

# Kishwar Naheed and Religious Nationalism in Pakistan<sup>(\*)</sup>

Under the Supervision of  
Shereen Abouelnaga

**Samah Mohamed Ibrahim Awad**

Assistant Lecturer at the Department of  
English Literature and Language,  
Faculty of Arts, Cairo University

## Abstract

This paper discusses religious nationalism in Pakistan and highlights the role of religion in the nationalist movement for independence and in the development of the nation-state. The study focuses on the subjugating impact of the gendered aspect of this twin-force of nationalism and religion on Pakistani women especially through the relentless attempts to control their bodies, roles and sexuality. The research paper mainly examines the intellectual and poetic stance of the Pakistani woman poet Kishwar Naheed towards the nationalist and religious disciplining of women's bodies and conduct onto which the image of the nation is projected, and which dramatically transforms matters of personal and individuals choices into national concerns and debates.

### Keywords:

Religious Nationalism- Gender- Pakistani Nationalism- Pakistani Poetry- Pakistani Women Poets- Kishwar Naheed

### المخلص:

يناقش هذا البحث القومية الدينية في باكستان ويسلط الضوء على الدور الذي لعبه الدين في الحركة القومية من أجل الاستقلال وتأسيس دولة باكستان. وتركز الدراسة على الأثر القمعي الناتج عن ازدواج قوى الدين والقومية على المرأة الباكستانية وارتباط هذه القوى بالجنس من خلال المحاولات المستمرة في التحكم في أجساد النساء، وأدوارهن، وحياتهن الجنسية. ويتعرض البحث بشكل أساسي إلى الموقف الفكري والشعري للشاعرة

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الباكستانية كيشوار ناهيد تجاه هذا الإكراه القومى والدينى لضبط سلوك النساء وأجسادهن التى أصبحت انعكاساً لصورة الأمة مما أدى إلى تحويل أمور حياتهن الشخصية والفردية إلى قضايا ومناقشات وطنية.

### الكلمات الدالة:

القومية الدينية- الجندر- القومية الباكستانية - الشعر الباكستاني- شاعرات باكستانيات- كيشوار ناهيد

## Introduction

The development of nationalism in Pakistan is intricately linked to powerful religious drives. The idea of the formation of an independent nation in itself was sought for and legitimized on the grounds of Islam. The Pakistani identity was perceived first and foremost as an Islamic identity. Islam was firmly regarded as "the legitimizing ideology of Pakistani unity" and hence, Pakistan claimed its sovereignty and distinct identity on the grounds of religion which became "constitutive of nationhood in itself."<sup>(1)</sup> Religious nationalism is considered an inseparable fusion of nationalism and religion so that it expresses the political movement of a group of people who are heavily influenced by religion and who aspire to be politically self-determining in such a way that their own independent state or region would be directed and governed according to religious beliefs.<sup>(2)</sup> This paper discusses the idea of the powerful interaction between religion and nationalism in general and focuses on religious nationalism in Pakistan in particular. The research examines the use of religion in nationalist movements and explores the role of religion in the creation of Pakistani nationalism and in justifying military regimes as part of Pakistan's national identity. The study further aims to highlight the extent of the gendered aspect of religious nationalism which targets the strict control of women and their confinement to specific roles and codes of behaviour. A major objective of this research is to review the intellectual reflections and poetic struggles of the Pakistani woman poet Kishwar Naheed concerning the oppressive measures that she and millions of Pakistani women have to face as a result of this complex intertwining of nationalism, religion and state control and which influenced not only their personal lives, but also their social, legal and political rights.

### **Religious Nationalism: Pakistan—a Case Study**

Religion has often been "incorporated into and transformed nationalist movements."<sup>(3)</sup> The powerful interaction between religion and nationalism has played a central role in determining the "language and context" of nationalist leaders.<sup>(4)</sup> Religion with its "transcendence and absoluteness" is used to "set states into conquest and war, to spark civil wars and to establish the ethical habits conditioning the state."<sup>(5)</sup> Religious nationalism is sometimes viewed as "a new terror: states armed with the power of the divine" where politics becomes "a religious obligation."<sup>(6)</sup> Religious nationalism is a "deployment of God in the service of the solidarities of the nation-state."<sup>(7)</sup> It promotes a "codex of values, a way of life", it further controls the "material resources", "the machinery of the state", territory, associations, hospitals, schools, charities and law courts.<sup>(8)</sup>

Religion in this case becomes of great significance to the nationalist movement which "adopts religious language and modes of religious communications, builds on the religious identity of a community, cloaks itself in the religion and relies on the assistance of religious leaders and institutions to promote its cause."<sup>(10)</sup> Religious nationalism relies on religion as the marker of the nation's collective identity and the source of its "ultimate values and purpose" in this world.<sup>(11)</sup> Religion hence acts as a powerful "reservoir" where "religious miracles" become "national feasts", "religious revelations" become "national shrines" and "holy scriptures" are "reinterpreted as national epics."<sup>(12)</sup> Resultantly, religion—as in the case of Pakistan—becomes a powerful source of identity that can create loyalties and unify people, that is why, in times of crises, it is invoked by national and political leaders to rally the masses, have their support, influence their choices and basically "direct them to newly-formed and developing political systems."<sup>(13)</sup> Renowned religious institutions can effectively give "legitimacy to national leaders" and can assist governments to achieve political cohesion through the call to defend people's "religious national identity" especially when the various economic, military or social institutions are failing to achieve stability and to provide for people's needs.<sup>(14)</sup>

