
HARMONY IN THE GARDEN: The Life and Work of Rubina Feroze Bhatti of Pakistan

By Kaitlin Barker, Peace Writer

Edited by Emiko Noma



2009 Women PeaceMakers Program

Made possible by the Fred J. Hansen Foundation

*This material is copyrighted by the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice. For permission to cite, contact ipj@san Diego.edu, with “Women PeaceMakers – Narrative Permissions” in the subject line.



JOAN B. KROC
INSTITUTE FOR
PEACE & JUSTICE
UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies
University of San Diego
5998 Alcalá Park
San Diego, CA 92110-2492
<http://peace.sandiego.edu>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	A Note to the Reader	4
II.	About the Women PeaceMakers Program	4
III.	Biography of a Woman PeaceMaker – Rubina Feroze Bhatti	5
IV.	Conflict History – Pakistan	6
V.	Map – Pakistan	13
VI.	Integrated Timeline – Political Developments and Personal History	14
VII.	Narrative Stories of the Life and Work of Rubina Feroze Bhatti	
	a. First Steps	20
	b. Precious One	21
	c. Parthaal the Brave	23
	d. The Spark	24
	e. Garden Games	26
	f. City of Eagles	28
	g. Things to Come	29
	h. What Religion Feels Like	31
	i. A Pocket Full of Saints	33
	j. Bearing the Cross	35
	k. One Pain in Life	
	1. The Incident	37
	2. The Mob	38
	3. The Arrest	40
	4. The Sufferings	41
	5. The Verdict	43
	6. The Appeals	45
	7. The People’s Representative	47
	8. The Exile	49
	l. The Personal is Political	50
	m. The Last Day of Blessing	54
	n. Longing for the Fullness of Humanity	57
	o. Changing Rhythms	61
	p. First Drop of Rain	65
	q. A New Classroom	68
	r. Everywoman	73
	s. The Sun Rises in the West	80
	t. Lessons in Peace	84
	u. Bagh-e-Aman	93
	v. Sajjar	100
	w. Epilogue	103

x. Acknowledgments..... 104

VIII. A Conversation with Rubina Feroze Bhatti 105

IX. Best Practices in Peacebuilding 113

X. Further Reading – Pakistan 124

XI. Biography of a Peace Writer – Kaitlin Barker 125

XII. Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice 126

XIII. University of San Diego 127

XIV. List of Acronyms 128

XV. Endnotes 129

A NOTE TO THE READER

In the following pages, you will find narrative stories about a Woman PeaceMaker, along with additional information to provide a deep understanding of a contemporary conflict and one person's journey within it. These complementary components include a brief biography of the peacemaker, a historical summary of the conflict, a timeline integrating political developments in the country with personal history of the peacemaker, a question-and-answer transcript of select interviews, and a table of best practices in peacebuilding as demonstrated and reflected on by the peacemaker during her time at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.

The document is not intended necessarily to be read straight through, from beginning to end. Instead, you can use the historical summary or timeline as mere references or guides as you read the narrative stories. You can move straight to the table of best practices if you are interested in peacebuilding methods and techniques, or go to the question-and-answer transcript if you want to read commentary in the peacemakers' own words. The goal of this format is to reach audiences through multiple channels, providing access to the peacemakers' work, vision, lives and impact in their communities.

ABOUT THE WOMEN PEACEMAKERS PROGRAM

Made possible through a generous grant from the Fred J. Hansen Foundation, the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice's (IPJ) Women PeaceMakers Program annually hosts four women from around the world who have been involved in human rights and peacemaking efforts in their countries.

Women on the frontline of efforts to end violence and secure a just peace seldom record their experiences, activities and insights – as generally there is no time or, perhaps, they do not have formal education that would help them record their stories. The Women PeaceMakers Program is a selective program for leaders who want to document, share and build upon their unique peacemaking stories. Selected peacemakers join the IPJ for an eight-week residency.

Women PeaceMakers are paired with a Peace Writer to document in written form their story of living in conflict and building peace in their communities and nations. The peacemakers' stories are also documented on film by the IPJ's partner organization Sun & Moon Vision Productions. While in residence at the institute, Women PeaceMakers give presentations on their work and the situation in their home countries to the university and San Diego communities.

The IPJ believes that women's stories go beyond headlines to capture the nuance of complex situations and expose the realities of gender-based violence, thus providing an understanding of conflict and an avenue to its transformation. The narrative stories of Women PeaceMakers not only provide this understanding, but also show the myriad ways women construct peace in the midst of and after violence and war. For the realization of peace with justice, the voices of women – those severely affected by violent conflict and struggling courageously and creatively to build community from the devastation – must be recorded, disseminated and spotlighted.¹

BIOGRAPHY OF A WOMAN PEACEMAKER – RUBINA FERROZE BHATTI



Photo credit: Sun & Moon Vision Productions

Rubina Feroze Bhatti, born into a Christian family in the majority Muslim country of Pakistan, protects the rights of women who are targets of honor killings, acid attacks and other forms of violence. She is a founding member and general secretary of Taangh Wasaib Organization (TWO), a rights-based development group working for communal harmony and equality through its many programs addressing issues of violence against women, religious intolerance and sectarianism and discriminatory laws and policies against women and minorities. Bhatti trains women's groups to

report on violence against women, supports victims with counseling and legal aid and works with media to bring attention to these issues.

Bhatti's peacemaking story began when she wrote an article condemning the imprisonment and torture of a Christian Pakistani man unjustly accused of blasphemy. Her words inspired human rights activists all over the country to raise their voices against the sentence, and Bhatti joined them in creating a campaign that ultimately saved the man's life. She has since devoted her energy to human rights activism in various forms.

With TWO, Bhatti works to abolish separate electorates which prevent non-Muslims from voting. In 2000 and 2001, the organization launched a massive campaign for religious minorities to boycott local elections. The campaign was successful and the government restored the joint electorate system. Bhatti also has established educational and health care facilities for children working in Pakistan's carpet-weaving industry, written scripts for theater productions on human rights and peace issues that were performed throughout the Punjab and North West Frontier Provinces, and been selected as one of the 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. As a woman in the religious minority who lives in the rural and underdeveloped city of Sargodha, Bhatti and her work challenge the traditions and rituals shaped by a patriarchal society.



CONFLICT HISTORY – PAKISTAN

Though Pakistan is a relatively young country, just over 60 years old, the nation and its people have faced significant challenges and instability in the struggle for peace and democracy. Pakistan's creation itself was destabilizing. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who would become the country's founder, called for the creation of Pakistan along the two-nations theory, arguing that India's Hindus and Muslims could not live together and thus needed two nations. Furthermore – as many progressives have noted – he was concerned with the economic deprivation of Muslims. Two interpretations followed: one, that Pakistan was intended to be an Islamic nation, and two, that Pakistan should be a place for Muslims to practice their religion in safety, in a society of tolerance and moderation.

The circumstances of Pakistan's birth therefore invited a question that has continued to resurface ever since: Would Pakistan, a country created as a homeland for Indian Muslims, be a religious or secular state – an Islamic republic or a safe and tolerant space for all religions? The first interpretation of the two-nations theory has been used to exclude minorities and deny their involvement in Pakistan's creation, but Pakistan has in fact always been a multi-religious society, and its flag seems to suggest an aspiration of coexistence – the green representing Pakistan's Muslim majority and the white its minorities. Not knowing what the answer would be, millions became homeless and thousands died in the migration to East and West Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the 1947 partition of India.

Since Pakistan's founding, democracy has been repeatedly suspended through a series of coups, halted administrations and periods of martial law by a powerful military structure. Competing ideologies over the nature of Pakistan's nationhood have disrupted efforts at political and social stability, and fundamentalist Islamic groups have held varying degrees of sway over Pakistan's leaders. Half of its 62 years have been spent under military rule, and an elected government has yet to finish a term of office. Had Pakistan's founder not died one year into the life of the country, perhaps his vision of equality and democracy inspired by Islamic values would have had time to form a stronger foundation. In a speech soon after independence, Jinnah encouraged his new Pakistanis that "If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone, no matter to what community he belongs ... no matter what is his color, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this State, with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make." But his untimely death ushered in the beginning of minority marginalization in the name of religion. In 1949 Jinnah's successor, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, proposed and passed the Objectives Resolution declaring both that Muslims would be enabled to order their lives in accordance with the teachings of Islam *and* that minorities would be allowed to freely practice their religion and develop their cultures. But subsequent resolutions and constitutions would primarily promote the former and neglect the latter.

Shortly after Jinnah's death, Khan was assassinated by an Afghan presumably insulted by remarks made in a speech. Including Khan, Pakistan went through seven prime ministers during the years from 1947 to 1958. Though tumultuous, the succession of turnovers constituted one of Pakistan's three periods of civilian rule.

The year 1958 brought the first of four military coups when Gen. Ayub Khan took over as Pakistan's first military leader and declared martial law. Many Pakistanis were convinced that democracy was doomed to fail in Pakistan and were relieved that martial law would end the chaos. Khan was a secularist who promoted family planning and objected to traditions like polygamy and the wearing of the burqa. Eleven years later, Ayub Khan resigned and was replaced by Gen. Yayja Khan.

Pakistan lost a significant portion of its territory in 1971 when East Pakistan seceded and became Bangladesh. Primarily an ethnic conflict, tensions were exacerbated by an unequal distribution of power and wealth that tilted in favor of West Pakistan. Though the majority of Pakistan's population lived in the East, resources were based in the West. Politics were dominated by the West, by Punjabis specifically, and Bengalis were militarily under-represented. The Pakistani army attempted to suppress the outraged Bengalis but were eventually defeated. During the two-week civil war, Pakistan lost half its army and navy and a quarter of its air force. More than 90,000 Pakistani soldiers became prisoners of war, and millions of refugees flooded into India to escape the violence.

Following the war, in 1972 Bhutto signed the Simla peace accord with India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, negotiating the release of prisoners of war and establishing a new, though temporary, ceasefire line in the Kashmir conflict. The dispute with India over the Kashmir region is a continual source of Pakistan's instability. A satisfactory agreement on the state of Kashmir was never reached during partition, resulting in two inconclusive wars (1947 to 1948, and 1965). The militarization of Kashmir was and is a substantial drain on the country's economy. The conflict fuels the growth of militant Islamic groups, as well as perpetuating Pakistanis mistrust of neighboring India.

By the 1970s, Pakistan's rivalry with India heightened the seriousness of the country's instability and militarism – research and development of nuclear weaponry began. "If India builds the bomb," Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is often quoted as saying prior to his 1971 presidency, "we will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own."² Bhutto organized a meeting of scientists in 1972 to begin serious plans for a nuclear program. After India tested a nuclear device in 1974, the international community became concerned about proliferation, and Pakistan's nuclear reactor outside of Karachi was cut off by its supporter, Canada. But India's progress only motivated Pakistan to continue the development of a nuclear program. By 1982, A.Q. Khan, one of Pakistan's most prominent nuclear scientists, had developed the technology to produce enough enriched uranium for a bomb. The race then began to construct a missile that could launch it. It wasn't until May 1998 that Pakistan tested its first nuclear bomb in the dry mountains of Balochistan, just a few weeks after India tested five bombs in the Rajasthan desert. Many Pakistanis danced in the streets, but the world now had one more nuclear state on its hands.

The modernist leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became president in 1971 (and later prime minister from 1973 to 1977), and his was the second period of democratic civilian rule. His Pakistan People's Party (PPP) promised socialism infused with Islamic values. "*Roti, kapda aur makan*" (bread, cloth and house) was his slogan, and he attempted to deliver with a series of nationalizations including schools, banks and major industries. Minorities lost their educational and health institutions, but the redistribution of feudal land wealth was a boost to the mostly lower class minorities. Bhutto established compulsory education for all children under 15, opened up new fields of employment for women, set up a quota for employment of minorities and replaced the separate electorate system

(which only allowed Muslims to vote for Muslims, Christians for Christians, etc.) with a joint electorate.

But at the same time, in order to gain the support of the religious parties, Bhutto constitutionally adopted “Islamic Republic of Pakistan” as the country’s official name, made Islam the state religion, changed the official work week holiday from Sunday to Friday and officially declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims.³ Bhutto’s constitutional amendments enhanced the Islamic provisions that had been inserted in the 1956 constitution. He also attempted to impose a ban on alcohol, gambling and nightclubs, and jailed opposition challengers. When Bhutto was ousted in a coup by Gen. Zia ul Haq in 1977,⁴ Islam was brought for the first time into the heart of government power, and quickly.

Gen. Zia immediately stepped up Pakistan’s Islamization, and the coinciding Soviet invasion of Afghanistan afforded him even greater freedom to establish Islamic rule without the imposing oversight of the West, namely the United States. Pakistan’s new position as a valuable ally in the U.S. front against the Soviets gave Zia free reign to abuse human rights and take away freedoms with each new law he introduced.

In 1979 he introduced the Hudood Ordinances, writing a series of Quranic and Sunnah⁵ punishments into law. Hudood is plural for the word *hadd*, which means limit, as in the most severe punishment. Theft became punishable by wrist amputation or public whipping. Consumption of alcohol was banned. The Hudood laws were a package of laws, but of particular concern to women’s rights were the *zina* laws regulating illicit sex, such as adultery, rape and premarital sex. Aiding or abetting in an abduction or runaway also falls under *zina* charges. Transgressions of *zina* are technically punishable by death by stoning, but most result in long imprisonment with expensive bail. Though both men and women are susceptible to *zina*, women are the most common victims. In cases of rape, for example, if the rape cannot be proven (which requires four male, Muslim witnesses), the woman is then charged with *zina* herself – for partaking in illicit, extramarital sex. False *zina* charges are commonly used as a tool to control women. A woman who attempts to choose her own marriage partner is often seen as endangering her family’s honor, and the threat of a *zina* accusation can rein her in. Husbands often use *zina* to trap so-called “errant wives” attempting to leave an abusive marriage or even remarry after a verbal divorce.

In many cases, the potential for dishonor is avoided all together. Inconvenient or strong-willed women often disappear under the guise of honor killings – the murder of female family members to avoid cultural shame – or are intimidated into submission with tactics such as acid attacks. It is also socially acceptable that a raped woman will end her and her family’s “dishonor” by taking her own life. Rape victims generally commit suicide rather than attempt seeking justice. Gen. Zia took even more power from women by declaring the witness of a woman worth only half of a man’s. Women then faced further restriction through the confinements of the *chador* (scarf) and *chardimari* (boundary wall). Students, teachers and women working in government and media were all required to wear the chador.

Laws like *zina*, paired with Pakistan’s strong feudal traditions – which include feudal courts, or *jirgas*, rather than governmental courts ruling over local disputes – mean that women face significant challenges in the justice system. Powerful landowners tend to settle conflicts between families in rural areas, administering solutions like exchange marriages, polygamy, or *wan’ni*, the

trading of a female family member in marriage as compensation for a wrong done by a male family member.

Zia's Islamization also made life much harder for religious minorities. He reinstated separate electorates – further marginalizing minorities from political participation – and wrote blasphemy laws into Pakistan's legal code, the latter of which have stayed in place to this day. Under the laws, anything construed as insulting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) or desecrating the Quran is punishable by death, and an individual can be imprisoned simply on the basis of accusation – without investigation. False accusations are easily wielded as revenge against one's enemy or in mere neighborhood disputes. Minorities especially continue to suffer notable discrimination through the abuse of this law.

Zia also revamped and censored government textbooks to purge them of any un-Islamic content, exacerbating religious intolerance and stigmatizing of minorities. And though Sharia courts were established, Zia made sure these courts could not challenge military law; the power of the military trumped Islamic law. Later, in 1985, Zia further ensured his power by amending the constitution to give the president power to dissolve governments. Thousands of government jobs were given to activists who supported him in the Jamaat-e-Islami party, many of whom remain in those positions today – thus ensuring the perpetuation of Hudood laws long after Zia's reign.

The Zakat tax was introduced in 1980, which demanded 2.5 percent of one's total savings to be collected on the first day of Ramadan. Zia insisted that the Quran and Sunnah include the tax as one of the pillars of Islam; the measure inflamed tensions between Shiites and Sunnis, as Shiites believe the tax is voluntary and therefore the government has no right to force collection. The Shiite-Sunni conflict is rooted in a dispute over the rightful successor of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), but the Zakat tax stirred up their differences and acted as a catalyst for the growth of radical sectarian groups and violence between them. By the late 1980s, both Shiites and Sunnis had well-armed and violent sectarian groups.

Sectarianism and its religious intolerance has made Pakistan a breeding ground for instability, violence and discrimination. Though extremists and fundamentalists occupy the headlines, these radical Islamic parties do not represent the typical Pakistani. Muslims make up about 95 percent of Pakistan's religious landscape – 20 percent Shiite and 75 percent Sunni. Most Pakistanis, about 60 percent, are Barelvis Sunnis, the more moderate and tolerant sect. The other 15 percent belong to the Deobandi sect; Deobandi *talibs* (religious students) provide the backbone of the Taliban. The remaining 5 percent of the population is comprised of Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis. Punjab, the most populous and prosperous of Pakistan's four provinces, is home to 90 percent of Pakistan's Christian population, making it an epicenter of minority discrimination and blasphemy accusations.

Extremism also continues to be fueled by poverty. Pakistan's suffering economy makes it difficult to combat militants on the government level, but on the civilian level it makes something as simple as paying school fees a challenge. But madrassas – Islamic schools, many of which cultivate young militants – offer free education, and usually room and board, as well as the promise of financial compensation and support for a martyr's family, making madrassa education a viable option. Girls' education suffers especially in rural areas, where girls' schools are attacked by militants. Poverty and illiteracy only increase women's victimization under Islamic law. In more urban areas female literacy hovers around 50 percent (while for the general population it is about 55

percent). But in most of Pakistan, and especially rural areas like the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), female literacy rates are in the low 30s.

In addition to stirring up sectarianism, the Zakat tax also had a negative effect on the economy. Because rupees were the only taxable currency, Zakat encouraged “dollarization” or the transfer of savings to foreign currency. Dollarization paired with Zia’s inflated defense budget launched Pakistan into the economic crisis that it still struggles with today. In the 1950s and 1960s, 80 percent of foreign aid was used for development purposes. But in the 1980s and 1990s, the percentages reversed – 80 percent of foreign aid was funneled into defense and other non-development expenses, leaving only 20 percent for development. Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan’s war also burdened the economy with a flood of refugees, increased heroin addictions and led to the abandonment by the United States after its anti-Soviet mission had been accomplished.

Zia’s regime ended when he died in an airplane crash in 1988, and a third period of democracy asserted itself until 1999. For 11 years the government went back and forth – administrations starting and halting – between two political leaders: Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. Their political rivalry was rooted in a few key differences. Bhutto, whose family owned a large estate, came from the traditional feudal system. Sharif, however, was industrially inclined – his family owned the largest industry in Pakistan. They also had different perspectives and approaches to religion and the military. Because of her father’s execution, Bhutto was naturally wary of the army; but Sharif was more familiar and comfortable with the military, as he had been a chief minister for Gen. Zia. Bhutto’s governments were more secular while Sharif tended to play more to the religious groups – he incorporated Sharia law into the legal code in 1991, and in 1992 tried unsuccessfully to add a religious column to the national identity card.

But both ruled under difficult conditions, facing a military that balked under civilian, democratic rule after so many years of Zia-approved power. During the Bhutto-Sharif government dance of the ‘90s, various presidents (who oversee the military) employed Zia’s Eighth Amendment to dissolve two of Bhutto’s governments and one of Sharif’s. Just as strong feudal traditions tend to wield judicial power over the comparatively weak state in rural areas, the justice system proved weak against military muscle and did not uphold civil law. Democracy repeatedly crumbled under the power of the army.

When Benazir Bhutto won the 1988 election, she became the first female prime minister not only of Pakistan, but of any modern Islamic state. Her administration was dismissed by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan for the first time in 1990 under charges of corruption. Nawaz Sharif took over for two years but then resigned under military pressure in 1993. Bhutto was re-elected and held power for three years before again being dismissed for alleged corruption and placed under house arrest. Sharif returned as prime minister, and in 1999 Bhutto and her husband were convicted of taking kickbacks while in office – she denied the charges and remained out of the country in self-exile.

Just after the Kargil conflict (a massively flawed military insurgency in Kashmir) in 1999, Sharif, who had lost much of his public support, was removed by Gen. Pervez Musharraf in a military coup. In 2000, Musharraf attempted a slight reform to the blasphemy law, not addressing the punishment but proposing the requirement of investigation before arrest (rather than just an

accusation). He backed down quickly, however, when religious scholars, or *ulemas*, opposed it. But in January 2002, Musharraf did support the rights of religious minorities when he banned the separate electorate system established by Zia.

Following Sept. 11, 2001, Gen. Musharraf allied Pakistan with the United States' "war on terror," which required he turn against the Taliban and al-Qaida. But he did so tenuously, trying both to satisfy the United States and not to incur the complete wrath of militant groups. Ending sectarian violence was one of Musharraf's missions even before partnering with the United States. In August 2001, he had begun a steady anti-extremism project, banning the militant groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammed (SMP), and placing Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) and Tehrik-e-Jafria (TJP) on a terrorist list. After 9/11, because he had to back U.S. policy, Musharraf came down on two more Kashmir groups because of the Mujahedeen training link between Taliban and Kashmir fighters in the 1980s. He later banned the remaining major sectarian groups, the Sunni organization SSP, and the Shiite group TJP.

Musharraf's partnership with the U.S. campaign stirred up intense anti-American sentiment, much of which increased discrimination against Christian minorities, as they are often associated with and assumed to be sympathetic to U.S. policy. Violence against religious minorities has become progressively worse in recent months as extremist groups grow larger and more brazen in their attacks. Cases against Christians involving the discriminatory blasphemy law are becoming more and more common. The weight of discrimination forces many minorities (ethnic and religious), who are able, to leave Pakistan in hopes of greater freedom and security.

In the spring of 2007, Musharraf removed Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry from the Supreme Court. Musharraf's grasp for power resulted in the United States insisting he attempt to share power with then-exiled Benazir Bhutto. They were not able to come to an agreement. In November, afraid the courts – and especially a reinstated Chaudhry – were about to remove him from his military post, Musharraf declared emergency martial law. He dismantled the judiciary system, deposing 60 judges (including Chaudhry for the second time) and arresting hundreds of lawyers. But by the end of the month he resigned from his military power so he could run in the upcoming parliamentary elections against both Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

On December 27, Benazir Bhutto was assassinated at an election rally. In the aftermath, her political party, the PPP, won the 2008 parliamentary elections, making her widower Asif Ali Zardari the new president.

Since Musharraf's exit from government, the Taliban and other militant Islamists have been resurfacing and spreading their control across Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan, throughout the NWFP and further into the heart of the country. In February 2009, President Zardari attempted to broker a ceasefire with the Taliban by reinstating Sharia law throughout the region. But militants continued to attack government forces and overstep the bounds of the agreement, so in May the military launched a campaign to force the Taliban out of Pakistan. The conflict created the largest mass movement of people since the migration during partition – 1.3 million Pakistanis became refugees and internally displaced persons. In August the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in an airstrike, and the militants, many who were trained in the 1980s during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, have returned to their haven in Waziristan, the mountainous region of NWFP bordering Afghanistan.

But the threat of Talibanization persists in Pakistan. A new Taliban made up mostly of younger radicals is focusing on south and central Pakistan, and because of ties with other terrorist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Toiba, they have access to established madrassas and other lines of recruitment. Terrorist bombings continue to disrupt and destabilize the lives of innocent civilians as militants retaliate against the military campaign.

The United States has promised to give Pakistan \$1.5 billion in non-military aid per year for the next five years – but only if terrorist groups are no longer supported and the military refrains from disturbing civilian politics. The aid would be a boost to Pakistan's economy, which has been surviving on an \$11.3 billion International Monetary Fund loan, but the stipulations make many – the military most of all – wary of U.S. influence over the country. Pakistan's relationship to the United States continues to draw opposition from Pakistanis, from anti-American fundamentalists to average civilians tired of losing homes and relatives to U.S. drone attacks meant to target wanted militants. At the same time a renewed wave of internal attacks from Taliban and al-Qaida-related militant groups has swept across Pakistan, aimed primarily at Pakistan's own security forces but endangering and destabilizing the lives of civilians as well.

Perhaps more vital than the resolution of international tensions is the answering of those central *intra*-national questions that continue to evade agreement between vying philosophies. Will Pakistan be a secular or religious state? And who will be stronger – state or feudal systems, civil or military rule, extreme or moderate ideologies? The answers to these questions have serious impacts on the everyday liberties of Pakistanis – especially the marginalized.



Map No. 4181 Rev. 1 UNITED NATIONS January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section

INTEGRATED TIMELINE

Political Developments in Pakistan and *Personal History of Rubina Feroze Bhatti*

- 1906** The Muslim League is founded in India to advocate for Indian Muslim separatism.
- 1940** The Muslim League supports the formation of a separate nation for India's Muslims.
- 1947** India's partition creates an independent East and West Pakistan; millions of people become homeless and hundreds of thousands die in the migration. The first war over the controversial state of Kashmir begins.
- 1948** Pakistan's founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, dies.
- 1951** Liaquat Ali Khan, Jinnah's successor, is assassinated.
- 1952** East Pakistani language riots erupt when Bengalis demand recognition of Bangla as an official language alongside Urdu.
- 1956** Pakistan's first constitution is created, declaring Pakistan an Islamic republic.
- 1958** Gen. Ayub Khan takes over in Pakistan's first military coup.
- 1965** The second war with India over Kashmir begins.
- 1969** Gen. Ayub Khan resigns and Gen. Yayja Khan takes power.
- Rubina Feroze Bhatti is born in the Sargodha district of Punjab province.***
- 1970** The first national elections in East and West Pakistan take place.
- 1971** East Pakistan becomes independent Bangladesh after a two-week civil war with West Pakistan. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto becomes president of Pakistan.
- 1972** Bhutto and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sign the Simla accord, a peace agreement that releases over 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of the East Pakistan war and establishes a new, temporary cease-fire line in the Kashmir conflict. Bhutto enlists scientists to begin building a nuclear bomb.
- 1973** Bhutto becomes prime minister and oversees the passage of a new constitution.
- 1974** ***Kamran Bhatti, Rubina's only brother, is born.***
- India's first nuclear test takes place.

- 1976** *Subina Feroze Bhatti, Rubina's younger sister, is born.*
- 1977** Gen. Zia ul Haq takes over in a military coup during the protested re-election of Bhutto.
- 1978** Zia becomes president.
- 1979** Zulfikar Ali Bhutto is executed by hanging after being charged with murder. Afghanistan is invaded by the Soviets. Zia begins a process of Islamization, including the creation of the Hudood Ordinances, a set of laws particularly focused against women and minorities.
- 1980** The United States gives military assistance to Pakistan, offering itself as an ally during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Zia attempts to increase the Zakat tax, sparking renewed tensions and violence between Shiite and Sunni Muslims; extremist groups start to organize.
- 1981** The Women's Action Forum is formed as an advocacy group for women's rights after Islamic law is introduced into the penal code.
- 1985** With the Eighth Amendment, or constitutional clause 52b, Zia amends the constitution to increase presidential power, adding the ability to dissolve governments. Zia introduces separate electorates for minorities (i.e., Muslims only vote for Muslims, Christians for Christians, etc.)
- 1988** Zia dies in an airplane crash. Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party is elected to government. Oppressive policies in Kashmir motivate the Kashmiri Muslims' struggle for autonomy, marking the beginning of the Kashmir insurgency. The Soviets leave Afghanistan.
- 1989** *After receiving a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Punjab, Rubina takes her first job as a science teacher at a Catholic high school in Sargodha.*
- 1990** Benazir Bhutto's government is halted after the military intervenes with charges of corruption and incompetence. Nawaz Sharif takes power for the first time.
- 1991** *Rubina moves from Sargodha to Multan to begin her master's degree in Chemistry.*
- Sharif incorporates Sharia law into the legal code.
- 1991 – 1994** *Rubina leads a campaign against the blasphemy law and frees her uncle – who was accused under the law – from prison.*

- 1992 ***Rubina, in collaboration with other civil society groups, organizes a successful campaign against the inclusion of the religious column on national identity cards.***
- 1993 ***Rubina completes her M.S. in Chemistry from Baha-ud-Din Zakriya University.***
Prime Minister Sharif and President Khan both resign under military pressure.
- 1994 ***Rubina completes her one-year diploma in Resource Development from South Asia Partnership – Pakistan.***
Benazir Bhutto's second government begins
- 1995 ***Rubina works with the Pattan Development Organization – Pakistan on its women's program in riverine communities.***
- 1996 Benazir Bhutto's second government is dismissed by the president, Farooq Leghari. The Taliban take power in Afghanistan.
February – Rubina is appointed as a chemistry lecturer at the Government Girls College in Sargodha.
July – Rubina's mother passes away.
- 1997 Nawaz Sharif's second government begins.
- 1998 India and Pakistan conduct nuclear testing.
December – Rubina helps form Taangh Wasaib Organization for peacebuilding and interfaith harmony.
- 1999 Known as the Kargil conflict, Pakistan's army attempts to cross the Kashmir border, resulting in more than 1,000 dead on both sides. Gen. Pervez Musharraf's coup ousts Sharif.
- 2000 ***Rubina, along with the Justice and Peace Commission of Pakistan, organizes a boycott of local elections in protest of the separate electorate system; Musharraf reinstates joint electorates before the 2002 elections.***
Musharraf attempts to reform the blasphemy law, requiring an official investigation of the accusation before arrest, but backs off when confronted by *Ulema* (religious scholar) opposition.
- 2001 ***April – Rubina attends a world conference against racism and network meetings for nongovernmental organizations, in Nepal.***

August – Musharraf bans the militant groups Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammed Pakistan (SMP).

Musharraf begins disassociating with the Taliban when Pakistan signs on as an ally of the U.S.'s post-9/11 “war on terror.”

2002 *Rubina runs for the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) women’s reserve seat in the Punjab provincial assembly. The PPP does not win the parliamentary majority, so most of the reserve seats go to another party.*

January – Musharraf bans two of the most prominent militant organizations: Jaish e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba (the latter notorious for acid attacks on Kashmiri women). He also bans the two largest remaining sectarian groups, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, who in 1985 demanded Shiites be deemed non-Muslims) and Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP). Musharraf “wins” a referendum that awards him five more years in power.

December – Rubina travels to Thailand to attend the Asian Civil Society Forum and participate in a U.N. mechanism training workshop.

2003 *Rubina begins media advocacy focused against harmful anti-woman traditions like honor killings and wan’ni (the trading of female family members as conflict compensation).*

April – Rubina travels to Canada to give a presentation on “Leadership and Participation: Role of Women Participants in Social Communication” at the Social Change Forum.

2004 *January – Rubina presents on “South Asian Women in Politics” at the World Social Forum in India.*

June – Rubina gives a presentation on women and politics in Bangladesh.

2005 *Rubina participates in a meeting of Asian justice and peace workers, held in Islamabad, Pakistan.*

February – Rubina travels to the United States for three weeks as a participant in the State Department’s International Visitors Program, focused on volunteerism and community service.

June – Rubina is one of the 1,000 women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

September – Rubina goes to Ireland to study at the Kimmage Development Studies Centre (KDSC) in Dublin and meets Nobel Prize laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire. She is later granted the “Student of the Year 2006” award by the Higher Education and Training Award Council of Ireland.

2007 February – Sixty-eight people die, mostly Pakistanis, when a train from New Delhi to Lahore is bombed and burned out.

July – A new wave of militancy begins after an eruption of violence between Islamic militants and the Pakistani government at the Red Mosque in Islamabad.

August – Rubina travels to Afghanistan to give a presentation in a gender consultation meeting.

September – Rubina attends financial management trainings in Nepal.

November – Fearful that the Supreme Court is about to deem his rule illegitimate, Musharraf declares martial law, deposes Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry for the second time, removes 60 other judges and arrests thousands of lawyers. The arrests continue through February and stoke the lawyers' movement, which advocates for an independent judiciary.

December – Benazir Bhutto is assassinated in a street rally in Rawalpindi just prior to elections.

2008 ***May – Rubina travels to Germany for lobbying and advocacy meetings with German parliamentarians on gender issues; the parliamentarians later send a delegation to Pakistan.***

June – Rubina attends the U.N. Advocacy Session in Thailand.

July – Rubina travels to Nepal for a month-long course on feminist capacity building.

August – Musharraf resigns after impeachment charges.

September – Bhutto's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, is elected president.

November – Terrorist attacks in Mumbai are carried out by the accused militant group Lashkar-e-Toiba, killing 163 people.

Rubina completes her master's degree in Development Studies from KDSC in Dublin.

December – Rubina travels to Hong Kong to present on gender issues.

2009 February – Zardari reinstates Sharia law in the Swat Valley to appease the Taliban and attempt to wage a cease-fire.

April – The Swat agreement fails and the military launches a campaign in May to force the Taliban out of Pakistan, creating the largest mass movement of people since partition – 1.3 million refugees.

July – Rubina travels to Indonesia to participate in an international conference (organized by the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs – Switzerland) on sustainable human development.

August – Baitullah Mehsud, leader of the Pakistani Taliban, and Ali Sher Hyderi, head of the largest Sunni extremist group, SSP, are both killed, separately.

September – Rubina travels to San Diego, Calif., for two months as a participant in the Women PeaceMakers Program at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice.

NARRATIVE STORIES OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF RUBINA FEROZE BHATTI

First Steps

A mosaic of footprints narrated the dusty road through the Pakistani village outside of Sargodha City. Lazy, wandering footprints of those with nowhere particular to go. Sharp, purposeful prints of those hurrying to work for their landlord. Others were heavy, laden down with melons, pumpkins or gourds to sell along the street to bustling throngs of promising morning customers. Goat, sheep and cow prints muddied the gutters at the edge of the golden dust, creating a darker ribbon of brown before the same dusty hue repeated itself up the walls of the mud homes lining the road.

The night breezes would blow through the orange trees and settle the dust, erasing the stories of the day. But each morning one pattern – baby prints followed by a line of larger prints – would recreate itself in the road. It was a curious single-file line, led by three-inch shoes.

Every morning Inyat Begum walked her schoolgirls to the village school. The swath of colorful cloth draped over her head and around her shoulders fluttered in the early morning breeze, appearing more like a flag of nobility than an everyday *chador*. As a teacher, she was highly regarded in Pakistani society, a lady commanding respect. Even her name, Begum, was more than a name. She'd given herself the surname, which meant madam or lady of respect, instead of taking her husband's family name. And so the madam of the community navigated the daily route through the village, her students and oldest daughter, Nabila, following obediently. Before she was old enough to walk, Nabila never minded riding in the arms of one of the schoolgirls. But Inyat's youngest daughter minded – and not only did she insist she walk on her own two feet, she wanted those feet to lead the way.

“Ruby, you must walk faster,” Inyat would try the first time. It was the same production every morning. What was once a 10-minute walk to school had never been the same since her little one had learned to walk. One foot after the other. Three inches by three inches. The minutes slipping away quicker than the line was moving.

“Ruby, walk quickly or come to my arms. We will be late if you don't.”

But Rubina said nothing. She only turned her head slightly, just enough for her mother to catch the glimmer of insistence in her dark, dancing eyes. Mother's eyes held the glance of daughter's for a moment and read what was written there: familiar determination. She knew it because it was her own. And she knew her Ruby would need it in a culture that didn't like its women to walk alone, much less lead the way.

Here on the morning street was a slice of society. Besides Inyat and her parade of schoolgirls, the traffic consisted mostly of men. Men drinking tea from roadside vendors, men exchanging the news of the day, men heading to the landlord's orchards. Rubina would watch this world from her front-of-the-line view.

Where are all the ladies?, Rubina would wonder. Other than harmless grandmoms limping along to deliver a family message and a handful of farming or laboring women fetching water, her mother was one of the few without a male companion. Wives followed closely behind their husbands, retaining their honor by stepping into footsteps already made for them.

