



## Radicalisation and Engendered Space

Women, Voice, and Visibility

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## Executive Summary

This research entitled “Radicalisation and Engendered Space: Women, Voice, and Visibility,” intends to assess and analyse the ‘occurrence’ rather than the ‘emergence’ of radicalisation in four districts: Buner and Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. The focus on ‘occurrence’ instead of ‘emergence’ is essential since this study does not take a historical approach. Rather, it takes contemporary threads for empirical examination through a prism of historical perspectives. The overarching primary aim is to explore whether space for women has shrunk or disappeared, or whether it has expanded over time in the target areas.

Subsequently, the investigation on spatial constriction or expansion for women on account of radicalisation is not based on a presumptive and pre-historical radicalised polity. Neither should it be assumed that radicalisation consequentially leads to demarcation of boundaries for women. The central aspect of this study is in fact to substantiate the critical relationship between radicalisation and radical elements engendering and determining women’s space.

A causative insight into women’s space in the aforementioned four research districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab will enable us to reveal whether radicalisation has deprived or facilitated their social, political, and educational mobility. Besides critiquing their mobility within these three benchmarked sites, this research also evaluates the reach of their voice, and the ensuing mobility. Are the women socially, politically, and educationally visible and vocal as autonomous agents? Moreover, what do women think and understand by radicalisation without being spoon-fed by male agency? These are some of the questions that the research addresses.

Finally, the inclusion of ‘voice and visibility’ in the research should be read as an attempt to chart the course of women’s mobility from the domestic to the public sphere. This would then determine whether or not their shrinking space is on account of the process of radicalisation precipitated and flourished by culture and religion, or if other factors are involved.

## Radicalisation and Engendered Space: Women, Voice, and Visibility

### Introduction

The concept of radicalisation does not necessarily translate into an aggressive mode that is manifested through terrorism and public acts of aggression. Nonetheless, in Pakistan, radicalisation and terrorism have assumed an altogether common negative connotation. Guided by a rabid ideology installed through a peculiar mode of behaviour, radicalisation in the country is taking a gradual course towards pervasiveness, at least in the areas selected for this research. This study, entitled “Radicalisation and Engendered Space: Women, Voice, and Visibility,” intends to critique the ‘occurrence’ rather than the ‘emergence’ of radicalisation in Buner and Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. The focus on the ‘occurrence’ instead of ‘emergence’ of radicalisation is essential to this research as it does not delve into its historical framework and concentrates on its present contemporary prevalence.

A mandatory aspect of this research is to analyse how radicalisation has impacted women. It will also scrutinise the availability of space for women prior to the occurrence of radicalisation, and address the question of whether it stands reduced after its prevalence. It should not simply be assumed that radicalisation consequentially leads to a demarcation of boundaries for women. A central point of this study is to authenticate the critical relationship between radicalisation and radical propellers engendering women’s space.

An engendered insight into women’s space in the aforementioned four districts is undertaken, firstly, to comprehend whether radicalisation has deprived or facilitated their social, political, and educational mobility. Are women in these regions socially, politically, and educationally visible and vocal as autonomous agents? When addressing these questions, it is essential to understand how women conceptualise and recognise radicalisation themselves, which is central to this research.

Secondly, the inclusion of ‘voice and visibility’ in the study should be read as an attempt to chart the course of women’s mobility from the domestic to the public sphere, determining whether or not women’s shrinking space is due to the process of radicalisation precipitated and flourished by culture and religion, or if it is caused by other factors.

In addition to examining women's mobility or lack thereof in the public/private domain, the third component of this research is an examination of the how AAWAZ has facilitated the expansion of space for women through the establishment of such sites of public participation as the Aagahi Centres.

Finally, a significant aspect of this study is its reliance on empirical rather than secondary data. Within feminist and non-feminist discourses, theorisation and conceptual debates on radicalisation are often beyond the praxis of Pakistan. This assertion is strengthened by a dearth of empirical research on the impact of radicalisation on the public and private mobility of women in Pakistan, despite a longstanding interest in the general study of radicalisation in the country.

