

An Analysis of Women's Contribution to the Gender Discourse of Jamaat-I-Islami of Pakistan

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1. Introduction

Religious discourses are generally considered to be a product of patriarchal social structures. Hence men's contribution is regarded as more important than that of their women comrades and feminine voices remain by and large unheard. There is a need to address this lacuna by carrying out analyses of women's contribution to various religious discourses from different perspectives. This article analyses the manner in which women contribute to the discourse of Jamaat-i-Islami Pakistan (hereafter referred to as JI). It has influenced and negotiated with other discourses in multiple ways. Specifically, the article deals with an analysis of the gender discourse of the JI. It illustrates how women members of the JI substantiate its gender perspective on the one hand, and on the other, they pave the way for inculcation of gender sensitive norms into it. The article is divided into three sections. The first section explains important features of the gender discourse of the JI. The next section is meant to explicate the theoretical perspective employed for analysing the contribution of women of the JI. Thereafter, it proceeds to elaborate upon some of the outstanding features of women's contribution to the discourse.

2. The Jamaat-i-Islami and its Gender Discourse

The JI is one of the most organized religio-political parties of Pakistan (Nasr, 1994; Joshi, 2003). It was organized by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 before partition of the Indian Subcontinent (Nasr, 1996, p. 41). Maududi kept on anchoring and supervising the JI for more than three decades till his death in 1979. Maududi's contribution for laying down the discourse of the JI is momentous as whatever had been written by him is regarded as its standard discourse. According to Jackson (2011) and Nasr (1996), Maududi is "the most influential of contemporary revivalist thinkers" (p. 3). At present, Maududi's brainchild, the JI, is organized and works under the same name "Jamaat-i-Islami" in five geographical locations in the Indian Subcontinent (Grare, 2005, p. 11). The JI's influence has exceeded far beyond its place of birth, i.e. the Indian Subcontinent. It maintains links and has organized sister organizations in the USA, the UK, and other parts of the world, and such ideological connections are largely due to the diaspora of the Subcontinent (p. 102). Maududi's ideological influence may also be observed in Central Asia, North Africa and Southeast Asia (Nasr, 1996, p. 4). Maududi wrote extensively on gender issues. His most important book on the subject is *Purd* (seclusion and veiling) (2003) written in Urdu and first published in 1940. The book was translated into English as "Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam" (2010). Maududi's books dealing with gender issues include *Khawateen aur deeni masayl* (2000), *Haquq us zojjain* (1943), *Tafheemul Quran* (n.d.), *Deen aur khawateen* (n.d.), *Rasael-o-masayl* (2000). Maududi was one of the most vocal proponents of duality of spheres between men and women which may be regarded as a foundation of his gender discourse. The dual spheres thesis means that the private space is assigned to women and the public space to men. There are inherent natural differences between men and women, and it is not possible for both of them to deviate from their naturally assigned tasks. This scheme of division of labor into two distinct and complementary spheres is not only sanctified by their essentialist and different human nature but is considered as apposite in light of the teachings of the divine (Maududi 1943/2010).

Maududi's ideas about women education have some conditionalities. They should be educated and trained in order to become a "good wife, good mother and good housekeeper" (2010, p. 152). They should not be provided exactly the same education designed for men, as women's education must have some correlation with the demand of private spaces. Moreover, they should not be educated in a co-educational system and every effort should be made to procure women teachers for them (Maududi, 2000, p. 208; 2002, pp. 163-164; 2003, pp. 209-210). In our analysis in the article, we will also come across how the scheme of duality of spheres is appreciated by the women of the JI to create a space for avoiding the adverse effects of its strictures.

3. Theoretical Perspective

It is one of the basic reasons for continuity of the gender discourse of the JI that women participate in it, as without their participation, the discourse would not endure. By and large, the discourse is indebted to them in two different ways: firstly, they contribute academically to make it convincing. And secondly, they are one of the most prominent markers of the discourse in the society, as they personally embody and represent it, e.g. by wearing specific dress codes.

We often come across an argument which maintains that discriminatory readings of the sacred texts are due to the overwhelming dominance of male interpreters in the interpretative communities of the divine (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). The underlying assumption is that, had women been included in that prestigious sphere of interpretation, they might have interpreted it in an egalitarian and non-discriminatory manner. This assumption is bound to be problematized when we study the written material produced by the women of the JI, as they generally support Maududi's opinions. This academic endorsement is important because of the fact that it is extended by those who are supposed to bear the burden of the discourse.

