

### BRINGING THE EXPERIENTIAL & THE UNUSUAL

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#### EDITORIAL

### The Need to Act

When we think of activists, we often think of people marching with protest signs and chanting slogans. This is, of course, the bravest form of activism and has created great change across the world. However, there are other forms of activism as well. These are the daily, personal forms of activism, from reclaiming a space to changing one's lifestyle to even choosing a profession. Though it may not always seem like it, a change in one's day-to-day can become a quiet revolution by which broader societal change can occur. There are even terms for these styles of activism, such as 'artivism' (making art), 'economic activism' (where people choose to spend their money) and many more.

To look at one example, the changes that have occurred in women's rights in Pakistan have partly occurred due to women finding their way into business and entrepreneurship, however slowly it happens. So many women speak of not only leaving harmful domestic situations, but taking their children with them, all due to having enough financial independence to do something so daunting and difficult. Added to this, many other minorities have also found security in finding some form of work that provides for their needs, regardless of gender, religion, ideology etc.

There are also climate-related actions that people have begun to take. Many charitable organizations attempt to use solar energy (such as with solar tube wells) in their projects, rather than traditional fossil-fuel powered technology. People with the means to do so are also attaching solar panels to their houses (whether for a few devices or several) and working toward reducing electricity and fossil fuel use in their personal lives. Added to this, waste and recycling are emerging issues, particularly in regard to Karachi's water supply and seaside, where trash and sewage are often dumped. The increasing awareness of ideas like composting and eco-friendly disposable products is also changing the way people interact with a variety of organisations and industries.

Lastly, the stepping in of minorities to the public sphere, particularly people who are part of the transgender, or locally known Khwaja Sira community. Though there are still many struggles, these minorities are increasingly making themselves known as doctors, teachers and a variety of other professions that still hold many barriers for them to overcome.

Most people feel a deep need to do something valuable and make positive change in the world. Unfortunately, living in Pakistan is often a demoralizing and stress-inducing process, especially for those who have to work and face the daily challenges of a regular citizen. Carrying out these daily acts of rebellion or, as we may say, activism, can make us feel powerful and even shift our perspective and our culture for the better.

In this issue Outlier focuses on the critical role that activism plays in our society today, in big ways and, of course, the smaller, day-to-day ones we all can start right now.

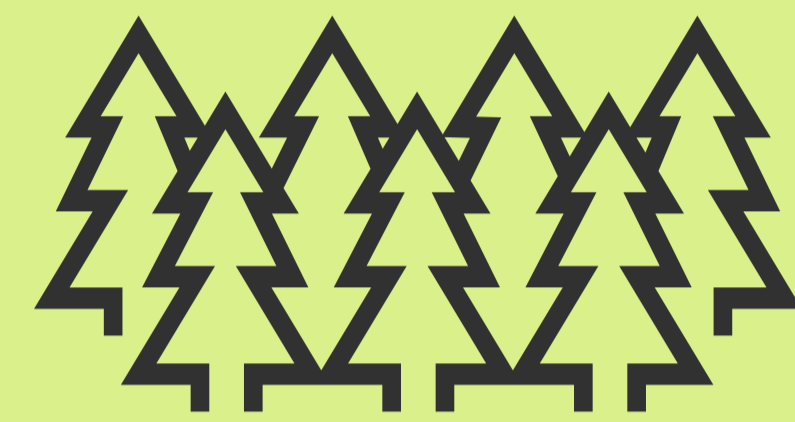
[1] <http://www.genderconcerns.org/country-in-focus/pakistan/the-situation-of-women-in-pakistan/#:~:text=This%20action%20worsens%20the%20already,school%20children%20in%20the%20world.>  
 [2] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>  
 [3] <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/climate-change-cost-pakistan-38bn-yearly>  
 [4] <https://www.geo.tv/latest/331839-pakistan-improves-on-global-climate-risk-index-2021>

