




Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan

Exploring the Fourth Wave



Dr. Rubina Saigol
Nida Usman Chaudhary

Dr. Rubina Saigol
Nida Usman Chaudhary

Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan

Exploring the Fourth Wave

December 2020

Imprint

© 2020 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES),
Pakistan Office
1st Floor, 66-W, Junaid Plaza, Jinnah Avenue,
Blue Area, P.O Box 1289, Islamabad, Pakistan

Responsible:

Dr. Jochen Hippler | Country Director
Sidra Saeed | Program Coordinator

Phone: +92 51 2803391-4

Fax: +92 51 2803395

Website: <http://www.fes-pakistan.org>

Facebook: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Pakistan

Twitter: @FES_PAK

To order publication:

info@fes-pakistan.org

Commercial use of all media published by the
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted
without the written consent of the FES.

Cover photo copyright: Dr. Jochen Hippler
ISBN: 978-969-9675-27-0

Contents

List of Abbreviations	i
Executive Summary	v
1. Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan.....	1
Exploring the Fourth Wave	1
2. Historical Shifts in Feminist Practice	3
3. Fourth Wave Feminism and New Horizons	7
4. Intersectionality, contradictions, and ambiguities	15
4.1 Methodology.....	16
4.2 Is Aurat March a feminist movement?	17
4.3 Relationship with NGOs.....	18
4.4 Relationship with political parties.....	21
4.5 Inter-generational Relationships and Divisions	22
4.6 Religious and Sexual Minorities.....	25
4.7 Class Divide and Aurat March.....	28
5. Agenda of Socio-economic and Political Transformation.....	31
5.1 Economic Justice	31
5.2 Environmental Justice	32
5.3 State, Violence, Accountability and Judicial Systems	33
5.4 Reclaiming Public Spaces	34
5.5 Reproductive Justice	35
5.6 Rights of Religious Minorities.....	35
5.7 War and Militarization	36
6. Strategies for Social Transformation	39
7. The Backlash: patriarchy strikes back	45
Way Forward	53
Bibliography.....	55
Appendix A – Quantitative Data.....	57
Appendix B – Aurat March Manifesto 2020	64
Appendix C – Aurat Azadi March Charter of Demands.....	72
Appendix D – Organization Profiles	78

List of Abbreviations

APWA	All-Pakistan Women's Association
AWP	Awami Worker's Party
DRF	Digital Rights Foundation
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
JUI-F	Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-sexual and Queer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PML(N)	Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf
UN	United Nations
WAF	Women's Action Forum
WDF	Women Democratic Front
WEF	World Economic Forum

Foreword

“Feminism” and “feminist activists” are some of the most controversial terms in in Pakistan.

Feminism is the belief in full social, economic, and political equality for women, while feminist activism refers to movements which aim to define, establish, and defend the rights of women. This involves the pursuit of equal political, economic, and social rights, alongside equal opportunity.

The latest wave of feminists in Pakistan comes from all walks of life. It is different from previous waves of feminism as the new activists are trying not just to demand equal rights, but also to challenge the private spheres of lives where patriarchy prevails. Due to the use of social media platforms, these feminists are quick in spreading their messages, but they still need to engage with the mainstream media effectively. Also, they need to understand the importance of engaging with the state as that is where political power resides.

Women rights are human rights. If we want to have a country with democratic values, then women need to be engaged at all levels of decision-making positions. They need to be given equal opportunities to practice their best potential of making a difference in the society. For this, patriarchy must be dismantled to achieve freedom from oppression in a true sense. The current, fourth wave of Pakistani feminism is a quite new phenomenon, and is not just attacked from conservative circles but also criticised by many traditional feminists. However, it deserves serious analysis and public discussion.

FES hopes that this paper will provide a first step in this direction, and food for thought. We wish that it might contribute to a further development and strengthening of the feminist discourse in Pakistan.

Dr. Jochen Hippler
Country Director,
FES Pakistan

Sidra Saeed
Programme Coordinator,
FES-Pakistan

Executive Summary

Since 2018 a new wave of feminism has swept across Pakistan consisting mainly of a younger generation of women and other genders. The new, contemporary iteration of feminism departs in significant ways from the earlier articulations of activism from the 1950s to the 1990s which were focused on challenging the public, socio-legal sphere, that is, the state. The current fourth wave however, marked a tectonic shift in the feminist landscape in Pakistan and inaugurated an entirely new phase in feminist struggles by challenging and deconstructing the hallowed private sphere of the family, community, and society. The marginalized ideas of non-binary persons, non-reproductive and alternative sexual expression were mainstreamed. By reclaiming public spaces and inserting the personal into the heart of the political, the new wave feminists at once dissolved the false dichotomies of the public/private, productive/reproductive, and personal/political spheres.

Nevertheless, contradictions, ambiguities and submerged conflicts exist between and among groups. There is tension between religious feminists and members of the LGBTQ community which feels excluded, undermined and unrecognized by the former. Other tensions and ambiguities revolve around professional, NGO-based identities and a technical, rather than a political, approach to feminism unencumbered by donor-agendas. Ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions are also discernible across the divides of class, generation, and location, whether rural or urban.

The fourth wave feminists made extensive use of social media and digital platforms for greater mobilization and outreach resulting in two successive very successful diverse and inclusive marches across Pakistan. However, several challenges remain vis a vis its sustainability and growth as a movement. Firstly, since Aurat March rightly refuses to accept government, corporate or donor funding, there is a need to ensure that basic necessary funds are available from personal resources.

