

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### DYNAMICS OF FEMINISM, THIRD WORLD WOMEN, CULTURE AND ISLAM: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF AURAT MARCH

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**Bushra Naz, Zeenat Shahid, Sadia Irshad. Dynamics Of Feminism, Third World Women, Culture and Islam: A Postcolonial Reading of Aurat March-- Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology 19(1), 7-22. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Key Words: Third World Women, Islam, Culture, Pakistan, Feminism**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This article takes issue with the Western notion of feminism and argues that it is not adequate to explain the lives of Pakistani Muslim women. Highlighting Western feminism contentious, the study explores an inevitable network of Islamic culture and feminism at play in Pakistan for being not only an Islamic but also a Third World country truncated in its postcolonial history. To further problematize this issue of how these overlapping projects continue to engage and collide in the recent debates on culture, Islam, and women's rights in which the scope and nature of post coloniality, I will interpret Lila Abu-Lughud's philosophy of cultural difference building upon women discourses of R. Seodo Herr, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in terms of the ideology of colonialism and third world and fight against it for sociopolitical and cultural freedom a crucial element of Pakistani feminism especially of women's representation and conflicts of individual autonomy through a reconceptualization of Aurat March in the context of Islam and culture in Pakistan.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This article takes issue with the Western notion of feminism and argues that it is not adequate to explain the lives of Pakistani Muslim women. Highlighting Western feminism contentious, the study explores an inevitable network of Islamic culture and feminism at play in Pakistan for being not only an Islamic but also a Third World country truncated in its postcolonial history. To further problematize this issue of how these overlapping projects continue to engage and collide in the recent debates on culture, Islam, and women's rights in which the scope and nature of post coloniality, I will interpret Lila abuLughud's philosophy of cultural difference building upon women discourses of R. Seodo Herr, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty in terms of the ideology of colonialism

and third world and fight against it for sociopolitical and cultural freedom a crucial element of Pakistani feminism especially of women's representation and conflicts of individual autonomy through a reconceptualization of Aurat March in the context of Islam and culture in Pakistan.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Khushbakht and Sultana in their recent study "The Women Activism in Pakistan: An Analysis of 'Aurat March,'" have extensively discussed the situation of women's activism in Pakistan with a detailed analysis of Aurat March. By utilizing discourse analyses as a methodology, they argue that the recent feminism movement has failed because of its inclination towards westernization while overlooking the real issues concerning women in Pakistan. According to the researchers, Aurat March has not considered religious, cultural and legal boundaries and promoted western culture and lifestyle through 'bogus' placards and posters. Additionally, the slogans were not reflective of the collective and individual life issues of women in Pakistan. The authors concluded that "Feminism is a presented tool of the improvement of women's status is nothing but a mere fantasy created by the elite class for their own specific purposes. It convinced many women by showing them a picture of liberated women. Unfortunately, it leads them to be a woman without a man, a confused, strong but alone woman. It misleads them and took them back into the centuries" (Khushbakt & Sultana, 2020, p.66). The article raised a critical point by highlighting that religion and culture have not been considered. They strongly opposed borrowing western policies and traditions of feminism. They suggested modifications in placards and slogans and eliminating any borrowed ideas from the western ideology.

On the contrary, Sabeer Lodhi' does not perceive religion and culture as a source of women emancipation and empowerment. Criticizing the placards in Aurat March, Sabir Lodhi (2019) explicates that "[i]t is unnecessary to create the "shocker effect" by using controversial, albeit sassy and courageous, placards since ensuring and the fight for equality is not a revolution but a process." Tuba Umair Shamsi (2019) argues that "the actual fight for the rights of women deprived seems to have been forgotten. Suddenly, all this seems to be reduced to a catfight, where each party is just looking for an excuse to put the other down". The authors sum up the research by saying that before making any policies or following foreign strategies, it is integral that Islamic values and tradition are not ignored, and boundaries are not crossed and they end their research with a suggestion to modify the policies, aspirations and plans to make the movement in accordance with religious and cultural values which is definitely very important for a country like Pakistan. "This marginalized group of 'Aurat March must realize that getting recognition through ridiculous ideas is not a success or development. If they are really concerned about women's rights and status, they would definitely have to modify their policies, aspirations, and plans in accordance with our religious and country values" (Khushbakht and Sultana, 2020, p.67)

