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What is right or wrong may be looked at from the point of view of ethics, religio-social constraints or simply within the value system of a society. The need for either knowing or defining 'right or wrong' arises only when an act is committed or an incident occurs that may have no precedent or has taken place in a moment of emotional outburst where judgement of 'right or wrong' becomes impaired. In Pakistan, where the society is still grappling with

trying to impose its own interpretation of 'Islamic society' without obtaining the consensus of the general public at large. The latest incidents of tearing down and defacing of advertisement hoardings with pictures and paintings of women in the northern areas of Pakistan, especially in the Peshawar region, poses a number of questions with regard to ethics and rights of the doings of a 'handful of men' trying to impose their minds on others. The question one may begin to ask would be; who is to decide what is allowed and disallowed? Leaving the matters of society in the hands of groups, some having vested interests, would certainly lead to anarchy and chaos and this is not the way a Muslim state is meant to be governed. Is it not right, that in a Muslim state the

A serious question arising from what was witnessed in the northern city of Peshawar is: Muslim state or not, do we have a right to mutilate and destroy other people's property?

Because the rampage against hoardings had a distinctive character and that was to eliminate pictures of women from advertisement placards, billboards and hoardings, the underlying factors had serious consequences. This is an area (NWFP) where already a controversy has started with changes being brought about, such as men and women's dresses being defined and the issue of separate existence (schools, colleges, work places, shopping centres, etc). The usual name given to any such changes being imposed by force or with the support of a law is referred to as 'Talibanisation' of the society. How far is this acceptable is another matter.

It seems that the centre of controversy with various groups of people belonging to different schools of thought is about women and their role in a Muslim society. So what is this role? Has this role been decided and defined? Is there a consensus on the definition? Has this 'definition' been accepted by the state and the general public? If not, then who gave the right to a group of people to impose their will on others, and by doing this, disrupting the normal way of life in a city? How can one destroy what is not his property?

The problem is that on most issues concerning women's social and cultural values and their economic independence, a clear cut policy has not come about - reason being - there is no consensus on some of the Islamic injunctions' interpretation - each 'school of thought' going its own way. In this regard, there are various followings on matters like *pardha*, social life, working away from home, makeup, fashion, going to mosques, working in a male environment, and several other issues.

The differences between the interpretations of some of the Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries where a large minority of Muslims exists must be understood. Let's say that most of the Muslim countries differ in 'right and wrong' and what is 'allowed and disallowed'.

(1) For a woman to travel to other countries, Muslim or otherwise, a photo of her full face is a must under international laws.

(2) In most Muslim countries and all western countries veiling of the face (*naqaab*) with only one's eyes visible is not obligatory.

(3) For identity purposes, men or women must show their full faces - their face having the characteristics that no two faces would possess.

(4) Talking to men or having a male dominated environment cannot be avoided in many Muslim and all non-Muslim countries.

There are several other things that can be mentioned here but the purpose of this article is to question the act of mutilating and disfiguring pictures of women placed on advertisement billboards in Peshawar. Was it an act of some 'disturbed' elements or a deliberate one towards imposing 'right' of one on to another, irrespective of its meaning and consequences?

Cultural conflict or an enforced doctrine?

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By Mohsin S. Jaffri



the definition of 'liberalism' and fundamentalism' in the light of Islamic cultural values, it is certainly difficult to come to terms with 'a group's way of thinking', those who try to impose 'their way' of 'right and wrong' through sheer street power and not the outcome of a 'school of thought'. Here due deliberations have been made and a consensus developed for the acceptance of a 'system' to be adhered to.

In Pakistan's somewhat disturbed politico-Islamic environment, a faction is

rulers are the final arbitrators of rules and laws by which the people are to be governed? Is it not true?

Do groups of people (minority at that) have a right to take law in their own hands when protesting about something that may not 'agree' with their sense of 'right'? Is it right to destroy other people's property (hoardings) irrespective of what is being displayed on them? 'What is right' is a matter for the state to decide and not for a handful of people wanting to impose their sense of 'right'.

In recent months, the northern province (NWFP) has seen some specific changes brought about, by and act of local parliament, concerning social and cultural activities of women with emphasis on the 'separation' approach i.e. limiting occasions of mixed gatherings. While this was advocated and implemented, religio-political activists roamed around the streets removing and defacing hoardings and billboards with pictures or faces of women