

UNDERSTANDING THE IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGMS CONVEYED THROUGH RELIGION-ORIENTED TELEVISION PROGRAMS IN PAKISTAN



**Understanding the ideological paradigms
conveyed through religion-oriented television
programs in Pakistan**

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Acknowledgements

This research is based on religion-oriented TV programs that have been telecast in Pakistan. The programs were viewed in the light of the Constitution of Pakistan, National Media Policy and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)'s Ordinance 2002. The research analyzed the ideological paradigms being disseminated through the religious/Islamic programs and specific channels.

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Glossary¹

1. *Akbar* 'The greatest' (ID)
2. *Aqeedah* The term used in Islam for a belief system that is based upon the fundamentals of Islam (ID)
3. *Asghar* Small
4. *Bibi* A word used for a Muslim woman out of veneration.
5. CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women²
6. *Da'wat e Islami* Inviting others to Islam. Missionary work (GITC) (Preaching)
7. *Djinnns* According to Islamic belief a creature created by God, made from fire; live in another dimension and invisible to world dimensions— other commonly used spellings are *_Djinns'*, *_Gin'* & *_Jin'* (ID)
8. *Dozakh* Word used for hell (ID) (*Jahanum* is another word for *Dozakh*)
9. *Dua* Prayer (Glossary of Islamic terms and Conditions)
10. *Eid* Islamic Ritual. There are two official *Eid* days in Islam: *Eid al-fitr* & *Eid al-Adhha* (ID)
11. *Fiqah* Jurisprudence in Islam (GITC)
12. *Ghair Mohram* Opposite of *Mohram*- someone lawful for a woman to marry (GITC)
13. *Gheebat* Back Biting, also spelled as *Gheebah*, (ID)
14. *Hadith* Words, actions, approvals & characteristics of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). (ID)
15. *Hajj* Pilgrimage
16. *Hamd* Praise, it refers to praise of God (ID)
17. *Haram* Something unlawful or prohibited in Islam (GITC)
18. *Hazrat* Word used for Mr. in Arabic
19. *Hijab* A part of dress code of a Muslim female in Islam (ID)
20. *Hilal* Something that is lawful and permitted in Islam (GITC)
21. *Hoor* Beautiful females given in gift to good men after death (in heaven).
22. *Hudood* The limits ordained by Allah; includes the punishment for crimes according to Islamic *Shareeah* (Law). (GITC)
23. *Ibadah* Worship. An act of worship done for the sake of Allah (ID)
24. *Ita'at* Obedience for God (Out of love, humility and respect)
25. *Jannah* Heaven, Paradise, (GITC)
26. *Jibreel* *Jibraeel* is the Arabic name for *Gabriel*, the angel of God, (ID)

¹ Following sites were referred for making glossary

- i. Glossary of Islamic Terms and Concepts <http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/reference/glossary.html#M>
- ii. Glossary of Terms <http://www.islam.com/Glossary.htm>
- iii. Islamic-Dictionary.com (ID) <http://www.islamic-dictionary.com/>
- iv. Encyclopedia of Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/>
- v. Division for the Advancement of Women <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>
- vi. National Media Policy Islamabad: dated 29 May 30, 2006 <http://www.infopak.gov.pk/misc/dnmp.pdf>

