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A Travelogue of Women's World: The Story of «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan»

A New Journal Is Born: Foundation of «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies» («PJWS»)

Writing this paper in the year 2019 offers me an opportunity to look back at our story and to share and celebrate it with friends. This year, «PJWS» has completed twenty-five years of publication, and I have entered the twenty-sixth year of my association with its editing, publication, and overall management. Since 2010, we have had an associate editor, Dr. Shehla A. Khan who, like me, works on a voluntary basis. I hope that she will replace me soon. The first issue of «PJWS» came out in July 1994, but that historic moment is as fresh as a sweet scented flower. The excitement and pleasure of holding the first issue of «Alam-e-Niswan» in my hands on July 28, 1994 was like holding your firstborn. Since then, «PJWS» has grown steadily and strongly, setting a role model for other journals, which have learned from it, and further expanded and shared the message of Women's Studies in Pakistan.

For Pakistan in general and for women in Pakistan, the 1980s were testing years. Chauvinism and authoritarianism hit a dangerous point. As it happens in all periods of history, a small twinkling spark showed the pathway in those dark days of brutality, and suppression and mutilation of human rights. That spark was the establishment of Women's Studies in 1988-89 as a five-year project at five major universities in Pakistan, the University of Karachi being one of the selected campuses. Prior to the final approval of the project, in frequently held meetings at Islamabad under the direction of a Federal Secretary regarding the aims, objectives and prospects of

Women's Studies, the issue of the lack of relevant teaching resources kept us worried. The gravity of the problem finally led to the inclusion of some important clauses in the PC-1 (project cycle-1), a document which all of us, the founding directors of the five Centres of Excellence for Women's Studies, were expected to follow and implement. These clauses were, briefly, that in order to build up a body of knowledge based on lost or forgotten lives of women and to study the roots and structures of inequality that lead to invisibility and exclusion of women from the concepts and methodologies of intellectual inquiry, we must create strategies aimed at empowering women in their struggle against inequality and oppression and at making sure that they effectively participate in all areas of society and development. To achieve these goals, the PC-1, in consultation with the members of the committee which drafted it, agreed to the publication of academic journals under each Centre for the purpose of generating, developing, and disseminating relevant knowledge that would facilitate and assist in procuring teaching resources and strengthening the discipline of Women's Studies in Pakistan. Soon after the establishment of the Centres, the first hurdle, that was to remain a hard lesson for us, was the withholding of approved funds for the implementation of the Project by the Women's Division of the Federal Government of Pakistan. The prospect of bringing out Women's Studies journals was the first casualty of this negligence. While the four other Centres took a rather passive stand on this issue, we, at Karachi University, remained convinced of the urgent need to establish a Women's Studies journal which we were convinced would generate and promote scholarship in Women's Studies with a feminist perspective and would strengthen Women's Studies.

However, one routine phone call from one of the male secretaries of the Cabinet Division from Islamabad spurred our resolve to establish a Women's Studies journal without any further delay. The haughty-toned phone call with an air of "I am the ultimate knowledge", enlightened me on how to design the teaching courses in Women's Studies, what should be the format of the syllabi and finally what is the end purpose of preparing the curriculum for Women's Studies. I listened patiently and carefully as I was told that I should prioritise the inclusion of subjects such as making pickles at home, preparing a good meal for the family, and learning embroidery skills. He also explained to me that the country needs "good women" and that as a "good educated woman", it was my responsibility to see that young girls acquired suitable knowledge. Those instructions

were a call for action for me. The pursuit of suitable knowledge became the keyword in our plans for the creation of the «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies».

