Since the report and the recommendations of the country’s first Commission on National Education (Ministry of Education, Pakistan, 1959), there has been a visibly greater emphasis on female participation in education in Pakistan’s education policies. A historical review of education policy and its related documents also explains a gradual shift in the nature of the emphasis on female participation in education policies over the years. While earlier policies framed girls’ and women’s education as instrumental in improving their efficiency for fulfilling family responsibilities and preparing them for traditionally female professions e.g. teaching, nursing), the education policies since 1970 (e.g. National Education Policy, 1998–2010) now lay greater emphasis on education as a right for all, with an underlying gender-encompassing approach. The review of education policies also reveals another discourse about women teachers running parallel to the emphasis on female participation in education.

National Education Policy 2009 has further reaffirmed its commitment around Educational For All and Millennium Development Goals with a visible emphasis on social cohesion (Ministry of Education, Pakistan, 2009). A continuous stress in the policy on the induction of female teachers seems to be a strategic intervention aimed at an improved participation of girls and women in education, and it has led to a substantial increase in the number of female teachers, particularly during the 1990s. The proportion of women among primary school teachers increased from 33.4% in 1990 to 44.2% in 2000; in secondary schools, the proportion increased from 32% in 1990 to 54.3% in 2001 (Farah and Shera, 2007). Current official statistics indicate that 53% of all primary school teachers and 56% of all secondary school teachers are now women. In Northern Pakistan, according to the same sources, women constitute 43% of the overall teaching force in educational institutions (AEPM, 2011).
The data presented above suggest a positive quantitative change, which nevertheless calls for deliberations on women’s experiences in schools in a patriarchal society. The present chapter examines the arguments presented for women teachers’ induction into teaching. Drawing on a study that I conducted on women teachers’ experiences of balanc-
ing their multiple commitments in the mountainous Northern Areas of Pakistan as well as on other relevant research studies, the chapter highlights the challenges facing these women in their career as teachers and school leaders. It describes and analyses women teachers’ attempts to negotiate their professional and personal roles through sometimes conforming to and at other times resisting the prevailing local gender norms. Some recommendations are also put forward to improve the possibilities of women teaching and leading in the schools.

9.1 Women teachers and education

In addition to strategies such as teacher training and gender-sensitive curricula and textbooks to improve girls’ enrolment, employing more women teachers is seen as an important strategy to achieve the EFA goal of 2015 regarding gender equality in education (UNESCO, 2006b). It is argued that increasing the number of women teachers can have a positive impact on girls’ education. According to an Advocacy Brief, a correlation between the two is reported in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, countries with equal numbers of male and female teachers are reported to have better gender parity in education (UNESCO, 2006b). An analysis of the arguments presented for an increased emphasis on women teachers for improving female education is presented here.

The view that the presence of women teachers in schools promotes girls’ participation in education prevails widely in the South Asian context. Several studies (Heward, 1999; Karlekar, 2000; UNESCO, 2000b, 2010) have presented various explanations for the emphasis on women teachers. First, parents prefer their daughters to be taught by women teachers. A comparative study (UNESCO, 2000b) in the rural areas of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal revealed that the presence of at least one woman teacher in the school gave parents a sense of security. This becomes particularly important for girls in Grades 3 and above. A reluctance to send girls to schools with male teachers is a frequently observed phenomenon. Second, in communities where women are predominantly seen in their traditional family roles, women teachers offer a positive role model for young girls (Ashraf, 2004) who otherwise may have difficulty in developing a similar association with their male teachers. Furthermore, mothers feel more comfortable discussing their children’s progress and problems with female teachers than with their male teachers. Third, the presence of women teachers is likely to have a positive impact on female students’ learning outcomes. In Pakistan, better composite scores were reported for students in primary schools with women teachers than for students in primary schools with men teachers (UNESCO, 2000b). Fourth, women teachers are found to be more effective in Grades 1 and 2, where good teacher–student relationships are crucial for students’ retention in the schools. An overall increase in the number of women teachers, therefore, can be seen as a positive sign for female education.
However, an increased induction of women into teaching has also generated debate around the tendency to see men and women teachers’ needs as similar. It is an important fact that women’s needs differ from those of their male counterparts because of their multiple roles and their specific position in the society. Specifically, the progression of many women teachers is a cause of conflict between their potential career development and their societal position of subordination with uncontested family responsibilities (Gaynor, 1997).

