

NEWSHEET

VOL. XXVII, NO. 1, MARCH, 2015

WAF set to mark Pakistan Women's Day



February 12, 2015

February 12 marks a milestone in the history of the women's movement in Pakistan.

On this day in 1983, women defied the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq by taking out a public demonstration in Lahore despite martial law regulations that banned all political activities, processions and public protests.

The immediate catalyst for the demonstration was the proposed law of evidence, which would effectively have reduced the testimony of women to half that of men; the accumulative trigger was the dictatorship's unrelenting push to rescind women's rights and reduce their status to half a human.

This demonstration became the symbol of women's resistance to all forms of oppression and of their unshakeable belief in an equal, equitable and just democratic order guaranteeing the full compendium of human rights for all, in particular for those who have been historically marginalized.

On Pakistan Women's Day, Women's Action Forum (WAF) has saluted the heroism of all people, especially women, who have continued to struggle for an egalitarian, democratic and progressive society and world order. In a statement the WAF said since 1981, Women's Action Forum has consistently fought to protect and promote women and human rights for all.

Events since then confirm that WAF's concerns articulated over the last three decades have had precisely those consequences that WAF feared. The militarization and Islamization have brought the country to a point where its very existence is at stake.

In addition to that, the meeting also included a brief discussion on the National Action Plan and its targets for achieving gender equality and elimination of violence against women.

(The Nation)

Working since 1975 as a leading women's rights organization, Shirkat Gah (SG) continues to contribute towards sustainable change across its core focus areas that include (i) family/ personal status law matters (ii) sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (iii) a gendered perspective in sustainable development, green economics and globalization (iv) new areas of women's leadership and peace-building.

In Memoriam: Najma Sadeque

By Zahra Chughtai

January 15, 2015

Senior journalist Najma Sadeque breathed her last in Karachi on January 8th.

Acclaimed as a human rights activist and environmentalist, she raised her voice to lobby against injustice wherever she saw it. Her journalism went hand in hand with her activism. Throughout her career, in which she wrote for the leading English language publications of Pakistan, she was known for her unwavering commitment to causes that were close to her heart. A prominent member of WAF, Sadeque, along with a group of like-minded women, went on to establish Shirkat Gah, a resource centre for women.

(Newsline Magazine)



‘Harassment’ case against Radio Pakistan official

February 2, 2015

The district police have registered a case against an officer of the Radio Pakistan Multan on the allegation of hurling threats at a radio jockey for lodging complaint of sexual harassment.

The Radio Pakistan director general suspended the officer from service a couple of days ago.

The Cantonment police, on the complaint of a radio jockey, registered a case (FIR No145/15) under section 25-D of Telegraph Act against the officer.

The complainant alleged that she was receiving threats from the official after she lodged complaints about sexual harassment against him at various forums.

The complainant told this correspondent that on May 16, 2014 she sent a complaint to the higher authorities of Radio Pakistan against the official who sexually harassed her during

a live programme after she refused to meet him in private.

She said she was banned from hosting the programme in July.

In October, she said, she sent a legal notice to the suspect and lodged her complaint with the provincial ombudsman the next month.

She said a three-member committee comprising Controller News Radio Pakistan Zuhra Usmani, in-charge Human Resource Faryal Malik and Deputy Controller Legal Asghar Mehmood Pirzada was constituted to probe the allegation.

She said the committee recorded her statement besides that of the official and she was told that she would be informed about the findings.

“I have not been informed about the findings so far. Rather, the official has been suspended and now I am receiving threats,” she said.

She said no action had been taken on her complaint to the ombudsman.

(Dawn)



Violence against women 'most rampant' in Punjab

February 13, 2015

By Xari Jalil

Keeping in view the shocking statistics of incidence of violence against women in Punjab, the highest in the country, it has become all the more important to legislate effectively to curb the menace, besides making efforts to sensitize society on the issue.

According to the data gathered by Aurat Foundation, as many as 7,010 cases of violence against women were reported in Punjab in 2014. Similarly, 1,707 cases of kidnap were reported during the year, while those of rape and gang rape numbered 1,408. Honour killings too were highest in Punjab compared to the other provinces, coming to around 340 reported cases. The NGO recorded that six women were kidnapped, four raped, three committed suicide and six were murdered every single day in Pakistan, in the same year.

In this backdrop, the introduction of the Domestic Violence Bill in Punjab has become a necessity. The bill still lies pending with the social welfare department.

In this connection, the importance of the National Women's Day cannot be ignored as its history is rooted in violence against women.

Nighat Khan of the Women's Action Forum (WAF) remembers the terrible day when the women also protested against the Law of Evidence. She says that they were to march to the Lahore High Court on The Mall where "massive numbers of police were deployed". She says the situation took a sudden turn when late Habib Jalib read out one of his poems and the police attacked him.

"It was as if the people just suddenly exploded. We were so angry then that we broke through the police cordons and willingly got beaten up by them. Some were thrashed very badly and many of them were arrested. But our resolve was so strong that we continued on to the high court till we reached there."

One thing she remembers is the support that the public lent to the protesters. "Shopkeepers, mostly men, gave us water and wet towels to counter teargas, and helped us get up from the ground. That gave us a new passion and energy to move on," she said.

She says that in a recent informal gathering when young women from different backgrounds were asked what angered them most as women, they replied with only personal experiences.

