

Islamisation and Women: the experience of Pakistan

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Introduction

During General Zia-ul-Haq's tenure, the escalating conflict in neighbouring Afghanistan brought Pakistan to the centre stage of international politics. However, at the popular level, it was Zia's Islamisation campaign, particularly its more brutal manifestations, that drew shocked world attention. Following hard on the heels of the Iranian revolution, it raised fears of another Muslim fundamentalist sweep in the region. These fears were unfounded. Comparisons between the outcome of a mass movement and the impact of state-imposed measures introduced by a military dictator are unwarranted and one needs to remember that the religiously defined political parties (*Islam-pasand*) in Pakistan have consistently failed to mobilise wide-spread popular support. Furthermore, the current use of the term 'fundamentalism' is so loose that it obscures important differences between various religious political forces.

Described by some as the high point of fundamentalism in Pakistan, the last decade should be seen as one which witnessed the convergence of interests between the military rulers and the Jamaat-e-Islami. The former needed political support for credibility; the latter saw in the situation the possibility of access to power, otherwise remote. Thus the slogan of Islamisation became the meeting point. If viewed in terms of social configuration this was the opportunity for the emerging class of traders and entrepreneurs to attain political power.

Pakistan has a number of religiously defined political parties, the most important being the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam and the Jamiat-e-Ulema Pakistan. While it can be debated whether the last two are 'fundamentalists', in the perspective of the Zia years and their impact on women it is the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) which is of primary significance, and to use the term 'fundamentalist' for the JI is grossly misleading. The party positions have been obscurantist in nature and determined by opportunistic motives rather than fundamental principles. At the same time, though there is no fundamentalist movement in Pakistan as such, Zia's policies did bolster the conservative and fanatical version of Islam characterising the JI. This brand of Islam has gained ground and despite its bigoted attitudes towards women has succeeded in winning over a vocal lobby amongst women.

Here we are examining the rise of obscurantist forces in Pakistan as represented by the Jamaat-e-Islami and the impact on women. The Jamaat is not the only example of obscurantists, but the writings of its founder and ideologue, Maulana Abu A'la Maududi, are the most widely circulated and the influence of the party extends well beyond Pakistan's national boundaries.

As targets of the strident anti-female rhetoric of the obscurantist lobby, women activists have reacted instinctively—rejecting and condemning such attacks but at the same time shying away from any dispassionate examination of the phenomenon. While this is perhaps a natural reaction, it does nothing to further our understanding of the mechanisms or the significance of such movements in our societies, and leaves unanswered the basic and often disturbing question of why women join them. Despite the distrust and dislike engendered by movements commonly referred to as 'fundamentalist', one has to concede that if there has been a rise of this trend, as we believe is the case for Pakistan, it must have been in response to some people's needs, the question being which people and what needs. In addressing this question it should also be stressed that one movement can simultaneously fulfil different needs of different people, giving rise to (sometimes unholy) alliances. It is our contention that only when some answers to this question have been found can we identify the impact and implication of 'fundamentalism' on different women, since we need to avoid the pitfall of viewing women as an undifferentiated and homogeneous mass.

In considering the rise of obscurantism in Pakistan, one has to remember: a) that the debate between 'fundamentalists' and 'non-fundamentalists' focusing on women is an exclusively urban phenomenon, b) that this debate is taking place against the backdrop of a much wider crisis of a Pakistani national identity, and c) that underlying this crisis is the developmental model adopted by Pakistan. This has intensified regional and class disparities on the one hand and has been spearheaded by a bewildering pace of technological penetration on the other which has already modified and continues to undermine older forms of economic, social and political organisation.