Given the significance of the contributions of female members of the JI, it comes to mind why do they contribute to the discourse? This question leads to an inquiry regarding the manner by which women members of the JI make themselves comfortable with the differences inherent in the scheme of duality of spheres. I have relied upon Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) notion of habitus and doxa to analyse these issues.

Habitus constitutes a "system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and make possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). There are several important aspects of this definition. Habitus is reflected by dispositions including the durable as well as the changeable. Dispositions are tendencies to respond in a particular way and help us prefer one choice/action over another. These dispositions are embodied through past experiences. So, habitus is connected to history which "produces individual and collective practices", and in this way, habitus ensures the "active presence of past experiences" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54).

Another significant aspect of the above definition is that habitus shapes the conceptual framework to produce infinitely diversified tasks. Such a framework is manifested in the form of "thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions" of people situated in a particular habitus; these manifestations are linked to their past experiences and there is always little likelihood of unlimited diversity in this regard (p. 55). To some extent, habitus makes these infinitely diversified tasks predictable and foreseeable.

Bourdieu (1977, p. 72) also equates habitus with a "strategy generating principle" which enables people "to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations". So, habitus enhances the capacity and competence of its members for shaping dispositions in those circumstances that have not been foreseen. Habitus not only generates practices as a "mechanical reaction directly determined by antecedent conditions" but also puts forward the framework for those practices which will "apparently [be] determined by the future" (pp. 72-73) Therefore, on the one hand, habitus has its roots in past experiences, but on the other, it is well-connected to the future.

All habitus are based on certain arbitrary distinctions and categorizations. Keeping this aspect in view, doxa attains special significance in the workings of habitus as it imposes a perceptual framework by categorising domains into thinkable and unthinkable. It is a tool to legitimize arbitrary distinctions within a particular habitus. Bourdieu (p. 164) states that every habitus "produce[s] naturalization of its own arbitrariness". This naturalization or normalization within a habitus is achieved through a "sense of limits", "sense of reality" and by viewing something as "self evident and undisputed" (ibid.).

The discourse of the JI produces effects similar to habitus as it shapes dispositions in a particular way. The notion of habitus makes us appreciate that the contribution of the women of the JI ought to be viewed from the perspective of a particular discourse only because their contributions are influenced by their affiliation. At the same time, the women contribute to shape the discourse to make it gender sensitive. Like any other habitus, the JI does not detail the schemata of future dispositions for those who are situated within it; there is always considerable space for future development and that space is utilized by the women of the JI.

4. Women's Contribution to the Gender Discourse of the JI

Female members of the JI support Maududi's, or in other words JI's, views on gender issues in general. The gender discourse of the JI, similar to habitus, has laid down broader framework and then provided its followers with opportunities for developing it further while keeping the original parameters intact. This process ensures coherence which is pivotal for subsistence of any habitus. The following are the main facets of women's contribution to the gender discourse of the JI.

4.1. Adding a Female Perspective

While relying on Maududi's writings, Najmi (2004) posits that a woman is not bound to surrender her religious identity to patriarchal demands. A woman is not required to sit at man's feet; rather, her place is at the side of him (p. 3). The statement has multiplicity of meanings. Firstly, this article was published in *Tarjumanul Quran* and not in any of the women's journals, despite the fact that the author is herself editor of one of the women's journals, *Iffat*. It implies that she was interested in addressing a broader audience including her male comrades of the JI; otherwise it would have been appropriate to publish it in her own journal only. Secondly, the reference to Maududi's writings is the signifier signifying a space for saying something "more," which appears to be the sole purpose of her article.

Najmi writes in the concluding part of the article that it is regarded as *kufur* to say *salaam* on telephone, i.e., the male auditory senses are to be guarded against feminine voices. She adds, "girls are required to go for *Madrasa*/religious seminary only. Nine years old girls are asked to observe *purdah*. Women are expected to wear gloves and socks in extremely warm weather. Women cannot even wear beautiful shoes because these may incite men's sexual urge" (p. 4). Najmi inquires that when the Quran also requires men to control their sexual urge and guard chastity, why is the entire burden placed on women? This question appears to be the main focus of Najmi's article. Her statement above is a fascinating illustration of the female perspective from within the JI. However, it is not an isolated example in this regard.