#### NUMBERS TELL A STORY

### Why Activism Matters?



In Pakistan, over **5.5 million** primary school-aged children are out of school, of which **63 %** are girls. [1]



Evidence from **25** countries shows that countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to set aside protected land areas. [2]



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank (WB) have estimated that Pakistan is facing up to **\$3.8 billion** in annual economic loss due to climate change. [3]



Long-Term Climate Risk Index highlighted Pakistan lost **0.52%** per unit of its GDP due to climate change and **173** climate-related events from 2000 to 2019. [4]

#### WIT'S END

Zain Ashir



*"Ok, now what would you say is your greatest strength?"*

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

### Beena Sarwar on Activism

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity*



Beena Sarwar is an editor, writer, teacher, media consultant, documentary filmmaker who has worked in Pakistan and internationally. She has taught journalism at several institutions, including Harvard University, Brown University and Princeton University. She has been an activist and part of various organization that work for human rights, peace between Pakistan and India and throughout South Asia, as well as other key issues.

#### Q1. What are the biggest threats and challenges facing activists today?

They've always been the same. It's an old story, the same challenges with new faces. The people involved always have the same objective: to uphold the status quo and maintain their own power. Activism is a broad word that can be applied to many people, even the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and the Hindutva in India. It's **progressive activism**, be it human rights, right to self-identification, women's rights that makes historic moves to make society better. Jimmy Engineer said about the Sabeen Mahmud murder that the fight between good and evil is universal. Sometimes evil is on top and other times good comes out on top, but the fight remains. Of course, it is important to note that Sabeen Mahmud's legacy will continue, that's her *amar*, her ideas will live forever.

Another challenge we all face is humanizing the other. I'm reminded of something my colleague, Muneeba Kamal, said. Pakistan was totally under attack from the Taliban at the time. She said 'these are not aliens, they are part of society and the human race. Yes, they may have been programmed to make them more robot-like in some ways'. A lawyer from Chandigarh I met said 'they are also victims. They were conditioned to lose their humanity. The families are also victims, because the parents have lost their son'.

Often, we start name-calling, which you can see in Pakistan right now. There's that divide, that you can't talk to someone with different politics from yours. Some people think that 'in order to prove that I'm a true patriot, I have to hurt someone who is not', which is not true.

#### Q2. What is your opinion on the current state of Pakistan's media, in terms of activism and societal issues?

We're in a very interesting time, because we have never had social media like we have now, and it's growing. Platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter. WhatsApp is even more dangerous, because you don't know what's circulating inside. Misinformation gets shared. A friend of mine sent me a tweet by Rahul Gandhi, saying that 'a lot of money exchanged hands in this no-confidence motion'. He never tweeted that.

Social media has forced legacy media to change the way it behaves as well, in chasing ratings and latest trends. There are certain basic journalistic values that social media users should use. Before you post any information, consider two-source verification, where you verify it from two independent sources. Don't label and name-call, focus on the issues and not on blaming. Show things as factually as you can, and try to do it without blaming somebody. We all have our own views and beliefs, but you should try to be fair to everyone.

I don't think this can be regulated, it needs to come from the culture. I would love to make a 'Code of Ethics' for social media users and have people sign it. "I pledge to not use this platform, verify this information..." etc. Then they can be held accountable, not criminally, but by being told by others when they go against it.

#### Q3. What differences do you see in being an activist in Pakistan today versus when you began your journey as an activist?

When I started my journey as an activist, that was in the time of General Zia-ul-Haq. Back then, you knew who the progressive activists were, the government, military etc. Zia criminalized a lot of things, such as not fasting for instance. His policies created this environment where you could take severe actions to maintain the status quo, anyone can use his policies for this purpose. At that time, we didn't have to be so careful about who will take offence to what.

