

## Islamic Perspective of Science and Pakistani Newspapers: A Study of News Dissemination Process

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### ABSTRACT

*Study of science news coverage in three English language newspapers from Karachi was undertaken for the case of gastroenteritis. 8.13%, 7.28%, and 6.90% coverage was found in daily Dawn, daily Nation, and daily the News International respectively due to eruption of gastroenteritis in the city. The news relating to environmental sciences and computer sciences found only 1%; but the news on food safety, botanical sciences, agricultural sciences, research & development, natural sciences/wild life, energy, geology, metrology, marine biology traced below 1%; whereas the news about nanotechnology, space science & technology, advance sciences (laser etc), and engineering were missing. The study concludes English newspapers in Pakistan lack proper coverage of science involving news and their readers possibly remain from better civic sense.*

**Keywords:** Science/health news, Pakistan, Newspapers, Case study, Gastroenteritis.

### INTRODUCTION

News media at all times gives science due importance with such an extensive scope that Edwin W. Scripps and William E. Ritter launched a news agency as 'Science Service' during the 1920s. Ritter (1928) valuing the joint efforts by science and journalism wished-for mixing both entities. Newspapers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century published the lectures by eminent scientists like Thomas Huxley, Louis Agassiz, and Asa Gray (Weigold, 2001) for public interest, but the coverage of science may have reached its peak all through the Second World War. Hence, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the large news organizations covered science by a beat reporter while small ones handled science reporting by a general assignment reporter or by wire service (Friedman 1986). Dennis and McCarty (1979) found science writers at large newspapers preferred stories on environment, medicine, and technology over physical and behavioral sciences stories. Hence, consumers of large newspapers are more exposed to science news, particularly, health related stories. Newspapers that carry regular science sections as compared to those that do not also give greater coverage to science in the news section (Bader, 1990), particularly for stories about basic research.

Since scientific discoveries can help people to avoid health threats, detect threats, or identify threats; the extent, and the way the press covers the risk, the reasons

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quest for the right thing to do. The pursuit of knowledge on behalf of mankind is a pursuit of search for truth and common good for humanity. This characteristic of true knowledge creation deserves an unbiased quest for the solutions to the problems faced by the mankind today. Instead of man versus woman, the fundamental paradigm of right versus wrong has much wider scope in combating the issues of status of women.

Thirdly, the “women for women” approach is hard to deliver goods in the closely integrated societies where women by virtue of being tied together in multiple competitive relations tend to let down each other to maximize personal space.

### Conclusion

The global program for empowerment of women by UN is a comprehensive plan of women’s well being. Working under three main headings of “Equality, Peace and Progress” it has shown success towards formulating a common global agenda for women rights. However twenty years down the road, there are many aspects which are in dire need of improvement as a result of consultations and genuine deliberations among member states with a true spirit of women’s progress in all areas. The guiding principles of the Commission on Status of Women clearly state that the Commission will work for the betterment of women worldwide, irrespective of nationality, language, race and religion<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand we seldom find any decision taken on this forum which is not in line with the political and economic interests of the global players. We may find hope for Pakistani women in this program by looking at women issues in their local context and find solutions suitable to the socio-cultural situation in hand.

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DrSitti Maria (Islamabad, March 2012) a member parliamentand an active member of the Islamic movementin Malaysia.Dr Maria is not only satisfied with the status of women given by Islam, but also a practical example of how enabling the *Shariah* is for women. According to her, marriage is a contract in Islam, and whatever you decide with mutual agreement at the time of contracting a marriage, that defines your future role.

Pakistan being a country of 98% Muslim population, the meta-narrative of religion (Islam) can be explored to bail out women from the backward and ignorant socioeconomic structures which deny women's rights and use them as a commodity. A positive disposition for religious values is more likely to earn popularity among public for women's rights activists in Muslim societies in comparison to a self-denial outlook which makes their struggle counterproductive among their respective public. According to the survey by Gallup published in New York Times, an overwhelming majority of women in Muslim societies do not consider them as oppressed and find the spiritual and moral aspects of their culture the most valuable for them<sup>1</sup>.Being unable to acknowledge and fully exploit the strengths of our socio-cultural and economic system already in place for centuries will be a reductionist approach towards empowerment of our women.

**Making use of the available structure.**Like other Muslim countries, Pakistan has a strong family system with man as head of the family and bread winner for his family members. The unemployment of a man renders a family of four to ten members suffering from poverty. In such a society a program for poverty alleviation in women can be equally effective by reducing the unemployment rate of men.