(Dawn)

A TALE OF TWO LUMS

November 7, 2014

By Shmyla Khan

If you cry harassment in a crowded Pakistani university, you might just end up with a fairly insightful lens through which to view the gender politics of Pakistani society, particularly the elite. On October 31, news broke that the Federal Ombudsman directed the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) to fire a faculty member found guilty of sexual harassment. The internal inquiry committee had failed to hold Professor Abid Hussain Imam guilty, despite finding instead that his actions were “unbecoming of a professor at LUMS” for “use of inappropriate jokes many times with sexual innuendoes and undertones, and obnoxious language.” The committee asked Professor Imam to render an apology, and he allegedly preferred to resign—but the Ombudsman found that LUMS was unable to produce any proof of said resignation.

Many have asked that if the LUMS committee conceded to inappropriate behavior on part of the professor, and he did not deny that the incident took place, then why was it not deemed sexual harassment? The CCTV video footage, prime evidence in the case, clearly shows physical contact between the professor and the complainant. The case is contingent on the nature of the physical contact; one side contends that it was a mere “tap on the shoulder,” while the complaint asserts that her shoulder zip was opened. The Federal Ombudsman agreed with the latter.

In any case, the debate about “what really happened” obscures the larger one: what exactly constitutes sexual harassment, and who gets to define it.

There seems to be a fundamental confusion

between sexual harassment, assault and rape.

It is this acceptance of small acts of harassment as part of the everyday while holding up rape or physical hurt as the ultimate crime that contributes to the trivialization of misogyny as a non-event.

Defenders to Imam have chosen to paint the incident in light of the shrinking space for liberalism at LUMS. The argument goes that this case stems from a failure of students to accept a “liberal” environment where people of the opposite sex can have candid conversations and casually touch one another without it being an issue. This conflation of women standing up for their rights and the alleged religiousization of LUMS is hilarious, ironic, but mostly irrelevant. The code of conduct for teachers vis-à-vis their students stands in any country, physical touching is out of bounds—especially when it is unwelcome. This image of the conservative LUMS student implies that girls should learn to take a joke and if they feel uncomfortable in a social interaction laced with sexual undertones then they are not liberal enough.

The biggest victim to the behemoth that LUMS has become is the complainant’s narrative. Any conception of her as a human being with possible feelings was discarded in the quest to defend Imam. Former professors (who had taught the complainant), in a petition printed in *Pakistan Today*, a local newspaper, question everything: her dress, her emotional state and her agency—attributing the whole incident to departmental politics.

(Quartz India)

HARASSMENT

THE PRIVILEGED KIND

November 4, 2014

By Maryam Wasif Khan

For my first trips to Ichra Bazar and Shahalmi, I recall, quite clearly even now, draping my twelve-year old self in not one, but two oversized shawls, covering and re-covering every possible inch of flesh in order to shield myself from the possibility of being touched or groped by a passing stranger. What we never talk about, of course, are other experiences. Unwanted touches, gropes, repeated incidents of exposure that we suffered from people close to us, around us, relatives, friends of parents, trusted family retainers. Recent incidents and the discourse that's surrounded them has made it abundantly clear that we would only speak up in spaces where we had power and privilege over the men who tried to harass us. The man who harasses or molests females, in the minds of most wealthy, usually well-shielded (by drivers, guards, among others), English-speaking, cosmopolitan—liberal even—Pakistani women is an illiterate, frustrated pedestrian, normally found in public spaces such as bazars, buses, melas, and parks. There is no other possibility of harassment in our minds; except for the kind we meet with when we are in public spaces. Improper or inappropriate touching of our bodies is not sexual harassment when it comes from someone who is familiar, well known in our social circles, or "educated," usually from abroad.

As for the LUMS sexual harassment case, the accused could not be guilty, people said, because they know him. The accused

could not be guilty, people said, because he felt sorry afterwards. The accused could not be guilty, people said, because he was an educated man. The accused could not be guilty, people said, among other things, because it was "just a brush," "harmless." The accused could not be guilty, people even said, because it was the victim who was "emotionally disturbed."

But most of all, people seemed to say, the accused could not be guilty because he is one of us.

Beyond referring to the victim as "emotionally disturbed," this media-savvy, twittering defense team of lawyers, friends, and socialites decided in a public statement that the Federal Ombudsman's office, set up for the support of the Protection of Women Against Harassment in the Workplace Act (2010) also acted improperly. Does the Federal Ombudsman not understand that wealth, education, brilliance, and stature equate to dignity, decency, and respect for women?

Gender and class, one would like to imagine, are different and big deals, two separate behemoths that assail our consciences at suitably convenient times. And yet, the past week seems to tell a different story: class gives you the ability to rewrite and reorder feminine narratives with consequences so perverse that every single one of us becomes a loser. Class, this time around, has decided that the women who speak up are either hysterical and weak, or calculating and conniving, and therefore must use every bit of its social clout to carry out its own version of what gender relations should look like.

(The Nation)



National Women's Day

February 13, 2015

By Myra Imran

National Women's Day is commemorated all across the country on February 12 to mark the struggle initiated by women's rights activists against the anti-women policies and legislation of General Zia-ul-Haq.

Two main events organised on the occasion included a panel discussion at Nomad Art Gallery organised by Women Action Forum (WAF) and open forum in front of National Press Club arranged by Insani Huqooq Itehad (IHI), a coalition of rights activists and civil society organizations.

A charter of demand was issued at the end of panel discussion organized by WAF. The charter demanded that women security should be ensured and their dignity with impunity should be protected at state levels.

