

# **Women-oriented CSOs in a Fragile State: A Gendered Review of State-Civil Society Imbroglia in Pakistan's History**

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## **Abstract**

State-Civil Society relations in Pakistan have seldom been far from problematic and when it comes to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working for women empowerment and gender equality the relations with the state become highly adverse. According to several researches gender insensitivity is often an important characteristic of fragile states. In this context, this paper seeks to explore the role of CSOs working for women empowerment in the history of Pakistan and their relationship with the state of Pakistan. It also tends to assess whether an improvement in this relationship can possibly help to diminish the fragility of the Pakistani state. The paper is based on qualitative research with an analytical approach and has been completed with the help of interviews with relevant persons and overview of related material in print and on line.

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## **Introduction**

The most natural privilege of man, next to the right of acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow-creatures, and of acting in common with them. I am therefore led to conclude that the right of association is almost as inalienable as the right of personal liberty. No legislator can attack it without impairing the very foundations of society.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, Tocqueville's 'privilege' of 'combining' or 'association' is no more limited to 'man' and has been recognized by the UNO as a fundamental right declaring that 'Everyone (man and woman) has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association'.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, this right is questioned in many developing and underdeveloped

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* – vol. I, transl. Henry Reeve (Hazleton: Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classic Series Publication, 2002, first published in 1835), 218-19.

<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 20 (1) adopted by UN General Assembly by Resolution 217 A, in 1948.

countries of world. While some states still fail to recognize civil society as a partner, many sections of their population also tend to abhor civil society organizations (CSOs) because of various reasons. Even in the West it was only in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that the importance of civil society was recognized.<sup>3</sup> To some, civil society emerged as ‘the single most viable alternative to the authoritarian state and the tyrannical market’;<sup>4</sup> to others, as ‘a magic trio’ (together with market and democracy) of development panaceas which emerged in 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

On the contrary, the concept remained least understood in the developing world. In fact most of the theoretical work existing in this context was specifically west-oriented and had little meaning for many poor, strife-torn and backward societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Particularly, majority of Muslim countries with their overwhelmingly authoritarian regimes had little room or appreciation for civil society and CSOs as independent, legally protected public associations. Ernest Gellner has already put a question mark on the existence of a viable civil society in the Muslim states by identifying Islam as one of the ‘rivals’ of civil society.<sup>6</sup>

In this backdrop, the possibility of existence and success of civil society institutions in the under-developed, conflict-ridden and military-dominated Islamic Republic of Pakistan remained a tough challenge. Interestingly the long existence of hundreds of traditional charity and welfare organizations, community-based outfits and religious associations actively working for relief, welfare, education, health-care, and religious services has been accepted as a normal societal feature while the modern NGOs particularly those working for human rights, environment, women empowerment, rural development etc., are often regarded as aliens in pursuit of sinister agendas.

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<sup>3</sup> The term civil society in its modern sense was used firstly during the Enlightenment Era (18<sup>th</sup> century) in Europe particularly as a rival of the tyrannical state. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the political discourse again became more state-focused wherein the civil society took a back seat. It was the rise of neo-liberal ideology in the post-cold war era that brought to focus the civil society and its organizations from the backyard of history.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon White, ‘Civil Society, Democratization and Development (1): Clearing the Analytical Ground’, *Democratization*, 1:3 (Autumn 1994), 375.

<sup>6</sup> According to Gellner, the concept of civil society could best be explained with reference to its rivals: Islam, Marxism and Nationalism (of a certain kind). See Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Alan Lane/ Penguin Press, 1994), 9-22.

The Constitution of Pakistan recognizes freedom of association as a fundamental right, guaranteed by the state and enforceable through judicial intervention, provided that such freedom does not affect the sovereignty or integrity of Pakistan nor its public order or moral values.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately this right has been often suppressed or manipulated in favor of vested interests. In this context an inherent dichotomy is obvious when the state at times appears to encourage, patronize and even co-opt nonprofit organizations involved in welfare and service-delivery activities while stern measures and criticism often remain the fate of advocacy and rights-oriented outfits. Under such conditions the women-led and women-oriented Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), particularly those working for empowerment and rights, bear the gravest brunt of opposition from the state as well as many sections of the society. In this context, this paper seeks to highlight the historical role of women-oriented CSOs in Pakistan, with special reference to their advocacy and rights-oriented services and their terse relationship with the state of Pakistan. It particularly tends to explore the fragile-state scenario in the context of comparatively low levels of gender sensitivity, and hence, low levels of encouragement to women CSOs in the country. For this purpose, the paper is organized into three sections: the first tends to develop a conceptual framework of the fragile state-women CSOs nexus; the second explores the same nexus in the history of Pakistan; and the third analyses the main variables in this relationship which need to be adjusted if a progressive change is desired.

The paper is inspired by the work of Nikki de Zwaan from Utrecht University who in her thesis explored the dynamics of women CSOs in fragile states and also conducted a related project in some countries including Pakistan. The author is personally thankful to Nikki for her valuable input via online discussions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Fragile states, gender insensitivity and women CSOs – A conceptual framework**

Fragility refers to certain states' inability and/or unwillingness to provide essential public goods like protection from external threats, rule of law

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<sup>7</sup> See 'Freedom of Association' Article 17 (1), *The Constitution of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (subs. by the Constitution (Eighteenth Amdt.) Act, 2010 (10 of 2010) s. 6. for 'Article 17'.

<sup>8</sup> Nikki de Zwaan, 'Gendering Fragile States–Roles, Capabilities and Activities of Women CSOs in the Context of a Fragile State' (unpublished thesis), <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/30893> accessed 23-7-2018.

and basic social services to most of their citizens.<sup>9</sup> The prominent characteristics of fragile states include wide-spread poverty, inequality, illiteracy, violence, insecurity, separatist movements and prevalent human rights violations on a considerable extent. The degree of fragility varies widely from the states approaching collapse, to the states which do provide essential goods and services to most of their citizens but lack either capacity or will or both to sustain the developmental process.<sup>10</sup>

During the last few decades, there has been an increasing recognition that in any given society, women's prosperity, security and gender equality as a whole are directly linked to the prosperity and security of the society. Likewise, gender equality has become an indicator of the strength of a state, and its absence leads to state-fragility.<sup>11</sup> Taking a lead from the theoretical work by Nikki de Zwaan, this paper tends to explore the nexus between the working of women CSOs and the state-fragility with reference to Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> This paper argues that the conditions of state-fragility (poverty, illiteracy, violence, insecurity, separatism and human rights violations) affect men and women differently and hence contribute further to the gender inequality and in-turn, more state fragility, and the cycle goes on. In many fragile states this cycle continues over decades and undermines the efforts for improvement of the situation, made at the state or civil society or even international levels. In many cases the state and society do not see gender inequality as a cause of state-fragility and hence fail to support or appreciate the efforts of women-oriented CSOs. Understandably, better support to such CSOs is likely to contribute to a positive change in fragile states thus diminishing the fragility scenario.

