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“Religion, Culture and Women’s Morality in Pakistan”
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Abstract

This is an excerpt of a PhD thesis on “Religious Power Structures and Gender issues in Pakistan”. The thesis informs that in Pakistan, Islam was most unfortunately transformed into a force that ‘legalized’ submission of women. Raising morality issues to compromise women’s rights in the name of custom, tradition and most importantly religion, is a routine matter in the country. The paper attempts to understand what it means to be “moral” or “immoral” in a local context. Secondly, it seeks to document the impact of a peculiar construction of morality on the life of women in Pakistan. People perceive and categorize women as evil, unchaste or immoral and find a justification against them for collective violence, for example, honor killings. The research brings forth the existence of other non-Islamic and un-Islamic local practices for instance marriage to the *Qur’an*, masquerading as Islamic. *Qura’n* and *hadith* is read like a menu card and randomly selected references, usable for creating gender biases, are promoted by the local religious authorities. It concludes by establishing that Islam was shamelessly exploited to serve cultural, economic and political interests in the local sphere.

Theoretical Framework

The framework seeks to explain moral behaviour through classical and contemporary social theories. It addresses the factors involved in the human choice for *being moral* and explains the function that morality performs. Additionally, it establishes morality within a power construct, serving political and economic interests of society.

Evolutionists like Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Leslie Stephen presented that morality like nature, has evolved. Darwin placed the origin of moral sense in the social impulse. He believed that those communities which included the greatest number of the

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most sympathetic members would flourish best and rear the greatest number of offsprings (Seth 1889). Darwin believed this is because man is a 'reflective being', fully aware that his impulse is 'temporary' but the 'social factor is permanent, ever present and persistent'. This constitutes the difference between the "actual strength" and the "legitimate strength" of an impulse. Eventually man realises to attach importance to persistent impulses. Stephen, however, argues that during evolution humans generate not Darwin's altruistic conduct but a type of 'character', an internationalization of an external morality leading to from a law of "Do this" to "Be this". Spencer also theorised that the 'coercion' factor of society diminishes after some time and moral consciousness becomes a natural and smooth process.

Kant believed, "will is not moved to act solely by desire or inclination, but rather by reverence for the moral law, which in turn is derived from reason alone". He characterized 'duty' as opposed to 'self interest' unlike Hume and Hobbs who attempted to reconcile the two. Kant made an effort to prove that "pure reverence for the practical law" provides a *motive* which far outweighs all the worth of what is commended by inclination" (Galvin 1991). The rationality argument was maintained for quite sometime with Kemp endorsing the same in 1957. According to him, we try to find logical, impeccable proof of the advantages of adhering to moral principles. Living in cooperation with society is a practical principle as well as a moral principle. It reduces choice, but ensures preservation. To promote one's self interest against social interest too can be rational, but not moral.

Amongst classical thinkers, Durkheim while presenting his *homo duplex*², conveyed that to him "moral" is synonymous with "social" and "individual" stands opposed to "moral" because Durkheim's "individual" denotes the body's egoistic passions and sensualities. He concluded that "moral" is a source of solidarity, forcing man to regulate his actions by something other than his own egoism. There is an emotional structuring of an individual's sensory and sensual being through this collective effervescence that captures the "force" of the "social". This force binds people to the ideals valued by their social group (Shilling & Mellor 1998).

Like Durkheim, Bauman, the contemporary thinker, is critical of Kantian law of duty that gives rationality an importance that undermines the significance of "spontaneous sentiment". Bauman focuses on the immoral, rationalising impulses of "totalising" social orders. He presents the modern world as a rationalising world implicated in dehumanising acts of violence. People are not made cruel by modernity but modernity invented a way in which cruel acts could be done by non-cruel people, by removing them from facing the consequences of their actions. Modernity has led to "forced categorization" of people and individuals perceive each other as "the dangerous other in need of elimination" (Shilling & Mellor 1998). Unlike Bauman, Giddens has a strong commitment to modernist ideals of rational control over the potential volatility of the flesh.

Foucault's work is significant in understanding human morality within a power construct. He explains the function moral norms are *expected* to perform. Both individual

² Embodied individuals are internally divided between their egoistic impulses and their capacities for reaching beyond these asocial passions to the realm of conceptual thought and moral activity held in common by the society. Read Durkheim, *Morality and Modernity: Collective Effervescence, Homo duplex and Sources of Moral Action* by Shilling & Mellor (1998)

and collective potential of human beings is utilized to maintain economy in the most economical fashion and society becomes a political target. In other words, the social moral norms are formed to serve political and economic interests in a society. In this set-up power is not essentially thriving on splendor but on regulatory and corrective mechanisms. Human body becomes a site of servitude, a system that faces constraints, obligations and prohibitions (Robinow 1984). Grouping human beings for being ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’ is a dividing practice. Bourdieu (1990), amongst other thinkers like Foucault believes that classification and categorization schemes, defining human behavior and interaction, create limitations.

Muslim feminists accept religious inputs in routine life, without realizing the “politics” at play because they have placed their faith in a belief that a return to the golden age of Islam will emancipate them. To them, after all it was Islam that gave them the right to acquire divorce, remarry if widowed, and become rightful owners and inheritors of property from amongst that which their male relatives possess. Muslim feminists want to interact with religion so that it provides safeguards to them (See Afshar in Bhavnani, 2001). Unfortunately, at present this is not the case.