**Engaging men and boys.**The clause "Engaging men and boys in empowerment of women" has been an integral part of the program since 1995. Since the cultures of Muslim and eastern societies are embedded in patriarchal practices, a program for change in the status of women cannot bear fruits without a change in the mindset of men in these societies. A social system based on strong family with man as head of the family requires a treatmentdifferent from those who have lost the centrality of family as an institution. The cultural typology of eastern and Western societies is remarkably different from each other with Eastern cultures being high context and collectivist. Collectivist culture is characterized by strong integration and an emphasis on relationships among people to a greater degree than the cultures of individualism where the integration is lose(Hofstede, 1984). This fact suggests devising an effective plan of creating awarenessin such societies without having to uproot or disregard the local norms and culture.

Secondly, engaging men and boys entails a collective effort to fight against a mind set. A cross-gender struggle for improving status of women will lead towards a friendly and non-hostile environment of gender relations and a genuine

Pakistan. This can be termed as the local version of the notion “Women rights as Human Rights” which is a popular idea in women rights struggle in the world today and included in the *Vienna Declaration and Program of Action*(1995) as well as a part of CEDAW. It is specifically relevant to the situation of countries like Pakistan where corruption is rampant among successive governments, and public funds are hardly used for public good. In addition, the inability of governments to devise effective programs for poverty alleviation, education and health, and to top it off, the absence of accountability are the root causes of its population’s endless afflictions. Had the gendered approach have a positive effect on this situation, the female legislators and ministers most of whom come from the most backward and rural areas of the country, must have created a difference by now. According to SairaBano(2009):

“Although women’s representation in the assemblies has increased quotas, they do not work in isolation: they cannot be separated from dominant societal attitudes and norms. The socioeconomic position of women in society means they are treated unequally by the men in the assemblies and their views are not taken seriously” (p. 31)

Same is the case with lady councilors as Jabeen (2004) writes, quoted by Bano(2009)“The general knowledge of councilors about their job is to serve the Nazim at the district level” (p.32).

Thus in the current circumstances where a lack of political will is at the heart of all problems, an increased presence of female legislators is hard to show any positive results. Same is the situation with other fields of women’s public engagement. The laws for equal opportunities for women are well in place. Articles 25 and 26 of the constitution of Pakistan specifically ban gender discrimination. These and other provisions for working women in the constitution are implemented by various statutes, ordinances, labour policies, and acts of parliament. Only the practical steps according to the legal framework on behalf of the respective governments are awaited to be taken(Sarwar & Abbasi, 2013).

**Discourse of Women’s rights activists.** Friedman quotes HinaJilan that the women’s rights activists in Pakistan like her sought a secular basis for their struggle and want equality according to the standards of international human rights law and not religion, as religion causes controversies(Friedman, 1995, p. 23). Same is the case with other Muslim countries. At the Beijing +20, the events of Muslim women rights activists were filled with a strong notion on behalf of the panelists that the Islamic *Shariah* laws in their respective countries were the basic hindrance towards achieving equal rights for women, without repealing which, women could not progress on the lines of global agenda. A law that was criticized the most was about wife’s obligation to take permission from her husband to take a job outside her home, which they saw as a great breach of a woman’s fundamental human rights. This reminded me of my interview with

West's political agenda instead, alludes to the ideological nature and political inclination of the program in favor of the US and its allies.

**Eschewing the plight of Kashmiri women.**The twelve critical areas of the Beijing program include Women and Armed Conflicts under which it has been acknowledged that “wars and armed conflicts destroy families and societies and leave women and girls particularly vulnerable. Sexual violence is widespread and often used as a war tactic”. The program tends to “train peacekeepers to detect, address and stop conflict-related sexual violence, while also supporting the reform of justice and security institutions”. However, the Session ignored the plight of Kashmiri women, who are suffering from sexual violence for years, being raped by Indian security forces and turned widows in large numbers. During the years of illegitimate Indian occupation, 10,167 women have been gang raped by Indian security forces and 22,778 have turned widows. Although under UN resolutions, the Kashmiri people are given a right of self determination that renders India as a usurping force in the valley, India's interests in the region are well backed by the West in its global and regional policies. A complete black out of the mention of Kashmiri women's situation alludes to the inclination of the said program towards the political agenda of the West.

**Resolution for Palestinian women.**The 59<sup>th</sup> session adopted a resolution on “situation of and assistance to Palestinian women” that was approved with a record majority vote. The resolution held Israel responsible for the plight of Palestinian women. Keeping in view the pro-Israel political policies of the West and the US-government's pronounced commitment to the state of Israel (which was manifested on the forum in the form of abstention of the European Union and a negative vote from the US), such a resolution being put up on the Session's agenda shows a genuine adherence of the program to the cause of women's welfare. However the rationale for voting against the resolution given by the US and Israel is the same given by the EU and Japan to justify their abstention, showing a unanimity of thoughts towards the issue among the global players. (Table 1)

Table 1 <i>Reasons for not favoring the resolution expressed by the dissenting countries</i>		
Country	Reason 1 (Political nature of the issue)	Reason 2 (Partisan draft against Israel)
Israel	Issue has been politicized	Text not balanced and accurate
European Union	Country-specific elements	-
United States	Political elements	-
Japan	-	Imbalanced draft

