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Defying Marginalization: Emergence of Women's Organizations and the Resistance Movement in Pakistan: A Historical Overview

By Rahat Imran[1] and Imran Munir[2]

Abstract

In the wake of Pakistani dictator General-Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization process (1977-1988), the country experienced an unprecedented tilt towards religious fundamentalism. This initiated judicial transformations that brought in rigid Islamic Sharia laws that impacted women's freedoms and participation in the public sphere, and gender-specific curbs and policies on the pretext of implementing a religious identity. This suffocating environment that eroded women's rights in particular through a recourse to politicization of religion also saw the emergence of equally strong resistance, particularly by women who, for the first time in Pakistan's history, grouped and mobilized an organized activist women's movement to challenge Zia's oppressive laws and authoritarian regime. This movement was to see the emergence of non-governmental women's organizations (NGOs), feminist writers, activist theatre groups, human rights and legal aid cells, as well as activist documentary filmmakers with a common agenda for social change and justice. Using secondary sources, this paper presents a comprehensive historical overview of the feminist and oppositional developments that began to take shape during Zia's dictatorship, and have steadily grown to make their mark in contemporary Pakistani society as organs for socio-political change and women's rights.

Keywords: Pakistan, feminism, women's rights in Pakistan, civil society, Islam

Introduction

The term 'civil society' is contested, and carries many definitions. However, for the purpose of this paper we take it as an intermediate sphere of activities, carried out by individual/family or groups for public betterment. We use the term civil society for all organized, non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations, trade unions, foundations, community based organizations, social movements and networks, and ordinary citizens actively engaged in

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the public sphere. Thus, civil society is a self-organizing expression of society, engaged outside state-power and market interests.[3]

In the Pakistani context, it is important to make a distinction between democratic and non-democratic civil society. Noted scholar Rasool Bakhsh Rais points out that the democratic civil society functions within the confines of law to make the state 'responsive, accountable, and transparent', checking it to stay within constitutional limits; whereas, he argues, the non-democratic civil society uses violence as its weapon with an aim to eventually capture the state. [4] We will focus only on the democratic civil society to understand and map the role it is playing to secure human rights and democratic political dispensation in Pakistan. Despite many constraints, such as authoritarian and military rules, civil society in Pakistan has been growing and influencing different spheres of social life. Although its focus remains on human rights – mainly on women, minorities, and on social development, now it is also engaging with a new focus on the strengthening of democracy, representative governance, and the rule of law.

Civil society organizations have been at the forefront of creating space for marginalized voices, and have succeeded in securing reserved seats for women, and the establishment of a permanent Election Commission in Pakistan for holding free and fair elections.

A Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report explains that Western political leaders acknowledge civil society as a crucial force to defeat authoritarian regimes and collapse of communism, therefore 'civil society has become a normative idea' that has a potential to liberate the citizens from the oppressive states.

A Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report elaborates:

> In recent years the United States and many other international donors have embraced civil society aid as a key tool of democracy promotion. They support thousands of NGOs around the world in the name of civil society development, investing in these organizations high hopes for fostering democratic participation and values.[5]

Following the shift to provide direct funding to civil society in the developing world to strengthen democracy and defeat authoritarian regimes, Pakistani civil society has benefited enormously. According to the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy, a certification granting authority to NGOs and charity institutions, between 100,000 to 140,000 NGOs are active in Pakistan in 2016 as compared to a total number of 45,000 NGOs that existed in 2002. Nearly all the known key NGOs have roots in people's struggles and resistance against General Zia-ul-Haq's dictatorship to fight for human freedoms, workers' rights, women's rights, and the rights of non-Muslims in Pakistan.[6]

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[3] For further discussion see Anheier, Helmut K. *Civil Society: Measurement, Evaluation & Policy*. UK: Creative Print, 2004. Cohen, Jean L., Andrew Arato. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. USA: MIT Press, 1994. Edwards, Michael. *Civil Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

[4] Rais, Rasul Bakhsh. 'Civil Society and Democratic Transition.' Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan. Accessed at: http://issi.org.pk/civil-society-and-democratic-transition/ on May 1, 2017.

[5] Carothers, Thomas and Ottaway, Marina. *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*. Carnegie Endowment for Int'l Peace, Washington, USA. 2000.

[6] Shah, Faiza. 'The Rise of NGOs and their Harmful Impact on Pakistan.' The *Monthly Herald*, Karachi, Pakistan. August 2016. Accessed at: http://herald.dawn.com/news/1152863 on April 17, 2017

This paper explores the emergence and role of representative women's organizations that have been key in opposing violations of human rights, and initiating positive and influential impact on Pakistani society in a historical context.

Pakistan experienced a tremendously volatile and transformative period during the long military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). During this period, also known as the Islamization period, the socio-political environment created by the imposition of Sharia laws, particularly the gender-discriminatory *Zina Hudood* Ordinance in the early years of the Islamization process that criminalized extra-marital sex, including rape, as a crime against the state, gave rise to countrywide resistance from Pakistani civil society.[7] In their quest for a return to democracy, Pakistani citizens in urban areas, particularly women, braved harsh political conditions to protest the transformations that were engulfing the country. It is significant to note that the public resistance against Zia's politically-motivated Islamization drive was initiated by women's groups who formed alliances to oppose government policies and legislative transformations that aimed specifically at the marginalization of women's rights and freedoms to further the government's religion-political agenda.

Prior to the introduction of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance in 1979, the few women's organizations operating in Pakistan had remained apolitical, the nature of their projects being mainly social welfare work that largely catered to the needs of the underprivileged segments of the society, with a focus on women, and children.[8] But the beginning of the 1980s witnessed a mass mobilization of politically conscious women in Pakistan, a development that was unprecedented in the country, who set out to challenge Zia's gender-discriminatory laws. This development set the stage for an organized women's resistance movement that has grown in strength through various channels, incorporating an agenda that is inclusive of socio-political demands for women's rights and treatment as equal citizens.

Many of these organizations with chapters in all the major cities of Pakistan, are staffed largely by women, are unaligned with political parties, and are funded greatly by international donor agencies for carrying out their projects. They have been working on women's issues such as: domestic and physical violence, educational facilities, opportunities in the development sector, women's empowerment, poverty alleviation, gender-discriminatory laws, gender-specific tribal customs and practices, the healthcare sector, and particularly awareness programmes aimed at family planning choices for women. Through various activities and programmes, these rights and feminist organizations have been instrumental in introducing a new wave of activism that centers on consciousness-raising and pedagogical experiments as part of their resistance against marginalization of women's rights. Measures in this direction have incorporated education and media awareness campaigns, networking and collaborative ventures with international government initiatives, international women's organizations, foreign academia, publication of issue-oriented and feminist literature, and academic research and writing. Additionally, there has been a growing emphasis on organizing international conferences locally, as well as participation at such forums internationally with the aim to foster greater cross-cultural solidarity and support for women's

[7] For detailed discussion on the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance, and its legal implications for women, see Imran, Rahat. 'Legal Injustices: The Zina Hudood Ordinance of Pakistan and Its Implications for Women.' *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2005. 7(2), 78-100 (87). Access at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol7/iss2/5

[8] For example, the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), formed in 1949 by the wife of Pakistan's first prime minister, Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, focused mainly on the refugee crises following the partition of India in 1947. APWA has operated as a non-political volunteer organization that works towards the social, cultural and economic betterment of women and children in Pakistan. For more details on the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) visit: http://apwapakistan.com. Accessed on March 30, 2017.

issues in Pakistan. Over the years, many of these organizations have evolved into research and resource centers for human rights, women's rights, and child and minority rights scholars and activists. They regularly organize seminars, conferences, and workshops to highlight women's rights issues in Pakistan, while dispatching trained research teams to conduct awareness programmes in the rural and backward areas of the country.[9]

Background to the Islamization process in Pakistan

Given that the Islamization process introduced in Pakistan by military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq during his eleven year regime (1977-1988) and the promulgation of gender-specific and gender-discriminatory Islamic Sharia laws are recurring aspects in this paper, it is pertinent to give a brief synopsis of the developments that transformed Pakistani society, and impacted women's rights in particular.

