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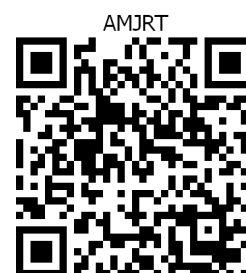
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The Women Activism in Pakistan: An Analysis of 'Aurat March

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Abstract

In Pakistan, although women's activism was initiated since the country came into existence, but a diverse activism was observed by the nation in the form of 'Aurat March during 2018-2020. The current study examines the Western feminism, what it was initiated for and its accomplishments in the current time. By employing a discourse analysis approach to the 'Aurat March event, this study highlights the women's activism in Pakistan, 'Aurat March and the antipathy faced by organizers and supporters from the public because of its strange slogans and ridiculous placards. It also observes the relationship between western feminism and 'Aurat March activism from the perspective of the social, cultural, and religious transformation of society. The study finds the need to raise a constructive and logical voice for women's rights with support of the public to eradicate social evils instead of focusing on insignificant matters. It has further recommended that there is a need to build a framework in which one may be able to differentiate women's rights in the context of western feminism and the limitation of women's emancipation in Islamic context.

Keywords: Western feminism, International Women's Day, Pakistan, 'Aurat March, slogans.

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Introduction

Globalization has had major political effects on women all over the world. It can be seen expressively in Muslim countries, where women's rights activism has paralleled the rise of the global women's movement.¹ The manifestation of the movement of feminism² can be observed in many countries in diverse ways. In the twentieth century, the internationalization of feminism has further complicated the idea. Historians, while giving consideration over the issue, suggested different schemes based on the philosophy of gender, specifically perceptions of women's differences or sameness to men.³ The most radical movement in recent times, which is revolutionizing the whole social structure and changing the entire basis of human relationships is the feminist movement, popularly known as the drive for Women's Liberation.⁴

In the West, a Muslim woman often receives much sympathy and support as long as they are seen as deviants and rebels within the world of Islām. Yet, many of them start to realize, sooner or later, that although they have difficulties with Muslim culture, they are also unable to identify with western or secular culture for many reasons.⁵ In Pakistan, there is a always complexity and contestation while dealing the gender related issues. Moreover, feminism in Pakistan has always had to defend itself against the charges of Westernization⁶, or of promoting an alien agenda. It is linked to class interests in a highly

¹ Anita M. Weiss, "Interpreting Islām and Women's Rights: Implementing CEDAW in Pakistan," *International Sociology* 18, no. 3 (2003): 581–601.

² Feminism is mainly a series of social and political movements and a set of ideologies that aims to define and achieve legal, political, social and economic equality of the sexes.

³ Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, "Forging Feminist Identity in an International Movement: A Collective Identity Approach to Twentieth-Century Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (1999): 363–86.

⁴ Maryam Jameelah, *Islām and Western Society: A Refutation of the Modern Way of Life* (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 1998), 98.

⁵ Riffat Hasan, "Feminist Theology: The Challenges for Muslim Women," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 9 (1996): 53–65.

⁶ Westernization is basically a process when any society adopts western culture in areas such as politics, economics, lifestyles, law, norms, customs and traditions. It is basically the adoption of western culture whether intentionally or unintentionally.

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stratified society where women activists, mainly derive from the upper-middle class and elite.⁷

This study aims to discuss the women’s activism in Pakistan, prevailing conflicts among activists and the general public, and the root causes of condemnation of such activism by the public. Noticeably, there is an enormous need to address the image of women’s activism, women NGOs and to explore their outlines. After all, it is not only limiting their scope of activism, but also defines its parameters of struggle in numerous ways.⁸ In this way, the study intends to reveal what sorts of misunderstandings are prevailing in feminist approaches and in their strategies while working for women’s rights in Pakistan. It is also central to know how cultural and religious differences play a vital role in bringing social change in any society. Hence this study may facilitate to provide an opportunity in a logical and systematic way to understand the debate of women’s activism in social, cultural and religious perspectives in Pakistani society.