Moving ahead

In the 1990's, obviously we were late in terms of chronology in joining the bandwagon of feminist/WS periodicals and journals, which had big names such as, to name a few, «Frontiers. A Journal of Women's Studies», founded in 1975, «Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society», 1975; «Women's Studies International Forum», 1978; and «Feminist Review», 1979. However, nothing –neither the long-standing repute of the other journals nor their hold over feminist scholarship–, deterred us from our resolve to start a journal of Women's Studies. Indeed, we looked at these journals believing that we could learn several lessons from them. Here, let me be more specific about what this “we” stands for. “We” refers to a small group of five of us, whom I always call the birthsisters of «Alam-e-Niswan». We worked through the gestation period lasting over more than a year, preceding the publication of «Alam-e-Niswan». These four were Zareen Saeed, Ayesha Jamil, Anwar Shaheen, and Shakila Rahman. Zareen was our librarian, who helped me to establish the first library of Women's Studies in Pakistan at the campus of the University of Karachi in 1989. Shakila was a specialist in human geography and a demographer. We lost both of them. Ayesha left for Canada and Shaheen moved to the Pakistan Study Centre where she is now the Director. I retired from the University and since then, «Alam-e-Niswan» moved with me as the new administration of the Women's Studies Centre was not prepared to take the responsibility of its publication. We worked together from naming the journal to designing its title page and its logo.

It was a testing time for our commitment to our cause, for our resolution to achieve our goal, and for our firm resolution to remain firm and unflinching. Working within the university administrative system, not only in Pakistan but also elsewhere, is like working with an authoritarian junta masked by the slippery cover of academia. We had to get the “approval” of the Vice Chancellor for all our work – from the planning stage to its actual publication. These communications, or applications as they are called here, had to go through “proper channels”, i.e., through the Dean, Faculty of Arts to the Vice Chancellor. I vividly remember being called by the Dean

through a phone call made by his office assistant, to discuss my “application”. The first thing he wanted me to explain, was what would I publish in the proposed journal and who would write for us. Indeed, he sounded totally insane when he quoted a late nineteenth-century Urdu poet’s couplet which verges on pornography, offering to produce a paper for us. Several such episodes of bad manners, chauvinistic idiosyncrasies and academic worthlessness kept thwarting us. These ugly incidents, though painful to recall, disappear like a phantom in our final story of success.

Aims, Scope, Resources

We asked ourselves «why do we need a journal of Women’s Studies?» After several discussions, we concluded that we needed an academic journal for the purpose of creating a knowledge-base in which women of the postcolonial world, Third-world women, South Asian women, Muslim women, women of colour, marginalised women, women from the global South, women from slow-developing economies, poor women, silent women have a legitimised share. «PJWS», by adding its sub-title «Alam-e-Niswan», which has remained unchanged and indeed is its clarion call to wake up the vast numbers of women who understand this term and stand up, makes them visible in the print world, and reclaims their rightful presence. Let me be a little more specific here. «Alam-e-Niswan», a combination of Arabic-Persian language, literally and metaphorically means women’s world –a space shared by women; it does not mean or connote even in a disguised manner, a world confined to any particular group– religious, ethnic or geographic. Not as an apology, but as a further note, selecting «Alam-e-Niswan» as our sub-title, we considered our historic connections with this phrase when in the late nineteenth century women’s journals began to appear under a similar title; to name a few, «Rafiq-i-Niswan» (Women’s Friend), a weekly newspaper in Urdu and Hindi, Tamil and Bengali, established in 1884 by the Women’s Foreign Missionary society of the Methodist Church in Lucknow, India, «Tahzib-i-Niswan» (Women’s Reformer), a Urdu language weekly for women established in 1898 at Lahore by a woman journalist, Muhammadi Begam, and later a book in Urdu entitled *Alam-e-Niswan* by Rashidul Khairi, a prolific male writer who drew attention to the plight of women in India. Interestingly, this same writer, Rashidul Khairi, in 1913, when research institutions working to explore women’s lives and experiences were

almost a rarity, wrote an article, *Markaz-i-huquq-i Niswan* (Centre for women's rights) to promote a dialogue between men and women with the aim of restoring women's rights.¹

Since 1994 «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies» has raised critical social and political questions through its timely and regular publication with the purpose of making significant changes in the lives of women. As an autonomous journal, published on behalf of the Pakistan Association for Women's Studies, «PJWS» has always valued and promoted critical feminist thinking and thus sought out new ways to ensure that women's human rights are protected, gender equation is fairly maintained and a culture of research and enquiry is promoted. For over twenty-five years, «PJWS» has explored challenges confronting women, such as authoritarianism, obscurantism, and capitalism. As the first scholarly journal in women's studies in Pakistan, «PJWS» set out two major roles to play on its agenda. First, it was to be the flagship of the newly established Women's Studies discipline in Pakistan, and second, to justify the legitimacy of Women's Studies as an academic discipline, it had to "show" that Women's Studies scholars are worthy of doing research and writing in all fields of knowledge.

