

Women's Rights and Organization

The early years 1947 – 1958/ Efforts at organizing

The Prime Minister's wife, Ra'ana Liaquat Ali, was the most outstanding woman who formed a large number of women's organizations and attended to many different areas that affect women, especially welfare and legal reform. In 1948, she started the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) which administered first aid to women, organized food distribution, dealt with health problems and epidemics, collected clothing for the needy, and provided emotional and moral support. The relief and welfare work was widely accepted as it was seen as an extension of the nurturing role that women were traditionally expected to perform. Apart from being seen as a maternal and domestic role, the work of WVS was voluntary with the result that it did not lead to the kind of threat that women's paid work poses.

However, the reaction to two other organizations set up by Ra'ana Liaquat Ali is a telling indication of the deeply patriarchal and gendered nature of society. The societal reaction to the setting up in 1949 of the Pakistan Women's National Guard and Pakistan Women's Naval Reserve differed significantly from the response to the WVS which received support from the government. The National Guard and Naval Reserve were set up in response to the war with India and were respectively under the supervision of the army and navy, while Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was the Chief Controller of both. This work brought women into contact with unrelated men, so it was not just seen as 'manly' but also threatening.

These two organizations trained women in military tactics including signaling, coding, marksmanship, use of weapons and defense. Upon criticism by conservatives, a *dopatta* was

added to their uniforms. However, the training of women for purposes that deviated from the social and traditional norms, and their empowerment in what were believed to be masculine pursuits, raised many eyebrows. This violation of the patriarchal public/ masculine and private/feminine division was met with opprobrium and after Ra'ana Liaquat Ali left the country to serve as ambassador to the Netherlands, these two outfits fizzled out.

Women were acceptable in the public sphere in so far as they conformed to a traditional and conservative vision of housewives, mothers, welfare workers and service providers. The absence of a feminist or women's movement meant that the conservative lobby could overwhelm the government over such measures. Nevertheless, Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was the first woman ambassador of the country, and this appointment was not subjected to major criticism.

Based on the success of the Women's Voluntary Service and the interest of a large number of women, in 1949 Ra'ana Liaquat invited a hundred women to a meeting in Karachi and from this was born the All-Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) which, in the context of the time, made invaluable contributions not only to welfare but also in the arena of legal reform.

APWA (All Pakistan Women's Association)

APWA was a voluntary non-political organization open to all women over sixteen years of age irrespective of class, caste, color or creed. The objectives were to be a welfare organization for Pakistani women. It focused on creating educational, social and cultural consciousness and improving the economic participation of women for national development. Urban women from well to do classes joined and it became an acceptable avenue for women's activities outside the home. APWA opened girls' schools, health centers and industrial homes,

and imparted sewing and related skills for incomegeneration. Most of its activities were concentrated in Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar with district and divisional headquarters in other parts of the country.

APWA's relationship with the government was one of mutual accommodation and co-operation. It, therefore, received government funding as well as patronage. It was a non-threatening organization because of the focus on welfare and development. Its main work was on women's education, development skills and incomegeneration. It opened schools, colleges, industrial homes and organized *meena bazaars* to market the products of needy women.

Apart from welfare and development activities, APWA made forays into the political and legal arenas. In 1953, APWA recommended ten reserved seats for women in the National and Provincial Assemblies. In spite of a predominantly non-political and welfare approach, APWA was not approved by religious clerics who chastised Raana Liaquat and others for not wearing the veil. The Majlis-e-Ahrar, a right wing orthodox party, labeled them prostitutes. The Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) also looked upon them with disapproval, despite having opposed the very formation of Pakistan. The conflict and tension between the right-wing religious lobbies and women's rights campaigners goes way back in history, but at that point it did not become an open battle as it did in later years.

Ra'ana Liaquat Ali, a tireless campaigner, initiated many other organizations and the time period appears to be rich in terms of the sheer number of organizations of women that were formed. In 1954, the Karachi Business and Professional Women's Club was established to bring professional women together on a platform and later it established branches in Lahore, Peshawar and Rawalpindi. In 1956, the Federation of University Women was formed for women who did

not enter the workforce after obtaining university degrees. A Degree College for women in Karachi was opened during that rich period which spawned a number of organizations for women's education and professional advancement.

