to generate new meams through employing all possible technologies.

She was questioned on whether the capacity to create new meams exists within Pakistani society. This generated a flurry of answers focusing on the media’s role and capability in dispersing meams and the elite’s capacity to circulate new meams after having stayed away from religious discourse for 63 years.

Ms. Farrukh asserted that the media has gone completely right wing infact it is a donkey cart being led by the right wing.

Ms. Haq was of the view that the capacity to generate new meams is there but we need to find it and take arguments out of religion. For example, the argument should be for the law to run its course despite it being good, bad or ugly.

Ms. Shaheed commented that the TV media has not been explored adequately by liberal activists. We need short simple messages. Tammy backed this by citing the huge volume of information on twitter and its concise nature.

An activism strategy shift from the streets to the cyberspace was cited and questions raised on how to deal with it. The panel remarked that change in thinking patterns is a slow process and must be understood that way, as urgency leads to negative reactions from people.

Kishwar Naheed shed light on the challenges faced by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in regulating channels as sometimes the government grants permission independently without consulting PEMRA.

Day 2

The day opened with a reading of a message by renowned Development Worker and Rights Activist. Ms. Tahira Abdullah.

Tahira Abdullah's Message:

“My felicitations to the organizers and participants of the International Conference on women, religion and politics in Lahore on 17th and 18th March 2011. I regret my inability to participate. I am with you in spirit and with my best wishes. At this moment let us regroup and extract from the thought provoking words of Dr. Nafees Sadiq on the occasion of the 4th Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Dr. Sadiq said “No value, no culture, no tradition worth the name supports the oppression and the enslavement of women. We will speak out, we will not allow ourselves to be silenced.” But today 16 years later women in Pakistan are still oppressed and enslaved.

Be it rightly or wrongly ascribed to and in the name of religion, culture, tradition and /or value women are still being buried alive in Baluchistan, thrown to the dogs and killed with their fetuses in Sindh, gang raped and paraded naked in villages and hacked to death for so called honor in Punjab and publicly flogged, slaughtered and stoned to death in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa/FATA for so called non compliance with the Talibans perceptions of shariah's injunction. Budl-e-Sulah which is giving of young girls in compensation for blood feuds between tribes or clans and karo kari that is honor killings, are common in all parts of Pakistan and are justified in the name of religion, culture and tradition even by prominent politicians and government office holders by all political parties even the so called progressive secular ones. But some of us still continue to speak out and do not allow ourselves to be silenced. Some of us have died for speaking out including very high office holders in the government. Some of us are under serious death threats but we will continue speak for equality and justice for women and non Muslim minorities in Pakistan. We will continue our struggle to reclaim Jinnah's secular Pakistan.”

Session 4: State and the Citizen: The Dynamics of Authorities

Chair: Khawar Mumtaz

Ms. Khawar Mumtaz opened the first session by stating how these days in Pakistan and across the world we are very concerned about State responsibility and how it is shouldering its responsibility to protect those who have a diverse opinion. She stated that during today's sessions we hope to explore further the dynamics of state and citizens relationships.

Church and Politics: Implications on Gender Equality by Professor Deidre Good

Professor Deidre Good spoke about the relevance of modern conflict theory to the present contexts as religion has increasingly come to play a part in fostering or repressing conflict

between religious groups. She discussed power dynamics within the church organization that can lead to social change beneficial to both men and women. Events such as the American Episcopalian church's ordination of women and appointment of a woman as presiding bishop have created dissent within the church. It is perceived that presence of women in prominent positions within the church will lead to more liberal policies. One small victory has been the use of more inclusive language in the revised version of the King James bible. The text now speaks of 'they' as opposed to men and women.

Professor Good stated that it is rumored that a critical reading of Quran as a book is in the pipeline and might be published by a prominent publisher.

Dars as Authoritative Discourse: Pakistani Case by Neelam Hussain

Ms. Hussain presented a paper exploring the ways in which Dars teachers have legitimized their own positions as authoritative sources and consolidated the position of Dars as authoritative discourse.

