

Women Representation and Development Discourse: An Anthropological Insight of Women Experiences

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Abstract

The present article deals with the existing crisis of representation in the development discourse. It focuses on the way in which things, events and even people are going to be presented at global level. Gender is taken as a cultural product, but in representing this particular notion, the cultural sensitivity is almost ignored by the development literature. This article explores purely woman's views and experiences while living in a Muslim society. The purpose is not to make any generalizations about women's status and perspectives in Pakistan rather to explore the women's self perceptions and strategies to cope with modern contemporary themes, i.e., women's freedom, modernity, family and public participation. The data largely depend on women's experiences and shows how particular culture and context can produce particular understanding. By applying qualitative tools, this article is able to identify woman's spaces of freedom available in the particular cultural setting.

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The first hand data were collected by utilizing different qualitative research techniques, i.e. IDIs, FGDs, and Interview Schedule from the area of Gulzar-e-Quaid, Rawalpindi by utilizing convenient sampling technique.

Introduction

In any nation, state, gender is a product of a particular culture and history and throughout the colonial period gender, particularly women possess cultural sensitivity, which is frequently exploited by external means to gain particular goals. Lila Abu Lughod¹, Chakravorty Spivak² and Leila Ahmad³ have also argued in this regard that foreign intervention with a use of women question is a common practice throughout the colonial period where white men saving brown women from brown men. This type of 'colonial feminism' is still working and taking the shape of more organized intervention where women navigate between racism and gender politics. In fact, the post 9/11 era not only narrated, but also defined and regulated women's identity. The target of this enforced identity is not generally women, but particularly Muslim women where Bush doctrine used religious rhetoric to explain their existence in Afghanistan and Iraq. The projected image of women as vulnerable and marginalized is used as the core source to legitimize foreign intervention. Thus, in this entire struggle, Muslim women have become a target group of foreign notion of development by claiming their oppression. Different modes to accelerate this effort have become more active as different NGOs gathered under the umbrella of western funding to express the body and identity of women as per their wishes. Jasmine Zine⁴ and Krista Hunt⁵ held the view

1 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflection on Cultural Relativism and its Others," *American Anthropological Association* 104, no. 3 (2002):783-790.

2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

3 Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1992).

4 Jasmine Zine, "Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19 (December 2002).

that the notion of Islam-o-phobia is consciously engaged with the gendered ideology in a way where *hijab* presented as the expression of women's oppression and a camouflaged politics completely embedded with feminism. Like colonial period, gender representation of western/global feminism is still promoting a holistic assumption of women's oppression. The evolutionary scheme of hegemonic western feminism assumes a global standard of women progression and liberation that is more a myth than reality. The modernized version of this embedded feminist politics excludes all the grounds for cultural relativism and sets an agenda of global feminism that all women are assumed to share. To strengthen this supposition, different theories and versions of development started to explain the theoretical framework of gender advancement. The division of core and periphery contributed a lot in this regard as women in third world already labeled as 'needy' and now is the time to satisfy their needs on self-constructed terms. There are a lot of problems with gender projection being continually ignored by the western projectors. Reconstruction of reality leads them towards extensive criticism for their complicity with both historical and contemporary projects to 'save' third world women.

Theoretical Framework

The impossible task to conceptualize social reality opted by western development agenda regarding gender flagged another debate about representation. Escobar claimed that reality, in sum, had been colonized by the development discourse and those who are not satisfied with this notion further struggle for pieces of freedom within it hoping that this process will explore a different reality. He viewed that this crisis of representation used as a tool of analysis for the application of intervention⁶. Foucault's work on the dynamics

5 Krista Hunt, "Embedded Feminism and the War on Terror," in (En)gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics, eds. K. Hunt and K. Rygiel (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

6 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1995), 5.

of discourse and power further contributed in the representation of social reality and in exposing the certain mechanism by which a specific ideology and the particular order of discourse is going to be produced. According to him, 'truth' is not something found or discovered, but something that must be created and that is the reason this word seems logical to us because we have made it logical. His fundamental goal was, as he said, the writing of the 'history of the present', where he tried to trace out the themes about the role of those who always have the right to speak. He claimed and many other further extended his insight that there is 'western consciousness' where the energy of the strong promotes the division between normality and abnormality. The way to present the picture only from one side further produces permissible modes of being and thinking while rejecting and even making others impossible. Foucault's work gave an extensive insight to various theorists about colonial and neo-colonial representation of development specifically from a gender perspective. Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' can be analyzed as the discourse of the Western style of dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient. Said called it a systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the 'orient' politically, ideologically, and imaginatively.⁷

Timothy Mitchell unveils another important mechanism of 'enframing' the reality. He argued that to understand the reality, the western are standing far away as visitors. Their experience of the physical world was based on objectivism and thus in order to make sense of their external reality, the enframing took place according to the European categories. In fact westerns are subjected to double demand: to be detached and objective, yet to immerse themselves in local life (Mitchell)⁸. So, there is a problem in representation of the reality generally and particularly women become the target