Since its birth in 1947 following independence from British colonial rule and the partition of India, Pakistan has continued to experience many political upheavals, including prolonged authoritarian regimes in the guise of democracy. However, the beginning of the 1977 martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, that lasted for eleven years (1977-1988) after usurping power from the first democratically elected prime minister of the country, Z.A. Bhutto, remains the most significant period in transforming the Pakistani society as it introduced the concept of Islamization through the imposition of Islamic Sharia laws.[10] Zia proclaimed that he had been ordained by 'divine powers' to institute an Islamic order in Pakistan. In an interview to the foreign media he categorically announced: "I have a mission, given by God, to bring Islamic order in Pakistan."[11]

The Islamization period was to see major transformations through the promulgation of legal reforms based on Islamic Sharia laws, particularly the criminal justice system.[12] Hence, a process begun which would increase the legal discriminations against women through the introduction of the Federal Shariat Courts[13] and the promulgation of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance that regulated sexual conduct and criminalized extra-marital sex as a crime against the state, and the new Law of Evidence that equated a woman's testimony as half that of a male in the Pakistani court of law.[14]

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[9] Zia, Shahla and Bari, Farzana. 'Women in Non-Government Organizations.' *Baseline Report on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life in Pakistan*. Project of International Women's Rights Action Watch-Asia Pacific. Published by *Aurat* Publications and Information Service Foundation, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1999 (81-82).

[10] For a discussion on the implications of Islamization and *Sharia* laws for women during General Zia-ul-Haq's regime see Weiss, Anita M. 'Implications of the Islamization Program for Women.' *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State*. (ed) Anita M. Weiss. Syracuse University Press, New York, 1986 (97-139).

[11] Interview given to the BBC on April 4, 1978.

[12] Islamic Sharia laws are socio-religious laws, based upon the literal interpretation of the *Quran*, dating back more than 1400 years, and believed by Muslims to be the divine word of God. For discussion on the implications of Islamization and *Sharia* laws for women during General Zia-ul-Haq's regime see Weiss, Anita M. 'Implications of the Islamization Program for Women.' *Islamic Reassertion in Pakistan: The Application of Islamic Laws in a Modern State*. (ed) Anita M. Weiss. Syracuse University Press, New York, 1986 (97-139).

[13] The *Federal Shariat Courts* were established in 1980, and all their judges are Muslims, even though non-Muslims are also tried in these courts under Islamic laws. These courts have the exclusive jurisdiction to hear appeals against all convictions passed under the *Hudood Ordinances*. For details see Jahangir, Asma and Jilani, Hina. The *Hudood Ordinances*: A Divine Sanction? Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003 (1-3).

[14] Ibid. The *Law of Evidence* (The *Qanun-e-Shahadat*) draft was introduced into the Parliament, known as the *Majlis-e-Shoora* (The Council of Islamic Ideology) under Zia-ul-Haq, in 1983, and passed in 1984. Its members were nominated by Zia, and not elected. For details see (pgs. 30-31).

Thus, through recourse to legal reforms on the pretext of Islamicizing the country, Zia's fundamentalist regime institutionalized the erosion of women's rights and status as equal citizens.[15] South Asia historian and scholar, Ayesha Jalal, explains Zia's strategy for governance through curtailing women's rights and freedoms:

> A devout Muslim, Zia proclaimed himself divinely ordained to steer Pakistani society back to the moral purity of Islam. Pakistan and Islam, he argued, were inextricably linked, and the preservation of both had been enjoined upon the military establishment. In case the equation between Pakistan, Islam and the military failed to register, Zia appropriated the call for a *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (a way of life based on the teachings of Prophet Mohammad)–that umbrella term dignifying an ideologically and economically fragmented opposition—and tried turning it into a personal mandate from the people…Realizing that very few had been persuaded, the General, a wily social tactician, calculated that playing the women's card could confirm his regime's commitment to Islam and, by extension, it's legitimacy.[16]

The *Hudood* Ordinance criminalizes *Zina*, which is defined as extra-marital sex, including adultery and fornication. It makes no distinction between consensual sex and rape. The Law of Evidence states that the testimony of a female is considered half that of a man's in a Pakistani court of law.

The *Zina Hudood Ordinance*, supposedly based on an extremist interpretation of the *Sharia*, and one that is still in place in the Pakistani legal system despite decades of national and international pressure to repeal or amend it, governs the sexual conduct of Muslim men and women, but ironically also extends to religious minorities in Pakistan. The *Sharia* based *Zina Hudood Ordinance* considers all sexual conduct outside the confines of marriage as an offence against the state. These offences include rape, adultery, fornication and abduction for the purpose of sexual intercourse. Laying down the punishments for adultery, fornication and extra-marital sex, the formulation of the *Zina Hudood Ordinance* tends to disfavour women, particularly in rape cases where it is applied alongside the *Law of Evidence*, which further diminishes women's legal status by requiring the testimony of 'four male witnesses of good character' to verify a woman's claim to sexual penetration and consequent rape. The law also equates a woman's testimony as half that of a man's in court, thereby also putting the onus on the rape victim to provide witnesses, failing which she can herself be accused as the perpetrator of rape and sentenced to the maximum penalty of 100 lashes in public and stoning to death, or the lesser penalty of between four and 10 years in prison and 30 lashes and a fine. This combination of the *Zina Hudood Ordinance* and the *Law of Evidence* has also proven to be the main hurdle in rape being underreported in Pakistan. For a detailed legal description and discussion of these laws and the gender-specific loopholes contained therein which discriminate against women, see Jahangir, Asma and Jilani, Hina. *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction*? Sang-e-Meel Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003 (23-33).

For various case studies related to the *Zina Hudood Ordinance* and the *Law of Evidence*, see ibid. (pgs- 181-250).

For detailed discussion on the changes initiated in 1977 by the fundamentalist government of General Zia-ul-Haq, also see Faruki, A. Kemal. 'Pakistan: Islamic Government and Society: Pakistan After July 5, 1977.' *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, and Society*. (ed John L. Esposito). Oxford University Press, New York Oxford, 1987 (58).

[15]For detailed discussion on the impact of Zia's legal reforms and the Islamization period on women's status in Pakistan see Imran, Rahat. 'Legal Injustices: The *Zina Hudood* Ordinance of Pakistan and its Implications for Women.' *Journal of International Women's Studies*, USA. Vol.7, #2, November 2005 (78-100).

[16] Jalal, Ayesha. 'The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State of Pakistan.' *Women, Islam and the State*. ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Macmillan Press, London,1991 (100-101).

As state reforms during the Islamization period legally reduced women's status through the judicial system, they subjugated them to an inferior role in their own country.[17] South Asia scholar Inderpal Grewal elaborates further on the socio-political and social environment that prevailed in Pakistani society during Zia's period:

> It is not only within a distortion of the role of women but also through various marginalizing practices that General Zia-ul-Haq brought in his Islamization programme. A move to Qur'anic laws, supported by a fundamentalist party called the Jamaat-e-Islami, turned out to be mostly anti-women. The Jamaat-e-Islami in 1983 was pushing the government to ban women from government jobs, the arts, the media, and even from driving cars, and to create separate women's universities. The Majlis-e-Shoora, the Federal Council, included members such as Dr. Israr Ahmed, who proposed "chadar and chardivari" (Purdah (segregation) and four walls) for women, saying that women should be confined to their homes and exist just for the pleasure of the male. The Majlis-e-Shoora was also responsible for the official "Should women vote?" questionnaire distributed in 1985.[18]

Following Zia's politicization of religion to gain political legitimacy, and favour and support from fundamentalist religious segments and parties, the country witnessed the victimization of women, non-Muslims, and minority sects, and a brazen contravention of the human rights commitment that the Government of Pakistan had made to the international community.[19] Ironically, Zia's oppressive regime also served as a catalyst for oppositional forces to emerge and organize, and gain momentum against discriminatory legal reforms and authoritarian state directives.

It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan has one of the most vibrant and active civil societies in the world. According to the USAID Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index Report 2011, Pakistan has scored highest among African and Asian countries.[20]

The following is a grouping and discussion of the representative organizations, and individuals that emerged during the Zia years, and since, and have continued to extend their operations, engagement, and collaboration in their respective areas of resistance, activism, and promotion of advocacy and awareness campaigns. In their ongoing quest for gender and human rights, as well as critique of laws and constraints that limit women's socio-legal rights and equal status in society, these organizations and individuals present a courageous and substantial parallel narrative of Pakistan's historical and political journey over the decades, and its civil society.

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[17] For detailed discussion on the imposition of these laws and their implications for women see Mumtaz, Khawar and Shaheed, Fareeda. 'Legally Reducing Women's Status.' *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Vanguard Books. Lahore, Pakistan, 1987 (99-110).

