

Radical Islamic Movements: Gender Construction in Jamaat-i-Islami and Tabligh-i- Jamaat in Pakistan

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Abstract

Muslim women are generally viewed as victims of prevailing religious and patriarchal discourses. Their subjectivity and subordinate position is discussed as imposed, through textual representations by orthodox and radical Muslims. Radical Islamic movements are examined as militarized masculinities, oppressing women as well as terrorizing the non-Muslims. This paper argues that women are active partners of their subordination within traditionalist and radical religious movements. They are agents of orthodoxy and have carved a new role for themselves within the religious paradigms. They not only conform to the radical world view but are instrumental in dissemination of radicalism amongst fellow women and create an environment that fosters the extremists' agendas.

Since the terrorist attacks in 2001, dominant discourses have put militant Islam at the centre stage for debates surrounding Muslim world, Islam and Muslims—largely representing them as homogenous groups, sharing militant ideologies. This synonymous usage of Islam / radicalism / militancy/ terrorism has put moderate and progressive elements in a fix, as new forms of (group) identity are being imposed on Muslims. Women on the other hand are stereotypically represented as oppressed domesticated subjects and followers of patriarchal norms. Their role in various traditional Islamic organizations is generally overlooked as the dominant discourses focus on radical elements and women are seen as mere victims of religious traditions.

In South Asian Muslim communities, religious idiom is used quite frequently and gender relationships and women's public role are usually

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discussed and debated by self-proclaimed religious experts often without any fundamental knowledge about the principles of Islam. Religious instructions form an essential component of social construction amongst Muslims, mostly as a part of school curricula. Still a large number is either only able to recite the *Quran* in Arabic without understanding its meaning or have no solid religious foundation at all. The economic pressure pushes large number of women into the informal, semi-skilled workforce as housemaids or house-based workers. As a result for them any formal education is only a remote possibility. Many more are deprived of opportunities to acquire basic religious knowledge.

For the last two decades, many religious groups are actively engaged in providing forums for religious education through informal and formal exclusive women gatherings. Such activities are attracting a large number of women from diverse backgrounds and professions, catering to their needs by providing religious education through various avenues. The outreach of such groups is in all classes through existing societal structures and school systems. These groups especially target middle class educated women with time on hand. They even organise gatherings at five-star hotels to cater to the upper classes.¹ However, urban centres are the main targets due to easy access and logistics. The actual performance and influence of these groups regarding women's rights is still in infancy and the functional aspect of the deliberations of these gatherings has not materialized yet. Ritualistic Islam plays a vital role in rural women's lives, though the knowledge even about the basics is limited. "Maulvi" (religious cleric) plays a leading role in the performance of rituals at birth, death and during the marriage ceremony, while in matters such as inheritance, divorce, maintenance and role and status of women in the household, the local customs prevail.²

In the context of South Asia, two mainstream movements have generated an enormous debate in national and international academic circles, due to their following, trans-national character, revivalist agendas and political strategies – one being an active political actor working within the existing nation-state structures while the other portraying an apolitical posture aimed at the individual stands for a change from within. These two movements, Jamaat-i-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat have formal and informal setups in over a 100 countries and aim at Islamic revivalism. In the last two decades, they have also attracted attention due to the swelling

numbers of their followers, alleged links with militant groups, and their growing political clout and active role as partners in the political manoeuvrings particularly in Pakistan.

Formation of Radical Islamists: Jamaat –i-Islami and Tablighi Jamaat

The Jamat-i-Islami (JI) is one of the most effectively organised religio-political movements and has played a critical role in shaping the nature and content of Islamic political discourse in Pakistan.³ It was conceived as a holy community with a high standard of ideological commitment, and limited membership in a well organized hierarchy. Its leadership has always been educated and intellectually well armed to influence the popular mind on issues relating to the Muslims and the Muslim world — though the current leadership has produced more activists than ideologues. JI believes that the interests of Muslims can only be protected by pursuing Islamic principles and the transforming the social order by political means through the state.⁴ The Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), on the other hand, was formed as a dawah (evangelist) group of lay men aimed to reform individuals to develop an ideal Muslim society in line with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad. (However, recent studies suggest that the traditionalist movements have been radicalised, and they now have close links with extremist groups like Hizb ul Tahrir in Central Asia).⁵ The TJ focuses on individual change and engagement with Muslim communities that do not seem to share commitment to revivalist agendas.⁶ It believes in devoting time from the routine chores of daily life for dawah with likeminded people and travelling within the country and overseas for evangelical work. The aim of their dawah travel is not aimed at its audience but at personal experience of piety, purification and change.⁷ They believe in personal jihad, purification of individual Muslims and despite some incidents, Tablighis are largely considered to be non-militant and they seek to avoid controversies surrounding the JI which still believes in waging “Holy War” (*Jihad*) and supports Muslim states in the process of such confrontation.⁸ While analysing the radicalism within the ranks of JI, Metcalf comments on propositions regarding conquering territories, collecting taxes and improving on welfare of Muslims. Her analysis reveals that JI is focused on Muslims, ignoring the realities of international and even national and regional politics, and fantasising about the fulfilment of desires for empowerment without any serious engagement with national or global

politics.⁹ (However, recent enactments in NWFP regarding Islamic laws, foreign policy suggestions, and tribute to terrorists like Zarqawi in the provincial parliament suggest that the JI is trying to engage in politics of confrontation both at the national and global level).