It might come as a shock to many that when we planned to start the Journal, we had no idea of the problems that lay ahead. We made no feasibility study. Our guiding principle was "we can do it". Thinking back, it sends shudders through my spine now. They say ignorance is bliss; in our case, all our dreams came true. We began with zero knowledge about journal production, editing skills, proofreading, peer-reviews, the cost of publication, marketing strategies, and most importantly, how to get quality papers, and so many other things that are nightmares for all journals. On the happier side, lack of information and expertise erased all hierarchies. Thus, our work for the «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies» began with the foundational message of feminism - stand together horizontally and not vertically. From cover design to the formatting of the text, all was done manually after 2:30, when teaching usually ended. We wrote letters and mailed them through our post office. No emails. We solicited papers. We succeeded. Infrastructure was missing; passion to succeed kept increasing.

All through its twenty-five years of life, «PJWS» has been published twice a year, June 30 and December 30. We have our webpage

1 Rashid ul Kairi, *Markaz-i-Huquq-i niswan*, «Tamaddun», 5, 1913, n. 4, pp. 48-50.

(<http://www.pakistanwomenstudies.com>) and we are linked to Face Book page. As soon as papers are finally selected for publication, we notify the authors through email and through our Face Book notification. Once formatting is completed and page numbers are allotted, we notify the abstracts through our Face Book and upload the abstracts on our webpage. Our webpage also shows abstracts of previous volumes.

We have produced special issues. For instance, on women and trafficking, women's health, and reproductive choices. These issues were well received by the international audience as we received proposals from various countries.

The first and foremost requirement for a project of publishing a journal is the availability of human and financial resources. Our human resources were thin in numbers. We had no permanent faculty at the Centre; one young man with no previous experience but loaded with a will to learn, was the only office assistant and had only one manual typewriter. My repeated appeals for the release of funds brought in money to pay the salaries. Funds allocated for publication cost were never released.

I turned towards our University for some help. I must acknowledge in all fairness, that the University of Karachi has always been supportive and has maintained a non-biased gender profile, thus creating an environment which welcomed Women's Studies and helped it grow into a strong academic unit now awarding PhD degrees and producing commendable researches.

Unfortunately, our University and the Centre could not financially assist our publication. As we worked voluntarily, the cost was minimised. However, we had to spend money on formatting the journal, printing, and postal charges. Our subscribers in the early years were few and most copies were sent gratis. To meet the cost and to defray our expenses, we pooled money; we also got some donations from philanthropic friends. In most cases, I paid the cost of printing. In 2010 we received a generous recurring grant from the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC). We apply each year for the renovation of this grant. All the expenses met out of this grant are audited, and utilization reports along with original receipts are submitted to the HEC for their records. This grant has put us in a comfortable position. Before, the number of articles published each year was no more than eleven per issue. Scholars from Pakistan were reluctant to publish in «PJWS» as international journals looked more prestigious to them. Now with the new grant, we can select at

least nine papers. As the HEC has recognised our Journal in the list of those journals whose publications are acceptable for the award of PhD degrees and for selection to university jobs, the number of paper submissions has gone up dramatically. This had added to our workload. Rejection is not taken easily; even comments and suggestions for improvement cause tension. As editor, I have learned how to remain firm and not to put at stake the academic quality of our product.

Editorial Board

The Editorial Board is the backbone of any journal. We have experienced several jolts in seeking members who would or could actively support us in our work by counselling, advising and sharing their experiences, as long as they are relevant to our needs. The most important issue regarding the composition of the editorial board is, because of the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline, its diversity in terms of the physical location of the members and in terms of their scholarship. Our members come from different geographic locations and varied academic disciplines and all have an excellent level of scholarship. Initially, we also sought the help of our members of the Advisory Board in reviewing papers submitted for publication. Indeed, their response humbled me beyond words. We were an almost unknown journal in 1994 and the appearance of these globally familiar big names, splashed on the inside front cover of «PJWS», added weight to our presence, legitimised it within the global academia, and far more importantly, enhanced the academic worth and quality of the journal. Later on, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan directed that AB members should not review the papers. This new directive created more problems for us as we had to identify new reviewers. I must acknowledge and put on record that «PJWS»'s success in the early years owes a great deal to the members of its Editorial Board and its reviewers who worked voluntarily. Members are usually appointed for a period of three years. However, some of our members are almost indispensable for us and with their approval they have remained with us beyond their three years' duration. One major step that we took in 2019, the year of our silver jubilee, is that we added a male academic to our Editorial Board (see appendix 1).