[18] Grewal, Inderpal. "Salman Rushdie: "Marginality, Women, and Shame". *Genders 3*. November, 1988. (pgs. 24-42). For detailed discussion on the changes initiated in 1977 by the fundamentalist government of General Zia-ul-Haq, also see Faruki, A. Kemal. 'Pakistan: Islamic Government and Society: Pakistan After July 5, 1977.' *Islam in Asia: Religion, Politics, and Society*. (ed. John L. Esposito). Oxford University Press, New York Oxford, 1987 (58).

[19] Ahmed, Ishtiaq. 'Pakistan's Human Rights Obligations.' The *Daily Times*, Pakistan, November 30, 2003. Constitution Making and Law Enactment in Pakistan. Accessed at: www.usenet.com on March 19, 2009.

[20] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Empowering-Pakistans-Civil-Society-to-Counter-Violent-Extremism-English.pdf

Women's Organizations

The beginning of Pakistani women's resistance movement is rooted in its opposition to Zia's imposition of the gender-discriminatory *Zina Hudood* Ordinance, and the case of Fehmida and Allah Bux versus the State that surfaced in 1981. In a horrific ruling supported by the provisions of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance, a Sessions judge sentenced a man and a woman found guilty of adultery to 100 lashes, and death by 'stoning'. This single judgment became a catalyst for the emergence of an organized women's movement in Pakistan, led by the historic formation of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in the city of Karachi the very same year, led by a women's organization, *Shirkat Gah* (Participation Forum). In a strong show of their resistance to the new Ordinance and the consequent judgment, the WAF was additionally endorsed by another five Karachi-based women's organizations.[21] These urban-based women's groups, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes, launched a systematic countrywide struggle against the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance through advocacy programs, research, writing, pickets, lobbying, street agitation, and press campaigns.[22]

These new developments and resistance initiated by WAF led to a significant increase in the growth of women-centered NGOs, the volume of research conducted by women on women, and the beginning of feminist literature and reports published on women's issues emanating from the NGO sector. As Khawar Mumtaz, development activist and a founding member of WAF, points out issues that had formerly remained taboo or neglected, such as rape, killing in the name of honour, violence against women, and discriminatory socio-cultural practices and tribal customs, began to be highlighted in the public domain for discussion and critique.[23] In time, various other campaigns, letter writing to politicians for lobbying, and street agitations led by women's organizations forced the country's political parties and trade unions to consider women as a significant and distinct political entity and force, and to include women's rights and issues on their agenda.[24]

In 1983, when the Zia regime proposed a new legislation, the Law of Evidence, that equated a woman's testimony as half that of a man's in a Pakistani court of law, women's organizations organized a protest rally in Lahore to march to the High Court to present a memorandum to the Chief Justice of Punjab High Court, denouncing the proposed law.[25] On February 12, 1983, over 300 women assembled on the Mall Road to march towards the High Court. The peaceful protest turned violent when a contingent of over 500 policemen intercepted the rally and used tear gas to disperse the women marchers.[26] The female protesters defied the obstructions and violent

[21] For details on the history and formation of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) see Mumtaz, Khawar and Shaheed, Farida. "Zia and the Creation of WAF." *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Vanguard Books. Lahore, Pakistan, 1987 (71-75). For further details on the *Shirkat Gah* and its activities and research areas, visit: http://shirkatgah.org. Accessed on March 30, 2017.

[22] For further details see "WAF and its Growth and Impact." *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Vanguard Books. Lahore, Pakistan, 1987 (123).

[23] Mumtaz, Khawar. "Advocacy for an End to Poverty, Inequality, and Insecurity: Feminist Social Movements in Pakistan." *Gender, Development, and Advocacy.* (eds) Kingman, Koos, and Sweetman, Caroline. Oxfam Focus on Gender. Oxfam, Oxford, UK, GB, 2005, (pg-64).

[24] Ibid. (pg-64).

[25] For detailed discussion on the Law of Evidence, and its legal implications for women, see Imran, Rahat. 'Legal Injustices: The Zina Hudood Ordinance of Pakistan and Its Implications for Women.' *Journal of International Women's Studies,* 2005. 7(2), 78-100 (88). Access at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol7/iss2/5

[26] For further details of this historic demonstration see "Legally Reducing Women's Status." *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* Vanguard Books. Lahore, Pakistan, 1987 (107).

measures used by the police that included physical violence and dragging women on the road with their clothes torn. They continued with the march despite the arrest of over 50 women. Several women managed to reach the High Court, where they were received and garlanded by male lawyers in acknowledgement of their shared resistance and resolve against the new laws.[27] This rally was to prove a benchmark in forming significant countrywide alliances in the country, and led to staunch activism against a host of issues plaguing the country that included General Zia-ul-Haq's politically–motivated Islamization process, the promulgation of the *Hudood* Ordinances, religious fundamentalism, discriminatory laws and practices affecting women and minorities, military dictatorship, violation of human rights, and curbs on freedom of expression.[28] These alliances and collaborations have since strengthened and grown in their shared agendas for resistance and activism, surviving several political upheavals and another military dictatorship lasting eight years following President General Musharraf's 1999 coup.

Pakistani women's opposition to the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance and the Law of Evidence never faltered. So much so, that February 12 has come to symbolize Pakistani women's resistance movement and continues to be observed annually as the National Women's Day in Pakistan. The date is commemorated across the country by women's organizations and rights groups with rallies and other events in memory of the peaceful demonstration that was attacked by the police in 1983.[29]

It was also against the changing scenario brought on by General Zia's Islamization process that a vast number of urban Pakistani women started to go to the West to study women's issues and gender development. They returned with the aim of generating an activism-oriented women's movement for emancipation and equal rights, as a result of which numerous non-government organizations (NGOs) began to emerge to fill the need. Although criticized by orthodox and anti-West factions such as fundamentalist religious parties that accused them of what they perceived as pandering to anti-Islam Western agendas, the fact remains that the Islamization period was ironically instrumental in instigating an organized countrywide women's movement that aimed at consciousness-raising across social classes to build resistance and opposition against rigid Sharia laws and gender-discriminatory practices from within the parameters of an Islamic state as they argued for a modernist and contemporary interpretation of religious laws to facilitate women's freedoms and equality.[30] Today, these organizations are run and staffed by trained educators, sociologists, artists, lawyers, and human rights activists, with a collaborative focus on education, research, publishing, advocacy, and activism in the areas of human and gender rights. It is significant to note that most of these NGOs also offer internships in various disciplines and areas

[27] For photographs of police crackdown on women protestors during the February 12, 1983 protest rally, see Jahangir, Asma and Jilani, Hina: *The Hudood Ordinances: A Divine Sanction? Sang-e-Meel* Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003 (34-45).

[28] The Islamization process, as it has come to be known, was introduced by General Zia-ul-Haq to enforce rigid Sharia laws primarily to win favour and support from religious parties and factions in the country and strengthen his own dictatorial hold on power. For discussion on state directives and curbs enforced under General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization process, and the promulgation of discriminatory and gender-specific Sharia Laws such as the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance and the Law of Evidence during this period see Imran, Rahat. 'Legal Injustices: The *Zina Hudood* Ordinance of Pakistan and Its Implications for Women.' *Journal of International Women's Studies,* 2005. 7(2), 78-100 (88). Access at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol7/iss2/5

[29] Women's Action Forum. "Pakistan Women's Day." Press Release, (WAF), Islamabad, Pakistan. February 12, 2004. The *Daily News International*, Islamabad, Pakistan.

[30] For further discussion on the women's feminist movement in Pakistan see Zia, Afiya Shehrbano. 'The Re-invention of Feminism in Pakistan.' Asian Feminisms: Negotiating New Terrains. *Feminist Review.* No. 91. 2009: 29-46.

of research on human rights and women's issues as part of their advocacy and training programmes, thereby extending their activist agendas and base.

In opposition to Zia's Islamization policies, significant and representative Pakistani women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came into existence, with a focus on feminist agendas for social change, legal reforms, and women's rights. These are the *Shirkat Gah* (Participation Forum), *Simorgh*, the *Aurat* (Woman) Foundation, and *ASR* (Impact), all of whom have also emerged as major multidisciplinary resource centers that have fostered activism and research on women's issues.