Secondly, to become a movement in the true sense of the term, Aurat March needs to graduate from an annual event to a continuous struggle for social change. This would mean ongoing cooperation and mutual interaction among participants, organizers, and platforms across cities and provinces, and engaging with the tensions, differences, and disagreements along the dimensions of class, religion, sect, sexual orientation, and organizational affiliation.

Another issue is that Aurat March needs to engage with the media because it was partly the biased and selective reporting of the media focusing only on

the sexual and body autonomy and ignoring the economic and political issues raised at the march, that is said to have led to the venomous backlash that the marchers received. The training of media personnel is therefore, a major requirement and the movement needs to address the issue urgently.

Lastly, even though the new movement reflects an understanding of the sexual, religious, gender and class differences more deeply than observed in the past, and while the Charter of Demands and the Manifesto do address issues of law, accountability and justice, a critical engagement with the state as a site of patriarchal oppression is not visible in the Aurat March praxis. This neglect separates the personal from the political even though one of the main ideas propounded by the marchers is that the personal is ultimately the political.

1. Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan

Exploring the Fourth Wave

Since 2018 Pakistan has witnessed a major shift in the feminist landscape which marks a significant departure from previous articulations of feminist theory and practice. On 8th March 2018, 'Aurat March' inaugurated a new phase in activism that seeks to radically transform the social, economic, political and cultural milieu in which patriarchy is lived and practiced. On International Women's Day every year, thousands of women, men and transgender people of different ages, belonging to varying ethnic, religious, class, sectarian and regional groups, march in several cities and have taken the country by storm.

'Aurat' is the Urdu word for woman hence, 'Aurat March' literally translates to 'Women's March'. It is an annual public demonstration held in various cities across Pakistan, including most prominently at Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, Multan, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Quetta, Mardan and Faisalabad, to mark the international women's day with the objective of demanding an end to patriarchal structures that result in sexual, economic, and structural exploitation of women or of those that identify as female and/or as other gender and sexual minorities (Appendix B).

No single entity or organization can be credited for convening the annual street demonstration. In Lahore and Karachi, it was initially organized under the 'Hum Aurtein' (We, the Women) banner however, over time Aurat March Lahore and Aurat March Karachi have evolved into loose collectives of their own, in their own right and now issue statements and pursue their activism under the 'Aurat March' title. Nevertheless, since 2018, there has been a deliberate and conscious effort on part of Aurat March to avoid any reference or linkage to any corporate, non-governmental or political party and for people to march for rights in their own autonomous capacity as feminists, as women and as other genders and sexual minorities.

However, in other parts of the country, including in Islamabad, Mardan, and Quetta, it is organized as 'Aurat Azadi March' (Women's Freedom March) by Women Democratic Front (WDF) which is a leftist-socialist organization. Another umbrella feminist collective, Women's Action Forum (WAF) as well as representatives from multiple women's rights organizations, activists, lawyers, domestic workers, students, women from informal sectors and members of civil society, are also closely involved in organizing the march each year across

Pakistan including in Lahore, Multan, Hyderabad and Sukkur. The collective endeavor to convene the public demonstration also found endorsement from Lady Health Workers Association which has a membership of about 90,000 women from across the country.¹

Aurat March is part of a movement towards collective action and consciousness building for a socially just and equitable society. They march, amongst other things, for social, economic, gender and climate justice, built around the theme of empowerment, sisterhood, and solidarity through which they seek to reconstruct the narrative on violence against women's bodies and call for more accountability and support for women who face gender based violence at home, in public spaces, at workplaces and at the hands of security forces. In order to maintain their autonomy, they strictly follow a 'no funding' and 'no association' policy with any corporations, non-profits or political parties. They seek to ensure intersectional politics that view gender in relation to various oppressive and unjust structures and aim for their struggle to eradicate brutal and inhuman economic and social systems that suppress all, including men, by imposing gender roles that censure feminine men, masculine women and transgender people alike (Appendix B).

In this way, the International Women's Day in Pakistan is changed forever; gone are the tepid government and ritualized non-government functions and ceremonies which used to mark the day. The energy, excitement, vigor and resolve evident in the celebrations over the last few years have surprised feminists themselves, let alone a shocked public, an indignant patriarchy and angry conservatives. Predictably, the backlash has been swift, fierce and violent. So long as women's protests for their rights remained within the bounds of bourgeois respectability, society and state tolerated them in a patronizing way. Aurat March tore through the fabric of restrictive and suffocating respectability by demanding an overhaul of the fundamental structures that oppress and subjugate women and marginalized sexualities, in both the public and private spheres. It is in the latter area that the new wave of feminism reflects a tectonic shift from the earlier iterations of feminist politics which were reluctant to intervene in the hallowed private sphere.

1. Alia Chughtai, Pakistani Women Hold 'Aurat March' for Equality, Gender Justice, Al Jazeera, 8th March, 2019.

2. Historical Shifts in Feminist Practice

The pre-partition mobilization of women in the public sphere remained within the ambit of religious political movements such as the Khilafat movement, and later the movement for national liberation provided a space for women to transgress the boundaries of home and domesticity, and participate in the freedom struggles.² In both cases, however, women did not venture beyond the borders marking respectability and middle class moral norms of proper behavior.³ The educational reforms of the period were also justified on nationalist and religious grounds rather than in terms of women's rights.⁴ Political demands for reserved seats and voting rights were met with disapprobation from conservatives, but voting rights were granted for strategic reasons in that women's votes were required to serve nationalist agendas. The religious and nationalist struggles legitimized the emergence of women from the home into the street as these causes were fundamentally patriarchal, and therefore women's participation did not defy or violate the sanctity of the home and family.