As rightly pointed out by Kandiyoti, 'The ways in which women are represented in political discourse, the degree of formal emancipation they are able to achieve, the modalities of their participation in economic life and the nature of the social movements through which they are able

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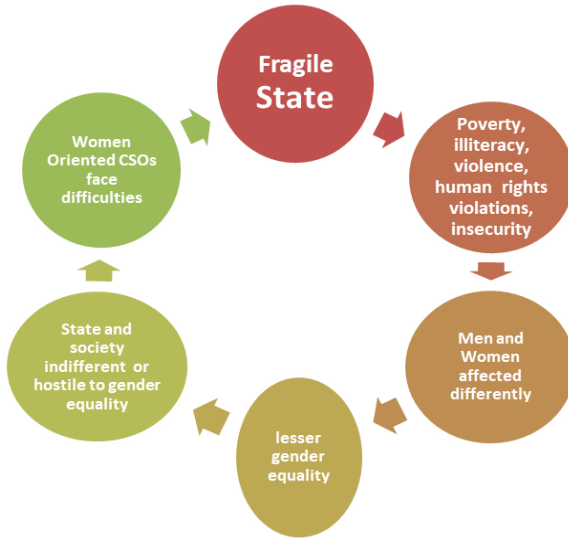
<sup>9</sup> D.W. Brinkerhoff, *Capacity Development in Fragile States*, Discussion Paper No. 58 D, 2007, 1 at <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/DP-58D-Capacity-Development-in-Fragile-States-2007.pdf> accessed 23-5-2018.

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, fragility may occur in some of the world's richest and most advanced states such as USA whose position declined during the last few years. See *Fragile States Index 2016-2018* at <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/> accessed 3-6-2018.

<sup>11</sup> For instance see Stephen Baranyi and Kristiana Powell, *Fragile States, Gender Equality and Aid Effectiveness: A Review of Donor Perspectives* (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> De Zwaan, *op.cit.*

to articulate their gender interests are intimately linked to state-building processes and are responsive to their transformations'.<sup>13</sup>



The next section of the paper will attempt to explore the above explained relationship in the history of Pakistan, with particular emphasis on the orientation and policies of various regimes and their impact on the women-oriented CSOs as well as their response.

### Women-oriented CSOs versus the State in the history of Pakistan

The concept of state-fragility (and state failure) has only appeared recently in the international discourse on politics and society.<sup>14</sup> However, the causes of state-fragility with respect to gender insensitivity and the role of women-oriented CSOs cannot be grasped without a historical overview of a given state.

Similar to the other states of the world, for the most part written history of Pakistan is also a 'his story' rather than 'hers'. Likewise, the

<sup>13</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Introduction', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> In 2005, the *Foreign Policy* journal generated the *World Failed-State Index* using twelve different indicators of instability, which included demographic pressures, group grievances, refugees, human rights, etc., available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/22/the-failed-states-index-2005/> accessed 3-9-2011; Since 2013 the OECD has produced regular lists of fragile states, at: <http://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/listofstateoffragilityreports.htm>

history of civil society also seems to be markedly male-dominated. However, women participation in welfare and service remained considerable since the beginning. The colonial period in the South Asian region had witnessed a beginning of awareness of women's problems and their overall position in Indian society. The social reform movements of 19<sup>th</sup> century such as Ram Mohan Roy's Brahma Samaj and Sir Syed's Aligarh movement did highlight the importance of women education and their freedom from the traditional role-models. Yet, those movements had a little impact on women other than those living in big cities and particularly belonging to elite families. Most of the reformist organizations comprised of enlightened men who highlighted women's issues such as *sati*, polygamy, *purdah*, widow remarriages, child marriages, and women education.<sup>15</sup>

### **Freedom Movement**

Ladies related to the male leaders formed the first group of women who gained confidence from their male relatives and entered the activist arena. Among the Muslim community, the few women from United Provinces (UP) mobilized during the Khilafat Movement<sup>16</sup> particularly, Bi Amman<sup>17</sup>, the mother of Ali brothers and , Amjadi Bano, the wife of Muhammad Ali Johar, Nishat-un-Nisa, wife of Hasrat Mohani, were among the first Muslim women to join the movement for independence of India and ultimately for empowerment of women. The freedom movement provided a unique impetus to native families, particularly those of male activists to allow their women to come out and join the struggle along with men. Hence, an upsurge was seen in the number of women in social and political organizations. A substantial change came in 1938 with the creation of Muslim League's All India Muslim Women's Sub-Committee by M.A. Jinnah in order to mobilize Muslim women.<sup>18</sup> By 1940s, a number of dedicated ladies took up a leadership role, working in various cities and districts. Jinnah's own sister and comrade Fatima Jinnah took the lead. Jahanara Shahnawaz, Salma

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, the Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj movements, which played a vital role in women's education and uplift in Punjab and Sindh, were mainly led by men.

<sup>16</sup> A pan-Islamic movement, for the restoration of the Caliphate in Turkey which continued during 1919-1924.

<sup>17</sup> Abadi Bano Begum who mobilized the Muslims for the cause of Khilafat with her participation and speeches, usually delivered from behind the veil.

<sup>18</sup> All India Muslim League, later renamed as Pakistan Muslim League, was the political party under whose flag the creation of Pakistan was achieved.

Tasadduq Hussain and Fatima Begum from Lahore, Shaista Ikramullah from Bengal, Zari Sarfraz from NWFP (now KP) and Lady Abdullah Haroon from Sindh became the vanguard of Muslim women activism committed to the cause of Pakistan. The Women's Wing of Muslim Students Federation played an active role in girls' mobilization. The women of Muslim upper and middle classes, who had come out of *purdah*<sup>19</sup> and family restrictions, mostly with the consent of their male guardians, stood with their male counterparts, and even travelled across the vast Indian provinces during the Movement. For those ladies it was an achievement to overcome the socio-cultural taboos while it was probably a great compromise for their male family members to allow and encourage them to come out of their seclusion for the sake of freedom.<sup>20</sup>

### **Co-option and coordination in the first decade of Pakistan (1947-58)**

In its infancy years, crumbling under the unbearable burdens of new nationhood, and crushed under the incredible pressure of unprecedented migration<sup>21</sup>, the state of Pakistan was looking for a partner to assist her in her initial difficulties.

On the other hand the emergent civil society, which had passed through its incubation period during the colonial era, and gained impetus during the freedom movement, was now looking for a new purpose. The purpose was already there: the multitude of social problems challenging the conscience of both the government and the civil society: The grave problem of refugees in the wake of post-partition blood-bath; families torn apart; children lost and women raped. Then the monsters of poverty, disease, illiteracy, swelling population, etc., were threatening the very existence of the new state. The nonprofit organizations, though few and far between, already trained to some extent in the fields of education, healthcare and relief work willingly came out to share this responsibility.

