

# ***Impact of Zia-ul-Haq's Gender Policies on Pakistani Society***

**Shehzadi Zamurrad Awan\***

## **Abstract**

*Zia-ul-Haq is remembered for controversial legislation on women in Pakistani society. His policies were set to impede the socio-economic and political development of Pakistani women. The gender-biased legislative and executive measures of the government pursued in that era, restricted public role for women and portrayed a negative image. The regime's policies determined various trends in society, which were discernable in the past. First, religious scholars were divided into various sects, presenting different interpretations of Zia's gender-related laws. Secondly, gender policies helped to organize women rights groups, which mobilized civil society through seminars and protests against biased legislation. Thirdly, religion and culture were amalgamated in such a way that it became impossible for common people to distinguish between the two, resulting in the adoption of many gender-biased cultural practices, considering them as a part of religion. The controversial nature of Zia's gender laws can be gauged from the fact that the repeal of these laws has remained a priority for most of the political parties in their manifestos during elections. Women groups also kept on pushing democratically elected governments for its abrogation and amendment.*

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Forman Christian College, Lahore.

## Introduction

Women comprise around 52 percent of population in Pakistan. Their status and position are debatable concerns among women groups, civil society and media. Evidence shows that a serious debate on women issues and gender discrimination was prompted by General Zia-ul-Haq because of his gender related orders, programs, laws and policies. The military regime introduced a different political order with a 'label' of *Nizam-i-Mustafa/Nizam-i-Islam* (The order of the Prophet/Islamic system). In his first address to the nation, Zia revealed his intention to Islamize various state laws. According to K.M. Arif, "For him (Zia) politics and theology went together: in an Islamic country, politics and the mosque was as inseparable from the state as the soul from the human body. Zia considered that he had a God-sent opportunity to serve the cause of Islam. Being ruler of a Muslim country, he felt, he had a moral and divine obligation to establish an Islamic polity as enunciated in the Holy Quran."<sup>1</sup> However, scholars and analysts believe that he took this action in order to go along with the tide, vouching for his legitimacy to extra-constitutional control of the country. There is a consensus that Zia's actions came as a result of expediency rather than conviction. While commenting on the intentions of Zia behind *Islamisation*, Imran Khan writes in his autobiography, "Zia cashed in on the opposition to Bhutto from the religious parties, which equated secularism with anti-Islamism."<sup>2</sup> This resulted in increasing discrimination against women in the society. Zia adopted 'centralized *Islamisation* of laws', which promoted "institutionalized gender inequality based on the concept of distinct social roles for each gender (men's roles include both public and private dimensions while women's roles are primarily domestic). They also promote the segregation of

---

1 General Khalid Mahmud Arif, *Working with Zia: Pakistan's Power Politics 1977-1988* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 252.

2 Imran Khan, *Pakistan: A Personal History* (London: Bantam Press, 2011), 68.

public activities by gender-purdah norms.”<sup>3</sup> His rule presented a portrait where he became a symbol and sole spokesperson of the orthodoxy by promoting conservative environment in which women suffered the most. Along with that, the political institutions as well as the social fabric of the Pakistani society underwent a spell of decay.

This article is divided into two parts. The first part examines women related legislative and executive measures of Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977-1988), the so-called '*Islamisation*'. The second part deals with gender related executive directives of Zia-ul-Haq, affecting women position in Pakistani society. While analyzing these legislative and executive measures, the role of women legislators in the National as well as Provincial Assemblies and civil society will also be taken into consideration. This in-depth study of the related processes and strategies would not only enable us to understand the state policy on women issues, during dictatorial rule but would also help to trace civil society responses and its immediate impact on Pakistani women; even beyond his rule.