More comprehensive research on the interpretation of slogans has been conducted by Ali et al. (2020). Their research analyzes the language used in the slogans that, according to them, represents an anti-Islamic perspective. The

research findings demonstrate that the main focus of the study was on the Islamic perspective about women's rights and status and hence supports the Islamic ideology. They accentuate that Aurat March has a hidden agenda of destroying Islamic values and the family system in the country. Although the research critically evaluated the linguistic choices of slogans, it has very biased and illogical arguments; for instance, it is assumed from the analyses of slogans (Mujhy Kia MalomTmare Mozay Kahan Hain?) that women are demanding freedom from the duties of home and husband which is a very bogus assumption. Another analysis of the slogan (My Body Is Not Your Battleground) has been interpreted by the researchers as harming women's modesty and morality because she denies the right of a husband to wife. The researcher has interpreted another slogan (Rebellious Women will Change the Society) as a rebellion towards Islamic ideology or challenging the values of Islam, which is again not true. The article also used ayahs from the Quran to justify the argument. It is quoted from Surah Buqrah; "Women are your fields, sow (raise generation) in them as you desire," (Chapter1, verse 223) but not the complete verse has been quoted, but only half of it which does not provide complete meaning as the whole verse have a background verse as well as following verse that clarifies its actual meaning which is about the do and don'ts of a marital relationship. The researchers also mocked the slogan about husbands warming their meals, considered it a liberal approach, and forgot to consider our Prophet PBUH's life, which is an example for all Muslims. He did all his chores by himself despite having several wives; he preferred to do it himself. The research concludes that vulgar language in the slogan is an open violation of the Islamic perspective, but it failed to prove it with any authentic references.

The aforementioned studies have highlighted the current situation of feminism in Pakistan and controversial issues related to Aurat March. A review of the related research highlighted two major issues in Aurat March: inappropriate language in the procession and the demands/March not aligning with Islamic ideology and culture. However, previous studies lack adding Islamic feminism and its discourse to the discussion. The present study aims to look at Aurat March with reference to Islamic Feminism with the nuances of culture, and Islam, which is entirely different from western ideology

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Indigenous culture, language, and tradition has never found adequate attention and respect in the eyes of the West. Western feminists are usually inclined towards a complete and totalizing identity. They keep their own culture and customs as a standard to evaluate the rest of the world (Mishra, 2013, p.131). Western Feminisms attempted to impose European model feminism on all women. They ignored the blind spots of culture and the concept of 'double colonization' that is a critical issue in colonized societies (Sirri, 2021). Lila Abu-Lughod, while talking about the idea of what feminism is, accentuates that [W]e needs to develop . . . a serious appreciation of differences among women in the world—as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires (Abu-Lughod, 2002 p. 783). She asserts “Instead of political and historical explanations, experts were being asked to give religio cultural ones, instead of

questions that might lead to the exploration of global interconnections, we were offered ones that worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres—recreating an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 784).

Lila Abu-Lughod in her work "Do Muslim Women Need Saving?" deconstructed the western ideas about Muslim women. Her criticism lies upon the perception of the West about the sufferings of Muslim women. According to her, many pulp nonfiction books narrate tragic stories of women in third-world countries and project Muslim women as victims of 'patriarchal' oppressive and misogynistic culture. Lughod fights back this perception through intimate and true stories of women in their real lives. She dismantles the notion women's suffering is due to religion or culture. She adds that women's suffering is due to global inequality and oppressive military and state regimes. Moreover, instead of calling for 'moral crusades' to 'save Muslim women' out of a sense of superiority, one should carefully analyze their own situation and recognize common humanity (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Lughod quotes while talking about veil as oppression that “This was a selective concern about the plight of Egyptian women that focused on the veil as a sign of oppression but gave no support to women's education and was professed loudly by the same Englishman, Lord Cromer, who opposed women's suffrage back home” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 784).