There are yet other peculiarities that need to be kept in mind. Firstly, no law said to be based on Islamic injunctions has been legislated by elected representatives of the people. Whether the progressive personal laws (Family Laws Ordinance 1961) of General Mohammed Ayub Khan or the retrogressive ones of General Zia-ul-Haq (Hudood Ordinances 1979, Law of Evidence 1984 and the Enforcement of Shariah Ordinance 1988), all came into force as decisions of authoritarian military rulers. Despite Zia's blessings, the civilian parliament of 1985 could not pass the Shariat Bill tabled by JI or the Ninth Amendment (another version of the Shariat Bill)¹ moved by the government. Secondly, once such laws have been enacted no democratic institution has succeeded in reversing them. Despite the rabid opposition of the

obscurantists, the Family Laws Ordinance could not be repealed and only the promulgation of another presidential decree (Shariah Ordinance 1988) opened it for challenge in superior courts. And, thirdly, there is no consensus regarding the interpretation of Islam, and opinion on most religious issues is divided—so much so that in 1953—54 a Court of Enquiry under Chief Justice Mohammad Munir found that no two *ulema* agreed upon something so basic as who may be defined as a Muslim. These differences remain and if anything have been intensified, as evident in the irreconcilable positions adopted by religious political parties over the Shariat Bill.

The Rise of the Religious Right

Like Mernissi,² we would posit that, far from being a stultifying force or an attempt to resurrect an ancient past, 'fundamentalist, movements are a dynamic force in society. Such movements are very clear—often loud—attestations of people's struggle to grasp and cope with a world where the old signposts no longer provide the needed guidance, since the onslaught of technology and its accompanying culture have so radically altered the scenery.

Through the 'fundamentalist' discourse, its adherents seek both for an anchor for asserting their identity as well as controlling—to the extent possible—the impact these changes have on their personal lives. 'This has had extremely serious repercussions for women ... (since) the control of women (becomes) the last bastion of cultural identity to be tenaciously defended.'³

We would like to emphasise that adopting the 'fundamentalist' discourse does not necessarily imply following each precept to the letter. As pointed out by Mernissi, we have to distinguish what people do (reality) from how they project themselves (self-identity), and recognise that this is as true of 'fundamentalism' as of other 'isms'. It is not possible for the religious right to turn back the clock—more specifically, for Pakistani Muslim obscurantists to take a quantum leap backwards 1400 years and sideways into Saudi Arabia. And whether they want to is also questionable. But certainly their ability to influence the polity is largely due to the failure of progressive forces to provide 'alternative ideologies capable of realistically coping with social change', and the colonial experience.

Placed in this perspective, the urban location of the 'fundamentalist' lobby becomes understandable since this is where the most rapid pace of change is taking place. In South Asia the first organised expression of Muslim obscurantism was the formation of the Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941. In the post-1857 Muslim consciousness the party was positioned between the traditionalists (those seeking to recapture the glory of a bygone past) and adherents of the modernist trend (those attempting to bring Indian Muslims into the mainstream of political, economic and social life). Like the traditionalists, the JI stood

for the reassertion of Islam but failed to support the former's anti-colonial stand. At the same time it vehemently castigated those demanding Pakistan, accusing them of misleading the Muslims of India.

Essentially, the Jamaat-e-Islami was, and remains, urban based, and, though numerically small, maintains a high profile thanks to an aggressive assertion of its views; these are conservative in nature and couched in Islamic terms. However, the hallmark of JI and its leaders has been their opportunism. If reviewed, their positions have more often been determined by political expediency than principles. Having opposed the idea of Pakistan, Maududi arrived in the country almost immediately after its creation, where, in a bid for a share of state power, he presented himself as the sole authority capable of defining its Islamic nature. Having stated in 1951 that the head of state could only be a 'pious and learned' man, in 1965 he had no compunction in supporting Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah as the joint oppositional presidential candidate against General Ayub Khan. Similarly, the JI supported the military coup of General Zia-ul-Haq and willingly became an ally when it joined the 1978 cabinet. More recently, with the military regime's isolation following the dissolution of the National and Provincial Assemblies by Zia in May 1988, the JI was equally willing to forge an alliance with the Pakistan Peoples Party. Not only is the PPP led by women but its positions on women and Islamisation are directly opposed to the JI's. The final somersault by JI was evidenced when, in the changed circumstances after Zia's sudden death in a plane crash, it joined hands with the Zia-loyalist Muslim League. In the ensuing elections JI launched a vitriolic and sexist campaign against the two women co-chairpersons of PPP.