These movements interpret various natural calamities and conflicts as signs of divine displeasure with the state of affairs of Muslim societies.¹⁰ Metcalf believes that with its focus on individual character, TJ works well within secular regimes, implicitly fostering privatisation of religion associated with the modern liberal state.¹¹ Worldly affairs do not matter to TJ as they believe in changing the individual and not the state, therefore they remain disengaged from non-Muslim communities and avoid theological debates.¹² Being trans-national in character, Tablighis consider national and ethnic identities as well as national boundaries irrelevant. They claim to be experiencing the realisation of Divine grace and envision a society organized along Islamic line that is open to any individual who – at any place, at any time - relives the prophetic example of Medina. Tablighis emphasise that material and worldly pursuits would lead to Hell in the afterlife, and therefore one has to pursue Heaven by rejecting the material world. Metcalf comments that this striking “emphasis on Paradise is the conviction permeating Tablighi discourse that Paradise is not only in the future but now”.¹³

The TJs do not trace linear change and causality but identify moments when individuals have followed the pristine example of the Prophet- relived his time, and thereby making time irrelevant. Metcalf says: “their history is history without the nation-state and with no concern for worldly progress” though, the Tablighi literature is rife with examples of equating gold and silver with reward to good deeds.¹⁴ Ordinary Tablighi narratives are raging with accounts of paranormal and supernatural powers and stories of miracles.

What turns out to be at stake is not *space*, the new place where they have chosen to live, but *time*, in which the past and future converge in the present. In Tabligh, participants seek to relive the highest moment of human history, the Prophet’s society in Medina, and in so doing to taste the joys of the eternal happiness promised to them in Paradise ahead. Far from being on the periphery, they can make any place a centre.¹⁵

Metcalf’s opinion that the apolitical nature of TJ and its different vision of history resembles privatisation of religion in a secular state, is in contradiction with her later arguments where she states that the globalisation

of Tabligh has transformed the movement, and it has shifted its focus from bringing about inner change among Muslims to an emphasis on countering the West, which is depicted as being materialist, without family ties and values, and sexually promiscuous. Her observation that by “embracing that picture, the space they inhabit becomes their own” does not accurately match with their new radical posture, especially in the context of their linkages with militant groups.¹⁶

Unlike the recent political engagements of the Tablighis, JI has always had a political dimension, and has been especially active during various military dictatorial regimes. It joined hands with the military dictator Zia during the 1980s and remained politically visible during the Afghan conflict, which gave it the means of influence within the state apparatus. With continuous Saudi financial support, accumulation of established logistics and infrastructure during the 1980s, it was able to train (jihadis) for missions in Kashmir, Bosnia, Chechnya and Central Asia. Jamaat believes in re-Islamising the Central Asian states through *dawah* missions and setting up schools. For the Jamaat, a Muslim society would not come into being simply because a majority of its members are Muslim. Only an Islamic state, which works towards the systematic Islamisation of all fields of public and private lives, could bring it about. The JI's top leadership believes that Pakistan's destiny lies in Islamic revivalism and it aims to challenge the influence of Western civilization in the world.¹⁷ The 9/11 incidents provided JI, an opportunity to shun its elitist ideological discourse and indulge in populist appeals, resulting in it gaining sufficient political clout and representative power to implement Islamist policies in (particularly in the NWFP) Pakistan. Both the groups, however, interpret the global issues from within the orthodox religious paradigms rather than on the basis of the realities of international polity.

Revivalism and Core Political Discourses

Moghadam, implies that the contradictions of modernisation and social change, including urbanisation, proselytisation, secularisation, and religious and social marginalisation has given rise to Islamic fundamentalist movements. In rapidly changing socio-political scene, some social groups seek to restore the familiar traditional values and norms and turn to religion and family. They hold extremely conservative attitudes on moral, cultural, and social issues, and are invariably situated on the right wing of the political spectrum.¹⁸

Both these groups have profound links with the conservative Deoband traditions. The founder of TJ, Maulana Mohammad Ilyas was educated in the Deoband tradition and also had some influence of Wahabi school of Islam. For him a return to the Prophet's era was the only answer to the decline of Muslim rule in various parts of the world.¹⁹ "In Tabligh lore, it was not military prowess but preaching that took Muslims from Sindh to Spain within sixty years of Prophet's death."²⁰ Instead of orienting Muslims to struggle for a just society, the preaching of the TJ remains confined to the adherence to the Islamic pattern of life (as it was during the Prophet's times). Their congregation in a mosque, along with common board and lodging at individual expenses, project them as members of an egalitarian organisation and adds to their appeal among common Muslims. Since the members are completely aloof from modern discourses, they became introverts.²¹ These movements indirectly help the political interest of upper class Muslim elite, who do not want the freedom of the common Muslims from their medieval psyche as the *status quo* suits their socio-economic and political agenda. With its conviction that any country under non-Muslim rules was 'Dar-ul-Harb', it also joined other Islamic radicals in obstructing the integration of the common Muslims into the social and cultural mainstream of the country of their residence.²²

