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Reimagining Feminism and Gender Debate in Pakistan

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In the World Economic -
Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025,
Pakistan ranked last - 148th out of 148
countries - with only 56.7% gender parity
achieved, a decline from 57% in 2024.
Pakistan stands at a paradoxical
crossroads in its gender landscape,
where progressive legal reforms coexist
with entrenched patriarchal norms and
alarming disparities. Historically, feminism
in Pakistan has been reactive, emerging
from colonial legacies and post-
independence reforms. From the early
20th century All-India Muslim Ladies
Conference, which advocated for
women's education and rights, to the
1980s resistance against Zia-ul-Haq's

Islamization policies, the journey has been marked by resilience. Contemporary digital activism, including the #MeToo movement and Aurat March since 2018, has amplified these efforts, yet faces backlash. This stark reality persists despite milestones like the Islamabad-Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2025, which raised the minimum marriage age to 18 for both genders in the federal capital, and ongoing grassroots movements such as Aurat March, which in 2025 adopted the theme 'Feminist History' to honor past struggles. These contradictions underscore a deeper crisis: while activism amplifies voices, systemic barriers continue to marginalize women. Feminism, in this context, can be defined as an advocacy for gender equality across social, economic, political, and personal spheres, challenging patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality. The broader

gender debate encompasses contestations involving religion, culture, class and intersectionality, often pitting progressive ideals against conservative interpretations in Pakistan. This encapsulates the urgency of reimagination. While traditional feminism in Pakistan has spotlighted vital issues like gender-based violence (GBV) and legal rights, it often faces cultural alienation; reimagining feminism requires an intersectional, inclusive, and culturally rooted approach that bridges secular and Islamic perspectives, prioritizes economic agency and grassroots norms, and transforms the gender debate from confrontation to constructive national dialogue for sustainable equality.