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<sup>19</sup> Traditional veil and seclusion of Muslim women from men other than their husbands and blood relatives of prohibited category.

<sup>20</sup> See Mumtaz Khawar and Fareeda Shaheed, *Women of Pakistan, Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward?* (Lahore: Zed Books, 1987), 4-8.

<sup>21</sup> As the renowned social worker Shireen Rehmatullah reports, 'Refugees were pouring into Karachi at the estimated rate of 3000 per month, which in four years had swelled its population from 300,000 in 1947, to 1,300,000 by 1951. The ubiquitous growth of squatter settlements all over the refugee colonies created an ugly spectacle as the civic services meant for a population of 300,000 could not cope with the uncontrollable growth ten times its size.' Shireen Rehmatullah, *Social Welfare in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.

Hence, due to the grave challenges, the state and civil society joined hands to ameliorate the grief of the poor population.

Fulfillment of the goal of Pakistan brought a dilemma to the mobilized sections of women: whether to go back to their traditional roles at homes or to continue the activist role in the new circumstances. As soon as the goal of Pakistan was achieved, the reactionary and conservative forces were ready to push them back into their secluded quarters. Nevertheless, at least for those enlightened and motivated ladies, there was no going back. Fatima Jinnah and Rana Liaquat led them to serve the new nation in the early difficult times. Hence, the 'first decade of civil-society activity in Pakistan was characterized by the work of extraordinarily devoted, talented and daring ladies whose efforts towards social services and mass uplift made a significant difference'.<sup>22</sup>

During this phase, the state-women CSOs partnership seemed to work well, despite the fragility of the new and impoverished state. In fact, fragility prompted the state to co-opt civil society and encourage it particularly through the Social Welfare Department.<sup>23</sup> Though the number of voluntary organizations was extremely low,<sup>24</sup> a large number of dedicated women workers embarked upon the welfare mission and the state provided comprehensive support at various levels to encourage them. The main identified tasks were refugee rehabilitation, poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, relief for workers and peasants, population control and betterment of womenfolk. All of these demanded highly organized social services which were impossible for the state to provide. It must also be noticed that at that early stage of the state's political organization, the distinction between welfare or service-oriented and advocacy or rights-oriented organizations was hardly discernible. The euphoria of independence blurred the differences of opinion particularly between the modern and the traditional, the right and the left. Though these differences did exist and soon made their appearance, at the moment the major objective was to bear and share the burden of nascent independence and all initiatives were welcomed.

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<sup>22</sup> Asif Iqbal, Hina Khan and Surkhab Javed, *Nonprofit Sector in Pakistan – Historical Background*, Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, SPDC Working Paper no. 4 (Karachi: Social Policy and Development Centre, 2004), 20.

<sup>23</sup> Shireen Rehmatullah, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> There were only 156 voluntary social welfare organizations out of which 100 were located in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). See Government of Pakistan, *Survey of NGOs in the Field of Social Services*, vol. I (Islamabad: Ministry of Planning & Development, 1990), 9.



Many of the early women activists belonged to the well-to-do families, mostly relatives of one or the other Muslim League leader or government servant. These women were ready to lead a social movement in the new state. The foremost among them was Fatima Jinnah, the beloved sister of the founder and the first Governor General of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Miss Jinnah was not only a source of inspiration and untiring support to her brother but was herself active in refugee rehabilitation and relief. She was the founder president of Muslim Women's Association established in 1949 mainly to support the rehabilitation work. Rana Liaqat Ali Khan, the wife of the first prime minister of Pakistan, as early as 1948, established the Women's Volunteer Service (WVS) to help the refugee rehabilitation. Calling upon the women of Pakistan to serve the nation Begum Rana declared that:

[T]his is not the time for forty million women of Pakistan to sit quietly in their homes. They have to come out ... to learn to work and then to teach others to do so.<sup>25</sup>

Her call did not fell on deaf ears. Women from many sections, some of whom had never before crossed the thresholds of their homes, came out in response. The WVS initiated endless efforts to supply food, medicine, and other services to the refugees. It also established an Employment Exchange Bureau, a Widow Home, a Marriage Bureau, a Lost and Found Bureau, and an Abducted Women's Home.<sup>26</sup> The same year, Rana laid the foundation of All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) in order to continue this work on permanent and long term basis. 'APWA proved to be a highly successful, popular and effective umbrella organization from which a number of sub-organizations sprang and served till today in all parts of the country.'<sup>27</sup> Many other devoted ladies were working in parallel with similar goals. For instance, Begum Mumtaz Umer Karamat established the Family Welfare Cooperative Society in Lahore and Begum S. A. Hafeez founded the Women's Refugee Rehabilitation Society in Karachi.

The relief work done by these selfless ladies and their dedicated teams was fully appreciated and actually facilitated by the state and the society at large. Apart from rehabilitation, women's health and education were of top concern during all discussions with various communities where government's community development projects were to start.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mumtaz and Shaheed, *op.cit.*, 51.

<sup>26</sup> About 60,000 women were abducted during the partition upheavals. See Kay Miles, *Dynamo in Silk*, 1963, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Asif Iqbal, Hina Khan and Surkhab Javed, *op.cit.*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Shireen Rehmatullah, *op.cit.*, 315.

Despite other pressing problems, some allocations were made for women's health and education in the First Five Year Plan, (1955-1960).<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the rest was left to the civil society.

Much more was required for the empowerment of the majority of women of Pakistan living in rural and even urban regions, under the perpetual patriarchy. The state, apart from lip service had little to do with this. The society, under its age-old conservative norms considered it totally undesirable.<sup>30</sup> While the social service for the poor, the homeless, and the sick somehow gained acceptance as an extension of women's domestic role, other fields of empowerment were seldom tolerated. Yet, a number of women's organizations started working for the much needed empowerment through social reform:

APWA was in the forefront of this campaign. It aimed at an 'informed and intelligent participation of women' in the development of Pakistan. Its objectives included improvement of women's legal, political, social and economic status; general promotion of educational, healthcare, community development and cultural programs and policies; and promotion of international goodwill and brotherhood of mankind.<sup>31</sup> Starting with basic health, education and relief services, APWA soon extended its activities to public health, social welfare, human rights, status of women, and training for the citizenship. Schools were set up under the bridges, and in the compounds and garages of APWA ladies showing their determination to fight against all odds.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, some of the women leaders were daring enough to go for an extra mile. In 1949 Rana Liaquat founded the much criticized Pakistan Women's National Guards (PWNG) and Pakistan Women's Naval Reserves (PWNR) which apart from nursing and first aid, organized defense training for members. Similarly, Business and Professional Women's Club, and University Women's Federation and

<sup>29</sup> Government of Pakistan, *First Five Year Plan, 1955-60*.