7 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

8 Mitchell Timothy, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ix.

of this false representation. The spaces of freedom and nature of their needs all are pre-assumed by the pre-set standards. Chandra Mohanty refers to the quintessential aspect of modernity where she raised two questions as who produces knowledge about third world women and from what spaces; she discovered that feminist literature on development is core source to represent them as having 'needs' and 'problems' but few choices and no freedom to act⁹. The hegemonic idea of West's superiority already defined Third World women especially Muslim women as tradition-bounded, family-oriented and victim-ignorant. The broad picture of contemporary style of western dominance is just the continuation of colonial discourse. Today, there is also an efficient apparatus working for producing knowledge to exercise the power¹⁰.

The focus of this paper is to highlight the cultural reflections ignored by the development discourse in order to highlight the 'anthropological structures'. Escobar¹¹ also realized the need to anthropologize the West by taking those domains mostly taken for granted as universal. There is a need to expose the 'other' reality by implying the anthropology of modernity. The articulation of knowledge and power intended to regulate social reality, but there is also a strong need of cultural explanations by acknowledging their own history and tradition¹². In the age of globalization, where impersonal forces are more active and coercive in their nature, anthropology has to explore the ethnographic realities in order to answer hypothetical model of modernization. To assume, one way direction of development is not only to hide the reality, but also ignoring

9 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 56.

10 Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge 1990), 75.

11 Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 11.

12 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflection on Cultural Relativism and its Others," *American Anthropological Association* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783-790.

the resisting element which, according to Foucault¹³ is the inherent quality of all cultures and where power is projected, it is always taken as action and resistance is the absolute reaction of that action. He claimed that there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives and the knowledge of projection is also a part of power discourse.

In the light of above literature, this article has two major claims; the first claim is that the knowledge regarding women should be more cultural oriented because the knowledge produced about the Muslim women yet, often has diverse political gender strategies. This research primarily advocates women's perspectives without ignoring their cultural landscape. The second claim of this research is that development discourse largely relied on one way knowledge in which things and ideas are presented to generalize the reality. The dominance of this system is further disqualified and rejects the other, often non-western/Third World knowledge and experiences¹⁴. There is the need to question and reinterpret the knowledge and relate it to cultural modes of representation that further provides a different picture of modernity and development. This research has forwarded the stances of Escobar¹⁵ and Lughod¹⁶ who claimed that the absence of cultural specificity created a huge gap in which nothing could produce but a linear way of seeing towards diverse experiences. Without considering culture, the reality (the diversity) and strategies, which women of the third world pursue to reshape them, are never going to explore.

Problem

The research revolves around the parameters of gender representation by exploring woman's self experiences being a part of a wider Muslim culture on one hand and influenced

13 M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972).

14 Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 13.

15 Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 13.

16 Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflection on Cultural Relativism and its Others", *American Anthropological Association* 104, no. 3 (September 2002): 783-790.

from the globalize elements of development and modernity on the other. Instead of general modern assumptions of gender liberation, the present study focused on particular cultural experiences and presents the diverse ways in which women in the third world, especially in Muslim societies tried to present themselves.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the stance of women who are perceived to be the main beneficiary of current weave of modernization.
2. To highlight a comparison between the core assumptions of western notion of freedom and the socio-religious spheres regarding gender representation.

Methodology and Locale

The data were collected by utilizing different qualitative research techniques, i.e. In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) from the area of Gulzar-i-Quaid in Rawalpindi. The two reasons for the selection of this area of research are; firstly it is an urban area in which women are more aware of modern themes and have good interaction with the public sphere, no matter if they are not working women. Secondly, there are better chances available to access the respondents and this fact was realized by conducting a pilot research earlier. During this study the focus was to generate the themes provided to women as their cultural spaces in which they exercise their power and authority. It was also helpful in a sense that it provided the ground of realities about what really women feel and what really they want by some general discussions with women of different professions. This study helped the researcher not only constructing the interview guide, but also making some modifications in it. This pilot study was conducted with the help of one of the key informants who helped the researcher in interacting with the appropriate target population.

The target population is divided into two categories; the first category comprises those women who are working in the home and the second category of those who are working outside the home and involved in any type of public profession. Detailed interviews were carried out from 20 respondents, 10 from each category. The interviews largely deal with the women's perspectives regarding women's roles, responsibilities, family and modernity and women's freedom in order to analyze their cultural experiences. In order to explore cultural definitions of women, this research has focused on both types of women; the one who daily interacts with public outside home and the other who has limited interaction with outer world but have other sources to get to know about modern contemporary themes related to women. In order to get a more holistic picture, the responses have been taken only from the respondents between the ages of 21-35 years. The reason to limit this age factor is to highlight the responses of those women who have more interaction with the outer world, regardless of diverse sources. While conducting two focus group discussions, the same categories were also applied to include more responses regarding research themes. The data are also presented quantitatively, but the focus is not to restrict the data in digits rather to present the diversity of expressions and experiences. The convenient sampling technique was used to get data and respondent's quotes and experience were used to build the analysis which is further validated through triangulations.

