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*Negotiating Modernity with Caution: Women of  
Jama'at-e- Islami Pakistan*

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**Version of Record****Received:** 28-Sep-21; **Accepted:** 01-Nov-21, **Online/Print:** 31-Dec-21**ABSTRACT**

*Role of Muslim women in public sphere has been a highly contested topic among international academia since many decades. Dominant Orientalist approach assumes universal and monolithic Islam that is uncompromisingly oppressive to women and confines them in homes. Many of recent studies contest this view and term it as reductionists. This article focusses on the transformation of policies of Jama'at-e-Islami Pakistan (JI), as a representative of contemporary Islamic movements, on the issue of Muslim women's participation in public sphere and adoption of modernity at their own terms. It investigates the underpinning of these trajectories traversed by the party, synthesising the modernity with Islamic Principles. Research is qualitative in nature and based on textual analysis of the documents i.e. published material (books, articles, proceedings, resolutions, interviews etc.). Input managed through few face-to-face semi structured interviews is also included. Study shows gradual change in party policy; from hesitation in granting even rights of vote to the women, to putting women candidates for assemblies, involving them in street protests and using all modern techniques to further party's agenda but at their own terms. Study finds that JI has taken every step for opening of public sphere for women, using all the available opportunities, resources and platforms. However there is conspicuous consistency in their narrative that, the first and most important responsibility of women is her home and family. When policies of JI on the issue are viewed in western feminism framework, these seem quite restrictive, oppressive and detrimental to women rights, however, there are others who admit that slowly and steadily, JI women, by using selective tools of modernity, have taken over the major portion of public space, once solely dominated by the secular women organizations in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** public sphere, synthesis, modernity, textual analysis, western feminism framework, selective tools, conspicuous consistency.



## Introduction

By wearing Burqa, I am excluding the world at my will, it is my choice. I can see every one, and it's up to me to decide to what limit I look at some one. I myself have not become secluded.<sup>1</sup> (An Islamic woman activist from Pakistan) We are neither dupes of religion, nor of western modernity We are proud to be Muslim women, and Pakistanis at that, in touch with our decolonized identities, finally rid of western values.<sup>2</sup> (Hijab wearing students of M. Phil & PhD of GCT Lahore) the disturbed equilibrium in the society can only be corrected by accepting, not celebrating, authentic masculinity and femininity, their admirable complementarity and rejecting their caricatures. Moreover, neither sex can raise its own perfection without the other sex to temper, shape and refine it. Without good cross-fertilization, each sex is doomed to remain imprisoned in its own structure and fail to fulfil its mission.<sup>3</sup> One of the most important debates in international academia has been the role of Muslim women in the public sphere. Western feminist discourse portrays all third world women as a homogeneous 'powerless' group, and implicit victims of particular socio-economic systems prevalent in these societies. Muslim women's popular presentation in feminist literature is that of oppressed and powerless individuals, living static lives burdened by both religion and patriarchy.<sup>4</sup> Veiling Muslim women have been portrayed as miserable, victimized, and inactive.<sup>5</sup> These dominant discourses have been criticized for creating a particular image of Muslim women, particularly: a) the orientalist's textual attitude drawing on the high tradition, using the scripture and the text as the blueprint for understanding the Muslim world as well as defining Muslims, and b) the anthropologists attitude of generalizing the entire cultural complex of Middle East and the Muslim world with data from only a single Middle Eastern village or tribe, taken as the unit of analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Even in the Muslim world, under the influence of modernization, the women from elite Muslim families tried to show, by negotiating the private/public divide through participation in the public life in the western fashion that Islam was not in conflict with western feminism. Rather, they presented it as an evidence and claimed the possibility of an enlightened and modern interpretation of Islam.<sup>7</sup> However these Muslim modernizers considered, a prerequisite for the

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<sup>1</sup>Nighat Said Khan, ed, *Voices Within: Dialogue with Women on Islam*, 1st ed (Lahore: ASR Publications, 1992), 9.

<sup>2</sup>Fawzia Afzal-Khan, "Betwixt and Between? Women, the Nation and Islamization in Pakistan," *Social Identities* 13, no. 1 (2007): 27, doi: 10.1080/13504630601163346.

<sup>3</sup>Alice von Hildebrand, "Physical and Spiritual Ecology." In *FEMINISM V. MANKIND*, by Christine M. Kelly, Milton Keynes (UK: Family Publications UK, 1990), 4.

<sup>4</sup>Sadaf Ahmad, The Multiple Locations and Competing Narratives of Pakistani Women, in Sadaf Ahmad and Ali Khan, Ed., *Pakistani Women* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>5</sup>Shahla Hari, "Fascination with Difference," in Sadaf Ahmad and Ali Khan, Ed. *Pakistani Women* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 282, 283.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 282-283.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 282-283.