Feminist activism soon after the emergence of Pakistan as an independent state remained confined within the bounds of bourgeois respectability. The focus of the women leaders, who hailed from the ruling families of the time, was on welfare and development issues such as the rehabilitation of refugees, education, health and income generation activities for poor women.⁵ These projects were acceptable for conservative patriarchies of the time as they reinforced the idea of women as nurturers who are well placed to help their less fortunate sisters. Apart from welfare activities, the focus at that time was on legal reform to enable women to have some basic rights within the family.⁶ However, these reforms were limited and did not challenge the family as the mainstay of patriarchy, and as the structure designed to control and regulate sexuality.

So long as the emphasis was on welfare and social issues - such as dowry, child marriage, polygamy and purdah – women advocates at the time did not face severe backlash. To be sure, there were accusations of adherence to a western agenda, and disapproval of the shunning of purdah by the elite class advocates of women's advancement who were subjected to invective by the religious

2. Mumtaz, Khawar & Farida Shaheed, *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* pp. 43-48.

3. Ibid, p. 41.

4. Khan, Ayesha, *Rhetoric and Reform: Feminism among Indian Muslims, 1900-1940*, pp. 44-45.

5. Rubina Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies*, p. 10.

6. Ibid, p. 11.

lobby. In so far as the agendas were seen in terms of the 'uplift and betterment' of the women lot, the backlash was not intense and remained mainly confined to the religious clerics. During this period, women's rights advocates worked in cooperation and collaboration with the state and the relationship was one of mutual accommodation.⁷

The feminist activism spearheaded by the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in the decade of the 1980s was far more confrontational and challenged the state's attempts to reconstitute and reorder social, economic and political structures in line with a facile ideology of Islamization articulated by a regime in search of legitimacy. Feminist activists, mainly belonging to the WAF umbrella group, lobbied for an end to discriminatory laws and measures against women. Since the early 1990s WAF activists fought relentlessly for a secular ethos in the interest of justice and equality.⁸ They were opposed by retrogressive religious patriarchies comprising both men and women at every step. Nonetheless, the struggle for a democratic and secular state by WAF resisted all attempts at silencing, suppressing and forcing women into compliance by a merciless state.⁹

However, WAF's activism remained focused on the state and the public sphere. Despite a strong feminist consciousness, WAF did not openly challenge the private sphere where the rebellious and potentially dangerous body of woman is controlled, sexuality strictly regulated, and patriarchy perpetually produced and reproduced.¹⁰ The main reasons for a lack of focus on the private sphere - with its insidious agenda of hiding, concealing, denying and controlling women's bodies and sexuality, include the quick pace with which the state was enacting discriminatory laws which were necessary to resist, and the presence in WAF of a large number of conservative and traditional women who did not want to question the sanctity of the family. Women rely extensively on family support for sustenance and security in the absence of state structures, therefore the patriarchal bargain requires subservience in the domestic sphere in return for support and security.¹¹

Sindhiani Tehreek likewise focused on the public sphere of politics and economics. The main demands of Sindhiani revolved around the return of democracy and maximum provincial autonomy based on the principles of federalism.¹² Patriarchy

7. Ibid, p. 10

8. Afiya Zia, Faith and Feminism in Pakistan, Religious Agency Or Secular Autonomy?

9. Ayesha Khan, The Women's Movement in Pakistan, Activism, Islam and Democracy.

10. Rubina Saigol, Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan, op.cit. p. 41.

11. Ayesha Jalal, The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State in Pakistan, pp.77-114.

12. Khan, Nighat Said & Rubina Saigol, Sindhiani Tehreek: Rural Women's Movement in Sindh; in Nighat Said Khan (ed) Up Against the State: military rule and women's resistance, pp. 192-208.

was challenged in terms of a focus on violence against women in the name of honor and its manifestation in regressive religious practices, but the body and sexuality- as produced by a masculine and statist discourse- remained a jealously guarded sacred terrain that was not to be touched. As a rural women's movement, Sindhiani was not in a position to challenge the mainstay of local and powerful patriarchies.

While WAF and Sindhiani Tehreek mark the second wave of feminism which confronted and challenged the state, the third wave constitutes a diffuse array of practices which some activists do not consider a part of the feminist movement, mainly on account of donor-driven practices and technical instead of political agendas. The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s may not have constituted a movement in the narrow sense of the term, nevertheless a great deal of activist and academic work was produced during this period. In a sense, this period may be regarded as a period of theory and reflection in that the funding available enabled a vast amount of feminist literature to be produced and disseminated, concurrently with a relative decline in street activism. One major reason for this resides in the fact that a democratic ethos had been ushered in creating the absence of a visible dictator against whom resistance was to be mounted.

Each manifestation of shifts in women's activism and feminist articulation was a product of its time in that it was a response to the global and national events which restructured state and society in significant ways.¹³ Although dictatorship returned to Pakistan in 1999 it was seen as benign and its claim that it represented 'enlightened moderation' protected it against the kind of open challenge and contestation faced by the earlier dictatorship based on religious nationalism. The third wave saw the promulgation of a number of pro-women laws, advocated by women activists working in non-governmental organizations, while collaborating with governments eager to please international donors. The return of democracy in 2008, with the relatively progressive Pakistan People's Party (PPP) at the helm of affairs, saw important legislation passed in favor of women, for example, the provincial Child Marriage Restraint Acts and Domestic Violence Acts. The trend continued but became less visible during the more conservative tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz (PML N).