Literature Review

The women’s activism in Pakistan for securing different rights is not a new debate for research intellectuals, but the subject of ‘Aurat March is a very recent one in the history of Pakistan that has been initiated in March 2018 on Women’s International Day. The literature review has been conducted after consulting, various books, research papers, reports and newspaper articles of different national and international scholars. Farida Shaheed in her recent study, “*Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’s Movement in Pakistan*”, has briefly examined some of the conceptual issues surrounding notions of women’s movement and ‘Aurat March in Pakistan. Her study centred on the new generation of feminists whose focus is on achieving societal changes in personal lives by prioritizing the politics of sexuality.⁹ Her another research work, “*The Women’s Movement in Pakistan: Challenges and Achievements*”, in which she has extensively discussed the distinct periods of the

⁷ Andrea Fleschenberg, “Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women’s Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan,” in *Women’s Movements in Asia*, ed. Mina Roces and Louise Edwards (New York: Routledge, 2010), 166–88.

⁸ Afshan Jafar, “Engaging Fundamentalism: The Case of Women’s NGOs in Pakistan,” *Social Problems* 54, no. 3 (2007): 256–73.

⁹ Farida Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’s Movement in Pakistan,” *Journal of International Affairs* 72, no. 2 (2019): 159–72.

Pakistan women's rights movement in specific contexts, by exploring assistant opportunities and opposing factors, influence activism and their outcomes. In her research, she has provided a brief review of some of the conceptual issues dealing with feminism and women's rights activism in the perspective of Pakistan.¹⁰

Baig et al., in her recent research paper, "*Role of Media in representation of Sociocultural Ideologies in 'Aurat March (2019 – 2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis*", represented well about the 'Aurat march and the response of the general public after monitoring the slogans and placards presented by the participants of this event.¹¹

Gulnaz Anjum in her recent research work, "*Women's Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals*", has explored the women's activism in Pakistan in the context of liberal and religious ideologies. The study revealed that women's activism is actually influenced by religious views and religious interpretation of feminism and nationalism in Pakistani society.¹² One of the studies on women's activism across Asia is conducted by Andrea Fleschenberg titled as, "*Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women's Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan*".¹³ This study provides a full overview that how Asian feminists have contributed to global theoretical debates on the woman question, the key successes and failures of the movements and what needs to be addressed in the future.

In another study, Lois Lamya'al Faruqi in "*Islāmic Traditions and the Feminist Movement: Confrontation or Cooperation?*" has examined extensively the intercultural incompatibility of Western feminism.¹⁴ According to the study, the foremost principle is;

¹⁰ Farida Shaheed, "The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Challenges and Achievements," in *Women's Movements in the Global Era The Power of Local Feminisms*, ed. Amrita Basu (USA: Westview Press, 2010).

¹¹ Fāṭima Zafar Baig et al., "Role of Media in Representation of Sociocultural Ideologies in 'Aurat March (2019 – 2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis," *International Journal of English Linguistics* 10, no. 2 (2020): 414–27.

¹² Gulnaz Anjum, "Women's Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology Among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals," *Open Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2020): 36–49.

¹³ Fleschenberg, "Military Rule, Religious Fundamentalism, Women's Empowerment and Feminism in Pakistan." 166-188.

¹⁴ Lois Lamya Al-Faruqī, "Islāmic Traditions and the Feminist Movement: Confrontation Or Cooperation?," *Islāmic Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1983): 132–39.

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that many of the goals of feminism as conceived in Western society are not necessarily relevant or exportable across cultural boundaries. He explained that the teachings that are found in the Holy Qur’ān and in the example of the Prophet Muhammad are regarded as the ideal to which contemporary women wish to return instead of appreciating the western feminist approaches that have nothing to do with Muslims culture. It is worth mentioning that critical analysis done by western scholars is a more appropriate tool to understand the pessimism and harmfulness of western feminism for many cultures. One of the studies conducted by Susan Faludi, “*Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*”, is the most evolutionary exploration of the outcomes of western feminism, social change and development. She analyzed comprehensively the cultural transformation in western countries which is brought by feminists to their country women.¹⁵ The need of the time is to investigate the events like ‘Aurat March in the context of cultural and religious parameters to differentiate between the Muslim and western world. Hence, this study examines those factors which make ‘Aurat March a contested matter until now and might be continued as in the coming decades. Particularly, the present research is different from the mentioned researches on the basis of its focus, theme and objectives.

Research Methodology

This current study has been utilized the qualitative method and the discourse analysis approach to analyze the event of ‘Aurat March in a socio-cultural and religious context. It has further observed different published literature, including reports, articles from journals, and newspaper articles to draw a considerable outcome of ‘Aurat March in Pakistan. In consideration of the need of the time, the researcher has, therefore, examined these resources further and built up the ongoing grass-root differences existing between Muslim and western cultures regarding the women’s rights debate. For the purpose of exploring a significant point of view regarding the transformation of cultures and outcomes in the western world because of feminism, the researcher has preferred centering on ideas of western scholars instead of local scholars.