Respondent's Profile

The whole data for this research was obtained from twenty female respondents. Five out of twenty respondents did not have permanent residents in Rawalpindi and migrated here from different areas of Punjab. Twelve respondents had rural ties, but only four of them had continuous interaction with their families in rural areas. Seven of the respondents speak Punjabi for daily interaction within the family. It was also found during research that eight respondents (out of ten) who were working women were

living in the nuclear family and total thirteen respondents (out of twenty) had the same family type. The income range of the respondents is between 50 to 90 thousand per month and being a part of an urban setting, this research has categorized them as middle class. Out of twenty, six respondent's spouses were doing government jobs. Fourteen out of the twenty respondents were mothers and only six respondents had four and more children. Out of ten, only one woman was working in the government sector and nine respondents were working in different private sectors where there is no job security provided to them. Sixteen respondents had done their graduation in different fields, three had completed their undergraduate education and only one respondent was found doing graduation.

Results and Discussion

To assume women of Pakistan as oppressed and largely affected by the severe male dominance under which they have not found even minimum opportunities for them to experience their lives as social individuals, is the construction that needs to be reconstructed or rethink. This research has explored the women's own definitions on the basis of cultural experiences, which further provide different parameters to define them.

Women's Expecting Roles

During research, it was observed that at household level, there has been a systematic division of work no matter either woman is working outside home or remains inside as a full-time housewife. Generally, to run a house economically is the mere responsibility of men and there is no social or religious restriction over women in this regard. Mostly, social matters are in control of women and over them there are no restrictions to become socialized. Eighteen respondents are of the view that this division is really a need because by this work division both; male and female feel some relief. Work and domains are divided so they both can produce better. It is observed that besides running a house; looking after the children, and cooking, women are also interested in social

gossips for which they get time from their busy routines. Out of 20 respondents, 16 were of the view that they always try to get in touch with all social affairs because this social life is always maintained by them and there is less involvement of their counterparts in this sphere. Respondents were found interested in making social interactions, but have their own meaning of social interaction. In their social circle, family is the most important element to decide to whom they are allowed to enter into their social circle. Women who were doing job found little time to spend on social interactions, but both types of women have family as the major source to provide them interactions. In all the social occasions; marriage, birthday, funerals and *Aqiqah*, women are in power to decide either to attend or not and what kind of gift are taken for the relatives. But the concept of socialization is very different in which women are more appreciated to make social ties within the family. Strangers, especially males are not allowed to enter in their social circle.

Table 1: Agreement Regarding Prescribed Female Roles

Sr. No	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Women who are completely agreed with their roles	18	90
2	Women who are partially agreed with their roles	02	10
Total		20	100

Source: Socioeconomic survey

The satisfaction level was not only recorded by verbal statements but also by including facial expression. Eighteen respondents were seen fully confident stating that they are satisfied with their roles but two of them were not confident as one of them replied this question in this way, '*humm! bas theak hai*' (Ah! its just fine) and she smiled by looking at the researcher. One of the respondents was of the view 'in my house, I've much freedom to decide and this power is regulated by *ghulnamilna* (social gatherings) about which mostly men were unknown'. Women at homes felt that they have better spaces to enjoy social gatherings and even one of the respondent said that because woman have no

economic pressures, she is more able to get relax. It is observed that a woman is expected as first priority to be loyal and obedient and 18 of the respondents were of the same view. Behind this view, there is a strong ideology that those (women) who are loyal and obedient to their fathers and especially their husbands get love and respect and God also bestow them by His blessings. Respondents have told that at a certain age, there are serious concerns regarding female mobility, but after marriage, there is no restriction over them in this matter. Sixteen of the respondents said that they frequently visit malls and most of the time they are not in serious need to buy anything.

Table 2: Perception Regarding Economic Power of Females at Household

Sr. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Women have economic power at household	14	70
2	Women have no economic power at household	02	10
3	To some extent, women have economic power at household	04	20
Total		20	100

(Source: Socioeconomic survey)

One of the respondents told that 'man only demand a clean house and meal on time, otherwise generally he has no issues with his woman'. She further added 'this is not only woman's responsibility but also his (husband) right to demand in such a way as he is struggling for us.' Women are of the view that they are satisfied with their roles as they have social space to exercise their authority and this space is never challenged because females have better understanding about how to maintain social relations.