Specifically, women teachers in Pakistan face innumerable issues that are generally categorised as social and logistical problems (Ashraf, 2004; Sheikh and Iqbal, 2003). Social structures that confine women strictly to their familial role of care-giving result in disapproval of women’s engagement in work outside home and their aspirations for a career. As described by Nayar (1988) in her comparative study of women teachers in Nepal, Sri Lanka and India, once married, a woman generally has to follow the path and will of her husband, whose career moves (with transfers from one place to another) generally mean aborted career prospects for the wife. Poor infrastructure, particularly in public transportation, poses yet another challenge for women teachers who have to commute from home to the workplace. The absence of proper means of transportation prevents them from taking up teaching positions far from their homes. Women teachers’ appointment in remote rural areas is yet another challenge because of the lack of residential facilities and the security risks associated with single women staying in those areas. This also leads to women with higher qualifications applying for lower qualified jobs because they are unable to leave their families for more compatible jobs (Sheikh and Iqbal, 2003).

In sum, the promotion of female education has contributed to women teachers’ increased induction into the teaching profession. However, numerous challenges confront women teachers: these are generally rooted in their familial responsibilities, which shape their career in the teaching profession.

The following section explains the role of the family in women teachers’ ascent to leadership and their enactment of leadership in schools in the context of Pakistan.

9.2 The role of family

Some recent studies (Ashraf, 2007; Baig, 2008; Nyangaga, 2007; Rarieya, 2007) on women teachers’ and leaders’ work in schools in Pakistan show the way the social world around these women shapes and directs their experiences as professionals. Specifically, these studies highlight parents’ dominant role in either facilitating or impeding these teachers’ accession to leadership roles. Importantly, increasing pressure is also reported to be exerted by the immediate families to comply with socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs with regard to these women’s appearance and behaviour in society.
Parental influence and family support, as reported in these studies, seemed to play a critical role by paving the way for women's entry into the profession and experiences in leadership (Baig, 2008; Nyangaga, 2007; Panah, 2009). The research participants' journey in these studies towards leadership in education also illustrates the impact of socio-cultural norms and dominant gender beliefs on the women's personal and professional lives. Their experiences in their families before marriage and in their marital home had been shaped by the influence of societal norms on family members' views about women's roles and responsibilities and whether women can enter into a career.

These studies around women teachers' lives have highlighted the roles of male family members, especially of their fathers, as main decision-makers in their lives, which is in line with the norms of a patriarchal community. The positive influence of fathers on women school leaders is particularly reported in studies conducted by Panah (2009), Baig (2008) and Nyangaga (2007). The fathers of these women encouraged and helped them to get an education and to develop sound academic and moral values. These studies report that the fathers' assertive and dominant behaviour also influenced the women's identity, their drive to become leaders and their perceptions of themselves as leaders. A similar influence of the family patriarch on shaping and directing her aspirations for higher education is noticeable in Bashiruddin's (2007) self-study report. In contrast to the family patriarch's positive role in the education of the women teachers and leaders in the studies by Baig (2008), Nyangaga (2007), and Ashraf (2007), the decision to solemnise early marriages of these women was an obvious submission to the local gender norms. At times, early marriages with minimal years of schooling significantly affected the participants' work even at the primary school level, for which secondary and higher secondary level education (Grades 10 and 12) is considered sufficient for prospective teachers and their eventual work as head teachers/teachers in-charge.