## Research Objectives

The objective of this study is rooted in decoding the production of radicalisation in engendering space to the detriment of women's social, political, and educational maneuverability. To understand the production of radicalisation, this research scrutinises constituent elements utilised in its deployment in the specified areas. Furthermore, in order to recognise the process by which radicalisation is produced, it also intends to understand the location of its implementation.

Engendered space is essential from the standpoint of this study. As a result, the formation of this locus in censoring voice and effacing the visibility of women as embodied selves becomes a central subject.

Finally, this study will also analyse whether or not the role of AAWAZ's Aagahi Centres, the structural spaces provided to both men and women to discuss issues, can be seen as spatially expansive points of facilitation.

## Methodology

Primarily based on field research, this study does not have a theoretical framework. Even though a gender perspective underlines the discourse on radicalisation and engendered space, engagement with theories on gender is deliberately relinquished. As stated above, paucity, though not complete unavailability, of academic literature on engendered radicalisation in Pakistan led to substantial reliance on empirical research. Nonetheless, parts of this research have sought recourse to the secondary literature most relevant to this study – most notably, it avails the concepts put forward by the prominent theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault.

The empirical study was conducted in four districts, Buner and Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab. Following the research tools developed for this study, the field research team was able to compile comprehensive data through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and visits to eight Aagahi Centres. All FGDs in the four districts were gender-segregated.

Table 1: Districts and Field Research

Province	District	No. of Aagahi Centres	No. of FGDs
<b>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</b>	Buner	2	4
	Lower Dir	2	4
<b>Punjab</b>	Bahawalpur	2	4
	Dera Ghazi Khan	2	4
		Total: 8	Total: 16

## Conceptualising the State of Radicalisation

As stated in the introduction, radicalisation does not necessarily transpose as extremism, and as Alex Schmid notes, nor is it “necessarily a synonym for terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> The semantic nature of radicalisation has been usurped by the formation of discursive practices produced through hegemonic representations and enactments. Discursive practice is a term used in Foucauldian discourse analysis whereby ‘truth’ and ‘epistemes’ are formed to establish identities, subjectivities, and patterns of dominant practice. Michel Foucault explains this further in his critically acclaimed “The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language” as follows:

*These discursive practices are productive: they produce the specific semantics of the words in use, and they relate words to objects and to strategies of acting towards and thinking about things, persons etc. In this way, ontologising categorisations and evaluations are integrated, and they appear as “natural” as opposed to “constructed” or as the*

<sup>1</sup> Alex Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,” *International Centre for Counter Terrorism* (The Hague: ICCT, 2013).

*contingent result of discursive practices. In this sense, discourses produce a perception and representation of social reality.*<sup>2</sup>

In the same work, Foucault also questions ‘truths’ and ‘epistemes’ by referring to them as constructions to create specific knowledge. In the case of radicalisation then, the term has become synonymous with ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’. This is not always constructive. As Saba Noor and Daniela Hussain assert, “the term radicalization is often used in Pakistan interchangeably with terms such as terrorism and extremism. Most definitions are borrowed from the West and may not accurately portray the Pakistani context.”<sup>3</sup>

Keeping this background in mind, an interesting array of responses was tendered by KIIs and respondents participating in the FGDs of their understanding of the term ‘radicalisation’. As most groups convened for FGDs demonstrated vacuity of discernment at what was meant by radicalisation, the concept was vicariously introduced to them by asking about cultural, social, and traditional restrictions imposed on them recently or in the recent past. Those restrictions could have been part of state policies or culture, but most of the responses centre-staged religious and ideological obduracy in the discourse on radicalisation.

The allusion leading to how the participants perceived radicalisation circulated around the political classification of the state of Pakistan. In all four districts, there was unanimity of response amongst the FGD groups and interviews of key informants. Their pride-infused response of Pakistan’s foremost identity as an Islamic state reinforced a religious dispensation, but did not subsume their proclivity towards ‘radicalisation’ (in this particular sentence the word radicalisation embodies extreme ideology).

At an FGD of men in Village Poari Keley, UC Khungai in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, participants did not give a direct response to the characterisation of radicalisation. In fact, their discomfort at the concept of discursive engagement with radicalisation was palpable in their silence till the query was veered to another aspect of identifying factors formed through discursive practices. “The state is a major factor. In our village women voted for the first time in last year’s local bodies election because the Election Commission had made it mandatory. Now, those religious elements and religious political parties opposed to women voting on the basis of religion, and secular parties on traditional grounds, are canvassing for women’s votes,” said a respondent.