The *Shirkat Gah* Women's Resource Centre was established in 1975, the United Nations International Women's Year, with an objective to design and conduct strategies and campaigns for women's equal rights and participation in the public sphere.[31] But it was under General Zia's repressive regime, and the promulgation of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance, that it came out stronger than ever in the public arena to co-ordinate and form the WAF. Founded by Pakistani sociologists Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed as a collective, over the decades it has taken up issues such as violence against women, legal literacy programmes, sustainable development, reproductive health, and economic empowerment. Besides these, every alternate year since 1994 the *Shirkat Gah* has been imparting paralegal training through its Women, Law and Status (WLS) modules. These modules have included Muslim family laws, the criminal justice system, and violence against women. Through its 'Outreach' initiative, the WLS has focused on promoting collaboration between NGOs and twenty six community-based organizations (CBOs) in three provinces (Punjab, Sindh, and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces) to lobby around various women' issues, including honour-killing and gender-specific tribal practices. Since 1988, the *Shirkat Gah* has also has functioned as the Asia coordination office for the international solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML).[32]

With regional and branch offices across the country, as well as an Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative membership status at the United Nations, the *Shirkat Gah* has expanded beyond its initial collective status into a major women's resource centre for research, documentation, and dissemination of information on women's issues in Pakistan.[33]

The *Simorgh* Women's Resource and Publication Centre, named after a mythical Iranian bird that is believed to nest in the Tree of Knowledge, was formed as a part-time initiative in 1985, and a decade later in 1995 started to operate as a full-time non-profit NGO.[34] Led by its founding

[31] An aspect that sets *Shirkat Gah* apart from other women's organizations in the country is that the *Shirkat Gah* was founded along participatory and non-hierarchical lines as a collective, and continues to function along the same structures. *Shirkat Gah* Handbook, *Shirkat Gah* Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2008.
For details on *Shirkat Gah's* initiatives and publications on women's issues, visit: http://shirkatgah.org Accessed on March 31, 2017.

[32] For further details on *Shirkat Gah's* collaborative alliances, visit: Asia-Pacific Women's Alliance for Peace and Security (APWAPS): https://apwaps.net/2015/02/26/shirkat-gah-womens-resource-centre/ Accessed on March 31, 2017.

[33] The first avenue by which non-governmental organizations took a role in formal UN deliberations was through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). 41 NGOs were granted consultative status by the council in 1946: by 1992 more than 700 NGOs had attained consultative status and the number has been steadily increasing ever since to 54 member states and 3, 200 organizations, currently. Consultative status is granted by ECOSOC upon recommendation of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, which comprises 19 Member States. For further details on the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) visit: http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/ Accessed on March 31, 2017.

[34] The mythical bird, Simurgh or Simorgh was depicted in Iranian art as a winged gigantic creature in the shape of a bird that can carry an elephant or a camel; a kind of peacock with the head of a dog and the claws of a lion and

member Neelum Hussain as the chief coordinator, this organization includes educationists, sociologists, and artists on its board who have continued to work with academics, students, professionals from the media, other national and international NGOs, as well as community-based organizations (CBOs).[35] Besides women's issues, *Simorgh*'s publications and research also encompass women's history and women's literature translated into local languages, and English.

While the organization focuses on research and dissemination of information through publications, seminars, conferences, documentary films, gender awareness workshops, and skills-oriented and income-generation projects, *Simorgh* has also included alternative education projects in their fold, and published children's primers with accompanying teacher's guides under their 'Kaleidoscope series 1-10' with a focus on human and gender rights.[36] In 2004, *Simorgh* also launched a bi-annual socio-legal journal, *BAYAN* (Expression), aimed at initiating an academic forum on socio-legal issues. Additionally, the journal presents critiques of judicial decisions by academics and activists from the legal and socio-legal fields. With an advisory and editorial board comprising lawyers, educators, and rights activists from South Asia, the journal attempts to reach out not only to the legal community but also to civil society groups such as academics, students, and human and women's rights activists to develop an informed and critical awareness of socio-legal issues from a rights-based perspective.[37]

The *Aurat* (Woman) Foundation was established in 1986 by Ms. Nigar Ahmad and Ms. Shahla Zia as a publication and information service, with a focus on working for women's empowerment and citizen participation in governance.[38] Over the decades, the organization has grown to be Pakistan's major women's rights entity. It has been promoting its agenda in the social and political arenas through campaigns such as 'Information Programme for Grass Roots Action and Organization', 'Programme for Strengthening Citizens for Advocacy and Action', and 'Programme for Affirmative Legislation and Policies'. These programmes were designed to educate women in their citizenship rights, while providing information about women's issues and concerns to decision makers. For example, the Information Programme for Grass Roots Action and Organization linked directly with women at the grass roots level, who constitute a substantial part of the female population of Pakistan. This initiative was designed primarily to develop women's control over knowledge, including knowledge about resources and institutions, and focused primarily on the information needs of the women of low-income households, as they are perceived to be the ones least likely to have access to information.[39] The Foundation has streamlined these core programmes by institutionalizing them through Information Network Centres, the Citizens Action Committees, and the Legislative Watch Groups, which now form part

sometimes it is shown with a human face. By an ancient Iranian account, the Simurgh, was said to live for 1700 years before plunging itself into flames, and by later accounts is immortal and is said to have a nest in the Tree of Knowledge. According to Iranian legend it is said that this bird is so old that it has seen the destruction of the world three times over. In all that time, Simurgh has learned so much that it is thought to possess the knowledge of all ages. Accessed at: http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/Simorgh on March 31, 2017.

[35]The founding members of the *Simorgh* Women's Resource and Publication Centre are regarded as the pioneers of the contemporary feminist movement in the country. Among its members who have continued to support and foster women's rights include educationist Ms. Neelum Hussain who has served as *Simorgh's* chief coordinator, as well as the senior editor for the organization's bi-annual socio-legal journal, *BAYAN*. For details visit: http://www.simorgh.org.pk Accessed on April 1, 2017.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] For further details on the functions and ongoing projects of the *Aurat* Foundation visit: https://www.af.org.pk Accessed on April 1, 2017.

[39] Ibid.

of *Aurat* Foundation's Outreach Programme. As part of its Outreach Programme, the *Aurat* Foundation held the First National Peasant Women's Conference in Pakistan in 1991, inviting rural women to identify their particular problems, and hold dialogues with policy makers, public representatives and officials of government departments about their needs for services, credit, training, and other resources.[40]

Additionally, the *Aurat* Foundation has used the media for transmitting knowledge about agriculture technologies to rural women. Besides a weekly radio programme on food production technologies for rural women, it also included Radio Listening Centres established in over 178 villages with an answering service to respond to queries, and 49 posters and pamphlets were produced and disseminated as additional information. This initiative, presented in the format of a romantic comedy, was selected by UNIFEM as one of the two Asian projects show-cased at the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995.

The focus of the Foundation's Programme for Strengthening Citizens for Advocacy and Action has been on women elected to the local government institutions, training them to raise women's issues effectively in local councils. Additionally, the aim has been to provide political education to women across the country to participate in governance, and run advocacy campaigns. Through the Political Education Programme, about 1,100 citizens representing various civil society organisations in over 60 districts of Pakistan acquired knowledge in key political issues and participated in the various campaigns of the Foundation.[41]

Given the environment of gender-discriminatory laws and practices in the country, the Foundation's 'Programme for Affirmative Legislation and Policies' was developed to undertake sustained advocacy with the legislatures, executive authorities, media, and political parties to influence policies, and legislation for women. The key institutional structures under this Programme have been the Legislative Watch Groups, four at the provincial level and one at the federal level, which undertake advocacy for women with public authorities and representatives.[42]

Through its advocacy and activist initiatives, the *Aurat* Foundation has remained a consistent participant and collaborator with other women's organizations and donor agencies, within Pakistan and internationally, to work towards a concerted and joint effort for the repeal of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinances, legislative reforms, and focus on issues of violence against women.

Besides maintaining its resource library, and publishing annual reports on women's issues, primarily on violence against women, the Foundation also continues to publish a quarterly newsletter, Legislative Watch, on developments in the legal and judicial arena, edited and compiled by human rights activists and legal experts.[43]

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Many of them are working in the Citizens' Action Committees at the district level to do advocacy and action for women's rights. Many of these activists were elected as councillors in the Local Government Elections 2000-2001. Citizens' Action Committees were set up in 70 districts of Pakistan to undertake awareness raising, gender sensitising and advocacy for women's rights at the district level. These Committees represent over 400 civil society organisations and over 70 per cent of the Committee members are men, willing to give their time and commitment to undertaking advocacy and action to address women's concerns. Citizens' Action Committees set up by AF in 70 districts of Pakistan provide the countrywide network for its women's rights and advocacy campaigns. Ibid.

