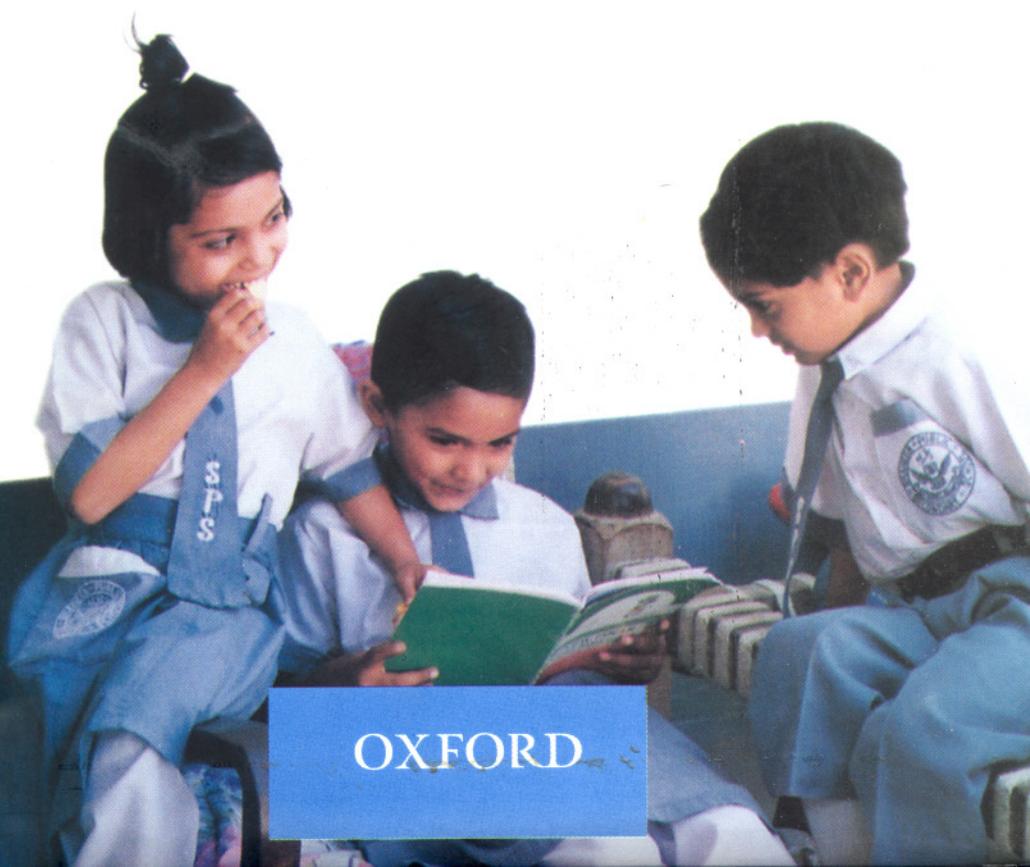


GENDER & EDUCATION

IN PAKISTAN

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PART II

GENDERED TEACHING

CHAPTER TWO

BECOMING A TEACHER EDUCATOR: A FEMALE PERSPECTIVE

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Life has so many different colours and shades to offer and this chapter is about my life and the colours in it. It highlights and critically analyzes the defining moments of my life as a woman and of my career as a teacher educator. Since I paint on silk, I was *fascinated by An Nee-Benham's (1997) artistic framework on which she 'painted' a story of an African-American teacher.* Using an adaptation of her framework, I look at this chapter as my silk painting which portrays my story. On my silk painting, the colours are merged yet their different shades are quite distinct. These shades capture the nuances of my struggles as well as others' support in the course of my life.

I have told my story in four sections. The first—*Preparing for the painting*—serves as an introduction. The second section—*Selecting silk*—refers to the medium I have used for telling my story, the self-study research approach. The third section—*Selecting colors*—refers to five stories that correspond to my pink moments as a young child, the yellow aspirations of a young lady, the blue limitless sky of my ambitions and achievements as a growing professional, the green cloak of employment which also drapes my challenges as a professional woman, and the red bridal gown that I wear as a domestic woman.