The shock of black hair, cut short and simple, just bobbed steadily on ahead while the schoolgirls snickered and shuffled their restless feet, anxious to be on time. But none dared to scold their beloved teacher's daughter.

"If you want to walk, that's fine," Inyat told her in her strictest teacher voice. "But let the other girls go ahead so they won't be late."

"*Ammi Jee*,⁶ no. I don't want any of the girls to walk in front of me."

Inyat felt a bit more patient this particular morning, and something in her heart told her not to squelch what she saw blooming before her: a little 3-year-old unknowingly defying the backward village culture. Her little Ruby refused to be someone else's burden to carry – and she demanded the right to move at her will.

Precious One

Ruby and Nabila had accompanied their mother to school since they were babies. Though she lived in the same house, their grandmother, *Dadi Jee*,⁷ refused to help care for her granddaughters – because they were not grandsons. But Dadi Jee was not a villain, merely a product of the feudalism and patriarchy that surrounded her.

"Curses, just curses," the old woman mumbled as she shuffled past the two sleeping baby girls. She spent her days walking aimlessly around the joint home of her two sons, one whose wife had given Dadi Jee two grandsons, and the other whose wife was proving to be a curse herself, only capable of bearing girls.

Nabila had been a mild disappointment for Dadi Jee, whose prayers for a boy began the day Inyat's belly showed the first promising bulge of life. Dadi Jee accepted the unfortunate birth and told herself the next baby would bring honor to the family. The glow of pregnancy appeared on Inyat's face soon again, and the family began to hint and hope. Surely she could not have two girls in a row.

So when Inyat brought a second girl into the family two years later, Dadi Jee had nothing to say. Inyat mustered her strength to stand in the doorway of the bedroom she'd just given birth in, cuddling her hour-old baby to her chest. An exhausted village midwife still sat in the dust tidying up the bed. Just loud enough for Inyat to hear, but not directly to her, Dadi Jee whispered to her prized daughter-in-law, bearer of boy children, "I should not have married Feroze with this woman. She has delivered another burden for our family."

But Inyat stood proud and firm, her face alight with the afterglow of birth. She knew this would be the greeting, and she also knew what she would name her new baby. Her daughter would not grow up believing she was a curse.

“Meet Ruby,” she said to her in-laws. And then softly, just to the face looking up at her, she added, “my most precious one.” Ruby would only become Rubina a few years later, when her first-grade teacher officially registered her name as Rubina. But she would always be her mother’s most precious Ruby.

Not only did Ruby’s grandmom say nothing at their first meeting, but she continued to deny the two girls’ existence. If they were crying in the middle of the mud house, in the shared, open-air communal area, Dadi Jee ignored them. She’d just circle their bed muttering, “Who knows what burden these girls will be to the family when they grow up?” But Dadi Jee had more than enough love and time for her beloved grandsons. She doted. She cooed.

When it was time for Inyat to go back to her teaching job, which was a vital contribution to the family’s survival, Dadi Jee still had no love or time for Ruby. She’d done the same with Nabila. So Ruby and Nabila both went to school with mother. It was the only way Inyat could keep her job. But when she began to feel the dizziness and fatigue of a third child on its way, teaching with two little ones in tow became impossible.

So against all her motherly instincts, Inyat was forced to admit 8-month-old Ruby to the childcare nursery at Fatima Hospital, all the way in Sargodha. Her tears fell the whole drive into the city and only increased as she handed her Ruby over to the daily care of babysitters and nurses. Strangers. She was paying the hospital her entire salary; all that was being saved was her job. Later in her life, when Rubina would ask her mother why she had left her in the hospital, why her and not Nabila, she would assure her, “Your face was always in front of my eyes.” She didn’t tell Rubina of all the sleepless nights of that awful month, madly wondering who was taking care of her precious one, if she was being fed at the right time, if she’d remember her when she returned home.

After a month of tear-stained cheeks and a broken heart, Inyat couldn’t stand it any more. She took her brother Bashir with her to visit Ruby at the hospital, and when Ruby saw them she called out “*Mamu!*”⁸ to Bashir. Overcome by emotion, he said to his sister, “She knows me! Ruby recognizes her dear ones. We cannot leave her here alone.” They decided then and there that Javaid, their youngest brother who was just 15 years old, would help with Ruby until she was old enough to accompany Inyat to school.

Ruby left the nursery that afternoon, and though she returned to the unchanged bitterness of Dadi Jee, she was her mother’s precious one. And, to her father, she was God’s will.

Feroze was not like most Pakistani men. He was a progressive, open-minded man, a dreaming storyteller and a mathematician who would later revel in teaching his girls their numbers. When murmurs of curses or burdens flit through the air, he would whisper in her ear above the poisonous words. “It is God’s will that you are a girl, my Ruby.”

Parthaal the Brave

“Oh, *Abba Jee*,⁹ when will you tell us what’s in that book?”

Rubina accosted her father the moment he returned from the village’s small library, hopping up to peek at the new treasures tucked under his arm. He was a lover of books, and he’d created a small library of their very own in the house. He always had the same answer for Rubina: in the evening. Even more than books, he loved the craft of a well-told story, and he needed time to read the new stories to himself so he could properly elaborate, add his own artistic flare.

Feroze, or *Abba Jee* to his children, was a teacher just like his wife. But she was the commanding one. She made sure her daughters knew the art of keeping a home – the delicate skill of embroidery, kneading flour for chappati and boiling water for chai – but she also fiercely protected their studying time. *Ammi Jee*’s was the strict voice of reason. She made the decisions, like which clothes the children would and would not wear, and which shoes said what about their family’s social status. His was the voice of wonder that dipped and rose as a story came to its crescendo, lilted through magical woods on the wings of fairies and professed historical tales of Indian kings and queens. *Ammi Jee* was Rubina’s teacher. *Abba Jee* was her friend, the one that let her run to the market instead of doing boring, ladylike chores with *Nabila*; the one that took his daughters to see the village’s first public telephone when it was installed at the bank, and let them dial the number of their uncle in *Faisalabad*.

Story time was sacred space. Every night, like a holy ceremony, *Abba Jee* gathered his two oldest daughters, opening up their minds to worlds beyond, captivating their young hearts with possibilities. In the winter, stories were always told on her father’s bed, atop the big quilt, the story-telling quilt. Warm nights would beckon them up to the rooftops to sit beneath the stars and summer-sweet air. The only variable was the story.

Even though he’d returned that day with a teetering stack of untold tales and unheard-of lands, Rubina still asked for the one she’d heard dozens of times before. All of *Abba Jee*’s stories had some moral lesson – helping the poor, speaking the truth, finishing one’s work – but none inspired Rubina like this one.

“Tell us again the story of *Parthaal*, *Abba Jee*,” Rubina pleaded. *Parthaal* was like no other female character Rubina and *Nabila* had ever encountered. She was strong and bold. She shot bows and arrows. She protected her country against invaders.

“*Parthaal* would ride swiftly through the countryside on her horse, her long hair flowing down her back,” her father began the old historical tale, his familiar opening words stirring up the girls’ fascination. He paused, as he always did, to tousle their own black locks.

Rubina waited expectantly for her favorite scene. It was almost time. *Parthaal* had just decided to disguise herself as a man so she could fight alongside them for the good of her country.

“The soldiers are fighting valiantly, but then through the dust, the invaders let out their secret weapon ...” *Abba Jee*’s voice slowed with dramatics. He knew it was Rubina’s favorite part.

Nabila looked up at his twinkling eyes. Rubina closed hers and imagined herself the courageous Parthaal.

Out of the dust tramps a huge elephant, colorfully decorated in battle paint. The brave prince steps forward and pulls the arrow deep into the bow. But the elephant swoops the poor prince up into his trunk, rolling it up toward his mouth. All the soldiers freeze, horrified at their fearless leader's imminent death. None dare to shoot an arrow, lest they miss the elephant and wound their beloved prince. But no one sees Parthaal, crouching at the edge of the clearing, sneaking silently closer. Suddenly, a red arrow pierces the thick, dusty air and flies directly into the elephant's eye. The prince falls to the ground and runs free from the collapsing elephant.

Rubina's arms fell back in her lap as she finished the shot.

"Whose arrow was that? Who has a red arrow? Ours are all black!" exclaimed Abba Jee in his shocked soldier voice.

"Parthaal's, it was Parthaal's!" shouted the girls in unison.

"Yes, it was the arrow of Parthaal," Abba Jee affirmed routinely. But he had a little extra moral flare to add that night. "The only one certain of her aim. Parthaal's red arrow was different than all the rest. And she was the one who rescued her country." He put one big hand on Rubina's head and the other on Nabila's. He hoped the repetition was sinking into his daughter's souls. *You can be a different kind of girl.*

The Spark

Nabila knew the whole story before Rubina told her. It had whipped through the classrooms of St. Joseph's Primary School, 36 South Branch, Sargodha, on an energized wave of incredulity. *Did you hear about Rubina? Can you believe she stood up to that Patras? He even cried to the teacher!*

Rubina, still filled with the adrenaline of her confrontation with Patras, stirred up the dust with her lively pace toward home. Nabila was skipping every few steps to keep up and trying to warn her of what would await her at home. She worried their mother had already heard and would be standing in the doorway with that dreaded look of disappointment – far worse than anger.

"You shouldn't have done that," Nabila said, not with a tone of older sister snobbery, but just her usual protective concern. It was as if an invisible thread was strung through the universe, connecting the two sisters' hearts. Nabila was always thinking of her little sister. Every time they enjoyed a frozen *kulfi*¹⁰ treat, they laughed over the memory of 4-year-old Nabila trying to bring Rubina a kulfi all the way back from Rawalpindi. She'd traveled there with Abba Jee, and on the way home insisted he buy two kulfis instead of one. When the long bus ride melted the second one in her lap and he asked why she hadn't eaten it, she replied simply: "Abba Jee, this one's for Ruby."

Rubina slowed down to wait for Nabila. She didn't agree. Qamar-ul-Nisa needed her to do what she'd done. She wasn't sorry that Patras had cried. He had no right to treat Qamar – or any girl – that way. Rubina wanted to make sure he knew that.

She'd been standing behind Patras at the water tap when it happened. Qamar, a gentle, soft-spoken girl, was next in line to wash off her wooden slate (*takhti*) before adding a new layer of mud to dry in the sun during the lunch break. Just as she stepped forward Patras had shoved her out of the way, shouting forcefully for her to go to the back of the line. "You're just a dull, foolish girl," he'd said. Qamar ran crying and shaken to the end of the line, and something ignited inside Rubina.

"It is not your turn, Patras."

He turned around, full of fresh bravado, unafraid of another silly girl.

"There are no rules for me," he said. "Boys will wash their takhti first."

Their classmates were pleased with the bit of schoolyard drama unfolding. They waited anxiously to see what Rubina would say. What would Patras do to a girl who challenged him?

"Do you think you can insult girls like this?" she asked, stepping closer.

"Yes, I will insult."

"You *will* insult?" Rubina asked one more time. They were equally determined not to step down, but Patras had an entire social structure behind him. He deserved to go before a girl. He could say whatever he wanted to a girl.

"Yes. I will insult."

The next thing she knew her pen was clenched in her fist and jabbing into his fleshy arm. His eyes grew huge with shock. They immediately filled with tears and he ran off to tell the nun. But when she heard the whole story, she simply gave them both a stern, short warning.

Inyat *was* waiting for Rubina. She had already heard a version of the story from Patras' mother – they lived right next door.

"Why did you do that, Rubina? You are not the *namberdar*¹¹ of this village. It is not your job to sort out every problem. I don't want to hear about this again."

Sharing her sister's warmth, Rubina lay in bed and stared at the ceiling, wide awake. She kept thinking about the day. She knew her mother wanted her to concentrate on school when she was at school, but she hadn't been able to ignore the strange burning she'd felt that day.

"I'll do it again, Nabila," she whispered in the dark.

Nabila clasped her hand, trying to calm the fire she heard in Rubina's voice.

Garden Games

Little beads of water still clung to Rubina's skin in the late afternoon sun. The canal that divided her house from the landlord's fields was the perfect antidote to a hot summer day. She sat with her friends under the shade of the orange groves, drying off and waiting for the landlord's daughter to bring the feast of fresh fruits. They were allowed to pick and eat all the fruit they wanted, but it was more fun this way.

"Father, bring us our favorite fruits from your garden!" Rubina called out. Because fathers were the providers, the ones who put food in the mouths of the small, the landlord's daughter transformed herself to deliver the treats. She would wrap her scarf up on her head in a turban and distribute oranges – sometimes even melons – to her hungry offspring.

The sweet citrus scent wafted into Rubina's window most of the year. Like all of her neighbors, the landlord and his family were Muslim. So were the neighbors to the right. There were many other Christian families in the village, but Rubina's was the only Christian home in her neighborhood and all of her close friends were Muslim. Even at St. Joseph's, the Catholic missionary school, Rubina's best friend was Lubna, the only Muslim in her class. But it was no accident that Rubina befriended Lubna.

Interfaith harmony was in Rubina's blood long before she knew the phrase. It was simply a way of life. A sort of familial fabric, a weaving of selected stories, patterned by the most important threads. Integration was one of her mother's favorite threads in this fabric. Her children would not be isolated. She taught them to befriend everyone, rich or poor, Muslim or Christian. Inyat filled their home with the entire social stratum of the village, tutoring any child free of charge – the son of a poor Christian or the daughter of a rich Muslim landlord.

Inyat had grown up poor, the daughter of landless farmers. When she was just a schoolgirl, her father went blind and her mother contracted tuberculosis. Inyat stopped going to school as life had delivered responsibility early: the care of six little brothers and the management of a home. But, as she liked to tell, she was saved by her best friend, a Muslim girl from a landlord's family. Year after year, Noor Safia supported her and encouraged her to study. "I hadn't the money or the time," Inyat would tell her children. "So Noor brought me books and stationery." After her own classes, she'd come and teach the lessons to Inyat. And when all the day's domesticities were taken care of, Inyat studied by the light of the moon – all the way through standard schooling and on to teaching courses and her first government teaching job.

So the scene in the garden reflected the social harmony Rubina had been raised to expect. If Rubina stood out among her friends, it was not because she went to mass instead of mosque. It was because she was the instigator of fun. When she would return to school after staying home sick, her friends would greet her with glee. "Why weren't you here yesterday, Rubina?" they'd ask. "We didn't know what to play without you here."

A new game took form in their private garden theater. In their own sort of social analysis, they reenacted the dramas of their village. The central character would be the miscreant, a drunkard, a husband who beat his wife, or perhaps a market thief. "I don't want you going near that street," Inyat would tell Rubina. "It's crawling with the darkness of the village." They had decided they

would practice identifying the bad characters of the village and punishing them in the courtroom of the orange grove. This would be the afternoon's activity, Rubina decided. *Chupan chupai* had lost its luster; all the good hiding spots had been seeked, and the landlord had just pruned all the perfect hiding foliage.

It was time for the distribution of roles. Before Rubina could begin casting characters, Nasir, a neighbor boy with an inflated ego, announced matter-of-factly that he would play the complainant. Rubina looked with surprise at his boyish chest puffed up in confidence and then at the quiet girls hanging back behind him.

"No, the girls will choose the complainant. If they choose you, then fine. But it is their decision. Girls?"

A hurried consultation produced their choice. "We choose Razia!" they crowed.

"You may accompany the complainant," Rubina conceded to a deflated Nasir. "Razia, now you must decide what type of culprit we will judge today."

Razia pondered for a moment and then revealed the afternoon case against a dishonest laborer – one who slept in the shade when the landlord wasn't watching and ate more oranges than he picked. Tariq, a small neighbor boy who loved to tag along, would play the laborer. But Razia and Nasir did not take their complaint to the police or to the court. In their world of childhood and village life, such institutions of justice did not yet exist. Instead Tariq was led to the clinic of wise Doctor Rubina, who administered punishments rather than prescriptions. Rubina always played the doctor; it was uncontested. She was the decision maker, and hers were always the most entertaining punishments. Sometimes the defendant would receive an injection that covered his skin in terrible scabs. A very serious criminal would be given a disease matching the severity of the offense. Lighter misdemeanors might receive an injection that made the offender laugh uncontrollably or feel as if he or she were always being tickled.

"Well, well, what will we do with you?" Rubina asked Tariq, stroking her chin. "Perhaps since you like to sleep when you should be working, I shall inject you with the never-sleeping shot."

"It must be worse!" shouted the complainant. "Make it worse!"

"Worse? Well why don't we add just one more injection. For the other offense. Because you are always eating, I will make it so your mouth is always open. Is it good?"

"No! Kill him, kill him!" chanted the children in unison. They always tried to get Rubina to assign more severe punishments, but she never agreed.

"We will not kill him. That is not an option," Rubina replied. She could hear her mother quoting the Bible: *Do not kill, for life is given to all by God, and that which God has given, let no one take away.* "If you cannot agree on a punishment, he will not be punished."

"No, no, he can't be freed! We will agree to whatever you say, doctor."

So in the garden of innocence, justice was distributed with mercy. A human life had been protected. But far from the orange groves that housed Rubina's imagination and carefree afternoons of play, protests had been erupting in the streets of Pakistan's major cities. In Lahore, in Karachi, in Islamabad, anti-government protesters were demanding a new polling of the recent re-election of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. It was 1977 and Bhutto had just won re-election, but by a suspiciously high margin. The demonstrations were getting increasingly intense, and Bhutto had called in the army for support.

After one such episode of the merciful doctor, Rubina and Nabila stepped gingerly into their front door, hoping to sneak past their mother's sharp eye for dirt. She'd send them directly to bathe.

But Inyat and Feroze, huddled together on the *charpai*,¹² didn't notice the girls. They were listening intently to the radio, their faces grave. Instead of arresting the protesters, the army, led by Gen. Zia ul Haq, had arrested Bhutto. "What will be the future of Pakistan?" she heard her father's voice rasp. He sounded worried. Rubina's joyful, dreaming father sounded very worried.

The City of Eagles

Rubina missed the gardens of oranges. Yes, Sargodha was known as the City of Oranges – for its surrounding villages' lovely aroma – but Rubina couldn't smell the landlord's sweet groves from here. The fruit-scented air that lulled her to sleep had been replaced by exhaust, and the quiet harmonium by city noise. Closer neighbors, sputtering cars, coughing buses. And above them all was the crashing cymbal of the urban symphony: the airplanes and helicopters. In a somewhat ironic juxtaposition, Sargodha also proudly proclaimed itself the City of Eagles for its beloved air force base. Though they'd been in their new home for a few weeks, the rumbling clouds still reverberated in Rubina's memory and brought one word to mind. War.

She remembered the two-week war over East Pakistan, back in 1971, when the thunder from the clouds had been more frequent – and more fierce. Rubina and Nabila would pause their rooftop games and stare up at the sky. Metal birds whirred over their peaceful village, heading to the other Pakistan, hundreds of miles away. The helicopters scared Rubina, but they quickly passed out of airspace and out of their minds. Conflict didn't touch their daily routines. But Nabila knew two things about those loud machines. They were used for war. And they dropped bombs. She'd whisper these nuggets of knowledge to her 2-year-old sister.

One weekend their mother took them into the city to visit her father and brother. It was a year since the civil war, but Rubina's uncle still had his underground bomb shelter. All the adults were out of the house for the afternoon when the planes started their routine exercises, dipping close to the tops of the tallest buildings. Rubina had never seen them this close in the village. Nabila sprang into action.

"The planes are here for bombardment!" she shrieked. Sargodha had no general airport, and it was a few years before their father would take them to the Faisalabad airport to see normal airplanes up close, so for now airplanes meant only one thing in their childlike knowledge of the world.

“Come, come, go down! There is a war!” She corralled her cousins toward the shelter, holding tight to her little sister’s damp hand. But Rubina squirmed free – they couldn’t leave her uncle’s goat.

“You’ll be bombed!” Rubina shouted at the goat as she wrapped its rope around her wrist and pulled; her cousins pushed it from behind. Nabila yelled for them to hurry.

Several hours later they heard their uncle calling for them. Nabila cracked the hatch, and the bright sunlight pierced the dark, dusty space. Rubina poked her head out. When her chuckling uncle asked why they were down there with his goat, she told him simply, “Because today a helicopter was there in the sky.”

Now, 10 years old, the planes still made Rubina’s heart thump like it had that day crouching in the bomb shelter. The City of Eagles was her new home. The move was for their own good, Inyat had told them. It had been Inyat’s decision, as were most big decisions in the family – especially concerning education. “The high schools are better in the city,” she assured her temporarily disoriented children. She held fiercely to the status her education had provided herself and her family. If Inyat had only one dream for her children, it was that they’d achieve social equality through education. They would be as smart, if not smarter than their Muslim classmates. And though they didn’t have much money to spare, Inyat was adamant that her children wear the most expensive shoes they could afford and never leave the house looking less than proper. But good shoes only went so far – education would be their way. She knew the extra stairs of assumption they would now have to climb. Christian. Minority. Poor. Uneducated.

Things to Come

“Bhutto has been executed. My God. Those cruel ones have killed him.”

Naziran’s words came out in soft spurts of disbelief, between her gasps for breath. She’d stepped out minutes earlier for her everyday trip to the market and had returned immediately with the news from the buzzing street.

Busy with their books and schoolwork, Rubina and Nabila sat cross-legged in the pool of afternoon sunlight streaming into the courtyard. Naziran, the mother of a poor family that lived in their spare bedroom, slumped down on the charpai next to Rubina. Her face dropped to her cupped hands.

Inyat stood in the doorway still holding the teapot she’d been filling with water, temporarily frozen by the words that had just pierced their serene sanctuary. She said nothing. Tears began to form in the corner of her eyes. She came and sat down next to Naziran, placing a hand on her shaking shoulders.

“Ammi Jee, why are you so sad?” asked Rubina, not knowing what else to say. Kamran scooted closer to his big sister. This was unshakeable Ammi Jee. They’d never seen her so disturbed. Inyat sighed deeply and looked up at her worried children.

“Bhutto was the leader of the poor, Ruby. He didn’t always do right, but he did a lot of good for the poor.”

Rubina nodded solemnly. She knew Bhutto was close to her mother’s heart. This was the Bhutto whose long life her mother always added to their prayers. And this was the Bhutto who not only gave voice to the poor but also had given plots of land to her poor family members¹³ – she remembered the jubilant praise of “Bhutto colonies” overheard in adult conversations. She remembered other grown-up snippets, too: Bhutto’s was an elected government. Zia’s had come by force. Civilian. Military. They’d been expecting this.

Minutes passed in silence. Lunchtime passed without eating. The time to tend the kitchen garden passed without watering. Inyat said it was OK.

“It’s a day of mourning,” she said. “All of Pakistan is crying today.”

Rubina’s stomach was churning with hunger when her father burst into the house a few hours later – but she mentioned nothing of it.

“You’ve heard the news?”

The question became an acknowledgment before the last word left his mouth. His answer hung palpably in the strange stillness of his house and in his wife’s somber gaze. Even 3-year-old Subina was quiet, sitting obediently in Nabila’s lap.

A devoted BBC listener, Feroze flipped on the little radio for an official confirmation. A familiar accent crackled into the heavy air momentarily. *Early this morning, under order of Gen. Zia ul Haq, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was executed by hanging in a Rawalpindi jail cell.*

Feroze’s head fell in surrender. He switched it back off and joined his family. The light slowly drained from the room as late afternoon faded into evening. April 4, 1979, passed with little food and few words.

No one could know what would come of life under Zia, that he would immediately begin injecting Islam into the constitution – and people’s everyday lives. Relaying the daily BBC news report was always another excuse for Feroze to tell a story, so he had unusually aware children. Rubina knew what a government was and what the military was. She knew that Zia had kept Bhutto in jail for almost two years and arrested activists and journalists who spoke against the coup.

Like most nights, Rubina lay in bed listening to hushed fragments of her parents’ late-night kitchen talks slip under her door.

Abba Jee’s voice: *An unjust leader ... he has killed an intelligent man ... how will things be now?*

Ammi Jee’s: *Benazir is an orphan now ... how will she survive and face this dictator?*

That night Rubina fell asleep trying to imagine the tears of an entire country.

What Religion Feels Like

It was the first time Rubina had felt her religion. As the mob of girls grew larger, the space in the middle – where Rubina stood alone – contracted. A barrage of questions and accusations flew through her sense of self, and two distinctly unfamiliar emotions wrapped themselves around her heart. Rejection and alienation tightened their grip with each verbal blow.

“Are you a Christian?”

“You think Jesus is the son of God? How could God have a child?”

Rubina wasn't prepared for this interrogation. She'd never heard such words from any of her Muslim friends. And there was something else new coming from their mouths. A bitterness, maybe even bordering on hatred. She pulled the stiff fabric of her new white *shahwar kamiḡ* – the government high school uniform – tighter around her body like a shield. Her new classmates were unrelenting.

“Christians are bad people – they have changed their Bible from the truth.”

The girls had surrounded her immediately after English class. Being the first day, the teacher had routinely asked her students to introduce themselves – their name, where they completed primary school, and if they knew any English yet. Rubina's heart beat with excitement. It was going to be a great day. There were new friends to make, new clubs to join, new teachers to impress. When it was her turn she stood confidently.

Rubina said her name and watched a succession of friendly faces nod in greeting. She shared that her family had moved to the city just before grade five, which she had completed at the government school (where her mother's dear friend was principal). More nodding. She'd saved the best for last. Her years at St. Joseph's had passed in delight – the loving nuns and creative priests, the music and art and plays. And English – she knew English had not yet been compulsory for her new government schoolmates. So her next sentence rang with pride, perhaps laced with a bit of naïveté.

“I completed grades one to four at St. Joseph's missionary school in 36 South Branch village, and the nuns taught us English from grade one.”

She stayed standing. A cool hush fell over the class, and the nodding heads now exchanged surprised glances. Her teacher broke the frozen moment. “How fantastic, Rubina. Has anyone else learned any English before?” More silence. Rubina sat down quickly. The silence itself had pricked her heart, but she preferred it to the maelstrom of words showering down around her now.

“Nuns taught you English – are you a Christian? Are you?”

Rubina had never felt anything but pride in her religion. Watching her parents tutor the village children under their courtyard acacia tree, Rubina regarded Christianity as the religion for the betterment of society – and Christians as the ones intended to uplift humanity through education. But maybe this was another part of being a Christian, she thought. Had her heart not been so mired

in the dejection of her insults, it may have retrieved a bit of solace from some of her mother's oft-spoken words. "Look at the life of Jesus, how he was humiliated, how he was cursed," Inyat always told her. "But a curse is something that makes you different from other people, that makes you strong, unique, a leader." But such soothing words didn't touch her raw moment of need.

Of course Rubina's Muslim friends – her dearest friends – in the village knew her family went to mass on Sundays, and from time to time they'd innocently ask her, "Why don't you become a Muslim, Rubina? You are so good, so nice, so smart." But none of their innocuous urgings negated her identity. She never took them seriously. They were the mere musings of children. "How good it would be if you became a Muslim, Rubina." The moment would ebb back into the harmonious flow of co-existence as they knew it. Like the magical nights of the Magis, just before Christmas. The whole village would emerge from their homes, Muslims too, to gaze in awe at the dramatic procession of the three wise men on camelback, one coming from each of the smaller surrounding villages. Rubina would stand on the road with her Muslim friends under the winter sky, the same enchantment dancing in their own eyes. *How beautiful are your ceremonies*, they'd whisper in wonder, squeezing her hand.

She *had* felt her religion before, and it felt warm, like a friend's hand. Like love. Like heaven.

Rubina returned to her reality, where religion felt very different. The stream of thoughts that had been running through her head condensed into one succinct retort. She gathered her strength to deliver it: "I have many Muslim friends, but they don't behave this way."

The eternal school break finally over, the girls unraveled their entrapment as quickly as they'd woven it, and Rubina escaped to the safety of her next class. It was a painfully slow day, the clock taunting her with its stubborn passage of time. She refused to cry in front of those girls. She held back tears until the walls of her home – and the arms of her mother – could hide her.

"Why are we Christian?" she asked Inyat, quickly trading the maroon stole of her uniform for the comfort of her favorite yellow chador – the one she'd embroidered herself. "Why aren't we like them?"

Dark yellow spots stained the sunny fabric as her tears fell and she told her Ammi Jee all about the first day of government high school. Inyat dabbed the spots while she listened. She wasn't surprised – she saw similar manifestations of Gen. Zia's regime in her own school. As part of his mission to inject Islam into every corner of Pakistani society, he had purged government school curricula of all un-Islamic content. Now the textbooks taught that all religions except Islam had changed their holy books. Chapters on the Crusades called Christians the enemies of Muslims. And Hindus were widely considered the enemies of Pakistan. This was just one of the many ways Zia was steadily institutionalizing – and constitutionalizing – discrimination. But that didn't mean her children's minds would be poisoned.

"Do you think we aren't good people, Ruby?"

"No, Ammi Jee, that's not what I'm saying."

“These foolish girls are not the true spirit of Islam,” Inyat told her. “Ours is a religion of love, peace and forgiveness. Islam is a religion of peace, too. And both religions teach us not to enter into religious debate or conflict.”

Rubina nodded, but her spirit was still wounded. Tomorrow loomed in the too-immediate future. She didn’t want to go back, but Inyat assured her things would get better. Just be very polite, she told her. Try to be very smart in class. It was one of the familiar threads in the family fabric: the social panacea of education.

“Go again tomorrow. I will talk with your teachers if it happens again. I won’t leave you to suffer.”

Later that week at the school assembly her class was to line up according to height. Rubina was a drop of oil in a pan of water. Titters of *She’s a Christian* and *We will not stand by her* snickered up and down the line. Rejection and alienation crept back around her heart, but Rubina refused to let them squelch her spirit. She took her mother’s advice and focused on her studies, awing her teachers and earning distinctions. She led school assemblies, joined clubs and acted in plays; she even wrote a Christmas play that her Muslim classmates performed. She found her old place, that familiar ground up front, but she carried something new with her. What religion feels like.

A Pocket Full of Saints

Madam Balqees Shad presided over her school with grace and dominion, strength and beauty. Rubina would ooze with admiration as Madam glided past her in the hallways, the queen and commander of the high school. Her colorful saris painted the trail of her steps like the wings of a butterfly in flight. She was Muslim, not Hindu, but she wore a sari every day anyway. Her long glossy hair was always pulled back in its serious, strict bun – never less than perfectly and meticulously put together, like the rest of her. Most students regarded her with a healthy dose of fear, but not Rubina. If it was possible to be in love with a principal, Rubina was.

In her daydreams she constructed conversations from Madam’s one-sided morning assembly addresses. But they were more like sermons for Rubina, the way they stuck to her soul. Every morning Madam Shad regaled her students with 15 minutes of wisdom on topics ranging from the intellectual or political to simple advice on how to treat one another or take pride in their personal presentation. Rubina drank it in. In the closed Pakistani society a girl’s world consisted primarily of two realms: home and school. So Madam was Rubina’s first heroine outside her home. Her first saint after her mother. Rubina listened intently to her every word. Everyone else disappeared for that quarter of an hour. Madam Shad was speaking just to her, and their private dialogue flourished in Rubina’s robust imagination.

It was rare for Madam Shad, always busily at work, to interact with students individually. But one day she stopped Rubina in the hallway to inspect the hem of her scarf. That morning she’d lectured on the virtue of a chador with a proper hem. *If you are a wise girl, your scarf should not be untidy with stray threads. And the hem should have beading, not just be plainly sewn. The scarf is a reflection of the girl.*

She held Rubina's scarf under scrutiny for a moment and then said, "You are a girl, and look at your scarf. So plain."

Rubina lowered her head in shame. Her embarrassed eyes fell on the perfectly beaded hem of Madam Shad's sari. Scarves did not come with beading. The embellishments had to be intentionally added, and from that day on Rubina adopted the habit diligently. She would be a proudly presented girl like her regal butterfly of a principal.

And what is a butterfly without her garden? Any place that supported life – a small patch of grass, a garden, a park – had a class assigned to its care. One period of the day per week was devoted to gardening. Rubina's love of nature, planted by her father and watered in their kitchen garden, blossomed even more under Madam's influence. And the garden had more to teach than harmony with nature – equality was a living, breathing lesson there too. Gardening was usually the job of the lower class, but the garden world was a classless society. Everyone got dirt under their fingernails, daughters of laborers and bureaucrats alike.

Madam Shad was a single woman – perhaps the most indelible impression she left on her young admirer. Her singleness had to be why she was such a strong, hard-working and respected woman. Rich, influential parents often tried to use their social capital to get their daughters into Madam's school. But she was a woman of integrity. No student was enrolled unless she passed the exam. If she wanted to be a strong woman, Rubina assumed she'd have to be a single woman. It was decided: She would never marry, even though an unmarried woman was viewed with a suspicious societal eye, and even deemed inappropriate or dangerous by some. Who would control such a woman? And who would take care of her?

Rubina carried Madam Shad with her, in a little pocket of her heart where she kept her Abba and Ammi, Nabila, Kamran and Subina, and all of life's joys. All of her loves. From there Madam Shad's lectures could echo always, and remind Rubina of who she wanted to become. Wise, just, articulate and graceful. A decision maker and a revered leader. And if she ever became a teacher, she would be like Madam Shad.

After her high school graduation, the informal lessons in leadership gleaned from Madam Shad were illuminated and reinforced at a Catholic summer camp in the small mountain town of Ayubia in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. The camps were organized for Catholic students who had completed high school, and in the shadows of steep mountain precipices and majestic green pines, Rubina's vision of leadership flowered. For 15 days in the summer of 1984, she and her fellow campers opened their minds to new ideas and improved their communication skills through discussion and debate. It was Rubina's first real schooling in leadership – the first time she'd consciously considered the concept of it – and she left primed with the insight and confidence collected from both Madam Shad and her treasured days at the Ayubia camp.

When she reached college, Rubina found another saint – also Muslim, also a teacher, Mrs. Ashiq. Rubina enjoyed chemistry and botany well enough, though nothing compared to the delight of Urdu classes. The language was like literature, elegant and intoxicating. She stunned her Urdu professors with her proficiency that came without studying. But zoology. Rubina could not muster an ounce of interest for zoology. Until Mrs. Ashiq.

Determined to succeed, Rubina went to her zoology professor for help. “How can I create an interest in zoology?” she asked.

“Come to my office whenever you want,” Mrs. Ashiq said, “and I will work with you.” She did, twice a week, but zoology still eluded her. So Mrs. Ashiq opened her arms wider, inviting Rubina to visit her at home. For weeks Rubina sat with Mrs. Ashiq, learning zoology and even learning to like it. And she took other problems, not just zoological, to her professor’s motherly ears. *If I’m ever a lecturer*, Rubina thought to herself, *I will be like her, one who students always come to with their problems.*

When Rubina graduated from college, she left with two distinctions: one in chemistry, and the other in zoology. But she also left with two saints who had made school a sacred sphere, and whose virtues she would strive to embody.

Bearing the Cross

“Are you a Christian?”

The muted question hung between them like an ambiguous fog. Why was he asking her that?, Rubina wondered. Ten years had passed since that question first pierced her innocence. And here it was again, completely unexpected at her college graduation ceremony – and especially from the esteemed man distributing distinction certificates. He’d said nothing when she accepted her first distinction. But this time the gentleman’s eye had caught the glint of silver resting on Rubina’s neck. His countenance changed immediately as if he’d been snagged on a thorn.

Her heart fluttered slightly under the cross necklace. Rubina had carefully positioned the cross in the V of her convocation stole that morning, a quiet and simple blessing on the day. She only wore it on two types of occasions: when she needed support from God, and when she wanted to thank God. *Remember your God not only in your worries, but also in your joys.* That’s what her mother had told her when she pressed the cross into Rubina’s hand a few years earlier after the three-day Ceremony of Mother Mary.

Lightly touching the cool metal, Rubina answered with a poised pride. “Yes.”

She waited expectantly for him to bestow her second honor. He gave her the opposite. “Then how did you earn distinctions?”