Other Organizations

Most other organizations were formed with specific objectives including, the Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP), The Pakistan Child Welfare Council (PCWC), The Pakistan Red Cross, The Pakistan Nurses Federation (PNF), The Housewives' Association, Girl Guides Association, and the International Women's Club. There was growing social awareness and each of these selected a specific area of expertise and worked on women's social and economic issues.

The Democratic Women's Association (DWA) formed in 1948 was unique in that it organized women at the political level and was established along Marxist principles. Led by the Marxist activist, Tahira Mazhar Ali, the DWA worked with working class women in factories and low-income areas, while focusing on political awareness and the creation of a socialist society. The DWA wanted equal pay for equal work, educational opportunities for girls and women, hostels and transport facilities for working women, crèches and nurseries at places of work and expanded employment opportunities for women. It appealed to working class women concerned for the emancipation of working classes and the creation of a socialist society. Its work was confined to low-income areas and it did not mobilize many women from other classes; however it is significant for being the only left wing women's organization in the country. The DWA was one of the most prominent organizations that staunchly opposed the military operation

in East Pakistan in 1971, and vociferously campaigned against the mass rape of Bangladeshi women by the armed forces.

Some of the other organizations include the United Front for Women's Rights (UFWA) which was formed in 1955, and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) that had been working since 1899.

Ayub Khan's Period (1958-1968)

APWA's warm and complementary relationship with the state continued through the era of Ayub Khan's military dictatorship. The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961, which gave women a few rights with regard to marriage, the custody of children, divorce and registration of marriages and divorces, was passed as a result of APWA's efforts. It was basically an attempt to discourage polygamy as the first wife's written permission became necessary for a husband's second marriage. The recommendations of Justice Rashid Commission (mentioned above) were not all embodied nonetheless some progress was made compared to before. Prior to this, the Child Marriages Restraint Act of 1929 recommended fourteen years as the marriageable age for girls, and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 defined the grounds on which women could seek divorce, for example, cruelty and non-maintenance.

The Family Law Ordinance 1961

Although the MFLO of 1961 was by no means radical, and the punishment for the second marriage was minor (an easily ignored small fine) with annulment not being an option, it was nonetheless a small step in the direction of women's rights. Such achievements were possible because APWA did not challenge the military dictatorship which defined itself as benevolent, moderate and modern. Even though the law was relatively weak, modest and moderate in relation to expectations, it was vehemently opposed by the *Ulema* who spoke against it from pulpits and condemned it as tampering with the Qura'an. Women retaliated by launching a movement in support of the Family Laws Ordinance, and in Lahore Begum Nasim Jahan led a march against the clerics which ended with the burning of the effigy of Maulana Abbas Ali Khan, a virulent opponent, in front of the Punjab Assembly.

Women in Politics

The absence of a vibrant women's rights movement or feminist struggle was one of the reasons that when Fatima Jinnah stood in the elections against Ayub Khan in 1965, he used the *Ulema* to declare that a woman could not be the head of state in a Muslim country. Ayub Khan's accusations that Fatima Jinnah was an Indian and American agent, and an unfeminine and unmotherly figure were not met with indignation and anger, unlike the effect of such accusations against Benazir Bhutto decades later, when they were met with scorn, anger, and uproar. Ironically, in an attempt to remove Ayub Khan and gain power, the Jamaat-e-Islami supported Fatima Jinnah and radically altered its earlier position that women could not become heads of state in an Islamic country.

Women's Organizations

There was a proliferation of women's organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, some concerned with welfare, others with economic and professional aims, and still others based on economic empowerment. Some of these include the Behbud Association formed in 1967 for social welfare and income-generation activities, and the exclusive Soroptimist Club, also established in 1967, which worked with women in senior managerial and administrative positions. The women's organizations worked together co-operatively and many had the same members on their boards, for example, Miriam Habib, the first recognized woman journalist in Pakistan, served on the executive boards of many organizations. The shared visions and common concerns led to a great deal of mutual interaction and collaboration.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1972-77)

The Politicization of Women

Ayub Khan's regime ended in 1968 after massive street protests against his dictatorship. However, power was grabbed by another military dictator, Yahya Khan during whose tenure national elections were held and won convincingly by the Awami League, a party based in East Pakistan. However, the West Pakistani civil and military rulers failed to transfer power and initiated a military operation in East Pakistan which ended in 1971 with the secession of the province which became Bangladesh. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) that had won the general election of 1970 in West Pakistan assumed power in 1972. The transformations in the state and reconfiguration of power did not change the relationship with women's groups and the mutual accommodation and collaboration of the Ayub era continued during the brief period of democracy.