The open forum by IHI was dedicated to the martyrs of terrorism and extremism – the women and girls who have died over the past decade. Representative women from Lady Health Workers Association, minorities and teachers from Peshawar Army Public School were also present.

Women rights activist from Peshawar Rakhshanda Naz said that after Zia, things might have improved in some parts of the



country but not in KP. "The ideology deeply penetrated in all government departments which made future policies for us," she said adding the space to work is shrinking for civil society organizations in these areas.

Lady Health Workers Association Chairperson Bushra Arain demanded of the government to protect the rights of lady health workers. "Without any pay since past six months, we are still performing our duties despite security threats. When a lady health worker gets injured in target killing, not even an ambulance is provided to her in time. If killed, no government department helps their families. All these injustices compel us to come to roads," she said. She urged civil society to go to remote areas to protect those women who face intense form of violence.

(The News)





CRIMES OF 'HONOUR'

November 18, 2014

When a category of crime draws sustenance from age-old cultural attitudes, particularly those pertaining to the concept of honour and a woman's place in society, legislation alone is an inadequate deterrent. Nevertheless, a beginning must be made, and so it was with the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2004 when, for the first time, 'honour' crimes were defined in the Pakistan Penal Code.

The same piece of legislation also effected an important amendment in Section 311 of the PPC. This section specifies the penalties that can be awarded by a judge regardless of whether or not a compromise has been reached in a case of murder, including honour killings.

The amendment set a minimum punishment of 10 years' imprisonment in cases where the offence is found to have been committed on the pretext of honour but, crucially, it did not take away judicial discretion in awarding punishment in such cases, or other instances of murder.

This meant that many husbands, brothers, fathers and other male relatives (victims of honour killing are overwhelmingly female) still manage to evade punishment.

The Punjab government, reportedly spurred by the horrific murder of Farzana Iqbal by her family, in broad daylight, adjacent to the premises of the Lahore High Court in May this year, has now taken an important step towards strengthening the law pertaining to honour crimes.

It has proposed, among other amendments, that the word "may" be replaced with "shall" in Section 311, thereby removing judicial discretion and making the punishment mandatory in cases of honour killing whether or not a compromise has been struck.

That such an amendment should be necessary is largely a comment on the cultural attitudes to honour which impact how — indeed whether — such cases are investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated upon. These attitudes hobble the case from the outset.

Quasi legal mechanisms of justice, such as *jirgas*, often hand in glove with an unsympathetic law-enforcement apparatus, discourage victims' families from going to court.

The police, a product of the same society that gives rise to such crimes, brings its own biases to the investigation. Delays at the trial stage render a victim's family susceptible to social pressures because of the 'shame' associated with pursuing such cases.

Chauvinistic judges sometimes allow the plea of "grave and sudden provocation" to colour their judgments. The issue must be addressed holistically: plugging loopholes in the law must go together with the sensitisation of police, medico-legal staff and public prosecutors.

(Dawn)

The gendered face of calamity



January 31, 2015

By Ayesha Qaisrani

The root cause of almost all grassroots level issues in Pakistan is poverty, which has a woman's face. In times of adversity, gender issues are accentuated. The recent drought of Thar region is a glaring example of how climate change and natural disasters are not gender neutral. The resulting suffering was most intensely inflicted on women and children.

As a result of little economic opportunities in the region and declining livelihood options, most men of this area have migrated out of the region, leaving behind women to take care of the children and carry out daily household as well as external chores. Left to fend for themselves in their routine activities, the women of Thar are burdened with the responsibility of taking care of their children, collecting fuel, wood and food, along with carrying out the subsistence farming activities and managing the livestock.

In the most impoverished households, women undergo the maximum intensity of income as well as multidimensional poverty.

In such emergency situations, the health of women suffers the most. In case of food shortage as a result of cut in availability, access and utilisation of food, women are the first to skip meals. With resulting malnutrition, their hemoglobin, vitamins, calcium and iron levels drop, exposing them to a number of serious health vulnerabilities. The situation is worse for pregnant and lactating mothers. On top of these issues, the dearth of proper healthcare system and lack of birth-attendants and doctors make matters worse for the sufferers. Moreover, lack of female doctors in the area is another excuse for not letting the ladies of the household to be checked by male doctors since it is against the prevailing social and cultural values.

As incomes dwindle and hunger strikes, domestic violence against women becomes a common practice in most households in the area. Use of brackish and saline water has led to a health condition in which bodies start looking old and wrinkled after the age of 15 years. The result is early child marriages of girls and higher mortality rates in case of early pregnancies. In the current wave of drought in Tharparkar, I have also heard incidents of children being sold, especially daughters for a few hundred rupees so that other members of the family could be fed with at least a day's meal.

Suicide cases in Tharparkar are considered the only way out for some poverty-ridden households in events of drought and famine. The number of reported suicides for women is far greater than that of men. The cases of suicides seem to be increasing with every cycle of drought. Apart from that, as reported by Dr. Lakesh Kumar Khatri, a doctor working in the area, 75 percent of the mental illness cases in the area, as a result of drought and famine, are that of women.

(Pakistan Today)

Married, feminist and(terribly) middle-class in Pakistan

November 21, 2014

By Sheherazad Hussain

I just got mistaken for a prostitute, a predicament that is probably familiar to most women who have dated in Pakistan. Or who have sat in a park. Or worn jeans. Or worn a niqab. Or walked on the streets. This is the second time this has happened in my life, and it is perhaps telling that in both instances I was with the same person.