Study Sample and Methodology

The research was conducted in Khairpur Mir’s, in the southern province of Sindh in Pakistan. Geographically, Sindh stretches between the Punjab plain and the Arabian Sea. The province, along with its district of Khairpur is an ideal sample to explore issues regarding women, local culture and Islam. Rural Sindh’s reputation for having low social development indicators, grave poverty conditions, established feudal base, powerful religious authorities like *pirs* and *sufis*, severe gender inequalities and a large female population that is powerless and disadvantaged, is well known. Khairpur is in the Upper belt of Sindh, an area considered to be more conservative and unfriendly towards women than lower Sindh. Since generations, a specific culture of Khairpur has allowed women rights denial and violations, supported and promoted by the local religious authorities of the area. It is common in Pakistan to make its colonial legacy responsible for all misdemeanors of present day society. In order to avoid the colonial- argument, focusing instead on the local power structure and its role in creation of a peculiar culture, Khairpur, an area that remained independent of British Raj,³ was an ideal selection.

Presently, for administration, Sindh is divided into 21 districts, a planning unit headed by an elected *Nazim*. Khairpur as a district is administratively under Sukkar Division and has 6 sub districts, called *Taluka* in Sindhi having 76 Union Councils.

It is a multi-method, single-embedded, qualitative case study with a flexible design. Case study here implies a methodological design of research and not a case in point. The field work in Pakistan spanned over a period of 08 months. Data was collected through multiple sources of evidence based on archival and historical documents, interviews, community meetings, direct & participant observations, and focus group discussions.

³ Khairpur was allowed to maintain its status of an Independent Princely State of Khairpur even after the annexation of Sindh to the British Empire in 1843. A small enclave of Pir-jo-goth was under the British for a time period to counter *Hur Gorilla Movement* (Ansari 1992)

The research was conducted in village Razzal Memon (union council Mudd), village Wissri Wahan (union council Thehri), village Umar Kanhar (union council Nurpur), village Larhi (union council Khorra) and village Ganwar Junejo (union council Daraza-Gambat). The sample communities were selected with the help of a local NGO acting as a support base organization during this research. These communities are known for their *piri-mureedi* (master-disciple) culture or are highly *sharia* inspired, forming strong relevance to the topic of thesis. The district police further established that the area had a very high crime rate against women. Therefore, the sample was interesting to understand the social status of Sindhi women. Understanding the ‘construction’ of women’s morality in Sindhi society was significant in developing an overall ‘context’ of the thesis that addresses gender issues. The sample provided ample information in this regard.

The study has two units of analysis: generation and gender. Generation groups were formed on the basis of pre-partition i.e. pre 1947 and post-partition. Both gender and generation are important to understand morality as they may or may not lend varying meanings to the concept. The pre-partition generation that lived in the independent state of Khairpur, interacting with Hindus spent their childhood, responding to the local culture, in a united India within the State of Khairpur. This meant that in 1947 they were to be 13 yrs in case of men and 8 yrs in-case of women since a girl-child begins to experience cultural barriers at an earlier age in a rural setting. The post-partition generation was divided further into *two groups*. The first group, i.e. (I), was inclusive of those people who were born either at the time of partition or 20 years after partition and have tried to practice their new identity as Pakistanis. The second sub-group in this generation, i.e. (II) was of those Pakistani adults, who are fully exposed to the influences of urbanization and modernity. Henceforth, the sample constituted of the following:

	Pre-partition Generation	Post-Partition Generation (I)	Post-Partition Generation (II)
Age Group (Men)	70 and above	40-69	18-39
Age Group(Women)	65 and above	35-64	15-34

At the beginning of research, for the purpose of developing a *feel* of the local moral norms and for forming generational groups, a ‘morality questionnaire’ was introduced in the communities. Low literacy level, especially amongst women, created difficulty in getting the form filled. However this did not effect their participation in community meetings. Though the statistical data of the questionnaire is shared throughout the paper, it may please be noted that it is based on a small number of respondents (85 males and 45 females) due to the limitations explained above. Moreover, it is most essentially a qualitative research and quantitative data is used only to facilitate the reader in visualizing the local context and not for the purpose of drawing final conclusions. Having stated this, as a qualitative researcher, I can state confidently that despite the small number of respondents who filled out the form, the results have a certain *transferability value*, keeping in mind the closely knit village communities where people influence each others mindset and are inheritors of a common social history.

In all five sample communities, two formal meetings each with male and female communities were conducted. This is to state that 20 formal meetings were carried out in the sample area. In each meeting, the turn over amongst men remained between 80 to 100 and 35 to 50 amongst women. Women remain occupied in domestic chores and attending to children that prevented them in allocating time for a formal meeting.

Other than this, several visits were made to observe the day to day living and enter a casual chat with the communities to develop a rapport for the focus group discussions.

Through the application of *Quota Sampling*, informal detailed interviews were conducted with people attending the shrines and mosques. The details are as under:

Site	Male Respondents	Female Respondents	Total Respondents
Shrine Pir Dastageer	18	10	28
Shrine Roza Dhanni	8	3	11
Shrine Sacchal Sarmast	24	15	39
Jamia Mosque Thehri	16	Nil	16
Total			94

Other than collecting police record on recent honor crimes, five complainants and the families of victims of *karo kari*⁴ were interviewed and video-taped with the help of district police. Additionally observations and personal-experiences were documented in ‘researcher’s diary’ that proved to be useful sources of information.

The data was documented in a way so as to incorporate “verbatim” to the maximum. Each utterance holds significance as it involves not just a meaning but also an emotion or an attitude and in some cases even a pre-meditated judgment. For example, there is no word as such in local use for fornication or adultery. People refer to it as ‘*na jaizi*’⁵ that literally means *unjustified*, a judgment.