<sup>30</sup> Though girls' schools and vocational institutes or related income generating activities confined to the four walls of their homes were allowed, but women adopting formal professions, and demanding for their rights and equality in their own lives was out of question. See Shireen Rehmatullah, *op.cit.*, pp.315-316. Also see Mumtaz and Shaheed, *op.cit.*

<sup>31</sup> Shireen Rehmatullah, *op. cit.*, 317.

<sup>32</sup> A large number of schools, maternity and child health centers, industrial homes, and cottage industry shops were opened in almost all refugee colonies, and later in other areas. A Cottage Industry program was also initiated to help poor families learn profitable skills and earn their livelihood. Shireen Rehmatullah shared this information in an interview with the author, in January 2004.

the United Front for Women's Rights (UFWR – founded in 1953 by Begum Jahan Ara Shahnawaz) were enough to offend the patriarchal mindset. Acquisition of economic and social freedom posed a direct challenge to the long established traditions and membership of these organizations remained limited due to family and societal pressures. In 1954 while Rana Liaquat was abroad, both PWNG and PWNR were disbanded.<sup>33</sup>

Another crucial front was that of the legislatures. There the struggle was led by Muslim League's Women's Committee which continuously fought for the enactment of laws for the socio-economic rights and safeguards for women. Through endless debates, protests and demonstrations, this struggle bore fruit with the enactment of two important legislations: First, the recognition of women's right to inherit property (including agricultural property) and equality of status, opportunity and remuneration:<sup>34</sup> and second, acceptance of 3% quota for women in legislatures. Meanwhile, the first constitution of Pakistan was in the making and APWA was actively advocating for women's rights and liberties. As early as 1955, APWA started a campaign against the system of polygamy and easy divorce by men.<sup>35</sup>

Another extremely important but tabooed field was that of population control and family planning. Pakistan's annual population growth rate had exceeded 3.5% which called for immediate measures. In the religious, feudal and conservative social milieu of the country population control measures were almost unacceptable. The government decided to carry out the work through voluntary organizations. Family Planning Association was established but had to face tremendous resistance. The Director General Health was himself against it.<sup>36</sup> The workers of nonprofit organizations like APWA, the Rotary Club, and dedicated personalities like Dr. Zarina Fazalbhoy came out to lead voluntary services in this regard.

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<sup>33</sup> The sad anecdote of PWNG and PWNR was related to the researcher by the veteran APWA activist Begum Mehr Kirmani in an interview in June 2003.

<sup>34</sup> 'The West Punjab Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act (IX of 1948)' and 'Muslim Personal Law (Sindh) Amendment Act, 1950'.

<sup>35</sup> The issue flared up with the second marriage of Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra and resulted in the enactment of the 'West Pakistan Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1962'. This Act extended to the whole of West Pakistan excluding the Tribal Areas.

<sup>36</sup> Shireen Rehmatullah, *op.cit.*, 301-2.

### **Support and suppression under the martial rule (1958-71)**

The imposition of martial law in 1958 brought to light some new questions regarding the role of civil society in general. The ban over the political parties and all political activity stifled the growth of the progressive sections of civil society. Some active organizations and the trade unions were banned and their offices sealed. Arrests were common. The ministry of Social Welfare which had to remove many public leaders and activists with strong political affiliations, working in National and Provincial Councils of Social Welfare, was facing a dilemma. A number of ordinances were issued to control the CSOs as well as to shift a major part of their responsibilities to the state. The net result of this statist policy was a retardation of the role and coverage of civil society to a secondary and at best a supplementary level vis-à-vis the state.

Under these conditions the major beneficiary within civil society that managed to find ample space for its activities, was a group of urban welfare and service oriented organizations. In fact these were the long established and esteemed organizations with a reputation of sincerity, vibrancy, and a committed non-political agenda. In addition a number of newly registered organizations under the Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies Ordinance (1961) also received encouragement and substantial Grants-in-Aid. The Grants-in-Aid Program was initiated to support as well as to strictly monitor the registered agencies, whose services to the community were considered of a sufficiently high (and harmless) quality. However, despite the authoritarian motives the Ordinance and the Grants-in-Aid program fulfilled a long felt need and in fact more organizations were registered under it as compared to the Societies Act of 1860.

The service oriented women's organizations formed in the first decade continued to serve their particular target groups. APWA slowly but surely increased its welfare and educational activities including the APWA College in Karachi. Begum S.A. Hafeez's dynamic leadership established some more institutions like the Sir Syed College for Women in Karachi.

Meanwhile, the so-called liberal policies of the government particularly the women-oriented reforms should be seen in the context of increasing dependence of Pakistan on the western alliance system.<sup>37</sup> Anyhow, the general liberalized atmosphere proved to be particularly conducive for women's social activities. The promulgation of the Family Laws Ordinance (1961), though not exactly radical, was definitely a step toward women's empowerment in the context of the prevailing

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<sup>37</sup> Pakistan had joined the Western block in 1950s.

backwardness. According to the Ordinance, the women were officially able to inherit agricultural property (in consonance with Islamic Law), second marriages were made contingent upon agreement by the first wife, divorce was made more difficult for the males, women attained the right to initiate divorce for the first time, and a system of registration of marriages was also introduced.<sup>38</sup>

But there was still a long way to go. From the household to the presidential elections of the state,<sup>39</sup> women were still in a highly disadvantaged position. While welfare and relief services were accepted, the struggle for rights was repugnant to the traditional and the fundamentalist sections. Hence the United Front for Women's Rights (UFWR), the first CSO exclusively working for women's rights was banned under the Martial Law.

Activists dispersed, women's issues dropped off the radar screen and in the decade 1957-1968 the struggle for women's rights ceased to be visible as a movement. Lobbying for women's rights, such as existed, was carried out via informal social networks by women connected to and therefore able to access the corridors of power in government of Pakistan.<sup>40</sup>

Very little account of any early women's organization in NWFP and Baluchistan provinces is available. Some minor and localized

<sup>38</sup> See Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (Ordinance VIII of 1961) at <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/pdf> accessed 2-3-11.

<sup>39</sup> Alluding to the presidential elections of 1965 under the new constitution of 1962, where in Miss Fatima Jinnah, the sister of the Quaid-i-Azam, and then the leader of the Combined Opposition Parties (COP), was contesting the incumbent president General Ayub Khan. She was chosen by the COP because of the tremendous respect and popularity she commanded. Yet she was bitterly criticized by pro-Ayub Khan *ulema* (clerics) who decreed against her eligibility to become the head of an Islamic state. She was defeated by Ayub Khan, who used all the state machinery plus his newly innovated system of Basic Democracies against her. For details see, Iftikhar H. Malik, 'Politics of Gender in Pakistan' in, *State and Civil Society in Pakistan – Politics of Authority, Ideology and Ethnicity* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1997), 145.