construction of a modern Muslim woman's identity, in a way that made some traditional markers like purdah, redundant in public modern secular nation-space. Proper place for purdah and veiling, rather religion itself was assumed the lower middle-class family and its private spaces yet wanting in development.<sup>1</sup> Islamic revival movements' agenda was widely defined in part through its misogyny.<sup>2</sup> People turning towards Islamism was attributed to the insecurities generated of economic deprivation, urbanization and militarization.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the early decades of the 21st century, the guiding principles of Muslim women's emancipation-as-unveiled mobility in the public life has been put to question. Many of the Muslim women entering national politics are defiantly taking the tropes of culture and religion with them as a symbol of the revitalized Islamic identity and claiming the place in politics with a modernist interpretation of Islam but at their own terms. This phenomenon is being interpreted by some feminist scholars as an undermining of secularism and the acknowledgment of the significance of religion in women's life. Islamist women have moved from the seclusion of their homes to the political and economic spaces in a manner that that the feminists had never imagined. There are indications that these women of Muslim revivalist parties are opening up new spaces within these organizations for questions, contestations and deliberations, which the feminists were raising outside.<sup>4</sup> The latest anthropological studies have shown that although the practice of veiling and purdah is dominant in today's Muslim societies, it was neither the source of women victimization nor an exclusively Muslim institution. Adoption of veiling by women does not necessarily mean that they are miserable, victimized, or inactive.<sup>5</sup> Many women have turned veiling into a license to appear in the public, advance their carrier as well as demand changes in personal laws and public institutions' policies. It has been noted that many Muslim women leaders around world as parliamentarians observe veiling more strictly, yet being close to the foci of power. Slowly and steadily a profound shift in the structural meanings and functional uses of veiling, has been clearly observed.<sup>6</sup> In the early days of Pakistan, the nationalist leadership was attuned to the discourse of global modernization, hence no need was felt to evolve Islam to keep up with the pace with the needs of the modern society. However, with the passage of time, the expectations of women activists, pinning high hopes on the western feminist framework for their rights, turned sour.<sup>7</sup> These women resented the attitude of the nationalists leadership who had

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<sup>1</sup>Amina Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a New Modernity?* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>2</sup>Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011), 129.

<sup>3</sup>Shahnaz Khan, "Locating the Feminist Voice: The Debate on the Zina Ordinance," in Sadaf Ahmad and Ali Khan, Ed., *Pakistani Women* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 144.

<sup>4</sup>Humeira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?* 130.

<sup>5</sup>Shahla Hari, "Fascination with difference, in Sadaf Ahmad and Ali Khan," Ed. *Pakistani Women*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 280.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>7</sup>Aysha Anees Malik, "Gender And Nationalism: Political Awakening Of Muslim Women Of The Subcontinent In The 20Th Century | Institute Of Strategic Studies Islamabad," 2, Issi.Org.Pk, Last

initially favoured their right to education, the opposition to purdah and polygamy during the independence struggle, when they struggled shoulder to shoulder with them but after independence, the agenda of these nationalists' changed gradually towards an ever-increasing control over women by limiting their political and legal rights. Consequently, feminists began seeing the nation-state as the chief oppressor of women.<sup>1</sup>

### **Women Struggle for their Rights in Pakistan**

From the post-partition period to the end of the PPP's rule in 1977, the overall mutual relationship between women activists and governing elite was characterized by collaboration and accommodation, as the women's organizations remained concerned mainly with women's economic uplift. Despite managing a few rights and concessions from the subsequent civilian and military governments, the religious parties remained a constant challenge for them, and led women organizations to put extra efforts to defend what little they had gained.

However, the promulgation of the *Hudood Ordinance* of 1979, *Qisās* and *Diyat Ordinance* as well as the Law of Evidence of 1984 by the General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime were considered the watershed moments in the relation between feminist activists and the incumbent regime. Rights groups considered these laws as being highly discriminatory towards women, undermining the hard earned rights won by them since Pakistan's inception. Although the criticism of these laws mandated a new Federal Shariat Court (FSC) to decide whether laws and provisions were in accordance to Islam, critics remained dissatisfied.<sup>2</sup> Realizing that only a coordinated response would suffice to oppose the government's Islamization policies, the representatives of numerous women's groups came together to form an umbrella organization called the Women Action Forum (WAF) in 1981.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the WAF has been struggling for women rights in Pakistan using Universal Rights framework based on equality and justice, but has succeeded in only partially achieving its goals. The women movements inspired by international feminism have faced chiefly two types of challenges: one is their internal built-in issue, and the other is the external, i.e. contestation of space for women rights in public sphere by Muslim women, thereby ending their monopoly on the issue. As far as the first issue is concerned, since the 1980's the WAF's leading elite leadership could not convince the women at large of their demands being indigenous, and uninfluenced by western hegemony.<sup>4</sup> (This dilemma still persists and their well-wishers continually stress that they must relate their narrative to own history, especially with

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modified 2017, <http://www.issi.org.pk/gender-and-nationalism-political-awakening-of-muslim-women-of-the-subcontinent-in-the-20th-century/>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid,16.

<sup>2</sup>Farida Shaheed, "The Women'S Movement In Pakistan: Challenges And Achievements," GOV.UK, Last modified 2018, 18, <https://www.gov.uk/dfid-research-outputs/the-women-s-movement->

<sup>3</sup>Isobel Coleman, *Paradise beneath Her Feet: How Women Are Transforming the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2013), 138.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

Pakistan's founder and early leaders. Though it may not be easy, but without this their struggle for gender equality will continue to be increasingly marginalised and de-legitimised within their own societies.<sup>1</sup> Another factor which heavily affected the women movement was an influx of NGO's with the rise of neo-liberalism since 1990s. NGOs began talking about gender, depicting the victimization of both women and men by the patriarchy such that women gradually began to disappear from the discourse, and 'gender' became an euphemism for women.<sup>2</sup>