Pakistani nationalism adopted Islam as its founding ideology. The cohesion between religion and nationalism in Pakistan has served to unite

diverse ethnic and linguistic groups into one nation-state. In fact, one of the major problems that surfaced for the young nation-state was the multiplicity of linguistic, ethnic, and regional cultures and identities; Punjabi, Pathan, Baluch, and Sindhi, which claimed to be "separate nationalities" and which eventually led to the disintegration of Pakistan and the redrawing of its borders after the secession of East Bengal in 1971.<sup>(15)</sup> The solution to maintain unity between opposing cultures and to overcome the linguistic diversity of the culturally different groups appeared to be in an "uncompromising emphasis on the enforcement of Islamic law" which was effected by the dictatorship of the military regime of General Zia Ul Haq (1977-88).<sup>(16)</sup> Although the idea of Pakistan was originally created as a homeland for Indian Muslims, the actual Islamization process of Pakistan reached its maximum under the rule of General Zia who "attributed many of Pakistan's social and political problems to an 'un-Islamic way of life'."<sup>(17)</sup> According to Zia, the solution to the lack of "individual and societal morals" which is responsible for all social and political ills was a strict "program of Islamization called Nizam-e-Mustapha (Governance inspired by the Prophet)."<sup>(18)</sup> It became clear that Zia's comprehensive Islamization program was less concerned with the Islamic nature of the state than with "the establishment of the political hegemony of Islam."<sup>(19)</sup> The Islamic rhetoric was invested to draw parallels between the armies of the classical age of Islam and the Pakistani army and to lend legitimacy to military regimes by postulating them as part of Pakistan's national identity.<sup>(20)</sup> The Zia period embraced an Islamist vision of state and society where "the Islamization of laws, public policy, and popular culture" expanded state power both domestically and regionally.<sup>(21)</sup> To consolidate and secure his military regime all the more, Zia's state patronage "helped institutionalize Islamic groups within the state structure, including the appointment to the judiciary as well as civil and military service of tens of thousands of members of religious parties....Religion was also integrated into the syllabus of all educational institutions and was emphasized in the army staff college" in addition to distributing in military circles "all Qur'anic verses pertaining to war", all these processes consolidated religious radicalism.<sup>(22)</sup> The rise of religious fundamentalism in such cases is mostly attributed to the modern understanding of nationalism as secular; in fact, the Enlightenment

philosophers insisted on "the separation of state authority from religion" as an "essential condition for freedom" and a more egalitarian society.<sup>(23)</sup> Religious nationalists have often attacked secularism as a "Eurocentric ideology" developed in specific conditions of European history and is thus, "inherently culturally imperialist when applied to non-European societies."<sup>(24)</sup> Secularist notions of a "public sphere" that is not controlled by "organized religion" are contradictory to religious nationalist aspirations.<sup>(25)</sup> Religious nationalists seek to counter global capitalism as a "carrier of an alien, profaning culture", as a Western material ideology and not as an economic system in itself.<sup>(26)</sup> For instance, the "elite warriors" around Bin Laden sought to counter global capitalism to defend Islam against "Western modernity."<sup>(27)</sup> However, as pertains to history, the social orders based on "the principles of enlightenment, rationalism and progress" as well as the economic and political systems, such as Capitalism and Communism have all proved "unable to fulfil people's material, emotional and spiritual needs"; as a consequence, a growing sense of "despair and disorientation" has directed people to religion as a "source of solace", "a compass and an anchor" that provide people with a sense of certainty and meaning.<sup>(28)</sup> Hence, the link between nationalism and religion acts as a powerful "identity-signifier" that can convey "unity" and "security" in times of ordeals, uncertainties and lack of stability.<sup>(29)</sup> It is worthy to note that the extent to which religion influences any nationalist movement is foregrounded once the movement achieves statehood and when national leaders start to institutionalize religious beliefs in the laws governing the state.<sup>(30)</sup> Religion in its non-institutionalized form is related to personal piety and inner faith; however, its institutionalized form "maintain(s) its hold on the populace and social institutions."<sup>(31)</sup> Like the state, religion is a "totalizing order", a model of authority that can regulate "every aspect of life."<sup>(32)</sup> Religious nationalism also entails the return to the "timeless truths" of the holy text and to "the fixity of signs", where the Quranic text, the Bible, or other holy scriptures are taken "as a basis for the narration of contemporary history" and a template to interpret the present social reality.<sup>(33)</sup>

In fact, the effects of the processes of globalization and the introduction of western socio-economic frameworks accelerated the increase

in "religion-based ultra-conservatism, fundamentalism and orthodoxy" in postcolonial Muslim societies.<sup>(34)</sup> The failure of secular western economic programs to solve the problems of poverty and to boost economic development increased demands for resorting to "Islamic Frameworks of socio-economic, political and legal development."<sup>(35)</sup> In Pakistan, the military and Islamist ideology are interlinked. Zia's regime with its Islamist vision of state and society, provided "legitimacy to military rule" and formed an "alliance" between Islamism and the military which suppressed various democratic parties that hindered the building of an Islamic order.<sup>(36)</sup> Even after the end of Zia's regime, the war in Afghanistan consolidated the fact that Pakistan must "remain true to its Islamic ideology."<sup>(37)</sup> The rise of the Taliban introduced a new militant Islamist force to Pakistan which proved that Taliban's "brand of Islamism" with its extremism and efficiency on the battlefield in Afghanistan, will serve Pakistan's military efforts to control domestic politics more effectively.<sup>(38)</sup> Indeed, the role of both Islamism and the armed forces in shaping Pakistani nationalism is of a greater importance than in most other Muslim societies for it undoubtedly defined Pakistan as a "military-dominated state that resorted to Islam as a legitimiser."<sup>(39)</sup> Military regimes as a result became part of Pakistan's nationalism and national identity.