The advent of Dars can be traced back to Zia-ul-Haq's attempt to leverage religious discourse to legitimize the proxy war of the US. State interventions brought about a change in social patterns whereby it became all the rage to go to milads. The popularity of Dars is rooted in the power of the oral word in a society where illiteracy is high. For women who stepped out initially it was not easy to break through the family hierarchy requiring them to stay at home and serve their husbands. Narratives of women who did suggest that humans subconsciously contrive to achieve what they want. This is evident in the 'Dream Syndrome' whereby the Dars teachers have dreamed of divine beckoning urging them to take up Dars teaching. The emergence of this new role for women has been empowering as well. It allows them if not to break away at least a reprieve from the in laws. The Dars teacher is to some extent emerging as a cult figure.

The content of Dars almost exclusively builds upon the use of 'cliches' or repositories of received wisdom. The Dars provides a comfortable ambience for people and generates a feel good feeling amongst its attendees by exhorting traditional values in light of the break down of the family in the west. The content relates to everyday incidences to engage the audience and impart multiple messages effortlessly.

Ms. Hussain also highlighted strategies through which the Dars teachers have expanded their domain and penetrated private forums. She contends that there is a need for alternative groups to come up with strategic ways of communication and outreach and for that we need to break our own class and intellectual barriers and prejudices. To put ourselves in the shoes of the people we want to help and see where their pains and desires come from.

Discussant: Anne Jenichen

Neelum spoke about the empowering role of dars. She said that even if we disagree with the message imparted, it must be noted that it has increased social interaction and mobility of women. The problem with Dars is two fold. Firstly, that it reinforces gender roles and secondly, its exclusivity. Through Dars one person in the family to some extent extends control over the rest of the family and disrupts their thoughts processes. Also claim of one true faith disenfranchises so many others and that is where dars becomes negative.

In response to a question raised on mobilization of funds for Dars and similar activities. Ms. Ayesha Siddiqa from the audience said that since the vast majority of Pakistani middle class is conservative it is very easy to get money from them. Dars is a prime example of how extremist elements within the country have communicated excellently and mapped accurately.

Ms. Farrukh said that we must stop glorifying the dars and discuss alternatives. In response to a question about which segment of society is more involved in dars, the panelists responded that it is very common among the upper class and is a way through which this section of society shows off its moral superiority.

Session 5: Youth, Religion and Education in Pakistan

Chair: Homa Hoodfar

Reconstruction of Patriarchies: Women's Education and Religion by Rubina Saigol

Ms. Saigol presented her study of leading Faith based organisations working on Women's Education in Lahore, Peshawar. Apart from reviewing curriculum and publications of the organizations, ethnographic data was also used. Secular minded members of civil society were also interviewed to generate comparison on opinions regarding women's rights in general and right to education in particular. The findings can be presented as Gender comparison, Worldview analysis and curriculum topics.

In comparisons across gender, a high level of control over sexuality and moral conduct of women was observed and an inflated sense of siege and anxiety surrounds women's virtue. While both men and women support education, men are of the opinion that women's education should be different based on different biology of both. Women's education should be tailored to the specific needs of the 'weaker sex'. Men also believed that women's education should ideally be in home and domestic sciences. In a nutshell, women are more likely to emphasize equality while men underline the differences.

In analyzing world views across religious and secular respondents, clear cut differences were identified in type and pattern of education desired. Secular respondents called for co-education and secular education while religious respondents feared sexual promiscuity and stressed religious education based on family values.

She concluded that religion based education seems to be disempowering rather than empowering women. The curricula, topics and teaching methods of faith based organizations are designed to reinforce patriarchal realities. The madrassa teachings also reinforce gender division of labor and public private divide. In view of these findings, the state education system should be reformed and secular education be provided for men and women.

Based on these findings she suggested that social development should be routed through faith based organizations to overcome resistance to development and enhance acceptance for change.

