Explaining Women’s Disempowerment in Pakistan

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Islam, military rule, or women themselves?

Abstract: Pakistan's disempowerment of women and neglect of women's rights is not just a social injustice but represents a security risk in an education system which fails to build the resilience required for women to stand up to intimidation from radical religious and terrorist groups. Women in Pakistan are educated to be disempowered. The ordinary women of Pakistan have no meaningful rights to make either political or family decisions and their only duty is to follow the will of the male members of the family. According to the Madrasa education system of Pakistan, women lack reason and, therefore, they cannot take an active part in the political and family decision-making processes. This paper will use the Feminist Securitization Theory to explore the causes of women's disempowerment in Pakistan. This study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with women in the two Pakistani cities in Swat and Peshawar (KPK) to examine the reasons for the disempowerment of women. The sample population was drawn from the Madrasa education system, including university students, and teachers. This paper discusses the status of women in Islam under civil and military rule, and finds that the failure of the Government of Pakistan to address women's disempowerment has implications for society and for security.

Introduction

Islam is considered by some scholars to be a progressive religion, but in Pakistan today women are not considered to be equal to men. Feminist scholarship contends that Islamic jurisprudence has developed in ways that are contrary to gender equality. This is not because the Quran is clearly aimed in that direction, but is a result of the selective interpretation of the verses of the Quran by patriarchal leaders. This study argues that the core reasons behind women's disempowerment in Pakistan are the mingling of Islamic teachings with the existing customs and traditions by the patriarchal leaders and, the failure of the government to address women’s empowerment issues as a national security concern. The concept of empowerment is associated with the power relationship between men and women and, their ability to utilise their resources and control them. But in Pakistan, men decide what women need to know (Naz 2015). This is despite the fact that in early Islam, women like Khadijah and Ayesha (wives of the Prophet Muhammad, pbuh) and Rabia Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) had a strong say in the domestic and state affairs. Even Jinnah (the founder of Pakistan) before the creation of Pakistan, has stated that:

“no nation can rise to the height of glory, unless women are side by side with you. It is a crime against humanity to shut up women within the four walls of houses as prisoners. We cannot expect a woman who is ignorant herself to bring up our children properly. Women have the power to bring up children on the right lines. Let us not throw away this asset.”

The Quaid 1944

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, Islamic sources particularly the Quran and Sunnah, the Hadith and Fiqh (Law) have been interpreted only by Muslim men. They have assigned themselves the task of defining the nature of women’s existence, their relationship with God and human beings, and their final destiny (life after death). Ironically, until now, whatever the male dominated society has decided for the women has been accepted by the majority of Muslim women and surprisingly, without even questioning their status in Islam. This research closely
examines the status of women in Islam and investigates whether women are absolutely unaware or ill-informed of their basic rights in Islam or whether they are helpless to use their power against the dominance of male-centered societies. This study argues that women are victims of both. They have a very little knowledge about their status in Islam and whatever little knowledge they have is all interpreted, designed and crafted by men. While there are various segments of women who are very well informed about their status in Islam, they cannot exercise their power to raise their voice against the dominant patriarchal society. In Pakistan, women are usually submissive and subordinate to men. This raises the question: who is responsible for the disempowered status of women in Pakistan? Is it Islam, the military leadership or women themselves?

Firstly, to what extent is Islam responsible for the disempowerment of women? In the Quran, there are about eighty verses concerning women’s legal issues, many of which refer to the role of women in society and important family issues, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. However, after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the companions of the Prophet consulted His wife Ayesha on several issues, seeking her viewpoint on the Prophet’s understanding of various questions. This shows that in Hadith/Sunnah Ayesha indeed had a strong say and she was a woman who was consulted for guidance. It is an example that in Islam women can have an equal say in the society. But in Pakistan, evidence suggests that obstacles to women’s disempowerment are due to the practices of Islam according to various interpretations, rather than Islam itself.

Secondly, in what way are the military leaders responsible for the disempowerment of women? During the military rule of General Zia from 1977-88, the Hudood Ordinance, Qisas, and Diyat, that had a negative impact on the empowerment of women were introduced. This study will discuss this in length. Thirdly, have women themselves contributed towards their own disempowerment? Are they complicit with their failure to move out of their comfort zones and to study the Quran? To what extent have they tried to investigate their rights under Islam, or questioned the way in which men have interpreted Islamic laws to the detriment of women? In their ignorance of Islamic law, women are getting targeted and manipulated by various terrorist organizations, educational institutions, and different segments of society. They are using women folk for achieving their personal interest. This is growing to be a serious matter of national security.