The December 2004 issue of the journal *Batool* featured a fictional narrative by Kashif named "*Ghali*" (mistake). A doctor marries a poor woman for the purpose of helping her out. The doctor's primary objective was to provide her with financial help, and he had been doing this before their marriage. But due to the culturally-embedded fear of the doctor that people might scandalize his humanitarian assistance to an unrelated woman, he has to marry her. The message of the story is that polygamous marriage ought to be regarded as normal in those circumstances where somebody marries a poor woman for humanitarian purposes and not for the sake of a second marriage.

This apparently benign message does not go unnoticed. In the following month's publication of *Batool*, Manzoor (2005) writes a review criticising this message, and highlights the damaging effects of a polygamous marriage on the existing marriage. Owing to widespread polygamous marriages in certain areas of Pakistan, marriage has lost one of its very basic characteristics, i.e. trust (Manzoor, 2005). Manzoor contends that the dictate regarding polygamous marriage in the Quran is not meant to be followed in all circumstances; it is only allowed in extreme cases of necessity. Manzoor (ibid.) also strongly criticizes the generally prevalent attitude of neglecting the Quran and Sunnah, but when one intends to marry a second wife, they are referred to as a justification.

A similarly assertive and critical attitude has been displayed regarding the issue of *qawama* by some women writers. Without questioning the husband's headship in the household on the basis of this concept, Zahid (2003) contends that the wife ought to be consulted in all household matters, and if the husband forces his opinion on her, he is the one who encourages a rebellious attitude. This manner of argument implies that if a rebellious attitude originates in the husband's non-cooperative attitude, the husband would not be justified in resorting to punitive measures linked to the concept of *qawama*. Zahid (2003) points out that, due to the continual dictatorship of the husband at home, sometimes the situation reaches a point where the wife may even feel too threatened to record her legitimate protests. In another article, Aftab (2003) observes that whenever it comes to the duties of a husband, the religious dictates are considered as discretionary or optional, but when it comes to the responsibilities of a wife, they are regarded as mandatory.

The above examples are not uncommon in the writings of women of the JI. One aspect, however, ought to be borne in mind that this female perspective should neither be viewed as a first step towards rebellion nor wholesale reformation of the discourse. All these examples are embedded in the gender

discourse of the JI, as neither has asserted that there ought to be similar sphere of activities for both sexes, nor has anyone read substantially differently any of the contentious religious dictates. Therefore, it is obvious that they have not gone beyond the basic premises of the gender discourse of the JI while employing the manoeuvring space provided by the discourse itself. For example, what Najmi (2004) has asserted in her article referred to above is that *purdah* is an obligation, but in those situations mentioned by her, it ought not to be strictly observed. Similarly, Manzoor's (2005) article does not contend that second marriage is prohibited; she simply argues that it ought to be exercised only in cases of extreme necessity. Thus, the women have introduced a female perspective to the gender discourse without undermining its basic premises or doxa.

4.2. Equalising Inequality

Another dimension of the women's contribution is that they have theorized gender equality within the parameters of their religious discourse. Batool (2007, p. 74) challenges the hitherto canonized version of Western thought on gender issues that men and women are equal in capabilities/capacities by arguing that there are visible differences between them. She further posits that their basic sphere of activity is not similar and in these circumstances it appears sensible that both should have been equipped with different but corresponding capabilities/capacities. Her contentions can be summarized to say that they are not equal in equalities; rather, they are equal in inequalities and the level of dependence on each other. They enjoy preference over each other in certain aspects. To support her contention, Batool refers to men's capacity to impregnate and women's capacity to procreate (pp. 74-75).

One may raise an objection that this way of argumentation imprisons women in their body/sexuality and demonizes their essential human status. But for Batool (2007, p. 64), a woman cannot achieve culmination of her womanhood without bearing and rearing children. Tasneem (2002) has reified it saying that it is an honour for a woman to be selected by God as procreator of *ashraf-ul-makhlooqat* ("the best of all creatures," i.e. humans). There are important implications of this argument. As per religious tradition, the act of creation is the sole attribute of God and whoever has the privilege of having been granted a share in this process should feel grateful for that. Furthermore, a woman is not involved in the creation of an insignificant being; she has been assigned the responsibility of the creation of human beings, the most important of all creatures.