Experience of Youth, Religion and Changing Parameters within Elite Academic Institutions in Pakistan by Nabiha Meher Sheikh

Ms. Sheikh presented a paper on the impact of growing intolerance amongst students in elite institutions academic institutions of Pakistan. Based on her interviews with students from minorities, personal interactions with students and teachers and review of literature on the subject, she analyzed the mechanisms through which voices which do not agree wholeheartedly on popular religious notions are silenced.

Even in elite academic institutes of today, differences and divergence from mainstream thoughts is not tolerated. Due to this, academia is not a safe space any more. Students are so resistant to new ideas that they deliberately fail critical thinking courses. Students who speak out against perceived injustices on current affairs are attacked by other students and treated with ridicule and hostility. This behavior has become so rampant that teachers have started self censoring. Teaching has become one of the most dangerous professions as students blackmail teachers by hinting at alleging blasphemy. Religion and politics is in the air in our country and has penetrated the education system to such an extent that all education has indeed become indoctrination.

Red Hot Chilli Peppers Islam: Is the Youth in Elite Universities in Pakistan Radical? By Dr Ayesha Siddiq

Dr. Ayesha Siddiq presented her research study on the socio-political attitudes amongst the youth in elite universities of Pakistan. The study elicited responses of students through three survey forms. The conclusion reached was that youth in elite universities accepts and internalizes radical ideas as they are often the only ideology popularised at one point in time and are not challenged by alternative discourse. They do not necessarily understand the underlying ideology but are caught up in social drive to create following for the 'us' versus 'them' paradigm. The notion of 'clash of civilisations' is not limited to youth from underprivileged backgrounds. Inability to separate political and ideological issues has led the youth to view Pakistan and the Muslim world as victims of a grand conspiracy by the west. The study indicates a difference between social attitudes and political views. Increased religiosity does not translate into greater sensitivity towards lower classes. Gender differences did not affect opinions.

Panel Discussion with Students

Moderation: Nishat Kazmi

A student from LUMS opened the session by stating that he was of the view that while he did not want to comment on the blasphemy law and whether its good or bad but the fact that its being misused and has cost lives is of concern to him. He spoke of growing intolerance for different points of views amongst students at LUMS and how moderate voices are accused of being 'liberal extremists'. He concluded that such behavior must not dissuade them from speaking up against oppression and reason must be allowed to prevail.

Sana from Punjab University: Extremism of any type is bad whether you talk about liberalism or 'Islam'. We must listen to both sides of the story. There are laws against blasphemy in other countries as well and there are laws against denying the holocaust. Therefore, in criticizing the blasphemy law in Pakistan we should extend our criticism to laws in other country's as well. Jamiat elements in Punjab University tend to go to extremes and at times misinterpret Islamic teachings.

Commonalities between liberalism and Islam need to be identified rather than talking only in terms of a secular or an Islamic state. A mid way can be chalked out.

Sara Haroon from LUMS: We shouldn't just be thinking about the green in our flag, we should fight for the white in our flag as well. Problem is not just radicalization, its why and where is it coming from? We need to redefine secularism for ourselves.

Pakistan has a problem with definitions. We tend to put things in boxes and assume things. For example, the youth at times thinks that secularism is all about divorcing religion where infact it is also about separation of the public and the private spheres.

Radicalization stems from deprivation which the state must address. At present there is no concept of secularism even in a place like LUMS which is perceived as a liberal place. This stems from no respect for personal space and rights at the societal level.

Sher Afghan Malik from Punjab University:

The Quaid's message as portrayed in our studies is censored and a lot of our problems stem from that. The Jamiat as a dominant religious party on Punjab University campus has not been clamped down upon despite criminal activities because its activists have penetrated the administrative and teaching staff of the university. One of the reasons for this is the lack of political activity on campus for example student elections.

The term liberal extremist does not make sense.

Nishat Kazmi: Loopholes in our education system exacerbate problems. The absence of civic education and the India centric nature of the education system is counter productive and detrimental to independent thinking.