In the third wave, the relationship between the state and women's rights advocates continued to be one of collaboration, cooperation and mutual accommodation. It was once again only in the public sphere that legal interventions were made towards the greater political empowerment of women. The private sphere of the home and family - the central location of the sexual, reproductive and

13. Rubina Saigol, *Feminism and the Women's Movement*, op.cit. 40.

transgressive body - was left untouched. While the Pakistani state empowered itself to intervene in the private sphere to discipline and control women's bodies and sexuality by a recourse to Zina laws, it relied on the right of family privacy to refrain from any intervention to protect women against violence and sexual abuse in the home.

All kinds of sexual abuse, violence and the curtailment of personal freedoms of women were justified by invoking the sanctity of the home and family. The notion of the heteronormative family as the only legitimate form necessary for the reproduction of the nation, was sanctified and given state protection. Punishment was reserved for those who transgressed the sacred boundaries of an institution designed to be the mainstay of patriarchy. Whether it was through the Qisas and Diyat law which protected male kin who murdered women in the name of 'honor', or through the Zina Ordinance under which the punishment for adultery was death by stoning, the state and society colluded against all those, especially women, who violated the moral norms and conventions of traditional patriarchies operating all the way from the family to the state and society.

3. Fourth Wave Feminism and New Horizons

The State, societal and family regulation of sexuality, conceived in only reproductive terms, served to create the docile and subservient bodies, otherwise suffused with dangerous desire that could potentially break through the patriarchal heterosexual fortress, thereby unleashing moral chaos. Any independent expression of sexuality, especially female sexuality, evoked fear, and the threat of annihilation of an order constructed upon strict compliance with established codes of morality. It was against this social and moral order that the new fourth wave of feminism rose in revolt. Subverting the restrictive norms of repressed desire, fourth wave feminism dissolved the boundaries of the public and private, the political and personal by challenging the core values of a system premised upon the suppression of conscious and unconscious collective desire.

Breaking from feminisms of the past, Aurat March introduced 'a critical juncture for feminist struggles around bodily rights and sexual autonomy'.¹⁴ A large number of placards that mocked real life situations were deemed inappropriate and vulgar by a conservative society and media unprepared for sexual rights and body autonomy asserted openly and unapologetically. The slogan that became the most contentious and caused heated controversies across the country was *Mera Jism, Meri Marzi* (My Body, My Right). For centuries women have been perceived as the private property of their male kin with no rights or autonomy over their bodies, choices or decisions. The open and unabashed assertion that their bodies belong to themselves and no other person has any right to dictate how they should feel, think, desire, act, sit, stand, walk or laugh, 'challenged the status quo and put patriarchal authority thresholds to doubt'.¹⁵ The control over the female body and sexuality, on which rests the entire edifice of patriarchy, was beginning to shake and crumble.

The secret of suffocating bodily control and sexual domination that women have known for generations was laid bare by a young group of vibrant and defiant feminists. They were saying what their grandmothers could not dare to think and their mothers could not dare to speak. The silence imposed upon previous generations of feminists was finally broken in ways that could not be imagined before. Feminists belonging to previous eras were well-aware that it is in control over the body and sexuality that patriarchy is produced and reproduced through the normalized heterosexual family. The gender division of labor is not natural but a social construction and social constructs function according to the way

14. Zoya Rehman, *Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies: Articulating a history of Sexuality in Pakistan*.

15. Neelam Hussain, *Aurat March and its Discontents*. The News on Sunday, 24 March, 2019.

in which power operates in society.¹⁶ The patriarchal state has its authoritarian counterparts in the family who exercise control over the members' behavior, choices and freedoms in the interest of maintaining, organizing and arranging social domination. Challenging and overthrowing this domination, exercised through the patriarch residing in every home, is the ultimate feminist political act. Hence, the personal is political.¹⁷

What is happening in hundreds of thousands of homes and families is not a personal issue because it affects many. The curbs on women's freedom of speech (don't talk too much or too loud), movement (don't go out into public spaces) and body (don't sit with your legs open wide, don't walk that way) reflect the minute regulation of women's sexualized bodies and violate many of their fundamental rights. One placard that evoked a severe conservative reaction said: *lo baith gai, theek se* (behold, I am sitting properly) carried by a woman sitting with her legs wide open instead of legs crossed which is considered 'proper' and 'decent'. The refusal to surrender personal and sexual autonomy to the state-protected private, reproductive sphere, distinguishes the new feminism from previous articulations in important ways. While earlier feminisms of varying hues remained focused on the public and politico-legal sphere, fourth wave feminism seeks to dismantle the false public-private binary constructed by patriarchy to organize production and reproduction in separate spheres.

On the one hand, the new feminists reject the traditional norms of the private sphere, on the other they seek to reclaim their spaces in the public one. In 2015, Sadia Khatri started *Girls at Dhabas* 'to encourage women to occupy public spaces that society has excluded them from – parks, streets, and most importantly, dhabas, cheap roadside joints that serve Pakistan's best chai'.¹⁸ Defying the constant strictures against venturing into public spaces and subjecting themselves to the intrusive male gaze, *Girls at Dhabas* enjoyed sitting and chatting at the joints and were encouraged to share photographs of themselves - 'selfies with chipped teacups, blurry pictures of cricket games, lazy snaps at the neighborhood park.'¹⁹ Khatri imagines the future of *Girls at Dhabas* as an 'eternal online archive of photographs and narratives celebrating *awaragardi* – the delightful word that means wandering around, untied.'²⁰ The subversive overturning and reclaiming of a pejorative word reflects the hallmark of new feminism in Pakistan.