The «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan» is a refereed interdisciplinary journal with a double blind review policy

which aims at providing a holistic understanding of the civil society by creating, disseminating and sharing women's studies research and feminist scholarship globally. From the start, we welcomed a variety of contributions that focus on women's experiences, gender issues, feminist theory and consciousness. All submissions, whether authored by known scholars or by fresh scholars and recently graduated PhD scholars, go through a double blind review process. Although we manage to get our papers reviewed by subject experts, the whole process is time consuming. Often, scholars initially accept our request to review the papers but later do not respond to our repeated reminders. We frequently seek our AB members' help in identifying reviewers. Thus, we have our database of reviewers. Some reviewers are so careful to maintain academic standards that they even re-read the papers after the authors have revised them. This is indeed a remarkable role that these academics have in improving the scholarship globally with no monetary returns and at the cost of their time and energy. The diversity of our AB members and of the reviewers helps us in maintaining the international level of our journal

Readership and Marketing

It might come as a surprise that I have put two different aspects together in this sub-heading. However, I find that these two move together as they are aligned to each other. Marketing an academic journal is quintessential, for two main reasons. First, good marketing means more subscribers and readers, and more readership ensures that scholarship generated by our efforts reaches its target audience. Second, marketing brings money and thus ensures longevity and excellence of the product. We had neither any knowledge of marketing nor any marketing staff. But this did not stop us. We kept sending copies of «PJWS» to different libraries and individuals. Their acknowledgement and thankyou notes were more than subscription cheques for us. Thus, unlike most of the prestigious and well-established journals around the globe, we have not been associated with a publishing house. Our major reason for avoiding this association, despite our awareness of the benefits in term of marketing and covering of the expenses, was protection of our freedom to be our own decision-makers. Thus, we deliberately and consciously avoided seeking assistance and linkages with publishing houses.

All articles of the Journal are abstracted / indexed in: Alternative Press Index, EBSCO, Feminist Periodicals Index Islamicus,

ProQuest Full Text, Sociological Abstracts, Studies on Women and Gender Abstracts, Sociology and Education Abstracts, ScoIndex, Women's Studies Abstracts. This abstracting has helped tremendously in catching our readers' attention, which is our main purpose.

Challenges

Journal publishing entails several known and unknown challenges. Often, these challenges and hurdles come into our way when we least expect them. Our long list of challenges from day one included lack of editorial skills, flimsy monetary resources, mediocre managerial skills, and almost nil marketing strategies. We also continuously struggle with copy-editing, formatting of the text, and proof-reading. Even though the same person has been formatting the Journal for the last ten years at least, he is great at refusing to learn. Each page has to be checked and rechecked several times for extra dots, commas, or whimsical breakup of words. «PJWS» is printed by the Karachi University Press which works with printing machines that are of museum value. More than the machines, human hand works here. One has to supervise and watch each sheet of paper rolled out of the dusty printing unit to check the quality of ink.

ISI status is our other challenge. Thomson Reuters ISI accreditation is viewed as standing in the line of the privileged journals. We are not in this list. Queries regarding "impact factor" of «PJWS» come as a challenge to me. The Journal is available through ProQuest and EBSCO, major world libraries make a subscription, academics list its published papers in the prescribed readings of their courses, and researchers and authors cite these papers; however, Thomson Reuters has not responded to our communications. I often wonder about the variety of hegemonic controls that one has to endure. I wish for complete and total academic freedom.

Concluding Observations

We might not have made praiseworthy improvements, yet our end result, despite our shortcomings, is success. Over the years, thanks to our sustained efforts and timely publication, the «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies», once a relatively unknown journal, has emerged as a strong indicator of progressive change in Pakistani society. As we move ahead, we continue to make partnerships locally and globally with new scholars who have fresh perspectives on

feminism and activism. In the coming year, we plan to bring out an anthology of papers in at least two volumes. We propose to arrange this anthology theme-wise. The next item in our agenda for 2020 is to switch over to an online version.