Methodology

This study has two parts: Firstly, it looks at the status of women in Islam, through a close examination of various verses of the Quran and Sunnah. Secondly, it looks into the status of women in the Pakhtun [Pashtun] society to analyze the government’s policies and their impact. In particular, the study focuses on the madrasah/religious education system and its impacts on the status of women.

This study draws on 50 semi-structured qualitative research interviews. The sample population was from Al-Huda (Islamic education institution), Peshawar University students and faculty, local madrasahs in Peshawar and Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. The time period was from November 2015 – February 2016. Undertaking the investigation, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Sydney Ethics Committee. The participants received detailed explanation of the project under investigation and the purpose of the research was clearly explained. A small sample population was chosen due to the rigid norms, culture and traditions of the Pakhtun society. They were asked questions about the creation of mankind, the rights of women in Islam, the status of men in the life of a woman and the
concept of male/female equality and what Islam says about it. They were asked if they had read the Quran with a translation and whether, according to the Quran, a woman has any right to perform economic activity along with her married life and children. Participants were asked about the degree to which Islam allows women to do any economic activity and what kind of jobs women would need to do to live a better life. They were asked about their understanding of what ‘empowerment’ means for women, what they see is the status of women in the society, and whether they were happy to be born as a woman? These questions helped in understanding the status of women in the ordinary society of Pakistan. It gave a general perception about the attitude of women towards the status of women in Islam, their status in the society, their role in the society and the role of men in their lives. It also provided a critical analysis to assess the empowerment/disempowerment status of women in Pakistan and its causes.

The status of women in Islam

Evidence regarding gender equality can be found in the Quran and the Islamic tradition. For a better understanding, this section will fully incorporate the verses of the Quran and Rifat Hassan’s (a religion theologian) arguments from her two articles: “The Islamic Tradition Sources and Interpretation” and, “The issue of Woman’s Creation”. Verses in the Quran that speaks about the status of men above women are:

“Men are leaders or managers in relation to women”  
(Surah 4: An Nisa: 34)

“A man share in inheritance is twice that of a woman”  
(Surah 4: An Nisa: 11)

“The witness of one man is equal to that of two women”  
(Surah2: Al-Baqara: 282)

The above verses were discussed with some local women in Swat and Peshawar. According to them, man is always superior to woman and he is the leader of the house as it is clearly mentioned in the Quran. In fact, some of them were of the opinion that man stands next to their God. When they were asked about the reason for their understanding, their answer was that “man knows better than woman: that’s why Allah has given women half status in terms of witness and inheritance”. But Rifat Hassan has argued that the above verses don’t set a direction towards men as superior to women in terms of their role as a leader but simply defines the role of men and women (Rifaat Hasaan 2014). According to Rifat Hassan, accepting gender equality is likely to provoke criticism from many who believe that the Quran, Hadith, and Sunnah consider men as above women (Rifaat Hasaan 2014). According to Al-Huda, Islam doesn’t believe in the equality of men and women. In fact, Islam believes in the division of labour between men and women. Al-Huda further advocates that men have the responsibility to bring home bread and butter while the women’s job is to take care of her family. She has to raise her children with the best manners and etiquettes. She has to please her husband and teach her children the best of the social, ethical and moral codes. Therefore, in the above verses the concept “leader” doesn’t mean that a woman is inferior to a man, rather it means that roles are different.

Women in Islam have been given less share in the property as compared to men. This paper argues that whenever the concept of men being superior to women is mentioned in the verses of the Quran, the scholars or clergy pay little heed to the context in which these verses are revealed. By getting into the detailed context of the verses, Islam advocates that a woman receives her share in the property both from her parents and husband’s property. Islam states
that a woman should inherit a half share in her parents’ property as compared to men. Here, the logic was not to portray women as inferior or subordinate to men, but to make it clear that she was entitled to a share in both her parents’ property and her husband’s property, thus putting women in an equal position, rather than inferior position to men.