16. Babar Sattar, *In the name of honour*, The News, 16 March, 2019.

17. Rubina Saigol, *Marching to their own beat: The past, present and future of feminist activism in Pakistan*, The Herald, April 2019, pp. 26-29.

18. Dur e Aziz Amna, *Good Woman Bad Woman*.

19. *ibid*

20. *ibid*

Girls at Dhabas received a tremendous response from women around the country. The media coverage was unprecedented, while the critics predictably frowned upon it 'declaring that such activities – women hanging out without purpose in public – was not part of Pakistani culture'.²¹ Khatri raises a relevant issue when she asks, 'what is our culture then, and who is part of it?' She challenges those who take it upon themselves to define our culture and promptly go on to become the its guardians, by asking the question: 'I wonder how an entire society has decided that it is normal for one half of its population to be terrified into constant purdah from the other half?'²² Khatri, an organizer of the Aurat March, insists upon the 'right to unapologetically exist in public' and expresses her joy that on the day of the march this demand was met for a whole day and women could be 'loud and boisterous outside, occupying a public space that they felt welcome in'.²³ This symbolic dissolving of the gendered and false public-private dichotomy is an act of feminist resistance that challenges the very foundations of patriarchy.

Apart from seeking bodily autonomy and reclaiming public spaces, the young new feminists also contested the gendered division of labor which lies at the heart of the patriarchal project. Expressed through curt, punchy one-liners the marchers subverted the division of labor which makes women responsible for all reproductive labor: warm your own food, warm your own bed, how should I know where your sock is, were some of the slogans carried by marchers. These slogans evoked indignant criticism from detractors and joyful peals of laughter from supporters who know only too well how women are expected to nurture and serve grown, but infantile, men in the home and family. Neelam Hussain writes that 'authority takes itself seriously and does not respond well to laughter. And that is the reason why Aurat March slogans were met with howls of outrage, anger and accusations of vulgarity, immodesty'.²⁴

Answering the question why many of the slogans that voice women's demands for respect, safety, agency and autonomy evoked a hysterical reaction, Neelam Hussain explains:

The answer lies in the shift from the broad outlines of larger public issues to their detailing as experienced and expressed publicly and privately in the daily routines of life. It lies in the irreverent tone of voice; in the appropriation and subversion of gender-based stereotypes and cliches that naturalize male

21. *ibid*

22. *ibid*

23. *ibid*

24. Neelam Hussain, Aurat march and its discontents, The News on Sunday, 24 March 2019.

dominance and routinize violence against women. It lies in women's use of satire and humor, aphorisms, inversions, role reversals that challenge power-based privileges. Not only did Aurat March foreground the personal as political, it challenged patriarchal authority thresholds by turning language on its head, and joked and laughed while doing so.²⁵

As Hussain rightly points out, slogans such as *Apna khana khud garam karo*, (warm up your own dinner) and *mujhe kiya maloom tumhara mauza kahan hai* (how should I know where is your sock) are not about warming up food and lost socks but about 'male privilege and entitlement that take the woman's services for granted and see her compliance as moral imperative.'²⁶ These punchy slogans challenge the patriarchal division of labor in a light-hearted manner, and point to the routine way in which women are expected to perform the 'labor of love' and take care of adult men as though they were children. The private/reproductive sphere requires women's unpaid labor wherein patriarchy supports the low wages that capital imposes on workers. If men were to pay for the child rearing and household services that women perform for free, they would need much higher wages. Hence women are consistently reminded that serving men and maintaining households is their religious and moral duty. Capitalism relies on the public/private and productive/reproductive division of labor which is the linchpin of patriarchy. Feminists in the Aurat March, therefore, challenged not only patriarchy but political, economic, and religious structures which intersect with and maintain patriarchal controls over women and labor.

The labor required for the perpetuation of both patriarchy and capitalism is often extracted through violence. Newspapers for years have published news reports such as the husband who killed his wife for serving a cold dinner (incidentally this happened even as the march was in progress), and the father who beat his twelve-year old daughter to death for not making a 'gol roti' (round bread eaten as a staple in most homes) and then justified his action by saying that any father would do that. Hundreds of incidents of women's nose, lips or ears being cut off for adding too much salt to the dinner, serving it late, not keeping a child quiet, or failing to have his clothes ready for the day ready before he leaves for work, have been recorded over the years by the media and women's organizations. While the Aurat March slogans may have been a source of amusement for onlookers, women are all too familiar with violence unleashed over the smallest pretext to uphold the division of labor. What conceals the violence deeply embedded in the extraction of household labor is the facile

25. *ibid*

26. *ibid*

and deceptive notion of 'ghar ki malika', (Queen of the Home), an idea clearly designed to define a woman's unpaid services as power.