There was no microphone. Only Rubina heard his question, laden with innuendo. It carried the weight of every bias she had struggled against to reach this day: Christians are not intelligent, Christians cannot rise to high positions, Christians are not worthy of honor. Rubina was the only Christian in the science department, and one of only a handful in all of Sargodha’s Government Girls College. It was her day for the stage and for honor, but with the jolt of a few words her soaring heart plummeted to the pit of her stomach. The coolness of the cross intensified against her bare skin and spread its chill down her limbs. Her face blanched slightly – she was exposed and

speechless. She fingered the edges of the cross, trying to extract a hint of her mother’s trademark composure.

If her mother had been there, Rubina would have searched the crowd for her strong, warm eyes. But Inyat was waiting anxiously at home (parents weren’t typically invited to college convocations), her face shining in a motherly glow – similar to the blush of pregnancy, but one that resurfaced each time her once small babies grew and embodied her dreams. A science degree. Even if it wasn’t Rubina’s dream, it had been her mother’s. There were two respectable and achievable professions for Pakistani women: a teacher or a doctor. But since Inyat was a teacher, she took the first up a notch in the dream she’d constantly recite to Rubina. *You will be a doctor or a science lecturer.* For as long as Rubina could remember, the dream had been and the dream would be. Rubina – and her brother and sisters – never seriously entertained any other options. Their parents had sacrificed so much for their success.

But Rubina didn’t want to be a doctor. “Fine,” her mother had said, “but you still have to study science.” A girl studying science was an anomaly, and science was only for the most intelligent of students – so it was the only possibility for her daughters. Rubina tried to temper her dissatisfaction with the idea of using chemistry in the textile industry, for dyeing fabrics – the only possible art of chemistry she could think of. Science, Rubina lamented, was not her cup of tea.

What was her cup of tea? The delicious realm of the imagination. Science boxed her in. Literature let her fly, or at least gave her the wings to fly. Her mind would skip along the verses of poetry she memorized for the *bait-bazi*¹⁴ competitions. Feroze would practice for hours with her in the courtyard, and he, Nabila and Kamran, her constant companion during high school and fellow creative spirit, would pose as her opponent. Three versus one – or two if little clapping Subina was on Rubina’s side.

As soon as grade nine came, and Rubina could actually study science, Inyat put an end to the games of childhood. But the allure of theater and poetry refused to release her. Her mind would not break from her heart; they ached together for the pleasure of creativity. So she’d ask to act in one more play. And just one more poetry competition. Inyat always gave in, unable to resist the pleading glimmers in her children’s eyes. *OK, but this is the last time. Why aren’t you concentrating on your studies? What’s wrong with you?*

But even though her heart and mind longed to spend the days immersed in pages of literature, flipping from delight to delight, Rubina had devoted herself to studying science and was now receiving distinctions in chemistry *and* zoology. And she would soon move away to Multan to work diligently on a master’s in chemistry. It did not quench her deepest desires, but pleasing her mother did. Seeing Inyat’s joyful face at home that morning had made it all worth it. This should have been one of the happiest moments of Rubina’s life, but in a fraction of that moment it had been stolen. Demolished.

The disbelief that had briefly paralyzed her dissipated. Rubina said nothing. She walked quickly but gracefully across the stage and back to her seat, one hand holding her certificates and the other pressed to her chest. She wasn’t hiding the cross – only pressing it closer to her heart. She’d worn it out of gratitude, not need, that morning. Now she felt both. When the applause ended Mrs. Ashiq weaved through the crowd and wrapped Rubina in a hug and motherly approval. At the

farewell dinner just a few days earlier, Rubina and her classmates had placed titles on all the professors' chairs. "The Mother We Want" hung on Mrs. Ashiq's.

"Look Rubina," she said, "you did it. You can do anything that you take seriously." The insult of one Muslim was slightly neutralized by the praise of another. Rubina laughed and smiled, but inside she still ached.

Those two companions had come back once again to rest on her heart. They now fit like an old pair of shoes – the ones so molded to the foot's shape that their presence is hardly noticed. They slipped on one after the other. Left shoe, right shoe. Rejection, alienation. Her heart knew them well. She had a new word for them now though. Discrimination. That was the official umbrella that hung over a host of unpleasant realities. Even if she rose to the highest of heights, would there still be someone lurking, ready to question her right to be there?

Not wanting to dim the light of her parent's joy as soon as they greeted her at home, Rubina waited until they'd finished exclaiming and kissing her forehead to tell them *all* that had happened on the stage. Inyat ran her fingers through Rubina's hair like she'd done since she was little, smoothing distressed strands. "Think of all the Muslims who congratulated you today," Inyat said, calm and sage as ever. "This is just one person, so you must leave it. Think of your successes, not your worries."

Rubina tucked her mother's words away, and her heart lifted a little. But like old friends who soothe the soul, her favorite poems were another reliable fount of consolation – immediately accessible, etched permanently in her memory. One verse kept echoing in her mind.

*If your sensitivity has not died, one pain in life
Is enough to show you what you must do in life.*

One Pain in Life

The Incident

It all started with a broken water tap. Then came the seasoning: the bitterness of a longtime political rivalry. Two seemingly unconnected events, except that they involved two of Rubina's uncles: Gul, the air force electrician, and Aziz, the politically active older brother. One concocted accusation could take care of them both. Blasphemy marked an entire family. Rubina would remember the water tap date her whole life. Dec. 10, 1991.

Life had been strolling along as usual, quiet and undisturbed, just three days earlier. Rubina had just returned home to the city from university in Multan, for a holiday from studying chemical reactions and memorizing the properties of elements. Her uncles, Javaid and Gul, were taking care of the goats and buffalo at their shared home in a village just outside of Sargodha. Inyat was taking care of Javaid's three children in the city – Javaid's wife had died and Gul was single, so their second home was with Inyat and Feroze in the city, where they could enjoy Inyat's cooking and the children could have a motherly influence.

But then the village's community water tap stopped flowing, and Gul gathered the neighbors together to pool the money for its repair. Sajjad, Gul's Muslim neighbor, suggested they give the money to the same neighbor they had the last time it broke. Gul disagreed. "He was not very honest with the money," Gul reminded his neighbors, "so we will choose someone else this time." Gul's brother Bashir, who also lived in the house, heard their rising voices and came outside to help mend the disagreement, but during the span of Gul and Sajjad's brief debate, someone fixed the tap. Their fleeting riff was moot, they shook hands, and Sajjad walked away with a smile on his face. And that, seemingly, was that.

Three days later, Rubina sat crouched and terrified in a dim room with Inyat, Subina and their three cousins. The men – Feroze, Kamran and Javaid – were hiding away elsewhere in the city. They didn't tell the women where. Darkness crouched next to them as they waited. The curtains were pulled tight. They knew the mob would arrive soon after noon prayer ended. No one had given the water tap a second thought, and certainly no one expected it to escalate to this. All had been calm since the handshake. Gul, away visiting friends, didn't even know that a case had been filed against him and a mob was marching toward his sister's home.

What Gul thought a mere incident, an everyday community wrinkle smoothed, Sajjad had taken as a challenge and the seed of dispute. Sajjad's seed was watered by another grudge that had been simmering for years. An influential member of Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP)¹⁵ held a longtime rancor for Gul's politically active older brother, Aziz. In the election for Sargodha's city council, Aziz had three times beaten the Christian nominee, who was propped up by the SSP member. That nominee would have supported the SSP member in his mayoral candidacy, but while on the council, Aziz thrice refused to vote for him. He'd never won the mayoral election, and so reserved lingering blame for Aziz. This was his chance for revenge.

Together with Sajjad they had a shared family target, and he had the social influence Sajjad needed to activate the necessary members of the community. Because he was a member of the SSP, a network of religious leaders and sectarian activists were immediately available to him. They would provide the spark to set the story aflame. The two bruised egos would register a case against Gul, accusing him of blasphemy – of insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

The Mob

For two days they cooked the story, adding the right people to the pot until it was ready to boil over. Mullahs agreed to make announcements before noon prayer and include a reminder at the end of their sermon. Fundamentalists would circulate the accusation through loudspeakers fixed to vans. Together they would stir a mob whose volatile energy would carry the news of Gul's blasphemy charge. A mob is a persuasion tool of its own, a distraction from the lack of evidence. Currents of anticipation reverberated beneath the everyday, unassuming flow of city activity. On the third day, the plan went into action.

The mosques' minarets broke the tranquil late morning ambiance with their tinny discordance. The familiar and trusted voices of muezzins¹⁶ echoed through the streets of Sargodha and surrounding villages, seeping into malleable ears: *Gul has disgraced the Prophet. He and his family are a stigma. Serve Islam and kill the blasphemer.* Within an hour, anyone with ears knew where the family

lived. The loudspeakers transported the message around the city: *If you are a true Muslim, you must defend your prophet and your religion.*

It started just before noon prayer. Friends rushed to the house to warn Rubina's family: The mob would gather after noon prayer. Rubina's father, brother and uncle Javaid fled after the third or fourth informant. Men were the ones in danger. Certainly no one would harm the women and children. And so they sat and waited. By 2 p.m. there was nowhere else to go. Prayers had ended and the streets were buzzing. Friends continued delivering reports: They are moving this direction, now that. There are 100 of them. There are 300.

People poured from mosques and homes and gathered force as they moved toward Rubina's house. They knew it was Gul's second home and the most likely place to find him. The stream became a rushing river as the ringleaders forced businesses to close and join the throng. Posters naming Gul's crime and calling for his death appeared on walls all over the city. Now a sea, the procession pushed on, waves ready to crash.

Fear had wrapped its fingers around Rubina's throat for hours. *They'll kill him. They'll burn down the house,* she thought. *Will I live to see the outside of these walls again? And if I do, will life ever be the same?* Rubina knew that a blasphemy charge could leave a permanent stain.

They ate nothing. They drank nothing. They just waited. Shadows slinking across the walls played with their jumpy nerves. Minarets still resounded with marching orders. And then they heard the rumbling roar: a fierce whirlwind of garbled chanting that grew rapidly louder. As the mob swarmed the house, the incomprehensible noise separated into distinct slogans. The words seemed to pierce the still terror of the room. Rubina's heart tried to leap into her throat, but it was even more constricted now.

You have disgraced our holy prophet!

Kill the blasphemer! Socially boycott his family!

*Now is the time to become Gazi Ilum Din Shaheed – the Prophet is waiting for you in heaven! Become Gazi!*¹⁷

The mob was steadfast, unrelenting – hurling their abuses. Their chants escalated to include the whole family. And not only did they threaten to kill Gul and his family, but anyone who dared have social relations with the family. So everyone, Muslims and Christian alike, were afraid to step in.

Rubina's fingers intertwined with Inyat's, their hot palms pressed together. The children huddled in their laps, the little sister shrinking inside the protection of her large scarf just as Rubina had so many years ago, surrounded by 11-year-old girls. The mob expanded by the minute. They couldn't see it, but they heard it in the rising tide of voices. Anger and hysteria charged the air. And all of it based on a lie. A swollen story. She couldn't stand the frozen fear any more – Rubina had to look outside. She snuck to the rooftop and peeked out over the wall. She was shocked at the vastness. It seemed all of Sargodha had surrounded her house. She ducked down and her mind reeled with the possibility of escalation: burning, demolishing, shooting.

Neither Inyat nor Rubina risked looking outside again. Thirty minutes loitered in eternity, as if the sun should have set and rose again. And then, without breaking a window or throwing a stone, the tide retreated and carried its chaos back through the streets. The case had been registered – and in the escalating emotions of the mob, Bashir had been added to the accusation. The police were on their way.

The Arrest

The police came immediately. It was assumed that police would treat women with gentleness, never with aggression or abuse. But they barked threateningly from the front gate, “Where is Gul?”

Inyat gathered herself at the doorway and approached them. “He’s not at home.” The children hid in Inyat’s shadow, glancing curiously around her flapping chador at the official-looking men. Their faces were shrouded in the shadow of their caps.

“Someone must come with us,” the tall one insisted. One hand suggestively tapped the gun on his hip. “We won’t leave without an arrest.”

Rubina stood close to her mother, forming a womanly wall between the children and the policemen’s icy gaze. The short one’s eyes moved toward Javaid’s oldest son, Irfad. Inyat intercepted it. “Take me,” she said.

“No, we will take the boy. When his uncle comes, then we will release him.”

Before Rubina could shoo Irfad inside, the gate was open and a large, rough hand wrapped around a lanky, boyish wrist. He yanked the boy out of Inyat’s shadow and took off at a brisk official pace toward the station.

“No, I will go!” Inyat pleaded. But her words were muffled by their trail of dust. She collapsed against the gate and then fell to the ground in despair, the last few hours finally registering in her consciousness. The officers’ dusty wake choked her instant sobs. Rubina sat next to her mother in the dirt, the fading sun casting dark orange bars of light across their faces, illuminating their fear. Police stations meant something terrible. They were synonymous with torture. The two women watched inky streaks of night overtake the blood-orange horizon.

Irfad was there overnight. All 14 years of him. A boy among men. They shoved him toward the washroom, renaming him for the duration of his stay: *Choorā*.¹⁸ Sanitary worker. He was a Christian after all, and even worse, a blasphemer by relation. *Choorā, clean this latrine*. They took turns shoving him to the next latrine, sometimes escalating to punches or sharp kicks. *Now this one*. As he scrubbed they tormented him, hurling their insults and marring his innocent boyhood. They’d shout their injuries from the other room as Irfad moved from latrine to latrine. *You are a curse on the world. You are only a dirty choora*. With each harsh *choora* he thought the time for his torture had arrived. His breath caught every time their deep voices rose. He’d listen for their footsteps before his breath returned and passed over his dry, cracked lips. Irfad’s sleepless night passed with labored breathing and a desperate longing for the soft light of dawn.

Inyat finally reached Gul and told him to return immediately, that a case had been registered against him and his nephew was in police custody. She assured him the mob was gone and that they would straighten out the misunderstanding quickly. “We’ll tell everyone that the story is false, that you did nothing.” Her brothers were like sons to her, and she’d do everything in her power to keep them safe. She’d give her life for them.

Rubina sat up with her mother all night, unsure of what the morning would bring. Inyat prayed, hunched in a posture of grief. Rubina thought of little Irfad spending the night in jail. Alone. She tried to avoid imagining what they might do to him. Tears inhabited their sleepless eyes as they too waited impatiently for the morning sun to end the long night. Rubina reminded her mother their family had lived in harmony among their Muslim neighbors for years. They were friends – surely they would support Gul.

Gul presented himself to the police early the next morning after traveling through the night, anxious eyes wide awake watching the dark world rush by the bus window. Accompanied by his brothers and several Muslim friends, they hoped their presence would persuade the police to let the case go. But Gul was arrested at once – though Sajjad’s initial and uncorroborated report was still the only evidence – and exchanged freedom with his terrified, sleep-deprived nephew. The policemen barked at the men, “Now bring Bashir!” They had no choice. They knew what the police would do to Gul if they didn’t. Irfad stumbled home in a daze. Only a fraction of his trauma was visible in the bluing bruises – the psychological damage was much harder to see. But Inyat saw the distress buried in his eyes and wrapped him in her hungry arms. A few hours later Bashir, who’d been in hiding, surrendered himself at the station.

The mob was a haunting memory, but the threat remained. The possibility of death – Gul’s, Bashir’s and their own – hovered over the family, a heavy veil of fear. Posters plastered up by the mob remained, and new ones promoting the brothers’ hanging papered the city walls. The strength of rumors, compounded by the influential mob and fundamentalist backing, were more than the family’s pleas of innocence could compete with. Longtime friends were afraid to voice their support. They had to think of their own lives. Rubina reluctantly returned to her classes, but her heart stayed with her stigmatized family and her uncles, sitting in jail, awaiting their uncertain fate.

The Sufferings

There were two sufferings, one inside the prison, the other outside. A Muslim friend had convinced a Muslim lawyer to take the case, and because Bashir’s accusation had been so suspiciously tacked on last minute, he was released after one month in jail. But Gul’s mind, body and soul slowly diminished in his jail cell. On the other side of the bars, Rubina and her family worried and struggled. Religious leaders encouraged a social boycott of the family. A simple walk to the market took them past posters reminding them of their stigma and Gul’s suffering. Cousins in missionary schools made due, but Subina and Javaid’s daughter Lubna couldn’t face the hatred in the government schools. One of the last days Lubna endured, a classmate spit on the street next to her – an extreme cultural insult. She and Subina dropped out, their education put on hold. Rubina and her family lived in their own prison, hidden and alienated. Even their Christian neighbors avoided them for fear of opposing the boycott. When Father Phillip Joseph, a respected Sargodha

priest, made an example by visiting them frequently, their isolation slowly dispelled. But not completely.

After Father Phillip Joseph's interventions, only a small handful of the community continued to reject them. Christians weren't the only ones frustrated by the manipulation of the blasphemy law. Muslims too were offended and embarrassed by the misuse that had become more and more frequent since the law was written into existence as part of Zia's Islamization in the '80s. Those who knew Gul and his family recovered from the frenzied fog of the mob. And those who'd been gathered around the broken water tap knew the truth. Not one blasphemous word had left Gul's lips. Two Muslim witnesses came forward to dispute Sajjad's story, and Aziz and Javaid circulated a petition testifying to Gul's innocence. More than 200 Muslims signed it. Rubina and her family were hopeful. But the petition and witnesses waited along with Gul as hearing dates came and went with each postponement.

Gul was visibly changed and tormented the first time Rubina and her mother went to visit him in Sargodha's district jail. He glanced quickly through the bar that separated them before covering his face with the sheet that enfolded him. He looked smaller – and weaker. Shrunken. His shoulders shuddered once, almost imperceptibly, and he let out a soft cry. Then they heaved, and the cries became sobs. He was out of his senses. The alienation and the abuse were breaking him. He didn't recognize his niece or sister. They frightened him. But they stayed until he calmed a little, and lowered the sheet from his face. His eyes locked with Inyat's in relieved, then desperate, recognition.

“*Appa*,”¹⁹ his voice came haltingly, as if he hadn't spoken in days. “I cannot sleep because the floor is so cold.” Pakistani winters were bitterly cold, and the cement prison floors captured every chill.

After that visit Rubina would hear her mother get up in the middle of the night and find her lying on the floor of her bedroom. Especially on cold winter nights – it was as if the night's chill seeped into her dreams and conjured a picture of her brother on the prison floor. When Inyat woke up, then Rubina woke up, and Kamran and Subina followed. Feroze would already be coaxing her back to bed. But she refused.

“I don't deserve it because my innocent brother is on a cold floor.”

“Ammi, why don't you come up?” Rubina would urge.

“Ruby, you don't know. You are not a mother. Gul is like my son.”

Rubina ached for her. “I am not a mother, no. But I am a daughter, and if my mother is on the floor, how can *I* sleep?”

So the whole family would sit up together, in a circle on the icy floor, repeating their story to one another. *What has happened to our family?* they would ask. *We were living so peacefully.* They wondered out loud when it would all end, but the cold floor and the silent night were the only answers. No one knew.

Both Inyat's mind and heart suffered. The stress and sorrow wore on her weakened heart, and she soon became a heart patient. Some days she would collect all her strength and accompany Rubina to the prison, but she mostly relied on her daughter's reports. Seeing him was too much.

But Rubina kept visiting. Once a month, sometimes twice, she made the eight-hour journey from Multan to Sargodha. She'd sit inches from his sunken eyes, whose dark pain matched the constant sting in her own heart. Rubina spent each half-hour visit wiping the tears off her cheeks as he told a new story of suffering. Fellow prisoners teased and taunted Gul. They could have been murderers, the guiltiest of criminals, but in the spectrum of so-called social culpability, Gul was the lowest. A blasphemer. He wasn't allowed to take water from the same pot as Muslim prisoners. They only spoke to him if they were cursing him. They shaved his head, his beard and even his eyebrows to make him look diseased, like a curse.

Already alienated, the policemen segregated him more, putting him in a solitary cell where scraps of bread were flung through a small hole. Sometimes. When the police felt like it. Sickness fell on Gul from sharing such a small space with his own waste, but when the doctor finally came, he refused to touch him to check the blisters. He just tossed the medication at him.

Rubina tucked each story away, in another pocket of her heart next to the one for her loves. But this one was for pains, for injustices. They were heavy at times, but they were her motivation. Because she and Nabila were the most educated members of the family at the time – some were illiterate, some had made it through class five, some up to 10 – and Nabila was married and living in Multan, Rubina did her best to navigate Pakistan's tangled web of legal codes and processes. She also endured the bullying of the policemen. Women were not common visitors in a jail full of men. Young 22-year-old women never were. Not only was she a woman, but a Christian as well – and not just a Christian, but the niece of a blasphemer.

The policemen held brazen sovereignty over their man's world. They shoved and stared. They insulted and humiliated. But she tucked their insults away in that same pocket, where they would make her stronger instead of wear her down. She had to be strong. Her visits brought her uncle a small vestige of peace. He'd send messages to the family: *Send Ruby*. She encouraged him, telling him that this pain would certainly end in a few days, but she also told him the truth. Other family members assured him that everything was fine. But Rubina let him know the family's realities. Bashir was completely unemployable, and Javaid had lost his tractor-trolley business, transporting luggage on a cart between stations. No one wanted to hire an accused blasphemer or the relative of one, so they had to sell their home in the village and all the cattle. So while her family struggled for the money to survive and support Gul, Rubina continued her faithful pilgrimage from university to prison.

The Verdict

Almost a year of visits and postponements passed before the day of decision finally arrived. Courts were not a place for women, so Rubina waited at home with Inyat and the other women of the family. The house was thick with anticipation, hope trying desperately to distract the nibbling dread no one dared to speak of. The men – Feroze, Kamran and all of Gul's brothers and nephews

– went to court with flowers. They had two eyewitnesses and 200 signatures, all of Muslims. Surely Gul would be released and they could all wake up from their nightmare.

Sajjad stood before the judge and told his story. He'd told it so many times that he may have believed it by then. Then his fellow villagers presented the petition and their testimony that Sajjad's story was false. According to Muslim law, two male Muslims are needed for a credible witness – but the judge ruled in favor of who he believed to be a *true* Muslim.

“Sajjad is a fourth-year college student with a beard and outlook of a true Muslim,” the judge said. “I have no reason to disbelieve him.”

The other witnesses were ignored and the petition disregarded. Neither outweighed the beard of a true Muslim. The judge announced his decision, solely based, at least outwardly, on the witness of Sajjad. But the invisible, though far-reaching, grip of fundamentalist pressure almost certainly guided his next words.

“I give Gul a sentence to death. I give him the death penalty.”

The invisible hand uprooted any hope that had sprung in Gul. Justice was usurped. Death penalty. A shocked silence swallowed up his words, and they lingered in the courtroom even after Gul was led away. They wilted the petals on the garland of flowers.

Kamran and Javaid ran out to the street where Gul was approaching the jail transport bus. They rushed to his side, ignoring the glares of the policemen.

“Mamu, don't worry.” Kamran said, grabbing his hand. “We will appeal in high court, so you don't worry.”

“Where will you get the money? You don't have it.”

“At least we have our house. We can sell it.” Kamran hugged him tightly, but not long. Gul's escort cleared his throat threateningly and pushed Gul toward the sputtering bus.

But Gul was inconsolable. “You have already sold everything else. The house is all that's left.” Despair was writ on his weary face. “Leave it now, Kamran.”

The policeman shoved him up the steps of the bus. Smudged glass blurred Gul's face from view. And then he was gone, disappeared into a puff of black exhaust.

When they all returned home, flowers still in hand, Inyat's breath caught in her chest. Feroze held her before repeating the judge's sentence. Her breath escaped in a gasp of disbelief. Their efforts had failed.

It wasn't over. They had to appeal right away – now Gul could be hanged at any time. They needed a lawyer to go to high court, but a blasphemy death penalty was such a stigma that no lawyers in Sargodha would take Gul's case. Plus a lawyer cost more money than they had. Nabila's husband, Peter Jacob, was involved in human rights work and knew of a prominent lawyer in

Lahore – Asma Jahangir – who might take Gul’s case. That night Aziz and Javaid traveled from Sargodha while Peter traveled from Multan. The three met in Lahore early the next morning and quickly located Asma Jahangir’s office. She invited the tired men right in and listened to Gul’s story.

Sargodha was a big city, but a city steeped in traditional customs that permeate every level of society, making it feel at times more like a huge feudal village. And though Rubina was in university, she and her family had little exposure to the proceedings of making an appeal to the high court of Pakistan. But Asma Jahangir took the case. Also a human rights activist, she refused to take any fees, insisting that it was her social responsibility to help. She filed an appeal that morning, and assembled a convoy of renowned lawyers to help her – Barister Ahtizaz Ahsan, Abid Hasan Minto and Naeem Shakir.

It was good news, but there were no guarantees. Again, Rubina was far away from the garden of innocence, of childhood enactments of justice and peaceful afternoons playing with Muslim children. That system was perfect; this one was flawed and obscure. Rubina held firmly to her belief that people were good – Muslims were good – but seeds of hatred and discrimination grew through a system that lacked transparency. When a court ruling contradicts the people’s sense of justice, the people are left confused.

The Appeals

Inyat *was* ready to sell her house if it would save her brother’s life. She spent her days crying and recording the conditions Rubina reported from her visits. Inyat knew exactly what was happening to him in jail and the threats circling outside it. She would spend every rupee she had to free her brother and clear his name – she’d been his mother ever since their own mother had died.

Gul dipped into depression after his sentence. He was on death row now. When Rubina visited him immediately after the trial, he told her, “Tell your mother to stop. You are wasting money you don’t have.” His case had already cost the family dearly, and it would only get more expensive if they appealed it in high court. There were fees and lawyers. There were transportation costs – meetings with parliamentarians in Islamabad and Faisalabad, the lawyers and civil society organizations in Lahore, religious leaders in Sargodha. Then there were Rubina’s university science fees, and Nabila’s wedding a few months earlier that had depleted the family savings. Bashir still couldn’t find a job, and since Javaid’s business collapsed, he and his three children had also been dependent on Inyat and Feroze’s two menial teacher salaries. And Gul’s food. If the family doesn’t provide the food, the prisoner doesn’t eat, but the system was corrupt, and more often than not it was like stuffing money into the policemen’s pockets. Rubina could not give the food she brought directly to him – it had to go through the policemen for inspection. Then they would deliver it. Or might deliver it.

Their own food was an issue as well. Every rupee was considered and put toward the most pressing need. Inyat had many pains in those days, but the day she went to the market to buy the biggest, cheapest bag of potatoes available marked the extent of her desperation. She kept her daughters like princesses – her precious ones – preparing delicious feasts when Rubina came home from university. Inyat placed a slice of bread on a plate and poured cooked potatoes into a bowl to serve her Ruby lunch when she returned from visiting Gul. She couldn’t hide the tears in her eyes

when she handed the plate to her daughter. Rubina put her arm around her disheartened mother and told her not to worry, that Gul had excellent lawyers, and justice would prevail.

“Ruby, my tears are not for Gul today.” Inyat glanced with defeat at the plate in front of Rubina. “I never thought my children would have to daily eat like this.”

“Ammi Jee, please don’t cry over this,” Rubina said. She took a bite of her lunch and chewed slowly. It was the third day in a row of potatoes and bread. “This food is fine, and trust me, good days will come back to us.”

Rubina managed to save enough for her bus fare – but only for the bus. Bus stations weren’t always in the center of the cities, but taxis were too expensive, so if it was only a few miles, she went by foot. Each mile walked was a bit of money saved. And each step reminded her of her family’s struggles.

But their struggles were small compared to Gul’s. His hope was almost extinct. When he begged Rubina to stop fighting, she tried to revive his spirits with one of her favorite poems – by a revolutionary Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz. She squeezed his hand as she recited it.

*We shall see.
Certainly we, too, shall see
That day that has been promised to us.*

*When these high mountains
of tyranny and oppression
turn to fluff and evaporate.*

But Rubina was devastated after the judge’s decision. She held herself together during that visit, but back at university she couldn’t sleep. Her exhausted eyes, dried out from tears, refused to rest. All her hope had drained away over the course of the year. And the sentence had claimed the last drop. If eyewitnesses weren’t enough, what could they do? That little pocket of her heart was bursting with its pains and injustices. They were ripe to be heard. So she decided to write. She got out of bed, sat down in the amber light of her desk lamp, and wrote. She wrote the whole story – the water tap, the plot, the mob, Gul’s long suffering in jail, the judge’s bias sentence. And parliamentarians were afraid to speak on such a sensitive, divisive issue. Not even Tariq C. Qaiser, the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) from Sargodha, would visit Gul. *He traveled to Geneva to make a statement to the United Nations on the minority security situation in Pakistan, Rubina wrote, but he never visited Gul Masih in jail.* She ended her article with two questions: *Who will support us? What is the next step?* And then a request: *Write to my uncle, and write to my government. Your letters, your prayers, your words of consolation can save his life.*

She shared her work with some Catholic brothers, an American and an Australian, she knew in Sargodha. They encouraged her to translate it to English. So she did, and the story left Pakistan’s borders, traveling to the consciousness of the international community. The brothers circulated it to all their international congregations and connections, and Rubina sent it to the *Catholic Naqib*, a magazine published in Pakistan. Naqib means “one who raises a voice” – and as her pen wrote, Rubina’s voice rose louder and louder. Gul’s case became quickly well-known in Pakistan and

internationally. This was her first serious writing. She was not memorizing someone else's words but creating her own. And it was not the script for a play, though she wished it were. This was real life, her uncle's life, and the ending mattered.

Soon Gul had company in his jail cell: concerned letters of solidarity from around the world. Hundreds of letters were delivered to the jail. Letters also arrived on the desks of Pakistan's president, prime minister and minister of minorities. International human rights organizations and journalists picked up the story. Rubina organized house meetings and spoke bluntly in parishes against misuse of the blasphemy law. *If my uncle is going to die, then I can die. I can speak*, she thought. *Anyone can die when a blasphemy accusation can entrap at any time.* It didn't matter that she had to climb two mountains – being a woman and a minority – to raise her voice. The team of lawyers worked tirelessly to speed the appeal through. But even with their expertise and Rubina's activism the case snagged and floundered in Pakistan's inefficient legal wasteland. They appeared for months of stalled hearings at the high court in Lahore while Gul endured almost two more years of prison life.

The People's Representative

Those days after Gul's sentence are filed in Rubina's memory as, among other things, the days of walking. This trip was no different. She and her uncle Javaid had walked the mile to the Sargodha bus station in the middle of the night to catch the next bus, and now they were wandering the deserted early morning streets of Faisalabad, trying to stay warm as they searched for the minister's house. They didn't know where it was, but they'd been told if they came early, at 5 a.m., they *might* get an appointment with him. *Mr. Minister is very busy*, the minister's assistant had told Javaid on the phone the day before. *Those who are not early do not get a meeting.* He would only be home in Faisalabad for one day, so Javaid and Rubina had taken the earliest possible bus – the midnight departure.

Javaid had decided they needed to present Gul's case to Peter John Sohtra, the minister of minorities. Because of the separate electorate system, Christians weren't supposed to go to Muslim parliamentarians – they weren't their voters. But the minority minister was a Christian. Aziz's political influence was confined to local politics, but Rubina was a post-graduate student, so Javaid had enlisted her as his colleague in the mission.

After hours of wrong turns on unfamiliar streets, they found it. A huge, beautiful house with an all-night watchman poised at the gate. Frozen clouds of sharp breath left his mouth when he spoke.

“This is the minister's house.” He looked at them suspiciously, awaiting their explanation.

“We are here to speak to the minister,” Rubina said. “His assistant told us to take an appointment first thing this morning.”

“Just sit there, in the street,” he pointed to the ditch on Rubina's side of the gate, still hidden in early morning shadows. “When the family wakes up, I will ask them. If they allow you into the house, then fine.”

So they huddled together, shivering and praying for the sun to rise and start thawing the inhospitable air. Three hours later the watchman was summoned. He returned and unhitched the gate. Rubina's heart leapt with relief. She could almost taste the warm chai²⁰ she would certainly be drinking soon. But once inside the gate, the watchman held up his hand. "You've been invited into the lawn only. Wait here."

Rubina's heart sank back down. She was shocked, but even more, she was offended. This was not Pakistani hospitality. This was humiliation. Pakistanis invite visitors inside for a cup of chai – and even if you have nothing, you at least offer a proper place to sit. And you certainly don't tell them to sit out on the street. Her dignity stung more than her frostbitten fingers.

When the minister emerged from his office on the side of the house, a line of security and politicians in tow, Rubina had no qualms. Hours of waiting and shivering had emboldened her. She walked up and presented herself.

"Well, we are here, and we want to speak with you."

Instead of Rubina, the minister looked at his assistant. "Ask them to sit in the veranda. Then I will come."

So Rubina and Javaid moved one more demeaning step closer to the minister's ear. From lawn to veranda. And then they waited again, for hours. Rubina knew the minister wasn't simply busy. He knew why they'd come – Javaid had told the assistant on the phone. Perhaps it had to do slightly with Rubina's unorthodox boldness, but she knew they were being avoided because of their business. Javaid was convinced they would not get an appointment, but Rubina was not ready to leave.

"Just let me try," she said. The minister was in the middle of a meeting in the drawing room, but Rubina opened the door with confidence. "Excuse me, sir," she interrupted, "But we have been here for so many hours. Could you give us just two minutes?" He looked up in surprise. "You can keep an eye on your watch," she added.

To Rubina's satisfaction he agreed. "I am a very busy person," he said, "so you have five minutes."

Rubina quickly explained her uncle's charge and sentence, and held up a copy of *Catholic Naqib*. "The story has been published here if you're interested. And here's a copy of the verdict." She paused and placed them both on the massive desk between them. And then all the pains that she'd stored up pushed her to keep talking.

"You are our only hope because you are our minister. We cannot go to the Muslim parliamentarians because we are Christian. And this is not just my uncle's case – this is a case of minorities. It could happen to me, and it could happen to you."

The minister's face did not appear affected or amused. He nodded routinely and told them to come see him in Islamabad the next week. He gave them a date and said unconvincingly, "Come then, and I'll tell you what I can do."

One week and a five-hour bus ride later, Javaid and Rubina knocked on his door in Islamabad's minister colony. A servant answered and told them the minister was not at home. Rubina saw a young girl pass down a hallway behind the servant. "Let me speak with one of his daughters then," Rubina said. She wouldn't be deterred that easily.

A tall, giggling teenager dressed in jeans and a T-shirt came to the door, and Rubina explained that the minister had told them to come that day. His daughter flipped her hair with practiced finesse. "Well, my father is in Karachi." There was no hint of apology in her response.

"We can wait," Rubina said, looking at Javaid. "He has given us a time, so maybe he will come."

A smirk tugged at the edges of the girl's mouth. She didn't invite them in, but Rubina hadn't expected her to. "Wait if you want," she mocked like a schoolgirl. "You can wait weeks, maybe months. We don't know when he will come." Chuckling at her clever response, she shut the door in their faces. Javaid put his hand on Rubina's shoulder. They'd gone from the street to the lawn to the veranda, and now the doorstep, and they didn't even get a glass of water from the people's representative. Javaid didn't have to say anything. He felt it too. Rubina's familiar companions had slipped back around her heart. Rejection. Alienation. They filled the dejected silence of Rubina and Javaid's long walk back to the bus station. A taxi was too expensive.

The Exile

Rubina wasn't there the day they won the case, but her brother-in-law called her with the news immediately. Gul was innocent. His sentence was repealed. After three years of bitterness and captivity, he was released. From death row back to life.

But Gul did not go home. And he wasn't safe. Even though the high court of Pakistan had declared his innocence, they could not give him back life as usual. Feudalism had appropriated many people's respect for government courts – justice was distributed by jirgas,²¹ not high court judges. Gul's life was still in danger. His accusers made their intentions clear. They'd told Rubina's family directly: We will kill him the first chance we get.

