

## Reinforcement of Male Hegemony through Female *Madaris* In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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### ABSTRACT

*The last four decades have witnessed a rapid increase in female Madaris in Pakistan. This paper examines whether these Madaris empower young women or buttress gender relations and male hegemony. This paper, based on qualitative interviews with Muhtamims, teachers and female students in ten female Madaris of Deobandi sect in two districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, argues that female Madaris are among the several institutional mechanisms through which gender relations are legitimized and women are taught to accept a male dominated culture, its legitimacy, and their subordination to it and in it. It further asserts that these Madaris construct young women as gendered human who position themselves as inferior to men and thus contribute to the perpetuation of male hegemony. The paper suggests that independent female Madaris with female Mohtameem and female teaches will make Madaris as powerful spaces that will enable young women to negotiate the existing gender relations in the light of religious injunctions interpreted from women's perspective.*

**Key words:** Male hegemony, discourse analysis, essentialist category, observation

### Introduction

The growing demand for Islamic education for young women in Pakistan has led to the mushrooming growth of female Madaris in the country. These *Madaris* are believed to respond to many of the changes and pressures resulting from socio-economic and cultural change in the country (see Bano, 2010). Families, especially the middle class families, and religious scholars believe that the easy access to mass media (internet, cable television and mobile phones) are exposing young women to western notions of liberty and gender equality which contradict the religious beliefs and cultural norms. The increasing negative effect of globalization on religious and cultural values has stress for safeguarding the notion of good Muslim womanhood, wife, mother, daughter and sister. This concern of safeguarding the good Muslim womanhood has increased the demand for Islamic education for young women who have completed their early secular education up to grade 10 as well as those who have never been to school at all, especially from rural area. This paper thus examine whether these *Madaris* develop their agency (the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices) or reinforce patriarchal structure.

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The paper gives a succinct of the historical trajectory of *Madrassah* education in Pakistan. It then briefly discussed the reasons of the current wave of female *Madaris* in Pakistan. Drawing on insights from Antonio Gramsci's and Michel Foucault's theories we explain how the selected curriculum and institutional setting of female *Madaris* serves the interest of men and perpetuates male hegemony.

### **The Historical Trajectory of *Madrassa* Education**

We are cognizant of the fact that the focus of this paper is female *Madaris* and not the history of *Madrassa* but we deem it important to give succinct account of the historical trajectory of *Madrassa* education in Pakistan to locate the emergence of female *Madaris* in the broader social context and educational debate in Pakistan.

*Madrassa* (religious school or religious educational institution) is one of oldest institutions of Islamic society. *Madrassa* (plural *Madaris*) exists in almost all Islamic countries and may be dated to the time of Prophet Muhammad Peace be Upon Him (Ali (2009)). From the very inception of Islam, *Masjid-e-Nabavi* was used as a teaching & learning centre (see Nadvi, 2004). As Islam spread across societies, the teachings of Islam required a specialized institution. It was with this growing need of Islamic knowledge that led to the establishment of the first regular and disciplined institute, namely *Al-Azhar*, in Cairo (Egypt). With the passage of time, *Madaris* were established in Middle East and Asia (see Khalid, 2004). The institution of *Madrassah* in the Indian sub-continent was introduced by Sultan Muhammad Ghauri at Ajmer (Dogar, 2010). British rulers introduced secular education in sub-continent and replaced Persian with English as an official language. Since then secular and religious education systems operate side by side, sometime complementary to each other and sometime in stark contradiction (see Khalid, 2014).