In the Quran there is no distinction between men and women in discussion about the creation of human beings, as can be seen from the following verses:

“And surely we created mankind of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape”
“And when the Lord said to the angels: I am going to create a mortal of sounding clay, of black mud fashioned into shape”
“So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down making obeisance to him”

Surah15: Al-Hijr: 26, 28, 29

“He created mankind from a sperm drop, yet he is a clear adversary”

Surah 16: Al-Nahl: 4

“Oh people, if you are in doubt about resurrection, remember that we first created you from dust, then, from a sperm drop, then from a clot, and then from a bite size tissue formed or unformed, so that We might clarify for you. We establish in the wombs whatever We will for an appointed term, and then We bring you fourth as infants, then you come of age. Some of you die, and some of you are kept back to the vilest state of life, after knowing somewhat, they know nothing. And you see the earth dry; but no sooner do We send down rain upon it than it begins to quiver and swell, putting together every fine variety (of herbage)”

Surah 22: Al-Hajj: 5

“We created the human from an essence of clay. Then We created of the drop, a clot (of congealed blood) and We created the clot into bite size tissue, then We created the bite size tissue into bones, then We clotted the bones with flesh, and then produced it an other creation. Blessed is Allah, the best of creators!”

Surah 23: Al-Momimun: 12-14

“And it He who created the human from water and gave him kindred blood and of marriage. Your Lord is the Powerful”

Surah 25: Al-Furqan: 54

“Who perfected everything He created. He originated the creation of human from clay
And then He created human and breathe into human its spirit. He gave you eyes and ears, and hearts, yet little do you thank”

Surah 32: As-Sajdah: 7-9

“Has the human not seen how We created him from a drop (of sperm)? Yet he is clear opponent”

Surah 36: Ya-Sin: 77

“When your lord said to the angels: I’ am creating a human from clay”

Surah 38: Sad: 71
“He created you from a single soul, then from you it He created its spouse. And He sent down to you eight pairs of cattle. He creates you in your mother womb, creation after creation, in three (stages of) darkness. Such then is Allah, your Lord. For Him is the kingdom. There is no God except Him. How, then, you can turn away”?

Surah 39: Az-Zumar: 6

“He created the human”
“And taught it its pronunciation”
“He created the human from clay, like earthenware”

Surah 55: Ar-Rehman: 3, 4, 14

“He has created you by stages”
“Allah has caused you to grow out of the earth”

Surah 71: Nuh: 14, 17

“Oh human! what has deceived you concerning your Generous Lord”

Surah 82: Al-Infitar: 6

“Indeed We created the human with the fairest structure”

Surah 95: At-Tin: 4

In the above verses, no priority is given to either a man or woman. While addressing the creation of men and women, the word human is used rather than individual beings as male or female. Nevertheless, some verses in the Quran are understood in such a way that they appear to endorse women’s creation of men, such as:

Wa min a_ya_tihi an halaqakum min anfusikum azwa_jal litaskuna_ laaiha_ wa ja’ala bainaku mawad dataw wa rahman in na fi za_lika la a_ya_tillaqaumi yatafak.

[Translation: And of His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you might reside with them and has put kindness and mercy between you. Surely, there are signs in this for those who think]

Surah 30: Ar-Rum: 21

Rifaat has pointed out that, “in Quran Surah Al-Rum:21, the term ‘ilaiha’ is used to refer to ‘mates’ created from, and for, the original creation. In the Arabic grammar, ‘ha’ is a feminine attached pronoun, the ‘mates’ it refers to, must be female. Thus, it considers the original creation as male. While ‘ilaiha’ literally means ‘in her’ and not ‘in them’ and refers not to women but to “azwaj” (masculine plural used in the Quran for both men and women)” (Rifaat Hasaan 1985).

Rifaat has further strengthened Maulana Waheed ud Din’s argument given in his book ‘Islam Rediscovered - Discovering Islam from its Original Sources’ that, “if the term ‘mates’ were clearly designated as women, the term used would be ‘hunna’ not ‘ha’. The word ‘ha’ here is consistent with the Arabic grammatical rule that permits the use of the feminine singular term for a class or collectivity” (Rifaat Hasaan 1985). Rifaat has highlighted, Mumtaz Ali’s argument pointed out in his book ‘The Rights of Women, 1898’ that “the Quran uses the masculine form of address to prescribe fundamental duties for instance prayers, zakat and fasting to Muslim men and women. If masculine terms of address are understood by the entire
Muslim community to apply to both men and women in highly significant contexts, such as the prescription of basic religious duties, then it cannot consistently be argued that these terms apply to men invariably and exclusively” (ibid).