Changing Family Structure as a Major Impact of Modernization

Family structure is one of most important social institution that produces specific norms and values. In the particular locale of this research the preferable family type is

nuclear, consisting of a couple and their children. Out of 20 respondents, seven respondents were living in joint family. The changing patterns from joint to nuclear family structure have also put drastic effects on the social life of people especially women. Respondents living in nuclear family have told the researcher that to switch to nuclear family is purely their decision while their husbands are not willing to live separately without their parents. Children's education and other economic constraints also were the reasons to have nuclear family but respondents told that the male has less courage to take these decisions until and unless supported by wife. One of the respondents told that 'women in Pakistan still are powerful in handling social matters as I convinced my husband for two months to move into a separate house and at last he agreed'. It was noted during the research that the close integration between the families of spouses, somehow give an edge to woman because in all the matters of conflicts, most of the times families take the positive initiative to resolve the tension between the couple. A respondent told that 'although mother-in-law can never become a real mother, but in a case of conflict between me and my husband, she always tried to resolve it and that's what I really miss while living in the nuclear family'. While living in a nuclear family, some problems were also reported by the respondents, including economic burdens and an element of social support is totally missed. One has to do one's work himself and there is no opportunity to help each other. A respondent reported 'our family structure is also a representation of our values and woman who want to live in a nuclear family, actually opt limited opportunities instead of choosing larger interests for their own selves'. It is also reported that this changing family structure has actually brought us far away from our socio-religious values. Many essential elements of enculturation previously fulfilled by the elders of the family are now missing while living in the nuclear family. Out of 20, 18 were of the view that sudden change has occurred in almost all the social patterns and for woman life has become tough because the family norms and social ideology force to adopt a separate path and

contemporary era demands them to move with change. A respondent said that 'she chooses to live in a nuclear family because she thought this way she get freedom and will have no social obligations, but now she realized that there are no social obligations but also no freedom as her life has become a machine. She added that previously she found some leisure time because her mother-in-law had divided the work between her three daughter-in-laws, but now she could just wish to be helped by someone'.

Female's Social Consent of Being Different

An interesting element found among the respondents was that they had a very different understanding about their selves. They wanted to get educated, to move outside and to participate in public life, but somehow or the other cannot do it. When the researcher coined this question they replied, 'No, there is no difference between man and woman'. But after clear explanation, it was found that they have different meanings. Culture and religion provided two different spaces (public and private) and both are not in a position to run by the ignorance of either the male or female. They considered that woman has her own importance. In a wider context, it is reported that it is wrong to think man and woman in a competitive roles, better to expose their complementary necessities that further tie these two opposite sexes in one relation. Female respondents were found with the consent that there should be no restriction on opting careers but the real ground for them to play is their home. A respondent told that, 'this is not possible for a man to understand the nature of relations and sentiments of all members of a family at a same time and it is a quality of woman that she is able to think not only rationally as man do but also emotionally which is the greatest requirement to run home in a pleasant way'. To serve the family and to take care of them is not considered a burden rather a responsibility by females of a particular locale. They were of the view that it is a source of happiness when they make themselves engaged in the work of their family especially of their father and husband. They also considered it inappropriate to take household work from

man, either he is doing any job or not. Another perception exposed during the research that females agreed that woman is vulnerable and she needs more care than man.

Table 3: Female Perception Regarding Man

Sr. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Woman needs man for her respect and security	20	100%
2	Woman does not need man to survive	Nil	-----
Total		20	100%

(Source: Socioeconomic survey)

They were of the view that naturally the body of female needs some strong protection and this protection is provided by God in the shape of man. They reported that the presence of a father or husband make the existence of a woman more comfortable. The concept of *Mehrum* (Urdu: a person with no marriage ties can be placed) and *Na-Mehrum* (Urdu: a person with whom marriage ties can be placed) is also widely observed as women take care with whom they should talk or with whom they shouldn't. In opting any profession they reported that they take care of this element and this is the reason women preferred to do job in a segregated environment or in suitable professions, like; teaching and medical. Their understanding of man is not solely an opposite biological sex but they have a complete orientation behind it. They perceived man as father, husband, and brother or as son and there is concrete ideology that provokes the features of love, respect and care for each of them. A respondent told that, 'we love all members of our family because they are the source of our respect'.