The secular and religious educational systems continued as parallel educational systems even after the creation of Pakistan. Multiple education systems (i.e. public, private and religious educational institutions) exist in Pakistan. The public sector education system accounts for around 64 percent of all enrolments and dominates the structures of Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools, college and university (see MoE, 2007). The overall share of the private sector, including *Madaris*, in the total enrolment is around 36 percent. It is important to mention here that in official discourses, private sector encompasses English medium private schools and *Deeni Madaris* (see MoE, 2009; Ullah, 2013). In religious discourses, public and private education systems are clubbed together as secular education. Like secular schooling and education, religious educational system has different sub-strands based on sub-sects of Islam like *Deobandi*, *Baralvi*, *Ahl-e-Hadith*, *Shia* and *Jamat-e-Islami* (Rahman, 2004; Malik, 2006; Sheikh, 2011). All these sub-sects have their own religious schools (*Madaris*). Each sect presents its outlook as ultimate reality and the only correct way of practicing Islam. Their differential outlook is inculcated to the new generation through their *Madaris*' curriculums and pedagogical practices (Sheikh, 2011; Anzar, 2003).

From 1947 till the Presidential ordinance for establishing Pakistan *Madrassah* Education Board (PMEB) on August 18, 2001, *Madaris* curriculum and processes remained subject of reform. It is noteworthy to highlight that unlike the British era, *Madaris in Pakistan* have been playing an important role in the provision of free education to those who cannot afford or do not have access to formal secular education (see Ahmad, 2015). Although, *Madaris* have existed in contemporary Pakistan for over nine centuries (Bano, 2010), but received much serious political

and academic attention after the accident of 9/11 due to their alleged links with militancy (Bano, 2007; Farooq, 2005). See Bano (2007) and (Ali, 2009) for a detail discussion on variation in their curricula and their alleged link with militancy as the discussion here may distract the focus of the study as well as that of the readers. The point that is relevant and here is that *Madrassah* education, like the secular, was designed by men for males.

### **Female Madaris in Pakistan**

Like secular education (see Henslin, 1997), *Madaris* were dominantly male institutions, both before and after partition. According to Bano (2010: 6) “male *Madaris* have existed in contemporary Pakistan for over nine centuries”. Historically, the institutionalized education, both secular and religious, was considered the prerogative of males. Selected religious knowledge (*The Quran* and *Hadith*: teachings of the Prophet Mohammad PBUH) were taught to females by their fathers, brothers and husbands in their respective homes. “The emphasis was on enabling women to read *The Quran* and *Hadith* and lead their lives in conformity with Islamic injunctions, but not on training females in formal Islamic education” (Bano, 2010: 5). The recent increase and preference for educating Muslim girls in well establish boarding female *Madaris* need serious academic attention and research.

In response to the global changes and their perceived threat to local Muslim identities, the birth and rise of female *Madaris* across Muslim countries is an established fact. In Pakistan, the emergence of female *Madaris* started in the second half 1970s to safeguard Pakistani Muslim women from the negative effects of modernization and globalization (see Bano, 2010). Female *Madaris* are established to save womenfolk from the adverse effects of westernization and modernization (Bano, 2010; Farooq, 2005).

It is important to mention here that the curriculum of female *Madaris* is not the same as that of males. It is shorten and made easy for female. The curriculum comprises a few selected chapters of the books on *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH), *Seerat* (life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH). The curriculum of female *Madaris* focuses on producing ‘good Muslim women’. The ideal Muslim women is to be understood as conforming to Islamic values (observing *hijab*, remaining chaste, observing Islamic rituals and obedient to their men). The teachings stress obedience; submission and character building of female students (see findings and discussion in the paper). The designing and selection of female *Madaris*’ curriculum by male *Muhtamims* may be seen with their hegemonic interest. In the light of the above discussion, this paper examines whether *Madrassah* education in Pakistan is to produce female Islamic scholars, who can take up the role of preachers and religious leaders in their own capacities, or it enables women to read *The Quran* and *Hadith* and lead their lives in line with male interpreted religious texts? The understanding of this question stresses us to examine and locate our findings in a sociological framework.