¹⁵ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (USA: Three River Press, 2006).

A Look into Western Feminism

Once European women first discovered that “their subordination to men was a result of a concerted ideology” that could and should be opposed by their own counter-ideology, it was the time of the French Revolution¹⁶. In between these, there is a century and a quarter when modern womanhood was constantly being debated and challenged.¹⁷ Feminists, on the other hand, spent decades proving themselves and others that women can enjoy their freedom without any barriers and feel potentially content and cheerful. Women certainly like the thought of being freed from time to time of their responsibilities. As it was certainly an alluring idea. Occasionally, they might like this idea of freeing themselves from their spouse and motherly matters just like anyone else would have. At the same time as matrimony and maternity demands interminable work and above all a true sacrifice.¹⁸

It is observed that today women in Europe and the rest of the West do have access to economic and educational opportunities that they didn’t have a century ago and finally, it is proclaimed by United Nations that “Women Rights are Human Rights.”¹⁹ Over the past 50 years, there has been an incredible change towards those women who provide for themselves and their dependents rather instead of only relying on their male counterparts. Alternative lifestyles, including a reduction in marriage rates, rising rates of divorce, later marriages, single parenting have changed the social and cultural life.²⁰ It is asserted that all the struggle for the liberation of women from all responsibilities, beyond this entire still woman:

Don’t want to be “free” if being free means being single, dependent on the government, or even being a big-shot powerhouse with no time for family.

¹⁶ The French Revolution was a period of social and political upheaval in France and its colonies beginning in 1789 and ending in 1799. It sought to completely change the relationship between the rulers and those they governed and to redefine the nature of political power.

¹⁷ Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman* (New York: Routledge., 2016), 2.

¹⁸ Suzanne Venker and Phyllis Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism* (Washington, D.C.: WND Books, 2010).

¹⁹ Karen Offen, “Writing the History of Feminisms (Old and New),” in *The Women’s Liberation Movement: Impacts and Outcomes*, ed. Kristina Schulz, vol. 22 (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 320–36.

²⁰ Leanne Adbnor, *Social Security Choices for the 21st-Century Woman* (Cato Institute, 2004), 4.

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Most women in America want what any reasonable person wants: a family to love and yes even depend on.²¹

Women in the United States do enjoy equality with men. Women’s rights for Divorce, custody, and property today exist to the extent that may cause Elizabeth Cady Stanton²² pride.²³ On the other side, many people don’t actually know about what they really think because feminism has so radically changed culture and language that women in America are supposedly liberated.²⁴ There has been noticed a marked demographic change in U.S. family life. In recent decades, marriage withdrawal, high divorce rates and rapid acceleration in unmarried coexistence has been witnessed.²⁵ Additionally, the increase in cosmetic surgery, eating disorders and body image dissatisfaction has got worse.²⁶ The hard effort and that endeavour women are now investing for in outer look or appearance can better be spent on families, friend circles, co-workers and in other healthy activities that might contribute well to their social responsibility and personal growth. This is something that letting women towards deep depression, low self esteem, anxiety, divorces and a distorted family system in the 21st century instead of happiness and peace of mind. Faludi’s observation can be well pointed out here as:

To be a woman in America at the close of the twentieth century is a good fortune to be aware of. Women have “so much,” At last; women have received their full citizenship papers.²⁷

At the same time in the twenty first century, it is explained that in the name of “freedom of speech,” this sort of pornography is on the rise, and it threatens the future of our youth, especially our girls and boys, by promoting and implicitly endorsing retrograde and fundamentally unhealthy images of relations between the sexes that

²¹ Venker and Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism*, 15.

²² Elizabeth Cady Stanton(1815-1902) was an American suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, and leading figure of the early women's rights movement.

²³ Shane Mountjoy, *The Women Rights Movement Moving Towards Equality*, ed. Tim McNeese (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2008), 133.

²⁴ Venker and Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism*, 167.

²⁵ S. L. Brown and M. R. Wright, “Marriage, Cohabitation, and Divorce in Later Life. Innovation in Aging” 1, no. 2 (2017).