Commenting on placards that rejected the patriarchal and gendered division of labor, Tooba Syed writes that the most objectionable signs were those that

Challenged social relations inside the private sphere: the unequal domestic division of work and other exploitations of women's labor. These messages have pushed the feminist movement to think critically about the unpaid care-work and social reproduction central to our economic and social system, especially the capitalist patriarchy...Women's loud, unapologetic refusal to allow their bodies to be treated as reproductive vessels threatens not only patriarchy but the state, which relies on the reproductive labor to provide the nation with its 'valiant soldiers' and 'willing daughters'. This powerful attempt to reclaim control over bodily autonomy is being termed as a rebellion against 'cultural norms'.²⁷

Continuing with her reflections on cultural norms, Syed asks an extremely relevant question: but who constructed them to begin with? This question underlines the fact that 'cultural norms' are not natural or primordial, but historical and constructed. Norms, values and beliefs are constructed by those in power, and usually applied on everyone, especially on those who have less power. Patriarchy, with its attendant norms and prescriptions is likewise a social-historical construction with a basis in the economic and political relations of power. To answer Tooba Syed's important question about who creates and disseminates the ideas that suppress women and subordinate classes, it is instructive to turn to the work of Zoya Rehman who explores the history of sexuality in the context of Pakistan.²⁸

Rehman argues that Aurat March 'marks an important moment in the trajectory of feminist resistance in the country, in which battles are now being fought for a new kind of feminist praxis that breaks the silence around issues of sexual autonomy and agency'. The violent reaction to the Aurat March raises important questions regarding the historical construction of sexuality in the Pakistani context. Drawing upon previous work on the subject, Rehman outlines how the image of Pakistani womanhood has been carefully constructed by the state since the inception of the country and locates this construction in

27. Tooba Syed, A Rising Movement, Dawn, 18 March 2019.

28. Zoya Rehman, Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies, Articulating a History of Sexuality in Pakistan, 26 July 2019.

Pakistan's colonial past. She explains that gender roles, as markers of Pakistan's conservative Islamic culture, are imagined today in relation to colonial politics and the resistance to it.

Rehman refers to the work of Shahnaz Rouse who argued that the fact that Pakistan was conceived on the basis of religion shaped existing 'Muslim' sexualities significantly in the light of the pivotal role of Islam in the independence movement. As Rehman writes:

Sexuality came to occupy a key position within state discourse, albeit covertly, and was influenced with particular regard for the institution of the family as per the dictates of Islamic customary practices. Therefore, sexuality was largely defined as being quintessential to the construction of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, just as long as it was of the productive and familial kind. [Emphasis mine]²⁹

This 'naturalization of heterosexuality' and the concomitant denial, devaluation of alternative expressions of sexuality is not just a colonial process, as it requires 'complicity on the part of postcolonial nation-states that shape productive sexualities to be their very basis'.³⁰ This foundation, argues Rehman, is then reified through the ongoing process of the sexualization of particular bodies by designating which sexuality is appropriate and acceptable, and which is not. Drawing upon the work of Rouse, the writer asserts that it is important to look at sexual discourses as being discourses of colonial power.³¹ This helps understand how sexualities came to be articulated and transformed in post-colonial Pakistan. Rehman elaborates that

The colonization process shaped the role of the family in a regressive, heteropatriarchal and classed manner...This shaped heterosexual relations significantly in the subcontinent vis-à-vis the sexual division of labor. The idea of a distinctly Pakistani Muslim womanhood...was shaped significantly in the postcolonial period, as women became central to the construction and sustenance of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and subsequently became a homogenized symbol of national 'Muslim' honor and identity.³²

29. Zoya Rehman, *Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies*, op.cit

30. *ibid*

31. *ibid*

32. *ibid*

The notion of the quintessentially good Muslim Pakistani woman effectively erased the diversity of alternative sexualities and other gendered experiences. The good versus bad woman dichotomy was weaponized in respectability politics.³³ This naturalized hetero-patriarchy in the construction of the monolithic national body wedded to Islam. Rehman argues that productive sexual relations became essential to ensure the prosperity of the upper and middle class nuclear families over other, 'non-productive' gendered individuals and, at the same time, working class sexualities and 'other' sexualities were rendered deviant and unsafe in public spaces.³⁴ The laws introduced by the British imperial government around modesty, indecency and sodomy in the subcontinent, as a part of the moralizing mission, to control 'deviant' sexualities of indigenous populations, imposed social controls over more fluid forms of sexuality thus producing a "coloniality of gender".³⁵

Colonial ethnographers classified and categorized populations along the axes of ethnicity, gender, religion and sexuality.³⁶ This helped maintain hierarchies for the allocation of power and resources, and ultimately led to the formation of vote banks once representative systems of governance were introduced. Eventually, Pakistani men replaced the colonial rulers and the 'lesser' genders, along with alternative sexualities, now became subservient to the new local colonial order.³⁷ Colonial rule privileged heterosexual men over non-binary individuals, women and others, thus erasing non-masculinist voices and silencing 'other' experiences. The interests of all the 'others' were subsumed within the broader interests of the construction of the masculine Pakistani citizen. It is this gendering and sexualizing of Pakistani bodies through a tightly controlled state discourse, that is now being punctured and interrupted by Aurat March activists who constitute the sub-altern in the dominant structure of power.

The Aurat March activists debunked the notion of the blissful heterosexual/reproductive marriage by holding up the slogan 'divorced and happy' showing three women smiling joyfully under the banner. Predictably, this slogan provoked much opprobrium in a society where a woman, not constrained within the bounds of suffocating patriarchy, is a pariah to be shunned. Young and vibrant Aurat Marchers dissolved the public/private divide, injected the personal into the heart of the political, reclaimed public spaces, challenged the gendered

33. Rubina Saigol, Syed Ahmed Khan and Dipty Nazeer Ahmad: The Construction of Muslim Womanhood: Syed Ahmad Khan and Dipty Nazeer Ahmad, in *The Pakistan Project: A feminist perspective on nation and identity*, pp. 47-75.