The same justification was provided by the Al-Huda international, Islamabad. According to Al-Huda, the Quran is written as poetry and in poetry at times we write for our beloved girl in a masculine way. This doesn’t mean that our beloved girl is a man but this is the rule of a poetry. Therefore, the same logic is applied to some of the verses in the Quran. But the same institute had a different perception of the status of women. According to them, women are subordinate to men, which is wrong according to the various verses of Quran. Al-Huda stressed upon that women have to obey men in each and every circumstance either as a father and brother, or husband and son. They consider women emotional and easily motivated as compared with men and assign household tasks to women and economic activities to men.

Regarding women’s creation from the rib of Adam, Al-Huda institute firmly believed that she is created from the rib of Adam and for Adam. When the staff were asked about to show a proof of it in the verses they were showing some Hadith books with the same words, but failed to find the Quranic verses. But Waheed ud Din has argued that ‘Eve is created from the rib of Adam’ is not the right interpretation of Islam. They are in fact the words of the Bible given in 23: 21:2. Later on, some people included it in the interpretation of the Quran (Wadeed ud Din 2002, 110). It is not evident from any of the verses of Quran that Eve was created from the rib of Adam. In one place, the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) refers to women as being like ribs. This means that she is like a rib, if you try to straighten it you will break it. There is no reference to women or Eve created from the Adam’s rib (pg.113).

Waheed Ud Din has also emphasized that scientific studies indicate with respect to personality traits, men are characterized by greater aggressiveness, dominance and achievement motivation, women by greater dependency, a stronger social orientation, and the tendency to be more easily discouraged by failure than men (pg. 114). From this section, it becomes clearly evident that in the Quran at some places a masculine term is used to describe the creation of mankind but it is used merely to describe a class or collectivity. It has nothing to do with considering women as inferior or subordinate to men. Today, the gender inequality is all due to the personal interpretation of the verses of the Quran. These rigid interpretations of the Quran have had a tremendous impact on the lives of ordinary women who lacks basic Islamic education.

Islamisation law and women in Pakistani society

In the wake of ‘Islamisation’ of Pakistani society in 1970’s and 80’s under General Zia, the anti-women empowerment laws swept across Pakistan such as Hudood (limit or restriction) Ordinance, Diyat (blood money), Qisas (the right of murder victim’s nearest relative) etc... Under Islamisation, strict punishments were introduced for zina/adultery and fornication. Women have had to provide four witnesses to prove rape or risk being found guilty of adultery. In this new law, there was no distinction between rape and sex for pleasure. According to the legal community, several rape cases were reported in the courts where women were considered guilty of adultery as they were unable to provide witnesses. A very famous rape case of Safia Bibi became an international human rights concern. Safia Bibi was a blind minor girl. Since his daughter was minor, her father filed a complaint against the people involved after she delivered the baby supposedly conceived from the illegal union. The parents of Safia, when asked why they filed a rape case almost after nine-ten months, said they had delayed out of fear of humiliation. But that now they want justice as she is having an
illegitimate child. The alleged rapist told the court that Safia was a morally corrupt lady and that she had not been raped. Under the Hudood Ordinance, a woman engaging in consensual sex outside marriage can be sent to jail for adultery, if she is married, or jailed for fornication if she is single. Safia was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment with hard labor (Cook, Rabeca J. 2012, pg. 50), though, technically it was impossible in Safia’s case to provide witnesses as she was blind. Her sentencing provoked protests, both nationally and internationally. The case was raised by the national and international human rights activists who requested the court to revisit its decision. Due to their outcry, the Federal Shariat Court set aside the judgment on technical grounds (Cook, Rabeca J. 2012, pg. 50). This is one of example of such incidents. Many women like Safia are tortured sexually, physically, morally, ethically and psychologically. There are many cases reported in the media and before the courts where women are burnt alive by members of their husband’s family, burnt with acid by their husbands; or killed for the supposed “honour” of their father, brother, husband or son. Women are the silent victims of all of these and they are not able to raise their voices for their rights in the society.