These life stories are painted on the canvas of Pakistan and are spread on the landscape of the North West Frontier Province where I grew up. Here the society is very conservative. By constructing and reconstructing these stories I try to make sense of my experiences as a woman and as a professional in the last section—*A reflection on the silk painting.* This section presents my reflections on the critical

incidences of my life and their analysis. In reflecting on my painting, I contemplate on the following questions: what is the role of a male family member in the career progression of a woman in a largely patriarchal society? How is it possible for a woman to develop as a professional and comply with the socio-cultural realities in which she is living? How can a woman be successful despite socio-cultural constraints and traditions? These questions are explored and reflected upon in the ensuing sections.

PREPARING FOR THE PAINTING

I come from a family of teachers. I grew up on the campus of a university in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan where my *father was a professor of English*. Like many women of her ilk, my mother was a homemaker. She kept an attractively furnished and sparkingly clean house. She was a good cook and a good house *manager. Like the conventional mother, she made sure that we too were* skilled in the art of housekeeping which was expected of a 'good' woman. I grew up in a family that had a blend of 'modern' and 'traditional' values. The three essential values cherished by my family included: (a) academic literacy; (b) religious values, and (c) good housekeeping. But the most valued was education. My father had confidence in all his four daughters and gave all of us equal opportunities to get a sound education. Women and their rights and responsibilities were very clearly spelled out and practised in my family. The love, respect and opportunities that we got in our daily life were proof of this and showed that my parents did not just preach equal opportunities but that they practised what they believed in.

Family values, traditions and moral values all of these played a significant role in my early socialization. Most of the girls at the time were not allowed to go out very often. Typically families would go out together as far as the market and such trips too were infrequent. Within the community people thought of us as 'liberal' because my father had decided to take all his daughters to school. We often went to see plays presented by the British Council; we went to the club; we learned how to type and drive, unlike most of the girls and women within our locality at the time. We had the freedom to think and pursue our own areas of interests. What I learnt from all this was that in a society like ours men had the power to put up or do away with 'ceilings' that stood

in the way of opportunities for women. Yet with this reality came another lesson—that I was both a product for and of the society. This became evident from the way my mother raised me to comply with the socio-cultural realities. She prepared me as a good house-keeper. I learned to cook, embroider, stitch, dust and clean the house and look after my younger sisters. She also taught me to respect the norms and values of our society, for example, I would cover myself with a ‘chadder’² and did not interact or have friendships with males because it was deemed to be improper.

I was labeled ‘unconventional’ and this proved to be a paradox for me. On the one hand, I enjoyed the freedom of becoming a professional woman and being different from many women around me. On the other, because of my ‘socialized’ notion of a ‘good’ woman’s life in the context of Pakistan, I also wanted to comply with the socio-cultural realities in which I was living. This has been a source of constant tension for me: How do I strike a balance between my role as a career woman, and as a homemaker with all their attendant pressures peculiar to a woman living in Pakistan?

SELECTING THE SILK

The kind of silk I have selected for my ‘painting’ is the autobiography. Most autobiographical research has been conducted in the form of the self-study (e.g. Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Loughran & Russell, 1997; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002). I, too, have employed the self-study approach because it is an ‘intentional and systematic inquiry’ (Dinkelman, 2003) and places importance on the subjective understanding of an individual’s life experiences.

In my silk painting, my ‘self’ is the main subject of inquiry. By becoming the ‘subject’ and not the ‘object’ of my research, the self-study research approach provided me with an opportunity to accommodate the complex ways in which I have experienced my life as a woman in general and as a teacher-educator in particular. Furthermore, the colours I have selected are based on the shades of meanings these critical life events conveyed to me. I have been writing stories in my reflective journal for the past seven years. After reading and re-reading the stories, I developed what Kelchtermans (1993) calls, ‘synthesis texts’ (p. 8). Hence, the five stories, presented in the later section of this chapter are part of my self-exploration.

In the process of my self study and reading through my autobiographical writings, I reflected on the processes of my identity construction (Kehily, 1995). I began by asking questions about the significance, meaning and my understanding of these stories—how are these colours splashed on the larger canvas of gender and education in Pakistan. This reflection deepened my own understanding of how I became a teacher-educator. At the same time it juxtaposed two important facets of my life: my success in becoming a teacher-educator and my struggles as a woman belonging to a specific culture, the Pakistani culture.

Another advantage in using the self-study approach for painting my life is that it helped me to blend my personal stories with the experiences of my professional development (see Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002; Elbaz-Luwisch and Pritzker, 2002; Graham, 1991). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) highlight the value of story which is closely connected to teacher-educators' ways of knowing. The stories have 'invitational quality' because people generally like to read and tell stories. The human brain actually 'runs' on stories; many contemporary thinkings have argued that the narrative mode is a supreme means of rendering otherwise chaotic, shapeless events into a coherent whole, saturated with meaning (Bruner, 1986; Coles, 1989; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; Rosen, 1988).