### RQ 3: Towards benefitting from the program

**Revisiting the gendered approach for women rights.**The common issues of majority population emanating from one fundamental issue of bad governance do not necessarily need a gendered approach to be resolved in countries like

maintains “Equality is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice”<sup>5</sup>, the claim demands for the realization where the rights start turning into duties, thus further increasing the liabilities, and where a woman needs equity instead of equality with man in order to gain true happiness. Although the biological determinist notion that all the roles and relations of the two sexes are fixed in a single, static pattern is not compatible with the demands of a modern society where Human Development Index is measured through income per capita of the population, however, women’s economic participation enhanced through the false needs created by the social pressures of consumer culture and commercialism are again a form of exploitation that cannot be justified in the name of women’s economic empowerment. Women’s forced employment is a severe breach of fundamental human rights that suggests a legal intervention to prevent this (Sarwar & Abbasi, 2013, p. 213).

The interpretations of the terms used in the draft are criticized by the right in those countries which include Church, pro-family and pro-life groups and NGOs. Family has been interpreted as “collection of individuals”, Mother as “care giver” and the word “partners” has been used instead of couple. The interpretation of the term “gender” was also severely contested from the right wing groups (Baden & Goetz, 1997). The “dubious interpretations” of the term “gender”, “based on world-views which assert that sexual identity can be adapted indefinitely to suit new and different purposes” has been dismissed by Vatican<sup>6</sup>.

The stance of Church on the possible interpretations of the terms further alludes to the influence of homosexual perspective on the program.

## **RQ 2: Political inclination (Observations from 59<sup>th</sup> session of CSW)**

**Saliency of Malala Issue.** The 59<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW was a continuation of the evaluation of progress towards the MDGs with respect to the twelve critical areas of the said program. The researcher had a chance to attend this session that held from 8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015. There was a visible resonance of Malala’s “heroic” story from Pakistan in events and sessions, who was recently awarded Nobel Peace Prize from the UN. Being a young woman highlighted as a savior of the cause of girls education on the face of religious extremism, she was widely hailed and celebrated during assorted events of the Session.

On the other hand, Malala continues to receive a tepid response at home. Majority Pakistanis are not only hesitant to acknowledge her as a hero, but also consider her as a tool to pursue Western agendas in the region (Yusuf, 2013). In order to raise awareness on education, the UN declared 12 July as Malala day which was not acknowledged by Pakistani government.

Prominence and promotion of Malala as a champ of women and girls’ rights which is not congruent with the perception at home and consistent with the

Vatican has dismissed any chance to accept the legal recognition to abortion, and so have many Muslim countries.

In the light of dominant and popular feminist stances, few articles of the Convention and clauses of the program are discussed as under:

- The critical area “women and media” (clause 33 of BDPFA) admits that “global communication networks have been used to spread stereotyped and demeaning images of women for narrow commercial and consumerist purposes”<sup>3</sup>. However it does not demand to regulate media content for discouragement of the commercial use of women’s beauty and sexuality and the objectification of women on media which is a worldwide problem faced by women today.
- The article 6 of the Convention demands States Parties to “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”. However it does not ask for any measures taken to safeguard women from having to turn into prostitutes, in order to end this exploitation. Instead prostitutes are termed as “sex workers” which shows an effort to approve this practice as a normal and acceptable profession just like other professions. The efforts of many Western NGOs culminated at Beijing in 1995 to exempt prostitution from the category of human rights violations and portraying it as a human right instead (Raymond, 1998). A number of distinctions (i-e consent, age etc were made to regard this form of violence against women as a human right.

There are a number of socio-cultural factors and social pressures in both the Eastern and Western societies which lead women into this profession. Also there are certain taboos and mindsets among members of our society which prevent such women from abandonment of their notorious profession and starting a noble life anew. Prostitutes are stigmatized in West too but the organizations for their rights like COYOTE in the US “works more for the rights of the customers and the industry, rather than for the rights of women to leave prostitution”(Raymond, 1998).In both of these situations women need to be helped through legal manifestations. Prostitution is a way of easy money for poor, but according to the generally held belief in Muslims, against the dignity of a human being. Prevention from this undignified practice is not possible without legislative support just the way doors to child labor have been blocked through laws so that poverty may not lead people into this undignified source of easy money.

- An exaggerated emphasis on the economic independence of women as an equal right and increase in the number of women in paid-labor force entails weakening of the institution of family. Feminists have failed to recognize the burden of double duties on women. Anne-Marie Slaughter, the director policy planning at the US State Department came in the cross-hairs of feminist circles when she resigned from her dream job in 2012. She did so upon realizing that she was not being able to give due attention to her teen age boys along with pursuing her career<sup>4</sup>. While the Beijing declaration