### **Legislation on Women**

Zia-ul-Haq's first executive order of February 10, 1979 comprised a series of reforms dealing with *Islamisation* by making state laws in 'conformity with the Islamic doctrines' as interpreted by the regime. This was followed by the legislative reforms known as *Hudood Ordinance*, dealing with female population. These contained punishments for the offenses under the Islamic laws, under specific circumstances. The cluster of Islamic laws was enforced through four Presidential Orders pertaining to drinking, adultery, theft and false allegation. The punishments prescribed under these four mentioned orders were amputation of hands for theft, stoning to death for adultery and lashes and strips for different crimes, especially under

---

3 Henry Korson and Michelle Maskiell, "Islamization and Social Policy in Pakistan: The Constitutional Crisis and the Status of Women," *Asian Survey* 25, no. 6 (June 1985): 600.

conditions where the police and administrative machinery were corrupt and could easily manipulate these punishments for a bribe.<sup>4</sup>

Following paragraphs highlight those parts of the *Hudood* laws, which deal with the placement of women in Pakistan. First legislation was the Zina (adultery) Ordinance; that did not distinguish between adultery (*Zina-bil-Raza*) and rape (*Zina-bil-Jabr*). Thus, rape and adultery were considered as same and the law prescribed equal punishment in both cases. The ordinance was criticized on two legal grounds. First, the victims of rape were punished as offenders, which provided a shelter to the real perpetrators. Second, the procedural lacunas to investigate such cases in law further made women vulnerable. Therefore, the law was considered biased, as argued by Anita M. Weiss, who thought the “punishments (under this law) were meted out in a highly discriminatory fashion. Women have been proven guilty of *zina-bil-jabr* through medical examinations following the rape, or because they became pregnant and were unmarried.”<sup>5</sup> These loop holes in law made this legislation arbitral and therefore, became subject to criticism by civil society. Criticizing the Hudood laws, Asma Jahangir stated “evidence of *Hadd* punishment did not include expert opinion, medical evidence or documentary proof.”<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the mentioned weaknesses, the *Zina* law had its societal dimension, when it applied to patriarchal society of Pakistan, where the possibility of harassment can also be expected from the male police staff.<sup>7</sup> Khan further explains that the police, instead of helping women victims of

---

4 “Islamisation of an Islamic Republic,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 14, no. 23 (June 09 1979): 966.

5 Anita M. Weiss, “Women’s Position in Pakistan: Socio-cultural Effects of Islamisation,” *Asian Survey* 25, no. 08 (August 1985): 870.

6 Asma Jahangir and HinaJilani, *TheHudood Ordinance: A Divine Sanction?*(Lahore: Rohtas Publisher, 1990), 49.

7 Shahnaz Khan, *Zina:Transnational Feminism and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

*Zina* aggravated their miseries and, thus “at the hands of the police, they face sexual, physical, and emotional violence and extortion.”<sup>8</sup> The impact of such kind of treatment by a law enforcement agency was more damaging for those middle/low class poor victims, who have meagre financial resources to defend themselves and were not in a position to bribe them. Secondly, the trail of middle/low class women under this law brought the consciousness of the already present class division in the society, accompanied by a strong feeling of suspicion and hostility towards lower-middle class by elite. Khan believes that, “the moral regulation of women through the *Zina* Ordinance reveals the extent to which docile middle-class women are considered moral, while agervative, impoverished women are deemed immoral.”<sup>9</sup>

This division implied that the lower-middle class of Pakistan is morally degenerated, resulted in their social boycott. Third, this legislation provided an excuse to the parents to discipline their daughters according to their wishes, which was most of the time based on patriarchal mind-set as remarked by Khan that “women’s narratives suggest that applying zina charges helps to provide families with docile daughters, mothers, and wives.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, in the presence of biased, uncooperative and hostile socio-cultural environment, it became a hard task for poor women to prove their innocence. Moreover, the punishments under this law were severe in nature, accompanied by difficulties for women. Thus, the law made them defensive, losing their capacity to initiate, having a bearing on their minds as if they were inferior to male members of the family.