Research on women teachers' experiences of teaching and leading in northern Pakistan (Ashraf, 2004, 2007, 2008) indicates tensions between their personal family commitments and their professional aspirations. In that region, teaching has long been recognised as the most appropriate profession and as a readily available off-farm employment opportunity for women. This profession can be considered appropriate on the basis of two major factors. First, the policy is for women teachers to be generally appointed to schools within their own villages, and this reduces the likelihood of their interaction with men unrelated to them. Second, working hours within schools allow women enough time to fulfil their responsibilities towards their extended families: farming and cattle rearing in the mornings and afternoons. Even though women take up employment to earn income for their families, family members often resist these teachers' attempts to take advantage of professional development opportunities if they require travel away from home. Women's restricted mobility and their familial roles are two obvious reasons for this resistance. Non-conformity to ascribed familial roles and to culturally approved codes of conduct have invited wider criticism.
The gendered division of labour as practised and maintained by these communities in the past is also being reconsidered. Travel by the male members of the family to the urban centres for off-farm employment and education has been a major cause of an expansion in women's familial role in rural areas. Women are now found engaged in all kinds of farming chores in addition to attending to the needs of their extended families. Educationally qualified women's entrance into teaching does not generally release them from their familial roles. A paid job, in fact, is seen as an addition to their ever-expanding familial role.

Although all five women teachers in the study (Ashraf, 2004, 2007, 2008) entered the field of education because of their family's financial needs, the data provide evidence of their attempts to negotiate their familial roles with their families in order to enable them to fulfil their job-related responsibilities. For instance, compensating for their absence from farming and household work through a monetary contribution to the family income, reducing the number of family cattle and using weekends for bigger farming tasks are some common strategies that women use to keep their professional commitments intact. At times women teachers coordinated with neighbours to complete bigger farming tasks such as cutting grass in the family pasture or picking apricots in the family garden. This arrangement allowed them to do on a Sunday those seasonal farming tasks that may otherwise take several days if done by family members.

Negotiating their identity as professionals in patriarchal communities also engaged women intermittently in determining the scope of their mobility. A display of conformity to the patriarchal norm of women's restricted mobility surfaced during the initial stage of women's induction in schools. At times they were escorted by male members of the family, particularly when the school was situated in a neighbouring village. These women gradually gained confidence for commuting independently to the schools and the education offices. Examples of seeking alternatives for the traditional familial role to establish their professional identity also show their commitment. Involving husband and grown-up children (boys) in household chores and negotiating with a neighbouring female relative to breastfeed the baby during her long working hours at a school are, as Kirk (2008b, p. 81) explains, deliberate attempts on the part of women teachers to balance what is doable within boundaries that are quite rigid.

9.3 Women in school leadership roles

Gender plays an important role in teachers' ascent to headship (e.g. Ashraf, 2004; Panah, 2008). Because of their better academic and professional qualifications, male teachers have better chances to avail themselves of a headship position, whereas female teachers may need to struggle longer to achieve better academic and professional credentials in order to prove their ability to assume a headship position. Women's familial responsibilities and dominant perceptions about women’s restricted mobility often prove a hindrance in getting the education and professional training necessary for mobility in a career. In
fact, women teachers’ aspiration to assume leadership roles in schools can be a challenge itself in the context of a patriarchal society. They are often hindered by dominant perceptions of women as being emotionally weak and incapable of assuming authoritative roles, which work against them in both the public and the private school systems (Ashraf, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009; Memon, 2005; Rarieya, 2007). These views therefore have led to the under-representation of women in leadership in the education system of Pakistan.

The complexity of the competing demands of personal and professional lives is further intensified by the women’s struggle to establish their identity as leaders. Non-supportive workplace and organisational structures are recognised as major barriers to women’s work as leaders (Ashraf, 2004, 2007; Memon, 2005; Rarieya, 2007). Male-oriented school leadership practices (e.g. visiting education offices located far from schools, school management committee meetings after school hours and at weekends) complicate women’s work as leaders. Given the opportunity, however, women leaders will negotiate with their patriarchal families and society for gaining independent mobility, for a gendered delegation of tasks among male and female teachers and for making alternative arrangement for their nurturing roles in order to accommodate their professional commitments. In Northern Pakistan, for example, women school leaders have worked to modify acceptable notions of care-giving roles of women, which required them to negotiate with neighbours and family members to help them in looking after their children while they spent extended hours in school (Ashraf, 2004). To safeguard their professional integrity, women teachers and leaders attempt to reconcile their various roles, which leads to reviewing dominant gender relationships in the mountain communities.