The first time it happened, I had just moved back home from the US after college. One night after dinner, we started talking while he was driving me home, and we thought it would be a good idea to park outside Alhamra Cultural Center in Lahore, Pakistan, which we happened to be passing just then, and finish our conversation. We didn't notice the swarm of cops descending upon us. In the next moment, there were raps on the car window (his dad's) and pot bellied moustached uniformed leering men looking me up and down and accusing us of zina and threatening to call our parents, which is of course a desi middle class girl's worst nightmare. "Thank God I'm at least wearing shalwar kameez today," I remember thinking.

Fast forward six and a half years, we are now married to each other, and have done our best not to bring up that incident in the preceding years.



We are waiting one night outside a house. Cops in Pakistan, like most predators, hunt in packs, and a five-member one is suddenly honking at us in a huge, intimidating cop car and talking on the radio and of course doing their best to take in exactly what I look like and how I am dressed (in jeans, sneakers and a scoop-necked tshirt, oh the scandal of it). By which I mean there are about five ugly noses glued to my glass window, trying to look down my shirt. The gentlemen from the police department declared that a house nearby had complained about us sitting there (mind you, we had been waiting for only about five minutes), and requested them to investigate our shameful behavior.

Despite trying, "sharam" and "log kya kahayN ge" continue to dictate so many of my actions and beliefs. Like other good girls, I have been raised with the idea that policemen in Pakistan are so cretinous that a good woman simply must not defile herself by interacting with one in any capacity whatsoever. I stormed out of the car, got in the faces of five desi cops – in my shameless western outfit no less – and proceeded to yell at them and shame them for the next several minutes. I continued to yell at their backs as they fled on state-owned motorcycles and a car paid for by my tax money.

(The Friday Times)

Female corporate powerhouses: In the corridors of power

February 15, 2015

By Marina Faryal

At a glance, power still seems a disproportionately male domain. But time and again, there are trailblazers who crack that code. They see opportunity where others see a disadvantage. Driving this point home are some of Pakistan's prominent female executives who have overcome multiple impediments to excel in their field and stand as reminders of what one can achieve if they put their mind to it.



Jehan Ara, responsible for developing the P@SHA brand, is a force to reckon with in the male-dominated field of Information Technology.

Zeelaf Munir is the Chairperson of the Executive Management Board at English Biscuit Manufacturers (Private) Limited.



Tahira Raza is the President of the First Women Bank Limited.

Madiha Khalid is the Head of Human Resources for Shell Pakistan.



Shafaq Omer is the Director of Human Resources for Unilever.



Aatiqa Lateef is the Group Chief of Staff at Byco Industries Incorporated.

(Express Tribune)

Women should claim the Right to **Risk** in the city

December 13, 2014

Unfortunately, as it happens, we have yet another round of victim bashing after the December 5 rape case – this one happening just days before the two-year anniversary of the horrific Delhi gang rape and murder that brought thousands of protesters on the street. Every time, soon after the details of the crime are reported and the accused is arrested, the inevitable questions begin.

“Sleep?” people ask shrilly. “You mean she fell asleep?” Presumably, these are people who have never slept on their way home after an exhausting day at work.

Safety for women is a false goal. It comes with all kinds of restrictions, conditions and moral policing. The right to risk is a far more realistic and liberatory goal. In order to understand risk, we need to redefine our understanding of violence in relation to public space – to see not sexual assault but the denial of access to public space as the worst outcome for women. The demand is that women’s right to be in public space should be unquestioned whether we are assaulted or not. The right to risk is not abstract. From the perspective of the city, it must be mirrored in the provision of infrastructure. While the decision to

take certain risks must be chosen, risks must not be thrust upon women by inadequate or poor planning. The right to pleasure, by default, must include the right against violence in the shape of infrastructure like transport, street lighting, public toilets, besides policies that enable more sensitive law enforcement recognising people’s fundamental right to access public space.

It is not our intention to romanticise risk itself, for risk is a term that is already value-loaded in terms of good and bad, and desirable and undesirable women. Still, the presence of violence should not preclude the possibilities for women seeking pleasure in the city.

(Scroll.in)



Man on ‘pedal mission’ for gender equality

December 20, 2014

Rakesh Kumar Singh, a Delhi-ite, who has already cycled through two States covering 3,200 km, aims to cycle 30,000 km by March 2017. His sole aim is gender sensitisation in a society which has its fair share of misogynists. He entered Karnataka four days ago from Kerala; he will stay here for nearly two months, and during the period he plans to interact with people from different walks of life. His next stop is Bengaluru, followed by Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and so on. He hopes to cycle through all the States in India.

Rakesh told the media that the spurt in crimes against women was due to the deeply ingrained gender-equations in society. The bike with a slate in the front displays the message on gender freedom, while the piggybank on the handle, calls for generous minded people to support the cause, and his daily needs of food and shelter, with their offerings.

(The Deccan Herald)

2014

Year in Review

From the passing of one of the Arab region's most progressive constitutions enshrining women's rights to changes in legislation to provide long overdue redress to wartime survivors of sexual violence, this timeline is a selection of some of the gender equality achievements, milestones and noteworthy moments from around the world this year.

January 22, 2014: Morocco: Controversial "rape marriage law" repealed

An article in a penal code that enabled a rapist to skirt prosecution if he married his underage victim is unanimously repealed by Morocco's parliament.