Research Analysis and Findings

Construction of Female Morality in the Local Sphere

*Pakistani idea of an ideal woman is of a woman who is goongi, behri andhi (deaf & dumb and blind)*⁶

The questionnaire used for reflecting social attitudes and opinions revealed that amongst men 83.33% of pre-partition, 88.46% of post-partition I and 60.38% of post-partition II generation believe that in a moral society, women *must* stay indoors. Amongst women 100% of pre-partition, 83.33% of post-partition I and 42.31% of post-partition II generation hold similar opinion. It is noticeable that the younger generation of both men and women has begun to question domestication of women. There were atleast 39.62% of men and 30.77% of women who do not agree to the notion that women must stay indoors.

⁴ honor killing

⁵ This word has multiple uses in the local sphere. Therefore, each time it appears in the text, the interpreted sense is given along with it.

⁶ Noor ul Huda Shah, Script Director of Pakistan Television; playwright and novelist during her interview with the researcher, November 2004, Hyderabad, Pakistan

Similarly, 83.34% of pre-partition men, disagreeing to the notion: ‘unrelated men and women must not talk to each other under any circumstances’, to ensure a moral society, is an interesting finding. This shows that the pre-partition male generation is less conservative than the post-partition generation I that had 61.54% agreeing to the same notion. Most interestingly the women of the post-partition generation I turned out to be more flexible with only 33.33% agreeing to the norm and 61.11% disagreeing with it.

Please refer to the tables below:

Table 1

Prompt								
Women Must stay indoors	Total		Agree		Disagree		Unsure	
Categories	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre-partition Generation	6	1	5	1	0	0	1	0
Post-partition Generation I	26	18	23	15	3	2	0	1
Post-partition Generation II	53	26	32	11	21	8	0	7

Table 2

Prompt								
Unrelated Men and Women must not talk to								
Each other under any	Total		Agree		Disagree		Unsure	
Circumstances								
Categories	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre-partition Generation	6	1	1	1	5	0	0	0
Post-partition Generation I	26	18	16	6	10	11	0	1
Post-partition Generation II	53	26	24	8	28	14	1	4

By now the logic behind the two units of analysis and the level of impact that gender and generation can have on the ‘construct’ of moral norms in a society can be fully comprehended.

During community meetings the respondents were asked to share the norms of their community and inform about the attributes that they considered a man and a woman of ‘good’ character i.e. *ba’ikhlaq*, must possess. The highlights of the data thus collected, is shared below:

Pre-partition Male and Female Generation

The men mostly believed that anyone prioritizing family ties and relations is most essentially of high morality and virtue. Morality for women is often translated as modesty i.e. *sharam, haya*. Kazbano of village Wissri Wahan shares the concept:

“*Ba’ikhlaq* woman is the one who talks less. The “*Sharam wali mai*” (a girl with modesty) is the one who cries on her wedding day. [...] otherwise people said, look at this immodest, indecent girl... she is so happy. By being happy, a bride would show her impatience and interest to be with a man...which is highly immodest. Also, she must not be joyous on leaving her parental home [...] this is very unkind towards them. So in our days, women used to *advise* the bride to cry to avoid rumors of being *bey-sharam*(immodest)”

Social environment and social group decides the level of latitude that is to be granted to women. If the social group constitutes of same tribe, caste, class or clan women can have more freedom in dress code and movement. However there is no general principle in following who is the 'other'. An old woman of village Ganwar Junejo shared that the concept of "other" was non-existent in the pre-partition days:

"I was 13 years old at the time of partition. A Hindu owned a kiosk in the corner of Sachal's shrine. We used to buy bangles from that stall. The shop-keeper himself adjusted bangles on our wrists. Those days were nice [...] now men do not allow young girls to go (outside). When the business was owned by Hindus, our men allowed us everywhere. Since the time Muslims took over that business, our men barred us and imposed *pardah*".

However, contrary to this view, older women in village Wisri Wahan, a *sharia* oriented community, strongly believed that *pardah* was of central importance for them. They denied the notion that men impose *pardah* on women. They believed that it "was part of their body".

Post-partition Male and Female Generation I

Morality is raised on the principle of observing *hadood* i.e. limits. This group shared the view that a husband is a woman's *mujazzi khuda*(God) who she must listen to and obey at all costs to meet the moral norms of the society. A respondent substantiated his argument by stating:

"The Prophet said that if Allah would have allowed prostrating to a mortal, I would have asked a wife to prostrate in front of her husband".

This group of women was narrated a vignette alluding to the commonly held belief that women can be beaten by their husbands. Their responses reveal that they themselves accept men as their Gods. They have submitted to the totalizing effect of a given social order that Bauman called "immoral":

"Woman becomes a *maliki'yat* (property) of her husband when she is married off to him and then she is required, and "must" do what she is told by him".

"Women must be beaten if they become *baaghi* (rebellious) against the norms and mores of society"

Generally men believe that Quran and *Hadith* support doubting women and undertaking corrective and disciplinary action to keep them on a straight path. Women are perceived to be morally weak. A respondent in village Umar Kanhar suggested:

"The number of women in hell will be more than that of men. This is written in the *Qur'an* and also that the religious power of woman is half to that of man. ...you can ask any *Moulvi*"

In village Larhi, a respondent shared similar opinion:

"Women are bound to err. They are *jaahil*(ignorant) and they remain locked at home[...]therefore it is the man's duty to keep her on the straight path".

A worshipper in the mosque of Thehrri suggested:

"A good husband [...] must give his wife the understanding of *shariat* and must ask her to adopt *pardah*. For this, he can be stern and strict with her. She must be assertively told that she must not come in front of *na-*

mehram men. She should take care of her respect and honor. *Purdah* is something that facilitates in that regard. She should be asked to be a good mother to his children”.