4.3. Criticising Cultural Constraints

The gender discourse of the JI has perceived the western ideas on gender as its epistemic other. This aspect is also reflected in the writings of the female members of the JI. But with the passage of time, another trend has taken shape within the gender discourse of the JI that critiques the culturally fossilized practices, which have essentialist religious claims. With the phrase 'essentialist religious claims' I wish to make the point that the rites are observed or expected to be observed alongside other religious dictates. Although, to some extent, this critical trend can be noticed in Maududi's work, particularly his book *Haquq uz Zojjain* (1943), it is more visible in the writings of the women. This paradigmatic shift is significant in initiating a self-critical appraisal albeit in its circumscribed scope.

Borrowing from standpoint theory, I argue that the women's voices merit to be heard, more so than those of men in this respect because the women are victimized by these practices, while men are the beneficiaries of such practices. This shift partially signifies a realization that the critical gaze needs to be internalized rather than always being at loggerheads with Western episteme. Going through examples of this shift, we will observe that this critical exercise is also well entrenched in the discourse.

In an article, Tasneem (2003, pp. 39-41) highlights similarities between the pre-Islamic pagan custom of killing daughters which is mentioned in the Quran, and prevalent ways of "killing" females in Pakistani society. Some of the methods identified by Tasneem include depriving a woman of her self-respect, depriving her of the choice of life partner, marrying a woman with the Quran to disinherit her from property, psychologically killing her while demanding dowry before and after the marriage, and depriving her of dower and other inheritable properties (p. 40). This comparison between the customs of killing daughters as was in vogue in pre-Islamic Arabia and some prevalent practices in the society is very incisive because the former is regarded as wrong while the latter go unnoticed.

In the same article, Tasneem has not spared criticising Western culture which is characterized, in her opinion, by the breakdown of the family institution and the defiling of sanctity of marital relation (ibid.). This continued criticism of the West is something which is ever-present in the gender discourse of the JI and may be regarded as one of its officialized norms. It is a characteristic feature of habitus that whenever one talks from a particular perspective, s/he tries to protect and promote the officialized norms of that habitus (Bourdieu 1990, p. 108). So, Tasneem's reference to the West does nothing more than to emphasize an official norm. But it is important to observe that Tasneem does not stop at that point, and also criticizes cultural practices originating in her own society.

Aftab's (2003, p. 46) article is another example of this paradigmatic shift in the discourse. It is significant to observe that it is restricted to criticism of cultural practices without any reference to the West. The article is based on research carried out by the Department of Behavioural Sciences of Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. The research findings show that many marriages of religious families end up in separation. According to Aftab (p. 47), one of the reasons for this separation is an ill-founded conception of *qawama* which is taught at different religious seminaries. This ill-founded conception is further strengthened by culturally-inspired attitudes of encouraging the wife to come to terms with ill-treatment meted out by her husband (p. 47). Relying on the Quranic precept of consultation in human affairs, Aftab points out that a household ought not to be considered as situated beyond the application of the religious dictate of consultation (p. 48). Husbands generally do not consider their wives' opinions as worth following despite their reasonableness, as if this might be derogatory to their manliness and mental superiority (p. 49). Similarly, there appears no justification of the husband's attitude of asking his wife to be obedient to his mother, as if the wife was married to serve her (ibid.).

Sometimes cultural practices are given religious sanctity through misinterpretation of the divine or by putting more emphasis on certain aspects as mentioned by Sachedina (2009, p. 140). Aftab (2003, pp. 46-49) also makes a point to this effect in her above article. She premises her analysis on the equitable concept of *qawama* as understood by her and the Quranic dictate of consultation in worldly affairs (pp. 46-49). While criticising the culturally inspired constructions of the divine, Aftab does not refute the husband's status as head of his family. Thus, she has kept herself within the parameters of the gender discourse of the JI while registering a protest against certain cultural constraints which cause a hurdle in realization of an ideal Islamic family.

In another article of this genre, Batool (2003, p. 22) argues that a woman ought not to be considered as a machine and treated in mechanical manner by her husband. Similar to other human beings, she is composed of flesh, spirit and feelings, so she is in constant need of appreciation and encouragement, and if she is kept under persistent pressure and mental ill-treatment, she will die (p. 22). The reference to death here is metaphorical and does not signify physical death.