Albeit the apparent strength of the self-study research approach, which lies in its recognition of the uniqueness of the individual voice, this paradoxically became its inherent limitation as it does not allow me to present a general argument about women's professional lives. However, the inquiry did allow me to reflect on my life experiences as a woman in Pakistan. Hence, I analyze the critical incidences of my life while, at the same time, reflect on the implications of the issues, challenges and questions that emerged with regard to gender and education in Pakistan.

SELECTING COLOURS

I have five colours on my palette; 1) Pink, the colour of my first story, is associated with tenderness, calmness, and pleasantness. These are the attributes which I believe personify my nature. 2) Yellow symbolizes my youth and it is a colour that is often associated with qualities of ripeness (for fruits), preciousness and vitality. I have used it to present

my second story that focuses on my pursuit for higher education abroad. 3) Blue, commonly associated with the sky and the positive spirit of challenge can also be used to mean good fortune and harmony. It provides a perfect background for my third story which is about the processes of being accepted as a professional. (4) Green is often associated with planting and harvesting. It symbolizes growth, prosperity and fruitfulness. My fourth story is about my role as the bread-winner in my family in a culture where this role is considered a 'man's job'. Draping on a green coloured cloak indicates the reversal of my role in the family; it also portrays my social identity; and 5) Red, which in Pakistan represents the start of family life (especially for a woman), as the traditional wedding dress is red. It is also associated with a sense of seriousness and readiness for a serious spiritual or political encounter and is often viewed as a symbol of sacrifice and struggle. For me, it denotes the ever whirling landscape of negotiating family responsibilities and developing professionally.

MY PINK CHILDHOOD

My elder sister and I were waiting at home with our maid when my father came in with a broad smile, his eyes beaming with happiness. He announced that a baby girl had joined the family of girls and that both she and mummy were fine. We were so happy to hear the news and could hardly wait to reach the university dispensary where they were. Our joy and happiness knew no bounds. We were so amused by her small feet and hands, and small round face. Later in the day, some of my mother's friends visited her. They were the wives of the university lecturers and professors, my father's colleagues. One of them looked unusually sad. She said to my mother, 'I am so sorry, you have three daughters now'. My elder sister and I were offended and my mother was shocked. My mother immediately expressed her joy over receiving another girl. Six years later, another baby girl was born. I clearly recall that for my father the birth of each of his daughters was a cause for celebration. He would invite his colleagues and students over for a cup of tea. He would always say how fortunate he was to have been blessed with four lovely daughters.

When I think about the 'near condolence' that was made to my mother because of the birth of her third daughter, the voice of my mother's friend pounds against my eardrums and I am reminded of the pagan Arabs before the advent of Islam. Islam negated this practice

and not only prohibited infanticide but also declared the birth of a girl an occasion for gratitude and happiness because daughters are the harbingers of Allah's blessings for the recipient family. My father took this command literally and celebrated every birth of his daughter. He took pride in the fact that he was a father of four daughters. He would always quote an *Hadith* of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH): those who are blessed with daughters, and are kind to them will be saved from the Hell-Fire. My father's views presented a stark contrast to the views of the community in which we were living where negative social biases and cultural practices that discriminate against women abound.

As I grew up, I had heard many stories from my parents and friends about how other people in the city and nearby villages, and even some of the literate professors of the University, treated their daughters in a discriminatory manner. There were many stories of wives who were often threatened with divorce if they 'produced another girl' and of daughters who were beaten and deprived of education. Maybe my father was 'unconventional'. He did not seem to share the typical views of the community around us. He instead provided us with every opportunity to grow as individuals, even though we were women. He gave us the freedom to think and develop intellectually and professionally. He always showed love and respect to women and condemned men who treated women with disrespect and cruelty, of whom there seemed to be plenty, including some of the so-called 'educated' professors at the university. A particular story that still chills me is that of a young lecturer of a very conservative background who brought his young bride to live with him on the campus of the university. He was said to have asked the university administration to cement all the windows in the house because he did not want his wife to even peek through the windows and neither did he want anyone else to catch a glimpse of his wife.