By and large *purdah* was upheld as a primary manifestation of a woman’s sound character. Additionally, men of high moral and virtue are also expected to cover themselves properly. The attitude is of asserting Muslim identity through observing a particular dress code. This is substantiated by the following excerpts based on interviews with the worshippers in Thehrri mosque:

“Muslims must wear loose clothes. It is for both men and women. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said it is indecent to dress up in a provocative way”.

“Both men and women must keep their *sharam gah* (private parts) covered. Dress code must include of clothes that are loose ... in a way that their body parts are not prominent. Their bodies are not for public but for themselves or their *mehram*. This is what their Creator (Allah), wants and He has imposed *limits* so that human beings behave and society remains on the right path”.

“Dress is the basic thing that determines human behavior. Women must be in *purdah* and not talk to *na-mehram*(outsider) men. Women’s private parts include her voice, because even that has an attraction for men. Western dresses are indecent. Our men do wear trousers, but it is not good. Trouser is *Farangi ka libaas* (dress of British)”.

Women associate *Purdah* with an invisibility that is liberating, as well as with security, modesty, decency, nobility, and high social status as is evident in their answers, given below. Although they denied that it is the men who enforce *purdah* on them, their whole logic behind observing *purdah* is based on their perception of men as intimidators and perpetrators. Henceforth, *purdah* for them suddenly ceases to be an issue of morality and becomes a practical choice establishing the logic of Kantian rationality thesis.

“It is important to observe *purdah* from a *ghair-mard* (unrelated man). While in *purdah*, women stay away from people’s gaze...they can hide themselves from men”.

“A woman in *burqa* is considered to be respectful. Such a woman is not expected to go around in public areas and if she does, the others give her a preferential treatment saying ‘attend to the *burqa-waali* first’”.

It is pertinent to add here an observation note formed on a 17 yr old girl from Mirpur-Macchailo. She was brought to the shrine of Rannipur by her husband and mother-in-law who believed that a spell had caused infertility in her daughter-in-law. The girl was literally thrown without a *chador*, or *burqa* in an open courtyard where the *pir* was treating the clients, providing remedy to possession and black magic. There were other young women with untied hair, uncovered breasts, and thrown amongst male visitors⁷. *Purdah*, was not an issue there, raising questions about the morality construct idealizing *purdah* in the same society.

Religious education is considered to be in consonance with practices of high morality and worldly education is condemned. In this realm, the *Sharia* oriented community of Wissri Wahan was found to be more conservative in comparison to the community of Razzal Memon that is influenced by *Sufism*.

Women are generally very conscious of their specified role. They believed it was their duty to eliminate vices from the society. This is contrary to the perception of men who believe women themselves are evil. Women emphasized the need of following

⁷ DVD file is available for viewing.

tradition, culture and religion. For them, the concept of morality largely hinges on observing *purdah*, and being *khidmat guzaar* that is, one who *serves*.

Post-partition Male and Female Generation II

Larhi community was given a reference of Bibi Khadija sending a marriage proposal to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The men were questioned that how come her action is considered non-controversial whilst a similar action if undertaken by a girl today will invite severe reaction. Following responses were gathered:

“Khadija did not watch movies and did not have dirty ideas in her mind like the girls of the present age”⁸.

“The times you are talking about are different. Khadija had *kirdar* (character). One has to keep women away from dirty exposure so that they behave. Now sending proposals to men is against *shariat*”.

All responses reverberate of the discussions of post-partition group I, where men believed that doubting women and undertaking corrective action against them is their prerogative, something that will benefit the whole society.

In village Wissri Wahan, an interesting discussion raised some dissenting voices. Largely, young women prefer owning *purdah* and feel secure in it as is reflected in the following responses:

“*Purdah* is the *zevar* (ornament) of a woman. This is her *zeenat* (beauty and dignity). The concept is to cover the *sattar* (private parts). Woman’s whole body is a *sattar* because she is *muqaddas* (sacred). She is not a thing in the bazaar that everyone passing by can stop and look and accept or reject.”

“A very beautiful woman in *purdah*...will invite no onlookers but an ugly woman without *purdah* will invite all as onlookers”.

Some women are questioning the stereotypical explanations surrounding *purdah* and are faced with an opposition from all levels of society, even from within.

“We are only observing *purdah* because our men have asked us to do so”

“Our mothers, grandmothers think that an educated girl will write (love) letters. When we give opinion they order us to seal our lips...they also intimidate us by saying that ‘your feathers need to be trimmed’, *Udari liganey laggi hai* (i.e. a pigeon that is ready to fly). They think that by writing letters we will become bad-girls”.

A girl added that moral norms for women serve economic and social needs of men.

“Now boys are demanding educated wives, therefore, we have to educate our girls so that they can be married off. In other words, men can twist and turn religion according to their needs and tastes”.

This group was narrated the same vignette that was used for post-partition group I and it was suggested that beating ones wife for the purpose of bringing her into obedience was allowed in Islam. The following argument once again revealed the level of awakening in younger women, something lacking in the post-partition group I. Only to repeat, they have opposition from within.

⁸ During repeated visits to the village it was discovered that the girls did not have access to movies and it was the men who were keen viewers of Bollywood releases, a routine in *tea-café*s

“Yes. She should be beaten for disobeying her husband. After *nikah* beating one’s wife is “*jai’z*(justified)”

“Violence is cruelty and why couldn’t he have taken a glass of water himself. Are his hands and legs broken?”⁹

“Whatever men believe in, they say...this is it... that is Islam. Had we been true Muslims we could have changed society. All these dirty things that we see...this crime, do you think that is supported by Islam? All we can think about is that beating women *is* Islam....this is violence and is nothing but cruelty”.

“If a woman is nice...what can a man do? He will never beat her...she must behave, respect and obey him”.

