

FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This current study investigates feminist movement and women empowerment in Pakistan through an analysis of 200 respondent aged 18 to 35 years, with diverse educational backgrounds through structured questionnaire. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was run to identify the key factors influencing these perceptions, including the importance of equal opportunities, urban-rural disparities, and the roles of feminism and women's rights organizations. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.633, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p = 0.0005$), confirming the data's suitability for factor analysis. Moreover, "Intersectionality" Theory was applied in context of women empowerment and feminist movement. The findings reveal a prevalent recognition of gender disparities, with respondents acknowledging the under-representation of women, wage disparities between urban and rural areas, and the impact of patriarchal structures on women's opportunities. Additionally, there is widespread support for feminism as instrumental in promoting women empowerment, some respondents view feminism as a Western import.

Moreover, the study highlights the perceived importance of education in addressing gender inequalities and the positive role of women's organizations in implementing legislation. Key findings indicate a strong consensus on the need for equal opportunities and significant recognition of geographical and societal differences in empowerment needs. However, limitations include potential sampling bias and reliance on self-reported data, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Further research is recommended to explore these factors in more diverse and longitudinal contexts.

Keywords: Feminist Movement (FM), Women Empowerment (WE), and Intersectionality Theory, Pakistan

Origin of Feminism in Pakistan

Pakistan became sovereign country in 1947 (Farooqui, 2016), with the independence Pakistan was declared as Islamic Republic. In Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Women and minorities were promised to be given equal rights in society. Women enjoyed almost equal rights and political freedom in the light of First Muslim Shariat Law (Seriez, 2017). Pakistani women enjoyed some amount of freedom right after independence due to the hard work of Mohtarma Fatimah Jinnah and Begum Liaquat Ali Khan who struggled to make a platform for women to listen to their demands, and needs.

Feminist Leaders

Mohtarma Fatimah Jinnah was considered true women rights fighter because she was leading many women right movements before and after independence of Pakistan. She was not only symbol of strength among women but also female feminist leader of Pakistan. Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah's initiative before independence includes All India Muslim Women Students Federation organization in 1941. After independence she was a binding force behind the formation of Women's Relief Committee (Sultana).

Another influential personality is Begum Liaquat Ali Khan. Her major work for women includes the establishment of All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA) in 1949. It focuses on social and moral status of women in Pakistani society (PAKNGOs, APWA). Today APWA is working in all provinces of Pakistan. It has completed more than 400 projects. APWA mainly

works in education and, health sector to empower women of Pakistan. It has played very positive role in changing the condition of women in different locations of Pakistan.

Different Regimes and Women Empowerment

Every government focused on creating a healthy and efficient environment for women in Pakistani society. In 1979 President Zia-ul-Haq's initiative towards 'Islamization' of the country such as Hudood Laws in 1979, and other laws such as Law of evidence, law of Qisas, and law of Diyat focused on cases related to rape, and adultery etc (Khan, 2010). These initiatives made feminists angry because few laws such as in case of rape claim four eye-witnesses were required to accept the allegations valid (Ovais, 2014).

Hudood ordinance and law of evidence resulted in insecurity among women because women felt that they are being discriminated and believe that these laws are giving more power to men. As a result, women protesters arose in resistance to these laws. In the same context, Women's Action Forum was formed in 1981, which did successful protests against Law of Evidence and Hudood Ordinance. Scholars through their writings tried their best to support public movements, and to encourage them for their freedom struggle.

The movements continued and the focus on women empowerment vacillated under different political regimes. In both tenures of prime-minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996) a great focus was given to women related legislations, NGOs were given right and say in women empowerment related activities. Many initiatives were taken such as establishment of Women's study centre in different cities (Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore etc), Land ownership, women bank (First Women Bank Limited) in Karachi etc. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was considered an inspirational icon among women (Nizamani, 2023).

Efforts towards women empowerment faced a lot of highs and lows varying according to the political leader as prime minister Nawaz Sharif's first tenure the process of women empowerment seemed slow as compared to Mohtarma Benazir tenure. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif government introduced women related projects such as Women development programs, women empowerment program and health programs. Government despite all these efforts did not succeed in providing safe and adequate environment to women against abuses. General Pervez Musharraf (2000 -2007) tenure was very fruitful for women as he focused more on women participation in politics, sports, and media. Different Criminal laws were introduced in 2004, and women seats were increased in assemblies (Ikram, Kiran, 2022). For giving women proper skills for their empowerment, he introduced IT programs in the light of National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women. He also reserved 33% women seats in local government and 17% seats in national and provincial assembly to increase their political participation (Desk, 2021). Women economic and social empowerment was focus of General Pervez Musharraf era.

Schools and origin of Feminism in Pakistan

Origin of Feminism in Pakistan can be traced back to the time of independence. Since then two schools of feminism exist in Pakistan. One is Secular Feminism and other is Islamic Feminism. Both schools have different ideologies and both are somehow rigid at their stances (Serez, 2017). Secular feminist challenge the dominant position of men and want to implement all western values such no specific dress code, no discrimination in Halal and Haram relationships etc, by overriding the teachings of Islam such as pardah, right of men and women. Whereas, Islamic feminism promotes the Quranic values, they aim to fight for the legal rights of women which Islam guarantees through its verses (Hebert, 1998). Different concepts associated with Islam are misinterpreted by the society. Such as women suppression and women control by men are two main concepts often practiced in rural areas more than in urban areas? These

misleading concepts allow secular school to manipulate the situation and attract more people toward western values in the name of freedom.