Do Muslim Women Need Saving? is a question that has become a paradigm to critique western philosophy about Muslim women. Lughod argues that the West intervened in the Orient to save them just as they did in Iraq and Afghanistan. She accentuates that there are many other ways of saving, emancipation, and liberation rather than just a 'western way.' Such intervention has a very negative effect on Muslim women in the East. Western scholars tend to speak on behalf of Muslim women and their often-negative narrative and portrayal of Muslim women is because of their narrow perception of Islam. Lughod opines that we need to address those meanings that have been attached to Islam and Islamic culture. For instance, the West measures women's freedom through her body and clothes, a woman in modest clothing and covered properly is often assumed as less free. According to many Western feminists, a veiled woman is seen as 'lacking agency'. Thus, it is inferred from her veiling that she has no choice over body and life, which is false. Moreover, discussing the matter of clothing and generalizing it as oppression shows the lack of diversity in perception of the West.

Lughod states that western scholars refuse to accept that other worldviews and cultures are different from the perception of the West regarding culture, which is a problematic attitude. It is imperative to acknowledge that Muslim women want equality and emancipation that is Islamic and fulfill Islamic living standards and align with Islamic values that might conflict with the western form of liberation. In another work, Lughod fights back the Western portrayal of Muslim women as backward and oppressive and points the finger back at the West by reminding them of their hypocrisy. She Quoted Osama bin Laden, "You are a nation that exploits women like consumer products or advertising tools, calling upon customers to purchase them... You then rant that you support

the liberation of women". AbuLughod further adds that the Quran gave women the right to vote 1400 years ago, whereas American women only received that right within the last century (Abu-Lughod, 2006).

Kimberle Crenshaw in *Race, Gender and Sexual Harassment* (1991) elucidates that woman of color experience racism differently than experienced by men of colour; similarly, sexism is experienced in another way that is not parallel to white women. Therefore, a kind of feminism that western feminism is trying to impose in the postcolonial society and women is not appropriate to them as it fails to address the sensitive peculiarities of the culture. Lemmerich too underscores the same point of view by drawing upon Gayatri Spivak's view given in *Can the Subaltern Speak*, she counters the Western feminists' assumption of speaking on behalf of all women. She believes that neither universalism nor a representation of all women can be achieved through western feminism since the interest of Western feminists does not align with the needs of third-world women (Lemmerich, 2010). Transnational feminists have challenged the idea of Western feminists regarding third world women that all women are the same as this idea did not consider race, class, religion, citizenship and culture and hence problematic. Abu Lagoud states that a Islamic feminists elucidates that Islam always believes in the empowerment of women and favors their rights. Albeit, other factors like lack of authentic knowledge of Islamic teachings and the amalgamation of traditions and cultural norms from other religions oppress women and make their lives miserable.

### ***The Problematics of Aurat March in Pakistan***

#### ***The Dynamics of Culture: Dilemma of Post coloniality, third world and Pakistani Women***

Pakistan, a Third World Islamic country, has always shown rigidity and repulsion towards feminism and its goals. It has been considered a dirty word for a long time and viewed as a western construct manifested in Islamic culture to destroy its values and ethics. Despite its dislikeness towards feminism and its goals, the feminists in Pakistan were not the silent observer of the movements happening in the world to fight patriarchy. Since independence, women in Pakistan have been active in their pursuit of equal rights. They remained the strong advocate of the Muslim Personal Law of Sharia 1948 and protested against Hudood Ordinance 1979; their struggle is laudable (Akhtar et al., 2021; Tarar et. al., 2020). Era of Zia's dictatorship depicts Pakistani women's resistance and resilience. They fought for their rights despite all constraints.

However, it must also be noted that why a third World Muslim countries like Pakistan are particularly pointed out for its crimes and ratios of incidents related to women. As Abu-Lughod pointed out that the West is more aligned towards looking for incidents related to women in third world countries. She talks about the cultural framing and proposes that such "cultural framing, it seemed to me, prevented the serious exploration of the roots and nature of human suffering in this part of the world, instead of political and historical explanations, experts were being asked to give religio cultural ones, instead of questions that might lead to the exploration of global interconnections, we were offered ones that

worked to artificially divide the world into separate spheres—recreating an imaginative geography of West versus East, us versus Muslims” (Lughud, 2002, p. 784).