During community meetings, fertility of women remained a significant topic of discussion. A young girl from this group contributed in the discussion in these words

“A woman’s greatest contribution in this society is children. A woman becomes superior to man only if she is a mother. Paradise lies beneath her feet. She has a high status in society”.

Here, gender role is accepted and rationalized as a guarantor of an elevated status to an otherwise disempowered woman. With the paradise under her feet, motherhood makes a woman feel “empowered” and “moral”, at the same time.

Religious authorities, for example, the *moulvis* play an important role in maintaining the local construction of women’s morality. During sermons, the men are constantly reminded of the desired gender roles. Some of the excerpts of one such sermon are given below¹⁰. Conforming to socially defined gender roles and expectations is regarded as moral behaviour. Modernization is condemned as something that leads to immorality. Maximum effort is directed in ensuring the maintenance of status quo. The keen audience include post-generation II males, who can then be expected to create difficulties for post-generation II females, some of whom are beginning to question the stereotypes.

A *good* woman is expected to be obedient, as is reflected in the following teaching of the *moulvi*

“The Prophet said that a woman who declares faith in her husband, in Allah, in *rasool* (messenger)...is pious. And (if she)serves her husband...even if she gives one glass of water to her husband with a smile ...she will enter paradise from the same door from which I will enter”.

On a similar note he said:

“God sent woman on earth to be obedient. The Prophet said ‘tell them(women) about the things in *Qur’an* and bring them into obedience’

During an interview with the researcher, Qazi Hamdullah of Madrasa Al Huda Thehri expressed doubt on women’s level of religiosity and hence morality:

“The Prophet himself said that the religious power of a woman is half to that of man”

Both statements remind of the male voices of post-partition generation I and prove that religious authorities influence people’s mindset. The *moulvi* continued:

⁹ The vignette is about a wife inviting the wrath of her husband by causing a momentary delay in fetching him a glass of water

¹⁰ Sermon delivered by Moulvi Fazal Ullah in Masjid Wissri Wahan, Thehri. Audio recording is available

“*hadith* directs that you must have *nikah* with a woman who gives birth to, *many* children. This proves that Islam forbids family planning. We have to make the prophet proud of his *ummat*(nation)”.

“In Allah’s *Qura’n*, it is of utmost importance for women to stay in *purdah*[...] Women are responsible for all domestic chores. Those who read for a Masters degree or do jobs[...] let it be known that these things are not permitted in our religion”.

Qazi Hamdullah of Madrasa Al Huda Thehrri expressed similar views in these words:

“Education for girls is *jaiz* (justified) till the time it is within *chardevaari* (four walls). Outside it... it is *na’jaiz* (unjustified)”.

Such dimensions of female morality in Sindh, as explained above, have existed since centuries with Sadiq Ali mentioning similar patterns in 1901, especially amongst *Sayyids*¹¹. He identified *Balouch* as being a tribe harsh in implementing women morality standards, leading to killings.

Morality and Constraints: Cultural Practices Masquerading as Religion

“To the prejudices and the mores degrading women that were part of one or other tradition, indigenous to the area before Islam, Islamic institutions brought endorsements and license. [...] Islam lent itself to being interpreted as endorsing and giving religious sanctions to a deeply negative and debased conception of women. As a result a number of abusive uses of women became legally and religiously sanctioned Muslim practices”
(Leila Ahmed: 1992)

Following are some of the cultural practices that target women. The Pakistani society has not been able to change these practices because these are provided a religious cover to grant it a final, *divine legitimacy*, convincing people to accept it unquestioningly. Even those rights granted to women by Islam are cleverly denied under the pretext of Islam. There is no way that Allah’s Islam can be equated to the Islam that is practiced by the people in a given society. The female morality ‘construction’, explained in the section above, after decades of application has come to allocate a very disadvantaged and powerless position to the women in Pakistan. One must understand the abusive practices unleashed against Pakistani women, as only a by-product of the low status they have in society.

Bibi’ism

Bibi’yan, is a term used for those women of marriageable age who have pardoned their fathers their right of marriage, also known as *haqq bakhsh’na*. In traditional societies parents are expected to arrange marriage for children, especially their daughters. However, in some *Sayyid* families of rural Sindh, the fathers ask their daughters to waive off this right formally, but secretly. In some families the daughters are forced to take vows with the *Qur’an*, after which marriage with a mortal becomes unthinkable. A *bibi* married to the *Qur’an* is then promoted as a woman of high virtue and morality and is *reserved* for service to Islam. A *bibi* becomes inaccessible to outsiders, spending time worshipping quietly, confined in her isolated quarter. Food and basic necessities are provided to her within these four walls. Sometimes these *bibis* receive requests from women for writing amulets for small ailments.

¹¹ Direct descendants of Prophet Muhammad from Fati’mah- his youngest daughter and Ali

It is difficult to acquire data on this practice, as the *bibi'yan* are mostly from influential families. Despite this, their existence is an open secret. Playwrights like Noor-ul-Huda Shah, and novelists like Manik Sindhi and Qaisra Shahrzad have written on the practice in their own creative fictional style. During my stay in Thehrri and Rannipur, the locals showed *havelis* i.e. the abodes of *bibi'yan* from the street. Similarly, some female devotees at the shrine of Roza Dhanni, Pir Jo Goth informed me that they sought prayer from the *bibi'yan* of Pir Pagaro's family. I was told that some *bibi'yan* were old women who were asked to surrender their right of marriage at a very young age whilst the male members of the same family were polygamous. Undoubtedly this is against the teachings of Islam but is most interestingly practiced under the pretext of Islam by using religious symbols like the *Qur'an*.