In the 1970 elections, it was widely believed that women, for the first time, voted independently of their male kin on account of being attracted by Bhutto's rhetoric of equality and justice for the oppressed. Nasim Jahan, a founder member of PPP, mobilized educated women in Lahore as in other cities and spread the PPP ideas in various localities and neighborhoods. Women, who had participated in PPP election campaigns, became a part of PPP's *mohalla* committees. Women from low-income areas as well as educated middle class were drawn to the dream of a just and socialist society. Nasim Wali Khan was the first woman to win the election on a general seat but did not take oath as many of the parties seeking provincial autonomy were

labeled 'traitors' by the PPP government, and the National Awami Party government in Balochistan was dismissed. In spite of such undemocratic measures, the PPP government was regarded as more womenfriendly than its predecessors.

In 1972 the PPP formed a constitution-making committee which had two women, Nasim Jahan and Ashraf Abbasi. The 1973 Constitution gave more rights to women than in the past. Article 25 of rights declared that every citizen was equal before law and Article 25 (2) said there would be no discrimination based on sex alone. Article 27 of fundamental stated that there would be no discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex for appointment in the service of Pakistan. Article 32 of the Basic Principles of State Policy guaranteed reservation of seats for women, and article 35 stipulated that the state shall protect marriage, family and mother and child. The constitution was unanimously ratified in the Assembly and later Article 228 was amended to accept the principle of at least one woman member on the proposed Council on Islamic Ideology. In spite of women's efforts, however, the idea of female suffrage for reserved seats for women was rejected, both in the constitution committee and the National Assembly.

In the 1973 constitution women continued to be indirectly elected members of the Assemblies. The PPP government took other measures to raise women's status and a cell was set up to evaluate the status of women. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali was made Governor of Sindh and Kaniz Yousaf was made the Vice-Chancellor of a university. Begum Ashraf Abbasi was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and all government services were opened to women through administrative reforms in 1972. Women could enter the services from which they were hitherto debarred, such as the Foreign Service and management groups. Women could now be Prime Minister, Governor or

Cabinet minister. A massive induction in the Foreign Service through lateral entry led to 121 entrants and the first ever women Foreign Service cadre came into being.

In 1975, the International Women's Year (IWY) was launched. The Prime Minister's wife, Nusrat Bhutto, went to Mexico to represent Pakistan and signed the Mexico Declaration. Following this, a semi-autonomous Pakistan Women's Institute was set up in Lahore to mark the IWY. In 1976, a thirteen-member Women's Rights Committee was set up chaired by Yahya Bakhtiar, the first Attorney General of Pakistan. It included nine women some of whom had been pressing for a commission to determine the status of women to make recommendations to improve their situation. This demand was mainly pushed by Nasim Jahan, Miriam Habib, Rashida Patel and Zari Sarfraz. The commission's task was to consider and formulate proposals for law reforms to improve the social and economic conditions of women. It presented its proposals on law reforms in July 1976 and made recommendations shortly after. However, it was neither ratified nor implemented and never made public.

The PPP set up a Women's Wing under Nusrat Bhutto and provincial wings were formed which educated women in the philosophy of Marxism and socialism. The women's wing held elections leading to the emergence of new leadership from among the middle class and low-income groups. Various trade unions and students' organizations emerged and were aligned with the PPP. During the PPP tenure, APWA continued to work without interference and the United Front for Women's Rights was revived to struggle for women's reserved seats through female suffrage but fizzled out when this endeavor failed.

Women's Organizations

In the 1970s, women's organizations such as Shirkat Gah, Aurat Foundation and the Women's Front arose. The Women's Front, based in Lahore, was a small group of aggressive and radical Left-wing Punjab University students, but it petered out after the students graduated and moved on. This group contested union elections and won both seats for women and organized chapters in other cities such as Sargodha and Multan. Their slogan was, 'women and politics are one.' Aurat, based in Islamabad, was composed of Left-wing university teachers and students and worked in low-income neighborhoods for the depressed classes. The organization brought out a newsletter which focused on the class struggle and wrote about male domination. However, lack of funding and human resources meant that it could not be sustained. Some members of the organization later founded the Aurat Foundation which focused on a range of women's issues. Several organizations for women began to emerge in various cities, however some became pivotal in launching an active and vibrant women's movement.