January 26, 2014: Tunisia's new constitution enshrines women's rights

Tunisia passed its constitution enshrining women's rights and laying the foundations of a new democracy, considered among the most progressive Constitutions in the Arab region.

February 11, 2014: Winter Olympics: Women [finally] compete in ski jumping

It only took about 90 years for women to finally be allowed to compete in ski jumping at the Winter Olympics, held in the **Russian Federation's Sochi** 2014.

March 11, 2014: Latin America and the Caribbean:

Women at the helm Michelle Bachelet was sworn in for a second term as President of **Chile** and even before she begins announces a record number of women to her Cabinet.

March 20, 2014: Reparations for wartime survivors of sexual violence

For the first time, **Kosovo** (under UNSCR 1244/99) amends a law that will offer redress – including

health, housing and employment benefits – to survivors of sexual violence during its 1998-99 conflict.

April 1, 2014: United Kingdom: Hospitals mandated to record FGM cases

British hospitals under the National Health Service (NHS) start logging cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) for the first time.

April 15, 2014: India: Transgender people recognised as "third gender"

The Supreme Court rules that transgender people, also known as "hijras", are a third gender. This means that transgender people can legally be recognised in official documents, such as birth certificates, passports and driving licenses, at the federal and state level as transgender.

June 10, 2014 — June 13, 2014: Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict galvanizes unprecedented attention

In the largest summit of its kind, more than 1000 high-level government officials, experts, NGO members and activists from across the world come together in **London** to establish practical steps to combat sexual violence in conflict, seek reparations for wartime survivors, and to bring perpetrators to justice.

August 1, 2014: European convention on ending violence against women comes into force

A landmark Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence comes into force after receiving the required 10 ratifications from countries in the region. The legally-binding instrument, commonly referred to as the "**Istanbul Convention**", obliges governments who have signed on to take concrete steps to counter all forms of

violence against women, from domestic violence to female genital mutilation.

August 11, 2014: Record number of women on UN Security Council

Women, for the first time, comprised more than a third of the UN Security Council's 15 seats this year with Ambassadors from Argentina, Jordan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Nigeria, and the United States.

September 20, 2014: Emma Watson delivers transformative speech on feminism at the UN

As UN Women's recently appointed Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Watson launches a global solidarity campaign, HeForShe, calling on men and boys to become allies in achieving gender equality.

November 25, 2014 — December 10, 2014:

"#orangeurhood" campaign turns landmarks, neighborhoods orange

Landmarks, such as the Empire State Building in New York and the pyramids in Cairo, light up orange for the first time as part of a United Nations call to #orangeurhood on the International Day to End Violence against Women and during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence.

December 10, 2014: Malala becomes youngest recipient of Nobel Peace Prize

A tireless advocate for girls' education who nearly lost her life at the hands of the Taliban, Malala Yousafzai becomes the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize winner at age 17. Yousafzai is awarded the Prize alongside activist Kailash Satyarthi for their fight to promote and achieve children's rights.

(UN Women)



Women in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan 'worst hit' by fundamentalism

February 1, 2015

Women are the greatest victims of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the extent of the violence being inflicted upon them can no longer be ignored, an international panel of human rights campaigners has said. In a debate about jihadis, campaigners at the World Woman Festival in Oslo said that in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, women's rights were increasingly being threatened by fundamentalists who wanted to return to the Middle Ages.

Yanar Mohammed, the president of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), which runs secret shelters in Baghdad for women fleeing abuse, said Iraqi women were suffering because of policies

put in place by the US and Britain which had allowed the rise of Isis.

The festival's organiser was Deeyah Khan, who made the Emmy-winning documentary *Banaz: A Love Story*, about a British woman murdered by her family in an "honour killing". She said: "We give so much space to the villains, such as IS, yet the heroes get so little space. We are here to stand in solidarity with the heroes."

The Pakistani lawyer Hina Jilani said were ignored before the World Trade Center attacks in 2001. "We are the voices of the women who said, much before 9/11, much before the world felt the effects of jihad, 'Don't go down that road, it is dangerous', but we were silenced."

(The Independent)



Failure of Bystander Intervention

December 23, 2014

The concept of intervention feels good, evoking pleasant visions of Princes Charming protecting damsels in distress and superhero women swooping down to lasso perpetrators. Yet the bystander model implicitly allows whoever is the most skilled with violence to control the outcome of the situation and leaves women's protection up to the chance outcome of a duel. In fact, bystander intervention further serves to uphold a culture of patriarchy in which whoever can most effectively carry out violence, on institutional and physical levels, is most able to successfully carry out his agenda. There can be serious consequences to physically intervening. Bystanders who "did what they were supposed to" have ended up injured, incarcerated or killed.

The ideology of intervention continues a mainstream anti-violence narrative of "if I can help one person..." or "if this can stop/prevent one rape from happening...". This is a problematic and dangerous concept of violence. Even where bystander intervention is successful, disrupting one assault is not the same as ending violence. It's not

even violence prevention. In fact, it upholds the structure of rape culture: Individual interventions mean little when the reality is that we need to turn our entire culture on its head.