Batool (2003) also comes up with a list of widespread cultural practices which need to be transformed. These practices include harassing the wife, expelling her from the home, abusing her, not giving her dower and maintenance, continuously threatening her with divorce, abusing her parents and relatives, forcing her to bring money or things from her parents, not letting her use her earned money, disinheriting her, discontinuing marital relations without any justified reason, family pressure on the husband to divorce his wife, a husband's second marriage and leaving the first wife and children as if the wife and children did not have a husband and father respectively (ibid., p. 23; p. 27).

The above condemnation by Batool is meant to distinguish cultural practices from the standard version of Islam as understood by the JI. Her selection of phrases indicates that she is comfortable with the religiously prescribed difference in the status of men and women as the JI understands it. She appears to be more critical of family pressure on husbands to divorce their wives as compared to the husbands' original right of divorce. Again, she is more critical of husbands' leaving their first wives and children unattended in the case of a second marriage, as compared to the husbands' right to second marriage itself.

Analysing the debate on condemning cultural practices from the perspective of Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) habitus, it emerges that the women have criticized cultural practices without extending their criticism to question the basic premises/doxa of the gender discourse of the JI. For instance, not a single woman has questioned Maududi's construction of the religiously-sanctified duality of spheres. There is no doubt they have created some space for themselves while criticising unacceptable cultural

practices without going beyond the doxic limitations of their discourse, but that is neither a step towards dismantling the discourse nor its wholesale reformation.

4.4. Theorising Coercion

There is another dimension of the debate carried out in the previous sub-section that pertains to the consistent comfortableness with religiously-understood differences between men and women by the women of the JI. It reveals that they do not have any problem with such differences and their grievance is basically against those differences which, they argue, have nothing to do with their understanding of Islam. When some sort of coercion is required for the purpose of maintaining equality, maintaining a difference of whatever nature will also necessitate a coercive mechanism. There are differences between men and women in the gender discourse of the JI; it is difficult to assume that these differences can be maintained without any coercive mechanism.

Female members of the JI regard coercion as one of the most important tools in the implementation of the discourse and for shaping human sensibilities. I will illustrate three different levels of the treatment of coercion by these women: realization/appreciation; theorization/rationalization; and romanticism/celebration. I will further argue that by supporting the coercive mechanisms, they have not only made themselves a site of coercion, but also contributors to that coercion. Therefore, they are simultaneously object and subject of the coercive mechanisms.

In another issue of *Batool*, Rashid (2003, pp. 76-77) narrated the story of how she started to observe purdah. The gist of her story is that she was not persuaded or convinced by any member of her family that she should observe purdah on the basis of any religious dictates. She was simply told that her father was of the opinion that she should observe it because she had become old enough to do so. At that time, she was in the later stages of her schooling (p. 76). Afterwards, she read some sayings of the Prophet and persuaded herself that it was a religious obligation to be observed by every Muslim woman. On the basis of her own experience, Rashid contends that it is the responsibility of male members of the household to enforce this religious dictate, and one of the ways to enforce it is that the men should accompany those women who observe purdah outside the home. In addition to such a coercive mechanism, Rashid suggests that those girls who observe purdah in obedience to their parents should also be informed about its benefits and religious nature. It would be better if girls were encouraged to read persuasive religious writings before coming to purdah-observing age, so that they might adopt it without coercive enforcement (p. 77).

This personal story is a cogent example of the realization of coercion in the process of observing purdah. It categorizes coercion into two kinds; one is actual/real and the other is symbolic, borrowing Bourdieu's terminology. Evident and visible coercion happens to be actual/real coercion, while a clandestine or invisible manner is symbolic. As far as the first situation is concerned, that purdah ought to be enforced, that clearly falls in the category of actual/real coercion, while the second way of guided learning can be categorized as symbolic coercion. This is symbolic coercion because of the fact that any particular way of instilling some beliefs tends to be canonical. When girls are told and encouraged from their childhood to observe purdah, it means that an option of not observing purdah is systematically unlearned. This is a particular space where women act simultaneously as a site of coercion as well as its contributors. They not only internalize the coercive mechanisms, but also encourage and perpetuate its embodiment by others.