²⁶ Deborah L. Rhode, *What Women Want: An Agenda for the Women’s Movement* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133.

²⁷ Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. 1.

objectify women and promotes unethical material.²⁸ Women's fight for their rights is over and succeeded, but there flashes a deep message. You might be equal and free to somehow, but you have never been more miserable than this.²⁹ This cannot be measured as empowerment or the development of women's status when their bodies are utilized to gain profit through exploitation and we are highly encouraged to take part in our commodification considering it a modernization.³⁰

No doubt, women have made it. But the shift has totally changed. Initially, they were driven by the dream of being independent and free, for gaining specific rights. Later on, the rights started changing day by day. It took a turn and the rights converted into more responsibilities not merely at home rather outside the home as well. Now she turned into a powerful, responsible, independent, hard working, professional woman with or without family. If it is with family, then she becomes more responsible for constantly, forever working strong woman.

‘Aurat March in Pakistan (2018-2020)

There is an intense need to explore the ways in which female activists of Pakistan observe and project their feminism, gender roles and their relationship with religion and nationalism.³¹ Recently, young women brought “the politics of sexuality onto the streets” with drastic results.³² Recently, the women of Pakistan came out to gain empowerment through participating in social-political women movements, so they initiated ‘Aurat March (2018) in Pakistan to celebrate the International Women's Day.³³

The movement of ‘Aurat March is referring to a series of campaigns intended for reforming the problems of the society, such as women's suffrage, reproductive rights,

²⁸ Offen, “Writing the History of Feminisms (Old and New).” 323.

²⁹ Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, 1.

³⁰ It means the development of modern approach and outlook and adoption of modernity in everyday life. refers to the deeper change in man's way of thinking and feeling, and attitude.

³¹ Anjum, “Women's Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology Among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals.” 39.

³² Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women's Movement in Pakistan.” 168

³³ Faran Manj, “The Illusion Of Feminism — ‘Aurat March,” *Daily Times*. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/570423/the-illusion-of-feminism-’Aurat-march/>, accessed on 5 March 2020.

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domestic violence, and equal pay in the workplace, maternity leave, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.³⁴

In 2018, young feminists in Karachi, some of whom were working in Shirkat Gah or had participated in different activities, took the lead in initiating and organizing the first ‘Aurat March under the prominent banner, “Hum ‘Auratein” (We Women). A few older feminists helped and the crowd was a cross section of generations as well as some transgender and rainbow activists. Simultaneously, a less significant march was held in Lahore.³⁵ It was held, to highlight women as less privileged in Pakistani society according to the small group of the rally.³⁶ The International Women’s Day was celebrated in major cities across Pakistan by participating in ‘Aurat March.³⁷ Yet again in 2019, marches were held in several major cities to mark women’s day.³⁸ ‘Aurat March (2019) has faced much criticism from religious scholars, politicians and common people of Pakistan, calling it against cultural, social and religious values.

In Pakistan, during the whole scenario, a sustained women’s activism has never been favored by political developments.³⁹ In reality, it is the public who does not support such activism that is somehow at any edge contradictory with Islāmic teachings, state laws and public customs or traditions that are highly regarded in the sight of people. In the context of the Pakistani nation, ‘Aurat March remained until now and might be continued to be in the coming decades a contested matter.

The majority of Pakistani people are highly concerned about their traditions and cultural values. In case of the ‘Aurat March, through electronic and social media, one would come across numerous reactions simply detesting ‘Aurat March. It has been seen more resentment from the public, condemnation from assembly members and especially

³⁴ Baig et al., “Role of Media in Representation of Sociocultural Ideologies in ‘Aurat March (2019 – 2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis.” 414.

³⁵ Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’S Movement in Pakistan.”168.

³⁶ Baig et al., “Role of Media in Representation of Sociocultural Ideologies in ‘Aurat March (2019 – 2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis.” 417.

³⁷ Zainab B. Alam, “Do-It-Yourself Activism in Pakistan: The Fatal Celebrity of Qandeel Baloch,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 1 (2020): 76–90.