The TJ guards mythical organisational and financial matters and avoids interaction with the media. It has no official spokesmen, a strategy that helps in avoiding controversies and they remain evasive. The whole missionary exercise is to attract the greatest possible number of Muslims to the idea of founding an ideal theocratic state based on the politico-religious principles under the spiritual authority of Islam. TJ's growing global influence owes a lot to the financial and logistic support of Muslim communities in the western societies. Earlier, they enjoyed support among the lower strata of Muslims. But their increasing focus on the professional upper middle class population, bureaucracy and military speaks volumes regarding their apolitical nature. Their existing close link with prominent Muslim political personalities reveals their hidden political ambitions; and seemingly it does not preclude the possibility of politics making a backdoor entry into the movement. Alex states that the TJ may not become actively involved in internal politics or disputes over local issues, though from a philosophical and trans-national perspective their millenarian philosophy is very political indeed.²³ The recent arrest of suspected Yemeni members of Al Qaida (Lackawann, Buffalo) and their suspected link with TJs further

suggest that the organisation is being utilised as a safe house for the free movement of Islamic terrorists.²⁴

The JI has a formal organisational hierarchy and members are ranked according to the length and nature of their services. Educated, articulate and seasoned political actors have always dominated its top leadership. Within the organisation there is an established procedure to elect the leadership by members and the changing nature of leaderships reflects the transformation of political strategies and policies. The TJ on the other hand has no formal criteria for membership, has multi-level participation—from full time missionaries to semi-skilled part-time and full-time workers and well-educated professionals and businessmen, who can devote time or money to travel regularly or occasionally with the Jamaat, and pray, congregate and listen to the discussions.²⁵ TJ is headquartered in Raiwind (Pakistan) and after its annual gathering of over three million adherents (every November) Tablighis are sent out to different places all over the world. The secrecy of the activities of the TJ partly flows from its dynastic flavour, (though Metcalf suggests that the top leader is elected, most of the literature suggests that relationships through marriages are the prime reasons for being at the top²⁶) as the line of succession in the leadership remains within the family (Kandhalwi) through marriages. The available information suggests that its Emir (top leader) presides over a *shura* (council), which plays an advisory role. Further down are individual country organizations. Despite suggestions that Tablighis self-fund their travel, it seems hard to believe that a part-time employee would be able to finance an international itinerary. The World Muslim League and Saudi Arabia heavily finance its global networks, apart from individual donations. Saudi link is also visible in its support for the activities of both Deobandi and Wahabi controlled mosques and Islamic centres in Europe and North America.²⁷

Metcalf suggests that TJ is a modern movement that creates a voluntary, trans-national society, though it does not ask questions and does not attempt to define the nature of the nation or state, or even deal with most current societal concerns. Instead it constructs an ideology of individualism in its radical concern for personal salvation. It is self conscious about authenticity, coupled with an ideology that is increasingly expressed as an alternative to the West. The TJ disseminates information in a variety of ways. It selects a limited number of texts that assert that the “past can be encountered in

the present” for dawah purposes and they are read intensively. Modern history of colonialism or nation-states has no meanings for them since they live in a world filled with the passion of revivalism of Islam.²⁸ Its low profile has helped it to avoid unnecessary attention of critics and won applause from academics (Graham Fuller, Barbara Metcalf, and Olivier Roy) for their simplicity and pursuit of non-political devoutness that stress individual faith, introspection, and spiritual development as positive influences on society. Such assertions entirely ignore the impact of the TJ on gender relations outside missionary activities, women’s education, employment as well as state/citizen relationship.²⁹

Trans-national feature

Both these movements have members as well as followers and supporters across Europe, North America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and are vastly expanding their activities in Central Asia. The operational side of these movements has grown from local to global; with significant financial, political and human resources contributed by a diverse range of supporters. For TJ, the death of its founder not only changed leadership but its vision and style as well. Under the direction of Maulana Muhammad Yusuf, it was able to establish a global network of support among the labour, student, and professional migrants to Europe and North America. They also utilised other networks such as haj travel, networks established by students and scholars of Islam, and trading communities.³⁰ Metcalf argues that lack of involvement in politics does not mean that Tablighis wholly eschew utilisation of facilities offered by the state. When needed TJ never hesitates to utilise governmental assistance to secure permits for buildings and meetings, as well as visas for travel. She is of the view that, given the exigencies and opportunities presented by state recognition, TJ seems to have adopted a higher institutional profile in the West than the status it enjoys in South Asia.³¹

Nonetheless, the revivalist movement has been banned in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan since 2004, for its alleged links to a string of bombings in Uzbekistan. It is still working in Kyrgyzstan with relative freedom, and its members can be easily recognised by their white caps, small beards, and Pakistani dress. TJ is successful in societies (ex-soviet) where people are aware of their Islamic heritage yet have relatively little knowledge of Islam. However, their accomplishment in places with long traditions of Islamic

faith and scholarship are insignificant.³² It has also been observed that many foreign Tablighi missionaries from Tajikistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, accompanied by interpreters, have been visiting Kyrgyzstan. They have also raised suspicions about their apolitical nature by participating in public demonstrations in favor of one of the presidential candidates (Kyrgyzstan) Tursunbay Bakir Uulu, a devout Muslim who had called for the legalisation of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir party.³³

The TJ was instrumental in founding the Harakat ul-Mujahideen in Raiwind in 1980. Almost all of the Harakat ul-Mujahideen's original members are Tablighis. Famous for the December 1998 hijacking of an Air India passenger jet and murder of a busload of French engineers in Karachi (2002), Harakat members make no secret of their linkage with the Tablighis, stating that: "The two organisations together make up a truly international network of genuine *jehadi* Muslims".³⁴ Another Tablighi by-product is the Harakat ul-Jihad-i Islami, founded in the early 1980s, which has been active in the Indian side of Kashmir. In North Africa, its activities involved the formation of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria. A section of Moroccan Tablighis are under investigation for their involvement with terrorist organisation At-Takfir wal-Hijrah. Another Tablighi has been convicted for masterminding the Casablanca terrorist bombings of 2003. Investigation is also on to probe the links between the Moroccan cells and the murder of Theo van Gogh (Dutch filmmaker in Netherlands in 2004). In Phillipine, the Tablighis are accused of terrorist activities in the South with Saudi financial assistance and are working as a cover for Pakistani jihad volunteers. The London suicide bombers were linked with Tablighis and also for providing a cover for jihadis who travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan for training. Similar incidents, linkages and training with Tablighis are being investigated in France and North America.³⁵