THE YOUNG LADY IN YELLOW

My mind was set on pursuing higher education and when I got the chance to achieve this goal in the UK, my father was very keen that I should take up this opportunity. In contrast, people outside the family were apprehensive about my pursuit for further education. There was a lot of pressure on my parents to get me married as soon as possible. Friends tried to help by sending proposals. My elder sister got married and therefore, I was next in line. I vividly remember one day when one family came to our home to

seek my hand in marriage for their son. However, when my father very proudly told them that I was going abroad for higher education, the woman in the family immediately said, 'why do you want to send her? If she becomes our daughter-in-law we would not like her to work?' The remark upset my father who quickly informed the family that he would not be interested in a proposal from such a family. A number of my parents' friends advised my parents against letting me go abroad alone, because if that happened I was likely to become too independent, as well as grow older and more experienced in the ways of the world. Hence, I would not get good marriage proposals. One of my colleagues wondered why I wanted to become 'unconventional'. Why did I want higher education? What was the value of education if one did not have a husband and a family? My father and I talked about these issues. In the end, I decided to pursue my studies and my family supported my decision.

Being unconventional, that is, an atypical Pakistani woman, surfaced persistently in the texture of my daily life. I wanted to achieve my academic goals, yet at the same time, I desired a strong family relationship. Again, the important role that men play in Pakistani society was brought home to me very clearly. It was my father's support that squarely set me on my path to become a teacher-educator. It was also he who 'enabled' me to realise my dreams as a female human being. In most patriarchal societies, a woman's life and profession are shaped by the decisions made by men in the family. My father did not have the typical hegemonic patriarchal outlook which 'enforces female domesticity and modesty through a protected and private family with woman as functionary and man as gatekeeper' (Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001, p. 557). I had friends who also wanted to study further but their fathers and brothers did not allow them to do so. Because my father was my mentor and my friend, I could talk to him directly about issues related to my personal and professional life. Because of his continued support, I could go abroad and pursue my ambition. In retrospect, my ability to pursue my career goals was partly made possible because of the nature of my responsibilities within the family. While my mother took care of the house chores, I supported the family financially and ran errands outside the home. In our community, the latter were not typical roles for women to play; they were played by men. The fact that my mother did not pay attention to what others said about her daughter going abroad to pursue higher education as a single woman is responsible for my career progress too.

Family support provided me with opportunities where I had the autonomy to improve my career.

My desire for higher education was indicative of my vision for change; a chance for renewal. In the North-West Frontier, women are confined to the house and their lives revolve around looking after the children and male members of the family. However, because of my family structure and equal opportunities as well as encouragement from my father, I developed into a woman who could think and act independently. This, I feel, is often denied to women in our society.

An interesting dimension of my life here is that although I present myself as an 'unconventional' female who was determined to have a career, I entered the teaching profession that is generally thought to be one of the most conventional professions for women in Pakistan. In many places in the world, teaching is regarded as an acceptable and appropriate profession for women because it is seen as an extension of their work with children, which is congruent with the roles of nurturing and caring which women are assigned in the society (Hoffman, 1981; Spring, 1986). However, my entry into teaching was because of a passion that I had had since childhood. It was the fulfillment of a dream and had nothing to do with stereotypical sex-defined roles or professions prevalent in Pakistan.

THE LIMITLESS BLUE SKY

One of my former professors visited the university where I was teaching. While on a tour of the campus, we came upon the Chair of the department where I worked and where my father had worked too. In the ensuing discussion, the Chair shared that our department was understaffed. Thereupon, my professor began to laud my skills as a teacher. However, the Chair immediately replied that he did not want young women in the department because they leave as soon as they get married. He further added that providing women with higher education and even giving them opportunities to study abroad was a waste of Pakistan's limited resources.

I had heard similar remarks in the course of my work as a teacher-educator. In many ways, these allegations were not without some foundation. Many young women I knew or had heard about left their profession upon getting married; but again, many of my female colleagues at the university were married. However, my married friends often remarked that I had all the time to professionally develop myself

because my responsibilities did not include running a house and caring for a husband. The dearth of time to work towards forging ahead in one's career due to family responsibilities was a major recurring theme in our conversations. Perhaps there was some truth in this but most important for me was that I had a choice; a precious commodity that I had but which many women in my community lacked. Hence, though marriage was important, so was education. The former was just not a priority to me then. As a result, I was ready to accept the challenges that came in the wake of my choices.