After publication of the above article (Rashid, 2003), the editors of *Batool* invited its readership to respond to the issue of observing purdah by coercion. In response to this invitation, Shabbir (2003, pp. 67-69) wrote her personal experiences of becoming a purdah-observing woman. Shabbir's account is similar to that of Rashid's with regard to initial enforcement, and later on religious rationalization of that enforcement. With respect to theorising coercion, Shabbir's (2003) article is a step ahead than Rashid's (2003).

Shabbir (2003, p. 68) theorizes coercion by referring to Liam O'Flaherty's famous short story *His First Flight*. This story revolves around a seagull that was hesitant to fly despite the fact that his two brothers and sister had already learnt to fly. The story reveals the psychological implications of the process of education. It is through a coercive methodology that the mother seagull forces the young seagull to learn the art of flying. The fear of death by hunger forced him to jump into the air. After the first coerced flight, in the words of the author of the story "he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly."

The moral of this story is the gist of Shabbir's article. She encourages specifically all invisibly coercive measures to get daughters to observe purdah and is of the opinion that women have the capacity to observe purdah but are hesitant due to fears, both private and public (ibid.). If a woman is coerced to observe it initially, like the seagull in the story, she would forget afterwards that it was coercively enforced on her.

These illustrations demonstrate that women of the JI are neither oblivious to nor apologetic for the coercive implications of certain religiously-prescribed dictates. Moreover, they have also endeavoured to rationally convince themselves of their utility. It is not contended that all women within the JI are so academically well-versed to comprehend these aspects in their niceties, but there are quite a few who have expressed their opinion in this regard.

I will now refer to another illustration which is even a step further than the rationalization/theorization of coercion, i.e., romanticism/celebration of coercion (cf. Bushra Tasneem, 2002). It is also an ideal expression by a woman of the JI with respect to a mother's role in shaping the sensibilities of her children. The theme running through this illustration is that when we endeavour to shape sensibilities in a particular way, it rules out, by necessary implication, other possible ways of shaping them and some sort of coercive mechanism is an integral part of this process.

Tasneem (2002) relies on the assumption that human beings are shaped by their environment: if they are brought up in an Islamic environment, it will encourage them to inculcate Islamic norms. Having this assumption in mind, she asserts that children are more prone to accept stimuli as compared to adults and if properly brought up, they easily embody and internalize Islamic norms. There are two important aspects in the bringing up of children; one is the mother's extensive role and the other, a proper balance between spiritual and material aspects of life (pp. 8-10). According to Tasneem, the material includes anything which has significance for this world, and the spiritual, in this dichotomous relationship, means anything having religious origin.

Tasneem perceives mother's role as pivotal in shaping the sensibilities of her children. The mother's influencing role commences from the time of conception (p. 7). Mother should be more particular in her prayers, readings of the Quran and engaging in prostration during her pregnancy (pp. 8-9). She should also be careful of her food during this period because the same food will become part of the foetus. She should go through this period in a state of mind which is comparable to the holy month of Ramadan as far as avoiding sin is concerned (p. 12). These precautionary measures are supposed to influence the foetus. After the birth of the child, a name should be selected that has some religious significance, e.g. the names of wives of the Prophet or his companions, as the historical baggage of the name is likely to encourage the child to emulate that personality (pp. 13-14).

Moreover, the ears of the child should be accustomed to hearing the Quran in his early days and one of the ways to do it is by softly playing a tape recorder which is placed somewhere near him, irrespective of the fact that he is unable to understand its religious connotations (p. 15). A very incisive analysis of how listening is likely to shape sensibilities has been carried out by Hirschkind (2006). According to his analysis, listening is not a one-way consumer process; the consumption is then reproduced or translated in the attitude of the listener. If someone is made to listen to something, he is expected to internalize it and behave accordingly. Thus, apparently neutral processes like listening may not have neutral repercussions.

Tasneem (2002) recurrently makes the point that the spiritual consumption of children should also be kept in balance with their age. They should be sensitized to the fact that they are Muslim before going to school and made to learn how to be proud of it (p. 21). Every child should be sensitized regarding the evil nature of Satan and encouraged to develop an enmity against him (p. 21). Tasneem (pp. 22-23) argues that prayer should be offered in front of children even at an age when they are not religiously expected to perform it, as offering prayer will become settled in their sight and unconsciousness. The same process of constructing sensibilities should be employed to make them realize the appropriateness of their dress (p. 24). They should be instructed and helped to sharpen their feelings of *haya* (modesty and shyness). Girls and boys should be encouraged to sit and play separately. Although, early schooling is generally provided on a co-educational basis, efforts should be made to find separate schools for children of different sexes (p. 25).