### **Jama'at-e-Islami Pakistan women**

In 1948 when Jama'at-e-Islami decided to push for an Islamic constitution for Pakistan, it also decided to check on the advances of western secularist ideas' infiltration in the society through women organizations. However, the dilemma faced by the party was their foundational literature, which categorically declared that the women sphere of activities was at their home and they were barred from the public sphere except in emergent situations with certain limitations. However, after independence, JI started the expansion of its own female activists' participatory sphere under the pretext of religious necessity. And since then, JI's woman wing has actively advanced their opposition to all type of women activism considered anti-Islamic. This opposition manifested in university campuses, election polling booths, the streets, in the media, on national and international forums, as well as in the parliaments and the assemblies.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the Islamist women, once termed as inactive, passive and dependent have traversed the journey of transformation towards activism and modernity at their own terms, the milestones of this traversing and justification Jama'at-e-Islami presents, for sea change in their approach on this matter. The study will enhance the understanding of the dynamics of their typical approach, the basis of strategic adjustments in their principles that they adhere to strictly, when confronted with challenges on the ground. Few scholarly works have already been carried out on activities of the JI women. In one of such works carried out recently, the researcher investigated the conditions which enabled the JI women to move from the object of modernization discourse to the agent of Islamized modernity.<sup>3</sup> Another work explored the role of JI and their women wing in the facilitation of Pakistan's secularization in spite of their opposition to secularism.<sup>4</sup> This study explored the missing strands in the existing work and tried to fill in the gaps about the understanding of the JI narrative's transformation.

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<sup>1</sup>Farida Shaheed, " *Gender, Religion and the Quest for Justice in Pakistan* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Rubina Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan Actors, Debates and Strategies," 22-23. Library. Fes .De, Last modified 2016, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/12453.pdf>.  
<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/12453.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Amina Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a New Modernity?* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>4</sup>Humaira Iqtidar, *Secularizing Islamists?* 157.

## Literature Review

An overview of the literature on the Muslim women's role in the public sphere and approach toward modernity indicates three prevalent theoretical frameworks:

The first one is based on the international feminist narrative which with its underpinning in western individualism and liberalism, considers both the human sexes equal in every respect and advocate the same role for women in the public sphere as that for men. The main representative organization of this narrative in Pakistan is the Women Action Forum (WAF). This forum came into being in the September of 1981 (Rouse 1998) to counter the effects, on the already earned women rights, of General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization project.<sup>1</sup> It was formed as an umbrella organization of seven existing organizations, working for women rights and welfare. In the beginning, it tried to use the Islamic framework as and when deemed fit, to advance their point of view. However, there was a group of women within, who considered the Islamic framework inherently detrimental to women's rights and equality, and considered an approach based on it to be self-destructing.<sup>2</sup> After a lengthy debate in the early 1990s WAF declared that it stands for a democratic and secular state.<sup>3</sup> That meant abandoning the Islamic framework and building their argument on the separation of religion from the state. Throughout Zia's era the WAF opposed any legislation initiated by the regime in the name of Islam. After Zia they tried continuously to get such legislation repealed but with limited success. This narrative, mainly adopted by elite women, has failed to attract considerable support from the masses in spite of the patronization of different regimes, especially that of General Musharraf, between 1999 and 2008. Muslims reject the concept of Western feminism and interpret it not as a struggle for the recognition of women's rights, rather as a movement to free women from all social constraints and obligations to family and community, leading to excessive individualism and even licentiousness.<sup>4</sup> The second prevalent narrative is that of the religio-political parties. They take their reference from the foundational sources of Islam i.e. Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. This theoretical framework accepts the equality of men and women before the law but considers their roles complementary instead of in competition. The basic difference among the western approach and that of Muslims is the notion of equality for women and men. Muslims recognise equality in certain crucial areas, but insist that Islam does not accept "equality" as a sacrosanct notion.<sup>5</sup> They view both the sexes as being rational and virtuous, unlike some of the western political thinkers, and their qualities as complementary rather than superior or inferior to each other. They recognise certain differences in a

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<sup>1</sup>Amina Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a New Modernity?* 11.

<sup>2</sup>Rubina Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan Actors, Debates and Strategies," 18.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>4</sup>Omayma Abdel-Latif, Marina Ottaway, "Women in Islamist Movements: Toward an Islamist Model of Women's Activism," Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Centre, Number 2 (2007): 7, <http://carnegie-mec.org/2007/07/10/women-in-islamist-movements-toward-islamist-model-of-women-s-activism-pub-19423#>

<sup>5</sup>Anis Ahmad, *Women and Social Justice: An Islamic Paradigm* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1996), 2.