Clearly, the respondent held the state responsible for creating, constructing, and preventing radical practices to negate ideological extremities associated with radicalisation. Mohammad Akbar Khan, President Rural

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972)

<sup>3</sup> Saba Noor and Daniela Hussain, “Women Radicalization: An Empirical Study,” *Pak Institute for Peace Studies* (April 2009).

Community Development Council, Lower Dir, provided a historical perspective of the region now constituting Pakistan, to define radicalisation (*intiha pasandi*) as understood by him. “Radicalisation is the absence of tolerance and balanced view leading towards a rejection of others’ points of view. If you study the historical background of this region, it was the cradle of the Gandhara civilisation that was peaceful and peace-loving in nature. This region witnessed aggression and invasions but never staged aggression or invasion against the other,” he historicised. The definition of ‘absence of tolerance leading towards rejection of others’ points of view’ was shared by a majority of participants in all four districts.

The formation of radicalisation as an adverse semantic must be seen in relation to the occurrence of events concretising its fatal immortality. Terrorism, Talibanisation, and religious pedagogy are temporal occurrences bespoken as radical collaterals. In Buner and Lower Dir, subsequently, FGDs of women revealed a pattern correlating radicalisation with terrorism, Talibanisation, and religious dissemination of thought. Even though their thoughts were not explicitly defined to corral radicalisation, women emboldened by the segregated FGD format, held men responsible for the ‘occurrence’ of radicalisation.

“You know men go to *madrasas* (religious seminaries), sit in local mosques, follow the instruction of *maulvis* (clergy) and come home to impose restrictions on us. We don’t know what they read; their religious education has made them suspicious of women, forcing us to remain at home,” said a female participant in Buner. “I blame the Taliban, who are of course men, for changing our culture and turning it into an anti-women society. They have turned it to an extreme level declaring it *haram* (forbidden by religion) for a woman to go to a hospital if she is treated by a male doctor,” said another at the same FGD.

The FGD at Jamal Channar, Bahawalpur was held inside a room turned into an Aagahi Centre at the home of Naeem Kauser, a focal person. Most of the participants had an above average literacy level, accounting for their specific socio-political views on politics, democracy, and an all-encompassing Islam. Ranging between the ages of 20 to 30 years, the spirited participants initially hesitated to admit the prevalence of radicalisation in their area, and nor were they forthright about restrictions on their mobility caused by factors nurturing it. After a protracted approach of discussing participants’ daily chores, the discussion took an unexpected turn when asked if they felt safe outside their homes. They unanimously deferred to the saviour role of the army and declared General Raheel Sharif as their protector and benefactor. They conceded the supremacy of the army and believed that radicalisation was a political progeny contained, and to a great degree, reduced by the army.

Most women attributed the emergence of radicalisation to terrorism brought on by injustice and poverty. “An unemployed person can be easily influenced. Parents spend hard-earned money on educating their children and when they are not able to get a job, they will obviously turn to any means to earn. But where the country is concerned, specifically terrorism, conditions are not improving,” said a participant. Another participant said that the Taliban did not come from outside. “They are within us. We tried to kill them but did we succeed? We need to confront them by educating people.”

An undeniable convergence of ideas between men and women participants, inasmuch as understanding radicalisation was concerned, was observed, arriving at a terminus of experiential meridian. Men evinced the propensity to historicise the ‘emergence’ of radicalisation compared to women whose lived experiences shifted preponderance on ‘occurrence’, a differential most significant to this research.

The next part of this study will further elaborate how this ‘occurrence’, undoubtedly emanating from ‘emergence’, is constructed and produced through propellers of knowledge implanted as absolute truth. It seeks to address the following questions: Who are those propellers of knowledge? Who are the targets? Are women the targets of radicalisation spread by dominant factors intrinsic to power?