Appendix 1
ADVISORY BOARD

Abbas Hussain	<i>Teachers Development Center, Karachi</i>
Amina Yaqin	<i>SOAS (University of London), UK</i>
Anila Asghar	<i>McGill University, Canada</i>
Anna Vanzan	<i>University of Milan, Italy</i>
Aysha M. Rasheed	<i>Aligarh Muslim University, India</i>
Chandra Bhadra	<i>Tribhuwan University, Nepal</i>
Claudia Preckel	<i>Ruhr University, Germany</i>
Habiba Zaman	<i>Simon Fraser University, Canada</i>
Humera Naz	<i>University of Karachi, Pakistan</i>
Janet M. Powers	<i>Gettysburg College, USA</i>
Kalwant Bhoptal	<i>University of Southampton, UK</i>
Marilyn Porter	<i>Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada</i>
Meenakshi Chhabra	<i>Lesley University, USA</i>
Mehr Afshan Farooqi	<i>University of Virginia, USA</i>
Nalini Iyer	<i>Seattle University, USA</i>
Nasreen Aslam Shah	<i>University of Karachi, Pakistan</i>
Nawal Ammar	<i>University of Ontario, Institute of Technology, Canada</i>
Nazmunnessa Mehtab	<i>University of Dhaka, Bangladesh</i>
Rabab Abdulhadi	<i>San Francisco State University, USA</i>
Rekha Pandey	<i>University of Hyderabad, India</i>
Rita Afsar	<i>Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Bangladesh</i>
Saeeda Shah	<i>University of Leicester, UK</i>
Shahrzad Mojab	<i>OISE/University of Toronto, Canada</i>
Shirin Zubair	<i>Bahauddin Zakariya University, Pakistan</i>
Siobhan Lambert-Hurley	<i>Loughborough University, UK</i>
Sobia Aftab	<i>University of Karachi, Pakistan</i>
Stefanie Strulik	<i>The Graduate Institute Geneva, Switzerland</i>
Sunita Peacock	<i>Slippery Rock University, USA</i>
Tanvir Anjum	<i>Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan</i>

Abstract: Questo articolo presenta la storia unica della pionieristica rivista pakistana di Women's Studies: «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan» («PJWS») e testimonia l'impegno, la dedizione e la risolutezza di un gruppetto di studiose appartenenti alla Facoltà di Women's Studies dell'Università di Karachi che hanno lavorato insieme per promuovere e incentivare gli studi femministi. «PJWS» è comparsa nel 1994, e da allora in poi si è proposta di fungere da ponte fra le accademiche e le attiviste, di produrre studi interdisciplinari e di dialogare con le riviste sorelle di tutto il mondo. Nonostante le difficoltà e le sfide che ne hanno ostacolato il cammino, la storia dei venticinque anni di vita di «PJWS» è una storia di successi.

This paper presents the unique story of Pakistan's pioneering journal of Women's Studies «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan» («PJWS»), and provides testimony to the dedication, commitment and resolution of a small group of scholars of Women's Studies at the University of Karachi, who stood together to promote and generate feminist scholarship. «PJWS» first appeared in 1994 and since then it has attempted to act as a bridge between academics and activists, to produce interdisciplinary scholarship and to dialogue with similar journals worldwide. Despite several challenges that thwarted its life, the story of the twenty-five years of «PJWS» is a story of success.

Keywords: storia delle donne, studi di genere, femminismo, feminist knowledge; Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan, Women's Studies, feminism, Pakistan, University of Karachi.

Biodata: Tahera Aftab è stata professoressa di Storia e ha introdotto e diretto il corso di studi in Women's Studies all'Università di Karachi in Pakistan. È una delle fondatrici del «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan» e attualmente ne è la direttrice. La sua principale area di ricerca è costituita dalle donne musulmane in Asia meridionale. È anche un'attivista femminista (pakistanwomenstudies@gmail.com).

Tahera Aftab was Professor of History and founding director of Women's Studies at the University of Karachi, Pakistan. She is one of the founders of the «Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan» and its current editor. Her research area is South Asian Muslim women. She is also an activist feminist (pakistanwomenstudies@gmail.com).