Social Understanding of the Term Gender

Gender is a social construction and it is a term which became a serious concern widely in both academic and non-academic circles. In order to explore an inside perspectives about the term gender, researcher interviewed regarding different aspects related to the notion of gender i.e. gender division and gender empowerment. While conducting FGD's

it was very interesting to note that women were very keen about the equality of rights for the both sexes; man and woman. They were of the view that gender based equality is necessary in all the matters of life because females are also very competent to participate not only socially but economically. At a later stage of in-depth interviews, 15 of the respondents were of the view that they are fully satisfied with the spaces they get from their family and society being females. Four of the respondents were of the view that there is a strong need to make some reforms regarding gender equality, but they couldn't tell what aspect their lives need to be reformed. One of the respondents told that she has no issue regarding her rights. She said, "I'm very much happy, but the image set at the global level regarding women is really oppressed". There was also a view that gender can better be understood in terms of religion and all other explanations about gender equality fail to produce strong parameters. The respondents of this research were of the view that Islam gives us a complete ideology regarding every relation between man and woman. A respondent quoted that 'Islam teaches us how to deal with a woman either she is your wife, daughter, sister or mother. Allah says, 'you (man) have to be in fear regarding your women because you are questioned about what you did with them'. There is a strong perception found during research that female respondents are not facing serious gender issues, but they have their concerns regarding it. They are of the view that women in many areas have suffered badly, but if anyone wants to improve the quality of their life, he has to construct all the assumptions on religious grounds. Female subordination is somehow the reality of our society, but not all the women are facing this issue with the same intensity. There was a complete consensus found among the respondents that Western definition of gender should not be adopted because there was a concrete difference between our social structure and their ideology regarding gender that is impossible to be fit in the same case. A respondent said that 'we have different meaning of 'woman' that is more related with the notion of *izzat* (respect), not for her own self but for the

whole family. So we cannot afford the same measurements of gender liberation where she is no more than a product'.

Self-Representation of Females about their Role and Scope

How female going to be represented completely depends on how they perceive them. The element of culture and religion plays an important role in constructing a concrete perception about how one being has to be represented. The element of respect is more important not as expectation from males of the society but also by females themselves. So, just in order to maintain this notion women are convinced to behave in a way that is culturally acceptable. A common perception found among the respondents is that they have to be respected and for this they are ready to give any sacrifice. They are of the view that it is their responsibility to maintain this element by the time they get its benefit. A respondent told that, 'my mother always do what my father wish for, and she (her mother) told me that she sacrificed a lot but by that time I have gained a lot respect not only from my father but also from all her in-laws'. She further told that she is a witnessed of how her father loves her mother and how her mother's decisions would be acknowledged and appreciated in all the matters of her life. She is of the view that all this happened because my mother always gave respect to my father and in return she get a satisfied life'. In a particular locale, it is observed that it is a learned behaviour that woman has to be obedient and calm. When the notion of women being obedient and calm is investigated, many new themes and concepts started to emerge. To be obedient, is more a focus of females than an expectation of males. It is a common perception that woman has to be obedient because by this way she gets a loving place in the life of her husband. Thirteen of the respondents were of the view that they never challenged certain decisions of their husbands but their husbands insist them to give their opinions. Five of the respondents were of the view that they never rejected their husband's decisions openly and they are never discouraged when they make some negative comment

on their decisions. The world view of women is more located inside home as they see themselves as daughter, sister, and wife and mother first and in a case of doing job, they still are conscious about their homes as their first preference. A respondent shared her views in a way that, 'I feel a sense of security at my home and I know that my home is my first priority because it is a place from where I gain all of my strengths'.

The role of brother, father or a husband is also considered very important in the maintenance of a family as they not only earn for their families but their presence is a source of social security and dignity. A respondent told that after the death of her father, she has faced many difficulties because before that she never even know how to submit her college fee and how to travel in a public transport, this all was done by my father and he was very conscious regarding all my work. She further told that 'he (her father) often used to say that I am an adorable princess of him and he never wanted to put myself in tough tasks'. Another respondent said, 'woman always feels complete in a family where father or husband is there to look after her. These relations are not burden but give social prestige as woman without family has no appropriate status to live'. The concept of *chadar* and *char'devari* (private sphere) is widely accepted among the respondents of the particular locale as they perceived that woman has to stay home and move outside only when they need because woman is vulnerable and any mishap can be happened to her so she has to be more careful regarding her movements. The way in which the work is divided between man and woman, provided two opposite spaces of private (for woman) and public (for man). But due to many reasons, now women are widely participating in public life. During the research, it was explored that out of ten working females, only two were doing job without any economic concern. The increasing demands and needs are the most reported reason for doing the job. A respondent told that, 'I love to stay at home, but I have to do the job because the new demands of time, especially related to children are not

possible to fulfil with the pay of one person (husband)'. Another view reported is that by indulging in both private and public spheres, a woman's life becomes tough and she has to do double work. A respondent is of the view that 'the essence of being complete can never be felt by doing work outside the home, I love to do all the work of my family myself and only this way I get relaxed and can release my stress. The notion of family and the element of children are also found to be very important as they (females) always prefer to represent themselves as better mother instead of a successful working woman. This element of preference is different on the basis of the gender and a world view. A respondent shared her sentiments that she always wanted to be a good mother as it was her first priority and all other matters are of a secondary nature for her.