This Machiavellian approach to politics has certainly helped the JI increase its influence, but the rise of the religious right in Pakistan has been nurtured by the peculiar manner in which political development has taken place. In the years following independence 'two important factors emerged: one was the phenomenon of Islam becoming central to the political debate in Pakistan and the other was the formation of new economic and social structures'. In jockeying for power, the political elites, of whom the religious groups were never a part, used the latter's views to bolster their own relative positions, and in the bargain gave currency to 'fundamentalist' arguments.

The most important casualty of this internal tussle for power and the manipulations it entailed was the democratic process and, consequently, the chances of evolving a Pakistani national identity. It was not until 1956—nine years after independence—that a constitution could be promulgated. Within two years of that, the first military coup took place, establishing the primacy of the armed forces in national politics. This was followed by attempts at legitimising military rule through controlled democracy. It is important to note that even some one as vehemently opposed to the obscurantists as Ayub Khan was not above using the rhetoric of an 'Islamic identity' to disguise economic

policies of regional disparity. In 1971, when half the country waged a war to liberate itself (Bangladesh) it was clear that no affected region had been fooled. Subsequently too, Islamic rhetoric failed to forge a national identity both at the level of provinces, where regional identities take precedence over the Muslim one, and at the popular level, where the religious political parties are soundly routed whenever elections of any sort are held.

Whereas at the time of its formation the social base of the JI was obscure, in the post-independence years this has become increasingly clear. Originally the party's strongest support was in the large cities of Karachi and Lahore. In Karachi the mainstay was the newly up-rooted *mohajirs* (refugees) largely from north Indian cities, while in Lahore the main support seems to have come from the newly urbanised and upwardly mobile middle class. In the new state of Pakistan the uprooted *mohajirs* had no option but to give supremacy to their Muslim identity. Simultaneously they put their trust in a strong central government. In strange surroundings their uprootedness and urban backgrounds made them more susceptible than others to the 'fundamentalist' idiom and to the JI, whose leadership hailed from amongst the *mohajirs*. For its part, Lahore experienced rapid industrialisation and became an important centre of education, attracting large numbers of persons seeking education and employment from all over the country. At sea in the unfamiliar surroundings of burgeoning cities, the newly urbanised youth in Lahore found in the familiar idiom of the JI (familiar because of its religious character) a source of self-identity and indigenous moorings. As other smaller cities underwent the process of change, there too, pockets of 'fundamentalist' support appeared.

Spreading its influence in educational institutions as part of a conscious strategy, the JI made special efforts to ease the newcomers' adjustment in the alien environment by providing not only a point of reference but very real material support, of which the party seems to have no dearth. (The party is alleged by some to receive substantial funds from abroad.) Over the years, the base of religious political support has expanded with the emergence of a new class of entrepreneurs (of traders and small businesses) who are socially and psychologically distinct from the older comprador bourgeoisie with whom they are now beginning to compete. Yet despite the broadening of its support base, the JI and other obscurantists have remained numerically small, enjoying only a limited influence amongst the masses, as is evident in their consistently dismal performances in elections. In the elections of November 1988, the JI lost even in its areas of traditional support, because of changes having occurred in these.

If the religious right exercises and is seen to exercise a far greater influence than warranted by its urban-based numbers, it is due to the following two reasons. Firstly, mass popularity loses its impact when there is little scope for mass participation in the political process. In its

absence the importance of informed political groups—particularly if they are as well-organised and funded as the JI—increases dramatically. Moreover, if the obscurantist lobby appeared larger than life in 1988 it was thanks to Zia's attempts to legitimise his military coup and continuance in power through his 'Islamisation' process for which the 1977 JI manifesto seemed to be a blueprint. This was the first time that the obscurantist position received the full backing of state authority and its adherents a taste of power, both of which bolstered their influence.