The Pakhtuns in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province are famous for being warriors- with their strong build, conservative outlook and warm hospitality, along with a steadfast commitment to take revenge for any slight to their honour. According to the official government statistics, women in the rural areas of KP have reduced access to education, health care, personal growth, and development. Women’s role in this province has been relegated to that of a mere household servant. The Pakhtuns live by a culture code known as Pakhtunwali (Shaffer 2006) in which the role of women is confined to producing children and performing house chores alone. The Pakhtun women have no right to raise their voice against the will of the male members of their family and have no role to make decisions both on family matters and state politics.

When it comes to getting an education most of the Pakhtun women are only allowed to seek religious education in Madrasahs and are strictly forbidden from acquiring a general education. The Pakhtun families usually arrange a lady teacher or an elderly man to teach their daughters the Quran and the basic tenets of Islam. Some families send their daughters to Maktabs (primary Quranic schools) established in the nearby mosque or in a lady teacher’s home, to get a religious education, but the Maktab education is confined to the poor and lower middle-class families (Farooq, M. pg. 71-72). After getting basic religious knowledge from Maktab, girls are normally withdrawn when they come of age (Farooq, M. pg. 71) (Danish 1984, 189).

In madrasahs, girls are unfortunately taught that their most important and fundamental qualities are dependence on men. Girls are taught that their only successful career would be to get married and to be subjugated to the will of a husband. They have no access to jobs or personal development. In the rural areas of KP, the law of Qisas and Diyat is/was also used to subjugate women. In the poor class of the Pakhtun society and some other parts of Pakistan, young girls are sold for money. In many cases, these girls are further sold as prostitutes or are trafficked overseas. This issue is becoming a hot debate in the human trafficking laws. Another serious issue of women’s rights is Pakhtun culture is the practice of Swara (women presented as a gift to settle a blood dispute). For instance, while settling any dispute, the Pakhtun people ask for a woman as a gift. Taking a woman from their enemy is like playing with their honour. In the case of Swara, once a woman is presented as a gift she has no rights. She is treated as a war bride.
In this society, women are for rearing families: an attitude transferred from one generation to another. Even the mothers treat their daughters as inferior to their sons. The female members have no voice or rights as compared with male members of the family. Every effort is made to maintain male dominance over women and men label their women as a symbol of their honour, respect and dignity. Daughters and sisters are never consulted when decisions are made about their marriages. If a female member of the family chooses her male partner and marries him without family permission, it is socially accepted to kill either or both of them.

Rural Pakhtuns very seldom allow their women to seek worldly education or get involved in any economic activity. Their only access is to a certain Islamic education. Empowering women is against their code of Pakhtunwali. Ul-Haq’s Islamisation laws were in line with the Pakhtuns’ existing cultural code of honour and were seen by many as legalizing Pakhtunwali and supporting harsh punishments to please the Pakhtun men and later to use these men in the Afghan Jihad. The perceived national interest was served by empowering Pakhtun men and the mullahs (clergy) at the expense of women, a trend further enhanced by the Afghan Jihad which extended Wahhabi and Salafi ideas across Pakistan and were often supported or at least tolerated by more Islamist state forces.

**Madrasah education and women**

In Pakistan the madrasah is not a new phenomenon. Many were established post partition across Indian sub-continent from 1947 to satisfy the core need of the society to provide Quranic and Islamic education to their children, a need largely not being met by the government. Today in Pakistan there are five madrasah boards, the Ahl-Hadith, Deobandi, Shia, Bareli, and Jamaat-i-Islami. The focus of this study is the Deobandi madrasah system only: it will not discuss the other boards’ education systems. The Deobandi madrasahs are the dominant ones all over Pakistan. The Deobandi education system has several levels such as the Ihtedayia (primary) and Mutawassita level (middle) level; Sanaviya Aama (Secondary School Certificate); Sanaviya Khasa (Higher Secondary School Certificate) and Darja Alamiya (Masters of Arts). This study will investigate how the book Behiste Zewar has become one of the important Fiqh (Law) texts in the Deobandi curriculum for girls. For better analysis between the Deobandi curriculum for boys and girls, this study will refer to Muhammad Farooq’s article on Disciplining the Feminism: Girls’ Mardasa Education in Pakistan.