Discussion with Audience:

Ms. Farida Shaheed spoke about the importance of coining new language carefully. The audience asked the students if asking questions was encouraged in their respective present and former educational institutes. Students from LUMS said that debating was the only subject area where asking questions was actively encouraged. One student spoke about how he became unpopular on campus because of his ability to ask questions which weren't even questions for those around him. He also made enemies amongst teachers because of this knack for asking unsettling questions. One student said that he has never given an open book exam. One student said that her preparation for the Civil Services examination encouraged her to think as it asked for various points of views.

The audience questioned whether it was possible to pass the CSS exam by giving alternative points of views. The students responded it was possible if the various points of view are presented diplomatically. Another member of the audience commented upon how dangerous it is to read text without historical context. She also commented upon the mixing of the religious rite on campus with political rites. For example, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is as right wing as the Jamiat. Ms. Ayesha Siddiqi, said that we are fast drawing to a point where it will be very difficult to differentiate between the two.

Session 6: Minorities and the State

Chair: Justice ® Mehta Kailash Nath Koli

Pakistan: A Pluralistic State? By Anita Mir

This paper argued that rather than repealing Pakistan's regressive laws and practices, Pakistan should become a pluralistic state. Ms. Mir contends that the move towards pluralism will "entail a debate, a stated and perhaps written understanding that political reasoning and the values it generates be held as supreme over and above, though not excluding comprehensive religious and non religious doctrines." At the heart of this debate is the concept that "human beings are ethical beings who seek reason and sociability". A call to pluralism can be made by expanding this model from the individual to the collective level. She studies the passage of Islamic laws in Pakistan and the present status of its minorities to make a case for a pluralistic state.

The idea of a transnational Muslim ummah first took root in Pakistan when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in an effort to gain Maulana Maududi's support for his political reforms accepted his wish that no laws in opposition to the teachings of Islam be promulgated in the state. The Zia regime further consolidated the role of religion in countouring the ethos of the state. The global scenario of the time aided the concept of the transnational ummah and firmly established it within people's minds. With this background, laws such as the blasphemy law were passed which diminished the status of women and religious minorities as equal citizens. As Ms. Mir's ethnographic study of a Christian and Hindu community in Pakistan shows, the country minorities feel alienated and insecure. These feelings can only be removed by propagating Pluralism: requiring people to think in terms of society and not just their own particular social group within society.

Discussant: Naeem Shakir

Naeem Shakir opened the discussion by expanding upon the concept of Pluralism. Pluralism is an acknowledgement of diversity. A stage of co-existence can only be arrived at through pluralism and accepting shared rules of conflict resolution. He underlined the need for mutual respect and understanding. Dialogue is very important in this, which needs to happen through proper framework.

The genesis of Pakistan is different from that of Mecca and Madina where Islam came and developed. Pakistan has a different history. There are 3 basic resolutions in history of India and Pakistan: the 1940 Pakistan/Lahore Resolution, the 1941 Madras Resolution; and the 1946 Delhi Resolution (this is followed practically – 2 independent States, India and Pakistan in which constituent units are sovereign). The Magna Carta of Pakistan – the Quaid's 11 August speech – spells out the blueprint of the State chalking a pluralistic path and giving equal rights to citizens irrespective of caste, colour, creed and religion. The vision was that religion would have nothing to do with the business of the State

Despite this pluralistic foundation, objective resolution made after Jinnah's death allowed for Islamic paradigm to enter and gave room for religion to enter in State affairs. He finished by expressing the opinion that for practical purposes, Pakistan *is* a theocratic State because it is run in this way.

Discussion/Q&A

The audience questioned the panelist about whom to have the suggested dialogue with? And what should be done to establish such a dialogue?

Naeem Shakir answered saying that it is imperative to have a dialogue first amongst ourselves – deliberate about the volume of damage caused to us. Minorities does not only mean religious but also ethnic; diversity has to be respected. The 'silence' of the majority needs to be broken. He said that we must regain the space which has shrunk. He felt that we can still defeat regressive elements as we are in larger numbers but silent.

