

# Discuss in detail - the feminist movements in Pakistan.

## 1. Outline

- The Right of Women is not a novel phenomenon
- Feminism is considered a myth and anti-Islamic
- Equality for women is a taboo in Pakistan
- Women - the second class citizen
- Half of the population is facing suppression at the hands of their counterparts
- Women-friendly measures by different governmental regimes

## 2. Understanding - the timeline of feminist movements

- Pre-partition age
- Post-partition scenario
- Glimpse of the era of field Marshal Ayub Khan
- Contributory efforts under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era
- Zia-ul-Haq's period - the triggering one
- Benazir Bhutto's regime - the cornerstone to women's rights
- General Pervez Musharraf - an era of modernism Kemalist principle
- Zardari era - A period of collaborative efforts to trigger the feminist movement

## 3. Critical Appraisal

## 4. Conclusion

"No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live!"

- Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

## Introduction

Women's plight is not a new phenomenon in any part of the world, whether in west or the east. Owing to this, women have always come to the forefront to fight against the suppression of women. Pakistan also does not lag in paving the way towards women's equality. Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has been fighting against the exploitative and subjugative treatment of women under the influence of patriarchy like in other countries around the world, the backlash against socioeconomic and political inequality has sparked feminist movements in Pakistan too. Feminist movements have always been active, sparked by issues such as domestic violence, acid attacks, violation of freedom, honor killing, educational rights and many others.

The predicament of women's oppression is a continuous phenomenon that has made women second class citizen. Undoubtedly, different governmental bodies under different executives have advocated for the equality of women and taken several initiatives to foster the spirit of equality. Not only feminists, but several prominent non governmental organizations (NGOs) also played a key role in granting women the status that Islam granted them centuries ago. Seeing through the lens of feminism, it is that women have internalized their sufferings and upper class women have turned a blind eye to the suppression to maintain status quo. However, the fight for full gender equality is still a pipe dream. And, talking about equality rights is still a taboo in Pakistan, even in the 21st

century, as a result of which status quo of patriarchy is still dominant, and feminism is a myth and anti-Islamic in Pakistan

## Understanding - the timeline of feminist movement

Feminism in Pakistan has a complex history divided into a number of periods. Before partition the debate on feminism began in 1930s and 1940s. The struggle of social, political and educational rights started even in the colonial period. With the passage of time, feminist movements with different splits emerged in different regimes.

### • Pre-Partition age:

Advocacy for women's rights began even during the colonial period, when British laws were unfavourable to women's rights. The Muslim personal law passed in 1937 helped women achieve their rights. Sir Syed Ahmad and other proponents played a crucial role in granting the rights to women.

1. Anjuman e Hamsyat e Islam opened schools for girls in 1885.
2. Women's education training school was opened in Calcutta in 1889.
3. Sir Muhammad Shafi and his daughter Jahan Ara opened the first organization for women.
4. Anjuman - e - Khawateen - e - Islam opened for women in Lahore.
5. Girls hostel by Begum of Bhopal was opened in 1915 in Aligarh.
6. Women also joined the All-India Muslim league in 1915
7. Memorandum of equality represented by Begum Jahan Ara in round table conferences (1930) demand

rights for all without discrimination on the basis of caste, color or creed.

8. Six million women were liberated under the Government of India Act 1935 to make it possible for them to participate in the Council of State and provincial assemblies.

9. Fatima Jinnah led millions of women to fight for their rights.

"No nation can be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men".

- Fatima Jinnah

## • Post-Partition Scenario

The desire to achieve the status granted to women by Islam motivated women to keep feminist movements alive even after partition. As a result of their efforts, a number of initiatives to ensure women's socioeconomic and political rights were launched in newly born Pakistan.

1. All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) was founded by Begum Rana Liaquat Ali Khan in 1949.

2. In 1951, Agricultural rights were granted to women for which they were fighting since 1948.

3. United Front was established under the stewardship of Begum Jahan Ara, which proved the mouthpiece for women.

4. Chief Justice of Pakistan made it possible to legally recognize right of marriage and divorce.

5. Constitution of 1956 granted rights to women.

6. Women Action Forum (WAF) was established in 1981, the purpose of which was to disclose the conspiracies against the rights of women.