It is the singlemindedness with which the obscurantists, as epitomised by the JI, have pursued power and their ability to forge unprincipled alliances while spouting self-righteous rhetoric, combined with their vehemently anti-women stance, that makes them a dangerous opponent for women.

The Religious Right and Women

Unlike other issues in the political arena, where compromises have been made frequently, the obscurantist position on women (as expounded by its male exponents) has been largely consistent. The chief ideologue, Maulana Maududi, had very fixed ideas on the gender division of labour and social organisation. Before examining the content of his discourse, however, it is important to establish the identity of those being addressed.

Maududi divided Indian Muslims into three distinct categories; the 'oriental occidentals', the 'lip-service Muslims' and the 'foolish and thoughtless ... who cannot think and form independent opinions'.⁵ These last are said to be people who 'don't deserve attention and may, therefore, be ignored'. Given Maududi's penchant for elite politics, it is easily understood that those who are so summarily dismissed constitute the vast majority of Pakistan's illiterates.

On the other end of the spectrum are the 'oriental occidentals', who represent a powerful force that is disrupting Eastern order and against whom his arguments are pitched. Since he counterposes his own brand of Islam to this 'evil force', we would like to quote the Maulana at some length. Writing *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam* in 1939, Maududi defined this section as people who:

abhor Purdah because the ethics underlying it is radically opposed to the Western ethics which they have accepted blindly ... now they want to mould the social pattern of their respective homelands also after the same Western pattern. They sincerely believe that the real aim of education for the woman is to enable her to earn her living and to acquire the arts of appearing attractive to the male. Her real position in the family according to them is that like the man she should also be an earning member so as to subscribe fully her share to the common family budget. They think that woman is meant to add charm and sweetness to community life by her

beauty, elegance and attractive manners. She should warm up people by her sweet musical words, she should send them to ecstasy by her rhythmic movements, and she should dance them to the highest pitch of pleasure and excitement. They think that the woman's role in national life consists in doing social work, attending municipal councils, participating in conferences and congresses, and devoting her time and abilities to tackle political, cultural and social problems. She should take part in physical exercises and sports, compete in swimming, jumping and race contests, and set new records in long distance flights. In short, she should do anything and everything outside the house, and concern herself less with what is inside the house. This is their ideal for womanhood. It leads to worldly prosperity and all the moral concepts that run counter to it are devoid of sense and meaningless. To suit the purposes of the new life, therefore, these people have changed the old moral concepts with the new ones, just as Europe did. For them material gains and sensual pleasures are of real worth, whereas the sense of honour, chastity, moral purity, matrimonial-loyalty, undefiled lineage and the like virtues, are not only worthless but antiquated whims which must be destroyed for the sake of making progress.

(pp. 72—73)

Having thus placed themselves beyond the pale, in themselves these people are not of primary concern to Maududi. Their importance stems only from the fact that they are 'trying their utmost to spread and propagate (the Western creed) in the Eastern countries' and consequently from their ability to mislead others, particularly the 'lip-service Muslims', Maududi's third category. These latter consist 'wholly of professed Muslims' but are in danger of committing the 'grave folly' of following in the footsteps of the 'oriental occidentals'. It is to them that Maududi's discourse is addressed, those who:

want their women to be chaste and modest ... But on the other hand, they are violating the principles of the Islamic way of life and taking their wives, sisters and daughters, though hesitatingly, on the way of Western civilization ... People who are treading this path should clearly understand that the beginning they have made may not bring them to grief, but it will surely lead their children and the children of their children to grave consequences. (pp. 80—81)

From the above a number of things can be discerned. Firstly, the obscurantist lobby is vehemently opposed to the Modernists in Islam, accused of misinterpreting Islamic injunctions to justify alterations in social organisation undertaken to satisfy the 'baser instincts of humanity'. Secondly, the Maulana addresses himself solely to men and does not consider women to be actors in their own right, and, thirdly,

that the men he is actually concerned about belong neither to the working and peasant classes nor to the powerful elite but to the emerging Muslim middle classes in the cities—those having both the economic power and the social aspirations to emulate the ‘westernised and westernising elite’. (That they form part of the elite is implicit in their acknowledged ability to influence others.) Appropriately enough, it is from amongst this group that the JI has attracted its staunchest support.