After such an extensive narration of how a child should be brought up, there remains no need to emphasize the coercive implications of this entire process. Tasneem's (2002) elaboration goes beyond

mere theorization of coercion and it would be appropriate to say that she has romanticized it in religious terms.

Before moving on to another subsection, it is submitted that the analysis of the realization, theorization and romanticism of coercive measures has not been carried out by women of the JI for the purpose of acquiring more freedom in the sense it is understood in liberal philosophy (Mahmood, 2005). Rather, the entire exercise has been undertaken for the purpose of thorough internalization and embodiment of coercion itself.

4.5. Employing Literary Writings for the Dissemination of Ideology

This subsection explains the employment of literary writings by women of the JI for the dissemination of its ideology. Stories and fiction are written with a specific object in mind or without any object other than entertainment. Even in the latter situation, these have implications for the authors and readers in numerous ways. But when stories are written with an objective, they are likely to be more motivating. They may give way to the expression of hidden desires; they may be employed for registration of protest; they may be effective in communicating that which cannot otherwise be communicated in a plain essay; and they may capture the imagination of readers and also to some extent, structure the imagination. One more aspect of story writing, and more particularly object-oriented story writing, is that it does not only structure or construct the feelings and sensibilities of its readers; it is bound to sharpen similar feelings and sensibilities for its author.

Having said so, literary writing is one of the most important medium of communications employed by women of the JI. Such writings have been an integral part of the monthly *Batool* since its inception, while the monthly *Iffat* publishes them exclusively. Both these journals are managed and edited by women of the JI. It is not important to make the point that these women are fully conscious of the implications of their literary exercise, but it is worthwhile observing that the above implications are a by-product of the process. Using literary writings for the disseminating of ideology is a technique employed by male authors of the JI but not as extensively as the women.

An example of this technique is a fiction written by Bintul-Islam (1978). The name of the fiction is *Zara Nam Ho To Yai Mittee* which means “this soil is fertile if properly cared for.” It was written in the historical context of the 1970’s election, and succession of Bangladesh as its tragic aftermath. The author has developed her story in an exclusive girls’ college. She (1978) classifies the teachers and students into three groups; the first group is pro-Islam, the second is secular and the third is the largest group within the college, larger than either of the other two groups, and willing to side with anyone who emerges victorious in the ongoing conflict between the first two groups. The author also appears to be optimistic that the last group is more inclined towards the pro-Islam group but due to constraints, whether personal, familial or cultural, finds it difficult to openly align with this group (p. 105; p. 167).

The underlying assumption of this division and the propensity of the third group to join the first group is integral to the JI’s political ideology premised on the notion of an Islamic state: if the JI happens to implement the Islamic system in the country, the largest and apparently neutral group within the public will become devotees of Islam.

There are scores of other themes running through Bintul-Islam’s (1978) fiction, all of which are meant to enrich the discourse of the JI. For example, numerous examples of the continuous struggle between good and evil in day-to-day affairs; the proper way of preaching Islam (p. 49); the explanation of terminology employed by the JI in its literature (p. 50); conferring different meanings to otherwise general words in pursuance of the JI’s perspective (p. 155; p. 224); narrating Islamic history and constructing the ideal characters (p. 18; p. 64); and explaining the inseparability of the state and religion (p. 143).

Although the themes referred to cannot be viewed as not having any gender implications, there are some specific gender issues discussed by the author, e.g. a woman’s independent right to marry and employment in Islam (pp. 75-77; pp. 87-91). The fiction revolves around a female lecturer, Munaza, who is portrayed as the ideal Muslim woman. She is still unmarried but was engaged in her early childhood, apparently without her consent. Owing to the social status of her family, she was well placed to receive higher education. After completion of her education, she joins the teaching profession. Munaza’s future in-laws do not like her employment, but she manages to continue it because of the support of her family.