Feminism is a political movement that advocates the equality and rights of women in all spheres of life in Pakistan. It is difficult to identify the difference between women's rights and feminism as they overlap each other. However, women that were part of either of these movements' fight for the shared goal and agenda which is women's equal rights, gender-based discrimination, reproductive rights, etc and all these falls under the umbrella of human rights accentuates that the “women's movement would include all those seeking to bring about more gender-equal rights and greater autonomy for women within the operative structures of state and society. Feminists see the essential problem as that of patriarchy as a system .... manifest in the structures of both state and society” (shaheed, 2010, p.2). One thing is sure that there is no one type of feminism but many. Furthermore, another misleading thought is that feminism is a western phenomenon (Ahmed, 2009). This misconception happens because the works of writers of the nineteenth and twentieth-century euro-centric world got all the limelight. Hence, the work of indigenous feminists from other parts of the world got ignored. It is a fact that western feminism had a lot of impact on the globe, but parallel feminist movements were also emerging in various parts of the world. For example, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Egyptian feminism paralleled U.S. and U.K. activities, although their sphere of activity and concerns differed (Ahmed, 2009).

Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminists on their universalizing and homogenizing women's issues without considering the sensitivities of culture, race, gender, imperialism, and furthermore believe that their texts represent all women of the world. Mohanty deconstructs western politics in her work, she argues that, in the process of colonialism just as men reduced women to the other which she called double colonization, so the white women had constructed the Third World women as the other to herself (Tolan, 2006, p. 334). According to Edward Said in his work *Orientalism*, the discourse of the West defined the Muslim and the Oriental as “irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"” thus incapable of representing himself or governing himself (Said, 2003, p.41). The western discourse turned Islam into an outsider against which the whole of European civilization from the Middle Ages was founded on. Even the issue of Muslim's identity is still in crisis as Barlas argues that:

Although most Muslims live in a state of apartheid in Europe, we are all inhabitants of ...‘intertwined worlds’..... As I see it, without respect for religious and political autonomy and diversity, secular democracy will have no promise in Muslim countries regardless of how many bridges are built across divides. After all, bridges are meant to enable travel in opposite directions and, without this possibility and mutuality, I feel some bridges are better left uncrossed” (Barlas, 2013, p. 423).

Thereby creating a question of cultural identity and difference. Mohanty (1991) also endorses the same point in her influential article *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, she critiques Western feminism

and considers it 'ethnocentric' she states that Western feminism does not consider "the unique experiences of women residing in postcolonial nations" (Mohanty, 1991, p.53). she criticizes Western feminism opinion regarding all women as a homogeneous group without having any sense of difference pertaining to race, class, and circumstance" (Mohanty, 1991, p.59).

The cultural heritage of the Muslims is radically different from western culture as Muslims refer to the Quran and Sunnah for every matter of life and anything that is against it is deemed unacceptable but because of its cultural history in the subcontinent reflects upon the lives of the people. As Asma Barlas argues that As many recent studies reveal, women's status and roles in Muslim societies, as well as patriarchal structures and gender relationships, are a function of multiple factors, most of which have nothing to do with religion. The history of Western civilization should tell us that there is nothing innately Islamic about misogyny, inequality, or patriarchy. And yet, all three often are justified by Muslim states and clerics in the name of Islam (Barlas, 2019, p.2).

Therefore, the feminism that would appeal to Muslim women and society must be different from western feminism and must be in accordance with Islamic believes and values. Western women are fighting for legal and social rights that were already granted to Muslim women in the 7<sup>th</sup> century; therefore, Muslim women's struggle in this movement is quite different (Ahmed, 2009). The feminism that Muslim women need must be an indigenous form of feminism that is embedded in the Islamic faith rather than the one espoused by western women, which does not align with the problems and goals of Muslim women because Muslim women take Islam very seriously, it is a vital part of their identity. It is important to understand that the problems of third-world countries are different from the rest of the world. Seodu Herr in her work *Reclaiming Third World Feminism* talks about transnational feminism. She argues that Third-world feminism and transnational feminism separately deals with women's rights or feminism in the Third World, however, both kinds emerged as resistance towards western or second-wave feminism which opines that all women face similar oppression because of their gender. Race, class, imperialism and colonialism and other cultural contexts were ignored by them (Herr, 2014).