From Maududi’s own writings, it is clear that the ‘fundamentalist’ discourse developed in response to changed material circumstances, offering guide-lines to salvation in the midst of confusing times. One very important set of guide-lines concerned the need to preserve the ‘division of labour which nature herself has devised between the sexes’ that was being undermined by contemporary developments. For a rigidly patriarchal society such as Muslim India, the real danger lay not so much in allowing individual women to carry out social welfare (or other) activities, as in the fact, in Maududi’s own most revealing words, that: ‘The woman can, if she strives against her temperament and natural physical structure, carry out with some success all the duties assigned to man by nature, but man in no way can make himself fit to bear and rear children.’ (p. 121)

As such, Maududi’s discourse deals with the very essence of gender relations. His warning to his male audience—that any alteration in the gender division of labour, no matter how innocent-seeming today, will inevitably lead to a usurpation of their male identity—plays on very deep-rooted fears of a loss of masculinity and manhood. For men to retain their superiority over women it therefore becomes imperative to maintain absolute segregation and separation of the sexes, thereby eliminating any possibility of competition between the genders that could sow the seeds for challenging the patriarchal order. Without in the least agreeing with Maududi’s ideology, one has to concede the depth of his 1939 analysis, as also his foresight regarding the direction of social change in the future that allowed his party and ideas to gather support.

Like most ex-colonial states, Pakistan displays a jarring juxtaposition of the old and the new. In people’s immediate lives, the confusion that surrounds them has been compounded by an alarming erosion of control in the world outside their families where, nevertheless, they have to operate. Since women have traditionally wielded less power in the exterior world, this loss is most intensely felt by men excluded from the ruling elites. While this loss of control was only experienced outside the home it was possible to order one’s world by dividing the economic and social spheres, and seeking stability in the latter, where men would cope with economic developments while women would provide social stability in the homes.⁶ Today the stability of the home is also being threatened. Thanks to high inflation and growing consumerism, the ability of large cross-sections of men, particularly in the employment-orientated urban areas, to meet the family’s economic

needs is fast being eroded. Socialised in traditions that justify male superiority on the basis of his provider role, such men either have to supplement their income by moon-lighting or second shift jobs or, and increasingly, have to come to terms with their women joining the labour market. As one female victim of these changes put it:

It is useless working. The men always decide everything, and now that their earnings are not enough to support us (they feel) that they have to assert their authority on us even more.⁷

In the absence of any integrating structures of social transformation that would ease the tradition, it is little wonder that people seek some ideology that allows them to understand and order their world. It is this need which is fulfilled for some by the discourse of the religious right, and fulfilled particularly for the newly urbanised and new upwardly mobile middle class currently experiencing the most rapid changes and therefore subject to the most intense pressures. This class, addressed by Maududi in 1939, has increased in the intervening years. Yet, it would be erroneous to suppose that 'fundamentalist' positions are static and unresponsive to the forces of change. Over time, even obscurantists have had to concede that women may participate in politics (though they must conform to the rules laid down by them) and that they may, and even should, study, providing it is in segregated institutions (where preferably they should be taught those subjects most useful to being efficient homemakers and child-bearers and rearers), and, finally, that they can leave their homes for employment providing they do not challenge male supremacy in the home, or even at work. These concessions have been made in response to the real or perceived exigencies of changed and changing material conditions.

Equally important is the fact that no matter how critical Maududi was in theory of the consumerism and materialistic trends being introduced by capitalism, in practise the conservative religious parties, whether led by him or others, have never actually initiated any move to boycott consumer goods. Practically speaking, the average 'fundamentalist' is as busy consuming the fruits of technology, finding admissions in prestigious educational institutions and upwardly mobile job opportunities as the next man, or woman.