So when Peter called Rubina with the news, he told her to go to Faisalabad, where Gul had been secretly transferred from the jail. "Go quickly," he told her. "Someone from the bishop's house will guide you to where you need to go." Bishop John Joseph – an outspoken and diligent protester of blasphemy laws – had arranged for Gul's asylum.²² She and Kamran traveled from Multan to see their uncle, but they arrived to a city tangled in chaos. Faisalabad's roads were clogged with strikes over Kashmir, and they spent hours pushing through the crowds. Each time they arrived at their appointed destination only to find Gul's hiding place had shifted once again. Rubina's anticipation mounted by the minute as she told Kamran what she would say to Gul once they saw him. She'd worked so hard for so long. Her tired heart was finally relieved. She could barely remember a time before that fated day at the water tap.

But Rubina didn't get to say a word. They were too late. By the time they found his final hideout, Gul was already on his way to Germany, smuggled out of the country. Out of his home.

The blasphemy case didn't really end that day. It set up a permanent home in her soul, in that pocket of memories that propelled her forward. *One pain in life is enough to show you what you must do in life.*

Rubina had seen her country's politics and distribution of justice up close. And she hadn't just seen it. She'd *felt* how minorities had to struggle to survive. Her parents always told her that education would be her survival, but she realized that education was no guarantee. She could be trapped at any time with a blasphemy accusation, years of her life stolen like her uncle's. She needed to find another answer, something beyond education, to ensure security.

The Personal is Political

One face out of the dozen or so bobbing along Multan's dusky city street was different. They were all there for the same reason, but one stood out, framed by a dark, draped scarf. But it wasn't silent. This face had a mouth wide open, shouting the slogans as loudly, sometimes louder, as the other voices, but this voice was a little higher, a little sweeter than the chorus of deep, male voices. It was Rubina's – the only woman in the demonstration. She didn't know she'd be the only woman when her brother-in-law asked her to join the small spontaneous protest march, the first opposition effort; she'd simply said yes and started walking.

She was front and center nonetheless, carrying the banner at the head of the procession. Men to the left, men to the right, men behind. But no one in front. Nothing but the road stretched out before them. Orange lettering proclaimed their protest: Don't Make the *Shanakhti* Card a *Shararti* Card. Rubina loved the poetry of their banner. Don't make the identity card a divisive card.

"Pakistanis are one nation!" an energized man next to Rubina boomed through his bullhorn. The growing crowd cheered behind them as curious bystanders stopped to hear their message.

She may have been the only woman, but Rubina felt right at home. The excitement, the political slogans, the sign waving, the frenzied crowds – they had all accented the days of her girlhood in the City of Eagles. Inyat was always an active campaigner for her brother Aziz's city council elections, and she took her children to all the processions and speeches. Rubina chimed in on the chants and learned early on to raise her left fist for the Pakistan People's Party, never the right. And she fondly remembered her mother – one arm in a sling after fracturing her wrist – dancing to the drumbeats after Aziz won the election.

"A religious column will divide one nation into many columns – into many nations!" the ringleader continued. "A Christian nation, a Hindu nation, a Sikh nation. Non-Muslim nations and a Muslim nation. This is against the unity of Pakistan!"

"We are one nation! We are Pakistani!" Rubina and the other banner-holders shouted after him. The refrain rippled backward on a wave through the small sea of demonstrators weaving through the center of Multan. This rally was the very beginning of the campaign, so though their numbers were few, passion flowed at large.

One discriminatory law had already come crashing into the realities of Rubina's own life and put her uncle behind bars, so when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced that parliament was drafting a bill to add a religious column to Pakistan's national ID card, the personal became political, the individual, national. If minorities stayed silent, Rubina thought, things would only get worse.

It was October 1992 – one month before Gul's initial death sentence – when Islamic fundamentalists put the proposal before parliament with the desire of making religious differences more visible. Their aim was the Ahmadis, a sect of Islam that Bhutto had constitutionally declared non-Muslim in the '70s, but fundamentalists wanted them to be absolutely identifiable. The religious column would clearly stamp them, and other minorities, as non-Muslims.

Rubina was perched and primed to fight it. She was busy traveling back and forth to visit her uncle that year, but she'd also been flung head first into the struggle for minority rights. Hungry for some solace and answers to her burning question – *What can I do to create peace and security for religious minorities?* – she started learning from and campaigning with human rights groups like the National Commission for Justice and Peace and South Asia Partnership-Pakistan. So when Peter Jacob asked if she'd join the rally he was organizing, Rubina was more than ready to take her activism to the streets. Discrimination, she was quickly realizing, was larger than her uncle's blasphemy case.

Pakistan's identification card had never designated an individual by religion. Rubina's card had an ID number, her name, her city of residence, and her father's name. A religious column would make her primary identity either Muslim or non-Muslim. "Pakistani" would pale behind that designation. Discrimination and religious intolerance would become even easier. Systematized. And identification cards were used all the time – to vote, apply for college and jobs, open a bank account, get a driver's license, buy a train ticket. *When people want to be powerful, they marginalize the margins, Rubina thought. And then they throw away the marginalized.* She would not be made a second-class citizen. She was a Pakistani.

But not everyone was as convinced of the danger of the proposed law. "The purpose of an ID card is to show your nationality, not your religion," Rubina would explain as she and her fellow volunteers tried to build support in Multan's Catholic community before the rally. "Religion is a personal matter."

"What's the problem?" people would ask her. "We are Christian. If they put that on our ID card, what's wrong with that?" They didn't understand the consequences that would follow, that they would be further isolated in society. But Rubina understood their confusion. The separate electorate system had kept minorities politically isolated for decades, confined to the fringes because they could only vote for their own minority candidates. They were used to it. Most expected it.

The rally in Multan was just the first spark though. If they wanted to pressure the government to kill the proposal, they needed the heat of a national movement. The people had to make themselves heard – and visible. They had to come out of their houses and fill the streets. So Rubina took the campaign home to Sargodha. She coordinated with the Catholic Church, Father Phillip and a Sargodha nun, Sister Anna Nawab, and they quickly went to work. Priests, nuns and volunteers went door-to-door to inform the community and invite them to a demonstration. For four days, day and night, they talked to people. Rubina was tireless. Gul was still in jail, and his

suffering fed her energies. If she didn't stop this law, every Christian, every minority, would be marked like her family.

Rubina traveled from home to home with Sister Anna, focusing on women and Christians in particular. Father Phillip focused on men. Because of the blasphemy case, the community knew Rubina was a woman unafraid of challenge. Or risk. She was young, but she was a survivor. A young girl – especially a Christian – would not typically be taken seriously, but Rubina had gained acceptance and respect in her community. So when she and Sister Anna knocked on doors, most were willing to listen. “Look what’s happening in your town with blasphemy, what’s happening to minorities,” Rubina would point out. “If you don’t address your issues, no one else will come and do it for you.”

Some women began crying when Rubina reminded them how she and her family were suffering because of discriminatory laws. *You are our daughter*, they would say. *If you say this is right, we will come out and stand with you*. But even with her credibility, convincing people was no easy task. “Look, we are already under the separate electorate system, which makes us nothing. No one has to care about us,” Rubina told the doubters and the apathetic. “But this is a second attack. If we don’t push this back, they’ll never consider a joint electorate.”

Different ears required different arguments, but each conversation ended with an invitation: Now is the time to come out of your houses and protest.

On the day of the demonstration, thousands of people filled the streets of Sargodha. Women and men, boys and girls, of every social status. Christians, Hindus and even friends from the Muslim community jostled next to each other, pushing closer to the central stage.

In Multan she’d been the only woman walking, but at Sargodha’s rally, Rubina was the only woman to speak. She gripped the frail bamboo poles that passed as railings. Twenty feet above her was the stage. Father Phillip was greeting the masses, thanking them for coming out and raising their voices. The cumulative hum of thousands created a steady, energized buzz. Rubina could feel it vibrating the bamboo in her hand. It was only the noise though. She wasn’t afraid. Her heart was bursting to speak – it had been storing up its words with each prick and every bruise.

Oh my God, she thought as she took her first step onto the shaky stairs. Father Phillip announced her name. She’d never spoken to such a multitude. The rickety wooden stairs swayed a bit, but the two men holding the poles as she climbed steadied the staircase. All she could feel were her emotions. She was there on a mission. The blasphemy case had focused and enlivened her in a new way. Now she was ready to struggle, to be a freedom fighter – but not like so many who operated under the guise of *jihad*. Jihad did not mean car bombings and suicide missions. Jihad is the struggle against injustice, to save humanity. This was Rubina’s jihad.

Snippets of poetry, again from her dear Faiz Ahmed Faiz, climbed the steps to the stage with her. One revolutionary line for each stair.

Speak – your lips are free.

Speak – your tongue is still yours.

This magnificent body is still yours.

Speak – your life is still yours ...

Speak – there is little time

But little though it is

It is enough. Time enough ...

Speak – truth still lives.

Say what you have to say.

She stepped up to the microphone, bolstered by the reminder that she was free, that this was the time, and she had something to say. Her words were grounded in the credibility that she *knew* discrimination – and that she spoke from her heart. Familiar faces in the sea of thousands, the ones who called her “daughter,” knew that.

“Pakistan should repeal all laws that discriminate human beings from each other,” Rubina began. Her words echoed through the sound system. She looked out at her community, the visual representation of so many doors opened. “This is not something I’m doing for Christianity or for minorities. This is for Pakistanis.”

A chant started with a tentative, dull rumble and quickly gained strength: *Rubina Bhatti, zinda baad. Pakistan, zinda baad.* Long live Rubina. Long live Pakistan. Rubina’s eyes scanned the crowd for her family to prove it wasn’t a dream. The surreal moment seemed to stick on the film reel of time as her gaze caught on a little girl with her mother. She’d been that girl once. She was jolted back into real time when a waving Kamran and Feroze caught her eye near the front. One of their Muslim neighbors stood with them.

“This is also for our Muslim brothers and sisters,” she continued. “If we are segregated from Muslims, the ties between us will be broken. The distance will get wider and wider, and both will suffer.”

Something warm stirred deep inside her, like a long lost friend returned. Rubina felt optimism for the first time in almost a year. It was invigorating, like a rebirth. High above the rally, she felt like she was floating, and all around her were beaming faces of the people – small children, old men, students waving signs, mothers with babies on their hips. She saw her community awakening, and it looked something like a revolution.

And it was. A few days later Rubina joined the demonstration in Lahore, while the same message was being shouted in Karachi, Islamabad and across the country. Their voices rose together in a chorus of protest, and the politicians way up high actually heard. Rubina’s identification card remained a document to indicate her identity as a Pakistani, and nothing more. Nothing less.

The Last Day of Blessing

It was early evening, and the warmth of the July day still loitered idly in the corners of the house. Rubina's cousin was getting married in two days but the festivities started that evening, and the whole family was in Sargodha for the ceremony. The wedding was at her uncle's house so there were more women than usual staying in Inyat and Feroze's house. It would be the perfect night for an outdoor celebration. Not a cloud graced the sky, and the stars would be free to light the night with their glittery, romantic glow. Rubina held her wet hair in a bun so she could fasten the cross necklace. These were certainly days to give thanks.

Inyat was lounging gracefully on the charpai in the courtyard, the coolest place she could find. She looked like a lady of nobility, reigning over her prized palace in her favorite dress. The other women were still rushing about, putting the final touches on their party attire, picking out the perfect scarf for the occasion and trading jewelry. The men sat on the charpai across from Inyat, enjoying the languid afternoon, perfectly patient. They were used to the giddy beautification rituals of the women. Rubina stood in the doorway admiring her mother and patting her black hair dry with a towel. "Come sit with me, Ruby," Inyat called, patting the spot next to her.

She ran her fingers through her daughter's freshly washed waves like she had for 27 years. "Oh my daughter has such beautiful hair," she cooed as she combed the locks into place. "Don't ever cut your hair, Ruby." An ethereal contentment settled on her features, as if there were no greater moment than the current one. It was a look of satisfaction. All was well within her world. Life was delicious, and she was savoring its taste. She showered Rubina's forehead with kisses, and then grasped her hand seriously, demanding her attention. Her eyes jumped with sparkling joy. "I am so proud of you, my Ruby. When people ask if my daughter did a master's degree in chemistry, I love to answer, *Yes, and she's a college lecturer.*"

Rubina had taken her first lectureship at Sargodha's Government Girls College that February – she was a chemistry lecturer, the pinnacle of her mother's dreams. It was 1996, and she was the first Christian professor the college had ever appointed. The months that followed had been the happiest in Rubina's recent memory. They missed Gul, far away in Germany, and heard too infrequently from him, but Inyat basked in the glow of having two lecturers in the family. Nabila had just taken a lectureship too, in economics. She called all her friends, effusing pride. "This was the dream I saw 20 years ago, that my daughters would have respectable jobs in society." Rubina didn't love teaching, but she enjoyed it well enough. And seeing her mother so fulfilled was its own reward.

Teaching in Sargodha meant she could live with her family once again. Nabila was married and living in Lahore – and Kamran was in Lahore too, working as a film producer. But Subina was there, and the potato days were in the past, so Inyat's diligent care for her family was robust as ever. Rubina's return to Sargodha revived her even more. A supply of traditional cool drinks were a critical concern of hers, especially in the oven of summer when electrical outages were an almost daily occurrence. "My girl is almost home!" Inyat would exclaim. "I must have something for her." Every day Rubina returned home from her students to her mother's open arms. And lassi and lemonade.

Inyat's praises, paired with her soothing fingers and the mild summer draft, were a sort of lullaby. Life had been difficult, she reflected, full of struggle and sacrifice, but now all her children were happy and successful. "You have made me so proud, Ruby. I have become young with happiness. I am satisfied now."

Suddenly the caresses stopped. Inyat's last sentence tapered off on a gust of July breeze. "All of my dreams have come true ..." She slumped in the folds of Rubina's beaded scarf. For a moment no one moved. No one spoke. And then Rubina began screaming. "Ammi Jee! Ammi! Are you OK?"

But she didn't move. Her head lay peacefully in Rubina's lap, as content as she'd been a moment before. Feroze leapt up and rushed to his wife, patting her hair and shaking her lightly. "Inyat, Inyat," he whispered urgently, rocking her.

"Someone call the doctor!" Rubina shouted. "Hurry!" She grasped the cool metal chain around her neck. *In worries and in joys*. She'd put it on for a day of celebration, a day of thanks – again not knowing she would really need it for support. But it couldn't quell the rising fear in her chest.

Everyone in the house was gathered around them now. Rubina sat absolutely still, Inyat still limp in her lap. She carefully stroked her Ammi Jee's face and hair, aware that she couldn't feel her heart beating. Her mind screamed for Kamran and Nabila to hurry. They were due from Lahore any minute. Inyat had been bouncing in her skin – like a Christmas morning child – to see her two grandsons Tabeel and Sachal. Within five minutes the doctor arrived, but it was too late. Inyat was gone. Expired, he announced. A strong and sudden heart attack.

Rubina felt herself collapse, but then she was outside the moment. She couldn't yet feel her pain, and she wouldn't let go of Ammi until someone made her. Time stood still as the life that had illuminated her own slipped out of this world and on to the next, dissolving with the warm light of the day. The first, and holiest, of Rubina's saints to return home. The one who'd named her Ruby, precious one. The one who didn't scold her when she walked ahead or played outside with boys. The one who held her hand at the end of a horrible day. The one who held back tears as she served potatoes to her princesses. And the one who loved to say, "I told you she was my Ruby."

Kamran and Nabila missed their mother by 20 minutes. She still looked ready for a party when they arrived. Inyat had never been an ordinary woman, and it was fitting that she would end her life looking so delicate, elegantly dressed for a festive evening. Feroze was still at her side, now rocking himself. *My moving spirit*, he moaned softly, over and over. That's what he'd always called his tireless wife.

They kept her body with them overnight, and the next day Inyat was buried. Her name meant Blessing. It was the first day of life without Ammi Jee – but her blessing would never be buried.



There were no words and not enough tears to express Rubina's anguish. So she spoke little and cried constantly. And her cross didn't leave her neck once during the 40 days of mourning. She

needed it next to her skin. The days and nights came and went, visitors and their condolences passing in and out of Rubina's consciousness. But because it's what Inyat would have done, and because they too were mourning, Rubina made sure there was food available to serve her guests. Otherwise, she sat under a veil of silence, asking one question to her God: Why did you take her from us – *why now, God?*

Inyat's whole life had been a whirl of endless struggle and hard work. She did it all from her heart, for her siblings and for her family. A mother since the day her own mother died, Inyat's family was her lifeblood, the beating pulse in her every day. Rubina and her brother and sisters had big plans of lavishing their mother with thanks, some fraction of return. *Had*. It was too late now for their good intentions. For the beautiful clothes, the gold jewelry, the trip to Lahore, a city she'd never seen. Even if she'd lived one more year, Rubina told God, maybe she could have enjoyed some moments of rest in her life. Summer had just arrived, and they'd planned to spend it living all together in Sargodha, laughing, eating and traveling. But Rubina had always felt, deep in her heart, a disappointed knowledge that she could never return all her mother had sacrificed. How do you repay everything?

She remembered with a faint smile the day she'd told her mother she wanted to buy her some gold jewelry. Inyat had always been quite fond of gold ornaments, as she called them, but she'd sold her only pieces years ago – the ones Feroze gave her at their wedding – to help pay for the construction of their new house in the city. Kamran's ears perked up. "No," he said urgently, "I want to give the gold to my mother." Inyat just laughed at their squabble. She didn't expect such extravagance in her life. A few days before the wedding Kamran had called Rubina bursting with excitement. His newest film was a huge hit. "Tell Ammi Jee that when I come for cousin's wedding, we will watch the picture together in Sargodha." Her shimmering pride would have been her jewelry.

Nabila had planned to take Inyat to Lahore and show her all the adornments of the historical city. Rubina would buy her all the beautiful cloth she wanted, so her vibrant scarves would bless the road behind her. She'd been planning for that summer of gratitude since her lecturer appointment in February. February to July had been the anticipation months. But then the unexpected July had come.

Forty days after the last day of Blessing, Inyat's memorial service was held in front of her home. The home she'd sold everything to build for her family. The people just kept coming, flooding through the front gate. Old students, dear neighbors, friends and strangers she'd helped throughout the years. Three priests came from the city and surrounding villages, and more than half of the guests were Muslims. The crowd painted a picture of Inyat's life, of her commitment to service and compassion and love for all. Hand after hand was placed on Rubina's shoulder, with a murmur of *Your mother was such a great lady*. Rubina just nodded. She knew. That's why she couldn't stop crying. She didn't speak at the funeral. She could still hardly speak at all.

Kamran and Nabila boarded a bus back to their lives in Lahore, and Rubina took charge of Subina and her father's care. *It was God's will*, she finally told herself. *Human beings can do nothing*. So she uncovered her strength. She cooked, she cleaned, she mended. She comforted. And she returned to her students and lectures at the college. But teaching couldn't distract her from the void. During her free period she'd retreat to her office and let the tears fall. Her mother had always been her greatest strength. Her inspiration, her light, her first saint.



It took months for Rubina to settle herself into some semblance of normalcy. And even then, the pain was still there. It was the greatest pain of her life, and it was far too big to fit in the designated pocket of her heart. It just *was*. It lived everywhere and touched everything. The tears would return at the most inopportune times, like when she was standing in front of a class, writing formulas on the board and lecturing about a complicated chemical reaction. Her colleagues always commented that she cried like it was the very first day. *How attached they must have been*, they would say. But like every other pain of her life, it inspired her to work and to move forward.

Rubina joined a professors' union, All Punjab Professors and Lecturers Association, to change her routine. She needed a new focus, a purpose. What would her mother desire for her? She was already a lecturer, her mother's loftiest dream – what now? Would her mother want her to spend all her time crying? Her answer was a firm no. Inyat always wanted her to be a leader, a benefit to society. If she kept passing her days in and out of tears, she would stagnate. She would fail.

So, Rubina asked herself, what *kind* of teacher would Ammi Jee want me to be? One like her, who gave herself – time and heart – to her students and community. And one like Mrs. Ashiq, with an ever available motherly ear. When the position to head student affairs opened up, Rubina snatched it. She busied herself arranging student functions, programs and debates, and sorting out any and every student problem. Following in the footsteps of her saints, Rubina's identity as a lecturer expanded, and the best part of her day became a student knocking on her door.

Longing for the Fullness of Humanity

Rubina nodded at the student near the back of the room, hand raised and concerned creases furrowing her brow. "Madam Rubina, I want to ask a question," the girl said. "Who killed the commissioner, and why did they kill him?"

Rubina had been at the college for two years now, and such questions during her student affairs meetings were not unusual. It was the month of Muharram,²³ and her students were discussing the city peace committees recently established by local governments to allay the annual spike in Shiite-Sunni tension during the Shiite month of mourning. There would be no need for peace committees if Shiite and Sunni could live in harmony, some students pointed out. And then they had remembered the commissioner.

Though the incident was three years old, the wounds of confusion were still unhealed. Syed Tajammal Abas, Sargodha's kindhearted commissioner, had been shot dead at The Officer's Club, a sports club in the city. While technically a bureaucrat, he hadn't been like all the rest. He was accessible, and he listened to the people's problems. *Good things are coming to Sargodha every day because of him*, people would say. Conjectures began flying as soon as the shot rang out. He was a Shiite, a progressive one with a political position, and one of good repute with the people of Sargodha. A threatening combination for Sunni sectarians. Shootings had continued with frequency, and sectarian violence was on the rise not only in Sargodha, but all across Pakistan.

Another hand shot up, and Rubina was happy to let a student answer. She wanted them to think for themselves, plus institutional protocol strongly monitored what issues, and how, she could discuss with her students. “Political education” was not allowed – there were rules and regulations to discourage professors with progressive or activist slants from mistaking the podium for a political platform. The avoidance resulted in her students’ lingering confusion, but it would have been dangerous for her to bring up the murder, so she was grateful her students had.

“That’s a funny question,” the other girl answered quickly. “You know he was a Shiite and a Sunni killed him.” As if that was it. Nothing to question about the way things are. Her matter-of-fact response sent a little chill down Rubina’s spine. She was shocked. Had the violence become so everyday that this was their response? Were her students so desensitized by the news of bombs in other cities and the frequency of gunshots in their own? And this culture of assumption – of judgment without investigation – was part of the problem. It perpetuated discrimination, intolerance and violence.

But, on a positive note, this is exactly what she wanted from these meetings. As head of student affairs, Rubina emphasized repeatedly that her door was open to all students, not just her science students. And every other week she held a student affairs meeting during the tutorial period, a designated time for students to bring up any issue of concern. She sensed it as they sat in her class, or passed her in the hallway: The violence and discrimination outside was causing anxiety and disturbance inside. They needed an outlet for their nagging questions and concerns.

So, while it was likely that the commissioner had been a victim of sectarian violence, Rubina wanted her students to ask *why*. She had to be careful of inserting her own opinion, but she could provoke reflection.

“OK, let me entertain that assumption for a moment,” Rubina began slowly, casting her eyes around the room, hoping for engagement. “The real question is *why* did a Sunni kill him, and *why* is this happening?” She didn’t have to say what she thought. She just continued posing questions in her Socratic method, and her students came alive. They didn’t just respond to her, they talked to each other.

After a few minutes of discussion, one girl said simply, “Well, we are Muslims, and we are one.” Rubina used her comment to probe further, to bring it from the streets and the political to the familiar walls of the college.

“If you are one, then why are there two Islamic studies books in the syllabus – one for Shiite students and one for Sunnis?”

“It’s wrong,” another student chimed in. “We are all Muslim, and we should have the same Islamic studies. Even non-Muslims study it, like the Hindu teacher in the nearby village, Dodha. He has a master’s degree in Islamic studies.”

Alia, one of Rubina’s smartest students, spoke up. “Hindus in Dodha face a lot of discrimination. The extremists won’t allow them their own graveyard or place of worship.”

“This is not Islam,” said the girl next to her. Her face was twisted in perplexed sorrow. “Our own Prophet encouraged religious tolerance by giving non-Muslims a place in the mosque to offer their prayers.”

That meeting was a breath of fresh air for Rubina. Her students were curious about what was happening in the world around them. Why was their religion so divided? Why were people being killed over it? *We cannot discuss it*, other professors told them, *these are political issues*. So they’d bring their questions to Madam Rubina. *Madam, why is it said that Hindus are the enemies of Muslims? Why we can’t we eat with Christians or Hindus? Why does the government allow hateful graffiti against Shiites?* Her response was always the same: *What do you think?* Even though her favorite poet had been banned during Gen. Zia’s martial law, and anyone reciting his verses was still suspected to be a revolutionary comrade, Rubina shared a few of Faiz Ahmad Faiz’s lines at the next meeting. *Speak – your lips are free*, she’d remind them. *Speak – the truth still lives. Say what you have to say*.

But *she* still could not speak freely. It was becoming harder and harder to breathe within the confines of the college. Her mind had been hard at work for some time, creating, planning and wondering: How can I free my voice? And how can I address issues of harmony with my students? She was lying on her bed, buried in the weight of her thick winter quilt, her ideas brewing, when the doorbell rang. “Rubina,” Feroze called to her, “there are two students here to see you. Dr. Ahmad Khan has sent them.”

What were they doing here? she wondered as she wrapped herself in a warm scarf. *And on such a cold night*. The two boys, Zimran and Naveed, were sitting anxiously on the sofa when she entered the sitting room. Their story didn’t even wait for her to sit before it leapt from their mouths. They’d just come from a village where a landlord had chained a poor laborer to a tree because he couldn’t repay his loan.

“He has iron chains around his legs so he can’t run away,” Zimran told her breathlessly. “The landlord works him during the day and ties him back up at night. He is weak and close to death, but the villagers are too afraid of the landlord to speak out. And no one is willing to pay his debt.” Zimran paused to catch his breath.

“Dr. Ahmad Khan told us to come see you, Madam Rubina,” Naveed interjected. “He said that you worked with human rights organizations and could help us.”

“Madam, if we don’t help him, he will die in a few days,” Zimran said impatiently.

“It’s terribly sad,” Rubina said. “Tell me, what is the name of the village?”

“Chak 36 South Branch,”²⁴ they said quickly.

Her brain seemed to stop in its tracks. *Chak 36? My village?* Rubina’s mind lurched back to life. *My birthplace*. A man was chained and hungry in the very gardens she had spent the most beautiful days of her life, eating melons and oranges with her friends. Her heart was pounding, but her face stayed calm. She’d learned to control her emotions and stay strong in the midst of others’ distress. “Tomorrow we will find a way,” she promised.

The National Commission for Justice and Peace responded right away to Rubina's request, and after a few days of legal action and activism, the landlord was forced to unchain his indebted laborer. Naveed and Zimran had confirmed her dream – her students *could* be activists. They *did* care about a peaceful society. They just needed some knowledge and assistance, and she knew how she wanted to start it: a student discussion group that met outside the college. Teaching chemistry became secondary to refining her plan to facilitate understanding in and between her students. She made a point of talking to Professor Ahmad Khan at the next professors' union meeting. He was the general secretary – overseeing thousands of professors in Punjab – and they'd forged an association when Rubina helped run his secretariat election campaign.

“Sometimes I feel suffocation in my heart,” she told him, knowing the progressive professor would understand the atmosphere she spoke of. And then she told him her idea. “My students want to discuss the issues,” she told him, “but they don't know how. They need a space, a platform.” Professor Khan held his chin and nodded, sparks of excitement in his eyes and a smile spreading across his face. Before he said a word, she knew he agreed. “Rubina,” he said, “your group will have my full support. And you must address religious intolerance.”



“This should not be for Muslim students only, but for other religions as well,” Father Patrick Sohail said, leaning forward, elbows pressed against the small table in his sparse parish office. He agreed with Professor Khan. If they really wanted to create some bit of harmony, they'd have to work on two levels: first, with the students in the college, and second, in the Christian community. It was just the three of them at that first conversation, huddled in Father Sohail's office, plotting their course in the dim parish light. Hours of discussion had planted a promise of possibility. Rubina's heart fluttered.

Their philosophy was simple: Before raising their voices against the issues of discrimination and violence, they – the students – had to understand the issues. “We have to ask why it's happening,” Rubina said. “We have to study the root causes, who's involved and why.” With Professor Khan's help Rubina would organize a group of college students, and Father Sohail would invite mature students in his parish to form a Christian group.

So the three strategists set out with their plan. Rubina's circle of support slowly grew as other professors and lecturers joined her efforts to foster a culture of peace. Students from the college gathered in Rubina's home, sometimes at Professor Khan's or other professors' who supported the idea.²⁵ They questioned Shiite-Sunni tensions in the college and society at large – like the frequent bombing of the Shiite holy sites that were killing men, women and children in the midst of prayers and mourning, as well as peace issues with India over the constantly disputed Kashmir territory and back-and-forth, nuclear test muscle-flexing.²⁶

Father Sohail discussed the idea with community leaders and then introduced the groups to Catholic youth in local parishes. Students began meeting at his parish and discussing topics like the separate electorate system, and especially the tragedy of Bishop John Joseph's recent suicide. He'd shot himself in a desperate final protest of the blasphemy law. The groups met separately at first – Rubina working with both – until they'd matured and learned the art of gracious, open-minded dialogue.

The first integrated meeting was informal. There was no talk of forming an organization. They would simply call themselves what they did. Study Circle Meetings: Not only Christians and Muslims, but even several Hindus,²⁷ sitting in a circle, studying the wounds of their society with the hope of healing them. It was up to them how often they would meet, Rubina told them. But each time they would pick a topic, someone would prepare and present a briefing, and then they would discuss and discover.

“We have to talk about what’s happening in our city.” Madam Rubina sat cross-legged on her floor surrounded by students. A vision of her mother flashed from her memory bank – Inyat bustling about the crowded courtyard of their house in the village, tutoring *all* the children, Christians and Muslims, free of charge.

“Religious intolerance is happening all around us. Sectarian violence murdered our commissioner,” she continued. “We don’t know what will be next, but we have to think about the issues if we want to change them.”

It was the beginning. Minds and hearts were opening, assumptions being challenged. Rubina looked at the circle of students with satisfaction. This is what she’d longed for – it was her battle plan in action, but together they were attempting to wage something radically different. Peace. Harmony. A fullness of humanity rather than the murder of it. And that became their name. *Taangh Wasaib*. A longing for the fullness of humanity.

Changing Rhythms

Rubina returned to her first love. She’d been poring over books of Sufi literature, soaking in their poetry, bathing in their philosophy of peace and harmony, studying their quest for truth. This was the tool she needed, the respected teachings that could span religious differences. This could be her interfaith bridge. Sufis, practitioners of an ancient school of Islam, focused on esoteric elements of religion rather than the exoteric or public: inner peace, meditation, spiritual truth, connection to the earth and humanity. The divine is mysterious, but the unity of humanity is knowable – and touchable. So, inspired by the never-ending quest for divine peace and truth, Sufis leaned toward progressive thought and concern for social ills. And though at times radically liberal, Sufism was embraced as a cultural treasure. Before Pakistan’s birth, the region that is now Punjab province was the birthplace and homeland of many prolific and celebrated Sufi poets. They wrote their verses and pondered their thoughts while gazing up at the same starry constellations Rubina watched now. And theirs were now some of the most cherished words of Punjabi literature.

But the Sufis were not a fresh discovery. The sacred Punjabi poetry was embedded in Rubina’s literary fabric, and the words rushed back from afternoons spent gathered around her blind grandfather, Daulat Masih (Inyat’s father), as he recited verses and entire passages from memory. Sometimes he sang the poetry, making the savory words even more delectable. She remembered his reverent tone as he taught his intent flock about the Sufis. *Sufism does not speak only of Islam*, he would tell his grandchildren. *It speaks of humanity. And every religion speaks about humanity*. He dazzled his grandchildren with his memory and the luminous words that seemed to hold something very important, but too wise for their young hearts and minds to fully comprehend. But that didn’t keep

the seeds from nestling their way in and waiting for their time to bloom. Now as she reintroduced herself to the familiar wisdom, the deep softness of his cadence swept over the words on the page.

But Rubina understood it now. It was indigenous wisdom – the wisdom of her roots. The wisdom from Punjab’s own saints who said, simply, that all human beings are sacred and equal, and that each of our lot in life is to protect, and to love, that sacredness. If, like her grandfather had reminded them, every religion values humanity, then Sufism could be the thread to bind people together.

So Rubina brought a Sufi poem in its original Punjabi elegance to one of the first integrated study circle meetings. The words of Bulleh Shah, one of those Punjab Sufi saints, would be her connector, to stoke the flame of their interfaith understanding and dialogue. Before she read, she shared a little about the poet. Tensions between Muslims and Sikhs were high in Bulleh Shah’s days, and his poems critique religious orthodoxy, reflect on strife between both religions and castes, and encourage nonviolence and self-reflection on the path to peace, truth and the divine.

*Bulleh, who am I? Rubina recited to the circle of young minds, as if she were the pondering Sufi. What do I know?
Neither am I orthodox Muslim in the mosque,
Nor do I follow the religious rites of pagans.
Neither am I among the virtuous nor the sinful.
Neither am I Moses, nor the Pharaoh.*

She passed the poem to the student next to her.

*Bulleh, who am I? the young man read, a bit timidly at first. What do I know?
Secrets of religion, I have not known.
From Adam and Eve, I am not born.
I am not the name I assume,
Not in stillness, nor on the move.*

When the poem ended Rubina asked everyone to reflect in silence as she posed questions to guide their thoughts. “The Sufis taught that people from all religions are equal,” Rubina said. “What do *we* believe? Do we see Bulleh Shah’s vision of equality in our society?”

She let those provocations mull for a while, and then the circle came alive, discussing religious intolerance, sectarian violence and the need for a tolerant and open society. The obvious answer was no, their society was not Bulleh Shah’s dream. But they wanted it to be. Rubina nodded and listened, allowing the student’s intuition to guide the dialogue.

“Bulleh said he was not a Muslim or a pagan. All he knew was that he was a human being,” Rubina offered as a concluding thought. That’s where Rubina wanted to start. That was the basis of human rights and peace: the acknowledgement that personhood came first, before religious identity. The circle was abuzz. Sufism was energizing her students just as her grandfather’s songs had stirred her child heart. *Our discoveries shouldn’t stay within our circle,* the students said. *How can we share Sufi wisdom with more people?*

Their question followed Rubina home that night. She'd already returned to poetry – what about her second literary love, theater? Sufism was the perfect message, and theater the perfect medium. She could use Sufis' words to say what would be disregarded coming from her own mouth, the mouth of a woman and a religious minority. Theater was accessible to everyone: young and old, men and women, educated and illiterate. She got to work on her first script: a mime theater on the life of Bulleh Shah. The students would do the acting and she would narrate with Bulleh's poetry. They would inject tolerance and peace into society one performance at a time.



She hadn't written a play since high school, and her foray into public theater lifted some eyebrows. *You have such a respectable job*, people (her family included) would remind Rubina. *Why are you doing things like this as a woman?* Theater was generally frowned upon as street art. Exhibitionism. Foolish frivolity – especially for women. The criticisms continued without any compelling basis, but Rubina was undeterred by suggestive comments about a woman's acceptability. And no one criticized her subject. Sufism was culturally off limits for insult.

The civic hall was packed for Taangh Wasaib's first theater performance. The Muslim religious leaders were sitting in the front row. University professors and other prominent community leaders were in the next rows, women and children behind them. Rubina was nervous as she looked out at the crowd – nearly 500 people – from behind the stage. She'd just watched some Muslim men in the front rows reject the cold beverages being distributed by a few Christian boys and girls. The men held their noses up a little as they shook their heads, even though the air was stifling in the crowded auditorium. Rubina read their minds. *I won't take a glass from a Christian*. She felt the sting as her own. Just one more reminder why this was needed.

The play's theme was straightforward: How the great Sufi Bulleh Shah might resolve the problems of Pakistan, the conflicted motherland and damsel in distress, if he were alive today. Colorfully patterned carpets of orange and red hues highlighted the stage, complemented by happy bouquets of flowers.

