

Is feminism a clearly understood topic in the society?

Outline

1. Introduction

Thesis Statement: Feminism is not a clearly understood topic in the society. Illiteracy, ignorance, orthodox values and personal biases have made feminism a misunderstood, vague and controversial topic. Since feminism is crucial for addressing women's issues, efforts should be made for understanding and perceiving it properly.

2. Social Perception of feminism

3. Why is feminism a misunderstood issue in society?

a. Lack of education and awareness.

b. Ignorance of feminism by certain social segments.

c. Deeprooted patriarchal system intentionally misreads feminism

d. The role of media campaigns

e. Cultural and religious factors contributing to misunderstandings

f. Misinterpretation of feminism theories for personal gains

4. Consequence of misunderstanding feminism

a. Neglect of genuine issues of women in society.

b. Polarization of society.

- c. Spread of Extremist Agendas
- d. Social, Political and economic deprivation of women.

2. Remedies for better understanding of the issue of feminism

- a. Education and awareness of masses.
- b. Judicial use of social media.
- c. Proper legislation of women rights campaigns.
- d. Integration of religion and culture with feminism.

b. Conclusion.

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Are you a feminist? "Yes", some say readily. Others grimace and deny any association with that "Man-Hating" movement. The difference between these two kind of people is their understanding and perception of feminism. Despite it being one of the most popular movements today, it is grossly misunderstood. A part of society chants slogans and participate in rallies on 8th of March, another segment throws stones at these participants. Many factors contribute towards the social perception of feminism: Class, Creed, cast, culture, values, traditions and religion. Lack of education and awareness further contributes to assumptions and misinterpretation. Furthermore, certain pre-conceived notions about feminism are due to patriarchal nature of society. Social and electronic media's role can't be ignored in creating these notions. Like any other popular theory, feminism is not without faults. But, it has played an important role in shaping the lives of women all over the world. Owing to its critical importance in solving and addressing the issues of women, it is imperative that feminism should be clearly understood in society. Despite the campaign being famous for more than a century, it hasn't achieved its goals. Women still suffer from discrimination. They don't have social,

Political and economic parity with their male counterparts. It is the responsibility of the entire society, and not just feminists, to make concrete efforts for understanding feminism.

One shoe can't fit all, thus some parts of the theory need to be modified and adapted according to the needs of the society. Ignorance and blind animosity will only lead to polarization and extremism. The need of the hour is judicious use of social media and inclusive education. Feminism is definitely a misunderstood topic in the society. Illiteracy, ignorance, orthodox values and personal biases have made it a controversial topic. Since proper understanding of feminism is crucial for resolving women's issues, proper efforts should be made to promote its real meaning and message in society.

Feminism is a philosophy that says that women and men should have equal rights. Women should have the same political, social and economic rights as that of a man. According to "Global Gender Gap Index" report- 2023, it would take another 131 years to achieve full parity. Despite more than 150 years of struggle, feminism is nowhere close in achieving its targets. It was Charles Fourier who coined the term feminism in

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the year 1837. The first wave of feminism started in the late 19th century. At that time women were fighting for their fundamental rights: right of employment, right to vote and right of education. Despite them being the very basic human rights, a significant portion of population opposed the feminist campaigns. Men had held a very high position in society and women were considered inferior, so men saw it as a challenge or a threat. Social perception of feminism has never been completely positive. Even today, feminism is a controversial issue and there are many factors responsible for it.

The first and the foremost reason is illiteracy. There are two kinds of illiteracy related to feminism. First is the lack of formal education, especially in the third world countries like Pakistan. In 2022, the literacy rate of Pakistan was 59.8%. [Annual report 2022, Ministry of Education and Development, Pakistan]. But, it is not just the formal education that can teach about feminism. Informal education that a person gets from parents, friends, siblings, newspapers and social media is unfortunately, of very poor quality. Official slogan of Aurat March was "Health issues for women" in 2020, but people only knew that some women are chanting on the streets: "heat up your food yourself" (اپنی کھانا کھانے کو گرم کرو).)

Such statements were highlighted by the social media and certain social segments to paint a bad picture of feminism for the common man. The truth is that people don't open a book for reliable information, rather they rely on hearsay. The tragedy is that 40% of Pakistan's population can't even read a book.

There is another fundamental issue in Pakistan and to some extent, in the rest of the world. That is Patriarchy. The belief that Men are created superior and women are created inferior. There is no doubt that men are more muscular and thus have high body strength and stamina. Priyanka Chopra, a representative of UNICEF, said in an interview that by equality, women mean "cerebral" equality. There is a lack of understanding among people about the very concept of equal rights. They think that women hate men and want to strip them of their social position. When in reality, women just want to share that position. Patriarchy adds fuel to such notions and misconceptions.

It's not just patriarchy, social media also didn't play a good role in communicating about feminism. A survey was conducted by Pew research centre in the United States of America in 2023. According to that survey 6 out of 10 American men don't want to associate themselves with feminism. This is a society that is highly educated and somewhat "non-patriarchial" but despite that, feminism hasn't gained positive popularity. ^{On social media,} A man who chooses not to marry is a career oriented man and a woman who chooses not to marry is a feminist.

"Toxic feminism" hashtag made several sounds on twitter. The "Me too" campaign started in 2017 faced a lot of criticism despite it highlighting a key issue of sexual harassment. All such incidents reflect that social media has not been an effective tool for better understanding of feminism. Instead, it has made this philosophy more vague and confusing for a common man.