Research on women school leaders in Northern Pakistan (Ashraf, 2004) shows the attempts made by women leaders to negotiate the transition between public and private gendered spaces. The indigenous social structures in the mountains draw a clear demarcation of public and private spaces between men and women. One woman school leader challenged this division in a subtle manner. At school she distributed tasks among male and female teachers (e.g. a male teacher maintained finance, while female teachers took care of the resource corner and the small library), which somewhat reflected the local gender dynamics. However, her position during the staff meetings also indicated her authority as head teacher. The small staffroom, also used as a head teacher’s office, had a number of chairs along the wall; however, one chair behind the table was always occupied by her. Although she invited her senior male colleagues to a conversation with a rowdy community member, her frequent interactions with the community at large and the parents reflected her confident demeanour as a woman leader. This head teacher’s frequent visits to the education office regarding school matters also explained visible attempts to establish her identity as a female leader. Commuting back and forth between her school and the education office by public transport without a male companion was, in her view, an important step to fulfil her professional commitments. She also negotiated the frequency of these visits with school officials because of the challenges of independent mobility. A further modification of the male model of leadership was to change the tim-
ing of meetings with parents and the community, which had generally been arranged for after-school hours or Sundays. She revised this practice so that the meetings took place either within or immediately after school hours. An understanding of her colleagues’ professional and personal lives and insights into problems faced by the students beyond the school boundaries allowed this woman leader to reach out to them as a concerned individual and professional.

9.4 Discussion

The significance of women teachers’ induction in schools with reference to girls’ education, as discussed earlier, is a widely documented phenomenon. Recognising the stated value of women teachers’ work in patriarchal societies in encouraging girls’ participation in education also requires unpacking these women teachers’ and leaders’ situated experiences, which, in the words of Kirk (2008b), are “characterized by dialectics of agency and submission, power and powerlessness, the possible with impossible and by a delicate balancing of what is doable within boundaries that are quite rigid” (p. 81). Researching women’s experiences reveals the process through which women teachers and leaders negotiate their identity, their physical and ideological space, and their agency. The fact that “organizational patterns and structures [of educational institutions] reflect male values” (Gaynor, 1997, p. 28) requires a constant analysis of women teachers’ and leaders’ struggle to gain and exercise their role as professionals. The discourse on women teachers also reveals the interaction of their “multiple identities and subjectivities, shifting positions and ever-changing power dynamics within complex discursive field” (Kirk, 2008b, p. 82) that emerge from their becoming teachers and leaders.

An analysis of women teachers’ and leaders’ experiences suggests that they have a dual stake in ensuring gender parity in education—leading the change and benefiting from the process—both of which require them to confront considerable societal, familial and cultural obstacles (Ashraf, 2008, p. 53). Women teachers’ and leaders’ contribution towards promoting girls’ education and changing rigid societal systems illustrates their conviction to transform gender relationships in patriarchal communities. Understanding the interrelationships between women teachers’ various domains of activity—familial and professional—is a vital analysis strategy for development stakeholders. Furthermore, a study of women teachers’ experiences of negotiating their roles as teachers and leaders demonstrates a need on the part of the education organisations to take a strategic position to influence the current situation of women’s participation in education. Some recommendations in this regard are as follows.

Formulating gender-equitable education policies is a fundamental key step towards the induction of women teachers and leaders in education to create a gender-inclusive educational environment. Current policies regarding educational leadership in Pakistan also need to recognise the experiences of women educational leaders. A key step in this regard
will be revisiting the current definition of leadership and existing practices to foster women's aspirations for assuming leadership roles. A gender analysis of existing policies and practices of leadership and school headship will help to explain how the present model accommodates or hinders women teachers assuming leadership roles.

With a consideration of local culture and women's nurturing roles, childcare facilities need to be established within the schools in order to encourage more women to take up leadership roles.

Affirmative action in terms of formulating policies to induct and retain more women is required in order to promote a gender equality model across the organisation.

Teacher education discourse needs to encompass close reflection on the barriers and challenges that women face in becoming and eventually being educational leaders, in order to allow their full participation in educational leadership in a context where, according to Nyangaga (2007), women are largely absent from decision-making bodies in education.