## Radicalisation: Construction and Production

This study is structured around investigating how, if at all, the ‘occurrence’ of radicalisation has contributed to engendered space to regulate women’s political, social, and cultural regimen. That it is a construction, created to produce a radicalisation discourse, is best encapsulated by Foucault’s explanation of discourse as:

*....a group of acts of formulation, a series of sentences or propositions..... discourse is constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence..... that the law of such a series is precisely so far called a discursive formation.... that this discursive formation really is the principle of dispersion and redistribution, not of formulations, not of sentences, not of propositions, but of statements... the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation...<sup>4</sup>*

Discourse becoming a discursive practice ‘belonging to a single system of formation’ is constructed verbally, textually, and most of all by the use of religion as an implement of power and regulation to engender

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<sup>4</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

space. The construction of radicalisation in Pakistan was established at the time of the Objectives Resolution in 1949 shortly after the country was created, asserted one of the key informants, Mr. Shams Bunneri, Central Secretary, Awami National Party, in an interview in Buner. As he noted: “The existence of Pakistan is based on idealism not realism. It was never ruled by its people but by the British and the Punjab-created bureaucracy. The Objectives Resolution, passed by Liaquat Ali Khan, who was assassinated the following year, was to provide justification for the state’s existence. According to the rules of democracy, Dhaka should have been the capital of the state, but the rights of Bengalis were denied.”

Mr. Bunneri believed religion was used and inserted into the Constitution to process the ‘production’ of radicalisation at the grassroots level. The beginning of the era of General Ziaul Haq (1977-88), who came to power through a coup d’état after overthrowing the democratically elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, congealed the state’s militant, as well as religious, character. “How many madrasas, Darul Uloom, and mosques have been constructed from 1947 to 1978? And how many since then? They all preach Wahabism! Look at the number of mosques named after the upholders of a particular sect. Majority of them are constructed through money paid by the Saudis,” said Mr. Bunneri.

Who are these propellers of radicalisation, engineering, constructing, and producing knowledge to perpetuate an engendered state where women are concomitant subjects of discursive practices? Perhaps the answer can be found partly in Foucault, who writes in ‘The History of Sexuality’ that a strategy can only achieve a complete effect “if it did not gain support from precise and tenuous relations serving, not as its point of application or final outcome, but as its prop and anchor point.”<sup>5</sup> Foucault is implicitly signifying the importance of continuity in the two levels of construction and production.

Shumaila Akram, a 20-year-old focal person at the AAWAZ Union Council, Aagahi Centre UC-14, Bahawalpur, believed the *mullahs* (clergy) were the main propellers of radicalisation, which she understood as terrorism. “No doubt unemployment is a huge factor forcing young men towards terrorism. The other huge factor is the misguided Islam preached by *maulvis*,” said Ms. Akram. Inspired by Dr. Zakir Naik, a renowned Islamic scholar, her unwavering faith as a Muslim residing in an Islamic country was not accompanied by constraints. “I feel free as a Muslim woman,” she said, dressed in an *abaaya*. A cardinal misinterpretation of Islam, in her view, was that women were forbidden from choosing their life partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 92-102.

Ms. Nabia Afzal, focal person Aagahi Centre, Naugai, Buner, was less euphoric than Bahawalpur's Ms. Akram about the impact of radicalisation on women. Her explanation of radicalisation as a process to change people into following continuous patterns of constructed truth, reinforced the use of religious discursive practices to form subjectivities. "Our culture and tradition have been deliberately destroyed. I blame the state and religious extremists for whom there is no law. Extremism is at its peak, preventing girls from attending schools. Women teachers are also forced to give up their jobs. Everybody is against women!" exclaimed Ms. Afzal.

To refer to Foucault again, the empirical evidence gathered from the four districts through the FGDs and KIIs enunciates 'historical a priori' extracted to fabricate an occurrence to be later inserted into historical emergence.<sup>6</sup> The process of pedagogical methodology used by the state, scholars, or the local clergy effectuates reliance on religion to maintain hierarchical systems of power. Factors facilitating or contributing to the maintenance of those systems are initiated from the domestic sphere and a façade of relational autonomy for women. Unemployment, poverty, and forced illiteracy – through closure of girls' schools in Buner and Dir, and the substitution of schools with seminaries and conformist scholasticism in Dera Ghazi Khan – are factors proceeding the construction and production of radicalisation, the most significant site of which is a 'woman' subjectified, her controlled and embodied self marking the consummation of radicalisation.