Justice Kailahs Nath Koli stated that during partition, minorities remained in the country on the promise of the Quaid – on assurance that minorities will be protected. The following examples highlight instances where minorities have been made subservient to the mainstream.

- In Hindu law, there is no divorce and, no inheritance. India made the amendment to add these in 1954 but Pakistan has still not added this amendment to its Hindu family laws.
- In Balochistan – Hindu girls are not sent to school because schools try to convert them to Islam

A member of the audience commented that Pakistan was born out of diversity. Misguided narratives suggest that Pakistan was made on the basis of religion; the Quaid's 11 Aug speech and the 1940 Resolution should be added to the curriculum.

A question asked of the panel raised the point that in an emerging pluralistic society, the Middle East context is more problematic as it raises questions of identity. The panelists answered saying that in political science, geographically, we are part of the South Asia context but other times the Middle East context is applicable because of Islamism.

One member of the audience asked Naeem Shakir about why the lawyer community supported M. Qadri, murderer of slain Punjab Governor Salman Taseer. He was asked if he defended these actions and how?

Naeem Shakir answered that this was a small group of lawyers in Rawalpindi. The lawyer community at large was against M. Qadri. In Lahore, he has been condemned. He also said that he did not believe they were lawyers because lawyers protect the rule of law.

Another question asked of Naeem Shakir was about whom all he refers to when he says 'we' should do things/start dialogue...who is 'we'?

Naeem Shakir answered that this must start with a dialogue between you and me – ourselves. We need to liberate ourselves; recapture the space that has shrunk for us. Feudalism, etc. are oppressive structures for those who are marginalized. These structures need to be dismantled but we need awareness, first of all, about oppression.

Concluding Remarks

Ms. Britta Petersen thanked the staff of HBS and Shirkat Gah for working tirelessly to make the conference possible. Patriarchy wears a lot of masks and religion is very much a part of it. It was the paradigm of our age and remains so. One of the masks is tradition as in the case of the Buddhist sanga which keeps women out on the basis of lineage or the Catholic church which resists women's ordination as priests. One of the masks is nationalism which assigns women certain roles deemed critical to the survival of the nation, it also fills the gaps that state leaves empty as seen in the case of the Catholic church in Poland, it takes over education. Church in a way is like the mafia which always succeeds when the state does not fulfill its functions and replaces the state by imposing its own law.

It is therefore not surprising that in Pakistan the federally administered tribal areas traditionally kept outside the jurisdiction of the state have now been taken over by fundamentalist factions that use religion to legitimize their actions. Not many institutions can replace the authority of the state so it's very often either weapons or God and very often both. In some cases such as that of Turkey, the state has not been able to deliver on the vision of the founding father, Kamal Ataturk. It's a fate that Jinnah might have suffered too. Referring to an authoritative figure is no more liberating than referring to holy scripture instead of the will and the right of the people to determine their own lives.

A French poet once said the 'Church has always lingered on the steps of the throne'. If you replace the word church by clergy it would be universally applicable today. Yet

rarely does it ascend the throne. Most of the time it doesn't even need to because it governs from the back seat.

“The way to truth is the way to power”. The priest governs through his alleged access to a higher truth but that alone is not enough as it can easily be contested so he governs through resentment as well. Resentment is a notion which makes one look good at the expense of the other. Very often the other is a woman. It might also be another cast or ethnic group.

Women as explained in the poem by Kishwar Naheed are controlled by various means and rules. However, all rules are not the prerogative of Islam. The very notion of truth in religious discourse makes it unsuitable for democratic procedures.

This conference has deliberated about what we are striving for. We are striving for a society where women are not oppressed and every human being irrespective of gender has the opportunity to live up to his or her full potential. The very definition of sky is limitlessness and we demand nothing less than all of it. Everything else is a self imposed limitation.