³⁸ Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’S Movement in Pakistan.”168

³⁹ Shaheed, “The Women’s Movement in Pakistan: Challenges and Achievements.” 96.

from those people who are more attached to family values and cultural traditions. On the religious basis, they are not only criticized by the Muslim community instead all the communities of different religions were not supporting this march because of the cultural values of their country are not allowing them to come out in support of the ‘Aurat March.’⁴⁰ There are real generational differences in the concepts, visions and praxis of activism, however. Older activists believe that younger women engage in agenda-based activism, unmindful of broader political dynamics, long-term goals, and impact; they consider most to be keener on joining international movements than building a national movement; and they view some of their concerns and online activism as elitist.⁴¹ These women want to support the March, they claim, but they are wary of the kind of feminism that has no qualms exiting the sphere of respectability.⁴² Unexpectedly, younger organizers reached out to older feminists and feminist organizations like Shirkat Gah on how to tackle the backlash, opening a vital channel of communication and trust-building. Reassured by the offers of support, these groups listened to the strategic advice of seasoned activists.⁴³ Even they have seen much criticism from self feminists, actors and many other women rights activists, e.g., Kishwar Naheed⁴⁴ said commenting onto them: “Women should not call themselves *Āzad* (free), we should locate our *Āzadi* (freedom) — in the law, not in our bodies and tongues.”⁴⁵

In societies like Pakistan, which are based on the ideology of religion, people are usually much attached to religious values and cultural customs. In Pakistan, women are facing many issues concerning their social, legal, and economical living. The need is to highlight these issues and try to eradicate social evils which are making their life tougher.

⁴⁰ Baig et al., “Role of Media in Representation of Sociocultural Ideologies in ‘Aurat March (2019 – 2020): A Multimodal Discourse Analysis.”, 417.

⁴¹ Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’S Movement in Pakistan.”167.

⁴² Sadia Khatri, “Should Feminists Claim Aurat March’s ‘Vulgar’ Posters? Yes, Absolutely - Prism,” *Dawn*, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1469815>, accessed on 22 January 2020.

⁴³ Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’S Movement in Pakistan.”169

⁴⁴ Kishwar Naheed (b. 1940) is one of the renowned feminist poets of Pakistan. She is famous for pioneering feminist, bold and radical writing through her poetry. She has also received many awards for her literary contribution towards Urdu literature.

⁴⁵ Khatri, “Should Feminists Claim ‘Aurat March’s ‘Vulgar’ Posters? Yes, Absolutely - Prism,” *Dawn*.

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There is a need to understand the cultural and religious differences of Muslim countries to those of western countries. It is not possible for every country, religion and culture to adopt and change once values by following blindly to any others. We should know our legal boundaries, our cultural limitations and our religious values.

The Placards of ‘Aurat March

In any protest, march or movement, slogans have been represented in many mediums including, banners, posters, audio instruments, speeches and songs. Similarly, slogans to represent the socio-cultural concerns have always played a vital role in inspiring people to unite and achieve their certain interests.⁴⁶ In the context of ‘Aurat March, within the movement reactions were split. Some felt that finally the issues had been catapulted into the public and others were heated that the posters were inappropriate, detracted attention from the issues of rural and grassroots women, and would alienate many women given that the term feminist is still so controversial. Self-made placards were more imaginative and humorous than at traditional rallies.⁴⁷ However, slogans, banners and songs always represent your struggle for the cause, purpose and a desire to accomplish the presented subject matters.

Slogans serve as a medium through which a considerable number of socio-political issues that are likely to be unmentionable elsewhere are raised. The slogans provides the medium through which message composers can state their cases in the knowledge they are on the safe side and are shielded from political or social sanctions that are likely to be imposed by the authorities and the community on members with opposing views.⁴⁸

The media have captured many placards and they got viral at national and international levels. One of its controversial placards portraying, “*Mera Jism Meri Marzi*”, has become the key symbolic slogan representing the ‘Aurat March. The term has been directly duplicated and translated from the statement ‘my body my choice’ which has

⁴⁶ Belqes Al- Şowaidī, Felix Banda, and Arwa Mansour, “Doing Politics in the Recent Arab Uprisings: Towards a Political Discourse Analysis of the Arab Spring Slogans,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no. 5 (2015): 621–645.

⁴⁷ Shaheed, “Maintaining Momentum in Changing Circumstances: Challenges of the Women’s Movement in Pakistan.”169.