Many western critics as well as moderate Muslims view TJ mannerisms as cultish and deeply problematic as several of its splinter members have joined ranks of the al-Qaida. Many Tablighi privately resent the current state of affairs in the Muslim world and consider the US and the West partly responsible, though these views are not mentioned publicly in Tablighi gatherings.³⁶

The JI has been politically active in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya, but there is not a great deal of evidence regarding the involvement of TJ at organisational level, despite the fact that many Al-

Qaida members have previously been associated with them.³⁷ For JI, Islamic revivalism is not to be brought about through revolution but by conducting a political struggle against the secular state and an elitist crusade aimed at appropriating the state. It has adopted a pedantic and literary style, ignoring populist themes and existing economic structures in Pakistan.³⁸ TJ on the other hand maintains an apolitical posture and focuses on changing Muslims in the orthodox Islamic traditions.³⁹ However, despite its apolitical posture, high profile politicians, bureaucrats and military officers are among its formal and informal ranks. It operates through these networks, rarely documenting any information about its membership or organisational hierarchy. Many observers believe that it is covertly political and has already traces of militancy in its ranks and recently has been accused of radicalising its apolitical reformist agenda after widening its dawah missions, particularly in the Central Asian states. Since the Afghan Taliban have roots in TJ, the revelations about these links and the radical agenda are sporadically surfacing.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the dissident members of JI have formed the Hizb-ul-Mujahidin and Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shari-at-i-Muhammadi (TNSM), and these groups maintain a close link with their parent organisation.

Gender Paradigm in Radical Movements

Changing gender paradigms is a key reason for the revival of orthodox traditions and the sustenance of the existing societal and gender hierarchies. Islamic revivalist movements are obsessed with the role, status, comportment, and covertures of women and aspire to “seek greater independence from Western hegemony” by returning to “authentic” Muslim culture. Since by entering into male professional domains Muslim women appear to have challenged the existing hierarchies, a return to traditional family values, domesticity and confinement in the private arena can ensure male hegemony. These revivalist attempts indicate the tensions and contradictions of a society in transition; and focus on the role, rights, and privileges of men and women. Existing social order remains at the centre of these endeavours.⁴¹ The hostile imposition of Islamic dress code on Muslim women in many Muslim and Western societies reflects the intensification of these revivalist movements.⁴²

Based on her extensive work on Tablighis in India, Pakistan and Egypt, Metcalf argues that women belonging to these movements have active public roles like men; for example joining them on Dawah tours (to preach

religion) inside and outside their countries. She suggests that in the absence of men, women perform an active public role by becoming the head of the family. However, she has not explored the nature of the public role and space women enjoy when both men and women are at home: the dynamics of the domestic hierarchy, the role of men as the head of the family and the nature of decision making process in the public and private arenas. She also fails to acknowledge that there are groups of women within the orthodox movements, apart from the political wings of religious parties, who may not be very vocal and visible but construct their political identity mainly through a central identification with Islam.⁴³ Tablighi women regularly meet to study and pray and are responsible for guiding their families and other women. They travel with Tablighi men and typically stay in homes, while men stay in mosques. Apart from the *Quran*, the only literature Tablighis are required to read are the *Tablighi Nisab*, seven essays penned by a companion of Ilyas in the 1920s.⁴⁴ Their literature illustrates that the primary pattern of gender boundaries is maintained and within its loose organisational formation an informal hierarchy exists as men make decisions for the roles and duties performed by women during dawah missions.⁴⁵ Metcalf has a different view, she contends that women are the driving force behind men in the Tabligh and are part of the decision making process.⁴⁶

Despite initial resistance to women's participation, the founder of TJ successfully persuaded his contemporaries to acknowledge that by reforming the Muslim family, the Muslim community would be reformed as a whole. However, the approved text for women participants remains confined to "*Bahishti Zewar*" (written by a leading Deobandi scholar, Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi).⁴⁷ Unlike the JI, the instructive literature for women is limited and it does not approve of modern education. The overall literature is limited to few basic texts such as "*chhe baten*" (six talking points) and "*faza'il-e-Aamal*" (heavenly rewards for pious deeds) that illustrate episodes of piety by Muslims and the rewards for their deeds. The idea is to focus on daily life, simple chores, the strengthening of faith, the practice of the Islamic rituals, and the reliving of the lives of early Muslims.

The texts produced and propagated by radical and revivalist groups for the female readership indicate the different approaches of the two movements. The TJ recommends literature produced in the middle of the

last century, while the JI, which has modern educated members in its ranks, deals with current issues, though the main argument regarding women's role in both remains invariably similar. Both organisations affirm women's submissiveness and seclusion and believe women have to be regulated and controlled by men. The approved role for women is that of a serving and docile wife, who has to stay away from male gaze and even hidden from the eyes of low caste women, thereby indicating an inherent elitist bias within the TJ. The boundary markers of women's sphere are services to husband and domestic chores, which are equated with religious duties and a promise of higher status in the afterlife. The only approved reason for looking after female bodies is the service of their husbands, not even for themselves as individual human beings. The kind of religious knowledge imparted to women by the TJ also reflect conflicting notions of women's role in decision making within the organisation. If women are not allowed to make a decision for the Tabligh on even on all-female audience, and if they do not have access to worldly knowledge and do not have a hands on participatory role in the formation of policy decisions, how can women be expected to be part of a global dawah project?