If the obscurantist position seems to be hinged on the women's issue it is only partially because it may be perceived as the most immediately threatening by males. The other reason is that it is the one sphere where control remains possible. However, this control can only be exercised over women of their own class. Paradoxically, until recently the debate on women's role, status and rights has been carried out between men of one socio-economic class and women of another. Where the men belonged to the lower middle or new economic middle class, the vocal women activists opposing them belonged to the older professional middle class with elements of the dominant elite. Enjoying in part the privileges and advantages of their class identity, these women have been

most successful in expanding the economic, social and psychological space available to women. On their own, obscurantists and the religious right have never been able to curtail the activities of the more affluent women. This is clear from their failure to effectuate any restrictive measures in 40 years until their ideas received the heavy-handed and undemocratic backing of the state apparatus and were enforced as Martial Law Ordinances, Regulations, and directives.

Such women are numerically small and do not pose a direct threat to the concerned men because they neither compete for jobs nor live with them. The indirect threat they present is as role models (not least because of their class affiliation) or because they suggest a real possibility of change for women of other classes. The latter are now beginning to explore the potential avenues of change for themselves as they venture (often for the first time) beyond the secluded confines of their homes for education or employment and in the process are bombarded by an entirely novel range of experiences and ideas. Even if they rarely step outside their homes, the mass media bring the messages across their threshold and into the *zenana* (which explains the emphasis constantly given to 'Islamising' the content of the most powerful media of all: TV). By attacking women who have most radically altered the parameters of their lives as being westernised and anti-Islam, the obscurantist lobby hopes to insert—or reinforce—a wedge of alienation between these women and women from their own families and class so as to maximise their control over the latter.

Impact on Women

In the course of Zia's widely publicised Islamisation campaign 'Islam, as expounded by the illiterate *maulvis* and obscurantist sections of society, seemed to consist of a series of cosmetic changes rather than any fundamental changes in the infrastructure of society'.⁸ As the least powerful and least organised section of society, women became easy targets of restrictive measures as obscurantists in and out of government adopted the easiest and most visible means for proving their Muslim credentials without, however, affecting the daily lives of most men. For instance, various orders and directives prescribed the acceptable way of dressing in public; the exclusion of women from the national annual games and from the Asian Olympics; and the stoppage of women in the foreign service from postings abroad. An anti-obscenity campaign was launched linking women to moral decline in society. The Ansari Commission was appointed to determine the appropriate political system of the country and recommended limiting women's participation in the electoral process. The Council of Islamic Ideology was reactivated and overwhelmingly packed with obscurantist and conservative men. But the most damaging changes were instituted through legislation that at once rescinded women's rights and strengthened misogynist views.

Of prime concern to women was the Enforcement of Hudood

Ordinances 1979, and the Law of Evidence 1984. While it is not possible to enter into the many ramifications of these laws, the most obvious discrimination written into the legislations concerns evidence. The first law excludes women's evidence as proof for awarding maximum punishment, while the latter accords their evidence only half the status of male testimonies. Further, the Hudood Ordinances make no distinction between the level of proof required to sentence someone for rape or adultery. Women's evidence alone being insufficient for maximum punishment, innumerable cases have come up where victims of rape have been convicted of adultery (because they acknowledged the fact of intercourse) while the accused has been released for lack of evidence. The second law categorically states that in 'matters pertaining to financial and future obligations when reduced to writing ... the evidence of two men or one man and two women will be required'. The most emphatically discriminatory law proposed was that of *Qisas* and *Diyat* which stipulated in black and white that the life of women (and non-Muslims) was worth half that of a Muslim man. Though proposed as early as 1980, this law invited wide-ranging criticism from within the religious circles and has so far been shelved.