Though strict regimen regulating women's public and private spheres was common to all four districts, women in Buner and Lower Dir held a better understanding of the propellers of radicalisation compared to the women in Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan. Exposed to the devastation caused by the construction of the discursive formation of Talibanisation, they were aware of the nexus between the *mullahs* and the state. "Our culture and code of living (Pukhtunwali) was deliberately destroyed to suppress our defiant spirit, and our men were pushed towards religion to keep them occupied. Men blindly follow misleading religious instructions of the *mullahs*," said an FGD participant in Dagar, district Buner.

At an FGD held at Mari Sheikh Shajra, Goth Laal, Bahawalpur, women showed little interest in the questions and they were not too eager to respond. Sitting on charpoys, most of them stared blankly at the interviewer, not understanding the necessity to respond to questions specifically on women's mobility and their public and private spheres. The FGD was conducted in Seraiki, Bahawalpur's local dialect, facilitated where necessary by Salma Azeem, the Aagahi Centre's focal person. Considering that seven of the nine participants could not spell and had only surfed through the Quran in Arabic, the concept of radicalisation and its impact on their mobility was

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

improvised to pivot their attention to household activities. Only one of them worked outside the house as a teacher. The others were comfortable to assume the role of mothers and carers. They did not feel constrained by their role as mothers, and neither did they evince bitterness towards men regulating their sphere. “How can you expect change in society when women don’t feel repressed? They are content to bear children, stay at home and when necessary go to the nearest polling booth to vote for a candidate favoured by their husbands,” said Sharifaan Bibi, a local teacher at Basti Moshi’s community school.

Dera Ghazi Khan was the most stringently controlled of the four districts edifying the formation of women exhibiting and experiencing radicalisation. When women in Samina Saadaat were asked to articulate the essence of radicalisation, they readily supplied the answer by stating the rigidity in believing the prevalence of one truth to the rejection of others. The respondents were asked who in their opinion constituted radicalisation. In both the women FGDs and KIIs held at Dera Ghazi Khan the unequivocal response to that question was: “Shias!”

The following is a verbatim account from an FGD held at Samina Saadaat of women’s constructed opinion on radicalisation.

“Thank God there are no Shias living here. They were asked to move out of here. You will not find a single Shia living here. They are mostly centred in Dera Ghazi Khan city where they practice their religion,” said a participant. Another woman interrupted and in a loud assertive voice said that unlike Shias who were a huge problem the Prophet (PBUH) was not a radical. They – the Shia – practiced idolatry (*shirk*) by creating images and expressed shocking views on Hazrat Omar, Hazrat Ayesha, and Hazrat Abu Bakar. “Shias only respect Ali, I mean Hazrat Ali – others don’t matter. Do you know how wrong it is for them to loudly take the names of women of the Prophet’s family in streets? We don’t even want to eat the food prepared by them. They are infidels! Marriage between a Shia and Sunni is not only against Islam, it is also invalid.”

## Engendering Space: Women, Voice, and Visibility

The previous section endeavoured to analyse the construction of knowledge to produce the occurrence of radicalisation causing experiential constraints for women. This part of the study is centred upon investigating how space is engendered in the four areas of research, concentrating women’s voice and visibility in the political, social, and cultural realms. Furthermore, this section will examine the programmatic provision of space for women through the AAWAZ Aagahi Centres (ACC) to determine their presumed functional purpose as ‘safe havens’. Prior to the occurrence of radicalisation, were women visible culturally and politically? Were there women-specific sites

in the past that are now obliterated by radicalisation? Have the Aagahi Centres expanded space for women? These are some of the core queries addressed in this part of the study. Before responding to these questions however, an insight into engendering space will enable a better understanding of the temporal and spatial seclusion of women on account of radicalisation.

Spatial segregation between men and women derived from embedded normativity is a delineation of the embodied occupation of the two sexes. Space transmutes into an engendered state when its occupying embodiments are reduced to reductive implements of a contrived hegemonic knowledge that condenses variables to uniformity. That compression in the case of this research study is a patterned rejection of diverse political and religious predilections. The division of man/woman space, men sitting separately from women, is not an indubitable contradiction of liberal existence and ideas. When that division is *engendered* however, the space becomes a site of regulated bodies to sustain imposed dogmas.