woman's nature, temperament and biology and consider it unnatural to eliminate or ignore them.<sup>1</sup> Men are considered mainly for out-of-the-house responsibilities and women are mainly confined to the activities within the house; upbringing of the children, upkeep of the house and looking after the in-house family chores. The men put certain conditions on women if and when they are involved in activities outside. The evolution of feminism in several Muslim countries, such as in Turkey under the Kemalist project, is considered a part of a larger movement of modernisation, secularisation and westernisation.<sup>2</sup> According to them, the women in the west were not freer but the victims of a vicious process of de-womanization.<sup>3</sup> Their claim is that Islam regards the woman's role of a mother and a wife in the society as being the most important, sacred and essential.<sup>4</sup> As per them, the highly balanced role assigned to a woman is that which is divinely decreed in the Qur'ān, that is, to take care of her home, children and husband.<sup>5</sup> This narrative considers Muslim women as the guardians of the sanctity of the Islamic tradition and prescribe strict segregation of the sexes as an absolute necessity to permit them to fulfil their role. Men and women must be entrusted with separate social responsibilities according to their respective natures, mental and physical abilities.<sup>6</sup> In spite of such a narrative, which apparently gives a very negative outlook towards women participation in the public sphere and to the opposition of legislation that gives more rights to women on the grounds of being contrary to the Islamic precepts, researchers are puzzled to note the importance of women in the organization of Muslim movements.<sup>7</sup> It has been further noted that thinking of most Muslim movements on issues related to women rights is evolving, evidenced by their invariable proclaiming of commitment to the rights of women, as long as those are interpreted and re-casted in an Islamic framework.<sup>8</sup> A problem with this narrative is its negation of historicity of Muslim societies, hence, though comparatively acceptable due to its religious strands but have failed to resonate in the society. The third narrative, furthered during the last few decades by some Muslim women intellectuals, is termed as Islamic Feminism. This narrative also utilizes the Islamic framework and considers the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* as the base but contests the interpretation of the applied injunctions. They

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<sup>1</sup>Zeenath Kausar, *Women in Feminism and Politics: New Directions towards Islamization* (Kuala Lumpur: WAFA, 1995), 64.

<sup>2</sup> Anis Ahmad, *Women and Social Justice: An Islamic Paradigm*, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender Ideology and the Jammāt-e-Islāmī," in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10, (Hudson Institute, Centre on Islam, Democracy, and the Future of the Muslim World, 2014), 176.

<sup>4</sup>Gamal A. Badawi, "Woman in Islam," in *Islam its Meaning and Message*, edited by Khurshid Ahmed (Lahore: Dar-ut-Tazkir, 1999), 141.

<sup>5</sup>Syed, Abul 'Ala Mawdoodi, "Isharat," *Tarjaman-ul-Qur'ān* (January 1934): 1-12; Suraiya Batool Alvi, *Jadeed Tehreek e Niswaan Aur Islam* [Modern Feminist Movement and Islam], IV ed. (Lahore: Manshoorat, 2007), 104.

<sup>6</sup>Syed, Abul 'Ala Mawdoodi, *Purdah* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2008), 152.

<sup>7</sup>Omayma Abdel-Latif, Marina Ottaway, "Women in Islamist Movements: Toward an Islamist Model of Women's Activism," 1.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

advocate the revival of the Islamic thought and the promotion of a new interpretation of the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* to pursue the cause of women's rights. They dismiss the accusation that their work tantamount to rejecting an established body of Islamic law and thought, rather claim that they are building on the contributions of the previous generations using the same tools of interpretation used earlier.<sup>1</sup> Their thesis is that no Qur'ānic interpretation is free of subjectivity as it is an inescapable human condition.<sup>2</sup> Based on this base they term the traditional interpretations as patriarchal and insist interpretation of Qur'ānic text through an application of the Islamic principles of equality and justice. This narrative contends that women have been subjugated through patriarchal interpretation of Qur'ān by considering them as an inferior creature and hence barred to participate in many nation building activities without rightful religious authority.<sup>3</sup> They also object the basis of western feminism and insist to construct a paradigm of human rights within the framework of normative Islam as they, in the context of contemporary Pakistan, consider this paradigm of human rights the only one that is likely to be accepted or actualized. The strength of this frame is this that it is based on religious principles respected by masses of people and is not seen as a foreign imposition.<sup>4</sup> However issue with this narrative is that the perspective of women rights is defined using the western framework. As far as the *Jama'at-i-Islami* policies toward the women's role is concerned, there is a perception that instead of a strict adherence to Muslim doctrine, its policy has been opportunistic.<sup>5</sup> By blaming it on the conspiracies of the west JI had moved the public conversation away from the one rooted in individual rights. It has added nothing but more damage to the position of Pakistan's women, and to the nation as a whole.<sup>6</sup> It is apprehended that JI's conservative religious agenda for women will erode the very rights currently available to them.<sup>7</sup> Critics blame JI for the creation of autonomous groups aimed at challenging the state and guiding the popular will to base the foundation of the state on the law and the constitution which Muslims consider to be divine. It remarkably resonates the Antonio Gramsci's definitions of critical civil society.<sup>8</sup>

### **Methodology**

This research explored the strategic trajectories of Jama'at-e-Islami Pakistan (JI), on the issue of Muslim women participation in the public sphere. Being qualitative in nature, this research

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>2</sup>Asma Barlas, "Still Quarrelling over the Qur'ān: Five Interventions," *ISIM Review* (2007): 32-33

<sup>3</sup>Riffat Hassan, "Islam and Human Rights in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis of the Positions of Three Contemporary Women," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 10, no. 1 (2002): 141. doi:10.1080/11926422.2002.9673311.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>5</sup>Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender Ideology and the Jamat-e-Islami," 190.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>7</sup>Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender Ideology and the Jammat-e-Islami," 174.