⁴⁸ Al- Şowaidī, Banda, and Mansour, “Doing Politics in the Recent Arab Uprisings: Towards a Political Discourse Analysis of the Arab Spring Slogans.” 2.

been a social campaign driven in the West that “aims to break the silence and end the stigma around a critical sexual and reproductive health issue: access to safe abortion”.⁴⁹ Later on, the issue became much debated and got viral on media. Even many of its supporters tried giving this slogan a new meaning of their own choice in justification that it is not borrowed from western feminism. Like, some explained it in a way that nobody has the right to beat their women and people must stop acid attacks on women. Some were saying that nobody has the right to violate, abuse and harass women. Another explanation explained in the sense that women cannot be strained into forced marriages, pregnancy, trafficking and abortion. Others were explaining as women are free of what to wear and what not to wear. Despite various different clarifications, these were not enough to convince the public. Strangely enough, the representations of all other slogans on placards were enough to justify the slogan’s genuine purpose.

‘Aurat March remained unsuccessful to meet the expectations of the general public. Initially, it was expected that this event would turn out to be a revolutionary accomplishment, but the reality was totally the opposite. Somehow, the event of the ‘Aurat March has become worthless in the sight of the public and turned into a meaningless condemned event. The actual reason for condemnation was its non-sensical source and absurd demands by the participants and distraction from the factual matters of women’s suffrage. “These so-called feminists are like ‘If Men Smoke Why Can’t We?’ Hence, this shows us how much they are concerned about the veritable issues of women and their rights in this society.”⁵⁰ It is illustrated that events like “Women March 2018 and Women on Bikes prove women’s resistance and that progress is taking place, but it surely is slow”, by eliminating religious and cultural impediments to advocate justice and equality for women.⁵¹ Ironically, it is far from understanding, what kind of justice and progress is for women while riding bikes, sitting like men, staying single, smoking, wearing men-like dresses or copying men. Except for some of the placards, many of them were showing

⁴⁹ Ahmed Asfand, “Questioning the Execution of ‘Aurat March and Reasoning Alternatives to the Campaign ’ s Slogan ’ Mera Jism Meri Marzi’,” 2020, 3.

⁵⁰ Manj, “The Illusion Of Feminism — ‘Aurat March.”

⁵¹ Anjum, “Women’s Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology Among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals.”39.

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that those attendants of the march are highly impressed by their males. They are not worried about women’s issues, but truly concerned about what illogical and absurd things men can do and women can’t. They have actually issues with women’s lifestyle that is different in comparison to that of western women. Actually, we don’t want our own characteristics of being women, to have a diverse identity and unique style of our own culture. All of our issues are revolving around becoming men-like because we think they are some kind of superior or a better creature than us or equality is being similar to men. If not, we have thousands of serious issues concerning women’s lives that are in dire need to highlight and to stand for them for an entire transformation.

In a nutshell, for the promotion of women’s rights and their empowerment in the country, Pakistan needs a logical and constructive solution. Women’s involvement in different sectors would be a helpful approach so that they may become able to defend their rights in Governmental and educational division.⁵² On the women’s International day, it is not something wrong to raise voice against social evils. We need to determine, the real issues, existent barriers and social evils. Those who are concerned about women’s progress, eventually they will realize that ‘Aurat March slogans were not representing the reflection of collective and individual’s life issues.

Cultural Transformation: from West to East

The goals of feminism as conceived in Western society are not necessarily relevant or exportable across cultural boundaries.⁵³ Happiness, then, has not marched forward with feminism. The most important and best sources of joy, meaning and identity for males and females are always found in the world of homes and families, not at the workplace.⁵⁴ Realistically, we need to stop debating about women’s issues, women’s progress, women’s rights, and women’s need. We must stop talking about female empowerment, girl’s power and overturning a patriarchy that doesn’t even exist. When we frame the debate in feminist lingo, we foster a war between the sexes. It’s time to end

⁵² Manj, “The Illusion Of Feminism — ‘Aurat March.’”

⁵³ Al-Farūqī, “Islāmic Traditions and the Feminist Movement: Confrontation Or Cooperation?” 136.

