

Question:  
Discuss in detail the feminist movements in Pakistan.

Answer:

"No nation can rise to the glory of the right of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs."

-Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Women's plight is not a new phenomenon. No matter if it is west part of the world or the east, women always have to come to the forefront to fight against oppression. Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan is facing exploitative and subjugating treatment of women under the influence of patriarchy. Like in other countries around the world, the backlash against socio-economic and political inequality has sparked feminist movements in Pakistan too. Feminist movements have always been active, sparked issues like educational rights, acid attacks, domestic violence, violations of freedom, and others. The predicament of women's oppression is a

continuous phenomenon that has made women second-class citizens. The despotic fact, as seen through the lens of feminism, is that women has internalized their sufferings and turned a blind eye to the suppression caused by various social and economic factors. Despite significant efforts from different governmental institutes, the fight for full gender equality is still a pipe dream. Talking about equality rights is still a taboo in Pakistan, even in 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a result of which the status quo of patriarchy is still dominant.

## Understanding the Timeline of feminist Movements

Feminism in Pakistan has been divided into number of periods that includes pre-partition era as well as post partition era. The debate on feminism even started in 1930 and 1940 in colonial period.

### Pre-Partition:

The Muslim personal law passed in 1937 helped women to achieve their rights under British

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regime. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and other proponents played a crucial role in granting the rights to women.

Following is the list:

- \* Anjuman-e-Hinayate-e-Islam opened for girls in 1885 to make educated.
- \* Women's Education training schools was opened in Calcutta in 1889.
- \* Sir Muhammad Shafi and his daughter Jahan Ara opened the first organization for women. Jahan Ara also participated in round table conferences (1930) while representing the memorandum of equality.
- \* In 1908, Anjuman-e-Khawateen-Islam opened for girls in Lahore.
- \* Begum of Bhopal opened hostels for girls in 1915 in Aligarh and at the same time women also joined All-India Muslim League.
- \* Fatima Jinnah also led millions of women to fight for their rights.
- \* The government Act of India in 1935 liberated six million women to make it possible for them to participate in councils and provincial assemblies.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

"No nation can be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with men."

- Fatima Jinnah

## Post-Partition Scenario:

In newly-born Pakistan, a number of initiatives were launched to ensure women's political and socio-economic rights that were given by Islam long ago.

1949 — All Pakistan Women's Association founded by Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan.

1951 — Agricultural rights were granted for which they were fighting since 1948.

1955 — United Front for Women's Rights was led by Begum Jahan Ara in reaction to second marriage of Muhammad Ali Bhagha.

1956 — Constitution allocated 10 reserved seats for women for 10 years.

The successive governments in Pakistan have done little to enhance the political participation

of women because Pakistan was made as a Muslim state. According to that perspective, interpretations of Islam emphasized women's roles primarily within the household.

## Era of Field Marshall Ayub Khan (1958-1968)

Owing to the previous years efforts of All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), in the era of Ayub Khan following improvements were seen:

1961

Muslim Family Laws Ordinance gave rights of marital life, divorce, and children custody.

1962

Constitution allocated only six seats reserved for women in National Assembly.

1965

Fatima Jinnah campaigned against military dictator Ayub Khan.

## Era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1972-77)

In Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's era, significant contributions were made to grant women

with their social and political rights. The Constitution of 1973 proved to be cornerstone in this era.

Article 25

No discrimination on gender,  
caste, or religion

Article 32

Basic Principles of state  
Policy guaranteed reservation  
of seats for women.

Article 35

The state shall protect marriage,  
family, and mother and child.

Besides, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) established a woman's wing under the stewardship of Nusrat Bhutto. Under this, 5% of seats were introduced in the provincial assembly and 90% in the national assembly.

## Zia-ul-Haq's Period (1977-88)

The period of Zia-ul-Haq was essentially the catalyst for women's movements to take off. Zia promoted "Islamization" by claiming that previous governments were too liberal and western in their policies.

1979

Hadood Ordinance conflated

with  
rape and adultery.

1981

Women Action Forum protested  
against law of evidence.

1982

Dupatta Jalao Movement and  
writings of prominent feminists

## Benazir Bhutto Era:

Women friendly policies were implemented during  
Bhutto's two tenures and remarkable periods  
(1988-1990 and 1993-1996).

1989

Ministry of Women's  
Development and Centre  
of Excellence for Women's  
studies.

1994

Institute of women's studies

1983-85

Zarai Sarfraz Commission revealed  
the discriminatory legislation  
imposed on women.

1995

Fourth World Conference on women:  
Action for Equality, and Development  
and Peace.

Moreover, Benazir Bhutto set up the first  
women's bank and established a separate police  
station for women.

# Musharraf Era - Kemalists Principle (1999- 2007)

Musharraf, a supporter of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and his modernist and secular regime fueled the flames of equality.

2000 — National Commission was established on the status of women as a statutory body.

2002 — Allocation of  $60/342$  National Assembly seats for women and 17% of the total seats. For Provincial Assemblies, 128 out of 728 seats reserved for women.

2006 — Enactment of the Women's Protection Bill.

Besides it, rape was taken out of Hadd penalty and added to Pakistan's Criminal Procedure Code.

Women Cadets from the military academy (karak) assumed charge as guards at Mazars-e-Jinnah.

The Cabinet also approved 10% quota for women in the central superior services.

## Zardari Period: 2008- 2013

The governmental period of Zardari gave impetus to the spirit of feminism while also displaying

the plight of women. It was the Zardari era, in which 12-year-old Malala Yousaf was shot for her contributions to women's rights and seventeen-year-old Chand Bibi was publicly flogged by the Taliban.

2009 — Sherry Rehman and Bushra Grohar play active roles in drafting Bills.

2010 — Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, Domestic violence Bill, Criminal Law Amendment Act 2010, and 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment are significant events.

2011 — Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act and Acid Crime Prevention Act.

2013 — Sindh Domestic Violence Act 2013, and strengthening of Ministry of Women's Development.

## Critical Appraisal and Conclusive Remarks:

Better to add relevancy in today's world  
 Some myopic, Westernised people often label feminism as western propaganda and anti-

Islamic. Despite this bone of contention, many proponents have come forward to raise voice against women suppression. Pakistan has been fighting with this taboo since its birth and some stocks of legislations are not enough to erase the inequality of genders in any country. In many areas women is suffering at the same level <sup>as</sup> she was in 1947. Is Obaid's Saving Face and A Girl in the River documentaries enough to make equality possible? Is appointment of few females in national assemblies could help those under-privileged women? The answer is a big "no". To summarize, despite governmental efforts, non-governmental contributions, and feminist marches, gender equality remains a myth till the pseudo implementation of legislative measures.