Spaces for Females Provided in Private and Public Spheres

The way to represent 'gender' is different because of ideological differences and it is necessary to include women's voices as how they want to represent themselves. Gender representation either in a sense of culture, politics, or religion has huge difference on the basis of sexes or this difference provides a different space of freedom for both of them. In a particular locale, there is a social obligation on men at certain ages to earn but no such responsibility is laid on the part of women. Sixteen respondents have said that there is no restriction over them to do a job which is related to their field of study. Another element which is exposed by this research is women feel themselves more relax as it is not their social duty to earn, no matter in what condition they are. One of the respondents has told that, 'I do a job of my own choice and besides this fact, my husband never asked me about my salary'. Home is perceived as the best and safest place for women, but besides that, they were not restricted to visit markets. They are allowed to drive a car, to visit the market places alone, and to do a job, whether it is a need or only their wish. The only element important is, respect and dignity. There are some obligations reported

during the research and are necessarily applied on the body of a woman as she is not allowed to interact with an unknown male without any purpose, she has to cover her body in an appropriate way and has to be sincere with her family. The proper concept of *purdah* is not widely used by women of the area. The *chador* is commonly used but only in a case when they are going to visit any market place. At all other occasions like in a marriage ceremony, visiting a relative and going outside for outing, 16 out of 20 respondents avoid using any type of long *chador*. The unique element reported by all 20 respondents is that they feel more comfortable with their male members while moving outside as with them they have less social obligations of *purdah*. A respondent has said that her mother-in-law never objected to the style of her dress when she is moving outside with her husband. Another respondent was of the view that 'presence of a male makes a woman more secure as I am very much conscious to take along *chador* when moving outside alone but with my husband I used to wear only a *dopatta*'.

Women are of the view that in religion, there are many spaces provided to women as there is great appreciation of focusing on female education, they have proper rights in inheritance law and they are allowed to marry by their own choice. It is reported that religion provides the legal basis on which women are confident about their rights. A respondent said, 'our religion makes us powerful as proper rights regarding the treatment with us, are presented and there is an important place for us in our social setup especially in our family which is strengthened by the religious doctrine'. Out of 20, 16 respondents were of the view that there is no problem in religious teachings about women role and status, but the laws to implement them, have to be reviewed.

Table 4: Perception about Socio-Religious Space Given for Females

Sr. No.	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1	Society and religion have notion of women space	16	80%

2	To some extent, Society and religion have notion of women space	04	20%
Total		20	100%

(Source: Socioeconomic survey)

The advantage felt by the respondents, while living in a Muslim culture was that no incident of physical torture was reported either before marriage or after marriage. A respondent shared her experience in a way, 'I and my two sisters are never beaten by our father and in a case of any mistake, my mother usually wants to slap us, but our father always said, *'betiyo pe hath uthana Khuda ko pasand nai'*, (Allah does not like those who beat their daughters) and just because of it we were saved'. Throughout school career, my father had instructed my brother to not only help me in taking my lunch from canteen but also to carry my bag from school to home'. The element of respect was also reported as a source to provide some cultural spaces as in most of the cases just because of woman, she has an edge. An incident was reported by a respondent that once she was going to bank for submitting her bill of electricity, and there was a long queue but after a few minutes a person gave way and allowed her to submit bill first. She experienced such courtesy many a time.

Female's Role in Decision Making

Generally, a female role in making decisions regarding their families perceived to be passive. The common thinking behind this act is that male members of the family do not like or even allow taking their inputs regarding the important matters of the family. In the selected locale difference is found regarding the matters on which women are free to give her opinion. Before marriage, they were not appreciated to give their opinion in economic matters of their house and a respondent has told that it is not banned for them to give their suggestions about such issues, but because females have less understanding and interest so they usually do not take initiative in discussing such issues. Otherwise, they are very much appreciated to give their suggestions regarding

social matters where males have no better understanding. She is of the view that 'this difference is a natural construction as we (women) naturally are less involved in public matters and there is no logic seems for me to take this difference as our subordination'. The matter regarding any marriage proposal is preferably discussed with them by their mothers and their consent is considered to be important. There are no restrictions reported by any respondent regarding education and subject selection. At a special occasion the choice of a daughter regarding gift is preferred as compared to son as a female has told that 'woman has natural powers to rule at social world and this key is always in our hands but art to use it is somehow difficult'. After marriage, it is reported that women's power of decision is enhanced and from choice related to grocery to other important matters, all are done with her consideration. A respondent told that, 'from the kitchen menu to school selection there is very little influence of my husband and that is more suggestive than authoritative'.