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| 27. <i>Jihad</i> | |
| 28. <i>Kaffara</i> | Paying in Compensation after missing a necessary doing. |
| 29. <i>Kafir</i> | Disbeliever; a person who refuses to submit to Allah (God) (GITC) |
| 30. <i>Kalima</i> | The credo of Islam, -There is none worthy of worship save Allah; Muhammad is the messenger of Allah" |
| 31. <i>Khalifah</i> | The successor of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Representative of Islam'. He is the Head of the State according to Islamic principles. |
| 32. <i>Khilafat</i> | The Caliphate. The leadership & ruling system of in Islam |
| 33. <i>Kufr</i> | The action of showing disbelief in Allah and His Prophets. (ID) |
| 34. <i>Makrooh</i> | Disliked, hated or detested (ID) (or that is no <i>Hilal</i>) |
| 35. MDGs | Millennium Development Goals (UN) |
| 36. <i>Miskeen</i> | Poor & needy, in need of certain necessities (ID) |
| 37. <i>Mo'min/Mumin</i> | A term used for a true 'male' believer of Islam in <i>Shareeah</i> (ID) |
| 38. <i>Mo'mina/Mumina</i> | A term used for a true 'female' believer of Islam & <i>Shareeah</i> (ID) |
| 39. <i>Mohram</i> | Also <i>Mahram</i> refers to the group of people who are unlawful for a woman to marry due to marital or blood relationships (GITC) |
| 40. <i>Munafiqin</i> | Hypocrite. In Islam it is referred to those who only apparently entered Islam and did conspiracies (GITC) |
| 41. <i>Muttaqi</i> | A pious/righteous person who fears Allah (abstains from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which Allah has forbidden), (ID) |
| 42. <i>Na't</i> | Recitation in the form of singing for Prophet |
| 43. NCSW | National Commission on the Status of Women |
| 44. <i>Nimaz</i> | Prayer. Its Arabic meaning is prayer is <i>Salat</i> , (ID) |
| 45. <i>Niyyat</i> | Intention, also spelled as <i>Niyyah</i> (ID) |
| 46. NMP | National Media Policy |
| 47. <i>Paak</i> | Clean, with ablution. Ritually pure (ID) |
| 48. PEMRA | Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority |
| 49. <i>Purdah</i> | Veil. It also refers to a separating curtain that is placed between men and women's areas in a mixed location. (ID) |
| 50. <i>Qasam</i> | Oath, religious promise |
| 51. <i>Qayamat</i> | Resurrection. Day of Judgment (ID) |
| 52. <i>Qina'at pasandi</i> | Contentment |
| 53. <i>Qira't</i> | Recitation of Quran |
| 54. <i>Riba'</i> | Interest (ID) |
| 55. <i>Roza</i> | Fasting (ID) |
| 56. <i>Salat</i> | Pray |
| 57. <i>Seerah</i> | Character. |
| 58. <i>Shaitan-</i> | Satan; Other terms for the same word are devil; <i>Iblees</i> (ID) |
| 59. <i>Shareeah</i> | Islamic Law (ID) |
| 60. <i>Shirk</i> | Associating false gods with the One God (ID) |
| 61. <i>Soorat</i> | A chapter in Quran. Pronounced as a <i>Surah</i> as well (ID) |
| 62. <i>Sunnah</i> | The ways/teachings/activities of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH).(ID) |
| 63. <i>Tafseer-Quran</i> | Interpretation of Quran |
| 64. <i>Tahajjud</i> | Nocturnal prayer |
| 65. <i>Taqwa</i> | Piousness, fear of Allah, love for Allah, Self restraint, (ID) |
| 66. <i>Tauheed</i> | Confirming the Oneness of Allah. It is the basis of Islam. (GITC) |

67. *Tilawa-Qurant* Recitation of Quran
68. *Tobah* Repentance (ID)
69. *Ya Ayuhannas* O people (in Arabic language)
70. *Zakat* Charity; obligatory upon a Muslim who is moneyed beyond a certain limit. (GITC)
71. *Zeenah* beauty
72. *Zina* Adultery (illegitimate sexual relation)

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 Djinnsah 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. 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.

4. 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.

5. Who is near God: 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.

6. 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.

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/*Nimaz*, 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

Introduction

Since its inception in July 2000, the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) has been examining laws, policies, programs, structures, practices and various positions held by government a propos to women. The Commission has been assessing the implementation process, and occasionally has been suggesting recommendations to concerned institutions for better implementation and results of laws, policies and programs. It is the mandate of the NCSW to review laws, rules and regulations that affect the status and rights of women of Pakistan, and suggest repeal, amendment or new legislation essential to eliminate discrimination, safeguard and promote the interests of women and achieve gender equality in accordance with the Constitution and obligations under international covenants and commitments³.

Keeping in view its authority to monitor the country's institutions and policies that determine the status of women and shape women's position in society, NCSW decided to monitor and assess the ideological paradigms discussed in and disseminated through the religious/Islamic TV programs shown in Pakistan through cable service.