The TJ emphasises face-to-face encounters to communicate Tablighi message, while the use of new technologies, cassettes, videos and websites is disdained, (on a lighter note - the use of modern aircrafts to travel is not disapproved of despite the desire to relive the early Islamic period). The TJ publishes its literature with emphasis on a narrow range of texts. It basically relies on oral traditions and narratives. Metcalf states that the literature stresses mutuality and appear non-judgemental, yet they sustain customary patterns of hierarchy and gender. The resistance to "Western" culture and efforts to revive the presumed authentic Islamic values are the other key messages. Such resistance fosters the irrelevance of the nation-state for individual existence.⁴⁸

Unlike the Tablighi Jamaat, Jamat-i-Islami uses modern technologies to disseminate a wide range of information – including gender concerns. The whole idea is constructed around segregation of sexes and domestication of women to procreate and remain in the service of men, this being considered as, "natural because it is the voice of her inner soul and not something that is backward or something belonging to medieval times."⁴⁹ It also explains the situation of women in Pakistan. It argues that women are being exploited in schools, colleges and universities, and are forced to give up their dignity and adopt near- nakedness and that the

slogans of equality of sexes have not made girl child acceptable or given women their rights. Indeed JI's literature hops from a critique of western civilisation to the prevailing culture of Muslim societies in order to underline the aim desirability of an Islamic society. Domestication is highlighted in the historical context suggesting that:

In times of need, Islam has not stopped the woman from serving in the armed forces, but Allah (SWT) has not made this compulsory for them. It is the duty of men to defend and fight for Islam. When the mind of men is at peace regarding their house then they can fulfill their duty of defending and fighting more efficiently. Islam gives woman the peace and comfort of a home, she is the dignity of her family and gets the same reward as Mujahid even by staying at home and fulfilling her role as a wife and a mother. But there is no way that a society that has forced the woman out of her house and made her an ornament of beauty, would understand this beautiful truth.⁵⁰

The JI's women's wing is primarily involved in propagating literature and ideas through periodicals (such as the well known *Batul*) aimed at bringing families into the holy community, recruiting wives and daughters of the Jamat members and encouraging women to bring up their children true to the teachings of the Jamat.⁵¹ The greatest significance and long-term effect lies in its influence on society through student recruits, who undergo various levels of indoctrination at a formative and impressionable stage of their lives. The indoctrination leaves a permanent mark on the thinking and style of the children and the youth irrespective of their background and future direction in life. They become the vehicles for a gradual and yet fundamental process of cultural engineering that is at the centre of Maulana Mawdudi's original programme and has far greater social and political ramifications than immediate gains.⁵²

After forming the women Tablighi group and involving them in local missions, it has extended their travel from 3 to 15 and then 40 days. Only married women accompanied by a male relative Tablighi can travel while the head of the group would always be a man and decisions regarding the content, method and routine would be made by men— the women are excluded. The code of conduct for women is different from men as they are prohibited from giving speeches from the pulpit (*minbar*) or while sitting on a chair, or speaking in an authoritative tone or imitating the forceful and emotive style of male Tablighis. Women have to conduct their work and affair during the Tabligh with the permission of men. Despite arguments that in Tablighi missions, women get an opportunity to be

together and share their own stories, their own joys and sorrows, they are criticised by fellow Tablighi for any indulgence in worldly matters. They may temporarily get away from domestic chores and family responsibilities, but the terms are determined and framed by men.

The JI claims to have 10 universities and the total number of girls who graduated last year is claimed as 2200. They state that these institutions based in major urban centres provide religious and modern education; (residential facilities for girl students) and cover a variety of subjects such as Computer science, English, Tafseer-e-Quran, Hadith, Arabic and Islamic history.⁵³ The JI believes in female participation in societal progress through female education but with an emphasis on motherhood. However, it does not “tolerate” co-education and approves only all-female professional institutions, and separate medical colleges and sports directorate. It has reserved 25 percent of its micro finance for women through a provincial bank, has established centres to educate, give craft skills, market products, share profits and provide legal assistance to women victims of domestic violence.⁵⁴ The JI, however, believes in complete gender segregation and supports professional education or paid work in all female arrangements.⁵⁵ It defines Muslim women in oppositional terms with the West, where women are portrayed as sexually vulnerable, exploited and disgraced by the society and even dehumanised. To them Pakistani women demanding equality and rights become synonymous with Western women and a threat to the moral and social order of the society. The traditional Muslim women however, is glorified as “anchor of society” and “refuge in turbulent world”⁵⁶ Women’s role is defined within the paradigms of biological determinism, and restricts her sphere of safety, power and control within the four walls of the house. It constructs ‘Muslim Women’ in two ways – in opposition to western women and to Muslim men. Western women are represented as sex objects, and as dehumanised humans in need of protection, dignity and honour given to women by Islam. The ideas of equality and emancipation are linked to examples of sexual abuse in personal relations, workplace and in service of state.