Ms. Nasreen Kazmi, AAWAZ District Forum (ADF) member and Programme Manager Women Youth Development, Dera Ghazi Khan, informed the research team that whenever a *khuli katcheri* is held under the AAWAZ programme, it is segregated and partitioned by a sheath of canvas with women sitting on one side and men on the other. “It takes place twice a month, but unfortunately, issues raised by women are seldom resolved,” she said. According to her, moreover, neither are women visible nor their voices heard. Did public places ever exist in the past for women? Has the programme of AAWAZ negotiated some space for them? “For women?” asked Ms. Kazmi incredulously, “No! None that I know of – not now nor in the recent past!” Crediting AAWAZ, she conceded the spatial significance of the ADF offering space to women alongside men. “If you go outside the city of Dera Ghazi Khan, sharing of space between men and women is taboo. In the city though, programmes like that of AAWAZ are gradually pushing for space for women. Their voices might not be heard nor are they visible behind a veil, but their presence at these forums is a huge step towards change,” she asserted.

Mostly dominated by men, the partitioned, segregated *khuli katcheris* in Dera Ghazi Khan, set up under the AAWAZ programme, offer a small portion of spatial presence, if not voice or visibility, to women. An unthinkable activity beyond the programme implemented under AAWAZ and similar projects initiated by other development organisations, the establishment of the Aagahi Centres has encouraged women to step out of the domestic sphere to a relative public sphere.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A detailed information on the Aagahi Centres is available on the AAWAZ website, [www.aawaz.org.pk](http://www.aawaz.org.pk)

How is an Aagahi Centre a 'relative public sphere'? An Aagahi Centre is not set up through a political administrative system demanding community recognition. It is placed within the AAWAZ programme to function in consonance with the communities' sensibilities to guide them on governance, service delivery, legislation, rights, and state accountability.

Based at Strengthening Participatory Organization's (SPO) office in Peshawar, Ms. Abida, Programme Officer AAWAZ, travelled specifically for the interview. She told the research team that AAWAZ had not held any *khuli katcheri* in Buner but acknowledged the spatial provision for women as a result of the Aagahi Centres. "The Aagahi Centres function as focal points of information for women and are one of the few places open to men as well," she said.

In Lower Dir, some of the issues raised at the Aagahi Centres and facilitated by resource persons are regarding information about marriage registration (*nikah-nama*), birth registration, and Computerised National Identity Cards (CNICs). A majority of the female respondents in Buner and Lower Dir agreed that there was an increase in awareness of women's inheritance through the spatial institution of the AAWAZ Aagahi Centres.

In Dera Ghazi Khan, a major issue raised at the Aagahi Centres was the suicide and suicide attempts of women who swallowed black stone (*kala pathar*) when they were prevented from marrying by choice. Facilitated by AAWAZ, a campaign was organised, with the participation of both men and women, to ban the sale of black stone. "We held a walk against the sale of black stone and now the administration has banned its sale in shops in DG Khan," said a male FGD participant.

The question of whether the Aagahi Centres have expanded or facilitated space for women is self-explanatory in establishing the diminished political and cultural space for women. When the criterion of a 'good' Muslim society is the absence of women in public, negotiating vocal and spatial visibility takes on a negative connotation. "At the time of militancy in Buner, when Maulana Tariq Jameel visited Buner, he did not see any women in the bazaar. In one of his speeches he referred to it as a sign of a good Muslim society," remarked a *maulvi* participating in an FGD. A similar sentiment was articulated by an elder in Dera Ghazi Khan, who equated the presence of more women than men in the bazaar with the Doomsday. "This is a sign of the Doomsday (*Qiyamat*) when women surpass men in number in the bazaar. Islam teaches *chaadar* and *chaardiwari* for women," lamented the elderly man.