<sup>40</sup> Fareeda Shaheed, 'The Women's Movement in Pakistan, Challenges and Achievements', in Amrita Basu (ed.), *Rethinking Global Women's Movements* (Routledge, 2010). This paper also draws on work, discussions and papers of the research consortium, *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: Gender Poverty and Democratization from the Inside Out*, led by the Southeast Asia Research Centre of City University. See [www.wemc.hk.com](http://www.wemc.hk.com) accessed 2-12-2017.

organizations like Anjuman-e-Behbood-e-Khawateen, (Organization for the welfare of women), Hazara, NWFP were working in some regions but their impact remains unmeasured. In the tribal and highly conservative societies of these provinces, the idea of women empowerment was still alien.

### **Nationalization and empowerment in the Bhutto era (1971-77)**

During the era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, thanks to his apparently leftist ideals, civil society, quite understandably took a backseat. Following the populist slogan of *Roti, Kapra aur Makan* (bread, clothing and shelter), Bhutto's government launched a number of programs, ranging from the famous land reforms (1972), to agrarian, industrial and commercial development, and social uplift and mass literacy initiatives. Regardless of the outcomes of these policies, net result with respect to the civil society was rather stifling.

Bhutto's policies of expanding the state's role in economic, educational and cultural spheres, through nationalization of industries, schools, colleges, etc. eroded the institutional base of the modern component of civil society. Leading industrialists were ousted. Professors, writers and opinion leaders were turned into public servants, as private schools/colleges and cultural associations were nationalized.<sup>41</sup>

With the state taking over the job of voluntary organizations, there was not much space left for the civil society. The nationalization policy adversely affected the activities of a large number of voluntary organizations, philanthropic foundations, trusts and communities etc. At the grass-root levels also a policy of centralization was obvious. The basic democracies system perished with its creator—Ayub and the local bodies remained defunct throughout the Bhutto Era. The civil society in these conditions remained limited in size and scope, yet some major boosts were affected due to the progressive democracy.

The mobilization of women in 1940s and 1950s had almost exclusively affected the upper class ladies and the *begums* (literally meaning 'wives') who carried the mission of social service in those days. On the contrary the anti-Ayub agitation of late 1960s, and the impact of People's Party's (PPP) manifesto upholding gender-equality, motivated numerous middle and lower-class women into the political arena. In the

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<sup>41</sup> Mohammad Qadeer, 'The evolving structure of civil society and the state of Pakistan', *Pakistan Development Review*, 36:4, 743-62, cited in Iqbal, Khan and Javed, *op.cit.*, 28.

post-election period, those mobilized women became a part of PPP's drive to form local party organizations like district and *mohalla* (neighborhood) committees, etc. The constitution of 1973 gave more rights and safeguards to women than the previous constitutions.<sup>42</sup> Some prominent women were appointed to high administrative posts hitherto reserved for men.<sup>43</sup> Many civil service departments like Foreign Service, and District Management Group were opened to women. Hence the general atmosphere was rendered more conducive for the growth and working of the women-focused and women-run voluntary organizations. The PPP itself formed its women's wings in the centre and the provinces under Begum Nusrat Bhutto, the wife of the Prime Minister.

For older CSOs also this was a period of transformation to a more vibrant and daring role. APWA that had hitherto maintained a welfare-oriented and a low-profile advocacy role seemed to acquire a more proactive stature with a magnified emphasis on participation of women in development. This policy was reflected in the APWA's struggle for a permanent commission on the status of women<sup>44</sup> and its special attention to the rural women. The United Front for Women's Rights (UFWR) that was suspended by Ayub was revived and struggling for women's seats in the legislatures.<sup>45</sup>

Further, the height of progressive movement encouraged many left-oriented women. Many of them in the beginning joined the PPP hoping to bring about a structural change in the society but later disillusionment caused them to leave and form leftist groups. Many such groups were initiated and run by women themselves wherein apart from ideological training in Marxism and socialism; methods of public interaction, awareness creation and community development were also taught. Common women citizens like factory workers, students, and slum dwellers, were approached in all the big cities and a close coordination was established.

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<sup>42</sup> For instance, equality before law, equal opportunities, induction of women to civil services, Islamic Ideology Council, and reserved seats in assemblies, etc.

<sup>43</sup> Rana Liaquat Ali was appointed Governor of Sindh. Begum Ashraf Abbasi was elected deputy speaker of the National Assembly, and Dr Kaniz Fatima as Vice-Chancellor of a University.

<sup>44</sup> A 13-member Women's Rights Committee was formed in 1976 under the then Attorney General of Pakistan, Yahya Bakhtiar where the members like Nasim Jehan, Rashida Patel, Mariam Habib, Zarin Sarfaraz, and others, pressed for the establishment of such a commission but had failed.

<sup>45</sup> UFWR later fizzled out due to unknown reasons.

Some daring new organizations also emerged. Women's Front (WF) was a small but very active group of leftist students and few teachers at the Punjab University and certain other cities of Punjab, fighting for equal rights and opportunities for women through seminars, lectures, discussions and off-course occasional resorts to street demonstrations.<sup>46</sup> WF won both of the women's seats in elections in the Punjab University. Its international outlook was extremely anti-West, deriding the UNO as a 'tool of the imperialists' and calling the international celebration of Women's Year (1975), and Women's Decade (1976-85) 'a sham' unless the existing socio-economic system undergoes a radical overhauling.<sup>47</sup> The Front unfortunately could not work effectively due to the state's oppression. Moreover, the anti-Bhutto movement (1976-77), mainly led by rightist political parties, overshadowed most of the leftist groups in the country.

Another left-oriented group emerged in 1976-77 in Islamabad by the University teachers, students and working women with the name *Aurat* (woman). It focused on creating general awareness of the working-class women against the patriarchal and class-based oppression. The bold mouthpiece of the Foundation titled *Aurat* had a considerable readership across Pakistan and abroad.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, the international celebration of Women's Year and Women's Decade activated a number of organizations with APWA in the lead. Seminars, Conferences and community based programs were initiated in many cities of the country. Pakistan Women Lawyers Association (PAWLA) had started as a sister organization of APWA, and had by now gained its own momentum and gradually became autonomous under the vibrant leadership of Begum Rashida Patel.<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, a unique addition reflecting this new trend was Shirkat Gah-Women's Resource Centre, established in 1975 in the wake of the series of conferences on the Women's Year. It was initiated by a group of young, western educated professional women, who, having been exposed to the development process of International Feminist Movement, were unsatisfied with the working of the existing women's organizations in Pakistan. The aim was to encourage women to play a full and equal role in the society by promoting the socio-economic

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<sup>46</sup> For instance, the procession led by WF on 8 March (Women's Day) 1975 in Rawalpindi in which they were baton charged by the police.