In the Deobandi madrasah education system from the year 1-8, the focus of the studies is on memorization (Hifz) of some parts of the Quran and Tajweed (learning method of the recitation of the Quran) and Sirat-un-Nabi (biography of the Prophet) (Farooq, M. pg. 75) (Moj 2015). Along with it, some modern subjects are also the basic component of the primary and middle-level education such as English, Urdu, and mathematics as compulsory subjects from year 1 to 8 (Farooq, M. pg. 75). In addition to these, social studies from year 3 to 8 and science from year 5 to 8 are also part of the modern education (ibid. pg. 75). For all these subjects, those books are used which are approved by the Text Books Boards of the general education system. Comparing the quality of education, the madrasah education is more than equal to the general education schools because they study socio-religious literature (Adab) in addition to their religious textbooks (ibid. pg. 75). From year 6, Persian learning, Karima, PandNama, Nam-e-Haq, and Gulistan-e-Saadi becomes part of the syllabus (Mahalli 1973, 259).

In the Mutawassit level, apart from memorization, translation and exegesis of the Quran, Hadith, and Fiqh (law) become part of religious education (Mahalli 1973, 260). In year 8 boys and girls are required to study Law or jurisprudence and in Law, boys study the book Bihisti
Gohar of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (edited by Wafaq ul-Madaris) while girls study the book Bahishti Zewar of Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (Farooq. M. pg. 77). According to the Deobandi education system, the Behisti Zewar indoctrinates that as a girl child has to observe particular reverential patterns in her relations to elders (Farooq. M. pg. 77) (Metcalf 1992). Therefore, she must be careful in her conversation, dress, address, obedience to elders and must accept the advice of an elder without questioning and must observe the hierarchy of eating patterns and seating in a room with elders (Farooq. M. pg. 77).

The Bihishti Zewar is considered as an ornament for the Muslim woman and was written in a reformist tone for personal grooming of the Muslim women (ibid. pg.77). To promote the reformist agenda, the Adab literature was the best and the cheapest way to reach the target population, as it did not need a proper institution for instruction. For years, Bihishti Zewar remained a favourite literature within communities and it is still a popular practice to present this book to a new bride (ibid. pg. 77). The reason behind this gesture is that as a young woman is going to take up the new social roles, so she should be well versed in the rites, rituals and traditions of being socially subordinate to men in their families. It also informs them that they are the possessions of men and subservient to male authority is her power and privilege (Metcalf 1992).

According to Farooq, Maulana Thanawi argues that ingratitude towards a husband is as much a sin as ingratitude towards God. It also instructs the woman that she should obey her husband’s will in all matters concerning her life and “call white black” if he asks so (ibid. pg. 76) (Metcalf 1992). The book instructs women that they must learn above all to relate to their husband as they relate to God, with obedience and gratitude (Farooq. M. pg. 78). Maulana mentions that women are responsible for their husband's mood and are expected to keep them happy (ibid. pg. 78). The book advises women, never think of your husband as your equal, and never let him do any work for you (ibid. pg. 77). The book also encourages women that they are entitled to certain rights if they submit to men, and that a woman’s power is in her submission to him (ibid. pg. 78). Farooq has mentioned in his article that Maulana Thanawi also believes that the observance of customs is responsible for the deprivation of women’s rights.

Women are also regarded “as [the] guardian of virtue” (Maududi 1971). Many scholars, like Barbra Metcalf and Mareike Winkelmann, include this book in the genre of valuable literature as it teaches women to live a modest life (Farooq. M. pg. 75). However, Farooq concluded that this book is focused primarily on establishing men’s superiority over women, which is against Islam’s basic education that considers women equal to men (ibid. pg. 76).

In contrast, the following verses of the Quran clearly state that men and women are equal:

“The submitting men, the submitting women, the believing men, the believing women, the obedient men, the obedient women, the truthful men, the truthful women, the steadfast men, the steadfast women, the reverent men, the reverent women, the charitable men, the charitable women, the fasting men, the fasting women, the chaste men, the chaste women, and the men who commemorate GOD frequently, and the commemorating women; GOD has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense.

