**Pen with a purpose: Aahung’s first Screenwriters’ Workshop**

In this day and age, no one can deny the great power of television and mass media. Despite the cyber revolution, television remains a powerful medium to inform, educate, entertain, and create awareness. It serves to advocate, whether subtly or forcefully, and it definitely affects how the audience thinks about or relates to certain subjects. It is also undeniable that Pakistani culture is steeped in patriarchy, which is perpetuated through various media, one of them being television.

Pakistani dramas are often thought to be portraying ‘reality’, but a great deal of sexism and misogyny seeps in, inconspicuously influencing attitudes and behaviors. Media influences our everyday choices more than we realize. These dramas are adamant to constrain women to certain roles and stereotypes. It is significant to address them and break these shells, because women need to see themselves as able and balanced human beings whose worth doesn’t depend on social norms and their physical attributes.

Keeping in mind the overarching the influence of television, Aahung has reached out to this particular group to not only attempt to bring change through this medium, to change perceptions of the issues outlined above, but to also draw focus towards burning issues that are largely ignored. For instance, overpopulation is hardly ever brought into focus, or development for that matter. Most serious issues brought to light are in a sensationalist or reductionist manner.

A two-day Screenwriters’ workshop was hosted by Aahung where the attendees were provided with an overview of Aahung and SRHR. These were followed by detailed sessions about the various areas of SRHR that have deep ties with social issues especially those that have attached stigmas and taboos that the average Pakistani deals with on a daily basis. Above-mentioned SRHR topics that are often not covered or ill-presented in local media were dealt with in detail. A group of seasoned Aahung trainers imparted the training along with renowned media personalities:

**Misbah Khalid is no stranger to the entertainment business. As a director and producer she has used her influence to write dramas with strong female protagonists. She has directed Meray Paas Paas and Tumhari Mariam and has a number of feathers in her prestigious cap.**

**Sabahat Zakariya is a senior journalist who has written for most major publications in Pakistan on subjects ranging from education, health, politics, women’s rights and cultural criticism. In 2015 she was awarded the Falak Sufi Scholarship for a Masters in Journalism/Near Eastern Studies at New York University where she wrote her final thesis on the changing dynamics for single women in Pakistan. She is currently in the process of turning this thesis into a book for Bloomsbury India. She is also Deputy Editor at The News on Sunday and runs a YouTube channel, Facebook and Instagram page called Feminustani that denconstructs Pakistani popular culture and social mores from a feminist angle.**

Media is an influential means to mould opinions. The time has come when production houses, producers, directors, and screenwriters exhibit responsibility and move away from stereotypes created and perpetuated by irresponsible dramas over the decades. Albeit slowly, more projects like these shall help change the opinion, attitude, and behavior of individuals and society over time.