Mohanty in her work *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003) explains the difference between 'feminism without borders and 'borderless feminism', she argues that border-less feminism recognizes the lines of differences, conflicts and fears that borders have. It also accepts "that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real-and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division" (Mohanty, 2003, p.36). Establishing the significance of cultural difference and religious distinctions involving gender differences and inequalities, Marnia Lazreg (1988) argues on the same grounds, she states that the feminist discourse on Middle East and North Africa often considers religion as the cause of gender inequality and made a reason of underdevelopment in many of modernization theory. She adds that the feminist discourse on women from Middle East and North Africa is actually the personal

interpretation of theologians in Islam and has no factual grounds. Such interpretations have been created to deprive women of “self-presence, of-being” (Lazreg, 1988, p.87).

Pakistan being a third world country has her own sociopolitical and cultural dynamics. While talking about western feminists' representation of postcolonial women and their rights, Sara Suleri accentuates in her critical essay "Women Skin Deep" that it is not the voice of postcolonial women that western feminists heard but their own; the use of 'postcolonial women' is to assert their own rights rather than third-world women. She argues that postcolonial women in western feminists; critique never rise above the status of an object. She further adds that gender and race are historically interwoven and they are inseparable (Suleri, 1992, p. 758). Therefore, the feminism that would appeal to Muslim women and society must be different from Western feminism and must be in accordance with Islamic beliefs and values. Margot Badran has contributed a lot in the field of cultural feminism, Islamic feminism. In her article *Islamic Feminism: What's in a Name?* (2002), she discusses the contradiction between secular feminism and Islamic feminism in detail. She argues that these two –isms are different because of their strategies and ideologies. Islamic feminism, according to her, is entirely based on the Islamic paradigm. She deeply studies the feminist movement in Egypt (Badran, 2013; Ullah, 2020). She asserts that “Islamic feminism explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Qur’anic notion of equality of all insan (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life. It rejects the notion of a public/private dichotomy (by the way, absent in early Islamic jurisprudence or fiqh) conceptualising a holistic umma in which Qur’anic ideals are operative in all space” (Badran, 2006 ,p.9-15).

Like religion, culture also holds an essential place in people's lives, and it is as much a part of life as religion is. This amalgamation has somehow blurred the difference between culture and religion. Some traditions are practiced so much that they are considered part of religion which creates confusion and misunderstandings. Comparing Third World feminism and transnational feminism in the context of colonialism, Herr argues that both “share important similarities, such as the rejection of false universalism presupposed by white feminism and an emphasis on Third World women’s complex and intersecting oppressions and multiple forms of resistance. (R. S. Herr, 2014, p. 2). The problem arises because of the lack of knowledge of Islam and the Quran, many practices and traditions even go against the teachings of Islam but they are part of the culture. People without investigating and studying their religion attach them with the religion. We need to understand that Pakistan has diverse cultures and ethnicities, and it is imperative to look at its historical and political context. Although the end of colonial rule brought many challenges and one of them was reclaiming old identities. Bhabha (1996, p.57) argues that a new kind of hybrid identity emerged because of interwoven elements of the colonizer and colonization, which challenges the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity. According to Barlas,

an argument can be made that the persistence of many anti-women traditions in Muslim societies is a legacy not only of a flawed Scriptural exegesis, but also



of latter-day encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim/Western civilizations (Barlas, 2001, p.124).

Third-world feminism emerged as a consequence of colonialism. Therefore, unlike western feminism, they firmly conflated gender with issues of cultural identity and colonial subjugation (Khan, 2011, p. 1074). Pakistan's national and cultural identity is based on its religion 'Islam.' it is the focal point of all other cultural-related values and norms. Hence, anything that comes from external force and does not resonate with its culture will not be appreciated. If Aurat March is to become the change required here, its cultural values, and political situation must be considered. It must resonate in a way that it becomes acceptable.