Surah-Al-Ahzab: 35

Their Lord responded to them: "I never fail to reward any worker among you for any work you do, be you male or female - you are equal to one another [ital added].}
Thus, those who immigrate, and get evicted from their homes, and are persecuted because of Me, and fight and get killed, I will surely remit their sins and admit them into gardens with flowing streams." Such is the reward from GOD. GOD possesses the ultimate reward.

Surah-Al-Ahzab:195

As for those who lead a righteous life, male or female, while believing, they enter Paradise; without the slightest injustice.

Suran An-Nisa :124

Anyone who works righteousness, male or female, while believing, we will surely grant them a happy life in this world, and we will surely pay them their full recompense (on the Day of Judgment) for their righteous works.

Surah An-Nahl:97

According to the above verses, the Deobandi education system is not following the Islamic knowledge based on Quran, but teaching according to their own interpretation of Islam and cultural beliefs. It is Deobandis who consider women as inferior to men and men as superior to women, rather than Islam considering them inferior. It shows the fundamental approach/mentality of these clergy towards the status of women in Islam and society.

Faroq has further argued that in Deobandi madrasahs, those students who pass level 8 are considered as having enough basic religious education and are able to perform religious prayers (pg. 75). They become able to perform their rites properly according to Islam while a girl can get admission in a higher madrasah for another two-year certificate course of Darja Sanwiyya Amah, equivalent to Matriculation (ibid. pg. 76). At this level, girls are deprived of getting instructions in modern subjects and it is said that they have got enough education of modern subjects during the first eight years of their Madrasah education (ibid. pg. 76) (Shaffer 2006, 277). The Deobandi Ulema also state that the girl’s education after level 8 is pointless. Therefore, there is acceptance that women should be taught and educated but not to the extent of men (Shaffer 2006, 277-278).

Their fundamentalism becomes clearly evident at this stage. At Sanaviya Aama level, six courses in each year study are constructed with an emphasis on Arabic learning (Farooq. M. pg. 76). Out of total twelve courses, six are related to language learning - grammar, syntax and lexicon (Ali 2011). In the next four-year studies, the curriculum mostly comprises of religious education. In addition to teaching exegesis, Hadith, Fiqh, principles of jurisprudence, laws of inheritance, syntax, and rhetoric become a scheme of the study (Farooq. M. pg. 76). A new subject, logic, finds a place in the curriculum, though only one book is listed for girls as against five for boys (ibid. pg. 76) (Ali 2011).

The girl graduates are religious specialists and have sufficient knowledge of the Islamic jurisprudence and other branches of Islamic learning except Hadith because the designers of boys’ curriculum reserved the next two years for Hadith studies. But comparing the girls’ courses of studies with boys, it is easy to note that many books on Islamic learning are omitted from the girls’ curriculum (Farooq. M. pg. 76). However, after graduation girls can get admission in a two-year program of post-graduation, Darja Alamiah, a specialised course of Hadith studies. The curriculum for Darja Alamiah, equal to Master of Arts (MA), almost exclusively focuses on the study of Hadith. Ten collections of Ahadith (plural of Hadith) (though not their complete texts, but some sections) make eight courses out of ten (ibid. pg.
The remaining two courses are related to *Tafsir* (translation) and *Usul-i-Tafsir* (principles of translation) and *Fiqh* (Law) (ibid. pg. 76).

**Findings:**

The above discussion draws our attention towards Hoogensen and Stuvoy’s argument that gender decides who goes to war and who does not; who is a victim and who is not; who is peaceful and who is not; who is legitimate within the security discipline and who is not (Hoogensen and Stuvoy’s, 2006). In Pakistan, three major issues are discussed in this paper. Firstly, the practice of Islam according to the various interpretations by the patriarchal society is leading towards the suppression of the rights of women who practice it; secondly, the role of General Zia in dis-empowering women through Islamisation of law and thirdly, the failure of the state to consider the status of women as a matter of national security.

This study has identified that the various interpretation of Quran is leading towards a serious gender security issue in Pakistan. In Islam, the status of women is exactly the same as given to men and consequently there should be no discrimination on the basis of gender. Equally according to Waheed, Islam has set the principle of the division of work and the principle of the division of equal status (Mullana Waheed Ud Din, 121). In Islam men and women are not duplicates but they compliment each other. Allah has set certain principles for performing their duties and these principles are not based on the level of their intellect. In fact, whatever is lacking in men, women complete it, and whatever is lacking in women, men complete it.