When my mother went to college in the 60's, there was a man in Anarkali Bazaar who, if a woman's hair was open, he would go and cut it. He was seen as a lunatic and criminal. After Zia, people think they can say what they want to anyone. We're constantly fighting on all fronts, which makes it very hard to carry on our fight for human rights and justice. So many things have been criminalized that should not be criminalized. People being sent to jail over these things is not justice. *Yeh insaaf nahin hai*.

#### Q4. Can you share some examples of real change in Pakistan due to the role of activists and activism?

Pakistan is a very young country. Not only as a country, but also in our number of young people. The youth have always wanted change. The idea of 'I want to be better than my parents were'. They want progressive change. A lot of change has been brought about, for instance, by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan(HRC), the Women's Action Forum(WAF).

Gradually, the narrative of justice and human rights is coming forward. This is not just due to activism, it's a natural thing. Even young people who have never heard of WAF or the HRC, or the PIPFD (Pakistan-India Peoples' Forum for Peace and Democracy) want those same things for themselves and their children.

#### Q5. Which activists, out of the younger generation of activists in Pakistan today, are most effectively championing their cause in your opinion?

I don't want to name any, as there are so many. They're in environment, legal rights, etc. People who get seen in the media, they become the face of a movement. Behind them are a whole lot of people. I think the thing we have to build is a community. That's the problem with social media, the idea of a 'lone warrior'.

You move in a team, you work together with people, then I think you move forward in a better way. I see so many young people working together, and I'm very proud of that. That's why the work we do in SAPAN (South Asia Peace Action Network) is so important. We have monthly meetings where we intellectually come together to take our work further.

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

# The Continuing Struggle for Trans Equality in Pakistan

Anoosha Imran

As many know, a significant reason for the partition of the sub-continent was the discrimination faced by Muslims at the hands of the British. The lesser-known consequence of this violence was the criminalization of the Khwaja Sira community of South Asia. The British passed the 'Criminal Tribes Act of 1871', under which the community was deemed as criminal in the public sphere. To this day, despite being officially recognized as third gender in Pakistan, transgender individuals still faces widespread violence, particularly homicide, sexual violence and public incarceration.

However, after tireless parliamentary and especially grassroots activism, Pakistan introduced the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. It was enacted to provide protection and equality to the transgender community residing in Pakistan. Under this Act, any transgender person above the age of eighteen can determine and register under their self-perceived identity.

Since the enactment of the law, there have been significant steps in terms of the inclusion of transgender people in Pakistan. An important step has been the employment of Dr. Sara Gill in JPMC on the instructions of the Sindh Chief Minister. Sara Gill is a renowned transgender activist who has had an active presence on social media.



Speaking to Deutsche Welle, Dr. Gill mentioned how the death of a friend triggered her journey to becoming a doctor. Her friend passed away from blood cancer and Dr. Gill recalls her last words as,

*“If there were doctors in the transgender community, I might have been open to sharing my problem with them more conveniently, and they would have understood me as well.”*

Dr. Gill's is one of the examples of rising indigenous voices from the Khwaja Sira community. Some of the other examples include public health specialist like Dr. Moiz Awan and the first police officer like Reem, to name a few who are trying to change the discourse around public perception of the Khwaja Sira community. Most of all, it is imperative that the people of Pakistan also recognize their humanity, their right to freedom, mobility, and assembly.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1569183/from-victim-to-protector-pakistans-first-trans-cop-fights-for-justice>  
<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/sindh-reserves-quota-for-transgender-people-in-government-jobs-1.85068105>  
<https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Pakistan-Transgender-Advocacy-Analysis-brief-2020-ENG.pdf>

## EMERGING ISSUES

# TrashIt: Household Action for the Environment

Syed Maroof Ali

Sustainable living is one of the many initiatives that people think of to reduce the fast-paced consumerism that is a large part of current climate issues. Be it the purchase of non-essential goods, latest apparels, or trending plastic-packaged products, we have developed a habit that adversely impacts the environment. Many groups and individuals are trying to change this.