A year of education abroad marked the beginning of change for me; of doing things differently; of taking leadership within my workplace. My passion for teaching meant that I did not want to be a stereotypical teacher. I wanted to be a professional, who wanted to develop and to move forward; be 'smart and successful' in life. Like the women in Smulyan's (2004) study, I also resisted the idea 'that teaching, as a "female profession" is nonagentic' (ibid, p. 523) because I perceive myself as a 'strong, positive social and sometimes political actor' (ibid, p. 523). I intended to redefine this role identity and show that I am as good as any other man or woman as far as my profession is concerned. I saw and still do see myself as a leader, both in my professional and personal lives; someone who critically reflects and brings about social change if and when I deem it necessary. This struggle contributed to my understanding of self, sense of responsibility and professional development, and developed my internal questioning skills. I have always thought of teaching as a dynamic profession. I see my professional growth as a challenge to the traditional role given to teachers. My own professional development reflects that I am a leader, an agent of change. Most women teachers in my university felt satisfied with what they were doing because most of them had husbands and children to look after and they felt that taking a leadership position would require more time. Ashraf (2004), in her study of women teachers in the Northern Areas of Pakistan refers to women in leadership as 'unusual' (p. 215). Indeed, she points out that for women, becoming a leader requires a renegotiation of familial obligations. For me, the tension existed between family life and seeking higher education. This is not to say that one cannot have both but that in a context like Pakistan, it is likely to offer a struggle with oneself and hence familial support is necessary if women are to move ahead and realise their potential.

I felt that as I had had an opportunity to go abroad for higher education, I had to give my best to my female students. I knew that most of them would be denied the opportunity to acquire further education. Using myself as a role model, I talked more to my students on how one can bring about changes in one's perceptions about getting higher education and contributing as professionals in their country. I negotiated for change within the existing courses and devised new courses for the students. My teaching practices changed. I now allowed for more discussion, raising of questions by students and critical thinking in my classroom. I not only made changes in the syllabus but introduced a new approach for assessing students. To bring about change in the perceptions of my colleagues who were expected to teach this new syllabus, I initiated a practical English Language Teaching course on-campus. Through these changes, I hoped to influence my female students' visions of themselves as women. My colleagues were open to change but at times I felt that it required a lot of convincing especially in regard to teaching strategies, student-centered approaches and teacher as facilitator rather than as lecturer. Although all my colleagues at the college were females, the male members of the University, whom I knew personally, were rather skeptical of the change—yet some encouraged my initiative and acted as external examiners.

Along with my professional growth, I further developed into a woman who wielded some 'power' because of my professional expertise and hence could communicate confidently with other women; I could convince and inspire them to pursue higher education and become professionals. But would they be allowed to do so by their families, especially by the male members of the family?

THE GREEN CLOAKED WOMAN

Upon getting my diploma and a 'foreign' degree, I began to work towards becoming a professional of some repute within Pakistan. As my reputation grew, people would often remark on my being the SON in the family. This remark became more pronounced when I took some of the responsibilities off my father's shoulders financially and otherwise. In fact, whenever people commented on my performance academically and on my professional growth, I was never given credit for who I am; that is, a woman. When my father retired and I was given accommodation in the university, some of his friends told him that he should not live in his daughter's house. This

perturbed me a lot and I made sure that he should feel that it was as much his house as mine. So I put a nameplate bearing his name outside the house. The main purpose of this act was to give my father respect as the head of the family. It was also to show society that my father (a man) lived with his family in the house and there was nothing to be ashamed of.

This experience served to highlight the tensions that surround one's gender identity in Pakistani society. Secondly, it raised important issues about my role and responsibilities as a woman in the family. I found myself beleaguered with the following questions: What about my own identity? Who was I? I was constantly struggling to carve out a niche for myself as a professional and a woman. I wanted to be recognized for who I was and not as the 'son' of the family. I saw this as a socially imposed definition and therefore my achievements were accepted as that of a man and not of a woman. I objected to this because I felt that it implied that my family was to be pitied because we had no male child in the family. My identity as a woman was constantly undermined. Whilst my family acknowledged and appreciated my achievements and the role I played at home, I often puzzled over the new definition of who I am as a person, as a professional and as a woman. Although I feel that there is nothing wrong with being a good housekeeper, I think the issue is that one should be good at what one does rather than be limited to certain 'suitable' roles as deemed by the society.