*Qanun-e-Shahadat (Law of evidence) Order 1984*, became the second legislation, which converted a woman’s testimony to half that of a man, citing religious injunctions. The contentious part of this legislation was that a woman’s testimony was not even considered in *Hudood* related

---

8 Khan, *Zina*, 78.

9 Khan, *Zina*, 72.

10 Khan, *Zina*, 72.

cases. It was assumed that the threat of prosecution became a cause of discouragement for rape victims from filing complaints, who had only women witnesses to prove their innocence. There are a number of scholars and commentators who consider this particular law as misinterpretation of the injunctions of Quran which in turn creates ambiguities; harmful to women under trial. In the views of Zaheer Khalid, this law became a basic cause of gender discrimination, while the real spirit of the Quranic verses were over-looked. These laws are not reflective of the true spirit of Islam on the interpretation of the Hudood Laws.

They (Hudood laws) were never intended to differentiate between men and women. In the instance of two women's testimony equalling one man's, the Quran is very clear. This law was introduced to strengthen the evidence of women, not to be flouted by men."<sup>11</sup> Zia's evidence law caused uproar in the civil society organizations, much to chagrin of the orthodoxy. Condemning one of such protests by women, around 100 renowned *Ulema* led by Maulana Latifur Rehman, declared them as proclamation of war against God's commands.' In this meeting, two resolutions were passed. One was against women protesters, who were called as 'westernized' and 'champion of secularism'. Second was against the women lawyers, who were supporting women's agitation.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately for these ulema, Zia government ignored the opposition and continued with the already proclaimed ordinance.

The third legislation of 1984 dealt with retaliation and blood money in the case of murder or injury, known as *Qanun-e-Qisas and Diyat*.<sup>13</sup> In case of murder, the law "fixed 10,000 dirhams or 30.63 kilogram of silver as the *Diyat* for

11 SheharBano Khan, "The truth about the law", *Dawn* Accessed on, August 08, 2002, <http://www.dawn.com/weekly/review/archive/020808/review2.htm>.

12 Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130; see also *The Pakistan Times*, February 16, 1983.

13 Under the Islamic law, the concept of Qisas based on the principle of 'limb for limb', while under Diyat, the relatives of a murdered person can give 'blood money', in order to escape from punishment, and same applies in case of injury.

male and half that amount for females,”<sup>14</sup> as compensation. This particular law was considered by critics from civil society, jurists and women’s right activists, as an ‘institutionalized discrimination’ against women presenting its own interpretation of Quranic verses. While highlighting the distinction, Justice Changez wrote, “I have not come across any Hadith regarding the payment of half of *Diyat* as compared to that of a man. On the contrary, the Holy Prophet in his *Farman* for the people of Yemen had fixed *Diyat* of 100 camels or 100 dinars for the killing of a believer, making no distinction whatsoever of a male or a female believer. How can I proceed to make a distinction?”<sup>15</sup> Changez further stressed that to fix the amount of *Diyat* is discretion of the heir of murdered woman and while fixing this amount there are various considerations like the paying capacity of the culprit and all relevant circumstances. Hence, the amount differs from case to case. It was similarly criticized by women right organizations like the Women’s Action Forum which along with other women groups protested and considered the *Diyat* Law against their freedom.<sup>16</sup> This law was omitted from promulgation. Though *Qisas* and *Diyat* law was a significant part of *Hudood* Laws, formulated and presented by Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) in its report of 1978, it was enforced in 1990 under the interim government of Prime Minister, Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, entitled ‘Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance’, through which *Qisas* and *Diyat* was inducted in Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). Taking refuge behind this law, many women were reportedly murdered by their own family members under the cultural practice of ‘Honour Killing’ (*Karo-Kari*) in all

---

14 *Dawn*, March 06, 1984.

15 Rubya Mehdi, *The Islamization of the Laws in Pakistan* (Curzon Press, 1994), 152, 153; see also, Rafiullah Shahab (1984b) “Proposed Law on *Qisas* and *Diyat*”, *PLD*, Vol. XXXVI, 86-88; see also A.R. Changez, “The Law of *Qisas* and *Diyat*”, *The Pakistan Times* 23, August 1984.