<sup>8</sup>Shaheed Shahid, *Gender, Religion and the Quest for Justice in Pakistan* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD, 2009), 33.



involved a textual document analysis of the party's foundational literature, policy documents, official statements, meeting proceedings, autobiographies, biographies, and speeches of its leaders. Information was gathered through a few face-to-face interviews of its leaders, as well as from replies to formulated questionnaires from the party activists. Documented opinion on the matter of the academicians and activists, not directly related with the party, have also been referred to where relevant. This study has been done in the Pakistani socio-political context. However, given the transnational nature of contemporary Islamic activism it can be used along with other similar studies carried out in different contexts to develop a theoretical framework for generalization. The data was gathered through direct contacts with the concerned persons in the Jama'at-e-Islami headquarter and the office of JI women wing in Lahore. It consisted of photo-copies of party manifestos, consolidated annual working reports, the minutes of meetings, etc. Printed material in the shape of books, pamphlets and published proceedings were obtained from the party publishing organizations. The library of party's research organ, *Idara Ma'araf-e-Islami*, was frequently consulted to get/obtain authentic information. Files of party magazines, the *Tarjuman-ul-Qur'ān* and *Batool* were also scanned. Proper questions were drafted prior to interviews in the light of the literature review and the personal information of the researcher. Time/ Appointment was taken from the interviewees in advance. While selecting the interviewees it was taken into consideration that they had a role in the party's policy making. It was a purposive selection based on the previous knowledge and interaction of the researcher.

Questions were put forward in the Urdu language for the ease of the participants, i.e., the interviewer as well as the interviewees. Interviews were written down rather than being recorded. Interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere, and was continued until the questions were sufficiently answered and the researcher was satisfied conceptually. Google scholar was also consulted to search the relevant material on the issue. University of Management Lahore (UMT) library and the Quaid-e-Azam Library, Lahore were frequently consulted for the latest publications. Data generated from the replies of the interviewees, questionnaires and textual review of the documents on the strategic trajectories, enabling the researcher to explore the current status on the issue and many of its hidden dimensions. Findings were cross checked with the data collected through interviews for its credibility.

### **Findings**

The treatise on the role of women, *Purdah*, written by Syed Maududi in the late 1930s is the foundation stone of Jama'at-e-Islami's strategic trajectories about the role of women in the public sphere.

### **Underpinning:**

Syed Maududi opined that the main role of women was within their homes, and were absolved from the duties outside.<sup>1</sup> Their movement outside was subjected to certain conditions.<sup>2</sup> The main

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<sup>1</sup>Farida Shahid, *Gender, Religion and the Quest for Justice in Pakistan*, 189.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 189-191.

goal of the Islamic social norms for women was to safeguard the institution of marriage, prevent sexual anarchy and eradicate immoderate sexual excitements.<sup>1</sup> The law giver devised three kinds of safeguards for the maintenance of the social system of Islamic society, viz. moral purification, punitive laws and preventive measures. Any circumstantial flexibility depended on the effectiveness of these measure at a given point in time.<sup>2</sup> (Shaheed, 2009). His final observation after elaborating in detail on the moral degradation of the Indian society at the time of writing and absence of any punitive law to safeguard the sanctity of family, on arguments of some Muslim intellectuals demanding relaxation of strict Purdah rules, was:

“On the one hand, Purdah has the draw backs which people so keenly point out; on the other hand, there are moral and social hazards in case it is discarded. Both are evils, but let us ask for the verdict of our heart to find out which is less, so that we may choose and adopt it.”<sup>3</sup>

He concluded his writing with a very meaningful remark:

Therefore, let us not weaken *Purdah*, which is bulwark against the sex anarchy, especially of the present age. Before even we think of relaxing purdah, we should have mustered enough strength to pluck out those eye that stare a Muslim woman who has come out of her house for some genuine piece of business.<sup>4</sup>

### **Step by Step Transformation in Jama'at-e-Islami Policies**

There was no representation of women in the inaugural session of the party in 1941. The first women joined the party in 1945<sup>5</sup> and subsequently the party established its separate wing of women, *Halq-e-Khawateen*, on February 15, 1948<sup>6</sup> They were tasked to attain the maximum knowledge of Islam, build the self, home and family according to Islamic teachings, liaise with relatives to convince them to adopt the Islamic way of life, deliver Islamic books to the educated women and make arrangements for education and training of uneducated women and girls in the surroundings through individual and collective activities. The most important task given to the educated women was to confront the westernized women, by producing effective and quality literature on different contemporary social issues in the light of the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. Jama'at-e-Islami considered it appropriate for women to have their own associations for the deliberation and critical review of the Government's policies and recommendations for reformation, but considered it inappropriate to become a member of state parliament.<sup>7</sup> The appointment of women for presidency, ministership, and membership of any consultative body or management of any

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 277

<sup>2</sup> Farida Shahid, *Gender, Religion and the Quest for Justice in Pakistan*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>7</sup> Sarwat Sawlat, *Mawlana Mawdudi Ki Taqarīr, Part II* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1987), 153.

department was said to be against the directions of Allah and his Prophet <sup>1</sup>(PBUH) The party extended the women's role in 1951 by deputing them as an agent on women polling booths in elections.<sup>2</sup> The trend continued and during local bodies' election of 1956 in Karachi, Jama'at-e-Islami women not only worked as agents of the party at election booths but also conducted a dedicated campaign for party candidates in all of the 21 constituencies contested. <sup>3</sup> To enhance the quality of the writings of the JI women writers, *Halaqa-e-Adab Islami Khawateen* was established in 1950.<sup>4</sup> "Jahan-e-No, Karachi" provided space for articles of new JI women writers and groomed them.<sup>5</sup> As soon as a team of dedicated writers was ready, JI started their own magazine "Iffat" in 1954.<sup>6</sup> The name was changed to "Batool" after two and a half years, and its first publication came in the market in Nov, 1957.<sup>7</sup>