### **Theoretical Underpinning of the Study**

Theory or theoretical framework provides opportunity to support or underpin the research findings. Literature review, data analysis and interpretation enable us to draw on Antonio Gramsci theory of ‘hegemony’ and Michel Foucault concept of ‘knowledge as power’. The Gramscian term *hegemony* refers to the ideological rule of one social class over another (Slattery, 2003). We use ideology in the same sense as used by Gramsci and Hall. For Gramsci and Hall, ideology refers to a system of meaning that helps to define and explain the world and make value judgments about that world (see Hall, 1982). The key theoretical idea underlying the

study of ideology is the idea of hegemony. Gramsci defined hegemony as an ideological rule-a means of controlling dominant ideas and the way in which people think and behave as worker (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci was concerned with the ways in which power was seized and sustained by the ruling class using ideological leadership. Gramsci noted that power can be wielded at the level of culture or ideology or the realm of everyday life. Hegemony is not simply about ideological domination or forcible imposition of views on people. It involves winning their consent through a type of cultural leadership (Ullah, 2013). For Gramsci, hegemony operates at the level of commonsense in the assumptions that we make of social life (Gramsci, 1971). Hall argues that hegemony is the ability of the dominant class to portray ideas, moral, cultural values in a way they consider 'true' and the subordinate group accept these as 'common sense' (Hall, 1982).

Although Gramsci was concerned with the power of capitalism and the ways in which people's thoughts and behaviours were controlled by the state, his theory of hegemony has been interpreted and widely used to support/underpin educational research (see Ullah, 2013; Apple 2004; Williams, 1989). In the light of the aforementioned discussion, we deem Gramsci's notion of 'hegemony' as a useful analytical tool for understanding the role of female *Madaris* in controlling the thoughts and behaviours of females in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Raymond Williams (1989) asserted that hegemonic practices are at work in our education systems today. It is important to mention here that education system in Pakistan encompasses public, private and *Madaris* (religious schools). Williams further argued that educational institutions are the main agencies for the development of dominant culture [and ideological rule]. This dominance can be identified by the way in which people's thoughts, practices and actions are influenced by what is passed off as the 'traditions', yet which has actually been selected by the dominant body within, in which creates a equality throughout institution (Apple, 2004). Similarly, Foucault asserts that power and knowledge are intertwined and is indivisible (Foucault, 1980). Those who have power can subject others to their rule (ibidi). Foucault also held the view that the power-knowledge relationship underpins the fabric of modern society in the way in which this becomes evident through discourses. Those who hold knowledge are able to control discourses, thereby maintain their hold on ideological power.

In this research we take males as one social class and females another and argue that males maintain and perpetuate ideological rule over female through the institution of *Madrassah*. The existing arrangements and pedagogical practices in Female *Madaris* through which females' thoughts, practices and actions are controlled and influenced reflect Raymond Williams' notion of 'hegemonic practices'. By hegemonic practice we mean the naturalization of teaching and learning processes and management style of female *Madaris* by *Muhtamims*. *Muhtamims* are possessor and interpreters of Islamic knowledge in a manner that serves their interest in general and that of men in particular. Female *Madaris*, thus, function as total institution that craft 'docile bodies' and inculcate a specific form of womanhood through men interpreted knowledge. Docility is achieved through disciplining the body. In the modern system, the body is arranged, regulated and supervised rather than tortured (see Foucault, 1980). The overall link that is established between the study findings and sociological scholarship is that female *Madaris* create docility by constant indoctrination of a particular ideal of Islamic

womanhood—women are custodian of morality and nurturers of the existing gendered hierarchies in society (see Ullah, 2013; Ullah and Skelton 2014; Ullah and Ali, 2012).

### Methodology

The data for this paper comes from a large qualitative study of female *Madaris* in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Unlike positivistic research, decision of adopting qualitative methods was inspired by feminist epistemology. Feminists researchers assert that the age of *Meta* analysis and theories is over and we need to come up with locally, temporally, and situationally limited and fluid narratives (Ullah, 2013; Flick 2009). A total of ten female *Madaris* (five *Madaris of Deobandi*<sup>1</sup> sect in Nowshera and five in Peshawar) were selected with the help of convenient sampling technique. The reasons for selecting *Deobandi Madaris* were: a) *Deobandi* sect has one of the largest established networks of *Madaris* for both male and female; b) *Deobandi* sect constitutes the largest Muslim segment across Pakistan; c) 65 percent of the *Madaris* belong to this school of thought. It is important to mention here that entering female *Madaris* with the research purpose was a difficult task. These educational institutions do not allow any outsider to their premises easily. Researchers'/outsiders' entry, especially to female *Madaris*, are discouraged as most of these *Madaris* try to maintain their privacy and keep their spaces free from external interference. Nevertheless, we made the entry and our research possible with the help of a relative of the researcher who himself was/is a *Muhtamim*