As long as a woman is involved in the glamour of this world she is unable to comprehend the dignity and respect she deserves, nor can she feel the purity of her purpose of life. However, if she does hear the internal voice of her soul at any point, she realizes what her actual status should be.⁵⁷

The JI has a limited notion of rights, which is basically confined to inheritance, choice in marriage, dower, divorce and maintenance, while her duties are simplified to “keep husband happy and procreate and stay in the house”. Despite its strong criticism of elite and upper middle class professional women and feminists for impersonating Western notions of emancipation, its own agenda has class biases and excludes rural and poor segments of the society as it fails to challenge the existing economic relations in society.⁵⁸ The JI believes that Islam has given enough rights to women, and blames the West for maligning Muslims women’s status and situation through its propaganda against Islam and Muslim societies. JI suggests that such a posture puts the professional role of the woman in confrontation with motherhood – which is the key for women to enter Heaven. It quotes many examples such as fondness of Prophet Mohammad for prayer (one of the pillars of Islamic faith) and women alike, emphasis on treating wives well, his love for his wives and daughters, suggesting that, “our civilisation is so wealthy, when it concerns women, that as compared to it, the Western culture seems a mere beggar”.

These writings selectively compare Islamic beliefs with current norms in Western societies and Christianity, rejecting the Western civilisation and declaring its values regarding women as vague and inferior.⁵⁹ The JI views Western ideas of “freedom and equality” as deception devoid of any “philosophical or intellectual thought... or moral ground” – a political and economic need arising after WWII and industrial revolution. It questions gender equality, and affirms that gender relations in Islam are not based on equality but on complimentary relationship between men and women. Men are assigned the role of the guardian based on the “law of attraction” and that equals cannot attract each other. The view that equals cannot be attracted to each other seems to be at odds with many other arguments that the JI has constructed as the basis for demanding segregation of sexes in public space. It also criticises the West for pushing the idea of equality in the psychological, mental, emotional and physical spheres, and as a result the institution of marriage is declining in the West.⁶⁰ The JI literature ignores the fact that within Islam, there have been voices and struggle and alternate paradigms for the role and rights of women. In contrast to these views, the TJ emphasises the equality of gender roles required by men and women to the required for preaching, travel and performing the same duties and chores for religious purposes.⁶¹

During Zia-ul Huq's rule, the Jamaat vehemently supported his Islamisation agenda and the introduction of Hudood Laws in Pakistan. While women's groups were protesting against the introduction of these discriminatory laws, the Jamaat's women's wing was rallying publicly in support of the laws that reduced the value of a woman's evidence in court to half that of a man and put the onus of proving rape on the victims.⁶² The literature available on JI's website, takes the position that unless a complete Islamic system is implemented, the enforcement of a few laws would not bring the desired effect, and that they are opposed to the verdicts given by people's courts (panchayats and jirgas). However, in the parliament, it has taken an ambiguous position on the demand for repealing of Hudood laws, and has declaring that these are British laws sprinkled over with a few Islamic laws.

The Hudood Ordinance is, no doubt, a man-made law, but Hudood (limits) by themselves are part of Divine laws, so there can be no debate on these regulations. If there is any mistake in drafting the Divine rules, it should be pointed out and corrected, but fingers should not be raised against the Divine rules themselves, which are above any criticism or degradation by human beings.⁶³

Since most issues concerning gender relations fall under personal law, the criteria for selection and implementation of "true Islam" is crucial. As a norm orthodox traditions are invoked instead of having a wholesome theological debate. Such traditionalist views have very specific implications for women. The emergence of fundamentalism has resulted in fact from a challenge to the traditional patriarchal structures and the process of identity creation in situations of social and economic crisis.⁶⁴ The JI has recently taken a position that in rape cases, one woman's complain should suffice, and in case of husband accusing wife of adultery, wife's statement should suffice—though the marriage would become unlawful. However, these views are mere symbolic since JI has never extended support to any parliamentary initiative to amend or repeal Hudood Laws. Similarly it rejects honour killings yet supports laws of *Qisas* and *Diyat* and the Blasphemy Act, labelling the activists for women's rights as pawns of US, and recommends a complete system of Islamic laws.⁶⁵

The Jamaat claims to be making great efforts to raise the level of political consciousness amongst women through education and training. The JI's Women's Wing not only claims to strive for enhancing and elevating the

awareness of women on local, national and international political issues but also for fulfilling its responsibility as political representatives. The JI however has criticised the increased proportion (33 per cent) of female representation in local bodies as incompatible with Pakistan's religious, social and cultural values. At present, it has one women member in the Senate, six in the National Assembly, nine in the Provincial Assemblies and 1250 in local bodies (known as Al-Khidmat Group).⁶⁶ The JI formed the government in NWFP with the alliance of other religious groups, and has launched the Islamisation of laws in the province. It has also opposed various bills introduced in the National assembly to repeal Hudood Laws, declaring them Islamic despite the continuous controversy.

The JI formally criticises feudalism, growing corruption, concentration of wealth and its impact on politics. It says rural women are ignorant of fundamental rights, and urges the government to reform the basic conditions of women. It asserts: "Politics, statesmanship, military services are the men's field" while women should stay at home as they are responsible to God for family matters while men are for providing. Jamaat aims to establish an Islamic state that will have the responsibility "to spread education, eradicate corruption and give an atmosphere of peace" and demands the formation of a "council of veteran women judges, women educators -women from different walks of life, who can give proposals for women's development. These proposals would need to be approved by the assemblies. This is only possible when the foundation of an Islamic government is laid."⁶⁷ Jamaat criticises the appalling state of human rights in Pakistan, and takes the position that the existing system is rife with nepotism. It of course ignores the fact that its own top leadership has also been criticised for nominating female relatives in elections to the national assembly and senate – and Jamaat Amer's daughter is one of the nominees in the assembly.