The impact on women has been two-fold. Women have had to bear the brunt of this Islamisation campaign both because of discriminatory laws and because, backed by state authority, it encouraged men in general to intensify their control over women's lives. At the receiving end of the most horrific state measures have been Pakistan's poor women, but the most widely spread impact has been on urban women who for education, employment or other reasons have to leave their homes.⁹ These women found themselves having to operate in an increasingly hostile and constricted space. The other impact may be seen as a silver lining, that is, the mobilisation of women to resist this anti-women trend in an organised and sometimes militant fashion. Spearheaded by professionally working middle class women who formed Women's Action Forum, this resistance has given birth to what can be termed a women's movement—non-existent until now in Pakistan.

In responding to the onslaught on women's rights, roles and status, most women's groups questioned the validity of measures proposed or passed from within a Muslim framework. They condemned the distorted interpretation of Islam being promoted, and rejected the self-appointed role of the *maulvis* as the custodians of a religion that does not believe in priesthood.

More interesting from the women's perspective has been a delayed consequence of the above. After a few years of heated debate and dispute between obscurantist men and women's rights activists, a vocal lobby of 'fundamentalist' women made its entry. Their voice was heard for the first time in the wake of the 1983 women's demonstration in Lahore protesting against the proposed Law of Evidence. Under the aegis of Majlis-e-Khawateen Pakistan (until then unheard of), these women

lauded the police action against the demonstrators (baton-charge, tear-gas and lock-up) and called for exemplary punishments for these 'traitors'. They rejected the UN declaration of Human Rights as un-Islamic and condemned a 'handful of westernised women' for giving bad publicity to the country. Furthermore, they 'suspected a political move behind the procession of women and demanded that "hidden hands" should be exposed'.¹⁰

As events progressed this became routine; any action or statement made by organisations like WAF elicited an almost instant and vitriolic response by 'fundamentalist' women (such invectives remained one-sided). Later, women belonging to the religious right reacted by bringing out their own demonstrations, the first being in September 1986, following a public protest organised by WAF outside the National Assembly against the Shariat Bill and Ninth Amendment. It is noteworthy that the obscurantist lobby deemed it necessary to counter women's rights organisations by visibly organising its own women, and also that, thanks to newspaper coverage over the years, an indirect, and as yet unacknowledged, discourse has emerged between the two groups of women.

Whereas the idiom and rhetoric of the two groups is very different, similarities are nevertheless discernable not only on certain issues but also in the level of militancy. Their common interests are: on the one hand, a demand to end the exploitation of women for commercial purposes, polygamy, and divorce by repudiation, and on the other the enforcement of *haq-mehr* (money given by the husband to the wife at the time of marriage), and a general desire to improve the women's lot. What separates them is the acceptance or rejection of the 'fundamentalist' position that sees desegregation as the root of all society's ills. Consequently, if the women of the Jamaat-e-Islami and those of the PPP can jointly bring out a demonstration protesting regarding crimes against women, the solutions proposed are diametrically opposed. Women belonging to the religious right believe that complete gender segregation of society with appropriately separate spheres of life is the only necessary and sufficient condition for overcoming the current crises, whether social, political or economic. In contrast, the women's rights lobby points to the underlying structures as being at fault. Lastly, where as religiously conservative women appear to accept the patriarchal structure of family and society as the 'natural order', those of the women's movement are beginning to reject this, some more clearly and radically than others.

From the outside, 'fundamentalist' women present an enigma, but possible clues to understanding may be: a) they appear to be women who for the first time are completing higher education, entering universities, professional and technical institutions and going on to work; b) they come from backgrounds where socialisation prepares them for segregated existences, yet in reality they have to face and cope with a

mixed environment; and c) brought up to believe that men will provide for them, they are frequently being pushed into supplementing the family income. The resulting dissonance between stated ideals and reality is reflected in their convoluted arguments as well as the gap between what their leaders say and do. For example, they constantly reiterate that man is the provider yet at the same time demand separate women's universities and segregated places of work in order to accommodate the 'huge female workforce' which, though willing to work, does not want to work with men.¹¹ Or, for instance, Nisar Fatima Zehra—the most important 'fundamentalist' spokeswoman—publically opposes women's participation in politics yet sat in the *Majlis-e-Shoora* and later the National Assembly.