34. Zoya Rehman, *Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies*, op.cit.

35. Ibid

36. Rubina Saigol, *Strangers in the House*, *The Herald*, May 2013, pp. 49-53.

37. Zoya Rehman, *Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies*, op.cit

division of labor authored and authorized by patriarchy, and interrogated the monolithic and heteronormative view of sexuality. The marchers invoked and upheld the multiplicity of sexuality, giving equal importance to non-productive sexuality and non-binary people. This multiplicity is deeply intertwined with the intersectionality evident in Aurat March ideology and practice.

4. Intersectionality, contradictions, and ambiguities

The new fourth wave feminism in Pakistan reflects a complex understanding of intersectionality. The liberal feminist idea that women constitute a homogenized, oppressed group in relation to men, also seen as a monolithic group, has long been subjected to scrutiny. In a far more nuanced approach - mainly reflected in the work of socialist, Marxist and Black feminists - there is an attempt to grapple with the notion of multiple identities. It is now widely understood that women do not comprise an abstract category that exists outside of social, economic and political differences and inequalities. Beyond being women, they belong to a class, race, religion, sect, ethnicity, nation and country.

Differences of power and access to resources arise from differential locations of class, race, ethnicity or religion. As men also differ by class, race, religion or ethnic group, the struggle for equality is complicated as some women occupy a relatively powerful position compared to men of a subordinate class. The liberal feminist notion of 'all women being equal to all men' overlooks the fact that every society is layered and unequal because of divisions based on the markers of social differentiation. In the liberal feminist position, only formal equality (equality before law) can be achieved while substantive equality, based on equal access to public resources, remains a distant dream.

While post-modern and post-structuralist feminists celebrate diversity and difference, they fail to underline the essential inequalities that difference comes to signify. Marxist and socialist feminists, who understand how the dynamics of social class operate in capitalist societies and states, underline the importance of challenging all kinds of inequalities since latter day capitalism partakes of social difference in its pursuit of profit. Their analysis yields a complex and nuanced understanding of society and, consequently, a far more fruitful approach towards social transformation and feminist politics.

As the feminist Manifesto and Charter of Demands, discussed in the subsequent section reveals, fourth wave feminism in Pakistan is much more attuned to difference, diversity and the importance of inclusion than previous articulations of feminism in Pakistan. Aurat March protests and demonstrations included peasant women, home-based workers, teachers, lady health workers, nurses, factory laborers, artists, academics, writers, poets and performing artists, transgender persons, and people belonging to the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual and Queer) community.

The participants belonged to different cities, provinces, religions, ethnic and age groups. The remarkable diversity, along with unconditional acceptance and inclusion of every person as an equal fellow-traveler in the struggle, was never seen before. And there were no leaders and followers for each person was equally a leader and follower; older and younger, Christian and Muslim, home-based worker and teacher all danced, sang and marched together with no evidence of a judgmental attitude against anyone. Supportive men and boys walked along, remaining behind, and cheering the marchers. The level of participation and its diversity was unprecedented in Pakistan. International Women's Day in 2019 and 2020 was a day of the true reclamation of public space by women, non-binary persons and people belonging to minority religions.

The new movement is clearly more intersectional than any before it, nonetheless subtle underlying contradictions, conflicts, ambiguities, and tensions characterize the activism in different cities. There are also internal differences within the younger/feminist circles. Aurat March in each city operates independently and there are tensions within the organizers in different cities. A few of the tensions arise from professional identities, in particular the association of some activists with non-governmental organizations, while other differences are undergirded by intersections of class, generation, religion or sexual orientation.

4.1 Methodology

For the study of intersectionality, interviews of sixteen young activists and organizers, located in different cities, were carried out to explore the tensions and contradictions that were perceptible in some cases. They were asked questions about the dimensions of class, religion, sexual orientation, generational differences, and the non-governmental association of some activists. These interviews were done through the Internet between November 10th and 17th, 2020.

To gain the perspectives of the older generation of activists, interviews of five members of Women Action Forum in different cities were conducted through email to explore how they perceive the new wave of young feminists in relation to the same axes of difference. The interviews of WAF activists were conducted between November 16th and 28th, 2020. In the interests of confidentiality, the names of those wished to remain anonymous were withheld.

The responses were collated to get a picture of how the older and younger activists understand the intersectional and other issues of fourth wave feminism. The discussion that follows is based on the above-mentioned interviews.

4.2 Is Aurat March a feminist movement?

There is debate on whether Aurat March and Aurat Azadi March constitute consolidated movements or represent a collection of different organizations that come together for shared goals and activities. Majority of those interviewed believe that while there are differences between and among various organizations that together comprise Aurat March, it is still collective work and they come together on various issues and on Women's Day. However, they acknowledge that there are different schools of thought represented by the organizations but find that these differences are understandable and that 'it is natural and that is how it should be'. As Elaine Alam says

I think Aurat March works for a plethora of issues and does not strictly adhere to a linear school of feminism. Other organizations work for different causes, or endorse different schools of feminist thought. However, these organizations/entities overlap in a lot of the causes they work for i.e. sexual violence etc.³⁸

There is a view that Aurat March does not constitute a movement and is, instead, an activity. Nighat Said Khan, a WAF Lahore member, believes that coming together once a year to celebrate is commendable, but a movement requires sustained and continuous engagement round the year.³⁹ Aurat March consists of many organizations such as Bolo Bhi, , DRF, WAF, WDF, Hum Aurain, Feminist Collective and several others who come together on International Women's Day for the activities, but for the rest of year these feminists are focused on the specific agendas of their organizations.