16 William L. Richter, “Pakistan in 1984: Digging In”, *Asian Survey* 25, no. 2 (February, 1985), 150.

provinces of Pakistan. In this regard, the tribal justice courts known as *Jirga* and *Punchayat* in tribal/rural community have played a vital role in reinforcing the centuries old misogynist cultural practices. This law shielded the culprits and made mockery of punishment under *Qisas* and *Diyat* law.

Apart from the above three mentioned legislations, the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) was established in 1979, which besides proposing and reviewing the laws in conformity with *Quran* and *Sunna*, had a special prerogative to hear the cases registered under *Hudood laws*. With that, the *Shariat* benches at provincial high courts were abolished and all such related issues came under the jurisdiction of FSC, comprising jurists and *Ulema*.<sup>17</sup>

The decisions of FSC in *Hudood* related cases were criticized by the civil society organizations, for being gender biased because in most of the cases, only women were penalized. The human rights activists regarded the punishments awarded by FSC under *Zina* law, inhuman and most vulnerable were those women who belonged to lower-middle class. While writing about the plight of these women prisoners in 3399 appeals of *Zina*, from 1980 to 1987, one of the activists further states:

This is only the tip of the iceberg, given the number of women arrested and released before reaching the appeal stage. Once a woman is accused of *Zina* she stands stigmatized regardless of subsequent acquittals. Apart from a couple of isolated women prisoners, the majority of them come from extremely disadvantaged sections of society. In many cases, women alleging rape have been arrested and convicted of *Zina*. The accused men are given benefit of the doubt and acquitted by the Federal Shariat Court.<sup>18</sup>

There were some glaring cases of acquisition under the Hudood Ordinance like Fehmida/Allah Bux, Safia Bibi and

---

17 Hamid Khan, *Constitutional and Political History of Pakistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 362.

18 Asma Jahangir, "Women's Commission and Hudood Ordinances," *Daily Times*, September 12, 2003.

Shahida Perveen, which made the decisions of FSC under the *Hudood Ordinance* more questionable. The suffering of women in such cases raised eyebrows of the civil society organizations like Women Action Forum (WAF) and All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), over the misinterpreted edicts of the Quran and Sunnah, with a fallout of discrimination against women. Although, there is no systematic data compiled to see the level of injustice done to these women but various writers believe that because of its ambiguity, this law terrorized women.<sup>19</sup>

Responding to the severe societal criticism, government appointed women as *Qazis*, so that in the presence of female judges, women victims could clearly defend their stance. In addition to this, exclusive courts for family affairs were constituted with a single objective of hearing the cases of *haq-meher*.<sup>20</sup> This government decision was challenged by a petitioner Ansar Burney, who moved a petition in Federal Shariat Court comprising Chief Justice Aftab Hussain, justices Zahooreul Haq and Malik Ghulam Ali. The petitioner held that women under Islamic law are not allowed to become *Qazis* and there is no precedent, as such. He further argued that since under the law of evidence, a woman's testimony is half that of a man as is her share in inheritance half that of a brother, how could she become *Qazi* like a man. The clarification of the Attorney General was that a woman can become *Qazi* in all family matters but she has to be over 40 years of age and she must observe veil. After these deliberations, FSC gave a judgment declaring that a woman can be appointed as a *Qazi* without any limit of age and attire. FSC also mentioned in its detailed judgment that women evidence is not half that of a man and there is no restriction on a female judge to hear only family

---

19 Farzana Bari, "Tyranny of Hudood Laws," *The News*, Accessed on May 14, 2002, <http://www.hvk.org/2002/0502/128.html>.

20 *Haqmeher* is a God-given right of a wife on her husband in a shape of money or property and this right is written in a marriage contract (*Nikah Nama*).

related cases.<sup>21</sup> Zia's *Islamisation* program was resisted and challenged by civil society, presenting strong arguments.