Where should we be directing our gaze and shifting our efforts to end sexual assault? The answer actually is intervention and confrontation, but not the kind that relies on non-profits and the White House to direct us. Instead, we have to work on developing deep and personal understandings of violence in our own lives. We must acknowledge how we are complicit in violence and often unknowingly violent to those who are marginalized by our social positions. This process of inner confrontation requires deep learning and engagement as a daily process. We have to grapple with the idea that violence exists within us and exorcise our collective demons while supporting victims and keeping them safe. Bystander intervention is a last-ditch effort that should be made personally with as much awareness and support possible, not an automatic responsibility.

(The New Inquiry)

Suspension is a feminist issue

October 30, 2014

The university is an intensely hierarchical space, and students are structurally positioned to seek the approval of the academic staff to whom they are entrusted. This makes students vulnerable to abuses of that power. I have a particular perspective on the general issue arising out of my own experience during my PhD, when my doctoral supervisor was suspended for sexually harassing me and several other female doctoral students.

As is always the case, his suspension took place in an atmosphere of secrecy. No one in the department was allowed to say what was happening or why the suspension had taken place. This made it possible for conspiracy theories to circulate. A story circulated that his suspension was another instance of management unfairly attacking a vulnerable professor. Secrecy did not protect me or the other women. It didn't even protect the university management. The only person it protected was the professor, whose years of abuse were hidden from the public eye.

Suspension is a feminist issue. It is necessary to protect vulnerable students from abuses of power, and the reasons for suspension should be a matter of public record. Requiring the cause of suspension to be a matter of public record would also help to make clear when and if suspension is being used in an intimidatory way by university management. So long as the motivations remain secret, it is only too easy for those who have abused students to claim that they are the victims of the hard-won process that has finally held them to some account.

(The Times Higher Education)

New Chinese laws on domestic violence

December 31, 2014

Chinese authorities recently issued the first draft law on domestic violence. While it is welcomed as a breakthrough, grave concerns remain about the obvious loopholes in the legislation. It does not cover cohabitants, divorced couples or same-sex relationships. Nor does it address sexual violence. Women's groups hope that officials will take heed of the public consultation which has just closed.

Still, it was the most significant advance that women's organisations and domestic violence intervention groups had seen in 14 years of pushing for progress, particularly because it spells out how authorities should respond to cases.

The marriage law was amended to ban domestic violence in 2001, but the existing legislation did not address the problem systematically as the draft law does. The consultation process also raised the awareness of the public and allowed it to hear the voices

of victims and grassroots advocates.

A report from the official All China Women's Federation last month said that nearly 40% of Chinese women who were married or in a relationship had experienced physical or sexual violence. In many cases, families are complicit.

The draft law states that courts must rule on requests for restraining orders within 48 hours, which should offer women greater protection. But victims must then start a lawsuit within 30 days or the order will lapse, it adds. Experts warn that means victims having to make decisions while under stress and to find the money and other resources to take up a legal case. It requires schools and hospitals to report suspected violence in some circumstances and police to look into reports of violence – but allows officers to issue a written warning if they do not believe it is serious enough to apply criminal charges or administrative punishment.

(The Guardian)



How a culture of shame perpetuates abuse



August 29, 2014

I have first-hand knowledge of the under-reported among Asian girls due to deeply entrenched cultural taboos. I'm coming forward to publicly share my own story in the hope that I can encourage others to do the same and help tear down the wall of silence that perpetuates further abuse. I grew up in a small community of a few hundred British-Pakistanis in Skipton, less than 60 miles from Rotherham. When I was 10 a neighbour started sexually abusing me. Paralysed by shame, I said nothing.

It was only after a decade away from Skipton that I was finally able to garner the courage to return and testify against my abuser. When I first told my mother about the abuse I'd suffered, she was absolutely devastated. The root of her anger was clear: I was heaping unbound shame on to my family by trying to bring the perpetrator to justice.

Once the police began the investigation another victim came forward. Sohail described how he too had been abused almost 20 years before I was. Due to our combined testimony, the perpetrator was jailed for eight years.

Although Sohail and I had removed a proven

paedophile from the community and helped empower another woman to end her torture, we were not celebrated. On the contrary, we were shunned. During our investigation it became clear that for three decades many other women had suffered at the hands of our abuser, but they had refused to testify against him because of the indelible stigma it would bring. I learned that the parents of at least one of the victims had known their child had been abused but had done nothing. We also discovered that the larger community had long been aware of rumours of abuse by my neighbour but had chosen to ignore them.

This problem isn't about or religion race: it's about a culture where notions of shame result in the blaming of victims rather than perpetrators. I am and always will be proud of my Pakistani heritage, but I firmly believe community leaders must take responsibility for the fact that the taboos that prevent others from identifying perpetrators and supporting victims enable further abuse. And those taboos must be challenged.

(The Guardian)

Forced Marriages



January 31, 2015

A woman writes an open letter to her mother and family regarding her forced marriage.

It was a marriage that I had never acquiesced to, with a stranger from India. I had repeatedly told you and my father that I did not want this marriage, but you had forced me, often with the threat that you would take your life if I did not go through with it. So I did.

I have no memory of that wedding day. Though I do remember I was unwell beforehand and lost a lot of weight. Do you remember it? I was later diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder so, thankfully, my mind had somehow blanked out most of the memories that caused me such distress. It has been a long time since those days. I have survived 10 years and I have flourished with a lot of help, but there have been points of acute depression, self-harm and destructive behaviour. I still find it painfully difficult to maintain intimate relationships.