Non-consensual Contracting of Marriage

The sample communities were narrated a vignette based on a routine social practice of equating a bride's silence to her consent to marry at the time of vows. This is in contradiction to the Islamic teachings according to which a bride must audibly agree thrice. A respondent reflected on the vignette in following words:

“Women are denied things because of culture but the society use *thappa* (approval stamp) of Islam. In this case the woman who was married without consent will be appreciated as a Muslim woman with high morals and ethics having the decency to remain quiet and accepting her parent's decision for her. This is something that appeals to ... and is a requirement of both Islam and our culture. It is not this or that...it is both”.

In other words, if Islam gives her the *right* to declare her decision, it simultaneously imposes a *duty* on her to be respectful towards her parents. Therefore, her decision to waive off her right in order to perform duty will prove her high morals as a Muslim woman.

Denying Access to Worldly Education

“The usual Moslem prejudice against female education is strong in Sindh. All of them (men) agreed on one point that their women are bad and cunning enough, without enlarging their ideas and putting such weapons as pens in their hands”

(R. Burton quoted in Ali 1987)

In 19th century, R. Burton wrote about the level of ignorance prevalent amongst Sindhi women. Similarly, in 1901, Sadiq Ali in a report titled “Musalmans of Sindh” mentioned

“It is education of grown-up girls in public schools which the Musalmans consider fraught with danger to the moral rectitude of their females, and they do not allow it”.

Unfortunately, things have not changed much since then. Women are generally perceived as evil, as detailed out in the previous section. Modern education is taken as a harbinger of moral decline. The only positive development is that today the younger generation is willing to debate the issue. Those denying worldly education to Muslim women base their argument on religious references on *purdah*.

Following dialogue between two women of village Wissri Wahan belonging to post-partition generation II is interesting to understand the debate:

- Researcher: Does Islam allow education to women?"
X: "Religion allows education but the culture does not".
Y: "No. Religion allows only *Qur'anic* education"
X: "Islam says go to China for education, even if you have to"
Y: "that is only for men...women cannot leave their houses"
Researcher: Prophet told Muslims to go to China. Did they teach *Qur'an* in China? Or were the Chinese, Muslims?
X: "This is what I am saying...Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not say 'Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China provided they are Muslims and will teach you *Qur'an*, and provided you are yourself a man' "
Y: "Islam says that women must stay indoors. It is better for them. The *Qur'an* guides man to offer prayers in a mosque but to a woman, it says that the best place for you is your own room".

Morality and Violence: Price of Being or Being Perceived as 'Bad'

"Concept of Kari...although it doesn't appear in the Koran, the view survives in Pakistan and some other Muslim countries that a man has the right to kill a female relative if she violates certain rules and norms".¹²

Simply stated, honor killing is carried out in the name of honor. If the offender claims that he killed the other to save his honor, he is not indicted. Nowadays people kill in any dispute and later on state that the action was invoked to save family honor.

Shirkat Gah, one of the most prominent Pakistani national NGOs working on women rights issues and producing valid data published a report on honor killings¹³, dated November 2001. According to it, during 1999, Sindhi newspapers revealed 353 incidences of honor related issues, 446 honor-killings out of which 271 were women.

According to the statistics maintained by the office of the Inspector General Police (IGP) Islamabad, Interior Division, Government of Pakistan it can be stated that most of the murders that take place in Sindh are in the name of honor.

Violence against women from 1993-2002

Murder	73 (Honor Killings 51)
Beating	5
Any other	9
Total	87

¹² Asma Jahangir, lawyer and activist; during her interview with the researcher, March 2003, Cambridge, UK

¹³ Also known as *Ghairat ka Qatal*, *Karo Kari*, *Siah Kari* and other local names

Other important statistics on Sindh, during the same time period reveal 8 cases of acid throwing by relatives, 772 rapes, in which all accused are relatives, about 25 gang rapes, once again by relatives.

In another set of archival data that was acquired from the District Police Officer, Khairpur the following are worth noting:

Category	1972-77	1978-88	2000- April 2004
Murder of women on morality issue	41	91	99
<i>Siah Kari</i>	57	157	46

There is marked inconsistency in the government and non-governmental sector statistical record on the issue.

There are two widely held views on the evolution of honor killings in Sindh. Few people believe that Balouch (Jhal Magsi and Khuzdar) or Arabs introduced it in Sindh during their trading trips to the area. In Khairpur, largely people linked *Karo Kari* to their own landed aristocracy. Some hold the opinion that the incidences increased with commoditization and people indulged in honor crimes as it involved money with the two parties offering money to one another to reach a compromise. Few people blame women as a cause of *Karo Kari*.

“Woman cause fight amongst men. She is the root cause of *Karo Kari*...men loose their mind for women, committing crime. If a woman is young she is beautiful and attracts the man and he commits crime. If a woman is old, she controls her son and gets involved in *lagai bujhai*(gossiping). These are routine things”. (A male respondent of village Larhi)

There is a miniscule chance that a woman successfully escapes an attempted honor killing. If she manages to seek refuge in a *wadero*'s (landlord) house and is spared her life, she is kept as a slave girl (*baandi*). This is not a preferred choice for the family of *kari* as is explained by an interviewee in Larhi as he narrated an incident of a nearby village *Goth Sagoo*¹⁴:

“There was a “*mua'mla*” (matter) between a girl and a village boy. The *jirga*¹⁵ decided for *Karo Kari* [...] In this case, the *sardars*(landed aristocracy) were telling one another that you take her, no...no... you take her...she is *kari*(black)...in the end they did not kill her...they took her for themselves and the villagers were quiet. To the community, the feudals said ‘we have made her our *baandi*(servant-girl)’. They put up a nice pretence for everyone to prove their kindness by providing abode to a *kari*. But we know...they will do *sub-kuch* (everything—alluding to sexual assault in this context) with her [...] now tell me... is killing better or is this better?”