### **The Ordeal of Pakistani Women**

Of pivotal relevance to the subject of the research is the gendered aspect of religious nationalism. Women, "their roles and above all their control, are at the heart of the fundamentalist agenda"; women's conformity to the "strict confines of womanhood" that are set by the nation's religious codes helps maintain and reproduce the "fundamentalist version of society."<sup>(40)</sup> Women's "proper" behaviour is taken as a sign of difference between "those who belong and those who do not."<sup>(41)</sup> As a consequence, religious nationalists "center their fierce energies" on the defence of the patriarchal family and its gendered order, they give primacy to familial discourse as "the social space through which society should be conceived and composed."<sup>(42)</sup> Familial issues, such as divorce, contraception, abortion and the organization of sexuality occupy centre stage in fundamentalist discourses since religious nationalists seek to position the family, and not the autonomous individual, as the elemental unit of society, invest the

family with "transcendent status" and defend its capacity to "cohere across time."<sup>(43)</sup> They legally support "the powers of the patriarch", deny civil equality to women and further devote a great attention to women's bodies; "covering, separating and regulating their flesh" while asserting "divisions of gender" in schools, courts and the army.<sup>(44)</sup> To "masculinise the state", to cover "female flesh" and to limit "the visible presence of women's bodies in the public sphere" are critical targets of every religious nationalist movement.<sup>(45)</sup> For religious fundamentalists, women's ability to control their bodies and to obtain civil and political liberties is viewed as a "direct threat to their authority" and a "betrayal of sacred religious and customary laws."<sup>(46)</sup> By "cordonning off women" and constructing them as a "private property", a "secure possession" and a "non circulating commodity", religious nationalists defend their patriarchal powers against the threats posed by modernization and further enforce the representation of women's bodies as "a media through which the culture of the territorial state is constructed."<sup>(47)</sup> Women are viewed as the "cultural carriers" of the nation transmitting cultural traditions to the future generation, that is why, a tight control of issues of marriage and divorce guarantees that children who are born to controlled women are within "the boundaries of the collectivity" not only in the biological sense, but also in the symbolic one.<sup>(48)</sup> The fundamentalist tight control over women not only involves limiting and specifying their roles and activities, but also their oppression and restraint "when they step out of the preordained limits of their designated roles."<sup>(49)</sup> It is sad how the close relationship between long awaited nationalist aspirations and strong religious convictions— as much as it establishes the environment for collective solidarity and a shared sense of purpose and unity— breeds detrimental consequences on women.

The complex interaction of nationalism, religion and gender informs the ordeal of South-Asian women in general and Pakistani women in particular. Nationalism in South Asia originated in the form of struggle for independence that aimed at overthrowing the long British colonial rule and establishing self-rule.<sup>(50)</sup> Pakistan was partitioned from India in 1947 "in one of the most wrenching human tragedies of the twentieth century."<sup>(51)</sup> The idea of the partition was opposed not only by Hindu nationalists, but by many Muslims who viewed "the dismemberment of 'Mother India'" as

strongly problematic.<sup>(52)</sup> Islam served to distinguish Pakistan from India; its predominantly Hindu neighbour state.<sup>(53)</sup> The creation of Pakistan was the final consequence of a "rise of Muslim nationalism" in India and the use of religious symbolism especially during times of colonial resistance.<sup>(54)</sup> Pakistan's militant Islamism predates the 1947 partition and originates as a reaction to British domination, at that time, Muslim "masculinity" and identity reassertions were constructed around "anti-colonial resistance" and "religious revivalism through jihad and tabligh" where jihad was not limited to militancy, but included "journalistic, judicial, political and intellectual activism."<sup>(55)</sup> What was truly tragic during that period was the unprecedented communal violence that occurred during and after the partition of India especially the fierce gendered nature of the violence.

It is noticed that in times of crises and wars, women's mobility and sexuality are "strictly monitored" in order to maintain the boundaries of the nation, in its extreme form, this monitoring occurred during the partition when women were killed by their families to help secure the chastity, honour and symbolic borders of the community from being violated by the other community.<sup>(56)</sup> Urvashi Butalia has documented stories of communal violence against women at that time and which was committed under the mantle of religion:

*Thousands of women on both sides of the newly formed borders...were abducted, raped, forced to convert, forced into marriage...Untold number of women particularly in Sikh families were killed ("martyred" is the term used) by their kinsmen in order to "protect" them from being converted; perhaps an equivalent number killed themselves.* <sup>(57)</sup>

It is clear that women are the ones who mostly suffer from the politicization of the religious identity of their communities. In times of violence and wars, a strong emphasis on the gendered aspect of the conflict takes place to the extent that violence against women, in effect their rape, is utilized and encouraged as a tactic of war to humiliate and demean men.<sup>(58)</sup> If "protection is a fundamental component of masculinity", then the raping and "impregnating" of women becomes a symbolic "emasculat(ion)" of their men.<sup>(59)</sup> Many women were either killed or forced to commit suicide by their own families to protect them from being raped by the other men during



the violence that broke when India was divided.<sup>(60)</sup> The traumas that accompanied the circumstances of the partition foreground the terrible impact of the joint forces of nationalist struggles for independence and statehood on one hand and religious fundamentalism on the other. The outcome can result in the ideology that leads to an Islamist military dictatorship as in the case of Pakistan.