We conducted twenty interviews (Ten with *Muhtamims* and ten with teachers of female *Madaris*) following a semi-structured interview format with questions addressing *Muhtamims'* (*managers of Madaris*) and teachers' notions of good Muslim womanhood, their perceptions of gender relations and gender roles. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted in local language (Pashto). The interviews were taped and transcribed in English language. In addition to *Muhtamims* and teachers, some senior grades students were invited to participate in the study. The willing students were interviewed in groups or in the presence of their teachers as they were not allowed to talk to the researcher in a one to one session. These students were in constant surveillance (see Foucault, 1980).

We used inductive approach to see what themes emerge from the data. After transcribing the interviews, we printed them and did a line by line analysis to give one or two words summary to the interview responses. This open coding enabled us to see what meaning respondents attach to gender relations, gender role and women status. We then looked for similar responses and redundant responses to reduce our codes to smaller manageable number of codes. This we did with a constant comparison of the open coding. The constant comparison of words and group of words led us to develop some ordinary themes, some unexpected themes and some major themes. We gave due consideration to all types of themes to see how these interact with each other and relate to each others. Making a classification tree we moved from the specific to the general themes. After careful analysis of our interviews we reached some main themes that we present in the forthcoming section. We have presented direct quotes from the interview under

<sup>1</sup>Deobandi is one of the prominent sub-sects of Sunni Islam in South Asia. Who are strict and conservative in their ideological stance as compared to other sub-sects like Baralvi, Ahl-e-Hadith and *Salafi*.

each theme to substantiate our argument. The deconstruction and interpretation of responses were carried out with an insight from Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Foucauldian discourse analysis upon the questions of how some discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth', and dominate how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world, whilst other alternative discourses are marginalized and subjugated, yet potentially 'offer' sites where hegemonic practices can be contested, challenged and 'resisted' (Foucault, 1980). Interpreting Foucault, Weedon (1987) argued "discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the 'nature' of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (108). Foucauldian discourse analysis as methodological tool enabled us to track down the original responses and see what their context was, and what function they play in our data. Foucauldian discourse analysis gave us the lens to examine **how Mohtameem and teachers, as well as students, construct an argument around gender relations**, and how this argument fits into **wider social practices**.

### Findings and Discussion

From the analysis of our data we come up with the following themes to approach the question of how *Mohtameem* and teachers of *Madaris* see and understand gender relations and gender roles. The themes map the larger picture of how young girls are subjected to hegemonic discourses (women are biological and intellectually inferior to men and their appropriate place is the home not public domain). These themes also highlight how these young girls (*Madaris*' students) understand gender relations and act to position themselves and men within the existing male gendered order. The findings also suggest that gender power dynamics are not simply a matter of 'males dominate and females suffer' (Ullah, 2013) but women themselves are also involved in maintaining gender relations and contribute to the perpetuation of male hegemony.

#### Legitimization of 'domestic ideology'

The dominant discourses within *Madaris* and in the larger society entitle men superior to women on many grounds, i.e. breadwinning, controller of resources, stronger, managers/leaders of the household etc. The belief of breadwinning and financial support of the family as men duty is deeply ingrained in the minds of both *Madaris* teachers and students. *Muhtamims*, teachers and students firmly believed in the "domestic ideology: men as breadwinner; women as homemakers" (Ullah, 2013: 343). Their assertion was women are best suited for domestic duties at homes where they are safe from the various hazards of outside society. One of the *Muhtamims* from Peshawar, responding to a question regarding women's employment, argued:

Earning for women is out of question. It is a western trend and Islam regards earning as the duty of male members of a family. The place of women is their homes where they have to take care of their husbands and their children, nothing else.