## • Glimpse of the era of Ayub Khan

In the era of Ayub Khan Muslim Family laws Ordinance (MFLO) was passed in 1961. This particular ordinance gave rights with regard to marital life, divorce and the custody of child. This act was passed owing to the particular efforts of the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA). In addition Fatima Jinnah campaigned for feminist causes in the 1965 presidential elections against military dictator Ayub.

## • Contributory efforts under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era (1972 - 1977)

In Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Era the 1973 Constitution proved to be the cornerstone for providing rights to women. A number of articles in the 1973 Constitution privileged women by granting them rights without any discrimination on the basis of caste, color and creed.

### Article 25:

- i- All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law.
  - ii- There will be no discrimination on the basis of caste, color or creed other than on the basis of sex.
- Besides this, other special provisions under Article 25 provide protection to women and children.

### Article 27:

- i- It stated that there would be no discrimination based on gender, caste, creed or religion in appointments to the Pakistani military.

### Article 32:

- i- It is on the basic principle of state policy

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guaranteed the reservation of seats for women.

## Article 35:

i- This Article stipulates that the state shall protect marriage, family, and mother and child.

Besides, Pakistan Peoples Party established a Women's Wing under the stewardship of Nusrat Bhutto, under this 5% seats were introduced for women in the provincial assembly and 10% in the national assembly.

## • Zia ul Haq's Period, the triggering one: (1977-1988)

The Zia ul Haq era was essentially the catalyst for the Women's movement to take off. The law that sparked the women's movement at the time was an offense under Zina. The enforcement of the Hudood Ordinance (1979) by Zia ul Haq gave power to Pakistan's feminist movements. This ordinance empowered women to become feminist activists. Basically, the Zina Ordinance conflated raped with adultery. That Hudood Ordinance asked the victim to present four witnesses before the court for the claim to be accepted by women. The Ordinance has erased the basic difference between the two and made it impossible for women to prove rape. Not only this, but the victim's failure to prove the adultery made her the culprit. That ordinance made the actual rapist go scot-free instead of being behind bars.

### (a) - Regime's harsh Punishments

Zia had introduced the harshest punishments under the context of Islamization.

1- He introduced punishments such as flogging,

- executions, torture and sentencing by military courts.
- 2- Initiated controversial execution of the Hudood Ordinance
  - 3- Banned Women from participating in sports and from being audiences of sports
  - 4- Promoted parda
  - 5- Suspended all constitutional rights, including the right to freedom, on the basis of no discrimination.

## (b) Reactive behaviours against the aura of Islamization

The terrific reactions against the Islamization principles of Zia came initially in the form of the Women Action Forum in 1981. A group of Women gathered in Shirkat Gah, Karachi to open debate on the covert conspiracy by Zia ul Haq. Women Action Forum became the inspiration to the suppressed women of the country.

## (c) Initiatives by Women Action Forum

Women's action Forum contested a huge number of protests in the 1980's period against the implementation of Law of evidence. That association also played a pivotal role in exposing the misinterpretation of Islam under the Pseudo-scholar and its curfew role in the modern world. Furthermore, the association added more to the contributory efforts by making ways possible for women to play an active role in the socio-political domains. With the passage of time, Women Action Forum became the mouthpiece of the wave of feminism emerging in Pakistan. 'Dupatta Jaiso Movement' (1982) was launched in Lahore against the remonstrations of Zia ul Haq it was filed under Zina Ordinance and it encouraged women to safeguard and preserve the law.

rights that have been given to them adding more to the triggering factors. Pakistan Women lawyers marched with the collaboration of WAF towards high court. The purpose was to abolish the law of evidence. The then government tried to overcome the protest through different restraining acts such as using tear gas and filing charges against the feminist groups. The wave did not restrict to Lahore only but took other major cities of Pakistan into the whirlpool of the feminist wave bigger feminist movements in Pakistan.

#### (d) Case in Point

##### 1. Fehmida Allah Baksh Case (1982) -

In this case Allah Baksh had married Fehmida against the wish of her family and he was punished with ~~the~~ death by stoning and Fehmida, a hundred lashes of whips on the charges of adultery.

##### 2. Proponents

The writings of prominent feminist activists proved to be the cornerstone for granting Women's Rights. Kishwar Naheed's 'Hum Gunahgar Pakistan' (We Sinful Women) and Fehmida Riaz's 'Charadar or Chaardwari' (the veil and the four walls) mushroomed the growth of the movements in Pakistan. These writings and poems became the anthem of the feminist movement all around Pakistan. Not only that, but numerous organizations, through their contributions, made road to equality smooth. Among them, the Aurat Foundation, Rozan, and Bedast were the most significant.