The common perception found among the respondents is that they think their lives much independent after marriage. Seventeen respondents were agreed with the notion that there were more restrictions regarding their mobility and communication but after marriage these limitations vanished. The frequently reported reason for this difference is the parent's responsibility to save their daughter from all the expected dangers. A respondent has said that she never liked those restrictions that she had to face by her parents, but now when she became a mother of a daughter, she realized how sensitive this responsibility is. She reported that she also used most of her mother's strategies in her daughter's brought up. Another respondent has told that, 'there is a great difference between married and unmarried women, as married women are considered more mature and in her husband's house she has to handle all the work. So, she feels herself more free and powerful in her new place'. There is a social space available to exercise the power for women but after marriage economic expenditures are also in

their hands as one of the respondent share her experience that, 'how much money has to spend on which occasion and a monthly budget is managed totally by me and there is almost no check on me, the better I manage is reflected by my home itself'.

Social Definition of Modernization

Modernization in its current usage makes a very different picture as the ingredients of modernization are industrialization, economic growth, and restructuring of social structure and wash out the old norms and values which previously lead the societies because the theory of modernization perceived this element as the barrier towards modernization (Rostow, 1960). As far as this research is concerned, the purpose is not to follow theoretical assumptions of the modernization, but to focus on cultural explanations with relativistic notion. In a particular field the perception of modernization is something that drags them far from their religion. It is commonly reported that people unconsciously want to become modern and for this purpose they do not resist to adapt whatever presented in the name of modernization. The common understanding found among the respondents about modernization is 'something new' but 06 respondents view it as dangerous for cultural norms and religious teachings. It is a very interesting element that all the respondents having these two different views are agreed that there is no problem in adopting new traits, but have to have focus either they are appropriate for the existing culture or not. One respondent was of the view that, the notion of *pardha* for both man and woman is very much different in our cultural and religious orientation, but if we adapt blindly the current styles of dressing, I think most of the time it causes the conflict'. It is observed that modernization is used in negative connotation either consciously or unconsciously in this particular locale. If anyone does something which is not appropriate in the culture they usually hear people saying; '*zada modern banne ki zaroorat nai hai*' (no need to become modern). A respondent said that, 'modernization is something which is opposite to the existing patterns of

culture'. Another respondent was of the view that, modernization is the new element and it is not our creation, so it has less understanding about the context of two influential elements; religion and culture and this is the reason that although people want to become modern, they also show resistance towards it'.

Operational Definition of Woman's Freedom

A very different dimension is found among the respondents about the notion of women's freedom. In order to know the parameters of women's freedom, it is necessary to consider the general definition of freedom prevails in the researched area. In a particular locale freedom doesn't mean that a person is free whatever he/she likes and there is no family interference over his/her personal matters. Woman is allowed to educate, to enter in public sphere, and to has her own money and property but the element which is explored during the research is that woman is allowed doing all these tasks, but is not free in all these matters and this is not simply a case with females, certain restrictions are also imposed on the male members of the family. Because of the vulnerability, the body of a woman gets more care and sometimes they get more preference. One of the respondents said that, 'my office van comes to pick me at my area's stop and for this I have to walk of about 10 minutes, but before leaving for the office, my husband always drops me at my bus stop'. She is of the view that it does not mean that her husband doesn't trust her, but actually he wants to take care of her. It is explored that woman of this area are allowed to use personal mobile phones, and there is no check and balance reported from them by the male members of their families. It is also reported that there is huge space provided to the females, but the element of restriction imposed on them when they do anything not culturally accepted. There are no family pressures found among the respondents regarding the veil or *hijab*. Out of 20 respondents, only two of them practiced the veil and 16 of them said that they used to take *dopatta* either to cover their heads or body, while moving outside the

home and 02 of them observed using head scarf in any public sphere. The element of freedom is existed, but it has different measures as it is allowed within certain cultural and religious parameters.

Social Conception Regarding Engines of Modernization

The sources where the current wave of modernization perceived to enter into society are taken as the engine of modernization. While discussing this issue with the respondents, they were of the view that the media is the strongest body which provides a variety of ways and styles in which our own cultural traditions are demolished and external influencing elements have taken their place. The 17 respondents were of the view that the media is responsible for promoting all those elements for which there is no socio-religious acceptance among the members of a particular culture. The reason reported by the respondents is that there are no recreational activities commonly provided to the people so at the end media is the only source for the entertainment not only for females of the family but also for the males and children. It is reported during the research that the notion of becoming independent among the young males and females is also emerged by the dramas as now they do not like too much interference of their parents in their decisions. It is also pointed out that we have to adopt the content either of modernization or any other, by considering the existing cultural values. The most important element reported by a respondent in this regard is that females of the families still try to tie up the family relations in a strong bond because they know that the source of their respect is always their families, but wave of modernization makes it difficult for them as in one way their children want to adopt new patterns of life and on the other they have to stay within their cultural parameters. There is also another view reported to the researcher that to blame the role of media is not the right way but it is in our own hands and we have to control it according to cultural needs and expectations. On asking about the role of NGO's in this regard, the common perception that emerged by the views of respondents is that

NGO's have their access to the certain premises and they cannot change the minds of the people unconsciously as media can do. A respondent said that, 'they are promoting some specific defined themes but people have conscious awareness towards them'.