It is vividly clear that the head of the *Madrassah* is firmly opposed to women employment and earning. In a more serious tone, the same stance regarding women's earning was made by female teachers across *Madaris*.

Women should stay at home. They do not need go out of home for earning and work. Earning is men job. (Extract from interviews)

Discourses like these establish, nourish and legitimize gendered hierarchies in the family relationship and convey a strong message that “patriarchy is divine and natural” (Ullah, 2013: 244). This “essentialization of women and men across space and time reinforce hegemonic masculinity and women subordination” (ibid: 244). These messages about men’s superiority and women’s subordination construct these young girls in *Madaris* as gendered individuals. They (*Madaris* students) then believe and understand society in the same ways as their teachers do because “the world we experience and the people we find ourselves to be are first and foremost the product of social processes” (Cromby, 1999).

It is important to mention here that education is one of the most powerful social processes in contemporary society. Female teachers’ acceptance of ‘domestic ideology’ and their essentialist approach to gender reflect what Hazir Ullah (2013) argued that “not only have men consciously strategized women’s subordination to serve their own interest, but the prevalence of false consciousness among women has made them instruments of their own subordination and oppression” (346). These female teachers act as “transmitters of their false consciousness to the young girls” (Ullah, 2013: 346) by instilling the notion of “men as superior to women” into the minds of young girls. During interviews majority of the girls voiced that “male are created superior”. A student from a *Madrassah* in *Peshawar* asserted:

Of course, males are superior to females. Males have more rights and high status in family. Even in the *Quran* they are regarded as superior [she recited a verse from *The Holy Qura’n* and translated that: male are stronger and above female]. She went on saying that in some places it is mentioned that if bowing down would have been allowed to anyone except Allah, wives would have been asked to do it to their husbands.

The above response/discourse when read in conjunction with the *Muhtamims’* and teachers assertions conveys a message that God has created women inferior to men and therefore their dependence on men is natural and divine plan. The prevalence of this false consciousness among female teachers disables young girls to “understand the dynamics of society, accept or reject innovations and change, or become active agents of change” (Ullah, 2013: 346).

### **Men versus women intellect: Men are superiority**

Traditionally, men superiority over women has been grounded in ‘biological difference between men and women’ (Francis, 2006: 9). Research studies in the global north consistently conclude that men have bigger brains and higher IQs than women, but women can achieve just as much as men-as long as they work harder. Similarly, ‘religious discourses perpetuate and reinforce the essentialists argument that gender differences are encoded in the brain and in the body’s chemistry’ (Ullah, 2013: 287). *Muhtamims* and teachers, interviewed during this study, held strong essentialist stance on gender differences. The interviews from *Muhtamims* and teachers conveyed four messages: first, females’ IQ level is less than males; second, they cannot

understand certain subjects, i.e. logic, philosophy and *Dars-e-Nizami*<sup>2</sup> etc; third, even if they learn these to some extent they cannot teach them; fourth, subject such as *Dars-e-Nizami* is not necessary for females. In the words of one of the *Muhtamims* in district *Peshawar*, female cannot be good teachers. He argued:

Females do not have that much command on the subjects as male teachers have, because male graduates to the level of *mufti*, which is not offered to female so they (male teachers) can teach in a better and impressive way.

Similarly, another *Muhtamim* in District Nowshera emphatically asserted:

We have developed different curriculum for female student. [*Dars-e-Nizami* is excluded] as *Dars-e-Nizami* includes various difficult subjects that girls cannot comprehend and understand. Even if they pass examination in these subjects it would be difficult for them to teach these subjects, therefore, we have replaced it with the easy ones.