Shirkat Gah was also established in the 1970s and became central during subsequent decades as the Women Action Forum emerged from this organization. The idea arose from the International Women's Year and in 1976, educated urban middle class women formed Shirkat Gah as a publication and resource center for women. It promoted the social and economic development of women and carried out research and 'consciousness-raising' activities. Shirkat Gah set up a women's hostel and day-care centers for working women.

Beginning from the post-partition period to the end of the PPP's rule in 1977 through a military coup, the relationship of the women's movement with the nascent state remained devoid of conflict and confrontation. The governments, whether civil or military, supported the women's organizations in so far as they remained within the confines of traditional norms and engaged in

welfare work. The women's organizations remained concerned with women's economic uplift, development and consciousness-raising and did not offer political resistance. They gained a few rights and concessions from both the civilian and military governments with which the relationship was characterized by collaboration and mutual accommodation.

The women's organizations of the time did not challenge the legitimacy of the military government or its attitude towards Fatima Jinnah. Similarly, they failed to question or resist the Islamist provisions of the 1973 constitution, the lesser status of non-Muslim citizens, the declaration of Islam as the state religion, and the forcing out of Ahmadis from the pale of Islam in 1974. These steps and other measures, such as the banning of alcohol and gambling, the declaration of Friday as the weekly holiday, all done to appease the religious lobby, set the stage for the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) movement against Bhutto which culminated with military takeover and aggressive Islamization. The women's organizations operating at that time appear to have been quiescent and willing to ignore the larger questions of democracy and justice as long as women received a few rights. However, the few rights that they achieved during the Ayub and Bhutto periods were also subjected to continual challenge from the religious orthodoxy bent upon taking Pakistan in a theocratic direction from its inception. These efforts gained momentum in the ensuing period of General Zia-ul-Haq's military rule when the orthodoxy gained ascendancy thereby rudely awakening women's groups into mobilizing to defend the few rights they had won.

Zia and the Creation of Women Action Forum (WAF)

The year 1979 was a watershed in the history of Pakistan as well as globally. The orthodox revolution in neighboring Iran, and the Soviet Union incursion into Afghanistan, foreshadowed massive reconfigurations of power globally, along with the radical reconstruction of the state in Pakistan. Pakistan became the frontline state in the Cold War contest between competing imperialisms in Afghanistan. While the Soviet imperialism was based on a communist perspective, the competing US one sought an ally in a specific version of Islam to fight against ‘ungodly’ communism.

For the Pakistani military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, who had seized power in an illegal coup in 1977, the Cold War competing imperialisms provided a perfect opportunity to gain legitimacy by wrapping himself in an Islamic garb. The Islamization agenda that had been initiated by Bhutto’s ‘Islamic Socialism’ was now intensified. Zia proceeded straightaway to Islamize Pakistan based on the Deobandi/Wahabi version derived from Jamaat-e- Islami and Saudi Arabian articulations of Islam. Radical changes were made in the school curricula, educational policies, the media and the judiciary to strengthen the tenuous Islamic credentials of the regime. Harsh punishments, such as flogging and stoning to death, were borrowed from the Saudi model and journalists as well as lawyers were not spared in the drive to ‘cleanse’ society of all the evils of socialism that Bhutto had propagated. Only the economy was exempted from so-called Islamization as it was based on an international fiscal system in which interest had to be paid. However, *Zakat*, *Ushr* and Islamic banking forms were introduced to justify the resort to religion.

General Zia's Islamization drive was not confined to the public sphere as he wanted to restructure and regulate the private one also. *Salaat* Committees were constituted to ensure that people prayed regularly and observed other Islamic injunctions. With a relentless focus on piety in the private sphere and control over the personal lives of citizens, an inordinate amount of attention fell upon women who were seen as the repositories of culture, religion and tradition. The veil and the four walls were emphasized, piety in dress codes was imposed by vigilantes operating in the public sphere, and violence was used to ensure compliance with official measures.

