

Saturday, May 22, 2010

## Men should also fight oppressive policies, laws: Sherry Rehman

*\* Khaled Ahmed says Friday sermons using fear to promote 'particular' version of Islam*

Staff Report

LAHORE: It is inappropriate to put the responsibility of fighting oppressive policies and legislation on female lawmakers alone and men should be urged to play an effective role as well, former information minister Sherry Rehman said on Friday.

She expressed these views during a national conference on "Women, Religion and Politics in Pakistan", jointly organised by a German NGO, Heinrich Boll Stiftung and Shirkat Gah—Women's Resource Centre.

Presiding over a session on militancy and retreat in women's rights, Sherry urged members of the civil society to provide platforms for women to reflect on discriminatory laws and cultural practices to fight religious extremism and militancy in Pakistan and be a part of national discourse. The session discussed challenges in women's participation in national politics. In his inaugural address, the German NGO's Resident Director Gregor Enste introduced the organisation and its commitment towards continuing working in Pakistan for sustainable development and democratisation through promoting research.

Distorted version: Khaled Ahmed shared the history of the rise of religious rights in Pakistan, highlighting the current use of fear to spread an extremist version of Islam. He said Friday sermons at mosques across the country used fear to promote a "particular" version of Islam. He outlined Pakistan's path towards becoming an ideological state and the move towards "revisionist nationalism", which required the use of non-state actors. Farida Shaheed from Shirkat Gah talked about how a revisionist Islam has displaced a more tolerant version of the religion and pluralistic attitudes. She said unless the women are provided adequate space, revolts and rebellions are not possible in Pakistan. Later during the conference, Samar Minallah presented a documentary highlighting the need for religious tolerance. It showed how religious extremism and military operations were affecting local women. Participants from all provinces, academicians, politicians, civil society representatives, human rights activists and people from the media attended the conference.

The Nation on Web  
**The Nation**

Published: May 23, 2010

Progress only with women active role

Source: OUR STAFF REPORTER Submitted 2 days 9 hrs ago



LAHORE - Women are being discouraged and humiliated in different walks of life in the name of religion and honour but it is the need of the hour that they must be given equal opportunities in all walks of life especially in politics.

These views were expressed by the speakers at a national conference on "Women, Religion and Politics in Pakistan" held at a local hotel on Saturday. Different heads, chairmen, politicians and leaders of women organisations threw light upon the role of the males while alleging that the males in Pakistan always tried to suppress the women but in the modern era they (women) are working not less than the men in every field of life.

MNA Bushra Gohar, the senior leader of ANP speaking on the occasion said that women's participation during the process of legislation and policy making must be considered, adding that she had played his pivotal role in fighting the conservativeness of MMA on different issues like music, after when she was elected as MNA.

MNA Bushra Gohar said she was working to mobilise the student unions along with their active participation in the politics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which in the past always ignored and different student unions were always used by politicians as a tool to show powers. Former MNA Mehanz Rafi said she was working for the women's rights since 1976 but so far she was not satisfied with the so-called religious clerics and politicians, who were causing hurdles in the betterment of women. Anjumn Mazarin, Women Wing leader Aqeela Naz said she was working for the women since last ten years and so far she had mobilised about 5,000 women of the various women organisations.

Amar Sidhu of Women Action Forum deplored that the women of 'Dadu-Johi Ka' were not being provided the justice even in the era of PPP government whereas about 5,000 women had staged protest demonstration at the time of the Benazir's assassination.

She alleged that even an MNA of current government had been supporting the rapists who raped a girl (daughter) of the woman who also participated in the protest against the assassination of martyred Mohtaram Benazir Bhutto.

Rukhsana Ali of Balochistan said that her husband had become the victim of targeted killing but it was condemnable when a female teacher of Balochistan University was tortured when was travelling in a rickshaw.

Ms Shaheen the ex-minister said system of local government was must to strengthen the women role as well as providing them the basic rights in society, adding the rape cases of females should strongly be fought and protested by women on the solid grounds ignoring all diverse pressures. MPA Sajida Mir during the question-answer session highlighted the discrimination of political parties, which always

prioritised the electing of the influential families. In question-answer session one Dr Tahira pinpointed that women after being elected with the support of women were keeping themselves away from their supporters' problems and issues.



<http://DAWN.com> Published on May 23 2010

### **Challenges to women's role in politics discussed**

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE, May 22: Heinrich Boll Stiftung and Shirkatgah held a national conference on 'Women, religion and politics in Pakistan' at a local hotel on Saturday. The two-day conference (May 21-22) in its various sessions discussed challenges pertaining to women's participation in the politics of Pakistan. Shirkatgah CEO Khawar Mumtaz and about 200 people from all provinces of the country, including academics, civil society representatives and human rights activists attended the conference.

Saturday's proceedings were chaired by MNA Bushra Gohar. Opening the session, Dr Fauzia Bari talked about the impact of terrorism in Pakistan. She shared her research findings in terms of women's limited mobility during the Talibanisation process which also impacted men in completing day-to-day tasks at home and businesses. Ms Bari said in camps of internally displaced persons, women were neglected and faced socioeconomic problems.