[42] As a result of this initiative, five Legislative Watch Groups have been established at the provincial and federal levels to monitor legislatures with the help of civil society groups, media, and women politicians. The Legislative Watch Groups in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces have been given observer status in the meetings of the Standing Committees of the Provincial legislatures.

[43] For further details on the *Aurat* Foundation and its publications, visit: http://www.af.org.pk/ Accessed on April 1, 2017.

The *ASR* (Impact) Institute for Applied Socio-Economic Research and Resource Centre, launched in 1983, defines itself as an applied social research socialist-feminist organization. It has been involved in research, training workshops, academic teaching, community work, documentary media production, and assisting theatre and art groups on projects that deal with gender discrimination against women in all spheres. The organization also has the distinction of launching the first feminist press in Pakistan, holding the first National Women's Studies Conference, among others, and creating an educational and training Institute of Women's Studies in Lahore, with a focus on 'cultivating and disseminating a type of Women's Studies that addresses the specific realities of Asian women's experiences and contributions.'[44]

Led by its founder and director, sociologist Nighat Said Khan, *ASR* has been actively involved in consciousness-raising campaigns and a host of diverse issue-specific workshops on topics such as sexual harassment of women in the workplace; women's labour and rights in rural communities; women's health; peace and conflict resolution in South Asia; feminist perspectives on the portrayal of women in the media; the use of theatre for empowerment; design and crafts production; and feminist research methods. The organization has also organized and hosted several international conferences on women's issues, including the first national women's studies conference in 1994 that brought together women academics, activists, writers, artists, poets, theatre activists, dancers, and performers, and also included the first national feminist women's *mushaira* (traditional forum for public recitation of Urdu poetry). Other significant *ASR* conferences have included 'In Struggle Together', a national conference of development activists, and 'From Rio to Beijing' in 1995 that was attended by over 2000 activists.[45]

Along with other women's organizations, as part of its advocacy and activism initiative, *ASR* has remained committed to the struggle for the repeal and amendment of gender-discriminatory Sharia laws, and other socio cultural practices.[46]

As an extension of its feminist activism-oriented operations, in 1997 *ASR* founded the Institute of Women's Studies (IWSL). The institute has offered diploma and certificate courses designed specifically towards training and sensitizing NGO personnel, economists, sociologists, teachers, university faculty, government employees, media, journalists, artists, human rights activists, and post graduates in contemporary women's issues in.[47] The IWSL socio-economic research work has included projects on income-generation schemes in Pakistan, women in handicrafts, and the situation of women in industry, especially the brick kiln, construction, and quarrying industries. The *ASR* documentation centre and its in-house library today provide a wide collection of books, and journals on development-related issues in Pakistan and abroad for researchers, as well as housing an audio and film collection.[48]

Meanwhile, just as progressive urban educated women were forming alliances, organizations, and pressure groups to oppose Islamization and discriminatory Sharia laws, women

[44] ASR Resource Center Handbook, Published by *ASR* Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003.
[45] ASR Resource Center Handbook, Published by *ASR* Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003.
[46] Today, many women's NGO's in Pakistan, because of their active presence on the national scene and strong voice through collaborative ventures with international agencies such as the United Nations, Oxfam, ActionAid, and Heinrich Boll Stiftung, among others, are consulted at the government level in terms of policy making, legislation issues, and implementation strategies.
[47] The last two decades have also seen the emergence of several Women and Gender Studies departments and programs in the major universities of the country, but since these are mostly state-run institutions, their curriculums are designed under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. For example, the Karachi University, Karachi, the Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, and the Punjab University, Lahore.
[48] ASR Resource Center Handbook. *ASR* Publications, Lahore, Pakistan, 2003.

of the Sindh province formed the first rural based women's organization, the *Sindhiani Tehrik* (The Sindhi Women's Movement) to mass mobilize women to seek protection of their rights.[49] Their particular issues focused on abuse of bonded labour by feudal landlords, rape of their women, and unequal wages for rural women.[50]

Considering the alarming rise in cases of extreme domestic violence concerning women, in 1985 clinical psychologist Shahnaz Bokhari started the Progressive Women's Association (PWA). The PWA provides shelter, and medical care, and arranges for legal help for women survivors of extreme forms of domestic violence that includes acid-attacks, stove-burning, and rape. Regardless of threats and hostile confrontations by families of victims, as well as harassment from corrupt elements in the law enforcement system, Bokhari's organization has continued its mission to oppose gender violence and socio-cultural biases that encourage such acts against women. Additionally, the PWA has campaigned for stringent state legislation for the protection of women. In 1994, Bokhari succeeded in getting the Benazir Bhutto government to establish all-female police stations in the country to facilitate women's access to state help.

The PWA organizes workshops on issues of domestic violence against women at the provincial levels, and seeks to involve government and law enforcement bodies, NGOs, as well as the legal community to build partnerships for coordination and alliances to confront the menace more effectively at all levels.[51] The PWA also runs a shelter in Rawalpindi for destitute female victims of domestic violence by the name of *AASRA* (Support), founded in 1999 in Bokhari own residence, providing refuge to 30 victims at a time.

Human Rights and Legal Aid Organizations

The introduction of Sharia laws and the promulgation of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance witnessed a strong reaction from legal circles themselves. This resistance was articulated by prominent female members of the legal fraternity by establishing new organizations and legal aid cells that catered specifically to female victims of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance, as well as addressing issues of violence against women, and tribal practices such as honour-killing, and honour-rape.

In 1980, Asma Jehangir and Hina Jilani, two women lawyers and advocates of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, launched the country's first all-women's law firm and set up Pakistan's first free legal aid center, the AGHS Legal Aid Cell for Women, in Lahore, Punjab, to offer shelter and legal aid to thousands of battered and abused women.

Jehangir, and Jilani, winners of the Millennium Peace Prize for Women, among many other international awards, and known and respected as advocates of women's rights, were also among the founding members of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Asma Jehangir has also served as the Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), and UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial, Arbitrary, and Summary Executions. Jehangir and Jilani's has been one of the most vocal struggles in taking on the state

[49] For further details on the history of the *Sindhiani Tehreek* see Munir, Imran. *Social Movements, Religion, Democracy and Political Communication in Pakistan.* PhD Dissertation, Faculty of Communication, Art, and Technology, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada. 2011 (180). Access at: http://summit.sfu.ca/item/11823

[50] Mumtaz Khawar and Mitha, Yameema. *Pakistan: An Oxfam Country Profile*. Oxfam, Oxford, UK, 2003. (pg. 46).

[51] Most likely for security reasons, the PWA has shifted its website to Facebook. For details on the Progressive Women's Association's (PWA) projects, and case studies visit: https://web.facebook.com/Progressive-Womens-Association-111315255588748/info?tab=page_info. Accessed on April 2. 2017.

and press for the repeal of the *Zina Hudood* laws, while continuing to defend and represent female women victims of domestic violence, the *Zina Hudood* laws, and other human rights abuses. Consequently, they have been arrested, received death threats, and faced hostile propaganda, intimidation, public abuse and murder attempts on themselves and their families as fundamentalists accused them of 'misguiding women', and declared them 'non-believers' who are pursuing a 'Western' agenda to undermine and subvert Islamic values. It is pertinent to mention here that anti-West fundamentalist and extremist Islamic religious factions in Pakistan, as elsewhere, are quick to dismiss organizations, individuals, activists, and women who demand women's/gender equality and freedoms as pandering to 'Western' agendas, and perpetuating values that are against the spirit of Islam.[52]

Today, the AGHS organization has grown to include research and awareness programs and publications to educate women from all strata of the society regarding their legal and citizen rights. It is engaged in providing and fostering free legal aid and paralegal education; publication of books and pamphlets on legal awareness; research on child labour and child rights, bonded labour, discrimination against minorities and ethnic groups, and individuals discriminated against because of their sexual orientation, and AIDS/HIV; drafting human-rights related legislation; and fighting curbs on freedom of speech, press, and media. As a watchdog entity, the AGHS also documents and publishes its findings on countrywide violations of human rights, prison conditions, juvenile justice, and data on violence against women on an annual basis.[53]

As the Islamization period led to increased abuse and victimization of women because of discriminatory laws, the AGHS Legal Aid Cell also founded the *Dastak* (Knock) women's shelter in 1990 in the city of Lahore. Established under the AGHS charitable trust, the *Dastak* shelter house, supervised by a female staff, provides immediate help and temporary residence to women escaping violent and abusive domestic situations and in need of counseling and legal aid. [54] Over the years, the shelter has housed and helped both single women and women with children to find refuge and free legal aid through its team of lawyers specializing in Sharia, family, and civil and criminal law. *Dastak's* main activities include counseling, education, skill development, social integration, rehabilitation, and resettlement. Besides running the shelter, *Dastak* is involved in lobby and advocacy activities to gain political and public support, to bring about a change in the perception of protection for women by involving NGOs, community-based organizations, and the government to create better systems and monitoring of shelters. [55]

Expanding its operations, in 1994 the AGHS established a separate Child Rights Unit to promote and campaign for Pakistan's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the

[52] For further discussion see Zia, Afiya Shehrbano. 'Faith-based Challenges to the Women's Movement.' *Contesting Feminisms: Gender and Islam in Asia.* (ed. Huma-Ahmed Ghosh). State University of New York Press, Albany, USA. 2015 (92).