The mystical Sufi music begins, and Scene One opens with Mother Earth, stage left. Adorned in a vivid green dress and flowing white chador, her arms weave gracefully to the ups and downs of the music. She is free and beautiful. Alive. And she isn't just Mother Earth, but Pakistan. Her journey across the stage halts with the music. A second mime emerges stage right, Social Evil draped in a plain black shroud, her looming face darkened with harsh slashes of bronzy makeup. Mother Earth drops her head and stretches out her arms. Social Evil stands behind her victim, hands gripping surrendered wrists. The black cloak – sectarianism, discrimination, poverty – casts an enveloping shadow over her captive.

Rubina's narrative voice breaks the silence: *Whenever Mother Earth faces danger, a saint is born in the world.*

Scene Two: Enter Bulleh Shah, orange tunic, garlands of deep red flowers around his neck and greenery in his hair. The familiar poetry dances off Rubina's lips as she tells his life story. Born into the Syed family line, descendants of the Prophet, Bulleh set out looking for truth. His quest put him in search of a *murshad*, a guru. But he chose a murshad of a lower caste, the Arain caste, the

furthest removed from the Syeds. A shame to his family, his sisters and sisters-in-law approached him with a warning.

*Bulleh, accept our words of wisdom and go back home. Leave the Arains.
You are from the Prophet's line, a child of the Caliph Ali.
Why are you stigmatizing yourself?*

Rubina lowers her voice for Bulleh's famous retort: *If you call me Syed, you will go to hell. But if anybody calls me Arain, he will go to heaven.* It was one of Rubina's favorite lines, and with it she had just publicly spoken out against discrimination and the caste system. But they were Bulleh's words, not hers.

The murshad was angry and insulted. Bulleh tied straps of leather jingling with little metal bells around his ankles and danced to get the blessing of the murshad. But not just any dance – a prayerful dance celebrating creation and the unity of all things. The meditational movements would take him closer to God and self-actualization. The reflection would help him see a different world and change the traditional rhythms.

Scene Three returns to the plight of Mother Earth, though now she is joined by four other actresses: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and North-West Frontier Province. Huddled together at the back of the stage are four young men, darkly dressed and hiding in the shadows, symbolizing the primary social evils, Pakistan's collective and most pressing challenges. Bulleh looks on from the edge of the stage, watching the situation of Pakistan unfold before him. As he watches, Rubina puts words to the mime movements through more of Bulleh Shah's best-known verses.

Mother Earth, or Pakistan, weaves in and out of the four provinces, hunched in various defeated positions on the floor. *I am so tired of picking kasumbra*, Rubina says with a weary voice. *The thorns pierce my fingers with pain.*

In the old days, when Pakistan was still part of India, the women would collect kasumbra seeds in the jungle, pricking themselves on the notorious thorns. But the pain was worth it – the seeds were crushed into rich hues to dye delicate bridal cloths. Their hardship produces something beautiful and colorful. The poetry continues, and it becomes clear: Pakistan's provinces are the struggling women.

I am so tired of picking kasumbra. There are four powerful masters, each exacting a high tax.

One by one the challenges in the shadows step forward as their verse of poetry introduces them. And as they fill the stage with their presence, Pakistan and her provinces crumble a little further toward complete collapse. None of the masters are fulfilling their roles to society, and so Pakistan suffers under its taxation. The first master is the religious leaders, taxing the people by misrepresenting religion, misguiding believers and propagating intolerance. Political leaders levy the next tax; lacking seriousness and strength, they fail to protect their people. The third master, the judicial system, wears down the people with its discriminatory laws and severely limited access to justice. By the time the last master, society, taxes the people with harmful and oppressive traditions, Pakistan is bowed down in the middle of the stage. The four provinces are entirely beaten down,

limp in positions of distressed defeat. Bulleh Shah steps out of his posture of observance, compassion and conviction animating his movements. Rubina narrates his plan.

Now you will see how I will save my Mother Earth. I will dance.

His shackled ankles find the music's rhythm, and he dances between the broken provinces. When he dances near the masters, the social ills, they fall to the ground one by one. The bells tinkle out their own song, a light and floating chorus harmonizing with the meditational music. Grace notes hinting at something new. He stands next to Mother Earth, his orange sleeves fluttering with the prayerful undulations of his arms. Mother Earth slowly rises and joins Bulleh's dance, placing a hand on each province to revive them. Their dance forms a circle, a collective prayer, and instead of casting the evils off the stage – finishing them off – Mother Earth places her hands on them too. Bulleh's new rhythms have transformed the forces of evil. They learn the new dance of reunion and join the circle, replacing their harmful, poisonous rhythms with the rhythms of peace. No words are needed to accompany the closing scene. The music fades into the last note, and Rubina looks out anxiously at her audience.

The hypnotized captivation erupted into applause. The front row of religious leaders rose and continued clapping, and the rest of the crowd followed. Rubina's soul swelled. The room felt like it would overflow with the Pakistani emotions that always seemed to come in extremes. There were tears in many eyes, as if hearing their country's situation – and in turn their own – articulated and depicted with hope had been a long-awaited catharsis.

Like harvesting the kasumbra, Rubina knew they would have to pass through pain and difficulty before they arrived at the beautiful, colorful end – dancing in a unified circle of peaceful rhythms. She also knew it would be a slow process, learning new rhythms and rethinking ideologies. The Sufis asked her to change the faulty ideologies, not throw them out. And that would take time and devotion.

Her own life had been a kasumbra. She'd known pain and bleakness, and she'd been taxed by each of those masters. But what surrounded her was hope, a flickering of the vibrant potential she knew her society possessed.

First Drop of Rain

Rubina was uncharacteristically quiet on the drive back to the city. Her theater group volunteers were chattering away about how successful that day's performance had been. They'd been the ones to suggest celebrating Labor Day with the brick kiln community outside the city of Khushab. It was the perfect opportunity to address the issues of bonded labor *and* child labor – brick kilns were notorious for both. Kiln owners tended to trap the poorest, most vulnerable in society with an initial small loan, and when the severely low wages and too many empty stomachs perpetuated the debt, children became necessary additional wage earners. Survival trumps child labor laws, and generation after generation gets caught in the cycle of illiteracy and bonded labor.

“Rubina? Are you all right?” a concerned volunteer, Asifa Nawaz, asked, momentarily interrupting her own inner dialogue. Rubina was usually spilling over with enthusiasm after their performances, but this time her mind was far away from the conversation around her.

“Oh, I’m just not feeling well,” she assured them distractedly. And it wasn’t a complete lie. She *didn’t* feel well – her spirit was unsettled and disturbed.

Her body was bumping down the road back to Sargodha, but her mind and soul were still back in the monochromatic landscape of the brick kiln compound. The stacks of bricks, clouds of dust, squatter-like mud homes, sand-dusted donkeys and faces streaked with clay were all different shades of the same earthy hues. A hazy rainbow of browns that only changed with the time of day – silvery grey before sunrise and a hot ember orange at sunset. Her eyes were still being accosted by the dark inquisitive innocence of the little boy’s big brown eyes, and his questions still echoed in her ears: *What is school? And who are those children? Where do they get those books?*

“I’ll get you the books,” she’d told him. “And I’ll show you a school.” But how? The shame and embarrassment of the moment had pulled the promises out of her mouth before she could stop them. His longing eyes had latched onto her conscience, or maybe it was the other way around, and now she couldn’t leave him behind. As soon as the play ended, while the warm applause still fluttered in the ever-chalky air, those brown eyes sought Rubina out. The small boy in front of her asked the questions simply and sincerely. The theater group had brought children with them to act the part of the schoolchildren, and books and uniforms for props. They were the happy ending to Rubina’s script about the injustice and struggle of bonded and child labor. It was supposed to be a celebratory ending: all the children going to school instead of toiling day after day in the brick kiln.

Akram, the owner of the convicting eyes, was just one of a whole community of children working instead of learning. It wasn’t just that their families needed the extra wage – there *was* no school. And even if there were a school within walking distance, it was unlikely that the impoverished, debt-burdened families could sacrifice precious working hands, even for school. The wonderful cure of education was not such an easy answer. The kiln community wasn’t even a village. It was outside the village, on the outskirts of the outskirts, an isolated world devoid of any government facilities. A life that revolved around making bricks and chipping away at insurmountable debt. Only villages get schools, and this was a place the government would not acknowledge for a long time. And in the meantime, the children would lose their childhood to stacking and baking bricks. Their ravenous minds would continue to starve, which is why Rubina’s staunch conviction against delivering services that the government was supposed to provide – like free education – was wavering. This was an exception in the shade of gray to her black-and-white resolve.

Those eyes pulled on her conscience – a pair of unintentional reprimands. A guilty heaviness settled in her chest. *Am I cheating people with awareness?* Rubina wondered as the kiln chimney and its column of ochre smoke grew smaller and smaller in the distance. *Is it responsible to make people conscious of their problems and then leave them alone in those problems?* Maybe awareness wasn’t the whole answer. As the study circle groups had grown and graduated to new issues, so had the theater group and the number of volunteers. New topics became new scripts to take to new communities. But maybe they couldn’t just organize rallies and perform theater. She had awakened Akram’s hunger to learn, and she knew she was the one who had to feed it.

And so Akram's imploring eyes followed her home. They watched over her for weeks. His hungry questions went to sleep with her and woke her up early in the morning. Finally she shared her internal strife with Father Sohail and her friends Humna Basir and Shaukat Ghauri. Together they pooled enough money to buy some books and uniforms, a teacher's table and chair, and to hire one teacher. All that was left was an actual building – and the convincing of the brick kiln owner.

Armed with their purchases and plans, Rubina, Humna, Shaukat and Father Sohail returned to the brick kiln to meet with the owner. Akram spotted her and instantly abandoned his brick stacking. "You are an intelligent boy, and I'm going to try and open a school here," Rubina told him, crouching down to give him a hug. "But first we have to negotiate with the owner." Akram nodded seriously, but his childlike optimism was already envisioning the first day of school.

The owner came out of his office, which dwarfed the one-room dwellings that nearly 100 families called home. He greeted them with rigidity, unsure of their business. Rubina introduced herself and told him bluntly, "We want to start a school here, for the children." A short chuckle escaped his mouth, but Rubina forged ahead, explaining that they would take care of all the expenses, but they just needed a building. "You have all the bricks and you are a rich man. We only need you to construct one room."

At first his only response was laughter. Then he moved on to jeering. "What will they become, the president of Pakistan? Their fathers are illiterate brick kiln workers. Their mothers too." And then came his serious concern: "How will they learn? When will they study? They have to make bricks with their parents."

Rubina was ready for his argument. And she knew the parents would have the same one: They loved their children, but their first concern was putting food on the table. *If we send them to school, they cannot work, they'd say. How then will we put out the fire of the belly?* Her answer was, flexibility. "The school will be just two or three hours per day. It won't disturb your work." To her surprise he agreed, and so did the parents of the 18 children who enrolled on the first day of school.

The first time Rubina visited the school, a few of her volunteers were helping the teacher with a lesson. She watched from the back as Zaib Nawaz, one of the volunteers, asked the children what they wanted to be when they grew up. Not surprisingly, Akram was perched eagerly in the front row, glowing with life and bouncing with excitement as the little girl next to him answered. She wanted to be a teacher, or maybe a doctor. Akram's giddy trembling subsided when his turn came. He was ready with his answer.

"I want to be a priest," he said with grinning eyes.

"Why a priest?" the volunteer asked.

"Because priests open schools." He had watched Father Sohail talk to the owner with Rubina on the negotiation day, and he couldn't be Rubina when he grew up. She was a lady.

Rubina smiled at the irony. His school had really started with him, a 9-year-old illiterate boy. Akram had been the first drop of rain – not only for the brick kiln community, but also for Rubina's vision for the *holistic* awareness she and her volunteers could bring to communities.

A New Classroom

Discrimination – more specifically, educational discrimination – was not confined to the poor, its bestowing of favor or neglect not based purely on class. It was Rubina’s reality as well – still – even after she’d attained her respected position as a lecturer and an academic. As she’d suspected, and contrary to her mother’s convictions, education was not the all-powerful savior. It could not overpower deeply rooted social biases, at least not alone. Rubina’s identity as a Christian still announced itself before any other, or at least that’s what most people heard first.

Under the rules and regulations, government lecturers could not be transferred for at least three years. But social biases were also stronger than laws, and just two years into her lectureship at Sargodha College, Rubina was transferred to a village college an hour’s bus ride away, in Chak 73. But it wasn’t the commute that bothered her. It was the blatant discrimination. Her position had been given to a Muslim woman, and not just any woman – the relative of a Muslim parliamentarian. Rubina reported dutifully to her new appointment while the injustice simmered inside her, but it only took a few days for it to come to a boil and propel her to make an appointment with the department of education.

“Legally you cannot transfer me for at least one more year,” she reminded the education official seated behind an oversized, ego-boosting desk. “How can you transfer me?” She waited expectantly for his answer. After a long, heated discussion, he admitted the government’s mistake and promised to do what he could to get her position back.

But her triumph was quickly squelched as they left the office. The parliamentarian who’d propped up her replacement was pacing the corridor outside with an internal simmering of his own. He grabbed the official’s shoulder as they passed him, and Rubina continued hurriedly toward the exit. While she was still in earshot, the parliamentarian sputtered in the official’s ear, intentionally loud enough for her to hear, “Bad days have certainly come upon us if we are seeing Christians occupying such important positions. I will not see a Christian challenge our girl.” But Rubina did not respond. She kept her head high and her feet moving.

No matter how hard she tried to forget that afternoon, she could still recall with exactness each stinging word. They were tucked away, along with his biting tone and accusatory eyes, in that well-worn pocket. Sometimes they boiled over in a stream of questions: *Why are Christians still alienated in Pakistani society? Why do some Muslims still insist on disgracing and humiliating us?* And even though her determined battle – combating political muscle with her own network of social and political support – had been victorious and she’d returned to her lectureship at Sargodha College, it hadn’t dispelled those words. She tried to settle back in and enjoy her work, but a nagging disturbance sat stubbornly next to her. And then settled inside her – a dull ache that sometimes became a rumbling hunger. But it was more than the discrimination. Chemistry was boxing her in, choking her. The dissatisfaction expanded every day.

A lecturer’s life in Pakistan was a scheduled, controlled life – and one without creativity. What did her daily routine require of her? To deliver lectures on chemical reactions. That was it. *What am I teaching my students?* she asked herself. *Not about values or about humanity. I am just teaching them chemistry.* Instead of lecturing on two Hydrogens and one Oxygen mixing to form water, she wanted to ask her students: *Who suffers during a water crisis? And who has access to clean water?* She wanted to

produce peacemakers, not just chemists. She couldn't teach the lessons she wanted to in the college. If political conversations were squinted at suspiciously, activism was outright prohibited on the college premises. And though the study circle groups had given her a boost of enthusiasm, a much-needed breath of fresh air, she was still strictly limited in what she could say and do.

She realized she was leading a dual life; her lecturing life was in no way linked to justice, peace, rights, truth – the struggles her heart yearned to devote to entirely. She tried relieving her suffocation by writing articles on minority and human rights issues, but it wasn't enough. She needed full breaths of air. She was living for the liberated moments with her study circles, for her theater group, the people she met in the villages, and for activism. And chemistry was getting in the way.

Rubina's lectureship had been a huge achievement for her family and her community. They begged her not to leave, but she knew she could no longer walk both roads. She had to go one way or the other, and the choice was clear. The box had become too confining, and it was obstructing the full spectrum of her vision. She needed out. It was time to open the box. It was time to go. After 14 years, she left the college and her periodic table behind, but not the part she loved most. She still had her students. It was just time for a new classroom.



Their first lesson came immediately after she left, as if the universe was assuring her she'd made the right decision. The very thing Rubina had wanted more time for – organizing the activities of her growing number of Taangh volunteers – now needed her full attention. The issue of the separate electorate system that she had spent so much of her life opposing had finally come to a head. One year earlier, in 1999, Gen. Musharraf had taken over the government in a coup, and though he was a military dictator, he had already made popular reforms to the political system, like his devolution plan. He had replaced the local governance of a mayor with a local bodies assembly where 33 percent of the seats were reserved for women.

So they'd all been expecting the reform of separate electorates to come next. But it didn't, even with public pressure. When it became clear that Musharraf wasn't going to touch it, Rubina was already turning her wheels to set a campaign in motion. She belonged to the national Christian Organization for Social Action in Pakistan (COSAP), and when they decided to wage a full-fledged boycott of the 2000 local bodies elections, they made Rubina responsible for mobilizing her district, Sargodha, and the neighboring one, Khushab.

Rubina organized her volunteers and became their professor of political activism. The voters weren't their targets. They wanted to cut the elections off at the root by asking minority political leaders not to submit their candidacy papers. Together with Father Sohail and Hassan Mehmood Khan, a local lawyer, Rubina and her brigade of novice activists covered the two districts, employing Rubina's favorite method: door-to-door conversations. A few of the priests had cars, but mostly they took taxis or buses from village to village, even to far-flung villages two hours' drive through the hilly Khushab countryside.

The politicians, and their voters, were understandably uneasy about the boycott – and not easily convinced. “What will happen if we don’t run?” they’d ask. “Then minorities will have *no* representation in the local assemblies.”

But, Rubina argued, did they really want to participate in a system that didn’t value them, that seemed to view minorities as mere afterthoughts who sometimes raised their pesky voices? She warned them that eventually the status quo would cut them entirely out of the political process. “Don’t cut a man to fit the coat,” the old saying went. But, as Rubina wrote in another article published in the *Catholic Naqib*, Musharraf *was* cutting the man to fit the coat. The political system should accommodate the population, but in order to create the system he wanted, minorities had to be cut out.

The crowd that had gathered within the walls of Sargodha’s Catholic church compound when COSAP announced the boycott contradicted that philosophy. *Pakistan bnaya hey, Pakistan bchaim gay*. Their political song said it all: “We played a key role in Pakistan’s creation, and we will play a key role in Pakistan’s development.” And it wasn’t just the Christian minority chanting those words. Rubina beamed from the platform as she looked out at all the Muslim political leaders who had joined them. Muslims wanted restoration of the joint electorate too. *How could their voices not be heard?* she wondered. They were the voices of awakening, and they would not be quieted.

Maybe it was Rubina’s words, or maybe it was the strength of her legion of Christian *and* Muslim volunteers knocking on doors. It may have even been the example Dr. Ahmad Khan set – a Muslim withholding his vote as an act of solidarity. It was probably a combination of them all, an integrated choir of voices, that resulted in Khushab’s jam boycott – no minority candidates participating – and only a few Sargodha candidates contesting the election. Though the boycott was equally overwhelming nationwide, separate electorates didn’t disappear overnight. But, the stage had been set.



Two years later, Rubina was ready to wage the same campaign all over again. If the local election boycott hadn’t been serious enough to make Musharraf’s ears burn, maybe he would listen to a boycott of the provincial elections. But, much to Rubina’s unexpected elation, he made a surprise reform just as the election season was about to begin. She was at home with her family, Musharraf addressing them through the TV, when he made the announcement: Joint electorates would be reinstated for the coming elections. Rubina could hardly believe her ears. She hadn’t even finished proclaiming and celebrating with her family when the phone started to ring. The phone calls continued all day, from Dr. Ahmad Khan, old campaigning friends and her volunteers. They seeped over into the next few days too, and then her brother-in-law called with an even bigger surprise.

All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA), a political party allied with Pakistan People’s Party, was looking for a minority woman nominee for one of their reserve seats in the provincial assembly. APMA’s general secretary, Cecil Chaudhry, said they wanted someone engaged in political activism to run for either the woman or minority reserve seat. “Rubina,” Peter Jacob paused dramatically, “Cecil Chaudhry was impressed by your leadership potential during the election boycott. Your name is under discussion.”

She didn't say anything at first. His words sounded more like they belonged in her reveries, and she gave them a moment to swim dreamily through her mind. She'd certainly been inspired by women like Benazir Bhutto, but she had never seriously considered a political career. Her mind jumped back to the unforgettable afternoon when she had met – for a split second – the illustrious Benazir, or BB as Rubina and her other loyal supporters endearingly referred to her. Rubina had been invited to a small reception in the home of a local politician, and BB shook hands with each of the women before delivering her speech. Rubina could still recall the tremendous passion of her words and the glowing fervor of her face. She'd been captivated by BB's resolute and unwavering devotion to her country.

“Well,” he prompted her eagerly, “what do you think?”

It wasn't an official invitation, but word of the party's considerations had been passed on to Peter Jacob intentionally. Rubina came back down to earth. “OK,” she said, “Just give me some time to discuss it with my chairman and director.”

Dr. Ahmad Khan, now Taangh Wasaib's chairman, was uncertain. “Politics are one thing and social work is something else,” he told her. He reminded her of the movement they were trying to create with Taangh Wasaib. “If you get into politics, you won't concentrate as much on the movement.”

He was right. It would be something new, and maybe just a different kind of dual life. She listened and considered, but decided, ultimately, this was something she had to do. It was, in many ways, the pinnacle of years of struggle. Perhaps political influence could be the savior education couldn't be. At least she could get a little closer to the pens that wrote the laws. But, she'd also thought hard about what it would mean to sit in the woman's seat or the minority seat. They were not equal in her mind. *If they ask me to contest the woman's seat, I will definitely accept*, she thought. *But if they offer me the minority seat, I won't do it.* The minority seat would still be a form of discrimination in her mind, an appointment based on her religious identity, but the woman's seat would make her an equal with Muslim women – though still not with men.

So when Cecil Chaudhry called and formally asked her to contest the woman's reserve seat for APMA, she joined the campaign wholeheartedly. Without reserve. She was swept up at once into the campaign life with her four running mates, one for the national seat, two general seats and one for the minority reserve seat – Muslims and Christians, men and women, all campaigning together. Over the next few busy weeks of traveling and organizing speeches and rallies in city after city, Rubina quickly found solace in her friendship with Dr. Nadia Aziz, a Muslim woman running for one of the provincial seats. “You are my dear friend,” she'd tell Nadia. “No,” Nadia would always playfully disagree, “You are my sister.”

When the final round of the campaign arrived, the interim chairman of the PPP, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, and other prominent party leaders joined them for an election rally in Sargodha. Rubina sat with them on the stage and shivered a little at the thought that, if she weren't in political exile, Benazir Bhutto might be sitting near her that very moment. But the real moment was no less sweet or thrilling. APMA and PPP flags rippled in the wind. Religious majority and minority sat together on the same stage. And Rubina was about to give her speech to her hometown. Speeches in front of thousands were no longer something novel to her, but there was something symbolic about

this day. This was the city of her struggles – Gul’s blasphemy case, the campaigns against the ID card and separate electorates – but today she was part of a joint venture, an integrated struggle for the betterment and uplift of their people. The current speaker was reminding the voters why APMA was allied with the PPP rather than the conservative Muslim League (who had a strong following in Sargodha) or the more militant Jamaat-e-Islami, the parties that supported separate electorates and lobbied for the religious column.

In her own earlier speeches, Rubina pointed out that the PPP was the only party that had put a woman in the general seat or a Christian in the woman’s seat. In other parties a minority would only be offered the minority seat, and a woman the woman’s seat. But she made it a point never to stir controversy or disdain. “We can live together” was her constant and primary message. And unlike other politicians who spoke about schools or hospitals or roads, for Rubina it was always rights, constitution, laws – particularly discriminatory laws against women and minorities.

Today was no different. This was her message, and the tens of thousands gathered in the street were her family. They were the people she’d struggled with and for and, sometimes, against. Not surprisingly, she set the crowd in a story. She narrated the short script.

“Let’s say I am constructing a road for you,” she started conversationally. “But to continue walking on that road you have to present your ID card as a Muslim or Christian. So what is the priority? On the road you should be able to walk as a human being. So the first thing is not the road. The first thing is abolishing discrimination.”

She paused for a moment, and the crowd instantly filled the space with her favorite rally slogan, the one she always initiated: *Zulim kay ye zabtay hum nahin mantay*. Rubina’s heart beat with the cadence. *We don’t accept these principles of cruelty*. Her head bobbed as they repeated it once more, and then she continued.

“And after you present your Christian ID card, what if you are accused of blasphemy on that road? If you can’t survive the accusation, then what is the benefit of hospitals, schools, airports or roads to you? The most important thing is life. Rights. Security.”

Zinda Baad chants filled the excited air, rhythmic and constant as breathing. *Pakistan Zinda Baad, People’s Party Zinda Baad, APMA Zinda Baad*. The people’s voices found a common beat – unity in their diversity – in their call for Long Life.

Once again, Rubina knew the words that would stir her people. Her speech motivated large numbers of women and Christian voters, and for the first time in 30 years, the PPP won an election in Sargodha. Nadia took her seat in the general assembly, but because the Muslim League held the majority, their party nominees filled the reserve seats. So Rubina returned to her volunteers and her movement, and as she’d told herself, it didn’t matter if she won or lost. For the first time in her life she had really felt, and enjoyed, her identity as a Pakistani. She hadn’t been a Christian leader, but just a leader. And she wasn’t Nadia’s new Christian friend, she was just her sister. Her Pakistani sister.

The old family flame of Bhuttoism, which never extinguished but had flickered patiently in the shadows for some time, was also rekindled by the election victory. But it wasn’t just hers or her

father's generation. Even Rubina's 1-year-old nephew Aateer noticed the fervor – the PPP flags on the family's roof and cars, the frequent enthusiasm around the word Bhutto – and when he started speaking, his first word was not *mama* or *baba*. To Rubina's amusement, he'd see the waving flags in the street and happily chirp his first and favorite word: "Bhutto!" Though mere baby babble, Rubina treasured it as a symbol of her constant hope for his generation, the third generation – that they would desire and maybe even come to see integration and equality.

But Rubina wasn't entirely content. The election had raised a number of questions she'd yet to find satisfactory answers to. When APMA's chairman, Shahbaz Clement Bhatti, called her after the election results to express his regret that she hadn't won the reserve seat, Rubina shared her lingering frustrations without pause.

"Is the reserve seat system really justified?" she asked. "What is the role of minority political parties if Muslim parties still get to choose the minority reserve seats?"

"Your questions are extremely valid," the chairman responded. "We have a long way to struggle for equal rights, but this election we succeeded in getting nominations to the general and women's seats. In the next election we'll be better prepared for negotiations, and you could be one of our candidates who makes it."

Rubina laughed at the irony of the system after she hung up the phone. Muslim political parties still singularly held the right of choice, so participating in the political system was certainly a first step toward equal rights, but it wasn't the final step. And Rubina knew she didn't have to be a member of parliament to take those steps.

Everywoman

"The Two Years Woman might be a story about a German woman, and it might be written by a German author," Rubina prefaced the story she was about to read to her study circle. "But this is the story of every woman. This is the story of Pakistani women, a story about choices."

An old colleague from her college days, an English lecturer and staunch feminist, had recently given her the short story, and once again Rubina had met a precious gem of universal truth in the pages of a book. As literature does magically time after time, the story had taught Rubina something she really already knew – illuminated knowledge that already lived in her heart, in her own everyday interaction with life. It delivered that cathartic relief of putting perfect words to an unnamed nagging notion. The Two Years Woman had lodged herself in Rubina's soul, propelling her into a period of introspection and critical rethinking of the world around her – of the women around her. So, as with everything that moved her to reflection, she had to share it with her study circle, with the women *and* the men. She tenderly opened the small, worn book and began.

The Two Years Woman lived for 72 years. For the first 70 years she served her family as a daughter, then a wife, then a mother and finally a grandmother. But when her husband died, her children were also old enough to care for themselves, and she had time to think about herself. She decided to simply be a woman for the rest of her life. She'd do whatever she wanted to do. Her whole

life had been occupied by others. Lived for others. Cooking, cleaning, serving. But in her last two years she became her own woman. She lived for her own desires and made her own choices. She went to the cinema. She hired a buggy – ‘Like Queen Elizabeth in parades, like the rich people,’ she thought. Her children and grandchildren were old enough to take care of themselves, but they still whispered. ‘Our mother is going crazy,’ her sons would say. Look at how she spends her time. She is no longer a good woman.’ Their once-beloved mother was now the object of their derision.

She closed the book and let a few moments of silence pass for the story to absorb. “Think about the life of the ‘Two Years Woman,’” Rubina said. “Her identities were set for her from birth to death, and when she decided to choose her own identity, her family rejected her.” Rubina looked around the circle, inviting responses with her lively, provoking eyes. She knew each of the women in the circle had a lifetime of experiences that resonated with the story’s theme. They’d all grown from girl to woman in a society where their footsteps were not their own. Daughter. Wife. Mother. The steps were preordained, the role changing slightly with the period of life but always directly connected to the expectations and priorities of men. And if a woman chose to make her own footprint – one that took her away from being a *proper* daughter, an *obedient* wife, a *sacrificing* mother – then she was simply not a good woman.

Rubina decided to start there, with the cultural ideal of a good woman. It had been a painful trial, her first experience of character assassination, and she rarely discussed it. But if she wanted the women in the circle to share, maybe she would have to start. She knew her struggle was different than many of her Pakistani sisters. By no power of her own, she’d been lucky enough to have a father who encouraged her to fly, to be different, and a mother who was a strong woman herself. Rubina *knew* how to take care of a household, to cook and embroider elegant embellishments, but because that was not the role her family expected her to fill, her confrontation with society had been different than many women’s.

“I know what it is to be whispered about,” Rubina said, breaking the circle of silence. “When I started our theater group, most of society rejected me. At first there were just questions. *You are a respected lady, a lecturer*, people would tell me. *So why are you getting involved in theater?* But that was just the beginning.”

Rubina’s activities had threatened gender assumptions about public visibility, mobility, propriety and leadership. Those who were offended hoped that attacking her character would reel her back into the realm of acceptability. Character is a Pakistani woman’s most valuable cultural identity, and to mar her character is to destroy her social respectability.

“The insults were widely distributed. Rumors were circulated that I was leading the youth astray, that I was not a good or proper woman. My character assassination came because I was a woman becoming a leader in society. I was choosing an identity that some disapproved of.”

Her volunteers had been furious over the rumors and were eager to protect her honor; they would have physically harmed her insulters had she not reminded them, “We are peacemakers,” and explicitly commanded them to take no violent actions. Though family and volunteers warned her not to take her defamation case to court, Rubina was determined to break the cycle of silence and stop the use of character assassination as a tool for eliminating women from leadership – keeping them silent and homebound through demoralization. Just like her days in the garden, her playmates

shouting for death or a beating, Rubina chose civilized justice over retaliation. She filed the case and her defamers received their penalty from the court. She had refused to hide in the expected silence.

Her story struck a chord and created a safe space. Kishwer Bukhari, a bold gender activist, broke the silence first: *My fiancé broke our engagement when my job sent me to the city with some male and female colleagues. He said I was not bearing good moral character if I worked with men.*

And then one by one the other women in the circle opened up the secret parts of their hearts, where their silent pain and frustration lived.

My neighbor's abusive husband threw acid in her face when she tried to file for divorce.

When I went to university my relatives complained that I was destroying the family's honor because I was spending time with boys.

I opened a stall in the village market when my husband fell ill, but my community gossiped that my shop was an excuse to meet men. 'Good women stay at home,' they said.

None of the men spoke up, but they listened intently, their faces clearly sympathetic. The stories had lessons for them as well. These were just a handful of the hundreds of women in the surrounding villages living the same basic storyline, but it wasn't a story for them. It was reality. As she listened Rubina felt something shift inside her. The inner earthquake of a revelation, a path revealed. For years her vision had been focused on religion, on interfaith integration and tolerance, but she was beginning to see another path. Women were also in need of peace. Gender needed integration and tolerance too.



A bright winter sun was streaming through her office window when Rubina's phone rang. Busy compiling her notes from the previous day's fact-finding interviews, she had answered distractedly. But she was jolted into focus when the caller identified himself – Malik Asghar, a Geo TV representative in Sargodha.

"We're shooting a talk show about the recent case of Faiz Batool," the man said.

"Yes, you should," Rubina encouraged him. "It's absolutely appalling what happened to her. I just met with her yesterday to document her story."

"Would you come on our program *Chothi Khabir Bari Baat* (Small News, Big Issues) to talk about it?" he asked.

Rubina was well known in Sargodha for her activism, but, she asked, wouldn't it be better if they found an expert on gender issues? He told her that they *wanted* a human rights activist's perspective in conjunction with the district *nazim*²⁸ who would also be commenting on the incident.

"We've asked many people, but no one is ready to speak publicly because the guilty party is a strong feudal. Are you afraid too?"

“No,” Rubina answered without hesitation. “I am ready. I will come.”

Faiz’s humiliation had clamped itself to her, and Rubina felt the pain as her own as each of her own humiliations – the insults, the rumors – resurfaced. Every woman’s story she heard ignited that same spark of moral anger that she’d felt when she’d jabbed her pen into the boy’s arm in the schoolyard years ago. Now she had her words, and though she was decidedly a peacemaker with conscious commitments to nonviolence, she’d never fully outgrown that impulse. She ignored the concerns of her friends and volunteers. *Don’t go, Rubina. They are a very strong family. They will harm you.* Someone had to defend Faiz’s story. The real story.

She was the victim of a common variation on the basic storyline: As the object and keeper of a family’s honor, women – and their honor – become a commodity to be traded, exploited and targeted for destruction. In her case, Faiz’s degradation had nothing to do with her, except that she was married to the man who angered a village feudal. Her honor was simply the most sensitive place her husband’s opponents could strike. To harm the man, harm the woman. Because honor was everything.

Rubina and a female council member, Qaisara Ismail, had gone to the village, Shah Nigdar, and sat in the main room of Faiz’s home to document her story. They’d seen the splintered wooden door and the shattered windows. And the two-day-old, still ripening bruises on Faiz’s arms.

Two days earlier, her husband was making a phone call from the village’s public booth when an influential feudal landlord pattered by on his tractor, loud music blaring from his cassette player.

“My husband came out of the booth and asked the landlord to lower the volume,” Faiz told Rubina, pausing for a moment to look at her husband. He sat quietly near the wall, too wracked with frustration and guilt to contribute. He nodded slightly. “The landlord felt insulted that someone from a lower caste would make such a request. He was dishonored, so he wanted to dishonor my husband.” Her daughters moved closer to her, knowing what came next in the story.

Angry and disgraced, the landlord had come banging on her door within a few hours, in need of retribution for his bruised ego. Her husband and son were still out, but it didn’t matter. He and his servants-turned-thugs were there for her. The woman. The family honor. After breaking the door and windows, they pulled out a gun. Shoving it into the small of her back, they forced her out the front door and into the street. She remembered seeing her daughters’ terrified eyes right before she stumbled and fell to the ground halfway down the block.

The parading turned into dragging. They dragged her so fast down the rough brick road that she couldn’t regain her footing or keep her clothing in place. Her scarf – the symbol of respect and modesty – came undone, exposing her bundled hair. Throwing off a woman’s chador was a deliberate gesture of humiliation. Her captors were well aware. And her *tahmed*, the large piece of fabric village women wrap around their waist, quickly came unfastened as it rubbed and frayed against the road. She had no idea who was watching or what they could see. She wasn’t naked, but she was stripped of her dignity. The men paid no heed to her decency. That was the point – her humiliation was her husband’s punishment.

The spectacle lasted no more than 10 minutes, but that's all it took. It was a symbolic act. Their goal accomplished, the men abandoned her in the street. A pile of dusty, tattered garments and scraped, bruised skin. But the humiliation went deeper than any of her cuts. When the feared bullies were out of sight, her daughters rushed from their yard, and with the help of a few neighbors held Faiz as she hobbled home.

Faiz set the holy Quran she'd been clutching back on the table and sat in silence, self-consciously touching the long gash that ran down her cheek.

Now Rubina was watching Faiz on a screen in the TV studio, again holding her holy Quran as a symbol of her honesty and telling her story to the Geo TV reporting team. The nazim sat next to Rubina, folding and unfolding his hands with a hint of discomfort.

