

Q6. Discuss in detail the Feminist movements in Pakistan. (20)

# FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN

## INTRODUCTION:

Women in developing countries have played an active role in challenging the unequal status by taking part in collective actions for change. In many countries including Pakistan the feminist movements have been vibrant in the light of the startling issue of gender violence. as viewed by Samya Burney in her publication *Crime and Custom? : Violence against women in Pakistan*. In Pakistan women face a lot of gender prejudice due to a male dominant society and feudal mindsets. Feminist Movements have been promulgated due to deep violation of human rights. Women activists therefore are implementing approaches to limit gender violence through advocacy.

## I. WOMEN'S ROLE IN INDEPENDENCE STRUGGLE

Sir Syed played a crucial role in bringing the education reforms to the people of India.

- In 1849 → Women training education school opened in Calcutta
- Begum of Bhopal was deeply fascinated by women's education in Aligarh. In 1915 she laid foundation of girls' hostel in Aligarh.
- In 1885 → Anjuman-e-Hemayat-e-Islam opened 5 girls elementary schools in Lahore.
- In 1922 → Sultan Begam of Bengal became first woman to receive her Master's degree in law

These educational reforms despite being traditional enabled women to speak for their rights.

“The days had gone when women were fit only for cooking food and minding children and the time had come for them to take an equal share of responsibility with their menfolk in politics”

~ Lady Maratab Ali

The nationalistic struggle mobilized a large number of educated upper class women. The participation was further increased by development of Muslim Girls Student Federation (1941) launched by Lady Abdul Qadir, Fatima Begum, Miss M. Qureshi. Fatima Jinnah became a symbol of empowered woman because of her active role in the independence struggle along side her brother.

## II - POST INDEPENDENCE LEGAL REFORMS

In 1948; Muslim Personal Law granted woman's right to inherit all forms of property. In 1956, they were also granted the right to vote and claim for the reserve seats along with seats in the general level. Begum Rana Liaquat Khan played a vital role in structuring the welfare and legal reforms for women. In 1948, Women Voluntary Service was established by her to provide primary aid to women. and in the following year she also founded All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) for the well being of Pakistani women.

## III - POLITICAL ACTIVISM UNDER MILITARY RULE

During Ayub Khan Period, in 1961 Muslim family law Ordinance (MFO) was passed that gave rights to women regarding marriage, custody of children and right to divorce. Similarly, during the period of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq Islamization process was deeply criticized by the women because of the Hudood Ordinance 1979 which failed to distinguish between Zina (adultery) and rape (Zina bil Jabr) so there were <sup>country wide</sup> protest against it. In this era, Women's Action Forum (WAF) was also formed to strengthen the position of women. The important work done by this forum is

1. Highlighted the discrimination → According to analysis by Ayesha Jalal women are not uniform social group but are divided by social, cultural and class disparities. According to her, uneducated women do not enjoy the privilege of raising voice against violence and injustice since only educated women have gained sustenance.
1. Sindhani Tehreek → which took major stand against patriarchy as well as dictatorship. They believed all issue are women issues and woman cannot be discriminated on the basis of caste, color and creed.
3. Protest against Qanoon-e-Shahadat → objected to unequal weightage to testimony by men & women in financial cases. Hence the famous slogan was derived 'Men, Money, Mullah, Military'

## IV POST ISLAMIZATION STRUGGLE

Feminist activism gained most traction under the two terms of PM Benazir Bhutto as NGOs and focus groups gained considerable power. However, the momentum decreased during PM Nawaz Sharif tenure and women were losing ground to political conservatism and religious revivalism. But soon the process of reclaiming the ground began when Gen. Pervez Musharraf during his tenure introduced the strategy of Enlightened Moderation.

## V MODERN FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN PAKISTAN

Modern feminist discourse in Pakistan that created a divide among the women and particularly feminist. As Afifa Sherbano in her writing the history of Pakistani feminism suggested the certain of a binary between Islamic feminism vs Secular feminism

### ISLAMIC FEMINISM

1. Further women rights by focusing on female centric laws of Islam and liberal interpretation of scripture
2. Applies largely to lower, middle and parts of upper strata of society which looks to religion for answers.

### SECULAR FEMINISM

1. → See feminism as an extension of basic human rights regardless of any religious implication
2. Appeals to secular minded and progressive segments of society - labelled as western propaganda to suit Chauvinistic

### Prominent Feminists

1. Riffat Hassan
2. Amina Wadud
3. Asma Birlas

1. Shahmaz Rouse
2. Fouzia Saeed
3. Rafia Zakria

## VI RELATION TO WAVES OF FEMINISM

The social, political and historical context of each phase of feminism in Pakistan has been different and the feminist issue of each era arose from particular moments in the national history.

### 1. Partition:

The issue at that time were related to welfare and so the focus of activist was on the rehabilitation of refugees. It had social respectability in the social and traditional cultural environment

## 2. Pre Partition legacy:

Social issues - such as polygamy, pardah, child marriages, divorces, inheritance and right to education all these issues were dealt within the religious bonds.

The ideas and impact of all these three waves can be seen simultaneously in Pakistan. Under the 1st wave - legal protection was demanded. In 2nd wave - participation in workforce was asked under the slogan "Personal is Political" along with that issues like right to divorces, right to Mobility and punishment or action against domestic violence and marital rape. Under 3rd wave liberal rights such as bodily autonomy, personal freedoms, sexual freedoms, objectification of women, call out culture (misogyny) and movements like #Me too Movement are included.

## **VII MANIFESTATION OF MODERN FEMINISM**

1. Aurat March of 2019, 2020 was a monumental feminist event for its scales, magnitude, diversity and inclusivity. Women belonging to different social classes, religions, ethnicities and sects came together on a common platform to protest against the patriarchy that controls, limit and constraint their self expression and basic rights. From home-based workers to teachers, from transgender to queer all protested in their unique and innovative ways.

## **VIII CRITICISM**

Pakistan has never been truly able to free itself from the stigma of violence against women due to incidents of harassments, rape and honor killing.

1. Feminist movement failed to make long lasting impact due to inconsistency and constant shift in perspective.
2. NGOs - collecting funds for the betterment of people are filling their own pockets.
3. Injustice of women used to get fame like Chinoy got academy award but the condition of women remain same but no concentration is there on the actual problem.

## **IX CONCLUSION**

Feminist movement in Pakistan have contributed to the cause of women by raising voice in their defense. However, women can only achieve justice in Pakistan if the orthodox views on place of woman in Islam are revamped in accordance with demands of 21st century. The religious leader must consider the enormity of the fact that women are being abused. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) always treated women with kindness. The only hope to achieve justice is by change in mindsets which can be achieved by awareness and education throughout the country.