[53] For further information on the AGHS organization visit: https://aghsblog.wordpress.com/contact-us/Accessed on April 3, 2017.

[54] Ibid.

[55] *Dastak's* main activities include counseling, education, skill development, social integration, rehabilitation, and resettlement. Besides running the shelter, *Dastak* is involved in lobby and advocacy activities to gain political and public support, to bring about a change in the perception of protection for women by involving NGOs, community-based organizations, and the government to create better systems and monitoring of shelters. For further details visit: Critelli (2010). "Women's Rights=Human Rights: Pakistani Women against Gender Violence," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 37: Issue. 2, Article 7. Accessed at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3517&context=jssw on April 3, 2017.

Child.[56] Similarly, given the rising rates in domestic violence against women by burning, the AGHS also established a separate Burn Unit and Monitoring Cell in 2007 to research and document case studies.[57]

Another women's free legal aid organization, the Karachi-based Pakistan Women Lawyers Association and Legal Aid Cell (PAWLA), was founded in 1981 as an NGO by eminent human rights female lawyer, Rashida Muhammad Hussain Patel. As a women's rights lawyer, Patel played a pioneering role in introducing the Family Law Ordinance of 1961 in Pakistan as a result of which the then military ruler, President Ayub Khan, had to amend various clauses of the *nikahnama* (Muslim marriage contract) to ensure protection to women against abuse, and violation of their rights after marriage such as the provision of legal rights to divorce, and child custody.[58]

The PAWLA legal team provides free legal aid to women in cases of marriage, *khula*, guardianship disputes, and maintenance cases.[59] Staffed by professional lawyers and volunteers to provide free legal assistance to women in distress, its main objectives are to create legal awareness programs and activities, which it has been doing by showing educational videos on key laws and women's rights issues in schools, clinics, parks, and rural areas. As part of its awareness campaign, PAWLA also presents radio plays on legal issues, followed by question and answer sessions, on Radio Pakistan. With regional offices in all the major cities of the country, its members have been a strong voice in mobilizing street protests and rallies for women's equal rights and the repeal of the *Zina Hudood* laws.

Activist Theatre Groups

During the Islamization period a new politically conscious street and activist theatre of resistance emerged in the country. The changing socio-political environment laid the foundation for a new breed of activist theatre groups, writers, and actors that, flouting censorship policies and government clearance procedures, sought to raise political consciousness through street theatre. As General Zia-ul-Haq placed a ban on student unions, trade unions, and political parties, besides placing other restrictive measures on the freedom of press and expression, politically motivated theatre groups began to stage plays that provided a much-needed cathartic experience to the public, and activist performers an interactive forum to promote democracy and human rights.

The significant activist theatre groups that emerged specifically with a feminist and resistance agenda are the Lahore-based *Ajoka* Theatre for Social Change, and the Karachi-based *Tehrik-e-Niswan* (The Women's Movement) theatre group**.**

The *Ajoka* Theatre for Social Change came into existence in 1983 in reaction to Zia-ul-Haq's introduction of Sharia Laws and marginalization of women's rights. Founded by stage and TV actress Madeeha Gohar, her playwright and theatre director husband Shahid Nadeem, and a

[56] For further information on the AGHS Child Rights Unit visit: http://aghsblog.wordpress.com/child-rights-unit/ Accessed on April 3, 2017.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Thomas, Dorothy Q. "Double Jeopardy: Police Abuse of Women in Pakistan". Human Rights Watch Report, 1991 (31).

For further discussion on women's legal status and laws in Pakistan, see Patel, Rashida. *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Pakistan.* Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan. 2010.

[59] In Islam, *khula* is defined as 'the release secured by the wife from the husband from the marriage-tie, at her insistence, on paying or consenting to pay compensation to him.' "Family Laws in Pakistan." *The Impact of Family Laws on the Rights of Divorced Women in Pakistan.* National Commission on the Status of Women. Aligarh Publishers, Islamabad, Pakistan, 2008 (11).

small group of cultural activists, the *Ajoka* has produced plays, telefilms, drama serials, songs, and documentaries on themes of human rights, women's rights, religious freedom, family planning, regional peace, and honour killing.[60]

In 1979 a group of women in Karachi formed the *Tehrik- e- Niswan*, a cultural action group comprising performing artists, activists, and writers. Among them is Sheema Kirmani, classical dancer and actress, who continued with her profession, teaching, and cultural activism through dance and theatre during the Islamization period. The *Tehrik- e- Niswan*'s first All Women's Conference was held in Karachi, Pakistan in 1980, attended by women from all sections of society, especially women from the working-class Lyari and Orangi areas and from various trade and labour unions. *Tehrik*'s initial focus was on organizing seminars and workshops with titles such as 'Violence on Women' and '*Chaddar and Chardiwari*' ('Veil, Women, and Four Walls'). The organization sought to address both sexes in its consciousness-raising campaigns, particularly men, regarding the social, political, economic and cultural discrimination against women, and their low status in society. However, within a year of its inception, the *Tehrik-e-Niswan* moved away from seminars towards cultural and creative activities like theatre and dance to convey its message. Consequently, for the first time in the history of the Pakistan, politically conscious plays about the plight of women and other oppressed people began to be staged.[61] Today the *Tehrik-e-Niswan* is involved in theatre, dance, television plays and serials, video productions such as music videos, and documentaries that address socio-political and cultural issues regarding women.[62]

The parallel theatre movement in Pakistan, also known as 'alternative theatre', was identified as such because it offered an alternative to the entertainment programming available on state-controlled television channels, and the mainstream theatre performances at the arts councils.

These activist parallel theatre groups conducted street theatre and workshops to involve community groups and students, particularly at the grassroots level and in rural and low-income urban areas. Additionally, they trained individuals and new groups in theatrical and communication skills for mass mobilization and resistance against political, gender, and religious oppression. As opposed to the affluent classes that patronized mainstream theatre, the audiences for parallel theatre comprised mainly the educated middle class, the suppressed religious minorities, and poor and uneducated segments that aspired to equality and democracy in the country.[63]

Although the parallel theatre movement in Pakistan emerged as a result of cultural activism and voluntary involvement of individuals protesting against the impact of Islamization, and the martial law regime, the growing presence and support of foreign funded NGOs working on women's rights and gender issues in the country since the late 1980s also played a significant role in strengthening their mutual causes for justice and socio-political reforms.[64]

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[60] The *Ajoka* Theatre for Social Change. Accessed at: http://ajoka.org.pk/default.aspx on April 5, 2017.
[61] The *Tehrik-e-Niswan* Theatre. Accessed at: http://www.sacw.net/site17.html on April 6, 2017.
[62] For details on *Tehrik-e-Niswan's* projects and productions visit: http://tehrik-e-niswan.org.pk/default.asp Accessed on April 6, 2017.
[63] For further discussion see Iqbal, Shoaib. "Parallel Theater: Socio-Political Perspective." Accessed at: http://kunci.or.id/articles/parallel-theater-socio-political-perscepctive-by-shoaib-iqbal/ on April 8, 2017.
[64] For further discussion see Afzal-Khan, Fawzia. "Pakistani Community Theatre and the NGO Movement*." A Critical Stage: The Role of Secular Alternative Theatre in Pakistan.* Seagull Books, Calcutta, New Delhi, India, 2006 (71-90).