### Activism at the Household Level

One such collective is a Karachi-based early-stage startup, championing the cause of individual and community activism on climate change: Trashit. This organization aims to redefine this through individual action that can be categorized as eco-activism at the household level. With an actionable vision that states, “We empower communities to take responsibility for their waste,” Trashit has provided the populace of Karachi an option of sustainable living to reduce their carbon footprint.

### How it Helps

The key idea is composting: using food waste as raw material to make organic, all-natural compost that can be used in your gardens or plant pots as necessary nutrients for your plants. Apart from educational videos on Trashit's Instagram on the 'Do's and Don'ts of Composting', Trashit also offers products. The Eco Khamba, for instance, is an eco-friendly compost tower that can allow a household to make compost from food waste in a convenient and space-saving manner. Trashit has also launched *Trash On Wheelz*, a waste collection service to ensure waste segregation and ethical recycling. This service also provides insightful waste data that empowers individuals to reduce their waste footprint.

Individual effort, rooted in eco-activism, is indeed a necessity of our time. Instead of suffering from the bystander effect, which creates inaction in a group setting, we should take charge of our futures in a sustainable way. As initiatives like Trashit show, this could be done at every level, organizational and individual.

## QUOTE OF THE MONTH

**"Everything is a risk in Pakistan: If you defend women, it's a risk. If you defend non-Muslims it's a risk. If you discuss religion, it's a risk. But you can't really sit there like a vegetable in your own society. And I'm committed to that society... and I feel I need to turn around and speak as I should." - Asma Jahangir**



Asma Jilani Jahangir was a Pakistani human rights lawyer and social activist who co-founded and chaired the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

**FEATURE STORY**

# The Power of Family: Childcare for Working Parents in Pakistan

*A story based on our work-related experiences, as told through the perspective of a child*

Sabeen Rizvi



If my amma was a superhero, her power would be to split into three ammas! There would be Work Amma, Home Amma and Baby Amma. They would all have different jobs, here’s what they would be:

**Work Amma**— She would work all day long to help pay for the house, food, bills, my toys and all the other things we have to buy.

**Home Amma**— She would look after the house, there are many chores! Cleaning, cooking, gardening, so many things to look after. When I’m big, I want to help her with them, too.

**Baby Amma**— She would stay with me all day and play our favourite games, read me fun stories and help me with all my little tasks. I can’t wait until I can read all the words in the stories myself! Maybe I’ll even get to play cricket with Abbu and his friends.

But Amma doesn’t have that superpower, so she has to:

Work part of the day...  
 Come home and rush through chores...  
 Then Amma spends time with me when the bua leaves, reading me books and playing with me  
 (Abbu is still at work, he doesn’t get time off at all)

Amma and Abbu are talking about Amma leaving work, but I don’t like that: Amma loves her work!

There must be some way to help her. What if I was a superhero? Then Amma and Abbu wouldn’t have to worry about me. That’ll take some time...

Then Abbu has a great idea: there is a workplace near his office that has a daycare centre nearby. The people there pay for their employees to have daycare for their children. Amma decides to try and find a job there. It takes some time, but luckily, they have just the job for her.

She starts the new job and now has a safe place close by to keep me during the day. I can play and learn and make new friends. Amma can even come visit me during lunch. Abbu is also nearby so he comes to visit me when he gets time. Amma’s workplace lets her have flexible hours so she can get more done without having to rush around. Abbu spoke to his boss, who agreed to give him a little bit more time off to help out... every little bit helps!

Now I spend more time with Abbu and Amma and we are all happy together. Turns out, we don’t need to be superheroes, just a happy family!

**Source:** Revised Final Report-Nationwide Gender Sector Assessment For Office Of Economic Growth and Agriculture (EGA) – 2015, USAID/Pakistan’s Office of Economic Growth and Agriculture (EGA), by AASA Consulting

## READERS TALK BACK

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