### ***The Clash Between Islamic Ideology and Western Ideology of Women's Rights***

There is a continuous clash between Islamic ideology and western ideology of women's rights and freedom. Al-Faruqi (2005) argues that many of the aims of Western feminism do not resonate with other cultures as it is uneven, distorted and if Western feminism is promoted in Islamic culture, it will face severe vilification and will not be accepted by Muslim women in particular and Islamic society as a whole (Al-Faruqi, 2005). Feminism is not a new thing in the Muslim world; it has had its association from the beginning of 19 century. In the 1890s, Egypt was an influential proponent of feminism in the Muslim world. Because of that movement, Muslim men and women both used arguments to bring reforms in the repressive practices imposed in the name of religion. Later on, feminism changed into a more secular nationalism that advocated rights for all Egyptians, either Muslim or non-Muslim in an independent nation. Heba Roaaf Ezzat (2001) argues that Muslim women joined the Islamic feminism movement not to return to subservient and secluded roles but to find their social presence and political activism. It is a deviation from western modernity and keeps steadfast with Islamic faith and beliefs (Tohidi and Bayes, 2001). Abdullahi An-Naim while talking about two different types of discourse of women's rights i.e secular and Islamic contemplates that it is vital to engage religion for a social change. He believes that the advocates of women's rights must take religious discourse seriously and should enlighten themselves with Islamic concepts and techniques so they can have the necessary competence to challenge the traditional Islamists (An-Na'im, 1995). For example, discussing the tradition of veil in Islam Abu-Lughud propounds:

It is common popular knowledge that the ultimate sign of the oppression of Afghan women under the Taliban- and-the-terrorists is that they were forced to wear the burqa... We need to be more sensible about the clothing of "women of cover, and so there is perhaps a need to make some basic points about veiling, First, it should be recalled that the Taliban did not invent the burqa, It was the local form of covering that Pashtun women in one region wore when they went out and worn as a convention for symbolizing women's modesty or respectability. The burqa, like some other forms of "cover" has, in many settings, marked the symbolic separation of men's and women's spheres, as part

of the general association of women with family and home, not with public space where strangers mingled. (Abu-Lughud, 2002, p.785)

It has been observed that the Aurat March movement faced severe backlash over the language that has been used in placards/posters. They possess the authority of a lost empire to provoke anger, action, and aggression into a passive and indolent subject to obey the command of the master, as Badran expounds:

History attests that feminism is the creation of both easterners and westerners, of Muslims and those of other religions, of the colonized and colonizers, and of women of different races and ethnicities. Those who claim that feminism is 'western' and 'white' do not know their history and perpetuate the circulation of myths. Until today feminism remains in many ways a prisoner of colonialism (Badran, 2008, p.25).

The reason can be understood by drawing a comparison in Jawad's view that the rationale behind such an approach is, as we have explained, to re-visit the traditional legalistic commentaries to re-address gender inequity. In other words, they are principally concerned with the exoteric aspect of the Law (Shariah). But while these efforts are commendable, they tend to be oblivious to the other important aspect of Islamic tradition: that is, its spiritual dimension which has, historically speaking, favored women and allowed the pursuit of feminine activities. This is crucial if one has to present a balanced approach to women's rights in Islam. Without taking into account the spiritual dimension of the tradition, the misrepresentations of the image of Muslim women can hardly be corrected (Jawad, 2003, p. 108).

It is argued that language used by the participants of Aurat March does not align with Pakistani/ Islamic culture and has hurt the sentiments of many people. It has been perceived that many posters and demands were borrowed from the West. Mohanty argues that the west has created a dichotomy between West and the third world and has identified them with labels. She quotes "Third World women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as religious (read: not progressive), family-oriented (read: traditional), legally unsophisticated (read: they are still not conscious of their rights), illiterate (read: ignorant), domestic (read: backward), and sometimes revolutionary (read: their country is in a state of war; they must fight!). This is how the "Third World difference" is produced" (Mohanty, 2003, p. 40). For instance, "My body, My Choice" (Mera Jism, Meri Marzi) faced much hostile response and is considered a notion from the West. Amina Yaqin postulates that the March has initiated a new wave of feminism in Pakistan that demands structural changes and 'inclusivity in a gendered struggle against misogyny. She further adds that the objections that are raised over dress and language are actually diverting the attention from the real cause of sexual violence against women (Yaqin, 2021). One of the problems of Aurat March's problematic of recognition and culture is concerned with:

Nation-states and nationalism. I believe that such lapses considerably undermine the transnational feminist claim that it represents Third World

women's interests, as nation-states and nationalism have crucial relevance for Third World women's activism. (Herr, 2014, p.3)

Similarly, Pakistani society does not seem prepared for the discussion on sexual rights and body autonomy. As Mohanty asserts that the identity of women are constituted through a multifaceted interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks, such concepts cannot be assumed universally applicable as the homogenization of class, race and religion in the third world can create a false sense of the "commonality of oppressions, interests, and struggles between and among women globally. Beyond sisterhood there is still racism, colonialism, and imperialism (Mohanty, 2003, p.36). It is considered taboo to talk about such matters, and when they are represented on placards and particularly in a provocative way, they stimulate much opprobrium and become highly controversial. The blame was again on the western agenda as the debates on sexuality and agency are very common in their society. Similarly, some placards were also reflective on demanding body agency by asking for reproductive rights like " Woman is not baby producing machine" (Aurat Bacha paida krny ki machine Nahihai), from which it is inferred that many women have understood the importance of autonomy and looking for reproductive rights, which is very common in western society undoubtedly, the signs that were used in the protest offer tantalizing debate on the significant issues in Pakistani feminism, however, the reception of these placards were very severe. Fatima Mernissi extensively studied the early Islamic period, the Quran and the ahadith to understand the root cause of the indifferent and misogynistic attitude towards women. She also analyzed the referred texts such as 'al-Tabari, IbnHisham, Ibn Sa'), collections of Al-Bukhari and Al- Nasa'i. She wanted to clarify the misconceptions that are part of Islamic history to elucidate further that they are not part of Islam or the Quran. She looks for the evidence from the lives of shahbiyat and found that "women's rights are a problem for some modern Muslim men [not] because of the Koran nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of the male elite" (Mernissi, 1999, p.).

### ***Lack of Engaging Government***

Since the independence of Pakistan, different Laws have been made to protect the rights of women and minorities but their implementation has been limited to none. Some of them are discussed below; Few laws were also stressed upon by the proponents of Aurat March in their Manifesto.

### ***The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006***

It deals with matters like kidnapping, abducting or inducing, or compelling women to act against their will. It also includes laws for rape, prostitution, Zina, etc.

### ***The Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010***

This allows the victim to file a complaint against the alleged harasser. It is to be implemented on all provincial and federal levels. Manifesto also demands safe

and dignified workplaces by strict implementation of the ‘Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010’ (Manifesto, 2020)

***The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2011***

It disallows numerous cruel and discriminatory customs practiced towards women in Pakistan.

***Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929-***

This act restrains child marriages and applies to all citizens regardless of caste, race, culture, etc. Aurat March manifesto 2020 demands to amend this act and raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 which is 16 for females and 18 for males as per Act 1929. The government has not amended this act yet.

***Christian Divorce Act 1869***

This law requires the allegation of adultery as a ground for divorce. Manifesto considers very narrow grounds for dissolution of marriage to violate and damage the dignity of Christians, especially Christian women, due to the social and cultural implications ascribed to the accusations of adultery.

***Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019***

In manifesto of Aurat March, demand has been made for the implementation of existing laws such as which protects women from any sort of physical or mental abuse in the domestic workplace as well as safeguard their several other rights like wages, holidays, medical, etc.

Despite all these measures, laws, policies, and practices fail to address women's issues and provide justice. The implementation of these laws is limited to none. The Human rights commission has reported in Pakistan that at least 11 rape cases are being reported every day in Pakistan; however, only 77% of the accused have been convicted, which is 0.3 % of the total figure (**Human rights commission report, 2020**). It must be considered that only half of the cases are being reported; the rest are not reported because of the honor and reputation of the family. There is a problematic condition of the state as the state does not interfere in domestic matters that give rise to violence against women. Neither does it help women in their financial troubles.

**SUGGESTIONS, CONCLUSION, NEW PATHWAYS**

Aurat March as a movement also became controversial because of its lack of engagement with Islam in Pakistan. A country where people's sentiments are highly attached to religion. It is crucial to involve religion so the message that one wants to convey can be reached to a targeted audience. The lack of engagement received severe backlash from religious parties and scholars and hence called it an anti-Islamic movement. However, nothing was going against Islamic values as Islam itself empowers women and emphasizes giving rights

but not bringing religion in the discourse has somehow disabled its ability to resonate with the majority of its audience.