### **Executive Directives on Women**

Apart from the above-mentioned legislation, Zia-ul-Haq's orders as CMLA and later as President sought to establish a new code of conduct. These executive orders were issued under the slogan of '*Chadara aur Chardevari*' [Urdu: the veil and the four walls], with an objective to protect women's privacy. A larger segment of the society perceived them as an attempt to seclude women by curtailing their movement, especially in urban centers. The adversely affected areas of women activities were the realm of education, sports and workplace. It was believed that under the pretence of *Islamisation*, the government restricted their activities. These measures were supported by the fundamentalists especially by the Jamat-i-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam and Majlis-e-Ahrrar. Israr Ahmed became a principal supporter of Zia-ul-Haq's policies. However, he was opposed by various *Ulema*, who demanded a correct interpretation of religion.

The regime allowed the state-owned television channel to promote set views and reactionary ideas. In one of the television programmes 'Al-Huda', Ahmed opined that women should be barred from television programmes and that their employment should be restricted to medicine and teaching. When asked why the same principle should not apply to men, he had no satisfactory answer.<sup>22</sup> It was considered as a step to promote arbitrary division between genders. This programme invited a severe reaction from civil society. The rightwing Urdu newspaper *Jassarat* supported Zia's *Islamisation* program in its editorial by writing that, the most popular among the broadcasted religious programs on TV, with a distinction of receiving a direct appreciation from President Zia-ul-Haq's banned by the TV administrators, who are admirers of Bhutto rule and uncontrolled women conspirator of APWA, headed by Begum Asghari Raheem

21 *The Pakistan Times*, August 10, 1982.

22 *Jang*, March 21, 1982.

Ahmad (wife of the governor of Sindh).<sup>23</sup> The newspaper further quoted the protesting women saying that since they were well-aware of Islamic principles and the rights granted to them therefore should not be misguided by such programmes.<sup>24</sup>

The views of orthodoxy created an impression that they did not recognize any individual position or status of women on the basis of their education and job. A resolution by some religious scholars against protesting women was evident. It categorized these women as 'Westernized' and their act as 'un-Islamic'. It called for an immediate legal action and restoration of the banned religious program.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, there were a number of religious scholars, who opposed the exclusion of women from the mainstream and confining them to a specified role. In this regard, Allama Syed Mahmood Ahmed Razavi, a noted scholar and the then president of Ruyet-e-Hilal<sup>26</sup> Committee asserted that "Islam was totally against keeping women in the four walls of home. He held that as far as women's advancement and taking up jobs in various fields was concerned, Islam did not oppose it. In the days of Holy Prophet (PBUH) women attended the injured during the wars and served water to thirsty. It explained that women could serve even in a battlefield if needed."<sup>27</sup>

The executive orders of Zia regime can be classified in two general categories: attire and education; sports and employment. As far as first category is concerned, there were two directives. The first related to the implementation of new dress code in government institutions, including schools and colleges, along with that a separate women university was announced. The new dress code made mandatory for

---

23 "BismillahTV Par TashreefLayee (Bismillah Come on T.V)," *Jasarat*(Editorial), March 20, 1982.

24 BismillahTV Par TashreefLayee,

25 *Jasarat*, March 25, 1982.

26 Islamic Calendar is determined by sighting of the Moon. The committee which ratifies the sighting of the Moon is Ruyet-e-Hilal(Committee for Moon Sighting).

27 *The Muslim*, March 22, 1982.

women to wear *duppata*<sup>28</sup>. A similar circular to the federal government colleges stated that a prescribed size of a covering cloth must be worn by the girls.

Similarly, special directives were sent to the news channels for women newscasters and announcers, asserting that they must follow the prescribed dress code, which included covering of head and wearing full-sleeves shirt. The state-controlled media strictly abided these directives. It is true that wearing a *duppata* and other similar attire was not a new phenomenon in Pakistani society. However, to define its length and making its mandatory use was a daunting directive. Secondly, the governmental monitoring exclusively for women created an atmosphere of discrimination.