The party radically altered its earlier position that women could not become the head of state in an Islamic country in 1965, by supporting Fatima Jinnah in election.<sup>8</sup> When the opposition criticised this decision, Jama'at-e-Islami defended it rigorously and responded with detailed arguments in their official organ (TQ Jan, 1965) and argued that the decision was in line with the permissions granted in Islamic jurisprudence. JI made this decision in spite of "Fatawas" of Ulama of all the three main sects of Sunni's against the candidacy of Fatima Jinnah.<sup>9</sup> In response to the secular and left oriented women groups' activism in educational institutions, JI established *Islami Jami'at Talebat* (Islamic Society of Female Students) on September 21, 1969.

In the 1975's movement of *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (Anti-Bhutto) movement, the Jama'at-e-Islami women participated in protests and street processions. Few of them were even arrested by the police and remained under police watch for days. <sup>10</sup> Heightened activities of the JI women wing got a special boost during Zia's Islamization of Pakistan project in the 1980s. Women members of JI increased from 160 in 1983 to 321 in 1989.<sup>11</sup> The JI women for the first time played an active role in local

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Rashid, *Rakhshindah Koukab*, 47; Rashid, 297.

<sup>3</sup>Umme Zubair, *Tehrik-e-Islami Mein Shoibah Khawateen*, (1989), 301.

<sup>4</sup>Robina Fareed, *Roshan Abgeeney: Tazkrah-e- Mohsinat* (Karachi: Tadween-e-Tareekh Committee, JI Women, 2017), 108; Umme Zubair, *Tehrik-e-Islami Mein Shoibah Khawateen*, (1989), 320.

<sup>5</sup>Ahmed, *Aapa Hameedah Begum*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Hira Publications, 1989), 232-233.

<sup>6</sup> Umme Zubair, *Tehrik-e-Islami Mein Shoibah Khawateen*, 324.

<sup>7</sup>Robina Fareed, *Roshan Abgeeney: Tazkrah-e- Mohsinat* (Karachi: Tadween-e-Tareekh Committee, JI Women, 2017), 107; Umme Zubair, *Tehrik-e-Islami Mein Shoibah Khawateen*, 325; Rashid, *Rakhshindah Koukab* , 137, 216.

<sup>8</sup>Rubina Saigol, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan Actors, Debates and Strategies," 11.

<sup>9</sup>Zahid Rashidi, *Nawa-i-Waqat*, March, 5, 1989.

<sup>10</sup>Robina Fareed, *Roshan Abgeeney: Tazkrah-e- Mohsinat* (Karachi: Tadween-e-Tareekh Committee, JI Women, 2017), 47.

<sup>11</sup>Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution* (Berkeley (Calif.): University of California Press, 1994), 96.

elections,<sup>1</sup> and fully supported the Islamization legislation of Zia era. Whenever the women rights groups raised any issue, seemingly against the Muslims interpretation of teachings of Islam, invited immediate and vitriolic response from the JI women wing, who accused the former groups of secular, alienated and westernized.<sup>2</sup> *Majlis-e-Khawatin*, created in 1983 with the backing of Zia,<sup>3</sup> joined hands with women wing of JI to stymie WAF's campaign against Zia's Islamization Policies.<sup>4</sup> In 1985, the JI supported the president of the *Majlis-e-Khawateen*, Nisar Fatima, in her election to the National Assembly.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1988 and 1990 when Jama'at-e-Islami discussed cooperation with the Pakistan People's Party against the Zia regime and later on against Nawaz Sharif, they put a condition that the leadership of PPP must be changed, as they considered it un-Islamic to co-operate with a party headed by a woman, i.e. Benazir Bhutto.<sup>6</sup> Their *Shura* declared that the leadership of woman was *Munkir* (JI *Shura* December 1988). The JI election manifestos since the 1988 election included detailed policy points for women. The manifesto consisted of 24 pages for the 1997 elections which contained a ten-point comprehensive programme for empowerment of women. An equal service structure for men and women in jobs and representation in legislative assemblies was especially emphasized,<sup>7</sup> a sea change as compared with the 56 pages 1969 manifesto, which mentioned women rights in not more than two lines,<sup>8</sup> and the 1951 election manifesto almost completely omitted the mention of women rights. The party established its own Women and Family Commission in 1990s, with the objective to strive towards the strengthening of the institution of family, elimination of all the traditional customs and laws which exploit women, and the facilitation in getting their social, economic, legal and educational rights.<sup>9</sup>

In 2000, Musharraf introduced a quota for women in National and Provincial assemblies.<sup>10</sup> Jama'at-e-Islami criticized<sup>11</sup> the initiative, but later on got their party women elected by invoking

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<sup>1</sup>Robina Fareed, *Roshan Abgeeney: Tazkrah-e- Mohsinat*, 147.

<sup>2</sup>Khawar Mumtaz, "Identity Politics and Women: 'Fundamentalism' and Women in Pakistan." In *Identity Politics and Women*, edited by Valentine M. Moghadam (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1994), 238.

<sup>3</sup>Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender Ideology and the Jammāt-e-Islami," in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 10, 178.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam beyond Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 126.