Concerning Pakistan's constitutional history, there were various and constant tensions between the dictates of Islam and the demands of equality between men and women. Islamization in Pakistan has been claimed to threaten gender equality and to deny women's equal human rights, while endeavours to ensure more equality between men and women in Pakistan "have been condemned as un-Islamic" creating more conflicts primarily over issues related to the family, sexuality and reproduction.<sup>(61)</sup> There was thus a "conflation of gender roles with national identity" where "legal measures" to ensure women's modesty and to curb female sexuality entailed a "rallying of support from the forces of conservative nationalism."<sup>(62)</sup> The Zia period in the history of Pakistan and its repercussions are of crucial importance to the subject of this research as they deeply influenced the personal and professional life of Kishwar Naheed as well as millions of Pakistani women.<sup>(63)</sup> Under the Hudood Ordinance imposed by Zia, Pakistani women were facing "a legal double-bind" because even if they managed to overcome cultural inhibitions, as exemplified in the feelings of family dishonour and shame when reporting a rape incident, they were likely to be accused of adultery which is punished by death if they failed to provide four male witnesses to the incident.<sup>(64)</sup> Women's predicament in this case was embodied not only in the fear of seeking justice and legal protection concerning sexual crimes, but in the way the state controlled and regulated their bodies and sexualities. Gender roles and identities were the mostly targeted areas of contestation among extremist groups in Pakistan where gender disparities "cut across all classes, sectors and regions of the country."<sup>(65)</sup> As Kandiyoti accentuates, the rise of Islamist movements has created a special bond in the relationship between religion and politics in which the role of the state becomes the expression as well as the implementation of this relationship.<sup>(66)</sup> In Pakistan, resorting to Islamic doctrine is the only legitimate way to debate women's issues and since "the

most immediate and visible targets in "Islamization" programs were the dress, mobility and general status of women", the question of Islam and women's rights was back on the agenda with "renewed urgency."<sup>(67)</sup> The ways women are represented in political discourse, participate in the economic field and give voice to their demands through social movements are "closely linked to state-building processes"<sup>(68)</sup> Applying the Sharia, in itself, may not be essentially in conflict with the pursuit of gender equality, Muslim feminists have argued that there are numerous and varied interpretations of the Sharia; "there are progressive and conservative interpretations of Islam."<sup>(69)</sup> Conservatives confirm that "existing gender asymmetries are divinely ordained" where as feminists argue for "a more progressive politics of gender based on the egalitarian ideals of early Islam."<sup>(70)</sup> The question remains as whether women in Pakistan are entitled to act as autonomous individuals or the ideological units of the nation as exemplified in the "home" and "family" will continue to re-inscribe ideas about Muslim womanhood and to construct notions of "the normative woman in the Pakistani nation-state" as well as "definitions of national boundaries" in terms of social morals.<sup>(71)</sup> Women continue to serve as representatives of their nation's moral, cultural and social as well as their country's national and religious ideals and codes.

Kishwar Naheed steps forward as a female voice raised against the social and the legal discrimination on the basis of gender. She rejects the abusing and victimizing practices against women that were sanctioned by the state's fundamentalist and nationalist pressures. She is conscious of women's power, independence and autonomy that threaten and highly disturb traditional notions of female chastity and immobility. Kishwar Naheed's intellectual struggles and poetic vocation have been driven by a strong sense of daring. Her urge to defy traditions which utilize and control women is relentless, and indeed impressive, given the extent of the subjugating pressures which are not only national, religious, and political, but mostly societal and familial.

### **Kishwar Naheed: A Daring Voice**

Naheed had to fight to receive an education. She was born in 1940 in the city of Bulandshar in North India where the majority of the population was Muslim and did not send their daughters to school.<sup>(72)</sup> Naheed belonged

to the *Sayyids* who followed Sir Sayyid's philosophy concerning his objection to girls' education on the grounds that education is a threat to morals and honour; "if education means letting them (girls) loose to mix with whom they please; if it means that as they increase in learning, they shall deteriorate in morals, if it means the loss of our honour and the invasion of the privacy of our homes-we prefer our honour to the education of our women, even though we may be called Obstinate, prejudiced, and wrongheaded."<sup>(73)</sup> Thus, Naheed was denied formal school education, studied at home and was forced to accept the orthodox way of life. <sup>(74)</sup> She started to write poetry after she was encouraged by a teacher to write a poem for a competition, she won the prize and her successes followed, but unfortunately, she was reprimanded by her disciplinarian father who told her that "no one ever wrote poetry in the family, least of all women!." <sup>(75)</sup> Nonetheless, her defiant character would not allow her to give up a newly discovered source of inner freedom and a newly acquired sense of self-fulfilment. She continued to write in this hindering atmosphere: "I felt scared, as there was no other women around me who were as daring as I was. I felt attacked by everyone." <sup>(76)</sup> In "Recompense" she says: "I write poetry / Because I haven't committed suicide." <sup>(77)</sup> Poetry in Naheed's case is synonymous with life itself. Her childhood witnessed situations which further accelerated the building up of her insubordinate character:

*(Her childhood) raised more questions in her young but sensitive mind than the combined capacity of those around her to answer. Every time she was asked to shut up, the revolt inside her gathered a bit more momentum.... It was only natural that she was treated in the household with contempt that a rebellious soul deserves- at least in the mind of elders.* <sup>(78)</sup>

During the phase when the budding sensibilities of an aspiring poet are starting to take shape and direction as well as to seek confidence and encouraging feedback, it becomes utterly devastating for the creative endeavours when denial and oppression reside in the closest family circle. Naheed's maturity and artistic career were anchored by important developments in her personal life. One of them had been defying family conventions by marrying fellow-poet Yusuf Kamran; Naheed belonged to the *Sayyids* who think of themselves as supreme and would not allow their

daughters to marry non *Sayyids*.<sup>(79)</sup> Her family felt dishonoured at the way she challenged community conventions and chose a husband for herself. She did not behave according to expectations and told Shahla Haeri in their interview; "For months people would go to my mother to pay condolences for the way I got married."<sup>(80)</sup> It is clear how ideas about the normative Muslim woman in Pakistan are constructed to control every aspect of women's lives. The intimate tie between family honour and women's conduct and sexuality justifies the wrath, even violence, against women who try to assert their individualities because women, as mentioned before, are generally perceived as the nation's identity, purity and honour. Honour here is a "normative" and not just a "cultural ideal", its value is "an integral component of the overall Pakistani personhood" where men at times use domestic violence against women in the name of honour and at times take political violence as a means towards "exerting, preserving, or regaining subjective and collective (family/clan/national/transnational)" honour.<sup>(81)</sup>

Another product of the dominant chauvinist mental structure in Pakistan is the accusations of betrayal to women. This patriarchal national mindset considers all women's struggles for their basic rights "whether they emerge from within the boundaries of religion or from a secular and global perspective" a "betrayal."<sup>(82)</sup> Since such struggles are seen as "dangerously divisive of the Muslim world" they are unjustifiably regarded as a betrayal of one's religion, one's culture, and one's nation.<sup>(83)</sup> They further pose a threat to male dominance. In "Anticlockwise", Naheed says:

*Even if my eyes become the soles of your feet  
even so, the fear will not leave you  
that though I cannot see  
I can feel bodies and sentences  
like a fragrance.*

*Even if, for my own safety,  
I rub my nose in the dirt till it becomes invisible  
even so, this fear will not leave you  
that though I cannot smell  
I can still say something.*

*Even if my lips, singing praises of your godliness  
become dry and soulless  
even so, this fear will not leave you  
that though I cannot speak  
I can still walk.*

*Even after you have tied the chains of domesticity,  
shame and modesty around my feet  
even after you have paralysed me  
this fear will not leave you  
that even though I cannot walk  
I can still think*

*Your fear  
of my being free, being alive  
and able to think  
might lead you, who knows, into what travails.<sup>(84)</sup>*

The poem reflects and criticizes society's shameful and slave-like control of women. The title of the poem; "Anticlockwise" is symbolic. It denotes the reversal of time movement, but actually suggests that the poet is going to challenge the established order and the expected course of matters. The poet appears to be addressing her beloved or husband and in this line; "Even if my eyes become the soles of your feet", she draws an opposition of their postures; her bending at his feet and his god-like highness which reinforces the nature of the relationship that is built on her submissiveness and his pride. Her submission is mostly done for "(her) own safety" probably to escape violence and ill-treatment. Yet, she is conscious of her true source of her strength. Her strength does not lie in the conventional image of an obedient or modest woman who bends at her man's "feet" and "rub(s)" her "nose in the dirt" as a sign of humbleness and humiliation "singing praises of (his) godliness". Her strength lies in the way she intimidates her lover who, despite his sincere efforts to exercise a domestic control over her, her senses, and her body, he fails to control her mind, thoughts and soul. She "can still think" inciting his "fear" of her "being free, being alive/ And able to think". It is her free mind that he fears the most and

his fear might lead him into unknown and desperate "travails" to regain his ascendancy. The beauty of this poem lies in the way the speaker challenges forms of control and subverts images of subservience into an image of resistance to and defiance of gender relations in her country.

Naheed repeatedly inquires: "Why has equality never existed on this earth? Why is everything interpreted for the benefit of men?" and she answers for herself; "Because men are perceived as.... false gods" and "still, we teach our women to bow before them." <sup>(85)</sup> The fact that Naheed raises her voice and her feminist convictions against injustices and atrocities with a minimal of assurance, safety, and support is truly heroic;

*Kishwar Naheed*  
*The desire to see you silent*  
*Billows up even from the grave*  
*But speech is urgent*  
*When listening is a crime*  
*Now I can see*  
*Expressions which daunted me*  
*Strike fear everywhere.* <sup>(86)</sup>

Her awareness of herself and her subjectivity arouses a "desire" to silence her. However, her rebellious soul and assertive self foreground the urgency of "speech". Her speech will break rules and address taboos, thus making listening "a crime".