In the past few years, I have begun to campaign on these issues. I have written widely on honour-based violence and forced marriage. I wish I

had known then that what was happening to me was such a grave injustice; I was far too scared to walk out, and quite naive. When I speak to women now, I tell them that the pain of estrangement is preferable to sacrificing yourself for your family. Marrying a man against your expressed wishes will harm you in ways you can't yet envisage.

(The Guardian)



A poet with a distinct accent

October 19, 2014

By Naeem Sadhu

From making pickles with traditional recipes to knitting poems with an eccentric diction, she believes in romancing and celebrating every aspect of life.

Renowned poet, radio broadcaster and political activist Nasreen Anjum Bhatti was born in Quetta and raised in an art-friendly environment.

"I grew up looking at drawings by my father; my cousins also used to draw a lot. I clearly remember Saeed Akhtar, who was our family friend and like an elder brother to me, doing portraits. I can say I lived a rich childhood," she vividly recalls.

She was in junior school when her family moved to Sindh. After earning a scholarship, she joined the Lahore College for Women to earn a bachelors degree in Fine Arts. She started her professional career in 1971 as a producer at Radio Pakistan, Lahore, right after doing her master's.

"Radio Pakistan was an institution that helped a great deal in my grooming as an artist. We were lucky to have the company of music and literary legends like Amanat Ali Khan, Wazeer Afzal, G.A. Chishti, Zaheer Kashmiri, Sufi Tabassum, Nasir Kazmi and Munir Niazi," she recalls.

She has been composing poetry since a tender age. After moving to Lahore for studies, her interaction with literary icons like Dr. Anees Nagi, Dr. Aziz-ul Haque, Intizar Hussain, Abdullah Hussain and Kishwar Naheed helped her a lot in understanding the popular art and literary movements of 1970s.

"This generation of writers was very energetic and haunted by the pain and agony of partition. Even though we were the backbenchers at the houseful literary sessions at Pak Tea House, we were proudly a part of this fraternity," she says.

She talks about the politically-charged environment of the 70s and 80s with great enthusiasm, "the age of Sartre and Albert Camus."

"Being a government employee, I could not



participate openly in political activities but I used to go distribute flyers at night with fellow comrades."

"The assassination of Bhutto created a shock wave and it was the beginning of the literature of resistance in Pakistan," she adds.

"I was never inclined to write traditional romantic lines glorifying the love life of an individual.

My romance deals with the collective pain and pleasure of folks and their class struggle. So I created an idiom of my own. It was striking and shocking for the conventional poets and critics," she explains.

She is grateful to Najm Hosain Syed, who encouraged her to go for innovative experiments amid hostile criticism from literary pundits.

The pro-people and radical poets, especially Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain and Latif Bhittai, have been her permanent sources of inspiration and energy.

In her poetry, she creates surrealist images with a rich diction. Nasreen effortlessly knits poems with a sharp craft and facility to twist the ordinary words and phrases into stunningly beautiful lines. She challenges patriarchy, dictatorship and all other forms of oppression. Her works could be described as a bridge between folklore, classic and modern Punjabi poetry.

(Dawn)

Copper Woman

GOLD BANGLES ON HANDS OF IRON;
WHY DON'T THEY SUIT HER?
AND COPPER WOMAN;
BURNING... MELTING... BUT SMILING.... STAYING FIRM;
WHY DIDN'T SHE MELT?
WITH BURNING FEET
SHE STOOD STEADFAST IN THE SWELTERING SUN;
TILL HE COMES;
TILL HE GOES;
TRULY SHE DOES NOT CARE;
UNCONCERNED, UNAWARE.

Awareness

SHIMMERING RAYS ON THE GREEN GRASS;
GROWING ALONG THE POND;
A STALE SMELL OF RAW MILK;
WAKEFULNESS
EYES... ARE THERE EYES GROWING INSIDE THESE EYES?
THERE ARE NO BRANCHES ON THE GRASS
SO WHAT?
YET STUCK ON THE BRANCH
A GRASSHOPPER AWAKENS FROM DEEP SLEEP;
AWAKENING; SWAYING; BATTING ITS EYELASHES;
EATS UP THE FLOWER.



Rasheed Jahan Zafar (1905–1952) India

Rasheed Jahan was the eldest of the five daughters of the well-known reformers Shaikh Abdullah and Wahid Jahan.¹ Born in 1905, Rasheed Jahan therefore grew up in a family that strongly advocated social reform and education. From a young age, Rasheed Jahan voraciously read all Urdu-language magazines and pamphlets that her father subscribed to. When she was old enough for formal education, she joined the Aligarh Girls' School that her parents helped establish in 1906. Rasheed Jahan later commented to her sister-in-law that she and her family had, "slept on the mattress of women's education and covered ourselves with the quilt of women's education from our earliest consciousness."

Rasheed Jahan studied science at Isabella

Thoburn College in Lucknow, where she also published short stories in Urdu and English. In 1924 she entered the Lady Hardinge Medical College in Delhi, graduating five years later with a specialization in obstetrics and gynaecology. While studying she mobilized her classmates to help her run literacy classes and free medical clinics for the city's impoverished women.

Around the age of twenty, Rasheed Jahan bobbed her hair keeping with the prevailing fashion. Two years later, after an outbreak of head lice in 1927, she chopped off her younger sisters' hair and gave them a haircut to match her own. Her sister, Khurshid Mirza, recalled in her autobiography that, "From that day, we said goodbye to tightly

plaited hair. It was freedom at last." Rasheed Jahan was no slave to fashion, however. Throughout her adult life she wore no makeup and, a strong proponent of Mahatma Gandhi's swadeshi campaign, only wore simple, homespun clothes.

