

Understanding the ideological paradigms Conveyed through religion-oriented TV programs In Pakistan (March 2010)

Executive Summary

This report explores and analyzes the substance and ideological messages being conveyed through religion-oriented television programs in Pakistan. It mainly focuses in particular on the messages transmitted regarding women's rights in Islam, women's social position, as well as the roles and rights of non-Muslim communities in Islam as well as in Pakistan.

The importance of understanding the perspectives which these programs convey is that they have an inordinate impact on people from a wide array of backgrounds in Pakistan. We must also bear in mind that the Government of Pakistan has made explicit domestic pledges and international commitments to support the rights of women and non-Muslims in Pakistan. The former include safeguards in the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, (note 1-2 others), while the latter include Pakistan being a States Party to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), and Global Action Plan. This research seeks to understand what is being conveyed so that the NCSW – and other governmental entities within Pakistan – can recognize the messages being conveyed as well as strategies on how to counter any irredentist hate speech which may emerge from such transmissions. An important goal, too, is for NCSW to make recommendations to Parliament for laws to suppress hate speech in the country so that all communities need not live in fear of fallacious hate-mongering which may be conveyed through modern forms of media (e.g., television, radio, internet, and print).

The following seven categories have been identified as the main themes under which the content of the programs viewed focused:

1. Women's Positions in Society: the role/rights Islam gives to women

This covers views conveyed on the position and rights of woman in society rendered by Islam. Various programs were noted in which the speakers endorsed on the supremacy of Islam (vis-à-vis giving women rights equal to men); they often tried to prove the supremacy of Islam by comparing Islamic codes of life with those of other religions. They did this often through denunciation of the codes of the Western and European societies. However, there has also been a manifestation of Islamic ways of life shown in some programs without comparing Islam with other religions or cultures.

2. The rights Islam gives to non-Muslims

This theme covers the provisions, status and rights non-Muslims have in Islam. It studies how in a country that is comprised of a plural society—with sections having diverse religious and sectarian identities—Islam is portrayed by the Muslim scholars a propos the rights and status of non-Muslims. We also analyzed if the TV channels under review are following the dream (of equality and peaceful co-existence) of the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah or not, who stated (in his speech on 11th August 1947) that all citizens of Pakistan are equal irrespective of their gender, race and religion. *See appendix I.*

3. Religion versus the Law of the State

This theme covers the statements of Muslim clergies on the concept of relation between the Law of the State and religion. This also covers their perspective and dream of universalizing Islam by preparing Pakistan to come forth as a leading State to unite all the Muslim countries and form the United States of Islam.

4. Reward and Punishment: Importance of fear for a true Muslim

This theme provides details on those programs which focused on the concepts of reward and punishment, and heaven and hell, as the result of good and bad deeds. This section also covers information disseminated on the significance of fear of God in Islam.

5. The concept of human agency

This section covers those programs which focused on the role of phantoms/djinns/apparitions, Satan, and magicians, and how human agency can be snatched from individuals and they are made helpless in front of these creatures.

6. Attributes of a good Muslim

This section includes a variety of concepts related to Islamic principles, rules and regulations, the practice or non-practice of which determines an individual to be a good or bad Muslim. This includes such concepts as goodness, care for *Mo'mins*, prayer, giving of charity and other Islamic Fundamentals on which the speakers of the programs focused.

7. The Concept of Pluralism and interfaith conveyed in programs

This covers a variety of concepts associated with developing a better Pakistani society. It focuses on how Pakistani society should be, with special attention to concepts of pluralism and diversity (especially of color, race and religion).

8. Messages conveyed in advertisements

The advertisements displayed during the programs were also analyzed during the research. These consisted of ads requesting donations to such things as the *Da'wa* credit card, studying the Quran, adopting good deeds, praying/*Namaz*, giving charity, etc. Few of the messages inculcated a sense that one can be a good Muslim by giving donations and following the Fundamental principles of Islam.

Summary of Policy Recommendations: This research has resulted in a number of explicit policy recommendations. While justifications for each are elaborated upon at the end of this report, we have included mention of the recommendations in this Executive Summary. Given the Government of Pakistan's explicit domestic pledges and international commitments to support the rights of women and minorities in this country, as well as the international treaties Pakistan has signed with global entities (CEDAW, to achieve the MDGs, and its Global Action Plan), we hope this research results in guideposts for where the state can act to implement its writ. *(Theme wise Recommendations will be shared once I get feedback from Dr. Anita Weiss)*

Policy recommendations for State institutions

A. Parliament:

The National Assembly should develop legislation to place a vigilant watchdog on hate-espousing media. It is incumbent on the state to monitor such media, and to ensure that the espousal of hate becomes a legal offense in Pakistan.

B. Judiciary:

The judiciary is supposed to maintain and ensure the rule of law in the country. The judiciary must claim the right to take *Suo Moto* action whenever any form of media violates the law or dares to deny the rule of law. The Supreme Judiciary of the country should have a formal monitoring mechanism of the media to ensure societal harmony and that the media do not take the rule of law for granted.

C. PEMRA:

First of all, PEMRA should check why the cable operators are airing those channels that are not licensed by PEMRA. Secondly, for monitoring the content, discourse and Islamic interpretation of the licensed TV channels PEMRA should form a research and monitoring committee that develops a complete mechanism of assessing the aired religious TV channels and Religious Programs on other TV channels. The research committee should comprise legal experts, representative of non-Muslim groups, and activists of women rights/human rights. The inclusion of all these stakeholders would help religious TV channels make their discourses human friendly.

D. Policy recommendations for political parties

The established political parties in Pakistan – regardless of secular or non-secular views – must each develop an enforceable media policy to ensure that the messages being conveyed on their behalf indeed reflect their ideologies. In particular, they should include a watchdog entity within the party to ensure there is no misinterpretation of Islamic ideology by media that promotes hate speech and discrimination.

E. Policy recommendations for civil society organizations

- Monitoring
- Counter Advocacy
- Research
- Dissemination of research

F. Policy recommendation for academic institutions

- Research
- Dissemination of research
- Creating counter discourse