⁵⁴ Mona Charen, *Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense* (New York: Crown Forum, 2018), 13, 604.

the confrontation between the sexes that is truly leading towards matriarchy.⁵⁵ Feminism generally has got a dreadful reputation in social, religious and political outlook. The feminist has endured some of the abnormal kinds of distortion and defamation among all the emblems of social progressivism and liberation.⁵⁶ It would be significant to mention the cultural transformation brought by the women's liberation movement through the observation of a western scholar: "Women's liberation has given my generation high incomes, our own cigarette, the option of single parenthood, rape crisis centres, personal lines of credit, free love, and female gynaecologists."⁵⁷ The relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such a law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology is destiny formulation. In such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny.⁵⁸ No matter how much feminists attempt to deny sexual differences, women are and always will be more vulnerable sexually than men. So it's not the patriarchal ideology rather it's the biological fact that overstress the differences between men and women.⁵⁹ They have changed the label that there exists any difference between men and women. Now, in Western countries, women are all free, but still not happy because they have achieved almost all what they fought for once:

The prevailing wisdom of the past decade has supported one, and only one, answer to this riddle: it must be all that equality that's causing all that pain. Women are unhappy precisely because they are free. Women are enslaved by their own liberation. They have grabbed at the gold ring of independence, only to miss the one ring that really matters.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Venker and Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism*, 172.

⁵⁶ Melinda Kanner and Kristin J. Anderson, "The Myth of Man-Hating Feminist," in *Feminism and Women's Rights Worldwide*, ed. Michele A. Paludi (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 1–25.

⁵⁷ Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, 2.

⁵⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 2014), 13.

⁵⁹ Charen, *Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense*, 27.

⁶⁰ Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, 2.

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The Feminist movement took a disastrous wrong turn at the time when the home became a trap for women and it rejected the family as a prison for women.⁶¹ It changed the workplace, but it didn't change men, and, more importantly, it didn't fundamentally change how women related to men. If women's flourishing does matter, feminists must acknowledge that the family is to 2005 what the workplace was to 1964 and the vote to 1920.⁶² Now in many Muslim countries, like Pakistan, the liberation marches are more concerned about work, pay and economic stability of women. They are just insisting women to get rid of family responsibilities and go for something independent and well paid. The situation of women in twenty first century is well defined by Charen in these words:

I don't, and it's not because I object to women running countries or companies or men running the homes. It's because I don't think "equality" means "sameness". It needs not to frighten or bewilder us that, on average, women tend to be more inclined to choose children over work than men, and I have never understood why feminists consistently disparage women's preferences.⁶³

Logically, there lies no issue, if women are working outside the home, housewives or both. We need to come up with a better solution. The key to understand the choices in the ways in which women and men combine their waged and domestic work plays a big role. In fact, women who are having multiple tasks being mother, wife and an employee need some positive association between all these roles. Here come two things, a woman wants a family life and at the same time, she wants to earn. This is what makes her life more difficult and confused. In general terms, equality is if she and her husband working outside and when back at home, they must share the household too. But in reality, it is really something desirable only, but actually exists rarely instead it must be.

Men would feel less pressure to do work as her wife will share certain tasks, but women would have to do men's work and her own household too. So this makes women's life tougher, uneven and complicated if it's not manageable by her or her family. Like if she likes to be a wife or a mother and an outdoor worker at the same time, then obviously she needs to manage it instead of blaming society, culture or reserving

⁶¹ Venker and Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism*, 27.

⁶² Linda Hirshman, "Homeward Bound," *The American Prospect* 16, no. 12 (2005): 20–26.

⁶³ Charen, *Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense*, 18.

this credit to patriarchy. Because, after all, this responsibility is not given to them forcefully rather it's their own choice. However, it resulted as;

The conceptual and real-world 'trap' of choice feminism (between work and home) has led women to challenge each other rather than the patriarchy. Individualism conceived of as 'choice' does not empower women; it silences them and prevents feminism from becoming a political movement and addressing the real issues of distribution of resources.⁶⁴

Family is a key support to the happiness of men, women and children. Thousand of studies show that married people are happier, healthier, wealthier and longer lived than those who are single, widowed or divorced.⁶⁵ Probably, many people intentionally not joined the feminist cause in their lives, nor do apparently they support or have a strong opinion on these matters. But the lifestyle of many women is a direct result of feminism's influence. That is the insidious nature of the feminist revolution, and it is the reason why it's considered the most significant social movement of our time. Justly, the feminist approaches, programs and practices have been adopted and accepted by millions of people who even refuse to identify themselves as "feminists."⁶⁶

In Pakistan, although, public response to such marches has always shown a diverse picture, but still the fact is undeniable that it is affecting the new generation's attitude, approach and mindset unintentionally. For example, "Divorced and happy" is just a myth and slogan of an 'Aurat march in Pakistan that has no existence in real life. Sooner or later it will drastically change our traditions as once in Europe divorce was not as simple and easy as it is today. It is leading them to the worst of cultural destruction by following specific aim.