Activist Writers

Besides the organized women's resistance movement and women's rights organizations, Pakistani women in their individual capacities as writers, poets, academics, and journalists have also made their mark in waging an equally brave and focused struggle for the elimination of gender-discriminatory laws and practices in the country. Just as new organizations were springing up to resist and oppose the effects of Islamization, so were academics, journalists, writers, and intellectuals taking on an active role in their independent capacities in their particular fields. Independent daily newspapers such as The Daily *Muslim* from Islamabad, and the Peshawar-based Daily *Frontier Post* in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan, were taking a strong lead in scathing opposition to the Zia regime's politicization of religion, in the process thwarting and challenging the state censorship polices. As was to be expected, this opposition was not without consequences, as many journalists were repeatedly arrested, harassed, and tortured. Similarly, monthly magazines such as the *Herald* Magazine, and later the *Newsline* Magazine, both from Karachi, headed and mainly staffed by female journalists, were also opposing Zia's Islamization measures despite state-opposition and harassment. [65]

The literary scene also began to change with the emergence of women's and feminist literature in Pakistan, particularly during Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization that triggered a fierce response from the literary circles countrywide. This period also initiated a distinct genre of Pakistani feminist poetry, primarily led by feminist activist poets such as Kishwar Naheed, Fehmida Riaz, and later, Parveen Shakir.

Working as poets, writers, journalists and activists, Kishwar Naheed and Fehmida Riaz, have remained prominent and pioneering voices that have unceasingly spoken out against women's oppression and discriminatory Islamic laws for the last four decades in a field dominated by traditional male voices. Through their writings they have dared to step into the realms of female sexuality, politics, and social issues, something that had never been done by female poets in Pakistan before at the national level. Kishwar Naheed, in particular, has campaigned to raise cross-cultural and international awareness about women's rights in Pakistan through her writings, which have also been translated in over 20 languages, and through lecture tours internationally at North American and Western universities. [66]

Kishwar Naheed and Fehmida Riaz remained at the forefront of writers who were harassed persistently during the martial law years because of their very vocal opposition to religion–based

[65] For detailed discussions on this period of harassment, censorship and clampdown on the Pakistani media and journalists see:

Niazi, Zamir. *The Press in Chains*. Royal Book Company, Karachi, Pakistan, 1986.

Niazi, Zamir. *The Web of Censorship*. Oxford University Press, Karachi, Pakistan, 1994.

[66] The literary scene in post-independence Pakistan had traditionally been dominated by male Urdu writers—poets, novelists, short story writers, dramatists and essayists. This was largely so because the literary tradition among the Muslims in the Indian sub-continent did not allow women's voices to be heard in the public arena. Culturally, women were not in a position to find recognition as individuals due to the spatial segregation of the sexes. The most popular form of literature in Urdu has been poetry, with a tradition of public recitations, known as the *mushaira*, supplying the forum for poets to compete with each other by reciting their latest works. Traditionally, women could not participate in this exercise due to social and cultural segregation. For detailed discussion on the emergence of a new feminist literary trend in Pakistan see Silva, Neluka. "Shameless Women: Repression and Resistance in, We the Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. 2003, Vol.3, No.2. Wesleyan University Press, USA (28-51).

gender oppression through discriminatory laws.[67] Fehmida Riaz, who was the editor and publisher of an Urdu magazine, *Awaaz* (Voice), at the time, was charged with fourteen court cases of sedition, including one carrying the death penalty, and therefore driven into seven years of self-exile in India as a Poet in Residence at the Jamia Millia University in Delhi.[68]

During and since the Islamization years, the writings of both Kishwar Naheed and Fehmida Riaz have attained a prominent stature as symbols of the woman's resistance movement in Pakistan. A reading of these and other feminist Pakistani writers depicts the non-passive attitudes of a great number of urban, educated Pakistani women who joined the struggle for liberation during Zia's regime, and a return to democratic rule in the country through various means.

Activist Documentary Filmmaking Practices

Since partition from India in 1947, the Pakistani film industry mainly comprised commercial mainstream cinema with a focus on feature films that provided affordable entertainment to the masses.[69] However, as gendered violence, human rights violations, impact of Islamization and rigid Sharia laws, particularly on women and minorities, as well as the violent socio-cultural and tribal practices such as honour-killings and acid-attacks continued to afflict civil society, independent filmmakers, significantly women, began to turn to the availability of cost-effective video-technology and the documentary film medium as an activist tool to document and protest these issues, as well as to garner cross-cultural support through international screenings and film festivals.[70]

Four contemporary independent Pakistani women filmmakers have been at the forefront of highlighting socio-cultural, political, and gender issues, and the impact of gender-specific laws and customs that marginalize and target women's freedom and status as equal citizens. These are Sabiha Sumar, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Maheen Zia, and Samar Minallah, respectively, who have also won wide international acclaim and awards at film festivals.[71] Although these filmmakers have largely relied on foreign funding and Western TV channels (e.g. the BBC; CBC; Channel 4; ZDF/Arte; HBO, among others) to air their work internationally considering the hostile climate of intolerance and censorship policies at home regarding sensitive religious issues, it is to their credit that they took up topics that were of crucial importance and needed to be addressed and critiqued.

The pioneering Pakistani independent woman filmmaker who took up the issue of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance and its impact on women is the Karachi-based sociologist-filmmaker Sabiha Sumar. During the Zia regime, Sumar courageously launched her filmmaking career in 1988 with

[67] For English translation of these and other Pakistani women poets writing on contemporary feminist issues and women's oppression see Ahmad. Rukhsana, (ed and translator into English from Urdu) *We the Sinful Women: Contemporary Urdu Feminist Poetry*. The Women's Press, London, UK, 1991.

[68] For biographical details on Pakistani feminist women poets visit 'Feminist Poets of Pakistan' at: http://shari23a.wixsite.com/poets-of-pakistan Accessed on April 2, 2017.

[69] For a history of the Pakistani mainstream film industry see Gazdar, Mushtaq. Pakistan Cinema 1947-1997. Oxford University Press, USA, 1998.

[70] For detailed discussions of the emergence of the activist documentary filmmaking practices in Pakistan, see Imran, Rahat. *Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan: The Emergence of a Cinema of Accountability.* Routledge Publishers, Taylor & Francis Group, UK, USA, 2016.

[71] For further details on these filmmakers and their productions see Imran, Rahat. 'Cinema: Films Made by Women Screen Writers, Directors, Producers: Women Documentary Filmmakers: Pakistan', Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures, Brill, 2010, Brill Online. Access at Brill Online: http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/search?s.q=rahat+imran&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures&search-go=Search

her first film *Who Will Cast the First Stone?* (1988) on the topic of religious fundamentalism and the impact of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance on women prisoners languishing in jails under this law.[72] This observational and participatory film depicting the miserable condition of women imprisoned on charges of extra-marital sex under new Ordinance won her the Golden Gate Award in San Francisco in 1998. Subsequently, Sumar has continued to take up issues of women's oppression, religious fundamentalism, and socio-political malaise as topics for her subsequent documentaries, winning international acclaim and awards.[73]

Sumar established her independent film production company in 1992, Vidhi Films, as well as the Centre for Social Science Research in Karachi. Sumar's research and film production projects focus on topics related to social and political change, the film medium as a tool for advocacy, outreach, and consciousness-raising, as well as imparting technical training in filmmaking. As part of her activist intent to encourage debate on socio-political issues and mobilize public awareness on crucial gender and human rights issues her film company is also engaged in mobile film screenings of issue-oriented films in the country's remote areas and villages, thereby providing a cinema experience to people who have no access to cinemas otherwise.[74]

Samar Minallah, an anthropologist by training, has broached issues of gender-discriminatory social and tribal practices that affect women and girls in the ultra-conservative environment of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. Hers has been a particularly daring journey as a woman filmmaker considering that this tribal region is historically associated with rigid socio-cultural customs that operate in accordance with notions of honour, particularly regarding the status and treatment of women, and restrict their participation in the public arena.

Since 1999 when she graduated with a degree in Anthropology and Development, Islamabad-based Minallah has worked as a free-lance writer, and human rights activist with a particular focus on highlighting gender-discriminatory issues and tribal customs and traditions that were largely missing from media discourse and public attention in Pakistan. She took up documentary filmmaking with her first film, *Swara: A Bridge Over Troubled Waters* (2003), that investigated the tribal custom of swara that allowed for giving away of minor girls as compensation to the aggrieved party through forced marriages to settle disputes and avenge murders.[75] Minallah's 40-minute multi-award winning documentary film and campaigning proved instrumental in mobilizing public opinion against the tribal custom of swara, forcing the Supreme Court of Pakistan to deliver a benchmark ruling that criminalized the practice, proclaiming it a punishable offence under the Pakistan Penal Code.[76]

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[72] *Who Will Cast the First Stone?* Sabiha Sumar (with Ahmed Alauddin Jamal). 1988. (52 min.). Retake Film & Video Collective, UK, (Urdu/English/English sub- titles).