Neelam Husain talked about women's spaces in a patriarchal context. She made references to her research on the philosophy of 'Dars' and 'Mazaar' culture and how both provided public spaces and authority to women in different ways. Humeira Iqtidar examined two basic questions -- why do women join Islamist parties and what is the impact on women's life when they join Islamist parties. She gave instances of some women's personal choice to observe 'parda' and how that had affected their home life and their relationships with the men of their family. She further spoke about her interaction with the women thinktanks in Jammat-i-Islami and Jamaatud Dawa as part of her research. She concluded by saying, "While secularism has so far been viewed as measuring the increase or decrease in religion, it is important to analyse the changes in the quality of religious belief." A short documentary titled 'People's untold history', a collaborative effort of Shirkatgah and Heinrich Boll Stiftung, was also screened on the occasion. The documentary touched various issues such as sugar crisis and feudalism and the over-all situation of women in rural area.

The session followed by a round-table discussion which was moderated by Ayesha Tammy Haq in which various participants shared their personal experiences and expressed views in connection with women, religion and politics.

Former minister Shaheen Atiqur Rehman regretted the fact that in Punjab only 21 per cent rural women were educated and in Sindh the ratio was only seven per cent. She said: "In the over-all political scene of the country women should have 10 per cent representation adding that local government is a must." MNA Bushra Gohar said:

"Politics is the art of compromise in Pakistani context. It is not the job of the government to decide whether women will wear 'Abaya' while going to perform Hajj or Pakistani dress.

Former MNA Mehnaz Rafi said: "At present there is no secular party and all are rightist." A few other participants also made brief comments. Rafi said she had joined politics after serving society as a social worker in 1975. Later she joined Tehrik-i-Istaqlal. She said as a political worker she had the credit of providing her area people with basic facilities such as gas and water connections.

Aqeela Naz from Anjuman Mazareen Pakistan said she played a major role in mobilising women for the Anjuman and she had a 10-year-long struggle for the cause.

Amar Sindhu from Women Action Forum, Sindh, said when she started her career as a social activist there was an identity crisis in Sindh. Sindhis were being killed. As a student, she said, she launched 'Nari Tehrik' as a repulsive action towards the identity crisis.

Rukhsana Ali from National Commission on Status of Women regretted target killings in Balochistan. She said her husband also became a victim of target killing. She showed her concern at the target killing of university teacher Naghmana in Balochistan. She said something should be done to end the target killings.



### **Need to ensure women's role in progress stressed RECORDER REPORT**

LAHORE (May 23 2010): Speakers at the conference on "Women, Religion and Politics" said that political parties should give equal opportunities to women to enable them play their role in the progress of the country. They were speaking at the seminar organised by Heinrich Boll Stiftung and Shirkat Gah-Women Resource Centre on Saturday. The two-day conference discussed challenges pertaining to women's participation in politics in Pakistan.

Distinguished speakers and session chairpersons included Khawar Mumtaz - CEO Shirkat Gah, Sherry Rehman - Former Federal Minister for Information, and MNA Bushra Gohar Executive Co-ordinator Simorgh Women Resource and Publication Centre, Neelum Hussian talked about women's spaces in a patriarchal context. She made references to her research on the philosophy of 'dars' and 'mazaar' culture and how both provide public spaces and authority to women in different ways.

Research Fellow at Centre Of South Asian Studies University of Cambridge Humeira Iqtidar examined two basic questions: why do women join Islamist parties and what impact does it have on their lives when they join these parties.

She gave instances of some women's personal choice to observe Hijab (veil) and how this affects their lives and their relationships with the men of their family. She referred to her interaction with the women think tanks in Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-ud-Dawa, as part of her research.

She concluded by saying that while secularism has so far been viewed as measuring the increase or decrease in religion, it is important to analyse the changes in the quality of religious belief.

In her address, Dr Farzana Bari talked about the impact of terrorism in Pakistan. She shared her research findings in terms of women's limited mobility during 'talibanization' process, which also impacts men in their day to day tasks at home and businesses. She concluded saying that women suffer the impact of terrorism disproportionately.

Member National Assembly and leader of the Awami National Party Bushra Gohar said politics is the art of possibilities but unfortunately, in Pakistan, it is the art of compromise. She said PPP, which claims to be a progressive party, it is in their government that the ministry of religious affair has issued an order that women without veil can't go to Hajj.

Speaking on the occasion, former MNA Shaheen Attiq-ur-Rehman said that the local government system is the best system to empower women. She urged all the political parties to give representation to the women who belong to the working class.

She said issues of women should be solved at the local level and local body system is the best platform for the solution of these. She pointed that only 21 percent of the women are literate in rural areas in Punjab and only seven percent of the women are literate in rural areas of Sindh.

Former MNA Begum Mehnaz Rafi said there is no left-wing party in Pakistan. She said that all political parties should take practical steps for the empowerment of women. About 200 participants from all provinces of the country included academics, current and former government representatives, national and provincial parliamentarians, civil society representatives, media personnel and human rights activists attended the conference.

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