The entire legal structure was reconstructed to institutionalize discrimination against women and non-Muslim citizens. A number of discriminatory laws including the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, the Qisas and Diyat Ordinance and the Law of Evidence of 1984 were promulgated. The Qisas and Diyat law privatized the crime of murder and saved the perpetrators of 'honor killing'. The Law of Evidence reduced women's testimony in a court of law to half that of men. In 1983, the Ansari Report of the Council of Islamic Ideology recommended that women's participation in politics should be limited to nominated women over the age of fifty. In 1985, the Shariat Bill (9th Amendment) threatened to abolish the Family Laws Ordinance of 1961.

In the early years, women belonging to various organizations watched with incredulity the spate of laws and measures to control and order their lives in accordance General Zia's vision of religion. There were dress code restrictions, coupled with restrictions on participation in spectator sports, and enhanced segregation with a proposal for a separate women's university. By that time, a new generation of middle class women, which had studied in western universities

and was exposed to the feminist movements in those countries, had entered the workforce in various fields. They were seriously perturbed over the continuous attacks on a relatively tolerant and diverse culture of previous decades. Dr. Israr's lectures on a TV show in which he advocated the exit of women from the economy, threatened the loss of livelihood of a large number of women who worked at universities and other places.

However, it was the Fehmida and Allah Bux case, filed under the Zina Ordinance (one of the five Hudood Ordinances) that motivated women to protect and preserve the few rights they had achieved in the two previous dispensations. From that point on, the relationship between women and the state transformed radically from the mutual accommodation of the earlier decades to conflict, confrontation and contestation.

The Zina Ordinance of 1979 conflated adultery with rape and erased the distinction between them. This law made it virtually impossible to prove rape and, upon failure to prove it, the woman was transformed into the culprit while the rapist went scot-free. The punishment for adultery was stoning to death. The harsh punishments in the name of Islam mobilized the women into taking action. Following the year of its promulgation, a large number of rural and urban women from the economically marginalized groups were booked under false cases of Hudood and languished in jails for years.

Creation of Women Action Forum (WAF)

In 1981, a group of women met in Shirkat Gah Karachi and formed the **Women Action Forum (WAF)**. In a short span of time, there were chapters in Lahore, Islamabad and Peshawar. For the next decade, WAF became the face of the women's movement in Pakistan, although the

Sindhiani Tehreek in Sindh was a radical organization which used direct action as a method to fight not only the military regime but also patriarchy as articulated in interior Sindh.¹⁹ WAF used picketing, demonstrations, processions, rallies, signature campaigns, consciousness-raising, telegrams, writing and other strategies to register protest and oppose the regime's draconian measures. Each chapter functioned somewhat differently, depending upon the local context and ethnic mix, nevertheless WAF fought against the discrimination in law, spectator sports, educational segregation, media regulations, dress codes, and the steady march towards a theocratic state.

In 1983, when the Pakistan Women Lawyers gave a call to march to the High Court with a petition against the then proposed Law of Evidence, a large number of WAF members joined the demonstration and were baton-charged and tear-gassed on the Mall Lahore. WAF's profile was raised internationally and it made headlines in the national press as well as the international media. Subsequently, there was no turning back and WAF frequently resorted to pickets, demonstrations and protest rallies. The resistance to military rule and fundamentalism was not mounted only through the traditional methods of protest but also manifested itself in cultural forms such as poetry, literature, music, dance, theatre, films, art and painting. Kishwar Naheed's *Hum Gunahgar Aurta'in* (We Sinful Women) and Fehmida Riaz's poem *Chaadar Aur Chaardivari* (the veil and four walls) became anthems for the movement, along with Habib Jalib's famous poem read out at the February 12, 1983 demonstration in Lahore. The work of Salima Hashmi in painting, Madeeha Gauhar in theatre, Sheema Kirmani in dance and theatre, Sabiha Sumar in filmmaking, Sherry Rehman in journalism, Attiya Dawood and Azra Abbas in poetry, and Zahida Hina and Khalida Hussain in Urdu literature testifies to the multi-dimensional nature of the resistance.