There is an emphasis on the element of fear. In circumstances, when bold resistance to the state was "deemed illegal,... seen as treason and carried the punishment of imprisonment and death by hanging" then state-persecution is something to be feared. <sup>(87)</sup> Although the force of this menace must be great on any writer, not to mention a woman writer in Pakistani society, the practice of submission was not in Naheed's agenda. Naheed verbalizes daring opinions concerning her nation, she criticizes Pakistan's military institution;

*because of Kashmir, we have pampered the army..., and the*  
*army has taken over the country. Many nations are called*  
*martial nations, but we became the martial law nation: an*  
*autocratic social structure with a crazy character of a nation.*

*Just as people were the slaves of the Britishers during the British time, in Pakistan time they became slaves to their political and military masters. They bow before every power structure for their own petty interest.* <sup>(88)</sup>

Naheed criticizes Pakistan's military and its corrupt entourage, her audacious statements further extend to national policies concerning gender equality:

*The point of articulation lies in that we should aim for an equitable system where men and women work and are rewarded according to their qualifications and capacities, and not gender specificities that deprive women.... Up till now, the interpretation of all the educational systems, learning and teaching and religion, has been done by men only, and for only 50 percent of the population. We need a reinterpretation of society and culture and ethics.* <sup>(89)</sup>

Naheed wishes women to step out of their confined spaces and utilize their capacities and potentials in the public sphere just like men. She reflects on General Zia's Islamization program which, according to her, made women "the objects of national obsession." <sup>(90)</sup> In her poem "Charge Sheet 1990", Naheed draws upon the status of women under such fundamentalist regulations;

*The seals around my lips have been broken  
But I have lost the gift of speech  
I am free or in bondage  
I am happy or grieving  
I have a chadar over my head and my body is naked  
I wear a crown on my head and fetters on my feet.  
From adultery to a half-witness  
All abuses are meant for me  
...  
My charge sheet is pretty long!* <sup>(91)</sup>

In the line "From adultery to a half-witness", Naheed refers to the 1979 Hudood Ordinances promulgated during Zia's regime and which considered offences like adultery "crimes against the state" that must be

handled with strict punishment, she also hints at the Law of Evidence of 1982 which equated a woman's testimony to half that of a man. <sup>(92)</sup> Naheed expresses her bewilderment and inability to ascertain whether she is "free or in bondage", "happy or grieving", whether these state-laws are meant to safeguard her purity, chastity and her idealized feminine image and national status or they are meant to hold her captive within the confines of her home and small social circle and hence, destroy her free spirit and individual self. The contradiction is revealed in the way she depicts herself as wearing "a crown" on her head which is a symbol of royalty and superior status and "fetters" on her feet which are a symbol of captivity, imprisonment and a demeaned status. The "chadar" over her head does not secure, protect or cover her, she still feels "(her) body is naked". It is the female body over which battles are fought and religious nationalist codes are inscribed. It is "naked" and vulnerable to violence, control and subjugation. Her feelings of injustice, oppression and inequality climax as she realizes that "All abuses are meant for (her)", thus making her "charge sheet" "long" and her sense of social justice and equality totally absent. Naheed explicitly voices her view on fundamentalism;

*In any society where illiteracy is high, the only thing that can be effectively manipulated is religion. It is part of your culture. You are born into it. It is embedded in your psyche....., but when religion is manipulated as a means to divert the country away from progress, away from being a just society, and to deny people education, then it becomes a problem. And it is not only the Muslims who do it.* <sup>(93)</sup>

Naheed herself had been accused of being "against Islam" and of "advocating socialism." <sup>(94)</sup> When she was appointed director of the National Centre, she was attacked "everyday in every newspaper" for wearing sleeveless blouses with a sari and she wonders at this national obsession with her dress since "nobody ever talked and wrote about what (she) was doing, how (she) was managing and conducting the functions of the centre, and how (she) was organizing the council." <sup>(95)</sup> In a country where the preoccupation with muting women's voices, shawling their bodies, restricting their mobility is constantly exercised and preached, Naheed yearns to liberate herself and other women from this senseless control. Her



authentic realization of the predicament of her position and her refusal to uphold the patriarchal moral standings within the community and the authoritarian state demonstrate her strength of heart and autonomous personality.

Naheed even challenges religious obligations and religious authority as practiced by the state. In the first stanza of "We Sinful Women" Naheed says;

*It is we sinful women  
Who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns  
Who don't sell our lives  
Who don't bow our heads  
Who don't fold our hands together.* <sup>(96)</sup>

The focus here is on the rebellious attitude on her part and her taking pride in doing so. She is not "awed" by the "grandeur" of religious leaders and religious iconic figures. She refuses to "bow" her head or "fold" her "hands together" which might be taken as a refusal to the act of Muslim praying and the performance of a religious obligation. The tone of defiance dominates the whole poem and her provocative disobedience and challenge to sacred traditions intrigue or rather shock the reader. Naheed's individuality does not succumb to any form of submission, even if it is entailed by the complex dynamics of national and religious imperatives;

*It is we sinful women  
who come out raising the banner of truth  
against barricades of lies on the highways  
who find stories of persecution piled on each threshold  
who find the tongues which could speak have been severed.* <sup>(97)</sup>

The "barricades", the "lies", the "persecution", the "tongues" that are "severed" for speaking the "truth"; the ugliest side of state-dominance will not force her to draw back and lose ground. Kishwar Naheed is not intimidated into submission and silence, she follows her desire to exercise her own agency challenging gender and political power structures.