Conclusion

Women's involvement in radical Islamic movements, redefines their subordinate identities and subjectivities as ideal Muslim women. Both JI and TJ share similarities on their perception of gender hierarchies and support extreme patriarchal notions of male superiority – declaring men as her master, based on weak (*za'if*) and concocted (*mauzu*) traditions (hadith) attributed to the Prophet and in contradiction and complete

violation of the *Quranic* mandate of gender equality. They reinforce the image of the submissive wife, weaker sex and glorified motherhood. One major concern arising from such portrayals is that women are seen only in relation to men and not as an individual human being. They are therefore deprived of any protection and rights that they can demand as an individual and a citizen. The interesting element in the participatory role of women in these groups is their inherent contradictions in picking examples and illustrations from the *Quran* as well as historical traditions. However, many women participate voluntarily and enthusiastically in the projects of female Subordination, and confinement within the patriarchal and orthodox tradition. Both these movements compare ideal and model women with “vulnerable, insecure and pervert Western women” and emphasise a particular form of veil and dress for women, along with a lower status than men. They view this lower status of women as ordained in religious dogma –and approve mobility and role within the family and the community as active agents in the Islamisation process. However, women remain passive collaborators in the project designed to curb all assertion and agency amongst them, reinforcing the traditional gender division of labour, carving presumably a new role for women in an orthodox fashion - not a significant departure from traditional gender norms.⁶⁸

Though women engaged in radical and revivalist Islamic movements are not directly involved in militancy or terrorism yet inadvertently they play a pivotal role as creators of an environment that nurtures and justifies these radical positions. They are willing partners of their own subordination and subjectivity and share power and authority otherwise denied to them as women. Though they are not always able to cut across the boundaries of class yet they ecstatically perform roles cut out for them by men in these movements. Their commitment and participation in the orthodox agenda, creation of a domestic milieu conducive for jihadi activism, partnership in the revivalism of early Islam, negation of alternate opinions within Islam and belligerent opposition to the non-Muslim world qualifies them to be regarded as active players in these movements. Though not yet involved in training militants, financing or planning and organising terrorist missions, they support radical Islam, glorify martyrdom, and incite intolerance by rejecting moderate and progressive Islam and modern secularism.

In societies, where multiple layers of discrimination (class, caste, kinship, tribe, ethnicity, urban/structural location, social status, wealth, and

profession) exist, these movements assign a value to their role and contribution, which otherwise are largely considered insignificant. Despite assertions that poverty and low literacy are harbingers of militancy and terrorism, recent trends suggest otherwise as young men on suicidal missions are well educated – many of them in western secular institutions and belong to urban middle class families. Many studies and news reports have suggested that a significant portion of new jihadis belong to rural areas, willing to serve the religious missions. These contentions may be relevant in many contexts, however it must be noted that the significant number of jihadis do not belong to *madrassas* (religious schools) but come through the public school systems. The growing urban phenomenon would remain problematic as frustrated youth are attempting to find solace in religiosity and displaying it by donning the veil. The trends of religiosity and radical religiosity are not simple to tackle, as people living within intense hierarchies with lower status and marked social distinctions, are striving to redefine themselves and struggling to be accepted locally as well as globally. Underneath there lies a desire to acquire some form of agency or significant status, that is sought to be compensated by adopting “ostentatious religiosity,” especially through service as a *jehadi* and ultimately as martyr or mother and sister of a martyr— a losing battle of acceptance in the vocabulary of power, privilege and prestige.

References/End Notes

- ¹ After 9/11, I tried to interview women belonging to Al-Huda, one branch in charge agreed at first but on the day of appointment was not available, without assigning any reason and never returned my numerous calls. Later, I found that she suspected that I am working on behalf of an intelligence agency and since in the post 9/11, 2001 scenario, the military regime of Musharraf was perceived as being hard on various religious groups, she therefore decided to refrain from speaking to me. However, I was able to get hold of some women who regularly attend these gatherings, who revealed that the group has maintained an apolitical posture since its inception and has supporters and followers among the wives of upper rank military personnel and civil servants. I was impressed by the manner in which these groups operate and have managed to survive, despite all these contradictions, which at times are obvious among their leadership. Its founder Dr. Farhat Hashmi (with a PhD from Glasgow) recently settled in Canada and offering various courses on Islam for women.
- ² My observations are contrary to the research conducted by Shirkatgah that in rural Punjab the ratio of women getting information from Maulvi is fairly low. My living experience however, presented a different picture, as women consult

on a number of matters, spiritual treatment for minor ailments such as headaches, fever, as well as issues relating to marriage, compatibility etc.