The occurrence of radicalisation in the formation of the Taliban decimated the culture, and the traditional system of pride of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Restricted patterns of mobilisation were introduced to annihilate women's cultural space. Traditionally, there were several women-specific festivities in the province, including *samanak*,<sup>8</sup> *seal*,<sup>9</sup> and singing, particularly while playing the *Tambal*.<sup>10</sup> An annual festival of *Aakheri Charshanba* (last Wednesday) saw women visit various shrines.<sup>11</sup> Apart from these, women took part in agricultural activities, mostly in collecting fodder and wood. During harvest season, women of the community organised *Ashars* for harvesting and fodder cutting. Another point of cultural space was collecting water from the *goddar* (water collection point either from a stream or spring). There were also communal ovens where women gathered to bake bread. It was a festive occasion, providing them with the opportunity to gather and socialise on a daily basis. Those were segregated spaces offering mobility to women.

Around 15 to 20 years ago, however, these activities were abandoned, disclosed one of the participants at an FGD in Buner. The group was reluctant to discuss the reasons for their discontinuation. Some attributed it to an increase in population and urbanisation, while others ascribed it to girls going to schools in the mornings and *madrasas* in the evenings. "Now water is available at home and they watch TV in their free time," qualified a respondent. One participant argued that awareness, particularly religious awareness, discouraged women's mobility, especially without the company of a *mahram* (consort).

At Mari Sheikh Shajra, Goth Laal, Bahawalpur, women's cultural outlet was restricted to visiting each other's houses or gathering at weddings. But public space for women was not available. "We don't have the time after house chores to go out," said a woman whose husband was the *imam* of the local *masjid*.

Samina Saadaat, Dera Ghazi Khan, is illustrative of a society bereft of culture after being wrought by radicalisation. Women admitted a complete absence of public space to the extent that they were even forbidden from visiting a graveyard. "It is stated in one of the *ahadith* that when a woman enters a graveyard she is perceived nude and without clothes," commented a woman. Another challenged her by asking the source of the *hadith* and said that she had never heard of it.

<sup>8</sup> Samanak was a type of dish made of wheat grains. At harvest time all the women of a village or a community got together at a communal place to celebrate.

<sup>9</sup> Seal was a local term for Eid celebrations, stretching over five days wherein women assembled at a communal point in a village to celebrate Eid.

<sup>10</sup> Tambal is a musical instrument.

<sup>11</sup> Aakheri Charshanba literally means the last Wednesday of the year, which the women used to celebrate.

The *urūs* of two Sufis, Abdullah Shah and Pir Ghaib Shah, were annual cultural events enjoyed by women at one time. “As our men don’t consider a woman virtuous if she goes out unaccompanied, not even to a *mela*, a specific day is set aside for us. Unfortunately, that has also come to an end. This year the threat of terrorism prevented the two *melas* from taking place,” said a woman respondent.

As a sequestered domain of linear formation, reproducing hegemony through social and cultural invisibility, women’s exclusion from politics is all but inconsequential. Would the propellers of radicalisation cede space to those retained to nurture radicalised subjects of power? Political exclusion confirms a non-representative, non-visible, and non-challenging subject trailing a constructed pattern.

Under an unwritten agreement amongst various political parties, women were disenfranchised from voting in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the 2013 general elections and the recently held local government elections. In the by-elections held in May 2016 for PK-95, one of the constituencies for the Provincial Assembly in Lower Dir, thousands of women were disallowed to cast ballot. Religious edicts were passed, sanctioned by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s secular parties, to forbid women from stepping outside their homes to poll at PK-95. Even though the Election Commission had cancelled the election results, they were upheld by the Peshawar High Court. Mohammad Akbar Khan, President Rural Community Development Council, Lower Dir, regretted the reduction of women’s seats in the Local Government Act introduced by the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) after coming to power. “The Local Body Act of 2001 provided 10 percent representation to women but under the present Act women’s seats are reduced,” he said.

Nouman Nasir, District Program Coordinator, South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), Bahawalpur, was also critical of the recent reduction in women’s reserved seats from 33 to 10 percent in the Local Government Act. “First impact of radicalisation is on democracy and in the absence of democracy women become the primary victims. Half of the population is restricted to four walls,” he said.

In Dera Ghazi Khan, women’s interest in politics was restricted to casting their vote. “Yes, we vote,” responded the women. Amidst giggles and laughter they revealed that they voted for the candidate of their husbands’ choice. “We do what our husbands ask us to do. We don’t understand politics. Politics should be left to men. A woman has to prove her dignity, her honour when she is in politics. It is best not to take that path,” intoned one of the respondents at an FGD in Dera Ghazi Khan.