However when women from Peshawar University were interviewed and were asked questions about the status of women in Islam and society, they came up with the traditional gendered logic that it is a woman’s role is to take care of her husband and children. This sample population was unable to think beyond the boundaries set by the male members of their families. They were not ambitious about pursuing a career but were more inclined towards getting married and running their families. The male members of their families were considered as their centre of gravity. Some of the young girls and women were interested in getting a position in the society, but the male domination was not letting them achieve their goals. It became evident that whatever the young women are taught is reflected in their attitudes towards their social life. Today, these young women are fully dependent on men and not prepared to come out of that state of mind, or do not feel they have the means to do so.

By closely observing the curriculum of *Dars-i-Nizami* for boys studying in the Deobandi institutions this study has found that many books are deemed either not suitable for girls studying in the same institutions for the same certificate/degree or they are considered not necessary for their learning and training as religious specialists. According to Farooq Muhammad, Philosophy, Mathematics, Economics and Comparative Religion are the subjects which are excluded from the girls’ syllabus. Even modern subjects like English, Social/Pakistan Studies, Science, Mathematics, and Urdu are compulsory for boys of Darja Sanviyyah Amah but are omitted from the girls’ curriculum (Farooq. M. pg. 75). For boys, fifteen books are included under the title of grammar and syntax while for girls five are considered enough (ibid. pg. 76). Seven books on philosophy and logic, whereas fourteen in the original *Darsi-Nizami*, with the aim of developing the reasoning and thinking faculty of the students and they also prepare them to combat the Western onslaught, are added to the boys’ curriculum, whereas the girls’ curriculum contains only one (ibid. pg. 77). Farooq has further argued that this ratio of seven-to-one shows that Ulama (scholars), at least the Deobandi, still consider that women are relatively less required to develop their analytical skills than men. For developing competence in jurisprudence, boys are required to study nine
as compared to four books for girls. The same is the case with theology (Kalam) and rhetoric (Balaghat) (ibid. pg. 76).

The purpose of girls’ education in the Deobandi madrasah is not to develop an independent and autonomous self among them or enhance their intellectual capacities. Rather it is to make them more proficient wives, mothers and domestic managers, who can continue the civilising mission in their homes. Girl education is justified by the Deobandi education system as being helpful for them to fulfil their domestic duties and providing their children with at least basic instructions in the Islamic doctrines and Adab (etiquettes/values). By and large, education for girls does not aim to prepare them for playing a significant role beyond their homes – albeit teaching is an acceptable profession, if their domestic duties are not neglected and that the workplace maintains proper segregation of the sexes. A cursory comparison of madrasah curriculum for boys and girls evidences that girls are less than equal to their counterparts in getting religious education. The question of class and gender becomes more prominent in the girl’s madrasah education system.

Conclusion

Discussion about the gender equality is not a new phenomenon; it is a centuries-old debate in the Muslim world. The entire issue is dependent on the interpretation of the verses of the Quran and who is interpreting these verses and in what circumstances. The Quran depicts man as the shield and protector of women, but today man is seen as a superior to woman. This study sought to answer the question ‘who is responsible to the disempowerment of women in Pakistan?’ The evidence suggests that, yes, Islam is responsible, but it is Islam which has been interpreted by fundamentalist minded scholars. The government of Pakistan is also responsible. Under General Zia’s leadership, Islam was used as a tool to achieve his goals of serving the national interest. His government introduced certain fundamentalist literature into the syllabus that led to the radicalization of conservative society. With the Islamisation of Pakistan, religious institutes like Al-Huda, Deobandi madrasahs and other religious educational institutions - and mullahs - became powerful in implementing their institutional policies. They imposed their own rigid interpretation of the Quran to achieve their institutional goals. This has given rise to serious religious issues in the entire society, which are becoming a security concern all over the country. Women having half the religious knowledge of their men-folk, or zero religious knowledge, are getting victimized by various religious institutions and terrorist organizations. The government of Pakistan needs to frame policies which will advance the status of women, lift their educational levels and improve their resilience if gender security issues are to be addressed.

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