Interviews and discussions with *Muhtamims* and teachers revealed that their essentialist beliefs do not encourage young girls to become great religious scholars but to equip them with the basic Islamic knowledge so that they practice it in their daily lives and pass on Islamic knowledge to their families and neighborhood. Reinforcing the women intellectual inferiority, another, *Muhtamim*, heading a renowned *Madrasah* of Nowshera, asserted that:

Female students cannot understand certain subjects, i.e. logic and philosophy. Therefore, we have restructured the curriculum [made it easy] for females.

The same stance is reinforced by another *Muhtamim* in district *Nowshera* in the following words:

These ladies [pupils of female *Madaris*] cannot learn some subjects, i.e. logic, philosophy etc. So we have removed those from their syllabus, and also shortened their study duration, as they have to get marry soon.

The quote communicates two important messages: first, it conveys a strong message that women are ontologically deficient and therefore cannot comprehend many subjects; second, the ultimate destiny of woman is to get marry and play their important societal roles (homemaking and reproducing children). They are not encouraged to be active and informed agents of change. During interviews and discussions with *Muhtamims* and teachers, one of the *Maulana* (religious scholar) expressed strong belief in the innate differences between sexes. He argued:

Subject such as *Dars-e-Nizami* is unnecessary for girls. *Dars-e-Nizami* is difficult for girls and they cannot even understand various books offered in this curriculum. If a student cannot read and understand these books completely, so how would they teach them? Therefore, we [he referred to himself and teachers] developed a new curriculum for girls' *Madaris*.

These excerpts and extracts from interviews and discussions with *Muhtamims*, teachers and students convey several messages that explicitly and tacitly reinforce and perpetuate male

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<sup>2</sup> Curriculum developed by senior *Ulama* in eighteenth century India, is followed in all five *wafaqs*, although the specific texts taught vary



hegemony. The Muhtamims and teachers emphatically asserted that female, due to their psychological inferiority, cannot be teachers of Islamic texts, especially *Dars-e-Nizami*. This means that the ontological differences between males and females make the former innately superior to the later which, in turn, entitled the former (males) to lead, supervise and teach the later ones. *Muhtamims and Mulanas'* strong belief in the innate difference between male and females entitled them to define and fix the parameters and limits of males and females' intelligence and IQ levels. *Muhtamims'* and teachers' belief in the biological difference theory of gender qualifies them to decide every aspect of women's lives ranging from nature/scope of their study to the future prospects of their lives after completing education. The nub of discussion then is that the naturalization of men intellectual superiority over women, in Gramsci's words, is the ideological rule of men over women (see Gramsci, 1971). The study findings also suggest marriage as the ultimate destination of young girls. The stress on marriage conveys a powerful message to young women that they should devote themselves to the private domain of homemaking, reproduction and rearing of children. These responses vividly reflect that the aim of inculcating Islamic education to female was/is never to make them religious scholar but to train/enable them to read *The Quran* and *Hadith*, so that their lives might conform to Islamic precepts (Bano, 2010).

#### **Young women's discursive positioning of themselves within the patriarchal structure**

The point we want to make here is not whether these young girls have empowering or disempowering orientation but to point out that their religious learning and their exposure to alterative discourses in society have created contradictions in the lives of these young women, generating a critical assessment and a redefinition of their social place in contemporary society. We concluded at least three key messages from the analysis of students' interviews.

First, it fixes marriage and homemaking as the ultimate and final destiny of girls. Second, *Muhtamims*, teachers and students strongly believe in men's superior and women's inferior positions in society. Third, the acceptance of patriarchal social structure and culture by *Madaris* students legitimize patriarchy and perpetuate male hegemony in *Pakhtun* society. The interviews and discussions with students revealed how "*social role conformity*- a powerful discourse which frames the subject position available to male and female in society" (Ullah, 2013: 286) is naturalized as a commonsense reality. One of the several responses is quoted here:

Female education still receives little attention and priority in many families. Education is considered the right of male. Female education, you know, is believed as wastage of time as girls are expected to get marry and carry out domestic chores and homemaking. Domestic chores and homemaking do not require higher education (argument of a 18 year old student from a *Madrassah* in Peshawar).