While conducting this research, NCSW was conscientious to consider the existing policies of Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), National Media Policy (NMP) 2006 and PEMRA Ordinance 2002, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Fundamental Rights Chapter of the Constitution of Pakistan. Having kept in consideration the above-mentioned documents, NCSW has analyzed the effects of the content of these religious television programs on meeting the mandates of the above-mentioned policies and goals.

The questions addressed in the research study were:

1. How the content and the information disseminated through religion-oriented TV programs in Pakistan can potentially segregate/harmonize Muslims from/with rest of the world that is comprised of diverse religious identities?
2. It can be put in this way that would Islamic perception—displayed through information disseminated on religious TV programs in Pakistan—unite or disunite Muslims with or from rest of the religions on the basis of humanitarianism?
3. In the light of the religious/Islamic TV programs shown on Pakistan Television, is 21st century Islam ready to be (in humanitarian and global-social/cultural perspective) compatible with the global world?
4. Accumulating answers of all these questions was the main purpose of the research on NCSW.
5. How the views on the position and rights of women in society rendered by Islam are portrayed through religion-oriented TV programs

Objectives of the study:

- To understand what is disseminated on religion-oriented TV channels about women's position, role and rights given by Islam

³National Commission on the Status of Women - NCSW's home page, can be seen on www.ncsw.gov.pk

- To understand what is disseminated on religion-oriented TV channels regarding rights of non-Muslims given by Islam
- To understand how these channels strengthen/weaken the concept of human agency through interpretation of various religious rituals, manifestations of good/evil, reward and punishment
- To understand what attributes of a good Muslim woman and man are shown on these channels.
- To formulate suggestions and policy recommendations on the basis of the findings which can promote societal harmony, outlaw hate speech, and facilitate the Government of Pakistan's adherence to its domestic and international commitments and goals.

Significance of the study

The information would be useful for the Regulatory State institutions, i.e. Parliament, political government, PEMRA, Judiciary, Responsible institutions of civil society, i.e. Rights-based CSOs, HRCP, Organizations working on the issues/rights of women, progressive mainstream and alternative media, Action-Research groups, civil society activists, Academic institution (esp. media departments/mass communication departments of the universities and degree colleges) for theoretical and empirical research.

Delimitations and limitations of the study

The research formally began in November 2009 and continued until mid-February. A small team of four persons (two officially and two voluntarily, for a brief time) watched religious TV programs on both religious as well as on other TV channels transmitted through cable TV and the internet during this time period. Since this research prioritized watching those TV channels which are shown through Cable service, it was only in the course of conducting this research that we learned that each city's cable operators screen different religious channels. For example, in Islamabad's various areas Peace TV Urdu and ARY-Quran TV are shown, but in some areas Peace TV English, Madni and Labaik were aired. In Hyderabad, Haq, Noor and all of the above channels were viewed. Hence this research is based on viewing only those cable channels shown in the various areas of two cities, Hyderabad and Islamabad.

How the study was conducted

On the first stage, religious TV programs were watched; secondly a dozen think tanks and individual researchers were interviewed and their feedback was gathered on the queries that emerged from the discourses of the programs watched. The organizations visited for this research include Uks, the Centre for Civic Education, Centre for Peace and Civil Society, and the Regional Academy for Research and Renaissance, Al-Quran. We read various reports, policy papers, and research papers of these organizations with an eye towards helping us understand the complexities of the impact of hate speech (details of the literature reviewed are in the Bibliography).

Total seventeen channels are included in this study: Peace TV Urdu, Peace TV English/Spirituality, ARY-Q TV, GEO News TV, ARY News, Haq TV, Noor TV, Al

Rehman AlRahim TV, Al-Hadi, Iqra, Labaik TV, Huda TV, PTV Home, A-TV, TV Onne, Sarna TV, and Madni TV. Each of these channels was watched in four districts of two provinces of Pakistan. It should be noted that in every city and every area of the city it depended on the cable operators which channels they chose to air and which not. Some of the channels do not have license from Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. Details on the television channels included in this study are in Appendix II.