This passage also indicates once a woman is ‘categorized’ as immoral or *Kari* such social conditions are created that she becomes a site of never ending servitude and slavery, dominated by the landed aristocracy. This reminds one of both Foucault and Bourdieu and their contribution regarding the categorization and classification of human beings to serve the power construct of a society.

¹⁴ 1 km away from the sample community of village Larhi in Union Council Khorra

¹⁵ Local consultative assembly of tribal elders

Culture or Sharia

Literature available on the issue informs that there is no proper burial of a *karo and kari*. Their death is referred to as *haram*¹⁶ alluding to the illicit relation. Funeral rites are usually avoided (Shirkat Gah 2001).

The male communities largely suggested that honor killing is a cultural practice. A post generation II member of village Larhi shared:

“A girl submits under the pressure of *reet-rawaj*(culture). *Karo kari* is not supported by *shariat*. Benazir’s family was angry when she preferred *Zardaris* over *Bhutto* clan for marriage. Even the prime minister of this society cannot transcend the boundaries...even she is required to preserve family honor, so you can imagine”.

When he was asked whether the girl *cannot* or *should not* transcend boundaries, he responded that it was both. He continued that the responsibility of preserving family honor was on women. When probed that why the brunt rested on a woman, he replied:

“She is our daughter, our wife our sister, our mother. She has to live a life to fit in all these roles”.

Another respondent added:

“This is all very confusing. Our religion allows honor-killing so it is *ba’shariat* [...] *rajam* is allowed in Islam. The act of *zani* and *zania* is considered *haram* in Islam and therefore Islam allows us to kill them”.

He was countered:

“No, it (Islam) does not. In Islam, killing is *haram*. We all know that the powerful people kill for *siyasat*(politics) and *mufaad*(self-interest)[...]they don’t have a proof of anything before declaring people as *karo and kari*... just because they are strong they get away with it”.

In village Wisrri Wahan, a young girl from post-partition generation II condemned the practice of *Karo kari*, suggesting a severe punishment instead. The approach of condemning relations outside wedlock is regarded as a social and moral duty of Muslim men and women. Most of them support the idea of punitive measures over death penalty, as additionally substantiated through the results of morality questionnaire, shared later.

“The act is wrong. She should not cheat on her parents and family and must not go against the *buniyaad*(basic) of Islam. But still, *killing* is equally wrong. The accused must be locked in the house[...]beaten[...] forbidden to go out of the house [...]but not killed. If that action is *haraam* in Islam, so is killing another human being”.

This group was suggested that *Qur’an* itself supports the practice of stoning of those who commit adultery. To this another young respondent expressed her doubts about the decision makers:

“It is all politics. Who are the people who will establish the *zani* and *zania*?[...] They are themselves corrupt and they only play politics. Death sentence is wrong because the judges are corrupt”.

The following data reveals that amongst men 66.66% of pre-partition generation, 69.24% of post-partition generation I and 54.72% of post-partition generation II condemn

¹⁶ forbidden

karo kari. Please note that segregated result for each community is likely to change the trend.

Table 3

Prompt								
Karo Kari is important to keep social discipline	Total	Agree		Disagree		Unsure		
Categories	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre-partition Generation	6	1	2	0	4	1	0	0
Post-partition Generation I	26	18	8	5	18	12	0	1
Post-partition Generation II	53	26	15	4	29	19	9	3

Many respondents felt more comfortable in supporting severe punishment (and not death) for those who *transgress*. Amongst men 83.33% of pre-partition generation, 84.33% of post-partition generation I, and 75.47% of post-partition generation II agreed to the notion. Amongst women the opinion was widely divided in post-partition generation II with 30.77% agreeing; 38.46% disagreeing and 30.77% remaining unsure.

Table 4

Prompt								
Transgressors must be Severely punished	Total	Agree		Disagree		Unsure		
Categories	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Pre-partition Generation	6	1	5	1	1	0	0	0
Post-partition Generation I	26	18	22	13	3	4	1	1
Post-partition Generation II	53	26	40	8	10	10	3	8

Out of the five case studies collected, excerpts of two are shared below. These cases are based on the interviews of family members of victims of honor crime. These killings were investigated under the jurisdiction of police station Khairpur.¹⁷

Case Study 1 (Selected Excerpts)

Victim: Tehmeeza Khatoon (16yrs)

Complainant: Zubair Ali (Brother of Victim)

Interviewees: Mother of Victim and Zubair Ali

Zubair: We woke up at the time of *Faj'r* prayer. My father noticed that Tehmeeza was not on her bed. We looked for her. My father went to the neighbour's (Rafiq's) house and saw them, *ghalat kaam kartay huay* (doing something wrong), so he shot her. Rafiq escaped.

Mother: My husband killed my daughter because she committed *na-jaizi*(illicit act)

Zubair: She was a *woman* (emphasis is Zubair's). When a woman is born, she is a blessing. Prophet Muhammad also said that a woman is a blessing. But, when she becomes a *Zehmat* (trouble) then she should be killed.

Zubair: The first time my father looked at them...he was over whelmed by *Ghairat* (honour). Therefore he had to act.

¹⁷ Video files available for all interviews

Researcher: In Islam there are four witnesses required to confirm an illicit act. How many witnesses are there in this case?

Zubair: There are no witnesses.

Researcher: Don't you think that the murder is therefore un-Islamic?

Zubair: This can't be unIslamic because it was done in the name of honour. Had he (father) told anyone, he could not have killed her. Had he not killed her, it would have created hindrances for us for life. We would have ended up ...hiding our face from everyone...our village is a small one.

Researcher: How will you justify that she was 'immoral'...as you are suggesting?