Another directive dealt with the new syllabi up to Intermediate school, with an emphasis on religious education by those *Ulema*, who had gender biased views.<sup>29</sup> Islam as religion is already followed by 98 percent of the population of the country; the forced study of religious principles seemed irrelevant. Although, it was not women-specific directive but it had more implications for female students. Also in Islam, there are various interpretations, which were not kept in view while designing the syllabi, which amounted to enforcement of a particular mind-set in a generalized way not acceptable to a large number of *Sunni* as well as *Shia* population. The Shia protest forced Zia government to accommodate their demands by including a separate syllabus for these students in public schools.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Zia government's programme to establish a separate women university had a popular ring, as the conservative section of the population was hesitant to send daughters for higher education. The directive was strongly

---

28 A long scarf.

29 *The Pakistan Times*, February 16, 1983.

30 Mariam AbouZahab, "The Regional Dimension of Sectarian Conflicts in Pakistan", in *Pakistan Nationalism without a Nation?*, ed., Christopher Jaffrelot (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 117; Riaz Hassan, "Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan," *Middle Eastern Studies* 21, no. 3 (July 1985):279.

opposed by civil society, with valid arguments. For example, the President of Tehreek-e-Nazria-e-Pakistan, Allama Muhammad Razi Mujtahid, who was also a member of Zia's handpicked Majlis-e-Shura, opposed a separate women university, considering it a total wastage of money. He stressed equal treatment of women according to Islam.<sup>31</sup>

Not without good reason, it was alleged that the long-term consequences of this action would further segregate women. First, the proposed women university, restricted to female faculty, could not get the expertise required for higher education. Moreover, confining them in all female environments, the graduated women could later face problems of adjustment, if they opted to work with prestigious institutions, including multinational corporations, where the salaries are much higher than in the exclusive women institutions. In other words, segregation of genders in higher education could affect women's intellectual pursuits as well as chances of public employment.

The second important directive of Zia regime was a ban on women's participation in sports events outside Pakistan. The stated directions were not officially issued. This order was not only conceived against the universal principle of gender equality but also was also a negation of a precedent set by Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had inaugurated the First Pakistan Olympic Games in April 1948, where women athletes also participated. These orders rendered women athletes as handicapped and depriving them of opportunity to compete and excel. No longer would the women have the opportunity to improve their standards by competing with sportsmen and sportswomen of international calibre.<sup>32</sup> That became one of the reasons that Pakistani women athletes lagged behind the international standards. This order even restricted women athletes in enclosed arenas, excluding men spectators. These orders were supported by special *fatwas* from orthodox *Mullah*, who

---

31 *Jasarat*, March 21, 1982.

32 *Jasarat*, March 21, 1982.

argued that the women should not play even in front of men, who are not close blood relations. The women members of *Jamat-i-Islami* especially the President *Majlis-i-Khwateen-i-Pakistan*, Begum Nisar Fatima Zehra, a member of *Majlis-e-Shura and Islamic Ideology Council* supported these restrictions as head of a *Women Commission*. In this situation, even the pictures of women athletes in newspapers were resented by conservative section.

From 1980 to 1984, the women athletes and sport teams suffered considerably as during this time-period at least in six national and international events, women could not participate and their performance was confined to exclusive enclosures. If the women teams be allowed to visit such regional countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia and at international level games in Japan etc., these athletes would had been exposed to international competitions with all the advantages. Apart from sports, the women appointments on various government jobs and their participation in academic related pursuits were also restricted during Zia's rule as they were restrained from bank related jobs as well as foreign office postings and foreign scholarships.

In addition to this, the appointments of unmarried females to Foreign Servicewere barred, subjecting their appointments, promotions and postings on gender considerations and not on merit. Through these policies:

the state moved on to take over the lives of women, to control their bodies, their space, to decide what they should wear, how they should conduct themselves, the jobs they could take, the sports they could play, and took it upon itself to define and regulate women's morality. It is state's own interpretation of Islam, the one that suits its power interests that is popularized.<sup>33</sup>

The above-mentioned actions against women created hurdles for them.