When the reporting clip ended, the first question was posed to the nazim. "You are saying this didn't happen, so why are these people telling a different story?"

"No, what I am saying is that it didn't happen like this. It was only a minor incident." He didn't want to anger powerful feudals, so he was supporting their version – that it was simply the fiery emotions of a young man. Just young blood. In the revised story the men merely pushed Faiz Batool around a bit, and when they didn't find her husband, they left.

The blatant denial of facts was so arrogant, Rubina thought. "Do you think that dragging a woman through the street and humiliating her is a minor thing?" she probed. She pushed on, ready to make her jabs with her words instead of her pen.

"Why is the whole burden of honor put on the woman? You give a woman a chador and tell her to cover herself, but when you want to humiliate her, the concept of honor is disregarded. Society covers and uncovers her at its will."

The nazim was flustered. His efforts to retain the happy façade of his district were crumbling. "No, no. Nothing like this happened in Sargodha," he assured the host.

It was a short episode, and the host was trying to wrap things up. He flashed the clip of Faiz holding her holy Quran on the screen again. The bright lights flicked off and the nazim looked at Rubina with an air of bewilderment. He knew it as well as she. Faiz's truth had been heard above the revision.

Because of the coverage, Rubina's pressure for justice was echoed by all of the activated viewers who had seen the show. Faiz's humiliators were arrested as soon as the case was registered. Geo TV's reporting had shown local administrators that there were people watching them if they tried to walk around the law and make their own. But even so, the landlord was not arrested, only his assistants. Feudals did not go to jail. It just wasn't done. It would be an embarrassment, an insult. They were above the law, so they hid.

Rubina wouldn't quit. Faiz deserved more than requests for reconciliation and offers of token compensation to fix the broken door and windows. Ironically, Faiz was a member of the local council, and since women were on the council primarily to protect women's rights, Rubina

organized a group of other women councilors and reminded them: “This is your sister, and if it can happen to her, it can happen to any of you. So speak for each other.” After one meeting with the nazim and another with the district police officer – and the councilors’ chanting of “Women united will never be defeated” – the unexpected apologies finally came.

An apology from a feudal to anyone lower in the social ladder was unheard of. And it was more than symbolic. Big or small, it was a step forward. The community watched the apologies in awe and what they saw was a new possibility. They could challenge the once untouchable feudals. And the feudals saw something too – that the village was not a jungle outside the bounds of civility. They couldn’t do whatever they wanted. People would see and people would speak. *Women* would speak. They were more than docile objects of honor.



If the Two Years Woman was the story with a happy liberated ending, then the woman in the hospital bed was the tragic extreme of it, and her family had tried to write her ending for her. Mussarat Shaheen was unconscious from blood loss the first time Rubina went to visit her, but Rubina had seen the outline of her legs under the sheets, how they stopped bluntly after about four inches. Rubina’s breath had caught in her chest, and her stomach twisted at reality’s assault: While Mussarat’s in-laws had failed to take her life, they had succeeded in taking away her freedom, her mobility. Her legs. They’d done it with a hatchet.

Rubina and a few staff members had visited the village right away and gathered most of the story as they interviewed neighbors for their fact-finding, but she wanted to give Mussarat the chance to tell her own story, to recover her voice. She was awake when Rubina walked back into her hospital room a few days later, and though her voice was small and timid as she began, Mussarat was determined.

The pieces came out slowly. Painfully. As if the words were too sharp to push quickly through her throat. Her husband had been living in Greece, sending money home to her. When she’d saved enough, she built a house and for the first time in her life was the owner of property. Every few sentences Rubina would catch Mussarat’s gaze drifting down her sheet-covered body and freezing on the place where her legs should have been. Her words would taper off for a moment when her eyes landed there. But Rubina sat patiently, waiting for her to continue.

Her brother-in-law, Farman Ali, had been extremely jealous, wondering why his brother hadn’t sent the money to him, a male relative, and his mother felt entitled to the money and property as well. Their jealousy was the kindling, but Mussarat’s refusal to let Farman marry her younger sister sparked the flame. Mother and son, both insulted and blinded by envy, brewed a plan to get what they wanted: the money, the house and the marriage.

The storyline was all too common, Rubina thought: Mussarat was not fulfilling the compliant, submissive role the family expected, so they felt justified in alleviating themselves of the inconvenient and obstinate wife. To salvage their honor, they would kill her. And if anyone questioned them, they’d simply write her off as a bad woman, create an illicit affair of some sort.

But the next part, the method, was terrifyingly uncommon. Rubina wished it were only a fictional story she was listening to. Mussarat recalled the evening with glazed eyes. Earlier that day she had discussed the dispute with her brother-in-law – her other sister’s husband – telling him of a recent disagreement with Farman Ali. Mussarat was lying down and resting when Farman entered her house with his parents, an out-of-place axe held at his side. Before Mussarat could even process what was in his hand, iron chains and rope had strapped her down to the bed. And then Farman raised his weapon, fingernails white from his grip, and let the cold metal fall on Mussarat’s legs. She couldn’t describe the pain. There are no words for a hatchet chopping up a leg, little by little. Section by section. Skin, nerves, bones. Within minutes the act was done. Mussarat was amputated above the knees.

Mussarat’s words started to slow and soften. The details became fuzzy at that point, as she no doubt had been wavering on the line of consciousness. But she remembered the hatchet was not the end. Her mother and father-in-law had set a vat of oil boiling. She remembered Farman setting down the soiled, sinful tool, and lifting her under her armpits. He and his father carried her toward the hot, sputtering oil and lowered her torso into the vat ... and then darkness.

She was done. That was the end of the nightmare as she remembered it. Mussarat’s brother-in-law (her older sister’s husband), also in the hospital room, spoke up and told Rubina what had happened next. He came running when he heard Mussarat’s agonizing screams and found her lying on a blood-drenched bed, unconscious and nearly unrecognizable. When they saw him in the doorway, Farman and his parents fled with the chains and hatchet. With the help of a compassionate neighbor, he’d brought Mussarat to the hospital in Sargodha. The other neighbors had watched nervously from the sides of the road, shocked and unsure how to react.

“Mussarat,” Rubina said gently, but seriously. “Do I have your consent to pursue your case?” The trend of ashamed silence in Sargodha had started to change after Faiz Batool’s case, and the number of women reporting violence had significantly increased. Mussarat bit her lip, paused, and then nodded. “Yes,” she whispered before closing her eyes. Reliving the trauma had exhausted her.

The case was registered but Mussarat’s in-laws also had a carefully fabricated defense. The next day their lawyer held a press conference, explaining that Mussarat was a woman of bad character, involved in illicit relations with another man while her husband was abroad. No evidence, just a convenient story. And then he accused civil society organizations of supporting an immoral woman – they were un-Islamic and working against the culture. But an esteemed religious scholar, Professor Sahibzada Abdur Rasool, returned the accusation when he wrote an article on the tradition of honor killing, and then spoke in a mosque after Friday prayers condemning honor killings as un-Islamic. Gradually the editor of a local newspaper, Rana Sajid Iqbal, also joined the conversation and published dozens of articles on women’s rights in his daily paper, *Nawai Sharre*.

The villagers were confused about who to believe and had little sympathy for Mussarat. *If she has done what they say she has, they should not only have cut off her legs, they would say. They should kill her.* Honor killing was widely justified and condoned, but no one could confirm her in-laws’ story. They could, however, confirm watching the family flee the scene with chains and a hatchet.

Rubina had a cache of tactics ready to put into motion. She went back to Mussarat’s village with Pakistan’s Family Protection Program for their own fact-finding. Then she brought the case to

the attention of women's rights groups in Lahore and Islamabad and organized female city councilors to condemn the lawyer's defamation of Mussarat and suppression of facts.

A month after the incident, Taangh asked Geo TV to cover Mussarat's story. Rubina denounced the tradition of honor killings in her interviews with reporters, reaching ears all across Pakistan. All the attention won Mussarat the support of the Pakistani government, and Mussarat's three victimizers were fined and sent to jail on charges of amputation of a body part and murderous assault.

She'd won her case, but Mussarat was marked. She returned to a village of mostly cold and suspicious stares. Justice in a court does not always deliver healing at home.

Women needed a path to happy endings, Rubina thought. There were too many tragic versions of the storyline: acid attacks, honor killings, young girls raped and then rejected as spoiled by their families, girls and women traded in marriage to settle familial disputes or humiliated to punish a male family member. Women needed the empowerment to fight for their rights and write new stories – their *own* stories.

The Sun Rises in the West

Seven women sat in one of the house's two rooms: Asma, her mother and five sisters. Asma's father was alone in the other room, asleep on a charpai, waking himself with a rattling cough every so often. His chronic illness left him, and in turn his wife and six daughters, without a steady job. And so skilled fingers flew with ease all around Rubina, stitching, sewing and embroidering. The handiwork of women. And as she answered Rubina's questions, Asma's fingers flashed with proficiency and grace on the spinning wheel in front of her. She was weaving *baan*, the rope used to make the charpai mattresses. Her eyes flashed too, with intelligence and zest.

For the full hour Rubina sat with them, the women worked busily. Their creations kept the household afloat. So while they were warm and welcoming, they couldn't pause for a long afternoon chat. Rubina had come to Sillanwali that morning for her monthly meeting with its newly established Village Action Committee – a group of influential and concerned villagers that acted as a first response in reporting and resolving conflict and violence. As Taangh Wasaib's work and breadth had blossomed, the action committees had become the core unit of community organization and Taangh's connection to the pressing issues in each village. Rubina had been asking the Sillanwali group to include more women, literate and educated if possible, in their committee to keep the desired balance of half women, half men. A lack of women would make it difficult for women to feel comfortable reporting incidents of violence. But the men kept saying they needed her help to identify and include women.

"I want to introduce you to a family," one of her volunteers in Sillanwali told her as soon as she'd arrived. "Some of their girls are educated." Asma's family had been easy to identify. Educated girls were still uncommon enough there that if a household had one, everyone in the village knew. And so Rubina sat, mesmerized by the magic of Asma's fingers spinning the *baan*, asking her a series of casual questions. Asma answered quickly and smiled as she worked and talked. Yes, she was in

college, the only one of her sisters. No, they weren't all literate. Some had to stay home and help their mother so they could earn enough to live.

Rubina's next question made her look up from her wheel: "What do you want to do in your life, Asma?"

"I want to bring some change in my community." It wasn't the answer she expected from an 18-year-old village girl, or from any woman. Most women told her they wanted to bring a change to their own life, but they never thought about change outside of themselves.

"Why your community?" Rubina asked, and as she continued her spinning, Asma delivered a shrewd analysis of the situation of women in her village.

"Because if the community is changed, my life will be changed," Asma said confidently, as if it were the most obvious correlation in the world. Her eyes flashed even brighter. She wasn't finished. "Here in Sillanwali, women are mostly poor and illiterate. Child marriages and exchange marriages are very common. Women are victims of violence. And why?" she paused for a breath. "Because they are economically dependent on their husbands."

Impressed with her well-informed insights, Rubina wanted to hear more, and Asma seemed to have quite a deep well to draw from. "How would you change your community?" Rubina asked.

"There are hundreds of handicraft factories around this village, but they are all run by men," Asma answered without pause. "It's the main business in our area, and it creates no jobs for women. So they sit at home. First they are illiterate, and then they are unskilled. And because they are unskilled they are dependent on men, and that creates our strong culture of male dominance." She finished in a flourish, her smile softening her serious, impassioned expression.

Rubina thought about Asma's observations all the way home to Sargodha. Taangh Wasaib had been conducting awareness programs on violence against women and providing legal aid, especially for divorces, for some time, but they'd gradually realized something was missing. Rubina had long believed that if women possessed a bit of money, they would not be such easy prey – a man would think twice before slapping a hand that held and earned money. And if a divorced woman lacked the skill or money to start some sort of income generation, then legal aid alone was like moving her from the frying pan to the fire. Women, not just divorced ones, needed access to basic needs and control over resources. They needed decision-making power. So Taangh Wasaib had started a Women's Support Program, offering micro-credit loans to women and opening a few skill development centers in tailoring and food technology.

But Asma's idea was something new: integration of women into traditionally male sectors. The promotion of gender-neutral businesses. It struck an immediate chord in Rubina's heart, the one that had bucked the lines of gender roles since childhood. Inyat had encouraged playing with boys, and Feroze let her work in the garden instead of the kitchen. And in the high school play she wrote depicting a Catholic wedding, she cast herself as the Catholic priest. If this girl from a remote village who had never heard the intellectual discourses and debates over human rights had such thoughts, it had to be something that just lived in her heart too. *How can I help her build her dream?* Rubina wondered.

She invited Asma to meet with her in Sargodha and quickly learned there were more ideas in Asma's well. When Rubina introduced the micro-credit scheme to Asma and her mother, who'd accompanied her daughter on the 50 kilometer journey, and suggested they take a loan and distribute it to women in the village to start small businesses, Asma's response caught Rubina off guard.

"There is more need for the women to have skills than loans," Asma said. She was only making a suggestion, but it felt like a challenge to Rubina. But a respectful challenge.

"If we introduced a women's handicraft factory in Sillanwali, it would be something non-traditional," Asma continued. Sillanwali was famous for its woodwork, producing some of the most beautiful pieces in all of Pakistan. "Right now women only do the polishing in their homes, and men always do the woodwork. But if they had the chance, women could do the cutting and carving too."

Asma wanted to confront the traditional ways of her village, the routine that had created the ruts that women were now stuck in. Stitching and embroidery were women's work, and women's work made no profit. A woman tailor does her work from home, but a man can tailor in the market. And the tailor in the market gets the better price. Men had access to profit, and therefore power. Women did not. Asma knew all this. She'd grown up in the storyline her whole life, watched it on market day, felt it as she toiled with her mother and sisters for next to nothing. She wanted to put a visible crack in the patriarchal wall.

"How can we do this?" Rubina asked her. "If no woman has been involved in this business, then how do we start?" They met for weeks, discussing and strategizing, and meanwhile Asma accepted the loan and started a few small businesses, mostly goat-keeping, for the women in the village. Asma was the loan manager, and was constantly moving about her village, talking to the women, helping with their businesses. She was breaking the mold as she broke into her leadership, but she also threatened to shatter people's ingrained cultural expectations. Increased mobility, meeting with men, running businesses were all out of the bounds of a young woman's preset routine. And so the whispers began: *She is disregarding our culture of respect. She should stay at home.* And the raised eyebrows: *She is not a good girl. She is always going with men, chatting with them.* But Asma persisted, and her father, the most important defense against such rumors, spoke up for her. "I know my daughter," he would say. And Rubina kept encouraging her. "This is just the way," she would say. "You are out walking on the road, and people don't like it. But you have to keep walking."

Gradually, as people saw the good she was bringing to the village, the murmurs tapered off and were replaced with respect. If a woman starts to earn a wage, it's not just good for her. It's good for her children – they can go to school. It's good for her husband – he can eat a better supper. Asma helped organize Village Action Committees in surrounding villages, and Rubina made her the sub-district coordinator of all activities in Sillanwali. When a delegation of German parliamentarians visited Taangh Wasaib, Asma articulately represented her village and the situation of women. And when a massive 16-day campaign against gender-based violence marched through Sargodha, Asma brought more than 200 women, journalists and political representatives from Sillanwali. Balloons and bright banners bobbed to the drums and chanting, the streets teeming with women singing for their dignity and rights. And Rubina saw Asma, a petite young woman glowing brightly in her happy orange attire, walking boldly and purposefully in front of her group. Leading women *and* men.

Rubina had been watching closely and was convinced. Asma had commitment and courage. Leadership and determination. The spark.

And so the woodworking factory finally became a reality. Rubina found donors to fund it, and Asma set out to gather the supplies. Big machinery could only be found in big cities, so Asma traveled to them with her father. She went to the wood markets with her mother to buy the wood, and the men all stopped and stared, wondering if she was lost. This was the world of sawdust and splinters. And men. A young woman, even accompanied by her mother, was more than a rare sighting in the stalls of lumber. It was like watching the sun rise from the west. But she'd buy her wood, load it onto a cart and take them to the wood-cutter.

They had everything they needed to begin. Everything except the women. They had come for a few days and started to learn the trade, but because no women knew the techniques of woodworking, Asma had to hire male instructors. Co-ed environments were also not part of the approved routine. Illicit relationships were the immediate suspicion, and it was all the skeptics needed. The whispers returned. *Why are women going there? Who knows what's happening in that factory, men and women working together?* Families pressured their daughters to stop going. The risk to their honor was too great. The innuendos won.

When the once-enthusiastic women stopped coming, Asma called Rubina sobbing. "Come and see me," Rubina said. "Don't worry, we'll sort it out." So Asma traveled to the city to meet with her, her eyes still red when she arrived. They'd put so much into the factory, and now it was deserted. Rubina went back to Sillanwali with her and met with the Village Action Committee.

"We are all working for women's empowerment," she reminded them. "The machines are there. It would be easy to give the factory to men, but then there is no social change." They agreed to spread out and talk to each villager, dispel the rumors and convince them of the factory's potential. And Asma would continue to go to the factory, all day, every day, and learn the woodworking skills. The cutting and carving, the shaping and sanding. "If others won't come, then we will do it," she told her sisters, and for days she and two of her sisters were the only students. And as they watched the three of them go to work day after day, slowly the women returned. Within a few weeks 14 women were learning the craft of woodworking. Asma sold their wares to markets and shopkeepers in surrounding cities, and the women started to earn steady salaries.

No one had imagined that women could do this work – especially that they could manage the notorious cutting machines. Such cumbersome and dangerous machinery was certainly a tool for the strong instructors to operate, but when Rubina visited the factory a few months later, a 16-year-old girl was cutting through lumber with expertise. Rubina stood smiling in the swirling sawdust, taking in the sight. Finally, a happy ending.

Sometimes her activism felt like putting out hundreds of individual fires, but development and empowerment, Rubina realized, could change the structures that start the fires. If women had marketable skills, their status would rise. Not only in the eyes of men, but in their own eyes. And if women were seen as strong and equal, if they were valued, then chopping off their legs and dragging them through streets would cease to be a reality. To create more happy endings – safer and happier lives for women – the storylines had to keep changing.

It took time, and it didn't happen overnight, but eventually Asma and her woodworking factory were not such a phenomenon. She was still a ray of sunlight, bringing renewed life to the women of her village, but she was no longer the sun that rose in the west. The sun went back to rising in the east, setting in the west. Asma's revised storyline became a familiar and accepted reality.

Lessons in Peace

"I'd like to have a separate meeting with Rubina," the spirited Irish woman said to the others gathered around the table as they neared the end of their pot of chai. "Is it possible?"

They'd just returned, she and Rubina, from a day spent in a village an hour's drive away. The bubbly and enthusiastic Irish woman, Eileen Kingston, the coordinator for Trocaire, a large Irish Catholic world development agency, had decided to come to Pakistan herself after hearing about Taangh Wasaib's work. Eileen wanted to see their fieldwork, as she called it, so Rubina had introduced her to some of her peace committee volunteers trying to resolve conflict at the village level. She was impressed and used the entire 45 minutes of the drive back to Sargodha asking Rubina question after question: *Do you know what lobbying is? And advocacy? What kind of awareness-raising activities do you organize? What is your development philosophy?* Eileen seemed to have a whole sophisticated vocabulary to describe the work Rubina had been doing for years. But unaware of the informal assessment, Rubina answered each question with a fair amount of ease and confidence.

Though there were still a few sips left in everyone's cup, Rubina and Eileen's tea company pulled out their chairs and left the two ladies to themselves. "Rubina," she said as soon as they were alone, "Have you ever traveled abroad?"

Rubina took a sip of her tea, nodded yes, and told her about her trips to Nepal, Canada, Thailand and India for different international human rights conferences and trainings. But never longer than two weeks, Rubina added.

"Well, what would you think if someone asked you to stay in another country for one year?" Eileen pressed a little further in her agenda.

"I've never thought about it," Rubina answered matter-of-factly, unaware of Eileen's intimations.

Eileen paused, her electric green eyes sending a spark of anticipation into Rubina's core. "I want to see you go abroad for more education. I am very interested in you coming to Ireland to study."

Rubina forgot about the warm cup of tea in her hands as she looked into Eileen's emerald excitement and let the words soak in.

"Well," Rubina said slowly, withholding her excitement, "I have always wished to study abroad." A dream since childhood, it started with her mother's constant indoctrination: *My girls will get education up to master's level.* And it was embellished by that magical word always connected to the

education of Pakistan's leaders and intellectuals: *abroad*. She didn't even really know what it meant, but that didn't stop her from boasting to her family and friends. *One day I will study from abroad*. Her cousins would just laugh and tell her it was impossible.

Ridiculous. Unattainable for girls from the working class. But Rubina didn't care what they said. *You can do anything you want*, her Abba Jee had always told her. *You can fly on your imagination*. So, with a determined nose up in the air she'd snub her doubters: *One day I will go, and you will see*.

Rubina was hesitant to hope for any immediate fruit from their conversation, but when she received a package in the mail a month later, postmarked Ireland, her protective walls of disbelief crumbled. Inside was a brochure for a master's program in Development Studies in Dublin, an application form, and a letter from Eileen saying that if Rubina applied and was admitted, Trocaire would pay her scholarship. *My God*, Rubina thought as she read and reread everything in the package, *this is mobility. This is flight*. She applied without delay and was accepted.

September 2005 circled itself in Rubina's mental calendar. In bright red. In one year she would put on her wings, leave her beloved Pakistan and land in Ireland.



While she was waiting for the big flight, Rubina still got to stretch her wings. A few years earlier an official from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad had come to visit Taangh Wasaib. He'd slipped off his shoes and sat on the floor cushions in the extra room of Rubina's house that had become their office. Rubina thought he would write them off after seeing their simple facilities, but instead he was inspired by their voluntary work and asked her why they weren't working with the U.S. Embassy. *After all*, he'd said, *we have funds for your kind of projects*. Rubina thanked him and fell out of contact because funding was a current crossroads question for Taangh Wasaib's board of directors. They feared being mistaken for a business instead of a movement – that funding would destroy their vibrant, though young and budding, spirit of volunteerism.

But then she got a surprising phone call from Tahira Habib from the U.S. consulate in Lahore, extending an invitation from the U.S. State Department to be part of their International Visitors Program. That year the focus would be on volunteerism and community service, an opportunity for an international exchange of ideas and experience. Rubina accepted and gave her organization a three-week trial on operating in her absence. Besides the chance to share her pride in her flourishing volunteer network, Rubina was also curious to learn about American volunteerism. She knew that in the U.S., unlike Pakistan, it was supported and encouraged by the government.

During their three weeks, she and her co-visitors traveled from coast to coast, to big cities from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco, and had more than 50 meetings with high-level officials in the State Department and volunteer programs in schools, libraries, museums, parks and homeless shelters. Rubina saw the government acknowledging the importance of volunteerism, and perhaps just as novel, rewarding them. *Our volunteers are never recognized for their service*, Rubina thought. But more than all the flashy cities and people, Rubina took the memory of Sybil Muriel home with her. A 90-year-old from Louisiana.

Rubina had told the program coordinators she wanted to meet someone who had worked with Martin Luther King Jr., and Sybil was that someone. And, to Rubina's surprise, she was white. Rubina had assumed that the civil rights movement was an exclusively black movement. She thought of her own movement, how many Muslims had joined them over the years, and she felt an immediate connection to Sybil's life work. The challenges were similar too – like Pakistani Christians, black Americans had also faced constitutional discrimination. They'd been excluded from voting and forced to sit at the back of buses. And in Pakistan, non-Muslims were barred from becoming president or prime minister. But black Americans had succeeded in their struggle, Rubina thought. She wanted to know how.

A long vision, was Sybil's answer. There were two other women there with Rubina but they hardly spoke, so Rubina had Sybil and her wisdom all to herself. "If a system has been operating for a long time, we can't change it overnight," Sybil said. Rubina was captivated by the tiny old woman's endurance. She wanted to be dedicated like Sybil, 90 years old and still struggling for justice and rights. A vision as long, if not longer than, her own life.

Her mind was brimming with ideas and plans by the end of the three weeks, and Rubina used the long flight home to write them all down. First she would organize a volunteer appreciation event with flowers and certificates. Then she would divide Taangh Wasaib's work into focus issues and her staff and volunteers between them: women's empowerment, peace education and interfaith harmony. Her volunteers would be categorized based on their interests: art and theater, interfaith dialogue, writing, organizing campaigns and events. She would appoint project coordinators and volunteer managers, especially while she was in Ireland. And she would try to create cooperation between the government sector and her own.

Along with her plans, Rubina took with her a different, more realistic, picture of the United States. She'd seen that the country that most Pakistanis envisioned as the land of milk and honey, where all is rosy all the time, had its own problems. She'd seen poverty, crime, homelessness and the remnants of racism. But above all she left with Sybil's long vision and the heartening words of Dr. King – that the moral arc of the universe is also long, but it bends toward justice.



Women were far from fully liberated in her own province, especially rural Punjab, but it was not uncommon for women in Sargodha city to sit in the same room with men, and though the chador was customary, it was not imposed. Unveiled women frequently strolled city markets, though not alone, and no one reprimanded them. But Rubina did not assert the freedom she enjoyed at home when she went to Peshawar, the bustling capital city of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), to meet with the handful of volunteers who she visited regularly to offer guidance and training.

Peshawar's conservative streets were eerily dominated by men. Strictly regulated, women's worlds were mostly restricted to their homes. Employment and education were highly discouraged by the Taliban-influenced society. When they did emerge for a quick trip to the market, they moved almost indistinguishably, fully veiled. So Rubina always draped a large chador over her head, making sure to hide every strand of hair and most of her face. Veiling was enforced not only with disapproving glances, but also with guns and Taliban-influenced religious leaders. One afternoon

while shopping for cloth in a market, the silky material covering her head slipped slightly. Her forehead and face were exposed for only a moment, but she'd already offended the shopkeeper.

“You cover your head,” he scolded brusquely, as at a child. “What kind of woman are you?”

Rubina said nothing. She just pulled the chador around her face, clasping it at her chin, and bought the fabrics. Her assertiveness was bucking madly inside and burning on her face, but she kept her mouth shut. Resistance would get her nowhere here. She would only attract disrespect and suspicion, and no parent would trust their daughters to her influence. While she needed boldness, she also realized some situations called for flexibility and sensitivity.

Her long vision was also widening – to NWFP, a region deeply socialized by the strict enforcement of a skewed, immoderate interpretation of Islam that had seeped easily over the mountainous Afghanistan border for years. With the funding from their newly accepted cadre of donors, Taangh Wasaib set up a small, sparse office in Kohat and began to build their peace movement. It was the second day of Rubina's five-day workshop on peacebuilding and interfaith harmony in Kohat – discussing how current conflicts had emerged and how to overcome them. They'd rented out a conference room in a hotel, and as she insisted, both male and female students (and a few teachers) filled the room, even though the eyebrows and whispers of a closed society went crazy over co-ed events. It was part of Rubina's fundamental philosophy that she could not build peace without integrating the powerful structures, be they political parties, the religious majority or men.

To Rubina's surprise, a slew of journalists showed up right before lunch. They hadn't been invited, but her surprise quickly turned to happiness. *Maybe this is a sign of support for our peace efforts*, she thought. When they broke for lunch, she ate with them and answered questions about Taangh Wasaib activities, how it started, her background. “This is our first workshop here,” she told them, encouraged by their attentive ears and friendly responses. “If the media reports positively on our peace efforts, there will be a change in NWFP.”

Their cordial lunch gave Rubina no reason to expect the phone call that came the next day in the middle of her morning workshop. She never took phone calls during workshops, but it was urgent, her colleague told her. “It's Irfan Barkat,” he said, “from the National Commission for Justice and Peace. In Lahore.” So she took the call.

“You have to be careful,” the crackly voice in her cell phone said. “The news is published everywhere. In Sargodha, in the whole country.” Rubina had no idea what he was talking about. “You didn't see the newspapers this morning?”

“No,” she said, “I was up early preparing for my workshop.”

“Well, have a look. The content is explicitly against you and Taangh Wasaib.”

Rubina left a message with her colleague to continue without her and then stepped out to gather all the newspapers she could find. She spread them out over a table in the lobby. The words leapt from the pages and heaped onto her heart, sinking it further with each published accusation.

Christian professor exploiting our young generation ... Boys and girls sitting together in a hotel ... She is working against Islam ... Enemy of Pakistan.

Well aware of their situation, Rubina talked briefly with her volunteers and decided to end the workshop after lunch. They'd been warned before how unusual it was to bring men and women together, especially young ones. These were not just empty headlines – they were fuel for a very real and very volatile fire already burning. Local extremists had been watching their activities closely for months, sniffing them out. Every now and again Kohat's office phone would ring with a call from a secret number. *Close your office*, a gruff voice would order and then quickly hang up. The threat would linger in that low, unchanging dial tone.

But after the newspaper onslaught, the threatening phone calls were no longer infrequent. *What kind of Muslim are you?* they'd indict her predominantly Muslim staff. *You are selling out your Islam for just a few rupees and working with non-Muslims.* They called Rubina too, and not just with warnings to close down the Kohat office.

"You are misguiding our women and taking innocent Muslims away from Islam," the angry mystery voice spat one day. "Don't you love your life?"

"Yes, of course," Rubina would answer as calmly as possible, holding back her fear.

"Then stop your work." Click.

As the calls continued, her staff became increasingly jittery. Rubina encouraged them not to be afraid, but she knew they didn't all have the same outlook as her. Not everyone was ready to give their life to the movement, and she didn't expect them to. Some had family to consider if anything happened to them. But it was not time to stop. They softened their voice and met separately with men and women. *Go slowly*, Rubina told them. *Be flexible, be sensitive.* It was not time to close their doors. Not yet.



The months passed alternating between fear and excitement, struggles and joys, and keeping Rubina more than busy while that bright red circle in her mind came closer and closer. But before it did, she received another phone call – and not from a threatening extremist, but from the jubilant executive director of South Asia Partnership-Pakistan. Rubina had been nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize.

"Congratulations, Rubina," Mohommad Tahseen said. "They started with 2,000 women, and you've made it through the scrutiny to the 1,000 nominees."

Rubina was shocked. A few months ago when they'd asked her to fill out the application, she'd done so but without a second thought that she could really be selected. The Nobel Peace Prize. Her.

"You're doing wonderful work, Rubina, and it's especially difficult to do peace and human rights work as a marginalized minority group," he assured her. Of the 29 women nominated from

Pakistan, she was one of the few from a minority. “I’m so glad you’ve been chosen. You deserve it.” This wasn’t the first time he’d told her that.

Tahseen *Bhai*²⁹ had long supported Rubina’s work and encouraged her talent and leadership by providing opportunities to express her views with the international community, to link her local efforts for women’s rights with global efforts. He was the one who’d sent her to Canada in 2003 to present her paper, “Leadership and Participation: Role of Women in Social Communication,” at an international forum where she also experienced her first lobbying meeting with a parliamentarian, Canadian M.P. David Kilgour.³⁰ And then he’d selected Rubina as a member of the National Steering Committee of Pakistan Social Forum, which took her to India and Bangladesh to present a paper on the role of women in politics. So Tahseen Bhai was just one of the many people in her life who deserved to share her nomination.

She thought of Peter Jacob, her mentor in her struggle for the protection and promotion of human rights. Dr. Ahmad Khan had been her advocate in her dream for the social network that had become Taangh Wasaib, and Cecil Chaudhry, her usher into participation in mainstream politics. If Madam Shad had planted the seed of women’s leadership in Rubina’s mind, then Mrs. Ashiq had taught her the delicate details of how to make herself available to her people and serve them. And then, of course, there was her faithful family and the ceaseless support of her hundreds of volunteers. Rubina knew this was not *her* Nobel Peace Prize nomination. It belonged to every person who had formed her, supported her, worked with her or stood by her through the years.

It was June 29, and the very next day she was sitting on a stage in Lahore with the other nominees and Mohommad Tahseen for the worldwide nominee announcement press conference. Journalists swarmed the stage, flash bulbs popped, and Rubina tried to convince herself that she was supposed to be there. That no one had made a mistake. She hadn’t told anyone but her family because she still didn’t believe it herself. *Why me?* she kept wondering.

But when she saw her picture on the front page of *The News*, Pakistan’s big English newspaper, Rubina came slowly out of her fog of dispelled belief. It was in the papers. It was real. And friends from around the country called continuously with exclamations and praise. She finally let herself enjoy the honor, but as with every achievement or great joy since she’d lost her Ammi Jee, the happiness was laced with a permanent heartache. Her mother’s constant presence. Rubina knew she was there in her own way, but still she asked her God: *Why isn’t Ammi Jee here right now?*

But Ammi Jee’s pride shared the glow on her husband’s rosy face. And that was enough. Rubina still had her father, the fount of imagination and dreams. The voice that always told her she could be a different kind of girl. Strong and heroic, like Parthaal.



Rubina remembered her travel to Multan for studies. But now she was traveling much further than the city. She was moving to Ireland. She returned from her reverie and looked out the window at the diminishing Lahore runway. It was Sept. 18, 2005. The day of the bright red circle. The day of flight. She promised to be back in less than a year. Ten months at the most. She would come back to Pakistan to research and write her thesis, and go back to Ireland as needed after that. Her volunteer movement was too important to leave any longer.

A friendly Irish staff person from the college was waiting for her at the airport and drove her into the middle of the city. Dublin’s greenery shocked her senses. Verdant vines climbed the old walls that slipped past them. Rubina breathed the color of life into her soul. And it continued all the way to her new home on campus – Shannon House, a heaven, with a luscious display of nature right outside her window.

An array of accents decorated her classroom – together they represented 17 different countries. English accents, African, American, Eastern European, Irish. And Rubina’s melodic Pakistani. It was a beautiful sound, but it also made for arduous listening. Especially to the lectures. Rubina was devastated when she got her first assignment back, a paper about globalization. A big red “52%” was scribbled at the top. She’d never seen such a mark in her academic career. And her scholarship required marks of 60 percent to continue. She called Nabila the moment she got back to her apartment. She hadn’t even taken off her sweater or scarf.

“I am coming back. I will be a failure here, and then I will be a failure in my organization. I cannot study here,” Rubina told her sister in a flurry of emotion. “The accent, the complex topics. I can live here, but if I’m not getting good marks, what can I do?”

“It’s a different system there. Academic style, bibliographies,” Nabila tried to calm her. “You must stay, for three months at least. If you come back you will lose your confidence. This has been your dream since childhood, and as soon as it comes true, you want to come back?”

Nabila knew just the buttons to push. She *had* talked about this before she even really understood what the word “abroad” meant. She agreed to stay a few months longer, at least. *I won’t quit*, Rubina told herself. *I always take on challenges*. And her next paper was a 70, then a 74, then 86. Many nights found her in the library long past 11 o’clock. Sometimes she’d go early in the morning, with food for the whole day, and not emerge until she was nearly asleep.

Always laughing, making jokes, bubbling with stories, Rubina was very popular. And she was constantly busy, on top of her library hours. She traveled, delivered lectures, gave presentations, attended readings and other campus events. She’d come to Ireland with the intention of meeting people. Ireland didn’t mean Ireland – it meant Ethiopia, Tanzania, Germany, France. *The world is full of so many beautiful people and God has given me this opportunity*, Rubina thought, *so I have to smell each and every flower*.

Another Pakistani woman who had studied at the college years ago was visiting for an alumni conference, and when Rubina heard she would be reading at a book-launching ceremony on campus, she went and sat in the front row, anxious to hear the thoughts of her Pakistani sister. She’d written one of the articles in the book, and as she read she told of her birth in Pakistan, the discrimination she faced as a Christian and how she had moved to Canada because she’d been planted in the wrong garden.