The perpetual depositing of religion to form religious identities of power and subjectivity gravitates towards prefabricated vulnerable enclaves already subsisting on traditional and religious dogmas. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women's agency and autonomy were already 'defined' by the Pukhtunwali Code,<sup>12</sup> and its replacement with religious doctrinal ideology comprehensively dislodged areas of segregated freedom for them.

Shams Bunneri, Central Secretary for Culture for the Awami National Party (ANP), correlated the interests of patriarchy and religion. Religion, used as an exploitative tool, could only be matched through a strong democratic system of governance. While the Sharia equates the witness of two women to one man, relegating her status as a human secondary to man, democracy gives equal value to each individual whereby the vote of a woman weighs the same as that of a man.

Mr. Bunneri stressed the utilitarian relationship between patriarchy and religion to keep women out of politics. "Women form half of the population and in a democratic setup their vote is counted the same as a man's. Religion does not consider them equal to men whereas democracy considers them equal citizens. It is only through religion that women can be forced to stay out of politics. Otherwise, they will outnumber men. And that is what patriarchy fears. I think from the district to the centre, women should be elected, not nominated, to party positions and women rights should be an integral part of the curriculum," he asserted.

In Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan was socially, culturally, and politically the most stringent. Reasons yielded from empirical research attributed the restrictions in women's mobility to the tribal traditions of the Baloch who form a large part of the population. In relation to Baloch traditions, the ancient Pukhtunwali Code offered segregated cultural mobility to the Pukhtun women, which was denied to the Baloch women. The preceding statement stems from the interviews and FGDs conducted with Baloch women and resource persons at Dera Ghazi Khan. "A majority of the people hail from Baloch ethnicity and are very strict as far as women's mobility is concerned. They do not even allow them to go out of the house. Till recently, women were not allowed to have National Identity Cards because that required a picture," revealed a respondent.

## Conclusion

In the context of the areas of research, radicalisation in this paper has been analysed through its 'occurrence' rather than 'emergence' to signify its pervasiveness in the contemporary milieu. The radical propellers

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<sup>12</sup> A prehistoric unwritten code of life.

governing its occurrence are invariables formed through the *ancien regime* (the *ancien regime* does not imply ancient regime, but is an allusion to the patriarchal character of the state fortified by religious *diktat*) of the state and religion: extremism, religiosity, and state power to embed the creed of rejection of plurality. The kindred danger posed by the state and religion establishes control over polity, policy, and perception.

Anti-Shia partiality in Dera Ghazi Khan was not normative two decades ago, but the systemic eradication of plurality gained supremacy when the state 'allocated' space to the proliferation of a specific form of religious creed. Women respondents were more forthright in admitting an increase in Deobandi *madrasas* replacing elementary educational institutions. The other signifier of radicalisation is the non-existent cultural, political, and educational mobility of women whose space is historically reduced to be easily compromised.

Whether it was in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Punjab, male respondents were not willing to confirm women's reduced mobility on account of radicalisation. Their assertion that women's role as 'carers' was ordained by religion precluded alternate debate. But the conclusion drawn from this research notes that the containment of women's exteriority is a veneer deliberately adopted by them to achieve 'strategic interests'. If a reduction of physical visibility and stifling of voice indicate radicalisation, women's persistence in occupying and reclaiming available spaces should be viewed as a covert challenge. Their eagerness to visit the Aagahi Centres to discuss domestic violence, right to marriage, inheritance, divorce, and other issues faced by them is in itself a defiant step in challenging taboos.

## Recommendations

The following are some implementable recommendations to improve the impact of the Aagahi Centres, and to further women's rights in the areas of research that this study was concerned with.

1. The Aagahi Centres should be accessible and not established in non-approachable areas.
2. Future strategy should be devised to ensure the Aagahi Centres are not project-bound spaces.
3. Propagation of written and verbal material specifically concerning women should be banned.
4. Besides conceptual training of women, they should also be facilitated to earn a living.
5. Political parties using women as voters and banning them at the same time should be penalised by the Election Commission of Pakistan.



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