---

33 MaleehaAslam, *The Process and Impact of Idealizations of Islam in Pakistan* (Cambridge: M.Phil.thesis, University of Cambridge) Accessed on December 12, 2011, <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/EASASpapers/49MaleehaAslam.pdf>.

Apart from the above-mentioned gender biased legislative and executive measures, there were some steps taken by Zia government with positive intentions in socio-economic and political realms of women lives. The first step in this regard was to induct 20 women members in 1981 *Majlis-e-Shoora*. In 1985, women's reserved quota in National Assembly was doubled to 20 percent in non-party elections. In these elections, a total of 22 women joined the National Assembly (one directly elected, 21 on reserved seats), whereas in the largest Provincial Assembly, 14 women entered the legislature (1 directly elected, 12 on reserved seats and 1 on the quota of minority seats). However, as usual the selected women members belonged to the elite class, devoid of any knowledge about the sufferings of lower-middle class or ordinary women. These women legislators toed government policies. During the tenure of 1985 Assembly, not a single legislation was introduced for the empowerment of women by these women legislators, when two women out of 14 served as Ministers. For all practical purposes, the presence of women legislators was in consequential in both the National and Provincial Assemblies.

The second step was to create the *Women's Division*, as part of Cabinet Secretariat, which ranged from making policies for women issues and to assist women organizations through effective research, so that the opportunities of education and employment could be provided to female population. This division could have served well, provided it had a chance to work autonomously and organize conferences and trainings for rural and urban women. While writing about the ineffectiveness of Women's Division, Michelle Maskiell has observed that:

The Women's Division has channelled money into research and development schemes for women and has sponsored public forums for the discussion of women's issues. Still she adds, for all its modest achievements, the Women's Division has been

neither bold nor very successful in its representation of women's needs within the Zia government.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, despite the appointment of another Commission on the Status of Women and the inclusion of a chapter entitled 'Women in Development' for the first time in the Sixth Plan, not much was offered in practical terms for the female population, except exhibiting some concerns of Zia's government over the women distress. Third, the 1988 budget facilitated the widows in two ways. First, the budget announced full pension for the widows of government employees, which was earlier 60percent. Secondly, the relaxation was also provided to widows in property tax.<sup>35</sup> Another, significant step in this budget was the announcement of *National Dowry Fund* with two hundred million rupees, in which the financially sound and privileged people and institutions could also contribute annually, so that the daughters of poor families could get married.<sup>36</sup> Zia-ul-Haq's policies affected the progress and placement of women in the Pakistani society despite some positive measures. The damage done to the growth and empowerment of women was greater and long-lasting than the reward under some positive policies in favour of them.

### Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of the legislative and executive measures during Zia's rule, displays not only the gender biased laws but also insensitivity to the rights of women. Discriminatory ordinances and executive decrees reduced women's legal status in various ways and engendered an environment of suspicion and fear in the society, causing re-enforcement/redefinition of some socio-cultural prejudices against the female population. Zia's policies had serious implications for the Pakistani society. First, it created confusion about religion in daily life, leading to tensions between different Muslim sects, with far-reaching impact. Secondly, it shaped favourable environment for the conservative elements to interpret the Islamic laws according to their own biases, thus encouraging *fatwas* for gender-related issues in

---

34 Michelle Maskiell, "The Impact of Islamization Policies on Pakistani Women's Lives," Montana State University, *Working Paper*, November 1984, 12.

35 *Dawn*, June 26, 1988; *Jang*, June 26, 1988.

36 "1988-89 ka Wafaqi Budget," (The Federal Budget of 1988-89) *Jang* (Editorial), June 26, 1988.

particular. Interestingly, during the military rule of Zia there was an increased trend among women for education and employment.