<sup>5</sup>Khawar Mumtaz, "Identity Politics and Women: 'Fundamentalism' and Women in Pakistan," 238.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>7</sup>JI Media, 1997, 18-19.

<sup>8</sup>*Manshoor Jammāt-e-Islami Pakistan for 1970 Election*, (Lahore: Election Department JI, 1969).

<sup>9</sup>*Women and Family Commission Jammāt-e-Islami Pakistan*, (Islamabad: Women and Family Commission Jammāt-e-Islami Pakistan, 2009).

<sup>10</sup>Isobel Coleman, *Paradise beneath Her Feet: How Women Are Transforming the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2013), 142.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

### Negotiating Modernity with Caution: Women of Jama'at-e- Islami Pakistan

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an Islamic doctrine of necessity<sup>1</sup> The Women's Protection Bill of 2006 was hotly contested in the Parliament by the representatives of *Muttahidah Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA) including the women members of JI.<sup>2</sup> The Parliamentary Committee formed by MMA, for the preparation of a strategy to confront the government in the Parliament consisted of 12 parliamentarians of which 6 were women, the majority of them were from JI.<sup>3</sup> One of the JI women leaders was appointed as a member of the Islamic Ideology Council of Pakistan in March 2015 and political analysts agreed that she was "the candidate best suited to all the concerned."<sup>4</sup> Recently, JI has created eleven seats for women in their 80 members' central consultative body.<sup>5</sup>

Main points of the Jama'at-e-Islami policy for women, as per the recent official statement, are to educate them in a way that they understand their rights and duties. There is no prohibition to study law and medicine etc. They are required: to confront all the moves of anti-Islam organizations i.e. secular and liberal women corrupting the minds and morals of Pakistani women; to inculcate realization of women's duties toward the protection of the "family institution"; to eliminate un-Islamic customs in the social and religious spheres; to provide legal aid to the women in the court cases and to plan reformation and education for the women in the prisons; to train women to use their votes in the elections for a positive change in the country's governance; to safeguard the sanctity of "Constitution of Pakistan" through well-educated and pious women representatives in national institutions of governance, Parliament and Senate; to generate dedicated teams of women writers who can fight an ideological war against all the attacks of anti-Islam ideologies on all the literary fronts; and to provide platforms for women in different departments such as judicial courts, education, health, parliament or administrative departments of the government to advance Islamic principles.<sup>6</sup>

Information gathered through interviews and questionnaires from JI leaders and activists was quite similar. Almost all of them expressed their confidence in their *Shura* decisions, which they believe were made after thorough deliberation and taking into consideration the prevailing context and Islamic prescription. The Jama'at-e-Islami top leadership was more elaborate in admitting that they changed the strategies slowly and steadily after the proper analysis of the prevailing context, based on the opportunities available and challenges faced but within the limits prescribed by Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

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<sup>1</sup>Amina Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a New Modernity?* 10.

<sup>2</sup>Niloufer Siddiqui, "Gender Ideology and the Jammat-e-Islami," 188-189.

<sup>3</sup>Proposal MMA Committee, 2005.

<sup>4</sup>Dawn, March 10th, 2015.

<sup>5</sup>Decision of JI Shura of Oct 2015; Asif Luqman Qazi, "The Islamist Experience in Pakistan," In *Rethinking Political Islam*, by Shadi Hamid and William McCants, 262-273 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 273.

<sup>6</sup>Tawqeer Ayesha, "We Mothers, Sisters, Daughters," *ASIA WEEKLY Lahore*, 29, 33, April 6-12, 2017.

## **Discussion**

This study transpired that till 1947, i.e. before the formation of Pakistan, the main thrust of Jama'at-e-Islami was to prepare a vanguard of mainly educated men through a rigorous intellectual training, though they were not aloof of the other sectors of society and the requirement of mass support for their mission. During the early years, they mainly required the members to get the women of their own families convinced to support them and face with patience the opposition from friends and foes. The logic behind it seems to be their assessment that the political struggle for the independence of Indian subcontinent would take quite a long time, therefore, all the attention was on the creation of a highly effective and convincing literature, and the exemplary leadership for future needs of the movement. The target was to bring the changes particularly in the Muslim world and generally world over, as per the Islamic worldview, through well trained vanguard.

The creation of Pakistan in 1947 posed a challenge for Jama'at-e-Islami to revisit their earlier strategies. They were well aware that the Muslim League leadership, which spearheaded the independence movement for Pakistan, did not fully comprehend the challenges of creating a viable framework for a nation-state on the basis of Islamic principles, which they had promised to the Muslim masses to garner support for the separate state. The intentional or unintentional delay in formulation of Fundamental Policy Guidelines for an Islamic constitution, and the dubious statements by some government ministers in support of secular nature of country' future sounded warning bells for the religious circles of the country, especially JI.

On the other hand, within the first year of the creation, the country witnessed a successful movement of women for the legislation of their inheritance rights as per the Islamic Sharia. However elite women organized under the banner of the All Pakistan Women Association (APWA) started their activities for the rights of the women based on western values. Activities of APWA women and the requirement of popular support for the demand of an Islamic constitution, forced Jama'at-e-Islami to rethink their approach towards women's role in the public sphere. Realizing the strength of the opposite camp, which was having an active women group with them, JI decided to build their own women wing. Party women were tasked to strive for the improvement in their knowledge of Islam, and the refinement of their own and their children's character as per the Islamic teachings. Additionally, they were to spread the message of the party for the establishment of an Islamic society and state in Pakistan. Educated members were asked to further their knowledge of different ideological women movements within and outside Pakistan to prepare themselves for a response in the light of Islamic prescriptions. The party arranged special trainings for these women writers. This was a big shift by JI from the earlier view that women must be responsible for home affairs only.