'Fundamentalist' women, who seem to steadily change their position relative to the political and economic environment in the country, have in fact expanded their operational space while maintaining an appearance of traditionalism. To the extent that conservative religious discourse allows an evolution and in the life-context of the women involved, it can be considered a dynamic force. So that, in a conciliatory mood, Nisar Fatima can say:

There (are) two sections of women in Pakistan struggling for their rights. There is a gap between the views of the two groups. Those in power use the two factions against each other and thus avoid solving women's issues. The two groups should therefore sit together and find common grounds for the movement of women's rights.¹²

This is more easily said than done. Women outside the 'fundamentalist' camp hear these words with scepticism for the simple reason that in other moods, the same Nisar Fatima has not hesitated to heap abuse on them and warned them that they 'shall be met at the gates of hell by angels armed with hockey sticks.' She is also on record as saying that no assembly will ever usher in an Islamic system (*Nifaz-e-Shariah*) and therefore this has to be imposed through force.¹³ The fascistic behaviour of the JI student wing in universities with its penchant for terrorist methods coupled with the living example of neighbouring Iran's brand of fundamentalism, particularly as it relates to women, makes women activists extremely wary of any overtures from the 'fundamentalist' camp.

Even if we concede that the women of the religious right are also fighting for women's rights, this atmosphere of mutual distrust militates against a basis for dialogue, much less an alliance, between them and the emerging women's movement. In the foreseeable future it is therefore probable that the sharp division between the two will remain intact, although they may work in parallel fashion on some specific issues. Remembering that both these groups of vocal women are numerically very small, one can only hope that the indirect discourse on women's rights from such divergent view-points contributes to an expanding space

This is a slightly edited and shortened version of a paper 'The Rise of the Religious Right and its Impact on Women', originally prepared for the Panel on Revivalism and Fundamentalism—Religious, Ethnic and National Movements, Symposia of IUAES Commission on Women. 12th ICAES, Zagreb, Yugoslavia, 26 July 1988. The paper is to be included in Pakistan : The Zia Years, Zed Books, London.

- 1 JI's Shariat Bill stated that any law challenged for being in conflict with Islam would stand suspended until the final decision of the Shariah Court. It further defined the main source of Shariah as Quran and Sunnah (Practice of the Prophet). The Ninth Amendment on the other hand stated that 'the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah shall be the supreme law and source guidance for legislation through laws enacted by the parliament and provincial assemblies and for policy making by the government.'
- 2 Fatima Mernissi *Beyond the Veil, Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Revised Edition, Indiana University Press Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987.
- 3 Deniz Kandiyoti: 'Women, Islam and the State—A Proposal for a Comparative Framework', mimeographed-undated.
- 4 Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed: *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward One Step Back?*, Zed Books, London 1987, p. 8.
- 5 S. Abdul A'la Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, Islamic Publications Ltd, Ninth Edition, 1987. Lahore. (First published in 1939 in Urdu and translated into English in 1972.)
- 6 We owe this point to Tazeen Faridi in her background Paper on 'Strategies, Policies and Programmes to Integrate Women in Development at all Levels', *International Seminar on Women's Participation in Development: Building Leadership from the Grass Roots*, 10—15 November, 1965, Islamabad.
- 7 Interview of a home-based piece-worker for a *Study of Piece-work Amongst Women in a Lahore Neighbourhood* by Farida Shaheed and Khawar Mumtaz, quoted by F. Shaheed in 'Purdah and Poverty in Pakistan', in *Poverty, Women and Ideology*, eds. Bina Agarwal and Haleh Afshar, forthcoming.
- 8 Mumtaz and Shaheed, op. cit. p. 72.
- 9 According to the Repeal of Hudood Ordinance Committee, Karachi, there are currently 1500 women in prison under the Hudood Ordinance alone as opposed to the total of 70 women in prison in 1980.
- 10 *The Muslim*, 10.01.83.
- 11 Khawar Mumtaz: 'The "Other" Side', *She*, February 1987 p. 42.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 *Daily Jang*, Women's Edition, 18.07.1988.