<sup>47</sup> Mumtaz and Shaheed, *op.cit.*, 65-66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> The renowned human right activist and lawyer Rashida Patel was interviewed by the author in March 2003 at her office in Karachi.



contribution of women already participating, or willing to participate, in the national development. The Shirkat Gah's activities included research and publication, working as a reference agency and consultancy for the employed and unemployed women, keeping directories of women who needed accommodation and employment, establishing day-care centers for their children, mobilizing as a pressure group to safeguard working women's rights and also developing the skills of working women who could themselves work as consultants in future. A hostel for working women was established in Islamabad and centers to provide medical and legal aid to working women were opened in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Its tremendous research activity culminated in the publication of an annotated bibliography, *Women in Pakistan and other Islamic Countries*, a pioneer work of its kind. Shirkat Gah faced a lot of resistance from many sections of society. It symbolized perhaps the first attempt to isolate women's problems and create awareness regarding them. That was the reason it was criticized by the religious right, some existing women organizations (not APWA), some women in the government service and also by the leftist forums. Anyhow, this attempt was indeed the beginning of a new era of feminist politics that ushered in the next decade.<sup>50</sup>

### **Growth under state's oppression during Zia era**

The anti-Bhutto agitation culminated in another military coup and imposition of Martial Law by General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. Political parties and party-based politics both were rendered defunct. The political leadership, particularly that belonging to the PPP and some leftist groups, was either arrested or exiled creating a vast vacuum between the state and the society. This vacuum was readily filled by the civil society, under the combined effect of multiple internal and international factors.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, the 1980s witnessed a tremendous growth of civil society initiatives in Pakistan in a dictatorial regime. The civil society movement finally came of age availing itself the blessing in disguise of the suspended political activity. The disappointment from the ability and credibility of the state to deliver the basic necessities of life to the downtrodden led to experiment with another options. Meanwhile, the rise of neo-liberal critique of the welfare state at the international level and rising tensions of the Cold War together provided a supportive atmosphere for the informal initiatives all over the world. Hence, in

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<sup>50</sup> Mumtaz and Shaheed, *op.cit.*, Also see Shirkat Gah's official website <http://www.shirkatgah.org/>

<sup>51</sup> The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had a deep rooted impact on the rise of NGOs in Pakistan.

Pakistan, all fields of nonprofit activity, ranging from charitable endowments, individual philanthropy, religious and secular welfare services, and development oriented initiatives, to the human rights activism flourished in an unprecedented manner.

Paradoxically, some organizations grew as a result of the state's patronage while others emerged and flourished simply in reaction to the state's policies. Once again the criterion for the state patronage was same: 'yes' to service-oriented and 'no' to advocacy and rights-oriented organizations. In fact, this discrimination was so stark this time that while the former enjoyed highest levels of state support and encouragement, the latter suffered worst forms of suppression.

In Pakistan 'it is a part of repetitive history to bring in Islam as being endangered'<sup>52</sup> whenever deemed suitable by any group. This idea was again used in the anti-Bhutto movement aspiring to establish '*Nizam-e-Mustafa*' (the system of Mustafa, the prophet of Islam). This gave impetus to one section of the civil society – the religious organizations. General Zia, utilizing this religious sentiment, co-opted many religious parties and groups in a client-patron relationship. Many of them were inducted in a hand-picked parliament (*Majlis-e-Shura*) and cabinet and their students' wings such as Islami Jamiat-e-Talba, were patronized by the military regime as the main vehicles of state interest in the universities and colleges. While law and order deteriorated at the campuses, Islam was to be enforced through law and ordinance.

Women were among the sole victims of Zia's Islamization zeal. The controversial Hudood Ordinance (1979), Law of Evidence (1984), venomous speeches of obscurantist mullahs from the state-sponsored media, dress-codes, and the attempts to confine women to *Chadar and Char-diwari*,<sup>53</sup> all these factors spoke of severe limits on women's liberty and rights. The general atmosphere became so charged with anti-women sentiment that even the women from respectable families were offended and harassed in the streets and market-places with perfect

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<sup>52</sup> Mirza Irshad Ali Beg, *Democracy Displaced in Pakistan* (Karachi: Research and Development Publications, 1998), 105.

<sup>53</sup> Chadar is a large piece of cloth worn over the normal dress while chardiwari meant the confines of four walls or homes. This was the symbolism used to define the perfect model of a modest woman living within the parameters of an Islamic society.

impunity.<sup>54</sup> This oppressive atmosphere became the very cause of mushroom growth of women rights organizations.

Eventually from the discussion rooms of Shirkat Gah in Karachi, emerged a remarkable feminist movement that shook the power avenues of the reactionary regime. Women's Action Forum (WAF) commenced a tireless struggle against all forms of violations of women's rights and liberties. Supported by many old organizations like APWA, PAWLA, Women's Employees' Association, and Business and Professional Women's Federation, WAF activists held demonstrations protesting against discrimination against women in all the big cities of Pakistan.

Abida Hussain, the first woman mayor in Pakistan (Jhang District) and the sole directly elected female member of the National Assembly of Pakistan (1985), declared that the 'women in Pakistan are in the midst of fighting the biggest Jihad in history'.<sup>55</sup> It was indeed a Jihad (holy war) in the face of venomous criticism and punitive decrees issued by some state-sponsored *maulanas* (religious scholars).

By the end of martial law (1985), women's movement had established a firm foundation of opposition to potentially discriminatory laws. The proposed Shariat Bill and the 9<sup>th</sup> Amendment were challenged. Twenty-eight organizations including women's organizations, lawyers' associations, trade unions, students, and cultural and literary bodies issued a joint statement against the Shariat Bill on the ground that it neglected the principles of justice, democracy and fundamental rights and that it would give rise to sectarianism and divide the country. WAF started a Legal Aid Cell to help women victims of discrimination. Ten women's organizations in Lahore passed a resolution against the 9<sup>th</sup> Amendment calling it 'extremely injurious' to the rights and status of women in Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> The regime only responded with a new round of oppressive measures.<sup>57</sup>

Under such adverse conditions the resilience of Pakistan's civil society in general and women CSOs in particular is remarkable. Resistance continued despite persecution. The number of both service-delivery and advocacy organizations increased and the distinction

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<sup>54</sup> This was revealed by several women working in the women NGOs that in some cases women without head-coverings were abused and even slapped on the streets of Karachi. Also see Mumtaz and Shaheed, *op.cit.*, 71-72.

<sup>55</sup> Anita M. Weiss, 'The Transformation of the Women's Movement in Pakistan', in J. Henry Korson (ed.), *The Contemporary Problems of Pakistan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 99.

<sup>56</sup> Weiss, *op.cit.*, 101-2.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, the state-sponsored *maulanas* declared the marriages of protesting women annulled.

between the two types especially in big cities was often blurred due to their multi-dimensional objectives. Human rights particularly women's oriented organization grew surely out of adversity and denial.