That sentence – “I was planted in the wrong garden” – jarred Rubina’s very essence. She listened somewhat distractedly to the rest of the reading, her mind pushing those seven words around like a tongue with a curious piece of meat. Rubina understood the struggles, the twin pains of rejection and alienation. But Pakistan *was* her garden – and she wanted it to flourish. Its peace was her life’s work. When the writer introduced herself to Rubina after the reading and asked her what

she thought, Rubina told her as kindly as possible that she disagreed. She loved Pakistan, and she could never leave it.

“I learned that country is beyond extremism, terrorism, religious intolerance,” Rubina said. “Country is the place that gives you birth, and if you don’t love it, you can’t love any place in this universe.” It was a philosophy planted in her soul from one of her best teachers: her father. It was one of the many sermons on humanity and the universe he’d given as they tended the kitchen garden together. He’d also told her that when your country is in crisis, if you are a person born with love, you must address the issues.

“Well, this is your point of view,” the woman said, slightly taken aback by Rubina’s response. “It is not my point of view.” And she slipped away into the crowd.

Pakistan may have been a garden in need of substantial tending, but it was still her garden. So when a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad appeared in Danish newspapers, Rubina joined the protests in Dublin’s streets. Freedom of expression did not trump respect of religious sacredness. She was not only troubled by religious intolerance against Christians – she’d also been pained back in Pakistan when a group of Islamic seminary students desecrated a tree revered by a Buddhist community in Islamabad. Though it wasn’t her religion, Islam was part of her garden and she opposed the disgrace of its prophet. She wanted her fellow Pakistanis to know she was standing with them. Even in Ireland.



As promised, Rubina stayed in regular contact with her staff and volunteers. She was their rock, especially those in NWFP where the Kohat office phone continued to ring with threats. *Stay calm*, she’d tell them every time. *Life is not easy when you’re working for peace.*

But it was starting to seem that her own phone only rang with calls containing some genre of tears, either joy or fear, anger or elation. Only extremes, nothing in between. Each report from her Kohat volunteers detailed more serious threats and tightly strung nerves. Danger was no longer a phantom creation of over-reactive fear. It was imminent. Anything could happen to them. They knew it and Rubina knew it. The situation had reached its breaking point.

Rubina could no longer say in good faith that everything would be fine, that life was just harder when you worked for peace. The foreboding phone calls continued and finally forced Rubina and her board of directors to reconsider the fate of the Kohat office. It wasn’t a matter of their resolve or dedication. It was a matter of security for their staff – and that came before anything else. Personal harm was now a very real possibility, and that permanent guilt would be far worse than the temporary depression Rubina felt now over their dream deferred. It was decided: They wouldn’t close officially until Rubina returned, but the funded projects in NWFP would end. The office would soon be closed.



This is the gate of peace, Rubina thought as she rang the bell outside the gate. A simple wooden board nailed to the quaint stone wall marked their destination. Peace People. They were expecting a

watchman or a guard to come and let them in, but Rubina recognized her immediately from photos. Mairead Corrigan walked lightly down the path and gracefully opened the gate. Rubina was first stunned, and then impressed. A Nobel laureate, a heroine of nonviolence, was opening the gate for her – a gesture of kindness and humility.

“I am so glad you’re here,” Mairead said, pulling Rubina close in a motherly hug. It was more of a song than a statement in her charming Irish inflection. She held her at arms length to look in her eyes and then pulled her back again warmly. All Rubina could say was thank you. Nothing else. Gratitude and admiration overwhelmed her. She just kept thanking her as Mairead shook hands with Eva, Rubina’s Irish classmate, and her French husband who had driven to Belfast with Rubina.

The next circle on Rubina’s mental calendar, her return to Pakistan, was rapidly approaching, but when she first landed in Dublin, she’d made a pact with herself. She couldn’t leave Ireland without meeting Mairead Corrigan. Peter Jacob gave her Mairead’s book, *Vision of Peace*, when she was caught in the flames of her character assassination. Rubina had devoured it, taking refuge in its inspirational pages as the rumors about her theater group swirled in the streets. Mairead felt like a kindred Irish spirit, determined yet cheerful, and a grassroots peace activist working against sectarian violence. She’d created the Peace People movement after her sister and sister’s three children were killed by an IRA officer during the Northern Ireland violence between Protestants and Catholics. At a time when killings were the order of the day, Mairead stood up and said the killing must stop. She’d built a peace movement from the dust of death. *Yes, nonviolence is my way*, Rubina thought as she absorbed and reabsorbed her every word.

And now she was following her up the path to her office. It was warm and simple, just like her. The furniture – one table and a few chairs – didn’t even match. Mairead’s musical voice wove with the clattering of dishes as she talked to them from the small kitchen connected to her office. She came back with tea and biscuits.

Rubina fell more in love with her with every passing minute. Pakistanis had a saying: If you have beauty inside it will sparkle on your face. Mairead’s peaceful heart absolutely glittered on her face. “Rubina, what do you really want to ask me while you are here?” she asked, sitting down with her cup of tea. Rubina savored the warm melodic way Mairead said her name.

“I just wanted to listen to the words of your story. I’ve always been inspired by the stories of strong women,” Rubina said. “Your story is one of empowerment, and you encouraged me that women can do anything.” Mairead had been a soft-spoken domestic woman, not involved in activism, when her sister was killed. But then she stood on stages, inspired masses and started a people’s movement for peace and nonviolence. If one person has a clear vision, Rubina had learned from her, and if she stands up for that vision, hundreds and thousands of people can join that vision. And that is a movement of the people. And where there is movement, there is change.

Mairead asked her which part of the book inspired her the most. When Rubina told her the letter to her son, Mairead’s bright smile widened even further. She got up and went to the other room and came back with a copy of her book. She opened the cover and wrote: *For the people of Pakistan. Peace to you*. She handed it to Rubina with a kiss on the forehead.

Rubina’s mind finally unearthed her most burning question: *How had she found the courage to stand up to sectarianism?* In her soft, dancing voice, Mairead told her: the deaths of her family. Rubina was struck by the similarities of their stories. Both had been inspired to work for peace because of injustice or violence against their family members. Both suffered because of religious strife and intolerance. And both still loved the ones many would consider their enemies. Mairead was also a Catholic, and though her family was killed by Protestants, she still called them her brothers and sisters.

Rubina walked out the gate of peace with something new. Mairead had a contagious calm about her, and it had seeped into Rubina’s spirit. She felt it spread through her entire being. Inner peace. It was a force stronger than all her pains and all the fears she never allowed herself to fear – that she fended off with all her might because if she ever opened that floodgate, she was likely to drown. But inner peace was a new strength. A quiet, beautiful one. Like a resilient butterfly. One that could make a face that knew pain and sorrow sparkle.

So as Rubina headed back to her garden, she took Mairead’s calm strength with her. She tucked her into heart, alongside her other companions for the journey – her sacred saints.

Bagh-e-Aman

The familiar scent of her garden welcomed her home. The Pakistani fragrance of May flowers and spices and the promise of orange blossoms in December. Her family hugging her at the Lahore airport. She breathed it all deep into her soul. This is where she belonged.

Thrilled to have their Ruby home, her family threw a party to celebrate her successful studies in Ireland – she’d gone from the tear-filled phone call to Nabila to being named Student of the Year.³¹ When Ireland’s Minister for Development Cooperation and Human Rights³² bestowed her award, he told her he’d been to NWFP after its earthquake in 2005. “Pakistan is a beautiful country,” he said. “And I do hope you will work for the development of your country.” Her heart had swelled. He’d said her country was beautiful. She accepted her award and with it a renewed commitment to her country and especially NWFP.

Nabila traveled to Sargodha with her husband and two sons, Sachal and Tabeel, for the party. Both of Rubina’s nephews had gifts prepared for her. During dinner, 13-year-old Sachal read an Urdu translation of Mairead Corrigan’s “Letter to my Son Luke” – he knew it was his *Aani*’s³³ favorite part of the book and the best gift he could give her. Tabeel, who’d always loved his Aani Rubina most, followed his younger brother’s performance with a poem he’d written himself. “My Aani,” he called it:

*I love my Aani
She is different from all
She is!
Simple but looks elegant
Hardworking and diligent*

Humorous to make life enjoyable
Helpful to make life livable

Committed to work and studies
Determined to achieve success

Rubina spent a few days at home in Sargodha with her family and volunteers, but her first order of business, after formally closing the office in Kohat, was to tend to her volunteers there. Her support and presence was needed more in Kohat, so she left home once again. Even if Taangh Wasaib didn't have an official presence there – just informal plays and seminars when a suitable opportunity arose – she was not going to abandon them, and she was hoping to nourish them with her renewed philosophy of inner peace. It was an important part of their continued peace education, and they no doubt could use some.

There was a special spot nestled in the mountain range just outside of Kohat – the closest thing to heaven on earth Rubina had ever seen. A place where the water was always cold and the spring was always fresh. Plum orchards intoxicated the clean mountainous air and provided a cool tent of shade for Rubina and her peace students. She'd brought them there to help heal their spirits from the fear and anxiety of recent months. It was a retreat from the constant listening ears and peering eyes that clamped down harshly on the students' desire for a different society. But here in the high open field they could breathe deeply, think clearly and speak freely. They sat in a circle under the safe canopy, and Rubina gazed up at the branches, so grateful to be home, so grateful for the beauty. She couldn't imagine a terrorist anywhere near that place.

"This also is peace education," Rubina told her volunteers. "Peace begins with us. It is not just something external, but also internal."

They sat quietly for a few minutes as Rubina invited them to look around, to drink in the peace waiting in the natural beauty surrounding them. "We're going to spend some time in meditation. In reflection," she said after they'd had time to quiet their minds and hearts. "Just let yourself sit here in nature. Think about it. Feel your relationship with mother earth, the plants, the sky, the water."

As Rubina sat, she reflected on how important such afternoons were – and not just for a peaceful respite from chaos and fear. These outings were a rare opportunity for her female volunteers to leave the mundane confines of their daily routine. This was unusual in their social restriction of expectations. The girls' faces gleamed with more life than Rubina ever saw back in Kohat. They laughed louder and spoke more passionately. They were free here. The boys too. Some lay with their backs pressed to the earth, their faces basking in the sun. Their guards down. She brought them back from their quietude after a half hour and left them with a final thought to chew on in the coming weeks. "When you become liberated, then you can work for the liberation of others," she said with a soft zeal. "But if you are not liberated from the inside, you can do nothing for the liberation of others."

As they shared a meal before driving down the mountains, Rubina encouraged them to take the peacefulness they felt now back into the realities of daily life. And it struck her that she needed to take it home too, to her volunteers in Sargodha. They'd taken a few retreats to the countryside,

but Rubina started to concoct her own vision of peace. A permanent place that anyone could go at any time. On any day. Because inner peace was like daily bread.



The poetry of the Sufis had been Rubina's first instructors of personal reflection – *Who am I? What do I know?* asked Bulleh Shah – but Mairead Corrigan had been a real and breathing example of a peaceful spirit. Her infectious inner life had made Rubina evaluate her own.

The morning routine she'd started in Dublin followed her to her mornings in Sargodha. Before the daily concerns of the world started to pile up, Rubina tried to cleanse and calm her inner world. Sitting cross-legged on her bed, the morning breeze blowing in the window, the sun streaming on her face, she would concentrate until she saw the world in front of her. Then she would breathe deeply, imagining she was inhaling the beauty of the world and exhaling any ugliness inside – any worries and any hatred. It wasn't so much a prayer as a connection to the universe, a spirituality grounded in humanity and nature.

She found she didn't worry as much, even though friends continued to urge her to consider her security. Thoughts of *Will I live through tomorrow?*, after receiving a threatening call, dwindled. But, she realized, she was exhausted. Her staff was exhausted. Her volunteers, who worked nonstop, were exhausted. Things had been different when they were just small study circles, sitting and talking together, with an occasional theater performance. But ever since 2001 – September 11 to be exact, when militarism and sectarianism were stirred once again – they'd been running faster and further. That's when they broke into the community and started spreading to villages. That's when the work got hard, when they were confronted with opposition and violence. Hatred. Fear. An environment inhospitable to the growth of peace. And they hadn't stopped running – rallies, activism, advocacy, theater, education – for six years.

Not only were they fatigued, Rubina realized, but now they were 34 staff and more than 1,000 volunteers who rarely saw one another. They spent all their time running in the different directions of sensitive and highly charged issues – patriarchy, feudalism, terrorism. *We have to take some rest*, Rubina thought. *We have to think about what we are doing, collectively and individually. We need a place to refresh our souls whenever we want.*

Her mind drifted in search of the most peaceful times of her life, where they had been and why. It was immediately obvious. A garden. She would build her very own *bagh-e-aman*. A garden for peace. She remembered the swirling sweetness in the landlord's garden of innocence. Madam Shad's school gardens of equality. And her father's kitchen garden of wisdom in the city. *We are all the sons and daughters of mother earth*, he'd tell her as they planted and watered their seeds.

So Taangh Wasaib bought a small plot of land just outside the city. It already had an old stone wall surrounding it and two old fruit trees that soon had company. Rubina planted more fruit trees that now come to life whenever a warm breeze blows through the garden. A twirling potpourri of mango, guava and papaya – papaya for Inyat, her favorite. And so Inyat's essence twirls about the garden too, always close to Rubina. Flowers of every color make the garden a burst of color in a landscape of browns and green. Nightingales, hummingbirds and parrots add their songs of life to the oasis of peace. And Rubina's sanctuary wouldn't be complete without cactus, Taangh Wasaib's

logo. They teem from the corners of the garden, a constant reminder of survival in harsh environments – of perseverance through difficult circumstances.

The bagh-e-aman became a place of both reflection and celebration. Of stillness and revelry, poetry and music. Tree branches give shade for daytime meditation and hold little twinkling lights for nighttime ceremonies – like a birthday party for a violence victim, wishes of long life to a woman rejected by society. The little white lights blow in the wind above them, like the stars bending down to kiss them.



The smell of charred wood still seemed to cling to their skin and hair, days after returning from the devastation. But maybe it wasn't the scent. Maybe it was the sight of women sitting on the ground beside a pile of rubble and ash, singed skeletons of what was once their home. Their empty eyes telling of burned dreams settling in the dust. Or maybe it was the sound of terrified children scratching the blackened leftovers of wood with sticks, wearing the only clothing they now owned – whatever they were wearing when the terror lit their life on fire.

It wasn't just the scent. It was the haunting remnants of what they'd seen and heard in Gojra. And even in the garden of peace, Rubina and Sadia couldn't push away the world's realities. People were confused and distressed after the recent wave of blasphemy violence and the deaths in Gojra, so Rubina had gathered a small group in the garden. Sadia sat next to her in the circle as she opened the reflection session with a verse from the Sufi poet Shah Hussain. Sufi poetry always soothed her soul in times of religious violence and misunderstanding. Those in the circle closed their eyes and listened as she recited the lines by heart and the chirping birds and flowery August aromas tried to cheer them.

*O God you are aware of my true condition,
as you are within me and outside of me and present everywhere.
You are the Cause and Creator of everything.
I have no existence without you.³⁴*

Rubina had always loved that verse, she told the circle. All Sufis taught tolerance, harmony and love, but this poem emphasized the unity of humanity simply because God is the source of all existence. "God is present in all creation and his multi-color existence provides diversity to all human existence," Rubina shared her reflection on the verse. "Our being is rooted in him and we cannot think of life without his life-giving and life-sharing presence."

One of her senior volunteers and a local religious leader, Syed Qurban, added that Shah Hussein was explicitly guiding them toward harmony because God is in the heart of *all* human beings, regardless of caste, creed or religion. There *is* evidence of harmony and coexistence in Pakistan, Rubina thought. She didn't want her circle to feel like it was merely a distant, unreachable dream. So she gave them the example of an exposure trip she'd recently taken some volunteers on – to the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, who was deeply influenced by the Sufi mystic Baba Farid.

“When we entered the gate to his shrine, Guru Nanak’s teachings were written on the wall, and Baba Farid’s at the other end,” Rubina told the circle. “Both of their photos hung at the entrance.” A Sikh and a Sufi. A beautiful, real-life example of interfaith harmony right in Pakistan’s Punjab.

Rubina glanced at Sadia, hoping she would use the momentary lull to release some of the thoughts or trauma that their visit to Gojra had stirred. She was ready.

“This poem gives us the concept of existence with our creator and coexistence with creation,” Sadia began. “But when we deny the concept of coexistence, it creates conflict.” She paused to connect her thought to what she’d just seen. Six people, all from one family, burned to death in a Christian colony in Gojra. One shot in the head. The blistered uncle whose niece and nephew had died in his arms. The mourning family. The result of an impassioned mob misusing religion for their own purposes.

“People did not think about coexistence in Gojra, but about the misuse of religion,” Sadia finally added. Rubina said nothing. She didn’t want Sadia’s statement to lose its impact. A ripple of agreement spread around the circle, condemning what had happened: *Islam does not allow violence. Islam is a peaceful religion.* Rubina listened and nodded, retracing the sights and smells – and stories – seared in her mind.



Hostility toward Christians and the frequency of blasphemy accusations had taken a sharp upward spike, aggression and misunderstanding intensifying day after day. Not many of the stories were making the headlines because blasphemy was so easily justified and swept away, but when the violence erupted – literally exploded – in Gojra, the injustice was obvious. No one there had even been charged with blasphemy. Members of parliament, government ministers and media swarmed the still smoldering colony.

Rubina had watched in agony as the scenes flashed across her television screen. Burned bodies were blocking the railroad, the families of the dead staging a protest. They refused to move or bury the bodies until an incident report was filed against the fundamentalist mob that was responsible. A few days earlier, after a wedding ceremony in the nearby village of Korian, torn up pieces of paper had been found strewn in the street and then misidentified as pages of a book of Islamic studies. No individual could be pinpointed for the blasphemy, so more than 40 Christian houses had been burned to the ground. When the Christians of Gojra made plans to go help their neighbors in Korian, they became the next target. Homeless and disoriented witnesses, still lost in shock and grief, rattled off broken parts of the story to the reporters.

The mob had entered the streets of Gojra’s Christian colony full of bravado from their previous attack, chanting slogans – *Western Dogs!* – and firing guns. The residents had tried to fend them off, but their stone throwing was no match for the strength and number, and guns, of their attackers. They ran to their homes and locked the doors, but locks were smashed and doors thrown open. Shots were fired. And then chemicals were thrown on the houses. More shots fired followed by explosions of flame. The terrifying frenzy went on for hours, trapping innocent lives in their

burning homes. People were burning – women, children, elderly – and when the unnatural odor met their nostrils, the mob scattered, their revenge clearly complete.

Rubina had to go. She didn't want to just see it through a glass screen. There were plenty of organizations already helping the survivors, but she wanted to meet the people, especially the Hameed family. They'd lost seven loved ones. Her heart ached with both an eerie familiarity and a compelling urgency to at least be present with them. When she told her staff she was going to Gojra, Sadia, who was working as a psychologist for Taangh Wasaib, asked if she could join. Rubina had hoped to go alone, but perhaps it would be good to let Sadia see the aftermath for herself. If she wanted to.

They went directly to the hospital where members of the Hameed family were recovering from their burns. Rubina sat on the bed of one of the brothers, unable to find the right words to begin. She'd experienced a blasphemy mob, but this was a very different result. His entire body had been burned when he escaped the flames, and Rubina did her best not to stare at the blistering skin barely staying attached. Sadia was already crying.

A week had passed since the flames had engulfed his home and stolen his family. Stolen his life. He told Rubina and Sadia that for three days he couldn't speak. Only small words. Journalists came to his room to hear his story, but he couldn't talk to them. "I don't like to talk because there is no life for me anymore," he said as he started to choke on his tears. But he caught his breath and kept going.

"My father had been living for the last 52 years in this place," he said. "We had harmony. It happened overnight." Slowly he relived the unimaginable between sobbing hiccups. He'd watched what no man should ever have to see – his wife burning before his eyes.

When the chanting mob banged on his family's front gate, his father had told them all to be calm. Nothing would happen to them. Muslims were their neighbors and friends. He would talk to the mob and assure them his family had done nothing wrong. The family watched from inside as the father of the house went to open the front gate. He didn't speak a single word before the men on the other side lifted a gun to his head and fired it. Through the window he had watched his father slump in the dust and the mob storm into the house. The family scrambled to hide in a back bedroom and listened to the impassioned men loot the front rooms. Then sudden silence. They were gone. And then the house exploded, hot orange everywhere. His brother, who was on top of the house trying to see where the mob was, fell into the flames when the roof collapsed.

"I was picking up Musa and Umayya," he remembered. "I wanted to save my niece and nephew." He started running toward the hospital, the burned children in his arms. People were running everywhere, injured and disoriented in the smoky chaos. But the children died before he got there, he said. "In my arms."

Sadia was still crying. Rubina's emotions were just beneath the surface, but she tried to stay strong and composed. For his sake.

He was done. He couldn't relive the pain anymore. But before they left he said with weary conviction, "Islam is not like this." Sadia wept and nodded fervently. "I apologize. This is not my Islam."

One of his nephews was at the house when Rubina and Sadia got there. Everything was gone. Rubina's eyes caught on a heap of shiny blackness. The iron gate and window bars, the nephew told her. Even iron had melted in the strong chemicals. The young man showed her their few salvaged treasures: the burned pages of a Bible, a blackened cross and half-singed pictures of Mary and Jesus. "Look, is this not an insult to us?" he'd asked. "Is this not blasphemy?"

Before going home, they walked through the black ashy neighborhood to talk to the desolate faces that lined the streets, just sitting and staring, trying to see what came next. The children couldn't sleep at night, parents said. In the middle of the night they would cry and scream that a mob was coming. And their expensive school uniforms had been burned too. *But we've lived for decades with our Muslim friends, they all kept saying in stunned tones. They're afraid of the fundamentalists too.*

Small children left their dust drawings to answer Rubina and Sadia's questions. *Everything is burned*, they said. Their big dark eyes, still wide with shock, said more. And then they warned: *Don't take anything from Muslims. They are our enemies.* A Muslim neighbor cooked rice and distributed it in the colony, one parent had told them. But the children refused to eat it. Sadia asked them why. *Maybe they have mixed poison in it because they are our enemies.* Sadia spoke softly and calmly to the children, trying to offer whatever counseling she could in the short span of an afternoon.

On the way back to Sargodha, Sadia called many of her Muslim friends to tell them she'd seen it with her own eyes. That it was much worse than they'd read in the newspapers. And then she told Rubina she wanted to come back and start a counseling camp for the children. The fear and mistrust in their eyes – their obvious psychological trauma – had penetrated her. But Rubina was about to leave for the U.S. for two months, and she didn't want Sadia to navigate Gojra's lingering wounds alone. "When I come back, we will go together," she promised her.

Though the day had shown her that many steps lay ahead before all Pakistanis could live together in harmony and understanding, Rubina had been encouraged as she listened to Sadia talk to her friends. She hadn't told Sadia what to think. She was speaking for herself. It was one thing for Rubina to stand up and shout about the misuse of blasphemy laws. Taking someone to see the faces and hear the stories was another thing entirely. It was a small, but powerful, step.

People just need to see, Rubina thought. To touch and listen. To look into the eyes of humanity and not turn away – and maybe even see themselves. Then maybe one day all of Pakistan could be like the bagh-e-aman, a place where Gojra's tragic flames would never again be set ablaze.

Sajjar

Violence on the streets of Pakistan steadily escalated during Rubina’s two months in San Diego. And it plunged into fear and instability in her last two weeks. The fragile buds of peace were weathering a storm. As the Pakistani military waged an offensive against Pakistan’s own brand of the Taliban and other extremist groups pushing further into the heart of the country, the militants were retaliating with bombs and shootings. News reports shook Rubina over her morning cup of Lipton tea, sitting next to her window with the view of a fog-enveloped Pacific Ocean. Hopes and prayers for her people flew from her soul out across its gray waters. The alarming headlines became more frequent and concerning the closer she came to her departure date.

Blast Kills Scores in Pakistan

Taliban Attacks in Pakistan on the Rise

Bomb Rips Through Busy Market

Attackers Kill 6 at Islamic University

Schools in Pakistan Closed in Wake of Attacks

The morning of her radio interview, she gazed out the backseat window at the whizzing Southern California freeway, listening to the station’s commentary on the latest developments: *Clinton’s arrival in Pakistan is met by fatal explosions in Peshawar market*. Rubina was going back in 10 days. The international spotlight had fallen on her country once again, but Pakistan was not just a country of tragic headlines to be forgotten when the storm passed. It was her garden. The place she was born. Her Ammi Jee’s grave was there.

An hour later Rubina was in the sound booth for her live interview, repeatedly emphasizing that war was not the solution as the host ticked off questions about the recent violence, Talibanization and U.S. policy toward Pakistan. The real need, Rubina said, is to replace old ideologies – those that took root in the Islamization of the ‘80s – with a new ideology of religious tolerance and coexistence, of love, harmony and peace. Pakistanis don’t need weapons and warfare, she told the radio host. They need their basic needs provided and their rights protected. If the U.S. wants to help create a culture of peace in Pakistan, Rubina suggested adopting a policy of development over drones. And, as she’d done in every public discussion or interview, she reminded those listening that Pakistanis are peaceful people, and Pakistan, a beautiful country.

A few days earlier, Kamran had called Rubina urgently trying to convince her to stay longer in San Diego. “Don’t come back right now Rubina,” he begged her.

Rubina had expected the phone calls to start soon. “You are there. My sister and my father are there. So why should I be here?” she asked.

“But whoever can save their life should,” he argued.

“No, my life is with you and my people,” Rubina told him firmly. “Why is my life more precious than yours?” Her brother knew her philosophy well enough. He’d been a pupil in Feroze’s kitchen garden too. *Life is a gift from God. An equal blessing for everyone*. She refused to save her own life while everyone else stayed in the fire. And when you love someone, you don’t leave them in the middle of their distress. If there was ever a time she felt that she *had* to be in Pakistan, it was now.

“Why are you not understanding me?” Kamran was bewildered – but he knew his sister. He knew of her uncanny courage. Her constant determination.

There were more phone calls with each day as her flight approached. At all hours of the day and night. As her friends and family became more insistent in their concern, she became more anxious to get home.

A week after the government closed all the schools, one of her staff members called to tell her the threatening phone calls had found their way to the Sargodha office. The callers were suspicious about Taangh Wasaib’s work, firing off warnings that the organization’s future was short and reminders that they worked for the Christian and Western agenda. Forty years of her life had been lived, and still there were pockets of fundamentalists and extremists who saw her in one inaccurate dimension: *She is Christian, and Christians are not loyal to Pakistan*. When she’d earned her college distinction: *Are you a Christian?* When she’d been transferred as a lecturer: *Christian*. When she’d formed Taangh Wasaib and extremists scrutinized and mistrusted their work: *She is Christian*. It marked her, always returning like a stubborn boomerang.

Feeling the simultaneous pain of her beloved Pakistan’s distress and her own rejection as Pakistani by extremists, she asked herself: *Am I not a daughter of the same motherland? Am I not loyal to Pakistan? Are not all my struggles for my country?* But stronger than the aching was the fluttering longing to return to her home and rejoin hands with her partners in peace who far outnumber the extremists dominating the headlines. She wished her plane would leave that day.

Nabila tried next, to no avail. And then her father called. “Rubina, my daughter, just stay there two or three more months and then the situation will be a little bit more normal.”

But Rubina knew there would be no normalization without everyone’s contribution, including her own. As she’d said in a television interview earlier that week, yes the situation in Pakistan was critical, but it would not stop the work of building peace and countering extremist ideologies. She was determined to love her country unconditionally – even if extremists hated her in return. Even if her open arms were met with hostile arms crossed over chests.

“I must come back to my people, Abba Jee,” she told him with equal parts fervor and love. He, after all, was the one who taught her that human beings were above all, above the whole mess they had made. He was the one who told her to make the world beautiful for humanity.

And there was one person in particular she wanted a beautiful Pakistan for: Subina’s newborn daughter, Sajjar. A few weeks after she arrived in San Diego, Rubina’s first niece came into the world. Her name meant freshness. New life.

What kind of Pakistan will Sajjar live her girlhood in, and grow into a woman in? Rubina thought. Will she walk down streets of tolerance and equality? Or will she struggle against the same challenges as her Aani? Rubina would hold her for the first time when she returned and never let her forget that she was a blessing, not a curse.

Rubina’s life had been a series of steps, some big, some small, but all determined. And her next step was simply to return to her garden. She ignored the pleading of her family and friends and

boarded her airplane. She wasn't sure what life in the garden would be like when she got there, or even how long she would live, but there were thorns to be pruned so delicate buds can blossom. So *Sajjar* – new life – can flourish. Pakistan still needs tending, and a faithful gardener has returned.

Epilogue

The following is from Peace Writer Kaitlin Barker

Nov. 5, 2009

Dearest Rubina,

Or Ruby. You have become so precious to me, after all.

I could hardly sleep the night before meeting you. I wondered out loud to the ceiling: *Can I really do this? More importantly, will I do her story justice?* But all my fears vanished the moment we met and you grabbed my hand in yours and said, “This is my writer.” Your voice rang with your trademark contagious joy, and the way you said it, *my* writer, told me you were ready to trust me. I felt immediately at ease with you. Throughout that first day I listened to your shimmering laugh and watched your warm, dancing eyes as you spoke. Your heart was splashed across your face.

But that’s the Rubina everyone gets to see. The beaming, sparkling spirit of Rubina. You let me into deeper places. You told me of your pains, your sorrows, your questions raised to God through tears. Together we traveled back to days of struggle and formation. Thank you for taking me with you.

Thank you for trusting me with your stories, your dreams, your loves and your memories. Thank you for being an incredible partner in this storytelling, and story-creating, process. Of all the people you spent time with in San Diego during your two months here, I somehow was honored with soaking up the majority of it. I have felt privileged beyond words that mine were the ears that got to hear every detail, every precious ounce of wisdom and experience. Thank you for letting me be a small part of your peace work by telling your story.

It seems impossible that an airplane will fly you away in two days. And it seems almost as impossible that you were only here two months. I feel like I’ve known you for years already. But Pakistan needs you, Rubina. And Pakistan is blessed to have you working for her peace and fullness. As I write these words, tears are blurring my eyes. Maybe someone else *should* take you to the airport.

But one thing I know for sure – this is not goodbye. Some people grace our lives for a moment and leave us with just the treasure of a memory. I will cherish every memory of our time together, but my heart assures me that our friendship is not over. We have been peacemaker and peace writer these two months, but after I’ve written the last word of your story, we will be friends – and always colleagues in the work of making this a world of peace and harmony for all.

You have shared your life with me and taught me innumerable lessons about love, compassion, courage and impossible dreams. You have shared your country with me, and you are Pakistan to me. I have seen your love for Pakistan through your devoted eyes and your faithful life. You and your Pakistan will be always in my prayers.

You are one of my saints, Rubina, and I will carry you in my heart.

Peace and joy to you always. And, of course, love.

Acknowledgments

Just as a harmonious choir requires many different voices, an integrated movement for peace and justice takes many different people – men and women, students and elderly, rich and poor, Muslims and Christians. Rubina’s journey and peace work have been anything but solitary, and her colleagues, innumerable volunteers, family and friends have all been invaluable partners on the path toward building a more peaceful Pakistan. If time and space allowed, she would tell stories about each of the voices that have joined her song, but she wishes to sincerely thank and acknowledge all those whose names did not find their way into the pages of these narratives. Each has played a part, big or small, in Rubina’s longing for the fullness of humanity. This is not only her story, but also the story of all those who have struggled alongside her to create the Pakistan they dream of. *Shukaria*. Thank you.

A CONVERSATION WITH RUBINA FEROZE BHATTI

The following is an edited compilation of select interviews conducted by Kaitlin Barker between Sept. 18 and Nov. 6, 2009, an interview by IPJ Deputy Director Dee Aker on Oct. 12, 2009, and a transcript of a public event featuring Rubina Feroze Bhatti on Oct. 6, 2009, in the Peace & Justice Theatre of the IPJ. The public event was facilitated by Dee Aker.

Q: What do you want people to know about what it means to be Pakistani?

A: I'm proud to be Pakistani. I love my country. Though I have been discriminated against as a minority and a woman, I still love my country – because if you don't love your own country, it's impossible to accept and love other countries and people. I came to the United States with two points in my mind. Firstly, I would like to explain to Americans that Pakistan is not a land of terrorists, extremists and fundamentalists. It's a land of peaceful people who have their roots in peace and harmony. It's the land of Sufis. So for me to be a Pakistani is to be a peace lover and a peacemaker.

Secondly, I would like to share the stories of all those Pakistani people who are progressive and have been struggling to foster a culture of peace and tolerance by adopting non-violent approaches to peacebuilding. But unfortunately, the majority of the global community has very little information about Pakistan. For example, what they know is only about the handful of extremists and suicide bombers – and that's what comes out in the media.

“I would like to explain to Americans that Pakistan is not a land of terrorists, extremists and fundamentalists. It's a land of peaceful people who have their roots in peace and harmony.”

Q: You said that the majority of Pakistani people are peaceful people. What is your definition of peace and what is your vision for Pakistan's peace?

A: For me, it's a very easy definition. Peace is not only the absence of war; it is also the protection and promotion of human rights. It is the fullness of humanity. It is a situation where people don't live in fear and insecurity. There may be no war, but if there is a trust deficit between me and my neighbors and I am living in a state of fear in my neighborhood, there will be no peace.

What I want to say is that when people live in fear and insecurity, it generates ethnocentrism, religious intolerance, social exclusion and, finally, the underdevelopment of the country. Peace is the acceptance of each other without any discrimination, the active participation of all people in the development process and the uplifting of the entire population. Therefore, my vision for Pakistan's peace is a harmonized society where the constant improvement of the well-being of all people across gender, ethnic groups and religions is ensured by the protection and promotion of their rights.

Q: What was the reaction of most Pakistanis on September 11th?

A: They took it as a tragedy. They were very sorry about it because there was a lot of killing. But when Musharraf allied Pakistan with U.S.' war on terror, people were not very happy with it, because Pakistani people think that the U.S.A. is a fair-weather friend. Actually, the trust relationship between U.S. and Pakistan was lost after the Cold War when Pakistan found itself largely alone in trying to cope as the U.S. walked away after achieving its objectives – despite the fact that Pakistan fully supported America in the Cold War. Therefore, Pakistani people were not convinced to ally with the U.S. on the war on terror. They see it as a mistake. Gradually, an anti-America movement started after September 11th.

Look, when there is an action, there would always be an equal reaction. So the reaction could be of love or it could be of hatred. America is spending more and more money on war and weapons rather than on development projects. If America will spend more money on development to eradicate poverty and increase the literacy rate and provide health facilities, then definitely the trust relationship would be restored. But if America is providing sophisticated weapons and drone attacks, then people have the right to opine in this way – that America is interested in killing the Pakistani people, not in saving them.

Q: Does this increase sectarian violence?

A: Anti-Americanism has increased religious intolerance more than sectarianism. It made things worse for Christians, Hindus and other religious minorities. The recent wave of blasphemy attacks is an example of this religious intolerance.

Q: How would you best unite the world to be involved in Pakistan's issues?

A: Right now Pakistan has been passing through a difficult time. This situation reminds me of the words of Nelson Mandela, and what I say is that Pakistan needs its own Reconstruction and Development Program of the Soul: “It means building our schools into communities of learning and improvement of character. It means mobilizing one another, and not merely waiting for government to clean our streets or for funding allocations to plant trees and tend schoolyards. These are things we need to embrace as a nation that is nurturing its New Patriotism.”³⁵ To make the situation better, we have to engage ourselves in individual and collective efforts. We need to enhance our lobbying and advocacy work with the international community to keep informed of the human rights situation in Pakistan and to improve the quality of life for Pakistani people by increasing development aid to the country.

Q: You've traveled to many countries and learned different lessons in each, but you've said that your trip to Germany stuck out particularly. Tell me about that trip and your meeting with the German parliamentarians.

A: In June 2008, I was walking on the Hannoversche Street of Berlin with Andrea Bridget, a journalist and development expert. We were informally discussing subjects of peace and development when Andrea stopped and told me: “My forefathers belong to this city. When the Berlin Wall was erected, my father moved to West Germany but my grandmother stayed here. It is terrible when people of the same country are separated from each other by erecting a wall.”