In Pakistani society women can be categorized into three classes such as elite class, middle class, and lower class. Each of these classes faces different types of problems, which later define their association with specific type of feminist group (Cheema, 2012).

The segregation between women classes continues to get deeper with time because both the schools bent upon delegitimizing the ideology, and actions of the other. This is being done in an effort to acquire more solid ground for one's own representation and to attract a larger section of society.

Evolution of Feminism in Pakistan

The concept of Feminism in Pakistan is as old as country itself is. The Feminism has evolved throughout all these seven and half decades of independence, it can be divided into three waves starting from 1947 to 1970s, second wave 1980s to 1990s, third waves 1990s to 2000s also covering the current contemporary feminism (Batool, 2020). In first wave feminist demanded welfare reforms, in second wave feminist struggled against Hudood ordinance, in third wave they demanded the power to NGOs such as capacity building, more funding, building partnership, and other criminal laws reforms (Saigol, 2016).

Secular feminism grew more from protests against Hudood ordinance because Hudood ordinance was believed as rigid and promoter of male dominance. So, women protested against Hudood ordinance by seeking help from secular feminist organizations. Secular feminist fought against male dominance in the Pakistani society. Islamic feminism also claims that Islam is not a supporter of patriarchal society as rights and duties for both men and women are properly defined in Islam (Ahmad, 2022). So, Islamic feminism wants to reinterpret the misleading concepts of Islamic teaching that contradict with true essence of Islam.

Finally, 2000 onward the contemporary feminism presented as Aurat March, which talk about all type of discrimination women deal with. Since 2017 every year on eight March an annual socio-political demonstration in the form of 'Aurat March' takes place in which women, men, and transgender participate and share their views. They voice their concerns and demands through print, electronic and social media with the help of slogans, posters and interviews, which are highly, criticized by many politicians, mullahs, and media persons across the provinces of Pakistan because they believe that their demands contradict with religion and their slogans spread vulgarity in the society (Saigol, 2019).

Aurat march has become a platform and a form of expression through which all genders especially women share their demands and experiences with media. Every time Aurat March takes place, it faces a lot of criticism due to the slogans it share and use. In contrast, Haaya march also takes place on same day as Aurat march. In Haya March women march in Abaya and put forward their demands that are legitimate and according to the principles of Islam such as basic right to property etc. and lies within the domain of Islam.

Organizations are important for grass root level implementation of the legislation because they are more connected to the people by living and working closely to them. Here are few international and national organizations, there working is discussed below. International organization helps in setting the deadlines for improvement of condition of women.

Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

Pakistan is an active member of Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) since 1996. It has adopted different measures for the security and improvement of women's status in social, political and economic sector (HRW, 1999). Pakistan submits progress reports at-least every four years. So far Pakistan has submitted five reports to CEDAW (MOHR). First submission was done in 2007 and it was a combined document of

initial, second and third periodic reports, that covered the time period from 1997 to 2004 (MOHR, 2003). Fourth periodic report covered the period from 2005 to 2009 (MOHR, 2011). Fifth report covered the progress made from 2013 to 2017 (MOHR, 2018).

After becoming the member of CEDAW, Pakistan adopted different strategies to fulfill its commitments with CEDAW. It mainly focused on education sector, labor reforms and social status of women. Almost every regime tried to focus on the women empowerment but due to lack of proper implementation the results were never as successful as expected.

Pakistan launched many projects after becoming a member of CEDAW. Many policies and reforms were introduced in the light of following projects: National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women (2002) specifically focusing on Violence against Women (VAW). Monitoring committees under Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) at all levels for successful implementation of policies and Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP) etc (Mahmood, 2007). Women Safety Application which was launched in 2019 to provide instant protection to women travelling for any purpose. Many other initiatives including amendments in laws such as DNA test was made compulsory in rape cases. Pakistan has tried its best to fulfill its commitment with CEDAW through new legislations such as labor and maternity laws, and Amendments in old legislation such as Rape laws amendment etc.

National Commission on Status of Women

National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW) was established in 2000. The main focus of this organization is to review, examine new and old policies, laws, programs and projects initiated for empowerment and protection of women. Along with the review and examination, it also keeps an eye on the status of implementation of the policies. It helps the government to fulfill the international commitments along with observing the progress inside the state. It also acts as a delegate to represent Pakistan at the international forums such as CEDAW conferences, and in Commission on Status of Women (CSW) sessions (NCSW).

NCSW projects have been initially successful compared to other organizations. As a result it gains nationwide support. NCSW can produce more women related legislation with successful implementation if it gains the support of ruling party. Women parliamentarians also often support NCSW projects and policies if they believe them to be good for the future of Pakistani women.

The progress of the NCSW has been almost zero because no one has been selected to chair NCSW after last chairperson Khawar Mumtaz who retired in 2019. Due to no chairperson the all process including coordination between provinces, advising about legislation and response on women related abuses etc, has been slow. This lack of attention toward selecting new chairperson for NCSW clearly shows the irresponsible behavior of recent governments towards women empowerment.

Conclusion

The working of organization in Pakistan did not meet the demands because the organizations are not given much power to play part in the legislation. The organizations have been working to give enough services to public which they are capable of providing. The membership of CEDAW has been very beneficial as Pakistan is always working to meet the requirements set by CEDAW. The outcome of the organization can be improved further by giving them more roles in legislation and by providing the government support.

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