The backlash happened because of inaccurate propaganda and lack of awareness and has no significant and factual value. Some arguments were raised as; Allah and the Quran have already given women in Pakistan their rights, and there is no need for the protest. Many feminists answered back as the Quran has given equality to both men and women; however, the practice of equality between both genders has been hijacked by patriarchy over the centuries by misinterpreting Quran verses and using it for the subjugation of women. Few Islamic feminists came up with the translation and interpretation (Tafseer) of the Quran with their perspectives and knowledge, giving it a new understanding that is not hijacked by patriarchy. In her work, Wudud discusses how patriarchal beliefs have impacted the true spirit of Islam and women. Wadud believes that the Quran is neutral towards patriarchy (Wadud, 1999, 219), whereas, Barlas argues that the Quran is 'anti-Patriarchal' (Barlas, 2019, p.2). Sirri deduced it from the fact that the Quran rejects the 'patriarchal image of God' as a father/Male and that there is no mention of sex or gender inequalities (Sirri, 2020, p.54). Hassan contemplates that to save Pakistan and all other Muslim countries from the extremists (religious or anti-religious), it is imperative to bring an educated group of people who believes that it is possible to build a justice-centered society while remaining in the ethical framework of the Quran, which is the Magna Carta of Human rights (Hassan, 1982). As Said rationalizes that the modern world is discordant with Islam is due to the gradual disappearance of the extraordinary tradition of Islamic *ijtihad* has been one of the major cultural disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have simply dropped out of sight. Orthodoxy and dogma rule instead (2003, xxii).

In this perspective, engaging Islamic feminism will be beneficial for a country like Pakistan, where people's sentiments are attached to religion. Margot Badran asserts that engaging Islamic feminism will extend the parameters of knowledge and allow broadening and refining of new analytical and conceptual vocabulary (Badran, 2008, p. 34). Western feminism presents Islam as a reason behind the miserable condition of Muslim women, it also argues that even though patriarchy cannot be reduced to religion, it is equally valid that Islam cannot be de-genderized into a neutral observer of gender relations and operates as a colonial rule. As Barlas argues that Western colonialism, which came, it said, to liberate us from our cultural and religious heritage, actually occasioned the re entrenchment of many practices and symbols (notably, the veil) which Muslims came to see as markers of their identities, hence differences from the West (Barlas, 2001, p.124).

The problematic condition of feminism does not lie in Pakistan only but is all pervasive in the west. She further adds that the inequality among genders is a global problem and not a religion-directed plan. Hassan's (1991) work "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," also elucidates similar views, she argues that Muslim women have been assumed lesser beings by Western society and by Muslim men. She argues against the three theological assumptions that women are inferior to men; the creation of woman from man, the fall from

paradise because of woman, and third, the primary creation of Allah is a man. According to her, these three theological assumptions are not in the Quran but a misinterpretation of the Quranic text. Two of them are Judeo-Christian concepts and made part of Ahadith that Muslims believe are in the Quran. She gave several references from Quran to justify her arguments on the equality of men and women in Islam (Hassan, 2019). In this context, it will be more beneficial if Aurat March posters/slogans/language are carefully monitored and take into account the complicated cultural dynamics of the country; it is imperative to understand that feminism is not against men and giving equal rights to one gender does not take away the rights from the other gender. Mahmood asserts "feminism is not designed to undermine men" and there is "a dire need to discover a mutual ground for both genders, rather than playing a tug-of-war from a distance" (Mahmood, 2018).

No doubt, the Aurat March has served to amplify the voices of women and minorities in Pakistan. The feminist movement in Pakistan still has a long way to go as the fundamental rights of women and minorities are not met yet, let alone the crucial matters like equal job opportunities, inheritance, and political representation (Akhtar et al, 2021, p.148). This recent evolution of feminism has started to bring out new discourse on feminism in Pakistan. It will bring about new challenges, new trends that might cause a cultural dialogue in society and at the international level.

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