### **Post-Zia regimes and women CSOs (1988-1999)**

The end of Zia and Cold War (1988 onwards) significantly affected Pakistan's civil society. Neo-liberals were already challenging the welfare role of the state. The civil society faced tremendous boom as well as grave challenges. Facing a severe economic crunch due to suspension of western aid in the post-Afghan War period, the political governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif willingly allowed a greater space and role to the service-delivery CSOs. Many new organizations joined the field with programs for child, woman and adult education, computer literacy, career development, healthcare, relief against calamities, etc. Advocacy was also encouraged wherein civil society aspired to serve as a medium to attune the government policies to the actual needs of the citizens. This led to the rise of a number of organizations with successful advocacy programs. For instance, the Sustainable Development and Policy Institute (SDPI, Islamabad), Social Policy and Development Center (SPDC, Karachi), conducting extensive research through various projects, advocacy through seminars and conferences and awareness and information dissemination through publications, and policy advice to government departments on matters like land-reforms, federalism and devolution of power, literacy promotion, poverty alleviation, population control, women issues and so on.

Existence of democratic governments in 1990s did not signify an end to human rights violation in Pakistan. Exploitation of weaker sections of the society had become a norm and each year fewer eyebrows were raised over such issues. However, the daring CSOs continued to raise voices against them. The general environment of liberalization at least allowed a greater space for organizations working for human rights, gender issues, labor issues, etc. Presence of a woman (Benazir Bhutto) in the highest political office of the country was considered encouraging though it proved to be of little consequence regarding the general rights conditions.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Nawaz Sharif promised to uphold the rights of the downtrodden but at several occasions he himself disregarded the rights of judiciary and media. Nevertheless, many rights-oriented organizations proved their ability to

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<sup>58</sup> For instance the HRCP Reports during Bhutto's era show an equally grim picture.

work in greater collaboration with the democratic institutions and their eagerness to assume the broader responsibilities of community development. Particularly, the women rights organizations showed an increased degree of activity and their efforts led to increased gender sensitivity in the government projects.<sup>59</sup>

Yet the legitimacy and credibility of elected governments scored low on popular and even civil-society scales. So much so, the last military coup by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 was not only welcomed but supported by a large section of civil society including many advocacy and development oriented CSOs. Musharraf presented himself as the best man in Pakistan to conduct the 'War on Terror' outside and inside its borders and also to initiate structural adjustments to liberalize the economy. The civil society was eager to acquiesce. Musharraf appreciated the civil society as bastions of socio-economic change in the country. For the first time perhaps in his life, the common man of Pakistan was hearing the term 'think-tanks' as major advocacy units to advise the government on various issues of public policy. A partnership was again evolving. Many foreign funded CSOs were co-opted to embark upon a countrywide liberal movement to create awareness, undertake necessary research, collect data and educate the public opinion about the matters favorite with the regime. However, the sensitive sections tried to warn against the folly of civil society's 'qualified support' which provided legitimacy to the military regime and reproduced rather than resisted authoritarianism. 'It is no surprise that our basic, civil and political freedoms and rights ... are tolerated by the state one day but snatched the very next'.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless some of the organizations like the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the Women's Action Forum, among others, set an example by remaining committed to their original objectives without assisting or seeking assistance from the so-called 'enlightened' administration.

Anyhow the Musharraf regime's veneer of liberalism and enlightenment was soon exposed when the case of Mukhtaran Mai, focused world's attention on Pakistan, while the government officials after showing an initial sympathy left the Mai high and dry, even forbidden to leave the country lest her story create a bad image of

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<sup>59</sup> *The State of Human Rights in Pakistan, 1996.*

<sup>60</sup> Aqil Shah, 'Civil Society Without Democrats?', *Dawn* (daily), 28 June 2005.

Pakistan.<sup>61</sup> Further, the tone of government officials for the CSOs became more and more hostile with the passing years.<sup>62</sup> Particularly, the rights organizations that stood for cases like that of Mukhtaran Mai were openly blamed for working against the ‘national interest’.<sup>63</sup> In fact, it can be inferred that the Mukhtaran Mai case brought an end to the hallucinated honeymoon between the civil society and the government.

Over the last decade, women’s movement has grown to an extent not just reacting to the government’s actions but also to initiate legislations and mobilizing women to stand for the cause.

### **Variables to be adjusted for a progressive change**

The above paper had aimed at the historical analysis of the state-civil society relationship. It reveals a number of factors whose adjustment can lead to a progressive change not only in the gender equation but also in the incidence of state-fragility. These factors are mentioned briefly in the following.

#### **Patriarchal mindset**

Women rights and empowerment are still not very popular in the traditional Pakistani society. Patriarchy is well-rooted and ‘inequality of women is considered to be normal and is often justified by cultural and religious arguments’.<sup>64</sup> Mobilization of women even for welfare and service delivery purposes has yet to gain currency in the male-dominated society. Not to speak of CSOs working for liberty and empowerment of women. Since the beginning, women CSOs became the vanguard in relief and welfare work which was tolerated as an extension of women’s domestic roles. Conversely, their endeavors for empowerment invoked worst criticism. Education, curriculum and media have to alter this patriarchal orientation. Civil society can play a major role in altering norms that promote inequalities

#### **Centralization and co-options**

The state of Pakistan for most of its history has shown a tendency towards over-centralization. Ayub, Zia and Musharraf regimes reflected

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<sup>61</sup> Mukhtaran Mai was the victim of gang rape that was actually a result of a family feud in Punjab in 2005. It was later revealed that President Musharraf had himself ordered to restrict her travel abroad. See *ibid*.

<sup>62</sup> For details see HRCP, *State of Human Rights in Pakistan, 2007*.

<sup>63</sup> *State of Human Rights in Pakistan 2005*, 145

<sup>64</sup> Nikki de Zwaan, *Women, Gender and Fragile States: Report on Women’s Civil Society Organizations in Pakistan, Congo and Columbia* (A Report by, People on a Mission, 2009).

a homogenized and centralized state with a suppressed political system and various sets of co-options: Ayub's 'basic-democrats' who were also entrusted with the job of social welfare in their areas; Zia's religious outfits that created a substantial support base for Jihad and Islamization; and Musharraf's 'think-tanks' guiding and supporting him in so-called liberalization of economy and devolution of power schemes. CSOs with independent agendas were seldom welcomed. Particularly women rights CSOs felt difficulties during those regimes.