Naheed further expresses her anguish at the way her gender identity as a woman; as a daughter, a wife, and a mother was decided, regulated and stereotyped by men;

*I am not that woman  
selling you socks and shoes!  
Remember me, I am the one you hid  
in your walls of stone, while you roamed  
free as the breeze, not knowing  
that my voice cannot be smothered by stones.*

*I am the one you crushed  
with the weight of custom and tradition  
not knowing  
that light cannot be hidden in darkness.  
Remember me,  
I am the one in whose lap  
you picked flowers  
and planted thorns and embers  
not knowing  
that chains cannot smother my fragrance.*

*I am the woman  
whom you bought and sold  
in the name of my own chastity  
not knowing  
that I can walk on water  
when I am drowning*

*I am the one you married off  
to get rid of a burden  
not knowing  
that a nation of captive minds  
cannot be free.*

*I am the commodity you traded in,  
my chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty.  
Now it is time for me to flower free.  
The woman on that poster.*

*half-naked, selling socks and shoes—  
No, no, I am not that woman!* <sup>(98)</sup>

The poem focuses on men's selfishness and abuse. In the first stanza, she presents a juxtaposition between their states; her being hidden by him in his "walls of stones" and his roaming "free as the breeze". Another expressive image follows in the second stanza where he picks the flowers in her lap and plants thorns and embers instead. The image implies the nature of the relationship in which he enjoys her beauty, liveliness and goodness and offers barrenness and harm in return. Despite her situation, she stresses the qualities of the fighter inside her. She is a "voice" that "cannot be smothered", a "light" that "cannot be hidden in darkness", a flower whose "fragrance" cannot be contained and a fighter who "can walk on water" even when she is "drowning". Naheed resists society's shameful commodification of women's sexual identities and roles; "I am the commodity you traded in./my chastity, my motherhood, my loyalty". Naheed wishes the "captive minds" to be "free" since women's captivity is a sign of the nation's true lack of freedom. In Pakistan, a woman is a "burden" who takes an acceptable identity only when she is "married off", that is to say, only in relation to a man. In fact, Naheed's marriage, although she chose her husband herself, was an unhappy one as reflected in some of her poems;

*There's another man in you  
Who loves a woman other than me  
There's another woman in me  
Who loves a man other than you.  
Both of us hate each other  
And live under the same roof.* <sup>(99)</sup>

Naheed could have ended the relation, save the restricting societal considerations; she tells Shahla in their interview: "in our society the labelling of a man is very significant. It is "as if you keep a dog at the gate. Just keep the husband at the gate and stop people from making up stories about you." <sup>(100)</sup> It is worthy of note that Naheed's husband, though a poet himself, expressed his discontent at her drawing on issues of the self, body and sexuality, he tried to stop her from writing in her own name telling her; "Do not write such poetry; it is shameful. You are washing your dirty linen in public." <sup>(101)</sup> However, Naheed got recognition in a world dominated by

men because she "never behaved like a woman"; she "tried to break norms and taboos everyday."<sup>(102)</sup> Nevertheless, she was stuck in her marriage because of the force that deeply held cultural values exerted on her.

Naheed notes that poetry was her only support; her poetry sustained her as it gave her voice, made her heard and liberated her. In her poem; "Speech Number Twenty-Seven" Naheed says:

*My voice is the voice of my city  
My voice is the voice of my age  
My voice will influence generations*

...

*How can you call my voice  
the voice of madness?  
How can you think  
the coming storm a mere illusion?*

...

*Throw a stone in a desert  
and it sinks noiselessly in the sand.  
But my voice is not a stone,  
it is lightening;  
after the flash everyone can hear the thunder.  
Putting your hands to your ears  
will not stop the storm.*<sup>(103)</sup>

Her strength of will and determination actually emerge from a powerful conviction that one day her voice will be influential and inspiring, and it proved to be so. It is not "mad", it is "not a stone" that is "noiseless" when thrown in the "sand", but like the "lightening", the "thunder", and the "storm" it has a powerful and overwhelming presence and can draw the attention of everyone.

## **Conclusion**

The powerful interaction between religion and nationalism has played a central role in the formation of the Pakistani identity. Religion has become the marker of the nation's values and purpose and a heavily powerful institution that regulates the various aspects of life in Pakistan. The Islamist ideology became interlinked with the military in such a way that legitimized

military rule and justified military regimes as part of the Pakistani national identity. The fundamentalist drive took its hold on women aiming at a strict curb of their visibility, dress, activities and roles leading to their oppression and restraint. Kishwar Naheed is a citizen of Pakistan; a post-colonial nation state that thrives on religious nationalist ideals which represent the female identity as symbolic of the nation, and which depends on such representations for promoting its being, historical significance, and cultural identity. However, Naheed emerges as a subjective assertive voice in her society who is studiously preoccupied—though in her own way in both the private and public realms—with subverting the passive and stereotypical concepts of female identity that ultimately aims at subordinating women and controlling their agency and sexuality. She displays the refined dignity and sensibility of the poetic voice and has managed to transcend various obstacles and to transfer experiences of oppression in her life into irresistible drives for yet more autonomy and strength raising attention and social awareness in her society and claiming the status of an outspoken feminist poet far beyond the national borders of Pakistan. Kishwar Naheed's challenge to fixed gender roles and images that are propagated by nationalist and religious criteria reveals the feminine powers of mind, heart and spirit that religious nationalists fear and strongly desire to control.