In addition to questions about my identity in the family, were issues surrounding my 'singleness' as a woman and a professional. At every social gathering, my female friends and acquaintances constantly asked when I would get married. They felt that as a woman, my professional life had no value. A woman's life comprised a husband, home and children. This, they thought, was the true identity of a woman: to be known either by her father's name or her husband's name. She has no right to be recognized in her own right as a human being, an individual. This was very depressing for me for I had never denied that marriage was important. I only thought that the reasons for marrying were important. My experiences had revealed that most men were reluctant to marry a woman who was educated, independent, and a professional. I remember, upon my return from the UK, a friend brought a message of a marriage proposal for me. However it turned out, the man was reluctant to marry me because I was 'too educated and would not fit into their family'. Such incidents and remarks saddened me. Did it mean that a good professional could not be a good wife or mother?

To the outside world, my career progression seemed threatening. I supported the family financially, supported two of my younger sisters' education, and supplemented the family income. While these responsibilities were recognized and lauded privately, that is at home; publicly they were largely unrecognized and unappreciated.

I knew that within the given social parameters of a good woman in Pakistan, I had changed as I moved up the career ladder. I perceived myself as a smart, intelligent and independent woman. As a result of my struggle to become an effective teacher-educator, my vision of what success means changed. It entailed independence of both thoughts as well as actions. It meant setting my own goals and selecting my own means for achieving those goals.

THE BRIDE IN RED

1997 was a year of turmoil. I had moved to Karachi where I had taken up a new job as a teacher-educator in a leading private university in Pakistan. I was to be joined later in the year by my parents and sister. I was very happy. Then my father died leading to an increase in my family responsibilities. My mother and younger sister moved to Karachi to live with me. Shortly after, I was offered a scholarship for doctoral studies in Canada. This had been my dream and my late father's too. It was a difficult decision to leave my sister and mother alone in a new city and go for higher education which meant being away for at least three years. Needless to say, a number of our relatives and friends were against my going away. However, my mother rallied behind me and supported me, knowing that this was what I wanted and it was exactly what my father would have done. I was the sole bread-winner and so I was financially constrained trying to ensure that I could support my family in Karachi as well as myself abroad. I was often plagued with feelings of guilt and was constantly worried about my family. I missed my father sorely. He had been a mentor and friend. I missed being able to share with him the new knowledge, the ideas, the concepts, his advice as well as my personal struggles. This was the most difficult time of my life when tensions created by my emotional state, pursuit for further studies, family and financial demands proved to be a challenge. When I returned after completing my doctoral studies I compounded my 'unconventionality' by getting married at what is usually considered a very late age in Pakistan.

The death of my father had created a vacuum in my life. It also meant that more family responsibilities fell on my shoulders.

Fortunately, he had left behind a strong family structure and had also developed in me a sense of responsibility and an enthusiasm for continuous professional growth. The period of my doctoral studies during which I was responsible for my family, offered many contradictions and dilemmas. I was beset with worries about whether to continue with my professional ascent or stay at home with my bereaved mother and sister. I tried to do both. I increasingly found that family relationships, responsibilities, duties and their attendant rewards provided me with a structure within which I could understand and assess my development as a woman and a female teacher-educator. For it is herein that I had developed the values of mutual understanding, sharing, reciprocity and autonomy. I had learnt the importance of being given and giving voice, freedom, support, negotiation as well as balancing my roles and responsibilities. All these had enabled me to work well with my students and colleagues. I had developed the skill of analyzing situations, reflecting on them to develop an understanding of the issues, dilemmas and contradictions in life. This enabled me to think critically. This was also reflected in my professional life. I taught better; I asked a lot of questions and pushed students to think critically and in different dimensions. I would like to think that as a result, my students, especially the females, were able to expand their horizons, which they would otherwise not have done.

When I returned after completing my doctoral studies, I got married. This was a turning point in my life. Professionally as a teacher-educator I was 'caught within the maelstrom of a rapidly tumbling kaleidoscopic picture—new roles, new courses, new administrative structures, a publish or perish expectation...new colleagues, new challenges, further study, committees' (Perry & Cooper, 2001, p. 46) and also engaged in developing a new relationship with my husband. Suffice it to say that today I have to supervise household chores, and also look after my mother, who supports me mostly by taking care of the domestic chores. This enables me to take control of the different facets, patterns and elements of my life as a woman and as a professional. The roles I have played and continued to play as a woman—the professional, the daughter and now the wife—have provided me with many challenges. Yet at the same time, these roles are so closely intertwined as they define who I am: a female Pakistani professional. My father's role as the supporter of my personal and professional achievements has been taken over by my husband. Could it have been different? Was I lucky?