However, the success of WAF came with a price in that the differing voices within the WAF platform led to some of the most seething debates over strategy, aims and goals. At one point the debates led to a split in the Lahore chapter which was resolved after an acrimonious public controversy. The main debates in the WAF movement were the following: 1) Secular or religious framework; 2) focus on feminist issues only or larger ones that have an impact upon women; 3) a broad feminist approach or a narrow one on women's rights. There were three other debates which were of less import as they had more to do with functioning and terminology than an ideological disagreement. These include 1) nonhierarchical functioning versus a hierarchical structure; 2) non-political versus a political orientation, and 3) Open versus closed membership. It is important to lay out the main contours of these debates within the socio-political context of the time.

Secular versus a Religious Framework Initially, WAF had no clear position on Islam although several of the founding members were secular and socialist in personal orientation. However, since WAF was a lobby cum pressure group consisting of individuals and organizations, there was wide variation in beliefs and sentiments. Many of the members were believers, while some were practicing Muslims. WAF, as a platform was diverse, therefore ambivalent with regard to Islam. Islam was a class-based issue as women from the urban lower middle classes were relatively more conservative and religious.

The regime was justifying its measures by invoking its preferred version of Islam which was being imposed uniformly on all sects and all citizens. Hence the laws were made to appear divine and not open to challenge. Some of the members felt that that WAF would have to engage with Islam as it was being relentlessly imposed. Additionally, it was felt that women

from the lower middle and conservative classes had to be mobilized, since it appeared to become a matter of the word of God versus the word of women.²¹

In 1983, WAF Lahore used the strategy of inviting religious clerics who espoused liberal interpretations of religion and rejected the official state version being imposed across the board. This pragmatism was merely a strategy since many of the women in their personal lives had a secular outlook. Some of the members believed that the regime had to be contested and resisted on its own turf with competing interpretations. There was a need to emphasize that what constituted 'true' Islam was ultimately a matter of interpretation. Additionally, as Mumtaz and Shaheed pointed out, a large number of customs, traditions and cultural practices which in fact violated Islamic injunctions were being justified by recourse to Islam.²² It was, therefore, vital to sift culture, tradition and custom from religion. It was necessary to separate other versions of Islam from the homogenized singular one emanating from the regime. Furthermore, it was argued that WAF would have to function within the social, political and ideological context of the country and ideologies, such as secularism, would alienate the more conservative element within the movement.

Opposed to this perspective was the one forwarded by secular and socialist women within the movement, who argued that the strategic use of Islamic arguments would become self-defeating as women would be 'playing on the *mullahs*' wicket'. There were differing shades of opinion among the more secular women, which ranged from a strong belief in the human rights framework to those who envisioned a socialist society. However, liberal feminism was the dominant strand as the human rights discourse seemed less threatening than socialist or communist ideas.

Those on the secular side of the debate argued that the country does not have a singular and monolithic reality; rather there were multiple realities and Islam constituted only one of those realities. Beyond religion, there was ethnicity, class, caste, gender and linguistic and regional identities. The majority of the people were not so focused on the supposed danger to Islam as on bread and butter issues. In any case, there was no threat to religion as Pakistan was an overwhelmingly Muslim country with a miniscule minority, especially after the break-up of the country in 1971. The minorities could never become equal citizens as long as the state remained defined by one religion, especially a monolithic interpretation of it. There was a palpable fear that if WAF framed its arguments within a religious framework, it would not be able to emerge from it. For every liberal and modernist cleric, there were scores whose interpretation was fundamentalist, orthodox and literal.

However, there were all kinds of complications as there have not been movements, such as the Reformation, in Islam since there is no Church from which to separate the state. In western countries, secularization has a long history going back to the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, urbanization, industrialization and capitalism.²³ The secularization of Christianity was steeped in social, political and ideological movements and did not arise suddenly. In post-colonial states like Pakistan a modern secular democratic state had to be constructed from scratch. Another conundrum for the women's movement was that while feminism is premised on the idea that the personal is political, secularism separates the personal from the political because it separates the private from the public. It bans religion into the private sphere (usually associated with women) while making the public masculine sphere of politics and commerce free of religious constraints. For feminists, it is contradictory to assert that the personal is political

while simultaneously demanding a secular state. After a long and obstreperous debate which lasted into the early 1990s, WAF declared that it stands for a democratic and secular state.

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