**Notes:**

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- (2) Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer, "Religion and Nationalism: Understanding the consequences of a complex relationship" *Ethnicities* 3:2 (2003) 225
- (3) Gita Saghal and Nira Yuval-Davis (Eds), *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (London: WLUML, 2000) 8
- (4) Rieffer, 236
- (5) Roger Friedland, "Religious Nationalism and the Problem of Collective Representation" *Annual Review of Sociology* 27(2001) 126
- (6) Ibid
- (7) Roger Friedland, "Money, Sex, and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism" *Sociological Theory* 20.3 (2002) 419
- (8) Friedland 2001, 133,134
- (9) Rieffer, 225
- (10) Friedland 2001, 139
- (11) Catarina Kinnvall, "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security" *Political psychology* 25.5(2004) 756
- (12) Rieffer, 229
- (13) Ibid
- (14) B. C. Upreti, "Nationalism in South Asia: Trends and Interpretations" *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 67.3 (2006) 540
- (15) Farzana Shaikh, "From Islamisation to Shariatisation: Cultural Transnationalism in Pakistan" *Third World Quarterly* 29.3 (2008) 595
- (16) Shahnaz Khan, "Floating on Silent Waters: Religion, Nationalism, and Dislocated Women in Khamosh Pani" *Meridians* 9.2(2009) 134
- (17) Ibid, 139
- (18) Shaikh, 597
- (19) Ibid, 602
- (20) Vali Nasr, "Military Rule, Islamism and Democracy in Pakistan" *Middle East Journal* 5.2 (2002) 196
- (21) Khan, 135
- (22) Friedland 2001, 126
- (23) Saghal and Yuval-Davis, 13
- (24) Ibid
- (25) Friedland 2002, 403
- (26) Ibid, 394
- (27) Saghal and Yuval-Davis, 12
- (28) Kinnvall, 762
- (29) Rieffer, 230
- (30) Kinnvall, 759
- (31) Friedland 2002, 390
- (32) Friedland 2001, 145
- (33) Maleeha Aslam, "Islamism and Masculinity: Case Study Pakistan" *Historical Social Research* 39.3(2014) 143

- (34) Ibid
- (35) Nasr, 196
- (36) Ibid, 197
- (37) Ibid, 199
- (38) Shaikh, 595
- (39) Saghal and Yuval-Davis, 7
- (40) Ibid, 14
- (41) Friedland 2001, 145
- (42) Ibid, 137
- (43) Friedland 2002, 396
- (44) Ibid, 401
- (45) Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997) 35
- (46) Friedland 2002, 408, 409
- (47) Saghal and Yuval-Davis, 14
- (48) Ibid, 16
- (49) Upreti, 537
- (50) Shahla Haeri, *No Shame For the Sun: Lives of Professional Pakistani Women* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002) 3
- (51) Ibid, 20
- (52) Siobhan Mullally, "Women, Peace and Security in Contemporary Pakistan: Meeting the challenge of security" *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 22 (2011) 60
- (53) Aslam, 143
- (54) Ibid, 136, 139
- (55) Khan, 133
- (56) Ibid, 137
- (57) Ibid, 138
- (58) Ibid
- (59) Ibid
- (60) Mullally, 56
- (61) Ibid, 60
- (62) General Zia imposed Martial Law and promulgated the Hudood Ordinances in 1979, where offences such as drinking alcohol, drug use, pre-and-extra marital sexual relations and rape were regarded as "crimes against the state" that entailed the "severest of punishments, including public floggings and death by stoning." Hudood means "limit(s)" or "prohibition(s)" where punishment is fixed by religious and not by civil law, the Zina Ordinance required that rape or "*Zina b'il jabr*" would be proved through the testimony of four male witnesses, a requirement which makes it difficult for a woman to prove a rape incident, in addition to the Law of Evidence of 1982 which equated a woman's testimony to half that of a man. Anita Anantharam, "Engendering the Nation: Women, Islam, and Poetry in Pakistan" *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11.1(2009) 212
- (63) Haeri, 24
- (64) Mullally, 65
- (65) Kandiyoti, 9
- (66) Ibid
- (67) Ibid, 10
- (68) Mullally, 56
- (69) Kandiyoti, 9

- (70) Amina Jamal, "Gender, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in Pakistan: Willful Daughters or Free Citizens?" *Signs* 31.2 (2006) 289
- (71) Haeri, 248
- (72) Ibid
- (73) Ashraf Masood Hashmi, "The Impure Woman: Marginality and Detachment in the Poetry of Kishwar Naheed" *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary studies* 2.3 (2014) 9
- (74) Asif Farrukhi (Ed), *The Distance Of a Shout* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005) viii
- (75) Hashmi, 10
- (76) Kishwar Naheed, *The Distance Of a Shout* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2005) 10
- (77) H. Ishtiaq, "Autobiography: Kishwar at it Again" *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 25 (2010) 300
- (78) Haeri, 231
- (79) Ibid, 234
- (80) Aslam, 137
- (81) Hasmi, 11
- (82) Ibid
- (83) *The Distance Of a Shout*, 58
- (84) Haeri, 296
- (85) Kishwar Naheed, *The Scream of an Illegitimate Voice: Selections of Poems of Kishwar Naheed*. trans. by Baidar Bakht, Leslie Lavigne, and Derek M. Cohen (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991) 31
- (86) Anantharam, 211
- (87) Haeri, 252
- (88) Ibid, 253
- (89) Ibid, 273
- (90) *The Distance of a Shout*, 74
- (91) Mahwash Shoaib, "' A Dictionary to define My Dreams': The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetting in Kishwar Naheed's Poetry" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 39.3/4 (2011) 154
- (92) Haeri, 278
- (93) Ibid, 284
- (94) Ibid, 285
- (95) *The Distance of a Shout*, 74
- (96) Ibid
- (97) Ibid, 34, 36
- (98) Ibid, 82
- (99) Haeri, 237
- (100) Ibid, 236
- (101) Ibid, 288
- (102) *The Distance of a Shout*, 23,24



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