##### • Benazir's Era - Cornerstone to Women's Rights



Women friendly policies were implemented during Bhutto's two tenures and remarkable periods (1998-1999 and 1993-1996). These include:

- 1) Establishing Women's studies centers
- 2) Initiation of separate public universities for women
- 3) Setting up the first Women's Bank
- 4) Establishing a separate police station for women
- 5) Representation by Benazir Bhutto at the fourth World conference on women in Beijing (China)
- 6) Pakistan became a signatory to the convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW).

• Musharraf Era: an era of modernism as a ~~key~~ Kamalists Principle (1999-2007)

A number of initiatives took place during the Musharraf regime. Musharraf a supporter of Mustafa Kamal Atatürk, and his modernist ideology fueled the flames of equality. There were <sup>several</sup> major factors in Musharraf's regime that truly granted women's rights.

- 1- 33% historic representation of women
- 2- 17% of seats were reserved for women in both provincial and national assemblies.
- 3- Shamsah Akhtar was appointed as the first female governor of the State Bank.
- 4- Establishment of the National Commission on the Status of Women (2000) as a statutory body.
- 5- Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) to make it obligatory for governments to ensure gender inequality.
- 6- Enactment of the Women's Protection Bill (2006)
- 7- Repealed some of the Hudood Ordinances.
- 8- Rape was taken out of the Hadd (maximum) penalty and added to Pakistan's Penal

Proceduce Code-

9- The confusion between rape and adultery was cleared up

10- The rape case was treated in a same manner as in other countries.

11- Except for terrorism and murder, approximately 1300 women were released in 2006.

12- In 2006, the Cabinet approved a 10% quota for women in the Central Superior services.

13- Besides it, women cadets from the military academy (Kakul) assumed charge as guards at Mazar & Guard.

• Zardari period- a period of collaborative efforts to trigger feminist movement (2008-2013)

The government period of Zardari gave impetus to the spirit of feminism while also displaying the plight of women. It is the Zardari era, in which 15 years old Malala Yusufzai was shot for her outstanding contributions to women's rights. It was during this period that Chand Bibi, a seventeen year old girl was publically flogged by the Taliban for having an illicit relationship with the neighbour. Further, Zardari's regime contributed by passing the number of laws. It introduced:

- 1- Law against acid attacks
- 2- Protection of women against sexual harassment at the workplace
- 3- Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's documentary on acid attacks gave impetus to legislation against acid attacks.
- 4- Fehmida Mirza was appointed as the first female speaker of the national assembly in South Asia.
- 5- Hina Rabbani Khar was appointed as the first female foreign minister.

- 6- MQM hold the world's largest women rally
- 7- Law of inheritance was passed in 2011.
- 8- Domestic Violence Bill was implemented in 2012.
- 9- The ministry of women's development was established at the federal level.
- 10- The Sexual harassment act (2010) was passed.

## Critical appraisal and conclusion

Since the birth of Pakistan, feminism has been a contested and contentious subject in the history of the country. ~~Myopic~~ Myopic-versed people often labeled it as western Propaganda and anti-Islamic approach. Despite the bone of contention, a number of organizations and proponents have come forward to stand against the suppression of women. These feminists and organizations work under the umbrella of feminist movements to achieve socio-economic and political rights. The core purpose of feminist movement is to address the issues faced by women, and owing to this the movement has gained momentum. The startling slogans of equality and patriarchy have made it possible for women to commence debate upon the factors that are impeding the growth and development of women. The strong stance of feminism has made it possible to raise voices against the menace of exploitation by creating an atmosphere of 'Aurat March'. Not only this, but International Women's day is celebrated to make the roots of feminism strong. Despite all these crucial initiatives there is still a question mark regarding

the treatment of women ~~is~~<sup>are</sup> Obaid's 'savage face' and 'A girl on the river' documentaries enough to make equality possible? Can the equality of women be guaranteed by passing a stock of legislation? The answer is a big no. To summarize, despite the passage of legislation, the contributions to non-governmental organizations, and feminist marches, gender equality remains a major myth and taboo in Pakistan till the pseudo implementation of legislative measures.

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