She said she knew from the media that Pakistan is facing severe challenges: Violence and intolerance is an increasing problem; provinces are demanding provincial autonomy. Then she said, “Remember, when distance increases among people of different provinces, the development process slows down. This is what we learned from the Berlin Wall.”

Q: What are your other memories of this trip?

A: At a dinner served in the honor of foreign delegates, Heiner Knauss, head of Asia Pacific EED [Church Development Service], told me that after the erection of the Berlin Wall, people from East Germany could not travel to West Germany. Mass demonstrations against the government and the system in East Germany began at the end of September and took until November 1989. Thousands of East Berliners went to the border crossings. At Bornholmer Strasse the people demanded the border be opened, and it was. That moment meant the end of the Berlin Wall. After that moment a new era of development started in Germany.

Q: Is there any movement in Pakistan that could bring a new era of development in Pakistan?

A: Yes. Knauss asked me a similar question, “How do you see the future of the lawyers’ movement in Pakistan?” I told him that civil society movements are generally oriented toward bringing change, and the lawyers’ movement has changed the behavior and attitude of people and the environment of society. It will meet its objective of the establishment of the rule of law, the supremacy of the constitution and civilian supremacy over the military. Movements bring changes. When people stand up, the mountains of oppression fall down.

The head of the Asian Human Rights Commission, Basil Fernando, added that a peace process requires regional cooperation, and that the lawyers’ movement in Pakistan is an awakening call for Asia to tear down the walls of biases, hegemony and oppression to bring peace and development in the region.

Q: What was the specific lesson that you learned from that trip?

A: During my stay in Germany I heard many stories about the Berlin Wall and its impact on the lives of German people. But I was all the time thinking about the walls in my own country that separate my people: the wall of feudal culture, the wall of religious intolerance and sectarianism, the wall of discriminatory laws. During my lobbying meeting with the Human Rights Committee of the German Parliament, I shared about the need for an integrated effort to repeal customary practices and discriminatory laws against women and other vulnerable groups. They asked questions about how government and civil society organizations were responding and said they would try to follow up and come visit.

Q: And was that the last time you saw them?

A: A few months later, a delegation of German parliamentarians³⁶ visited Taangh Wasaib in Sargodha. We welcomed the delegation and gave an overview of our work, in particular the projects to develop and strengthen women’s rights. We also informed them of the political situation in Pakistan and possible approaches to the provision of aid within the context of development

cooperation, at a joint lunch with political representatives from Sargodha District. Then the delegation visited the village of Tangowalli, where Mussart Shabeen was attacked in 2004 in the incident that motivated us to begin our work on violence against women.

Q: Why did you choose that village and what was the engagement like in the village?

A: Our volunteers suggested this idea. They said if the parliamentarians are coming, they should see the beautiful part of Pakistan – the culture, the climate. They shouldn't always see the city. My volunteers said, "We want to meet them and we want to share with them." So we organized their visit in the village.

When the delegation arrived, the villagers threw flower petals and garlanded them. They were welcomed by Pir Bahaudin, a renowned religious leader, along with hundreds of people from more than 40 other villages who carried bright, colorful banners on which they had written texts that called for women's rights to be strengthened. A series of women demonstrated the kind of activities carried out by Pakistani women in the course of their routine daily work – someone on the spinning wheel, someone grinding wheat. The delegation watched a play put on by the women's forum that was intended to teach women how they should behave if they suffered sexual harassment and persuade them they should call the police. Then the delegation wanted to meet people and talk to them, so they split up for separate meetings and had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the members of the women's forum, religious leaders and victims of violence against women.

Q: What did you think about that day?

A: That day I was looking at our hundreds of volunteers and thinking of how courageously they were breaking down walls of discrimination based on caste, class, religion and gender. We were entering into new realms of integration: theater performances by women, meetings of parliamentarians with religious leaders, welcoming foreign delegates in their village. We have to bring people together by breaking down all walls of hatred and discrimination. And I imagined every volunteer chanting SANGAT's³⁷ favorite slogan: "I am not a wall that divides. I am a crack in that wall." I always assure my people that they are the strength. People are the strength. And if you are organized, you can put your agenda properly on the table. And they did it very well.

"That day I was looking at our hundreds of volunteers and thinking of how courageously they were breaking down walls of discrimination based on caste, class, religion and gender. We were entering into new realms of integration."

Q: What, in your perspective, are the roots of the gender conflict in Pakistan and the biggest obstacles to your work with women?

A: There are two key reasons: a strong feudal system and a weak state. Pakistan is a weak state in the sense that its institutions are too weak to act effectively to protect the rights of Pakistani citizens. For example, police and other institutions are still under the pressure of influential people. Equally, customary courts such as the jirga system are still in practice. Women have been struggling for a long time for the repeal of discriminatory laws. Both a strong feudal system and weak institutions make it difficult for us to protect women's rights and access to justice and equality.

Q: Do women in rural areas face the greatest challenges?

A: Challenges for women are both in rural and urban areas, but the nature of the challenges are often different. In urban areas women are comparatively more empowered as they are more aware of their rights. For example, if a women in an urban area is getting wages for her work, she does not have control over resources or decision-making power at home, in particular, and in society at large. But in rural areas most of the women who work in the agriculture sector along with the male members of the family have no wages for their labor, as well as no recognition of their role and contribution in the development sector.

Q: Most women you work with are illiterate and know little about human rights. How do you reach them?

A: We focus on rural areas where most women are illiterate – about 70 percent illiterate. So we have to adopt different methods. Art is one of them. If we want to tell them about their rights – for example, about Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women which defines “Discrimination” – we will write a script and perform a drama. It will be interactive theater. We perform, highlight different forms of discrimination, and then women come from the audience and take the prop, become the character and make the decision for how discrimination can be eliminated.

When I organize meetings of the village women and I screen a film or talk to them about issues, I ask them what they can do. They laugh and say, “We are poor and uneducated. We have children. Our husband won't let us do anything. This is not our cup of tea to struggle for our rights. This is the responsibility of you who have education, freedom, liberty.”

I try to convince them they are part of the system. I tell them: “Your vote is the same as your husband. Your work at home is worth more than your husband's. But you don't realize how important you are. Own your body, own your skills, your potential. You say you are illiterate – your husband is also illiterate.” We grow a sense of self-respect among them. We show them their splendor and intelligence. Women have a natural conflict resolution nature. They resolve the conflicts of their little ones when they play and fight. I ask them: “Why don't you come out of your boxes and resolve gender conflicts?” They realize, gradually, that they have something to contribute. We facilitate. We show them how they are full of skills and indigenous knowledge and wisdom. This way they become part and parcel of our struggle.

Q: Tell me about your documentary on the tradition of wan'ni.

A: It's a 400-year-old harmful tradition where women are given to an aggrieved family as compensation to resolve a conflict. When deciding the conditions of wan'ni a number of factors are

taken into account, including the number of murders and the length of the disputes between the two families, as well as the power balance between them. Since it is a forced marriage between the enemies, there is no wedding ceremony. The documentary depicts the issue of wan'ni in detail. It is based on true stories of women who were the victim of wan'ni.

Q: Does Taangh Wasaib have any specific programs for men?

A: We don't have specific programs only for men, but we involve men in all of our activities. We are running a human rights education program in both girls' and boys' schools. We have our advocacy groups in the village that take immediate action on violence, and these have men and women, 50-50. However, to ensure women's access to basic needs and control over resources, our micro-credit and skill development programs are only for the women.

Q: Do you feel a responsibility to speak for the issues of Pakistani women while you're here in the United States?

A: Wherever I travel, I do not deny the reality. The victims, the oppressed are not the only face of the society. If I say religious minorities have problems or women have problems, here I also need to talk about all those people who are in the mainstream who support women and minorities. If we highlight only the miseries and violations, that means we are turning our face from that entire struggle that is made to bring a change in the society. We have to highlight the solutions and remedies along with the problems.

“If we highlight only the miseries and violations, that means we are turning our face from that entire struggle that is made to bring a change in the society. We have to highlight the solutions and remedies along with the problems.”

Q: How do you think your organization will be different in 10 years?

A: Our organization is more like a movement than an organization because it's based on an ideology of peace, love, harmony and coexistence. We have our volunteers who proclaim and practice this ideology. In 10 years, we will have more volunteers who will take this message beyond all the boundaries that divide people.

Q: How do you view the similarities and differences between religions, especially with interfaith dialogue work?

A: I work closely with Muslim and also Hindu communities. As for similarities, all religions teach us about peace, harmony, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice and human dignity – human respect and human rights. The difference among religions is not the religion itself but the interpretation of the

message. For example, there is a saying of the holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) that a killing of a person is a killing of all humanity. If you understand these words, how can you say that in Islam the jihad concept is to kill others? Jihad means the struggle against injustices, the struggle to save and protect human beings, not to kill human beings. But those who want to misuse Islam, they interpret jihad according to their own way. If they bury a woman alive in the soil in the name of honor, they say they are doing something according to culture influenced by religion. But this is not the religion. In the same way, there are some extremist Christians and Hindus who generalize that all Muslims are terrorists.

“The difference among religions is not the religion itself but the interpretation of the message.”

The key principle of our interfaith work is “unity in diversity.” Sufism is the best source of practicing this key principle. Sufism doesn’t only speak about one religion. It speaks about humanity. So the children who get this message of Sufism, they will never hate Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, Hindus, lower caste, upper caste, poor, rich. And they won’t be persuaded by extremists. There is a potential in every person to become a terrorist or to become a peace lover, so we have to think: Which way are we guiding people? To become a terrorist or a peace lover? There is a saying, “If you don’t teach your child peace, someone else will teach him/her violence or war.”

Q: Many people have asked how you can live in such a dangerous country. Have you ever feared for your life?

A: Yes. Many people ask me that. Now everyone in Pakistan is passing through a situation of fear. But this fear is not limited to Pakistan only. Life is at risk everywhere. I met some Americans who are scared of another tragedy like September 11th.

Whenever I leave my house I think about one thing: whether I will be back safely or not. But I work tirelessly for my people, for my country, because in this crucial situation they need me more than ever. The purpose of all my travels, foreign trips and speaking engagements is to share the better images of Pakistan with the global community. I am never scared because I have faced a lot of difficult situations in my life and I took each difficulty as a challenge to bring change. I do not waste my time in fear; I know if I’m trapped in these feelings, I won’t be able to go ahead to meet my vision for peace and harmony.

Q: How do you think people find inner peace? Where does it come from?

A: It’s part of your inner being. It is not something that I can give you. Inner peace can be achieved and experienced after the cleanliness of oneself. It is not merely an external cleanliness; but it is an inner purification that enables a person to reconnect him or herself with the rest of the world and nature.

Q: How are you feeling at the end of your time here in San Diego?

A: I am feeling happy, relaxed and energetic. Here, I had time to reflect on myself and on my work in a global context. And now I feel that I am prepared to go back to my country to continue my struggle in a broader perspective. I would like to motivate people that they are not alone in this difficult time and that there are a lot of people from the outside world with us in this struggle to promote peace and harmony.

BEST PRACTICES IN PEACEBUILDING

The best practices outlined here represent both lessons learned in Rubina’s peace work before forming Taangh Wasaib Organization (TWO) as well as TWO’s own framework for its peace work. Awareness Raising, Capacity Building and Lobbying and Advocacy comprise TWO’s basic organizational strategic framework. Within that framework Rubina and her organization focus on three primary areas: Women’s Empowerment, Peacebuilding and Human Rights Education.

The strategies and activities presented tend to wrap themselves into a cyclical pattern, as the result of one strategy and activity is often the creation of an activity that falls under another strategy. Certain strategies and activities build the foundation for others, which is why the last strategy listed is the Holistic Approach. Every strategy and every activity in this table is part of that overarching strategy because building peace requires creativity and multiple foci and approaches, which means there are many more activities that fall under each strategy than are listed here. Rubina’s constant emphasis on integration and inner peace are a testament to that holistic philosophy.

Rubina’s peacebuilding strategies are rooted in a fundamental belief that real, lasting peace – the fullness of humanity – cannot be achieved apart from integration with majority or predominant culture. Religious minorities must merge their voices with the majority voice, and women must work in collaboration with men. So while Rubina works to dismantle patriarchy and sectarianism in the culture, she is not working *against* men or any religion. Harmony will only be a reality if people work with, not against, one another.

Inner peace is another fundamental building block for any efforts to create outer peace. In order to work for outer peace in society, one must have peace within his or her self. With that belief, Rubina emphasizes the importance of carving out time for personal and communal reflection. In 2008, TWO built a peace garden in a neighboring village to house such reflection sessions. Music, poetry, meditation, painting, yoga and collective book readings and reflections are all methods used to facilitate inner peace and reflection. Peace, then, requires both the coordinated commitment of individuals and integrated communities.

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
Volunteer Engagement	Establishment of a volunteer network	As of 2008, TWO has a vibrant network of more than 1,500 volunteers that continues to grow. They come from different religions and professions and are divided according to interest, skill and location.	Volunteers are the outreach strength. They expand TWO’s capacity to reach communities and organize more activities. Because of this human resource, TWO’s work spans 11 districts.

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
		<p>Volunteers act as point persons for TWO's entry into a new community by using their existing relationships and meeting with influential members of the community.</p> <p>Volunteers also implement activities in all areas of TWO's work, such as fact-finding missions (visiting the site of a conflict, interviewing both parties and creating an incident report), theater performances and campaign organizing.</p>	<p>Volunteers establish trust in a new community, opening the door for TWO to initiate new relationships and projects. They encourage community self-reliance by setting up systems that allow the community to begin accepting responsibility and self-govern.</p> <p>Fact-finding, as an example, elevates voices that usually would not be heard, facilitates conflict resolution and increases access to justice and the protection of human rights.</p>
Needs Assessment	Baseline survey	<p>Upon initial entry, volunteers identify pressing issues in the community through qualitative and quantitative assessments. Focus group discussions (qualitative) involve five to seven people, organized according to expertise or knowledge, who brainstorm issues and the priorities of the community. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews are conducted with opinion makers or influential leaders to gather specific details on the issues. Volunteers also distribute questionnaires and review existing data (quantitative).</p>	<p>Surveying allows TWO to gather concrete views and details, and then design and implement relevant, necessary programs according to a community's needs. They also gain commitments from leaders to support those programs.</p> <p>Sometimes the data collected is published as an advocacy tool, such as the book TWO compiled of data about violence against women in Sargodha district.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
<p>Community Mobilization and Organization</p>	<p>Campaigns</p>	<p>Communities organize themselves to participate in larger campaigns for human rights issues, mainly via door-to-door visits, which are often informed by prior fact-finding missions.</p> <p>Campaigns are also launched through introductory brochures, media announcements, and meetings with parliamentarians, media and local administrators.</p>	<p>Participation in campaigns convinces people of the importance of issues and creates energy behind them.</p> <p>In November 2008, women from Sargodha and surrounding villages organized and participated in the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence campaign rally, where they also presented recommendations to Pakistan’s provincial human rights minister.</p> <p>Rubina used door-to-door campaigning against the inclusion of a religious column in the National Identity Card, in 1992, and again in 2000 for the reinstatement of the joint electorate system.</p>
	<p>Group Formation</p>	<p>Volunteers, as the community contacts, identify community leaders and then form community groups such as Study Circle Meetings, Micro-Credit Groups, Village Action Committees, Women’s Forums and Theater Performance Groups.</p>	<p>The groups lay the groundwork and are the organizational seed that allows a community to begin making demands for its rights and needs. Groups provide access to resources and information, encourage conflict resolution and organize community events like theater performances or workshops that fit its needs. Local leadership also emerges and is then linked to government and civil society groups.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
Awareness Raising	Establishment of Taangh Theater Group	TWO uses theater as an awareness tool, especially in rural areas with high levels of illiteracy. Interactive theater in particular empowers audience members by allowing them to decide how a play will end. Taangh’s theater group oversees the following activities: Interactive and Mime Theater Performances, Film Screenings, Debate, Essay and Poetry Competitions, and Art Exhibitions.	TWO theater groups have performed in more than 50 cities and villages, specifically raising awareness of gender issues. As a result, more cases of violence against women are being reported rather than kept quiet. In NWFP, theater groups perform an interactive piece about the effect on families when men join militant groups – such as girls and women being kept out of school. At the end, audience members come on stage, use the props and choose the outcome. Performances in schools also introduce Sufism – and its peace and tolerance – as a parallel teaching.
	Employment of Taangh Volunteer Network	The volunteer network oversees and organizes the following awareness-raising activities in communities: seminars (several lecturers on specific issues), newsletters, campaigns, rallies and demonstrations, Study Circle Meetings (a group of students or villagers gather to discuss topics of concern, focusing primarily on human rights and interfaith issues), exposure visits (taking women to visit both government and nongovernmental offices), celebration of international days (i.e., International Peace Day, Women’s Day, Poverty	Study Circle Meetings were the founding activity of TWO – the organization began when Rubina gathered her students to discuss a rise in sectarian violence. Overall awareness-raising activities have helped to foster interfaith dialogue and relationship development, increase gender equality, and inspire communities to take action against human rights violations, especially women’s rights. One participant in the 16 Days Campaign returned home and called off the

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
		Elimination), theater and music performances, and classroom storytelling and reflection (a follow-up activity suggested in TWO’s teacher training on human rights education).	arranged child marriage of her daughter. Rubina organized one exposure trip to the Ministry of Human Rights for a group of women villagers to meet with the minister.
Capacity Building	Skill Development Centers	<p>Upon entry to a community, TWO assesses the skills the women already have and what they’d like to learn. Are they traditional or gender-neutral skills? The skill centers expose women to different skills, specifically promoting gender-neutral ones (such as mechanics or woodworking).</p> <p>TWO’s primary strategy in their women’s empowerment efforts, these centers teach women marketable, income-generating skills that will allow them to support themselves. In a sense they work in tandem with the micro-credit loans because a loan is more promising if the woman has a concrete skill to apply the loan to.</p> <p>TWO has eight centers throughout Sargodha and neighboring Khushab districts that provide vocational training (tailoring, woodworking, stitching, embroidery, knitting and other indigenous handicrafts), food technology (food preservation, preparation and cultivation) and computer skills training.</p>	The knowledge of a marketable skill increases women’s access to income and resources, which in turn increases their decision-making power in the home and their husband’s respect for them – greatly reducing violence against women. As skillful human resources are created, literacy rates also increase.

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
	Training Workshops	Along with feedback collected during Needs Assessments, the community identifies the type of trainings it wants. Workshops commonly focus on human rights education for teachers (follow-up activities included), communication skills (how to speak with leaders for advocacy purposes), leadership, advocacy and lobbying, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and gender training (patriarchy, gender relations and biases).	Training workshops yield much of the same empowerment results as Skill Development Centers do, with the addition of the promotion and protection of human rights through increased knowledge.
Women's Empowerment	Ensuring women's access to resources	TWO's Micro-Credit Program is part of its belief in tending directly to women's needs, which sometimes means access to money before a skill can be mastered and a business established. Bank facilitation is also offered to help women set up bank accounts and apply for other loans.	Similarly to skill development, loans increase female leadership, decision-making power and access to resources.
Service Delivery	Legal Aid Center	Through its one full-time lawyer and network of pro bono lawyers, TWO provides free legal services primarily for victims of violence against women, but divorce cases are also common. The center selects and prepares summaries of cases to receive legal aid, provides a lawyer, documents the proceedings and follows up with the victim.	The center provides legal rights education and access to the justice system, allowing women to navigate Pakistan's otherwise expensive and complex legal processes.

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
	Counseling Center	Trained psychologists provide counseling and rehabilitation for victims of domestic violence.	Women are given a safe place to share their stories of trauma, heal and rehabilitate, and strengthen their sense of self-worth.
	Free Education	<p>Though public education is the responsibility of the Pakistani government, underprivileged and underserved areas are often without schools. Child labor is often practiced in these places, and education is usually secondary to the benefit of an extra wage earner in the family.</p> <p>TWO has built two schools so far in government-neglected areas, one in a brick kiln community and the other in a carpet-weaving community. The schools run on a flexible time schedule to easily integrate with the working culture.</p>	<p>As a result of the flexible school hours, parents allow children to enroll because they can still contribute to the family income (though child labor is against the law in Pakistan).</p> <p>In the carpet-weaving community, health issues are also addressed. Physical activity is encouraged to offset long sedentary hours, and doctors educate workers about asthma and other respiratory issues, distributing and encouraging the use of masks.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
Networking and Developing Linkages	Individual and Group Meetings	TWO does not work in isolation, and the importance of integration also extends to social sectors. The media, government and civil society sectors, as well as international advocacy groups, each offer strengths to the promotion of peace and human rights. TWO staff and volunteers actively pursue meetings with parliamentarians and attend international conferences to develop influential relationships.	<p>Political engagement elevates issues within political parties and encourages the integration of those issues into their platforms.</p> <p>Media relationships give TWO newspaper space to run columns and increase the coverage and public awareness of human rights activities.</p> <p>TWO developed a relationship with the Ministry of Education and then established a memorandum giving them access to schools for human rights education. The 16 Days Campaign was one of TWO’s collaborative activities, in which they partnered with Oxfam, the media and members of parliament.</p>
Lobbying and Advocacy	Individual and Group Meetings	These meetings – with media, parliamentarians and other political leaders – are more intentionally directed than general networking meetings. Their purpose is to inform on issues of peace and human rights, especially in the areas of women’s rights and the repeal of discriminatory laws against religious minorities.	<p>Such activities increase both print and electronic media coverage on TWO’s key issues.</p> <p>In 2000 Rubina’s lobbying activities resulted in the successful restoration of the joint electorate system, and after her trip to Germany, a delegation of German parliamentarians visited Pakistan for lobbying meetings.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
	Letter writing campaigns	Communities are organized – both local and international – to write letters to political leaders expressing concern for specific issues.	Letter writing was used in the blasphemy case of Rubina’s uncle to elevate it to national and international consciousness.
	Signature petitions	TWO staff and volunteers, and collaborating organizations, collect signatures door-to-door to demonstrate the backing of a community.	TWO often works with other rights organizations on petition campaigns.
Information Dissemination	Creation and distribution of audio, visual and print materials	<p>TWO uses a variety of mediums to inform and educate communities. Its detailed Web site is a rich resource for information and education. Through publications like reports and newsletters, TWO reaches those who wouldn’t have access to the Web site. They’ve produced documentaries (based on research and facts) and “teafilms” (case studies turned into a film), which are screened in schools and villages, as well as audio music cassettes of songs about human rights issues – mainly violence against women and women’s empowerment.</p> <p>TWO also has a weekly 45-minute radio spot focused on human rights issues. Materials are actively distributed to relevant individuals and communities.</p>	<p>The variety of informational formats means that TWO can reach both literate and illiterate audiences, educating communities on sensitive issues like wan’ni (the focus of a TWO documentary) and other oppressive traditions against women. Access to this information fosters community awareness, mobilization and organization, as well as responses to human rights violations.</p> <p>People also utilize the materials for their own awareness raising, lobbying and advocacy.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
Indigenous Knowledge and Local Expression	Sufi teachings	<p>Sufism, a sect of Islam highly regarded across religious and sectarian lines, is an effective common ground tool. Sufis profess tolerance, peace and justice, and progressive society. Their teachings are accepted by and thereby accessible to wide swaths of Muslims and non-Muslims alike.</p> <p>Sufism informs and infuses all of TWO’s cultural and artistic activities, especially interactive and mime theater, folk music and painting (recreating a teaching visually).</p>	<p>Sufi teachings and philosophy inform much of TWO’s work. It provides the backdrop for many theater productions – some plays are simply based on the life of famous Sufis and their teachings.</p> <p>Performances often inspire dialogue, and Sufism is used as a discussion instigator in study circle meetings and interfaith dialogue. Sufi teachings encourage respect for human rights, inspire behavioral and attitude changes, and create tolerance and a broader view of humanity.</p>
Community Ownership	Village Action Committees (VACs)	<p>VACs are comprised of influential community leaders and initiators, roughly 15 people, and the goal is 50 percent male, 50 percent female participation. The committees report on violence and negotiate conflict resolution. They also develop shared ownership of village affairs and management of skill development centers. TWO creates VACs and slowly removes itself so the group, and therefore the village, becomes autonomous. The exit strategy of facilitation for a limited amount of time is an important part of creating community ownership.</p>	<p>The participatory approach of the VACs means that members take responsibility for their community’s issues and leadership. The work and sustainability of skill development centers belongs to the community. The platform for reporting violence creates a culture of responsibility and taking action against violence and injustice. Many cases are solved at the village level, or the victim can find justice through the legal aid center.</p>

PEACEMAKING STRATEGY	ACTIVITY <i>What?</i>	DESCRIPTION <i>How?</i>	PURPOSE <i>Why?</i>
Impact Assessment	Developing indicators	Tracking the objectives and indicators in a chart (or “log frame”) is important for evaluating and monitoring the impact of programs. A time frame for testing the indicators is established at the launching of new programs.	Indicators function as self-accountability. Qualitative standards create effective programming, which in turn helps create a culture of justice, nonviolence and equality. The objective of establishing an effective school is evaluated with the indicator of student enrollment and improved test results and learning. The women’s empowerment objective that women will have access to resources is indicated by the number of bank accounts and businesses in women’s names.
Holistic Approach	Awareness raising	Any number of activities, such as campaigns and information dissemination techniques, can introduce the issue.	People become aware of their rights and the important issues facing communities.
	Support of women	After awareness has been raised, an opportunity for change must be presented so communities and individuals can act on their new awareness. If legal rights awareness is raised, legal aid should be offered. If women’s rights are raised or a micro-credit loan given, skill development must be offered in conjunction.	Skill development is a major component of the holistic approach; it fosters personal growth, a change of perspectives and behavior, and the refusal of abuse. Knowledge is transferred to real life changes.
	Advocacy	After work on an individual, personal basis, there has to be work for change on a structural, policy level.	Education and empowerment leads to a desire to work for change, like repealing discriminatory laws against women and religious minorities.

FURTHER READING –
PAKISTAN

- Bhutto, Benazir. *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Cohen, Stephen. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
- Haqqani, Hussein. *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.
- International Crisis Group. "The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan." April 2005.
www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/south_asia/095_the_state_of_sectarianism_in_pakistan.pdf (accessed Dec. 15, 2009).
- Jones, Owen Bennett. *Pakistan: The Eye of the Storm*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Khan, Shahnaz. *Zina, Transnational Feminism, and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006.
- Rizvi, Hasan Askari. *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

BIOGRAPHY OF A PEACE WRITER –
KAITLIN BARKER

Kaitlin Barker, a life-long West Coast resident, spent the past year on the East Coast while living in intentional community in Washington, D.C., and interning as an editorial assistant for *Sojourners*, a faith-based social justice magazine. As an undergraduate at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, Barker traveled to Kenya to teach AIDS awareness and to Ethiopia to build homes for orphan caregivers, experiences that brought her face-to-face with both gender and economic disparities. After graduating in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in Literature and English Education, she set out on a self-designed graduate program of study. Barker worked with orphans in Thailand and India, learned from urban and rural women in Turkey and returned to San Diego to find the lessons didn't end with her travels. Tutoring a resettled Burmese refugee family cemented her desire to tell the stories of forgotten people and places, and specifically, to lift up the often-muffled voices of women.



Photo credits: Patricia Rogers

JOAN B. KROC INSTITUTE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

The mission of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) is to foster peace, cultivate justice and create a safer world. Through education, research and peacemaking activities, the IPJ offers programs that advance scholarship and practice in conflict resolution and human rights. The institute, a unit of the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, draws on Catholic social teaching that sees peace as inseparable from justice and acts to prevent and resolve conflicts that threaten local, national and international peace.

The IPJ was established in 2000 through a generous gift from the late Joan B. Kroc to the University of San Diego to create an institute for the study and practice of peace and justice. Programming began in early 2001 and the building was dedicated in December 2001 with a conference, "Peacemaking with Justice: Policy for the 21st Century."

The institute strives, in Joan B. Kroc's words, to not only talk about peace, but also make peace. In its peacebuilding initiatives, the IPJ works with local partners to help strengthen their efforts to consolidate peace with justice in the communities in which they live. In Nepal, for example, for nearly a decade the IPJ has been working with Nepali groups to support inclusiveness and dialogue in the transition from armed conflict and monarchy to peace and multiparty democracy. In its West African Human Rights Training Initiative, the institute partners with local human rights groups to strengthen their ability to pressure government for reform and accountability.

In addition to the Women PeaceMakers Program, the institute has several ongoing programs. The Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series is a forum for high-level national and international leaders and policymakers to share their knowledge and perspective on issues related to peace and justice.

WorldLink, a year-round educational program for middle school and high school students from San Diego and Baja California, connects youth to global affairs.

Community outreach includes speakers, films, art and opportunities for discussion between community members, academics and practitioners on issues of peace and social justice, as well as dialogue with national and international leaders in government, nongovernmental organizations and the military.

In addition to the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies includes the Trans-Border Institute, which promotes border-related scholarship and an active role for the university in the cross-border community, and a master's program in Peace and Justice Studies to train future leaders in the field.

UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO

Chartered in 1949, the University of San Diego (USD) is a Roman Catholic institution of higher learning located on 180 acres overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay. The University of San Diego is committed to promoting academic excellence, expanding liberal and professional knowledge, creating a diverse community and preparing leaders dedicated to ethical and compassionate service.

The university is steadfast in its dedication to the examination of the Catholic tradition as the basis of a continuing search for meaning in contemporary life. Global peace and development and the application of ethics and values are examined through campus centers and institutes such as the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice, the Values Institute, the Trans-Border Institute, the Center for Public Interest Law, the Institute for Law and Philosophy and the International Center for Character Education. Furthermore, through special campus events such as the Social Issues Conference, the James Bond Stockdale Leadership and Ethics Symposium and the Joan B. Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series, we invite the community to join us in further exploration of these values.

The USD campus, considered one of the most architecturally unique in the nation, is known as Alcalá Park. Like the city of San Diego, the campus takes its name from San Diego de Alcalá, a Franciscan brother who served as the infirmarian at Alcalá de Henares, a monastery near Madrid, Spain. The Spanish Renaissance architecture that characterizes the five-century-old University of Alcalá serves as the inspiration for the buildings on the USD campus. The architecture was intended by the founders, Bishop Charles Francis Buddy and Mother Rosalie Hill, to enhance the search for truth through beauty and harmony. Recent additions, such as the state-of-the-art Donald P. Shiley Center for Science and Technology and the new School of Leadership and Education Sciences building carry on that tradition.

A member of the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa, USD is ranked among the nation's top 100 universities. The university offers its 7,500 undergraduate, graduate and law students rigorous academic programs in more than 60 fields of study through six academic divisions, including the College of Arts and Sciences and the schools of Business Administration, Leadership and Education Sciences, Law, and Nursing and Health Science. The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies opened in Fall 2007.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APMA	All Pakistan Minorities Alliance
COSAP	Christian Organization for Social Action in Pakistan
IPJ	Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice
KDSC	Kimmage Development Studies Centre
MNA	Member of the National Assembly
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
PPP	Pakistan People’s Party
SANGAT	South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers
SMP	Sipah-e-Muhammed
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba – Pakistan
TJP	Tehrik-e-Jafria
TWO	Taangh Wasaib Organization
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USD	University of San Diego
VAC	Village Action Committees

ENDNOTES

¹ A version of this paragraph first appeared in the article “‘Women Cannot Cry Anymore’: Global Voices Transforming Violent Conflict,” by Emiko Noma in *Critical Half*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2007). Copyright 2007 Women for Women International.

² Jones, Owen Bennett. *Pakistan: The Eye of the Storm*, 187.

³ The Ahmadis are a sect of Islam who were declared un-Islamic by radicals in 1953, but this was the first time the state had ruled on the matter.

⁴ Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was later executed by hanging by Gen. Zia in 1979.

⁵ *Sunnah* is Arabic for “habitual practice”; it refers to the traditional social and legal custom of Muslim communities interpreted from additional accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon Him) words and actions.

⁶ *Ammi* is Urdu for “mother.” *Jee* is added as a title of respect or seniority.

⁷ *Dadi* is Urdu for “grandmother.”

⁸ *Mamu* is Urdu for “uncle.”

⁹ *Abba* is Urdu for “father.”

¹⁰ *Kulfi* is a type of popsicle or hard ice cream on a stick.

¹¹ *Namberdar* is a “village chief.”

¹² *Charpai* is a type of lounging bed similar to a cot, usually found in an open courtyard.

¹³ “*Roti, kapda aur makan*” (bread, cloth and house) was Bhutto’s famous slogan for his socialist ideals in favor of the poor.

¹⁴ *Bait-bazi* are school poetry competitions where one participant recites a verse of poetry from memory and the next participant’s verse must start with the same letter that the previous verse ended with.

¹⁵ Sipah-e-Sahaba – Pakistan (SSP) is now an internationally banned Islamic militant group and fundamentalist political party, but it was not yet banned in 1991.

¹⁶ Muezzins are the men who call Muslims to prayer through the minarets of mosques.

¹⁷ Gazi was a Muslim hero who killed a blasphemer in the time of British India.

¹⁸ *Choor* is a common insult used against Christians in Pakistan; though many Christians now work in the fields of education, health services, social work, business and land ownership, Muslims use *choora* (sanitary worker) to disgrace and humiliate.

¹⁹ *Appa* is Urdu for “older sister.”

²⁰ *Chai* is Urdu for “tea.”

²¹ *Jirga* is a customary court, a traditional feudal system of resolving conflicts and legal matters, comprised of male village elders.

²² Bishop John Joseph was deeply involved in the struggle for human rights, religious freedoms in particular. To emphasize his commitment to the repeal of discriminatory laws, he killed himself on May 6, 1998, at the entrance of a court where the trial of Ayub Masih, a Catholic accused of blasphemy and condemned to death, was being held.

²³ Muharram is the month of the Islamic calendar when Shiites mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him) and of the line of Shiite-recognized imams. His murder intensified the divide between Shiites and Sunnis.

²⁴ *Chak* refers to the government designation of villages.

²⁵ Professor Riaz Ahmed Shad was one such supporter.

²⁶ In May 1998, Pakistan tested its first nuclear bomb in response to a series of five nuclear explosions by the Indian government earlier that month.

²⁷ Ram Perkash, a Hindu and senior Taangh Wasaib volunteer, organized the Hindu participants.

²⁸ *Nazim* is Urdu for “convener” or “organizer.” It is similar to a mayor.

²⁹ *Bhai* is Urdu for “brother.”

³⁰ At the time, Kilgour was also Canada’s Secretary of State for the Asia-Pacific region (January 2002 to December 2003).

³¹ The award was from the Higher Education and Training Award Council of Ireland.

³² Conor Lenihan, T.D.

³³ *Aani* is Urdu for “aunt” or “auntie.”

³⁴ The original version, and the one Rubina used, was in Punjabi as follows:

Raba mery hal da mahram tu

Andar tu bain bair tu han

Tu bain tana tu hay bana sabh kuch meran tu

Kabe hussain faqir namana main nabi sab tu.

³⁵ From Nelson Mandela’s opening address to the South African Parliament in 1999. Full text available at: www.info.gov.za/speeches/1999/99205_openin99_10091.htm

³⁶ The delegation was led by Ute Koczy, Member of the German Bundestag (Alliance 90/The Greens). The other members of the delegation were Jürgen Klimke, Member of the German Bundestag (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union, CDU/CSU), Christel Riemann-Hanewinkel, Member of the German Bundestag (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD) and Hellmut Königshaus, Member of the German Bundestag (Free Democratic Party, FDP). They were accompanied by the head of the Committee

Secretariat, Andrea Zender.

³⁷ South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers. SANGAT works with like-minded individuals, NGOs and civil society groups across South Asia on issues of gender, sustainable livelihoods, democracy, peace, pluralism and human rights.