Zubair: I was her elder brother. She did not show respect towards us. Our respect, honour went down the drain. ...that is why we declare her "immoral". She gave a damn to the honour and respect of her father and brother... what kind of a sister was she?

Researcher (to the Mother): Instead of Tehmeeza, if Zubair had done a similar deed...would you or your husband, have killed him?

Mother: If *Kari*'s family would have killed him...they would have ...but we would not kill our own son.

Researcher: Was she buried in a public graveyard?

Zubair: Yes. But as the time passes there won't be any mark left. Then no one will recognise whose grave is it. It does not have a stone.

Researcher: Was the funeral prayer offered?

Zubair: I don't know...though it is not correct to (offer prayers) in such cases.

Researcher: Why?

Zubair: Because this is *najazi*. When a human being commits bad deeds, it is not right to offer the funeral prayers.

Case Study 2 (Selected Excerpts)

Victim: Bilquees (25 yrs)

Complainant: Allah Daad (Husband of Victim)

Interviewee: Allah Daad

Allah Daad: That day I was in the village and a man came running and said that your brother has *Kari* Bilquees. I went home and saw that she was lying dead. Later on, the man who was declared *Karo* said to me that 'I have committed *na'jazi*(injustice) with you'. He apologised and I pardoned him.

Researcher: Why did you pardon him?

Allah Daad: He came and begged mercy. He had brought the *Qur'an* along

Allah Daad: How it happened? Why it happened? I don't know. But I think it is something like what is very common and generally happens in villages... the problem of *karo kari*, you know!¹⁸...I agree with my brother...she should have been killed. In the name of *ghairat* (honour), Sindhis do commit murders...we know it...we see it around us.

Researcher: Had you seen her, would you have murdered her?

Allah Daad: I myself cannot guess how I would have behaved in *jazbaat*(high emotions). I might have killed her

A detailed analysis of the five case studies, reveal that older women perpetrate younger girls, in cases, even more so than men. Sometimes, family members murder the target and later on convince the husband by maligning the victim on moral grounds. The police seek a complainant who usually is the supporter of the perpetrator. Soon they pardon the offender and the case is withdrawn. It reminds of Bauman's thesis that the social system itself can provide a conduit for non-cruel people to indulge in cruel acts as they are removed from face to face confrontation with the consequences of their actions. Killing is mostly taken as a routine happening. Socially, honour killing is largely an

¹⁸ The tone is obviously casual, as if referring to a day to day happening. DVD file is available.

approved practice. It was found that people condemn it due to their doubt about the intention of the judges (*jirga*) and also that of the family members of the victim. But, generally, honour killing is regarded to have a support base in Islam. People believe that those who indulge in illicit relations are 'immoral' and must be killed. However, gender of the offender changes the gravity of the same deed. Zubair's mother is not willing to kill Zubair for the same deed but upholds Tehmeeza's murder as a righteous act and Allah Daad forgives the man who committed the offence but supports Bilquees's murder (refer to the excerpts above). Is this Islam? Does this mean that impulsive attitude and *jazbaat* (emotions), be it of killing or sex, are somewhat *expected* and hence acceptable from men, but not from women. Islam does not give these double standards but the society, where birth of a son is rejoiced and that of a daughter, mourned.

Sex remains a taboo in a society where a girl child, passes through stages of puberty, unnervingly stepping into adolescence as illiterate, domesticated, frightened, cloistered away from men, unaware of her own sexuality, burdened by the weight of morality and family honour that she cannot comprehend or articulate. Failing to be "morally" sound, according to her family members, at the age of 16, yet a child according to the UN Charter, she is brutally murdered and buried in a grave that has no epitaph.

Conclusion

The issue of our times is not to define religion but the various forms that it has taken. Drawing inspiration from Foucault, I believe it is important to acknowledge social, cultural, psychological and power dimension of the religion of Islam. It is significant to note that human morality instead of producing desired results of social welfare has become a source and cause of human constraints, abuse, and crime. Also, that now it has become possible for Muslim societies to declare their "illegitimate" actions as "legitimate" by housing them within the sacred institution of Islam. It is important to understand that sometimes cultural practices that pre-existed in pre-Islamic societies gradually came to adopt Islamic lingo, nomenclature and expression to define themselves and their logic. We should be able to understand that culture comes to develop not just from religion but through a whole 'social apparatus' that has been extensively explored throughout the paper. People were found interacting with religion according to their needs and interests. Religion comes to serve cultural interests along with economic and political ones. The women themselves vocalized concern over male monopolization of Islam and the resultant twisting and turning in religion to suit patriarchal interests.

Minturn (1993) rightly stated that women have a deferential status that makes them powerless. The exclusive "construction" of female morality as shared extensively through this paper prove cloistering, chaperoning and limiting access to public places win a "good" name and life to a woman. She must remain, chaste, obedient, and patient to attest her moral "goodness" to the society. In case otherwise, there is every likelihood, that she gets killed in the name of honor. Durkheim's 'force of the social', as shared in the beginning of the paper, is experienced differently by men and women. The society does not expect the same level of submission to this 'force' from men, as it does from women. Society routinely *regulate* and *monitors* female morality, undertaking corrective as well as punitive measures to serve the power interests of the community, as explained Foucault (1991). Female body may not always be a site of torture, but according to the

changing patterns of local power dynamics, even today it is most obviously a site of slavery and confinement. Women were debased and transformed into a disadvantaged and dispossessed group, that too in the name of Islam, the religion that bestowed them the private and public *rights*, centuries ago. Case studies of honor killings and violence, forced marriages, imposed domestication, present only the opposite. This pitiable status of women in Muslim countries has caused Islam global humiliation and hence is a cause of concern for all Muslim countries.

Archival Records

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