These are questions that plague me often as I ponder the plight of women in Pakistan.

REFLECTING ON THE SILK PAINTING

My painting reveals splashes of all the colours in my life. No matter what position I take in the room, I find that the different hues on my landscape painting take on different meanings both for me and for the larger society.

This painting elucidates the dynamics of becoming a teacher-educator from a female perspective. It shows how family values, positive and progressive thinking of the male members of a family open up avenues for women members of a family. Because of my father's 'progressive' thinking, I was socialized into developing into a woman of my own. The stories that I have reconstructed show the powerful impact of the family support, care and acknowledgement, especially of my father on my person. My father's role seems to suggest that men in Pakistan need to reconsider their roles and perceptions if women are to forge ahead academically and professionally.

My stories reveal that a different concept of patriarchy is possible in Pakistan and which I would like to call the positive dimension of patriarchy. This type of patriarchy is epitomized by the dominant role played by the male head of the family to support women in their educational aspirations. As Kandiyoti (1997, p. 86) points out '...the term patriarchy evokes an overly monolithic conception of male dominance, which is treated at a level of abstraction which [often] obfuscates rather than reveals the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between genders'. In Pakistan, the development of this form of patriarchy would be non-threatening and offer a more acceptable view of gender roles. This would have important implications on how gender is shaped within the Pakistani culture.

My stories suggest to me that in trying to change attitudes leading to gender inequalities, one should not attempt to wholly overhaul societal practices overnight. This change should be gradual, consistent and systematic because within the cultural and societal boundaries there are choices and ways in which a woman can achieve education and develop professionally. Male members of the family need to have faith in the abilities of the females and support them in their pursuit of

professional growth. The male member in the family could be 'protective and not oppressive' (Basit, 1997, p. 430) in order to support women to develop in their own right, both personally and professionally. This can only be achieved if the societal pressures that militate against women's development are done away with or kept to a minimum. This is because as Kandiyoti (op. cit, p. 92) suggests, a view I concur with, this is the way women can make adjustments within the existing system, because such an approach 'is intended merely to demonstrate the place of a particular strategy within the internal logic of a given system.'

My stories challenge the stereotype notions of being a female professional. I question the myth in Pakistan that a woman's place is only within the house. They show that a woman can be a holder of educational and professional qualifications, take up family responsibilities and uphold society's moral and religious values.

The fact that I come from the upper middle class can perhaps explain my ability to make choices and develop professionally. Women like me have relatively greater access to education and employment and consequently have more freedom and control over their lives. I know that in the context of the larger Pakistan, I am fortunate to have had access to education and the support of my family in a country where the overall literacy rate is 26 per cent and girls/women literacy rate is a dismal 12 per cent (Latif, 2005), thereby denying women access to many opportunities to improve upon their lives. However, the nature and degree of women's oppression and subordination does vary across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide in Pakistan. Patriarchal structures are relatively stronger in the rural and tribal setting where local customs establish male authority and power over women's lives (Asian Development Bank Country Briefing Paper (2000, p. 2).

My stories highlight my persistent determination to pursue my career as a teacher educator. Not many women can keep up the fight to get to such positions of responsibility. These excerpts also indicate that even though women may become professionals, they are still burdened with the bulk of the household responsibilities—is this inevitable for the working/professional woman in Pakistan?

Finally, I have used the term 'unconventional' to label myself because I did not conform to the prescribed norms of the conservative society I was growing up in. However, being unconventional has proved to be a paradox for me. On the one hand, I enjoy the freedom

of being a professional and belonging to the small group of highly educated women in Pakistan. On the other hand, because of my internalized notion of a 'good' woman in the context of Pakistan, I want to comply with the socio-cultural norms of the larger group of women. The majority of whom are exclusively homemakers and represent all shades of realities—illiterate, educated, privileged etc.

MORE SILK PAINTINGS

I share these stories in the hope that other women may share stories that resonate with, challenge and question issues raised in this chapter. Further research would be beneficial because it would generate a knowledge base of how women can become teachers and teacher-educators particularly, in Pakistan. This would bring to the fore the ways in which gender and women's professional development is perceived and dealt with in Pakistan. How women succeed academically and professionally despite the overwhelming cultural resistance is likely to be of benefit to women who hail from developing societies similar to Pakistan.

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NOTES

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2. A drape-like outer covering for ladies.