The study revealed that domestic chores and homemaking are still believed to be women's natural role. The discourses circulating within and outside *Madaris* reflect how patriarchal structure of society perpetuates the domestic ideology thesis and legitimizes the existing gendered social relationship as natural.

The patriarchal structure of *Pakhtun* society was highlighted by many respondents. One of the students in a group interview argued:

“*Pakhtun* society considers female as inferior to male. We cannot talk of equal rights in this society for male and female. Females are subordinate to males; they must be passive and obey males. This is how a *Pakhtun* society wants its female to be.”

Similarly, another student from a *Madrassah* in Nowshera asserted:

Well, it is difficult to change *Pakhtun* society. As it is male dominated and we (students) can not directly change such thinking. We can communicate them [males] the teachings of Islam but cannot impose the teachings.

It is evident that, on the surface level, *Madaris* students understand the notion of gender equality but they thought of themselves as powerless. They seem to have surrendered their agency (see Smith 2004) to the patriarchal social structure of society. Their responses revealed that the traditional gender hierarchical relationship and practices of *Pakhtun* society are widely circulated and inculcated into the mind of these young students. Their powerlessness was further reflected by their assertion that Islam gives equal opportunity to male and female in choosing their life partners (see Badawi, 1999), but *Pakhtuns* consider it their disgrace to ask their female while deciding about their life partner. One of the students from district *Peshawar* very emphatically argued:

Islamic injunctions vividly say to take the consent of boy and girl at the time of marriage. If any of the two, either boy or girl does not agree, the marriage cannot take place. But in *Pakhtun* society, taking consent from daughter or sister is considered unnecessary. It is considered as the matter of honour for male, so they decide females' fate without asking them.

Interviews and discussions with students across *Madaris* unpacked that their religious education has given them awareness about some of their rights and statuses that Islam has given them but it (*Madrassah* education) has not inculcated in them confidence to think of themselves a positive force in society. They have accepted their powerlessness and docility (see Foucault, 1980) with little self-worth which, in turn, denies them agency (see Smith, 2004). They failed to recognize that they can and should initiate a virtuous cycle of women rights substantiated/underpin with Islamic discourses.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the beliefs and opinions of *Muhtamims*, teachers and students about socio-economic and intellectual positions/status of women in *Pakhtun* society. The study endeavored to highlight whether female *Madaris* develop young girls' agencies and critical thinking to see themselves as agents of positive change or they are constructed them as agents of establishing and perpetuating male hegemony? The study found that hegemonic practices are at work in female *Madaris* which stress young girls to recognize their central roles in society as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters along men lines.

The belief that women cannot understand and teach *Dars-e-Nizami* communicates a very strong message that women are intellectual deficient and should depend on men for their decisions, guidance in life and maintenance (food, clothes and shelter etc). These messages naturalize women inferiority and buttress males' hegemony at the level of commonsense. Similarly, female

teachers' acceptance of domestic ideology and homemaking as natural and divine plane proves that males' hegemony is not simply about their ideological domination or forcible imposition of their views on females, but involves winning females consent through males' religious leadership. Thus, it can be argued that the existing arrangement and pedagogical practices of female *Madaris*, when look at from a feminist lens, may not be effective for women empowerment.

Nevertheless, our argument is not intended to be 'authoritative' and final but an attempt to motivate and help others to carry out research and develop their own thesis and arguments about the surge in demand for Islamic education for young girls in Pakistan. We also stress that the beliefs of religious scholars, parents and students need to be understood in the broader global and local socio-economic and political contexts. The future research should focus on questions, i.e. How female *Madaris* equip young girls, especially girls from rural areas, with social capital (social network)? How these young graduates are seen and positioned by their families and communities after their graduation, especially when they teach *The Quran and Hadith* in their respective communities without fee? How these *Madaris* politically empower young women to raise their voice in the male dominated political sphere such as women did in Pakistan Awami Tehreek's (PAT) *Inqalab March*?

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