A common man relies on culture and religion for his understanding of the world. One thing common in all religions and cultures is that men are different than women and they have different roles in society. Since feminism challenged this idea, it got huge popularity among the secular portions of society. However, the conservative and rightist didn't take it well. Ignoring the similarities in religion and feminism, they focused on

the differences and called it as an Anti-God philosophy. For example Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) advocated for equal educational rights for both men and women, calling education a necessity, a compulsion for both men and women. However, until 1857, there was no qualified female doctor in the world. Elizabeth Blackwell became the first MD 13 decades after religion made education compulsory for women. This reflects that religion was not properly interpreted and applied and was abused for keeping checks on women instead of empowering them.

(Why was feminism misinterpreted?)

Illiteracy, deeprooted cultural values, social media, religion as pure selfish interests, One ponders! For long, the balance of power was shifted in favour of men. Until 1920, women did not have the right to vote. A question arises in mind that who benefited from all the inequalities. Karl Marx blamed it on capitalism. He gave the theory of Materialistic feminism that women are deprived of economic rights and that is the sole cause of their discrimination. Society is capitalist in nature, one segment has to be exploited for other to excel and succeed. It is therefore the feudal lords and the rich wealthy people who get the most benefit from gender disparity. It is in

their best interest that women remain inferior and economically backward. If a woman get educated and empowered, societies excel and that would deprive the rich lords of their crown and their castles. Thus, women are deliberately kept uneducated, unemployed and weak. Any movement that raises voice for them is labelled as an anti-religion and anti-culture campaign.

When women are kept socially, economically and politically deprived, societies plunge into darkness. Social structure is disintegrated and whole nation bear the burden of this deprivation and disparity. In September 2023, the summit of largest economies was held in India. Only two out of 20 leaders were women. This reflects the political empowerment of women. In Pakistan, only 5% of the parliamentarians are women. These dismal numbers show that people still don't understand feminism. The 19th amendment gave women the right to vote but legislation alone cannot bring fundamental changes in society. As long as people don't understand and accept feminism, this condition will not get better.

Another disturbing effect of misunderstanding feminism is the polarization in society. Two extremist groups have been formed and unfortunately both don't interpret feminism properly. The reflection

of such ideologies was seen in the famous TV interview of Marvi Sarmad, a women rights activist and Iqbal-Ul-Rehman Qamar, a drama writer. Feminism doesn't stand for vulgarity and immorality, neither it stands for the animosity and hatred towards men. Such extremist agendas were popularized by the heedless media. Currently, the society is sharply divided among the two and one rarely gets to hear the voice of reason and sanity.

(This insanity has led to outright neglect of women issues. The fact that women are still afraid to walk at night or have to deal with random people while sitting in an Uber reflect the sad state of women. Especially in Pakistan, a country that stands at 142nd number out of 146 in gender equality. [Gender Gap Index Report, World Economic Forum, 2023]. A country where 23 Million students are out of school and majority are women. A country where young girls working at the house of sick-minded elites get brutally beaten and murdered. These numbers and these tragic events are many. Despite all this, feminism is considered an imposed agenda and Women Rights movements are called unnecessary. This bleak situation will

Continue to worsen if effective measures are not taken.

The first and most pressing matter is education. Good, inclusive and quality education for all. A famous proverb says that education without morality makes one a clever criminal. School curriculum should not only teach about feminism and gender equality, but also contribute in good upbringing of students. It should inculcate mutual respect in children. The values of harmony, tolerance and justice should be instilled in children at a younger stage.

Legislation only brings a temporary change, people often find ways around the laws and get away. The system can only be changed if parents and teachers do proper

upbringing of children. Islam calls mother the first school of a child. Here, women have the power in their hands to change society and bring a better generation in the world.

Religion and culture are important parts of our societies and cannot be completely overlooked. Feminism is not a scientific fact or a law. It's a philosophy and a theory that is open to changes and modifications. A common ground should be found between the two. Feminism is not without flaws. The gender v. sex debate and LGBTQ thinking is not acceptable in

Pakistan or in the one Billion Muslims living all over the world. Similarly, irrespective of religion, woman's role as a mother cannot be neglected. Not just for the baby, but also for the woman herself, this attachment and bond is necessary. Liberal feminism calls for a total elimination of sex. Feminists also have to realize that to work for the betterment of all women, they should work in harmony with culture and religion of the community.

Some responsibilities lie on the shoulders of community and the govt as well. Women right's movements should be registered by the govt. Any random group of people with a few flags cannot be allowed to propagate their vested agendas in the name of feminism. Similarly, Media should also be held accountable for its role. Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan founded the APIWA (All Pakistan Women Organization) in 1949. APIWA played a very important role in the passing of "Muslim Family Ordinance" in 1961. These movements and campaigns had a real goal and objective. Sadly, contemporary women right's movements could not continue this legacy and got mixed in controversies. It is essential that these campaigns

should be kept under check and balance. PEMRA should also take responsibility for its role. All segments of the society have to come forward for the betterment of women and for better understanding of feminism.

There is no denying the importance and vitality of feminism for women. In fact, feminism is derived from a latin word "femina" that means women. feminism has advocated for equal rights in all fields of life for both men and women. The world is currently witnessing the 4th wave of feminism. Still, the issue is not properly understood. And because it is not understood, it continues to face struggle in acceptance and implementation. Susan Faludi wrote the book "Backlash" in 1991 when she presents the idea that since the beginning of time, feminism has faced criticism by the society. Among various other reasons, she says that misinterpretation of feminism is one key factor of this backlash. Aafiyah Sheherbari in her book "The History of Feminism in Pakistan" (2007) depicts the same idea. Irrespective of the age, time and place, feminism could not gain total acceptance while there are issues from the society, there are some flaws in feminism itself. However, with education, awareness, tolerance and sincere efforts, anything

can be achieved. The future is bright
and though, there are problems, there is
a solution for each one of them.