Within the next couple of years, i.e. by 1951, the party decided to participate in the elections and the sphere of their women was further expanded to facilitate the party at women booths on the election days. Till 1958, Jama'at-e-Islami was optimistic about success in politics based on the

assumption that once an Islamic constitution was finalized, and free and fair elections were held, the party would be a major winner. Thereafter, with public support and through government resources, i.e. media, education policies etc., the society will be reformed gradually. The party performance in the Karachi Municipal elections were as per their expectations, but the Martial Law of 1958 dashed all hopes of JI. The ban on the political activities and the adoption of the family laws, which religious circles deemed un-Islamic, further aggravated the situation. Realizing the urgency, JI in 1965 supported women candidacy for the presidential post, a 180-degree reversal on their previous stand on women's role.

By the end of the 1960s, deteriorating economic conditions of the poor segments of the society as well as ethnic strife gave rise to the leftist and regionally-centred ideas. Universities and colleges became the battleground between nationalist, socialist and Muslim ideologies. The male wing of Jama'at-e-Islami students, the *Islami Jamiat Talaba* (IJT), was alone fighting this battle, while their ideological opponents' female members were hand in glove with their male counterparts. It led JI to rethink and finally form its own female student wing, the *Islami Jamiat Talibāt* in 1969.

The first free and fair national elections in Pakistan exposed all the political parties' standing among masses. Especially it was a great setback for JI which was sure of a major win, but were left baffled by the outcome. Success of the left-leaned Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), which was severely criticized by JI during election campaign, was an added matter of concern for the party. Inward reflection dawned on the party leadership that they were far away from the common people's thinking. They realized that by concentrating only on the educated 15% of the population they would never be able to succeed through the ballot box. As a result JI decided to expand its activities to all the segments of the society especially to the women, labour and farmers' etc. The party's women, who were previously doing mainly *Da'awa* work, decided to expand JI's organizational network and training activities. By 1977, the JI women wing was asked to lead from the front the women mobilization against the Zulfikar Bhutto regime.

The women organizations in Pakistan till 1977 had not yet organized as rights movement and their main activities were limited to lobbying through links within the regime's setup. Zia's Islamization project forced organizations of secular women to confront the governmental policies which were considered detrimental to the women's rights. As reference for these organizations, such as the Women Action Forum (WAF), was that of western feminism, Jama'at-e-Islami was forced to counteract. During Zia's era, JI went a step further by introducing its own women in the parliament (Zia's *Shura*). It was another *Ijtihadi* advance of JI to accept the women's role in the parliament. Since then, JI had made many further decisions to inject its women wing into the public sphere. As a result, the party's election manifestos started including women issues more elaborately. In mid 1990s, the party formed its own "Women Family Commission" to advocate the the rights of Pakistani women and issued a special charter of demand for women.

Since 2000, the party has started fielding its own candidates on special quota seats and their women members also performed their duties in the assemblies. In 2015, the party decided to given representation to women in their highest policy making institution, i.e. the *Markazi Majlis-*

*e-Shura*. In 2018 national elections, Jama'at-e-Islami fielded their women candidates even on general seats.

### Conclusion

The study transpired that JI women are using all the tools of modernity to advance their agenda. They are highly organised, well educated, deeply understand competing narratives and use all the available opportunities to defend their turf. The Party has adopted a pragmatic and progressive strategy on the issue of women's role in the public sphere. Slowly but surely it opened many avenues of the public sphere to the women, without compromising on its basic stand, that the main responsibility of a woman is her home and her family. All the outside activities are subservient to this condition, as well as that of the purdah and the avoidance of sex intermingling. JI women activists are using all the modern techniques, street protests, sit ins, corner meetings, door to door canvassing, print, electronic as well social media to spread their message. In national, provincial and local elected bodies, universities and intellectual forums they are active alongside their counterparts however cautious of their limits prescribed by religion. It is an innovative blend of modernity and tradition. The problem with the party turns out to be its limited outreach. There is also the case of a dearth of resources and resolve needed for the solution to even those women problems which the party itself recognizes as genuine. The strategic changes adopted by JI were mainly reactionary, in response to the secularists' advances. A proactive approach on the issue seems missing which indicates an underestimation of the gravity of the situation. Waiting for an Islamic revolution to take care of all the societal problems, and the only mode of conduct being to react against those who are considered westernized, does not seem to be an effective approach. Exposures to such harsh conditions for such a long time frustrates affected segments of society even their religious beliefs.

Overall there is an urgent need for the initiation of dedicated efforts by the government, political parties, all women organisations and civil society to join hands to ensure that Pakistani women have all the rights guaranteed under the constitution of Pakistan. Policy makers, and especially the Islamic parties, must understand that taking refuge from the invading liberating culture in the indigenous past has been a wasted effort. There must be a conscious and an intelligent plan for the women liberation from the cultural corruptions in an orderly manner, and their resurgence toward the height of the ideal Islam. It must be remembered that justice delayed is justice denied.



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