On this planet, compromise is something essential to live in harmony, peace and love. For happiness and for self-peace, we need a collective effort. We need to understand the value of relation, nature, worth and differences. The women movement

⁶⁴Kathleen P. Iannello, "Third-Wave Feminism and Individualism: Promoting Equality or Reinforcing the Status Quo?," in *Women in Politics: Outsiders or Insiders? A Collection of Readings*, ed. Lois Duke Whitaker (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 313–21.

⁶⁵Charen, *Sex Matters: How Modern Feminism Lost Touch with Science, Love, and Common Sense*, 26.

⁶⁶ Gerda Lerner, "The Meaning of Seneca Falls: 1848-1998" (New York, 1998), 40.

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suggests all women are on the same page) is bogus.⁶⁷ Instead of becoming anti-men and to give rise matriarchy, we should respect and accept the biological differences;

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, sex and age. It is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize [them] and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation.⁶⁸

Ironically, at the same time, all cultures and civilizations are not the same and can never be. Instead of copying other cultures, make your own culture and traditions worth recognized. Divergence always makes things look more unique and attractive. Everything that happens anywhere in the world is not necessarily binding for every person or nation to follow. Instead of promoting a foreign and different culture, just to get freedom from core values, the need is to bring a positive change to the sufferer and ignored group of Pakistani society.

Conclusion

Feminism, a presented tool of the improvement of women’s status is nothing but a mere fantasy created by the elite class for their own specific purposes. It convinced many women by showing them a picture of liberated women. Unfortunately, it leads them to be a woman without a man, a confused, a strong but alone woman. Actually, it misleads them and took them back into the centuries. In countries, like Pakistan, though such marches are not appreciated by the public, but still the influence on the younger generation is undeniable. The majority of the people are followers of the religion of Islām in Pakistan and practice religious values and traditions. The organizers and the supporters must consider that we are not a nation without religion or values. We are not living our lives for worldly desires; our bond is much stronger with Islām and *Imān* (Faith). In contrast to the Western world, they are more or less secular. The movement in the Western world for women’s rights was not bound by any religious or cultural values. The most important principle is that many of the goals of Western feminism are not acceptable or exportable across cultures. Before making any policies and following any foreign strategies, we must consider it that as a Muslim nation we

⁶⁷ Venker and Schlafly, *Flipside of Feminism*, 6.

⁶⁸ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 115.

are not allowed to cross the Islāmic traditions and values. It is not desired for any nation to follow the western culture for development and to be recognized as a modern civilized nation as the West can't follow the values and ethics of any other nation which is not in accordance with their country's ethical standards and values. The Qur'ān and the prophetic traditions have given more women's rights and yet, due to social, cultural, and at some points patriarchal domination in various parts of the country has developed narrow concepts in relation to women's rights. Mercy, kindness, unconditional justice, equality, freedom, and humanism are universal teaching of Islām. Consequently, due to these constraints women are denied their due rights. But it does not signify to borrow foreign policies or traditions. Since the history, traditions and culture of the Muslim world are different from that of Western society so the feminism that might appeal to Muslim women must be respectively different and in accordance with Islāmic teachings. Despite enormous resentment from the public, no one wanted a ban on 'Aurat March, rather a modification in slogans, placards and elimination of its borrowed ideas. This marginalized group of 'Aurat March must realize that getting recognition through ridiculous ideas is not a success or development. If they are really concerned about women's rights and status, they would definitely have to modify their policies, aspirations, and plans in accordance with our religious and country values.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations for future work. However, some of the highlighted topics are under progress as a part of my PhD research study:

- There is a dire need to conduct research in which one might be able to explore the plans, funding resources and strategies of such groups working for specific agendas to transform cultural and religious values.

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- Further research can be done on, the role of electronic media’s coverage and assistance to ‘Aurat March in Pakistan to change the mind-set of the new generation through absurd justifications.
- Similarly, there is a need to differentiate between women’s rights in the context of western feminism and the limitation of women’s emancipation in the Islāmic context.
- In addition, the requirement is to bring such issues and the motives of the specific group into the light which is drastically concerned about changing our moral values.
- It is recommended to highlight current policies and laws for women protection in contrast to the factual social and cultural evils currently prevailing against women in Pakistan.

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