- ³ Mumtaz Ahmad, "The Politics of War: Islamic Fundamentalisms in Pakistan" in James Piscatori, (ed.), *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis*, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Chicago, 1991, p. 156.
- ⁴ Barbra D. Metcalf, "Islamic Argument in Pakistan", *Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs'* in Barbra D. Metcalf, *Islamic Contentions: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 240.
- ⁵ Mariam Abou Zahab, and Oliver Roy, *Islamist Networks: The Afghan-Pakistan Connection*, Hurst & Co, London, 2002, pp.53, 74.
- ⁶ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4, p. 267.
- ⁷ Barbra D. Metcalf, "Women and Men in a Contemporary Pietist Movement" in Amrita Basu, and Patricia Jeffery, (eds), *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998, p. 109.
- ⁸ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4. p.266. See also, Sadia Rahat, "Reality of Objections on Hudood Ordinance", at <http://www.khawateen.org/article/ordinance.htm> (Accessed February 12, 2006)
- ⁹ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4. p.279.
- ¹⁰ Mumtaz Ahmad, no. 3. p. 170.
- ¹¹ Barbra D. Metcalf, "Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs" in Barbra D. Metcalf, *Islamic Contentions: Essays on Muslims in India and Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, pp.267, 280.
- ¹² Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, pp. 128-30. See also Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 7. p. 113.
- ¹³ Barbara D. Metcalf, "New Medinas: The Tablighi Jama'at in America and Europe" in Barbara Metcalf Daly, (ed) *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, at <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft2s2004p0/> (Accessed January 31, 2006)
- ¹⁴ Yoginder Sikand, "Women and the Tablighi Jama'at" *QALANDAR - Islam and Interfaith Relations in South Asia*, February 2005, at <http://www.islaminterfaith.org/feb2005/index.htm> (Accessed January 31, 2006)
- ¹⁵ Barbara D. Metcalf, no. 13.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Frederic Grare, *Political Islam in the Indian Subcontinent: The Jamaat-i-Islam*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 40, 43, 47, 49, 64, 68,114.
- ¹⁸ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Violence and Terrorism: Feminist Observations on Islamist Movements, States, and the International System" *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 1 (2), Summer 2002.

- ¹⁹ Initially, Ilyas tried to start his preaching from Saudi Arabia as he felt that the Muslims of that country required such preaching more than India. But ironically, he was not permitted to do his missionary venture in that land from where Islam had originated. The then Saudi Government seemed suspicious that Ilyas' preaching might become political and arouse feelings against puritanical Government.
- ²⁰ Martin E. Marty, and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *The Fundamentalism Project*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 707.
- ²¹ R. Upadhyay, "Islamic Revivalism: The curious case of Tablighi Jamaat" South Asia Analysis Group, Paper No. 569 at <http://www.saag.org/papers6/paper569.html> (Accessed February 1, 2006)
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Alex Alexiev, "Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad's Stealthy Legions" *The Middle East Quarterly*, 12 (1), January 2005.
- ²⁴ R. Upadhyay, no. 21.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 7. p. 110.
- ²⁷ R. Upadhyay, no. 21.
- ²⁸ Barbra D. Metcalf, "Living Hadith in the Tablighi Jamaat", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 52(3), August 1993, pp. 584-608.
- ²⁹ Peter Van der Veer, no. 12.
- ³⁰ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 13.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² International Crisis Group Report, March 2005, Quoted in Zoya Pylenko, "Central Asia's New Missionaries" ISN Security Watch (05/11/05) at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch> (Accessed January 25, 2006)
- ³³ Zoya Pylenko, Ibid.
- ³⁴ Alex Alexiev, no. 23.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Mariam Abou Zahab, no. 5. p. 58.
- ³⁸ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-I Islami of Pakistan*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, p. 221, See also, Mariam Abou Zahab, no. 5. p. 20.
- ³⁹ Mumtaz Ahmad, no. 3. p. 160.
- ⁴⁰ Alex Alexiev, no. 23.
- ⁴¹ Valentine M. Moghadam, no. 18.
- ⁴² R. Upadhyay, no. 21.

- ⁴³ Metcalf has dealt extensively with various aspects regarding women in these movements and how they negotiate their freedom and rights within the parameters of orthodox Islam. For further details see her following works, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982. See also, *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984. See also, "Women and Men in a Contemporary Pietist Movement", in Amrita Basu and Patricia Jeffery, (eds.) *Appropriating Gender: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*, Routledge, New York, 1998, pp. 107-122. See also *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996.
- ⁴⁴ Alex Alexiev, no. 23.
- ⁴⁵ Concise Chores of Women in 24 Hours, (Mastoorat Kay 24 Ghanta Kay Mukhtasar Kam) Tablighi literature circulated among Jamaat, published in India. n.d.
- ⁴⁶ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 7. p. 113.
- ⁴⁷ Yoginder Sikand, no.14.
- ⁴⁸ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 14.
- ⁴⁹ "Degradation of Civilization and Modesty", at <http://khawateen.org/article/civilization.htm> (Accessed February 12, 2006)
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, no. 38. p. 58.
- ⁵² Ibid. pp. 77-78.
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- ⁵⁵ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4. p. 246.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 247
- ⁵⁷ no. 49.
- ⁵⁸ Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4. p. 253-54 .
- ⁵⁹ Shahnawaz Farooqi, "Heaven vs. Professional Life", at <http://www.islamicity.com/forum/forum> (Accessed February 12, 2006)
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- ⁶² Barbra D. Metcalf, no. 4. p. 244 .
- ⁶³ Rahat, no. 8.

⁶⁴ Amrita Chhachhi, "The State, Religious Fundamentalism and Women - Trends in South Asia" *WLUML Dossier 4*, August/September 1988

⁶⁵ Rahat, no. 8.

⁶⁶ "Political Activities", at <http://www.khawateen.org/political.htm> (Accessed February 12, 2006)

⁶⁷ "33 per cent Representation of women in local bodies", at <http://www.khawateen.org/article/womenrepr.htm> (Accessed February 12, 2006)

⁶⁸ Yoginder Sikand, no. 14.

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