### **Development sans equality**

The claims of development by the above mentioned dictatorial regimes remain mere rhetoric in the absence of social equality in Pakistani society, because, according to the views of a renowned South Asian scholar on development: 'Development must be viewed as a process of expanding real freedoms for both men and women', wherein the major 'sources of unfreedom, including poor economic opportunities for women' must be eliminated.<sup>65</sup> The cost of economic growth becomes unbearable if its fruits do not reach the marginalized sections of society. Though most of the civilian and military regimes in Pakistan have adopted economic liberalization, the people living below poverty line had little access to the basic necessities of life. The state's expenditure on public education and healthcare has been perpetually low as one can see in the budget of 2019-2020 as well. Little effort has been made to assess how the development process and policies affect men and women differently. It is general trend that women have been left out of the process of development planning at three levels: local, national and international. In such a situation, women CSOs did play an active grassroots role in poor and marginalized sections, yet the task is too big and formidable for them to fulfill completely.

### **Limited democratization**

Ironically, democracy and authoritarianism seem to go side by side in Pakistan. The first democratically elected government—the post-dismemberment Bhutto regime had a socialist inclination and a vision of a grand role of the state. Civil society *per se* was not in demand while the state, though shattered economically and militarily, had taken up the welfare initiative. Yet this was the period when along with the growth of trade unions, a substantial increase in the number and activities of women CSOs was seen. On the other hand, post-Zia civilian regimes were too weak to take policy decisions. The economic growth of the

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<sup>65</sup> Amartya Sen, 1999:3

eighties halted due to the halt in foreign aid due to the end of cold war. Internal cleavages which were suppressed during the cold war made their most ugly appearance. Conflict management capacity of the democratic regimes remained low while the cost of conflicts further burdened the economy. The state lost the monopoly over the use of violence while the number of armed militant outfits as well as militant wings of political parties settled their scores outside the jurisdiction of the state. Fragility was evident beyond any doubt.

Both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in their incomplete alternating tenures tried to seek the solution in economic liberalization. However, their limited bargaining power in the international economic system kept them on the brink of bankruptcy. In such circumstances the major cuts were made in development expenditures, including basic education and healthcare, thus further decreasing state-legitimacy and increasing the state-fragility.

Under such circumstances, development of women remained a marginalized target. Though Benazir understood that discrimination against women can only be eroded through large-scale women education and employment programs, no such plan materialized. Pakistan remained among the countries having the lowest female labor-force participation rates in the world.<sup>66</sup>

### **Development planning**

Women empowerment appeared as a major goal in Pakistan's economic planning. Almost all Five Year Plans identified the advancement of women, particularly, the later plans carried more pronounced stance towards promoting women in almost all social initiatives and even enlisted representatives from women CSOs for assessing state's policies related to women.<sup>67</sup> However, almost every plan fell short of allocating significant amounts for these goals.

However, thanks to state's inability, civil society became stronger and more vibrant by nineties. Public-private partnership became the new social order wherein hundreds of new CSOs and their support organizations emerged to fill the gap left by the state. Yet, the general distrust towards civil society at large and women CSOs in particular

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<sup>66</sup> Of the 132 countries surveyed by the World Bank, only fourteen countries had female labour force participation rates lower than Pakistan. It was 21.9 per cent in 2018, also lower than the average 24.0 for South Asia. See, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS>

<sup>67</sup> For instance see the Seventh and Eighth Five-Year Plans, Government of Pakistan.



remained a basic hurdle in their being appreciated by the state and society.

### **Intra-state and inter-state conflicts**

Since the beginning Pakistan has suffered from internal and external insecurities due to the perpetual conflict with India and a plethora of restive situations concerning unsatisfied sub-group identities. Though the panacea prescribed for these issues was development of a massive national-security state, no government could successfully cope with them. Border situation with India and Afghanistan remained uncertain while internal cleavages between various ethnic and sectarian communities challenged the state during various periods of history. Women suffered the internecine attacks and state crackdowns, both as soft targets of violence and as economically dependent section. In fact, the last decade saw rise in attacks on girl schools and women health-workers and women NGOs particularly working in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan while the state remained helpless.

### **Conclusion**

It is trite but it is true that the state of Pakistan has been suffering from a degree of fragility since its beginning. From institutional ineptitude to sociopolitical chaos, the signs of weakness are self-evident. Polarization of society between sub-group identities—central and regional interests, government and opposition parties, moderate and radical elements, religious and secular groups, etc., has repeatedly led to breakdown of law and order, armed conflicts, separatist movements, terrorism, weaponization and criminalization of society. This all is accompanied by poor governance, economic failures, demographic pressures, low performance on human development index and political instability often leading to lapses into martial laws and unrepresentative governments. Even under the military governments, when the state was apparently considered strong, the above-mentioned signs of fragility remained unmistakably obvious.<sup>68</sup> In all these cases women were victimized to a

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<sup>68</sup> For instance, Ayub's 'golden decade' ended in civil war in the eastern wing of Pakistan which led to its eventual dismemberment in 1971. Zia plunged the country into a perpetual abyss of weaponization, drugs and religious extremism. State-fragility was obvious in the human rights violations and brutal suppression of opponents of the regime. Musharraf's 'enlightened moderation' could not roll back extremism and terrorism while Baluchistan went on the verge a civil war.

large extent and women CSOs were either suppressed or vehemently discouraged.<sup>69</sup>

However, in different periods the degree of fragility has visibly vacillated from high-alert to low-alert levels.<sup>70</sup> Reasons for fragility are multiple and multi-dimensional. This research did not intend to establish gender-insensitivity or low levels of encouragement to women CSOs as the main cause of state-fragility. Instead, it has explored that in Pakistan's history, like some other fragile states, gender insensitivity and discouragement of gender-oriented CSOs figure out as significant factors.

Women, despite the rise of a section of educated urban females, have been marginalized in public and private spheres in general. Women in Pakistan still need a voice in both these spheres. This voice can be found in civil society. Civil society is not the panacea for all ills but if allowed to work, it can, and it has shared the burden of the state. It can play a positive role in human development and peace initiatives. Women CSOs are potentially more helpful in positive management of conflicts within society. Women CSOs can work better to create inter-faith and inter-ethnic harmony. By expanding power and possibilities for the women CSOs, Pakistani women can become full participants in the business of the state. To Anita Weiss, this strategy can break the debt and poverty trap that Pakistan finds itself in today. To empower women is to empower the future generations, and for an enviable future of a progressive Pakistan, no one can ignore the viability of gender equality and equity as a fruitful strategy.

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<sup>69</sup> Women were among the worst victims of the civil war in former East Pakistan, Zia's Islamization and Musharraf's war on terror triggered a horrendous wave of extremism and terrorism in Pakistan.

<sup>70</sup> Especially in the last decade some international organizations, including the World Bank, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and Fund for Peace (Washington DC) have developed convincing statistics to assess the fragility levels of almost all the world states. According to their reports Pakistan's position has improved from 14<sup>th</sup> in 2016 to 20<sup>th</sup> in 2018. See Fragile State Index 2016 to 2018, <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/> 3-6-2018. Also see <https://www.passblue.com/2017/05/22/what-defines-a-fragile-state-it-depends/> accessed 14-3-2018.