Conclusion

The present research primarily focused on the diverse views of women who have their own cultural explanations regarding their role and status. The sample size, no doubt, is limited, but the methodology (in-depth interviews) of the research has enabled the researcher to explore different perspectives of women having diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The data have clearly shown that the women have their own definitions and understanding and their perspectives are largely influenced by their cultural setting. The women in Muslim societies are not passive beings, but have active identity to think and reinterpret the contemporary concepts of modernity and development regarding women. This research also explored the same cultural notion by explaining the elementary role of family, social values and religious influences in shaping women's experiences. At different stages of research, it was observed that women's practices are not related to what they have told the researcher. The case where family importance was discussed with the respondent, all twenty respondents felt that the joint family system has more significance for maintaining family issues but only four respondents were actually found supporting this family type. Females were not found in a state of confusion, at least about their roles and about how they should present them. There is a sense of pride and satisfaction found when females introduced them as mothers, and as more family oriented than public. The respondents have realized the equal importance of woman and man for the progress of a society, but it is found that they have clear differences regarding the role and responsibilities, distributed between them. Respondents have also quoted religious explanations to make a clear distinction between them and have confirmed that the social

sphere in which relationships are emerged and maintained, are better run by a woman. The element of socialization is considered a positive quality for a woman only when she has good interaction with her family and especially with her in-laws. The notion is largely associated with the family gatherings and women have preferred limited social circle within family and neighbours. The complete awareness is found among the respondents about their responsibilities towards their families and regarding the significance of the man as an earner. No matter of women's economic position, this research has explored that family is basic need of women and females have family preferences. The element of respect is also explored with different understanding in which men and women deserved equal respect but women have to be more obedient towards their husband. The religious explanations were also quoted while focusing on husband's status in family. Women were found confident when they claimed that they are not working women and supported their role by exploring social importance of woman in family. Women were found with an understanding of their role and its limitations on the basis of sex differences and with realization that they have more social strengths. The acknowledgment of the role differences between man and woman is further reflected in the construction of a family where man is the earner and woman is the manager. In fact the social relationships between man and woman either in consanguinal bond or in affinal one, have complementary nature than being opposition. It is also found that women do not perceive themselves as passive participants in their social environment, but have different cultural universe of experiencing reality in which they have perceived them differently but with effective role and status. In the case of veil (*pardah*), women have socio-religious explanations and it is observed that the cultural landscape of the respondent is more influential in taking the concept of veil (*pardah*). There is a conscious understanding of cultural parameters in which women have an obligation to cover her body. The religious doctrine is also reported while discussing the significance of *pardah* but the less religious intention was found than a

social construction of the woman's vulnerability or sensitivity. The respondent's definition of women's freedom is also constructed within the cultural framework where the right of education is observed but with no concept of individuality. The consent regarding the dominance of cultural rules is explored in which freedom is not interpreted in modern assumptions. Women freedom is also culturally defined where she does not confront with cultural and family values. The data of this research have explored that there is no space for unchecked freedom for both male and female and most of the things and events of an individual's life are linked with family. So the notion of freedom and liberty is also culturally explained in which individuals have to perform their roles. The most important element found during the research is that respondents do not have complaints for limited spaces or freedom. Instead, there is a deep consciousness found among the respondents about their role and responsibilities and also have realized that women are in need to have male support. Even the restriction on the mobility of women was also perceived with positive cultural intentions of love, care and security. The present study advocates the cultural ways in which different perspectives get emerged and further shape the ideas and experiences of the individuals in a particular cultural context. The conceptual understanding of different contemporary themes about women has contextual construction and there is a need to address this cultural sensitivity in order to analyze the difference, with no matter of opinion or of experience.

Conclusion

In a social world, there are always multiple aspects to apprehend and realize the social realities and truths. Among many other controversial terms, gender is one of the alarming notions that are continuously going to be confused by numerous modernity stances and development discourse. The truth about women is presented in a predefined way so that the other aspects of reality are concealed from the eyes and alternatively draw a picture that has pre-assumed shades and colors.

In a development discourse women of the world and especially Muslim women are taken as a universal entity that can share common norms and ways. Development literature audaciously explained the essence of woman, and set one sided (western) standards for them on which they further going to be explained as modern or traditional. The argument of this article is very simple and anthropologically constructed that there is diversity that has to be presented and individuals; no matter of women, have always their rational meanings of their perceptions and practices. To understand the real wishes and desires of a woman, it is necessary to understand the cultural realities and specific social construction. If development discourse actually wants to make some positive input for the rights of women than it should deconstruct all its pre-assumptions and take the cultural explanations to address them. There is need to explore specific cultural rationalities for women explanations.