[73] For a detailed discussion on Sabiha Sumar's three thematically-linked documentaries on religious fundamentalism see Imran, Rahat. "Deconstructing Islamization in Pakistan: Sabiha Sumar Wages Feminist Cinematic *Jihad* through a Documentary Lens." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, USA. Vol. 9, # 3, May 2008 (117-154). Access at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol9/iss3/8/

[74] For further details on Vidhi Films, and Sabiha Sumar's filmography and upcoming projects, visit: http://www.vidhifilms.com Accessed on April 9, 2017.

[75] *Swara: A Bridge over Troubled Waters*. Samar Minallah. 2003 (40 min). Ethnomedia & Development for the Mera Ghar (My Home) Project of GTZ and the Aurat Foundation of Peshawar, Pakistan. (Pushto/ Urdu/ English sub-titles).

[76] For further details on Samar Minallah's activist documentaries and projects see Imran, Rahat. 'Samar Minallah: Ethnomedia and Development.' *Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan: The Emergence of a Cinema of Accountability*. Routledge Publishers, Taylor & Francis Group, UK, USA, 2016 (161).

Minallah's Islamabad-based NGO, Ethnomedia and Development, continues to collaborate with activists, NGOs, and government bodies to highlight socio-cultural and gender-specific issues through seminars, public forums, TV talk shows, awareness workshops and advocacy programmes, and documentaries on crucial social issues such as honor killings, women's rights, education, and health issues regarding HIV/AIDS in the backward areas of the province where discussion on these subjects is still taboo.[77]

The multi-award-winning documentarist Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy took up documentary filmmaking with her first film *Terror's Children* (2003) that documented the lives of Afghan refugee children in Pakistan following the US-led 'war on terror' in their homeland in the wake of the 9/11/2001 attacks in the US.[78] With a journalistic and reportorial focus, in her subsequent documentaries Obaid-Chinoy continued to explore and document the impact of terrorism, jihadist ideologies, and religious fundamentalism in the aftermath of the 'war on terror' on populations residing in the tribal and northern areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the continued US strikes to dislodge the Taliban government caused massive destruction, death, and displacement that rendered huge populations homeless, or refugees. [79]

Obaid-Chinoy's work has spanned a variety of subjects, with a particular focus on issues of religious fundamentalism, gender discrimination, and social justice. Her topics have included the so-called 'war on terror' and its fallout on the local populations of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the impact of Talibanization on Afghanistan and Pakistan, women's lives under Sharia laws in Saudi Arabia, the treatment of Native American women in Canada, illegal abortions in the Philippines, Muslims living in Sweden, and the discriminatory treatment of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa.

Obaid's films are mostly collaborative ventures with foreign media channels such as Channel 4 UK, PBS, Al-Jazeera, CBC, CNN, and the Discovery Times Channel, hence reveal a distinctly journalistic style as courageously, she reports events and conditions from dangerous zones of conflict, and otherwise normally inaccessible situations, particularly for women.

Obaid-Chinoy turned her focus to the crucial issue of violence against women in Pakistan with her academy-award winning documentary, Saving Face (2011), a film that documents the plight of female victims of acid-attacks.[80] Following the success of Saving Face, Obaid-Chinoys's next documentary film on hour-killing, *A Girl in The River: The Price of Forgiveness* (2015), won her a second Oscar award in 2016.[81] Both films have renewed pressure on the government to introduce stern laws, and measures of accountability for such heinous crimes. [82]

Karachi-based filmmaker Maheen Zia has been among the pioneering independent documentarists in Pakistan who started her career as an editor for a post-production company. Besides her own filmmaking, and working as a writer, editor, cinematographer for several other

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[77] For details on Samar Minallah's filmography and Ethnomedia and Development projects visit: http://www.ethnomedia.pk Accessed on April 9, 2017.

[78] *Terror's Children*. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (with Jay Keuper and Mohammad Naqvi), 2003 (45 min.), Discovery Times Channel (Urdu, Darri, English/English sub- titles).

[79] For further discussion of Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's six documentary films on the topics of religious fundamentalism, and the 'war on terror', see Imran, Rahat. 'Cinema on Terror: Charting the Militant Mix of Politics, Religion, and Talibanization'. *Activist Documentary Film in Pakistan: The Emergence of a Cinema of Accountability.* Routledge Publishers, Taylor & Francis Group, UK, USA, 2016 (84).

[80] *Saving Face*. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy (with Daniel Junge). 2011 (52-min). Naked Edge Films. (English/English sub-titles/Urdu).

[81] *A Girl in The River: The Price of Forgiveness* (2015). Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. (40-min). HBO Documentary Films and SOC Films. (Punjabi/English subtitles).

[82] For further information on Sharmeen Obaid's projects visit: http://sharmeenobaidfilms.com/bio

film projects in Pakistan, Zia was also a founding member of the KaraFilm Society in 2001, for which she continued to work as an organizer and programmer.

Zia's work has primarily focused on local socio-political issues, and has included experimental shorts as well as docudramas. As an environmental activist and co-founder of the Pakistan Animal Welfare Society, she has incorporated these topics in her films. She has taught filmmaking at the Department of Visual Studies, University of Karachi, and has conducted several community video training workshops in the rural areas of the Sindh province.

Zia has also been active in the international arena through her participation as jury member for the Kabul Documentary and Short Film Festival, Afghanistan (2007), the Hyderabad International Film Festival, India (2007), the Tehran International Short Film Festival, Iran (2005) and the Tampere Film Festival, Finland (2006). She is also the founding member of the Pakistani chapter of the Union for Short Filmmakers of Muslim Countries, an organization that aims to help Third World filmmakers gain access to international film festivals.[83]

Zia has the merit of being the editor of Pakistan's first digital feature film (*The Long Night* 2000). She was also the winner of the Berlin Today Award 2008 for her short film *Match Factor* (2008) that centers on an Iraqi football player's whereabouts and suspected defection in Berlin, Germany.[84]

Conclusion

It is evident that despite socio-political upheavals, dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, the long and oppressive Islamization era, and the onslaught of religious fundamentalism and extremism, civil segments within Pakistani society have risen to the challenges of oppression, women's marginalization, and protection of human rights through various means and channels. They offer parallel narratives of somber events and conditions that have threatened the social fabric of the country, particularly regarding gender issues, and women's socio-legal status.

Over the years, beginning with the Islamization period and General-Zia-ul-Haq's promulgation of the *Zina Hudood* Ordinance in 1979, Pakistani women's organizations have continued to draw attention to women's specific socio-cultural and religious oppressions through conferences, networking, research, publication, media, legal-aid cells, and the arts that have included feminist literature, theatre groups, and activist documentary filmmaking practices. This is a tremendous achievement for organizations that emerged and collaborated through the initial efforts of a small number of women activists and have consistently grown to cater to a more diverse range of women's and human rights issues in the country. Consequently, as pressure groups they have led the way in establishing a permanent platform from within their own socio-cultural, patriarchal, and religious constraints and oppositions to promote women's issues and representation as a crucial entity for consideration in national political decision-making and legislative procedures.

Civil society in Pakistan has been growing for the last two decades in a variety of social life domains, providing space, training, and organizational capacity to the most oppressed segments of the society, including women and minorities. Civil society through rural development

[83] For details on Maheen Zia's productions visit: http://www.cultureunplugged.com/storyteller/Maheen1#/aboutme Accessed on April 12, 2017.

[84] *The Long Night* 2000. Hassan Zaidi. 2000. (94-min). (ed. Maheen Zia). Tamarin Pictures. Urdu/English sub-titles. *Match Factor*. Maheen Zia. 2007. (15-min). Zero Fiction Film GmbH. (English/German/English subtitles).

and women's empowerment initiatives are providing prospects to the people to secure economic, political, and cultural opportunities.

After making a well-contested shift from authoritarianism to democratization, Pakistan is passing through the consolidation period to secure democracy and rule of law in the country. Civil society is continuing to play a key role by supporting this transitional and consolidation phase to ensure the continuity of democratic culture and tradition in the country.

Needless to say, Pakistani civil society has emerged as a vibrant 'third sector' with a positive impact on the state and the market, where Pakistani women are increasingly assuming leadership roles in civil society organization throughout the country to facilitate economic and political empowerment. Defying marginalization in the face of severest of odds, theirs has been a most inspiring success story.

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