Rasheed Jahan always took a hands-on role in helping the more vulnerable members of her community. On one occasion, she brought home a young girl from Delhi who had suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Rasheed Jahan begged her parents to help the girl, and Shaikh Abdullah made arrangements for her to stay in a nearby hostel. Khurshid Mirza remembers another instance of her eldest sister's benevolence towards women. Once, the sisters were approached by an impoverished woman in Old Aligarh who said that her daughter had given birth and was bleeding profusely; the other sisters gave some money and wanted to continue with their outing. Rasheed Jahan, on the other hand, leapt down from their carriage and spent the entire day with the woman. When she finally came home, she explained that she had arranged for the new mother to be admitted to Lady Dufferin Hospital and that she, herself, was going to pay for the food, milk and medicine the patient needed.²

After graduation, Rasheed Jahan returned to Lucknow and became involved with four like-minded and politically conscious male friends, one of whom was Sahibzada Mahmud-uz-Zafar, the son of the Lucknow Medical College principal. The group published a collection of short stories in 1932, entitled *Angaray* ('Sparks' or 'Embers'). Rasheed Jahan's contributions, *Dilli ki Sair* (A Visit to Delhi) and *Parde ke Piche* (Behind the Veil/Curtain) portrayed women's plight with a heavy dose of irony. As a whole, the collec-

tion demonstrated a use of forthright language, a frank approach to sexual matters, general social critiques and a challenge to orthodox religious views. The daring language and subject-matter of the publication incensed many readers and the work was considered indecent. It was even banned by the government of the United Provinces.³

Two years later, Rasheed Jahan married her friend and co-writer, Mahmud-uz-Zafar. Educated in India and England, Mahmud had received a degree from Oxford University. On his return to India, he joined the anti-colonial movement and, like Rasheed Jahan, only wore homespun clothes. The couple had no children and was content to live on the slim allowance Mahmud received from the Communist Party of India and the small medical fees Rasheed Jahan charged. Their house became known as a centre for intellectuals, writers, and political activists and Rasheed Jahan's sister once remarked that their home was a "living example of a commune," where no one was discriminated against on the basis of religion, class or caste. Rasheed Jahan spent much of her time reading and writing short stories and radio plays. Like her husband, (who served as the General Secretary of the Party in the United Provinces), she was also involved in the Communist Party. Rasheed Jahan's literary career was only one facet of her life and work. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Rasheed Jahan provided medical treatment, especially for the poor and particularly for women. Though she always charged fees for home visits to wealthier patients, for poorer patients she accepted reduced fees or payment in kind, or provided free treatment. As part of her consultations, Rasheed Jahan also dispensed family planning advice to women and their families. She encouraged the poorer families to educate their daughters and argued that more Muslim women should enter

the nursing profession.

Celebrated as a trailblazer by liberals and progressives, Rasheed Jahan epitomized for conservatives the dangers of educating women and liberating them from purdah. Combined with her sympathy for the poor, Rasheed Jahan's medical training led her to write about the sexual problems facing women with a frankness that shocked her society. Through her writing and medical practice, Rasheed Jahan exposed the dangers of misinformation regarding women's health and the dangers of relying upon superstitions instead of science. Rasheed Jahan often remarked to her friends and family that, "women ought to be more than child-bearing machines for the pleasure of men."

When she was in her 40s, Rasheed Jahan discovered that she had cancer. Though,

at the time, Indian Communists were being denied passports to prevent them from visiting the USSR, Rasheed Jahan and Mahmud managed to obtain travel documents and to go to the Soviet Union for medical treatment. Unfortunately, three weeks after arriving in Moscow, Rasheed Jahan died at the age of 47. After burying her there, a grief-torn Mahmud travelled across the USSR. He later wrote his account, *Quest for Life*.⁴

Her sister-in-law, Hamida Said-uz-Zafar wrote in her autobiography that Rasheed Jahan consistently addressed herself to the myriad problems faced by Indian women. Invoking Rasheed Jahan's fiery spirit and frank literary style, Hamida concluded that she should, "rightly be called Urdu literature's first 'angry young woman.'"⁵

-
1. Her father had a law degree from Aligarh University, and her mother had been educated at home by her father. The two devoted their lives to campaigning for women's education. (See Chapter 5, this volume page 72 and this chapter pages 132-133).
 2. Lubna Kazim, *The Making of a Modern Muslim Woman: Begum Khurshid Mirza (1918-1989)*, (Brite Books, Lahore: 2003), pp. 102-3 and 106-111.
 3. Minault, *Secluded Scholars...*, 275. Angaray was banned when it was first released and reprints are still not available, though stories from the volume have been reprinted in various journals. Public outcry was so severe, that one rumour circulating after the book's release was that critics had threatened to cut off Rasheed Jahan's nose. See Lubna Kazim, op. cit., 118.
 4. Kazim, 112-7.
 5. Cited in Kazim, 123.



The Newssheet is compiled by the Information, Education & Communication (IEC) Department at Shirkat Gah.

For feedback email us at pubs@sgah.org.pk



شرکت گاہ
Shirkat Gah
Women's Resource Centre

Women's Resource Centre
P.O. Box No. 5192
Lahore - Pakistan

To get involved please visit us at:

Website: www.shirkatgah.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/shirkatgahdotorg>

Twitter: twitter.com/Shirkat_Gah