According to the author, Munaza's prospective in-laws are observant of so-called "cultural Islam" wherein apparent religiosity is cherished without pursuing the spirit of Islam. On the basis of this distinction between the imagined categories of "cultural Islam" and "proper Islam", the author criticizes moral, financial and other "corruptions" which are in vogue with her in-laws, including their oppressive behaviour towards the idea of a working woman. The author's criticism of Munaza's in-laws with regard to women's employment should not be construed as an argument for all kinds of occupation for women. She allows women to do jobs where they can observe purdah. This particular aspect is evident from the author's selection of an exclusive girls' college in her fiction. Teaching is one of the two professions Maududi (2000, 208) approved for women, the other being medicine.

The next issue which is a subject of scorn for Munaza in the fiction (Bintul-Islam, 1978) is her early childhood engagement. The author critiques the practice of childhood engagements and contends that girls should be asked before they are wed. But the issue in the story is not so simple. On the one hand, there is an explicit right guaranteed by Islam to every girl to contract her marriage by free will, but on the other, there are widespread visible and invisible constraints in society preventing the free exercise of this right. Munaza is caught between the demands of cultural determinism and her religious right to marry after her own choice. She does not want to marry her fiancé but is unable to find a way out. There are prolonged conversations between Munaza and her students, friends and brother which reveal her anxiety in this regard. These conversations depict an "ideal feminine Islamic construct", an image which clashes with the demands of cultural conformism. Her predicament is that neither can she revolt against cultural ethos nor can she prepare herself to marry someone she dislikes.

Going through different phases of anxiety, the story reaches a climax wherein Munaza has to "agree" to the undesirable marriage. The submission of Munaza to an unwelcome union is noteworthy in the context of the author's emphasis on a girl's right of marriage. There are certain factors which are illustrated by the author as decisive in making Munaza agreeing to the marriage. One of the factors is her in-laws' unconditional withdrawal of their objection to her job. Munaza is of the opinion that this compromise will provide her with an opportunity for instructing and guiding her students. The second and most important factor is Munaza's "realization" that this life is temporary and bound to finish. It implies that pleasures and displeasures are also temporary; therefore, one should not be more concerned with these temporalities and try instead to build a relationship with the one who is eternal, i.e. God. This is the end of the fiction (p. 424).

There are several implications with respect to gender arrangement in the fiction (Bintul-Islam, 1978). The author tries to visualize the repercussions of the conflict between the actual right of marrying of her own free will, and the cultural limitations of its exercise. She finds it difficult to exercise this as per the prescribed dictates of Islam, and then attempts to learn and make others learn how to prevail over the feelings of dejection and gloominess. In the last part of the fiction (pp. 416-424), she overcomes these feelings by developing a more attractive and fascinating alternative as compared to the so-called temporary displeasure of this worldly life. So, the message is that the temporary displeasures of the world can be endured for the purpose of eternal pleasure.

From another perspective, what the fiction (Bintul-Islam, 1978) does not teach is more important than what it does. A woman should not choose a revolt whereby she has to dislocate ties with her family, as it is the family that provides her identity and distancing herself from it would amount to depriving herself of that identity. Munaza, in the fiction, is interested in a new identity based on a different normative structure of religion, but in that struggle, she is afraid of losing her identity which is connected to her family and culture.

The above fiction has illustrated the significance of literary writings as a tool for ideological dissemination. The author has made use of it for highlighting many aspects of the JI's ideology, from the relevance of the state in organizing an Islamic system to gender relationships.

5. Conclusion

This article has analysed the significance of women's contribution to the gender discourse of the JI. There are several ways in which these women have contributed to their discourse, and the same can be categorized into two: firstly, reaffirmation of the fundamental premise of the discourse, and secondly, inculcation of women sensitivities into the discourse to soften some adverse socio-legal implications of the discourse. The article has highlighted that these women are trying to make the

discourse sound more women-friendly. They have developed and refined some aspects which were less spelled out in the discourse for the purposes of alleviating hardships faced by them. Their contribution in those areas which directly affect their daily lives, e.g. marital relationship including fair treatment by husbands and their relatives in case of joint families, and respect and dignity as free and independent human beings before and after the marriage, is manifested by the written material analysed in the article. Taking into account the women's contribution to the gender discourse of the JI, it can be posited that while being part of the discourse they are aspirant that their legal and religious rights should not be crucified at the altar of cultural constraints as well as by those religious constructions which facilitate men's unwarranted dominance in private and public spaces.

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