Acknowledging these differences, a Karachi-based WAF and Bolo Bhi activist, Farieha Aziz, reflects

I think it is more a case of them coming together on specific issues and a joint show of solidarity at the marches but around the year different organisations and individuals associated with the march formally (in organizing committees) or informally as attendees, have different methods and thinking on issues, which sometimes converge but also diverge.⁴⁰

This view is shared by WAF Lahore and Shirkat Gah member Gulnar Tabassum, who has worked extensively with young feminists to mobilize them. As she says

38. Interview with Elaine Alam, November 2020.

39. Nighat Said Khan, Zoom Interview, 28 November, 2020.

40. Farieha Aziz Interview, 16 November, 2020.

In my view, all these recently emerging feminist/women groups share a common goal of women's empowerment; they differ with each other in methodology and proceeding to get their common goals though. Hence, we can't say that there is a consolidated movement here.⁴¹

Islamabad-based WAF activist and writer, Maria Rashid explains that these organizations 'have common but different ways of working and approach, hence hesitate to come together in the form of a consolidated movement.'⁴² Tooba Syed explains that Aurat Azadi March categorically calls itself socialist-feminist while Aurat March claims to be a cross-class movement. Furthermore, the organizations range from women focused organizations to those on the Left who work with both men and women.

A Sindh-based WAF activist shares the views expressed by others:

It may be due to lack of organizational structure in AM groups and long-term commitment, as they are not organised cohesively one can say Aurat March is not process but it a single event. Therefore, despite generating a debate in mainstream media, or throwing open a challenge to patriarchy, it couldn't evolve as movement yet theoretically as well we practically.⁴³

4.3 Relationship with NGOs

Although Aurat March is seen by some as a consolidated movement within which some goals are shared and common causes are pursued, others think that NGO activists are engaged in income and career-based work to earn money and 'keep doing the same annual gender harassment surveys for 20 years plus.' There seems to be a realization that there is a difference between technical and political work and the NGOs are engaged in the former. NGOs are viewed as project-driven while feminist conviction demands work beyond such objectives. However, there is a realization that issues of subsistence occupy the minds of activists and people need incomes to live. Shehzil Malik remembers that Aurat March wanted an identity which did not include an NGO or a political party affiliation at any cost. It was resisted from the beginning.⁴⁴

Shmyla Khan states that there are differences within and among activists depending upon the city to which they belong:

41. Gulnar Tabassum Interview, 16 November, 2020.

42. Maria Rashid, Interview 22 November, 2020.

43. WAF activist based in Interior Sindh.

44. Shehzil Malik, Interview, November 2020.

Yes, there definitely are. Organisers in Hyderabad, Quetta, and Islamabad believe that resistance groups and left parties should be a part of the 8th march marches with their identities while the Lahore and Karachi organisers hold very different views on it despite women's day being a socialist day. Secondly there are also differences regarding men's role in the movement. In Islamabad, we hold masculinities' workshops and trainings with men as the organisations who organise here (WDF, AWP, PrSF) consist of both male and female membership... There is no conflict re NGOs bringing their identities since across the board the feminists have agreed to not allow them to avoid the allegations of foreign funding and also to minimize the role of organisations who are not likely to stand with the movement when the state attacks.⁴⁵

According to a Lahore-based Aurat March activist,

It's a personal question for me actually because I personally inhabit these contradictions- -working for an NGO while at the same time working within a feminist collective. I think there is a very clear tension because people who work in NGOs have a particular way of looking at organising, which doesn't sit well with organisers. Honestly, I am a firm believer that a separation needs to be drawn and we're very strict about that within Aurat March to the point that I have to negate my identity as someone who works in an NGO even when it could be an asset. But we've learned the hard way that because the feminist movement is so scrutinised, this separation is needed... I think there are differences. Some feminists have offered scathing critiques of the NGOisation of the movement and I agree. But I've seen that working with organisations is needed at times- -like often when we need a safe meeting space we turn to HRCP or when we need contacts we turn to other NGOs. A safe distance is healthy I feel.⁴⁶

There seem to be tensions based on the need to do paid work for subsistence and non-funded activism to gain credibility. Many activists straddle both worlds and struggle to maintain the necessary separation. However, WAF member Gulnar Tabassum believes that

45. Shmyla Khan, Interview, November 2020.

46. Lahore-based activist wishing to remain anonymous, Interview, November 2020.

Where NGOs are concerned, in my point of view especially in the present situation, they cannot run a feminist movement, at least cannot lead the movement. They are project-based organizations depending on funding and are answerable to the government (laws/regulations) whether you like it or not you have to follow the state laws/policies which is getting harder and harder nowadays.⁴⁷

Farieha Aziz highlights this dilemma in the context of Karachi:

Yes this is and it has been the subject of much debate especially with respect to branding at the marches, whether those are organisation/NGO banners or names, or those of political parties, which has been discouraged. One segment of activists or feminists feel political parties should be able to attend and display their identity as political inclusion and participation is necessary, whereas others feel they already have enough space and visibility, the march should be a space free of political and corporate identities.⁴⁸

Maria Rashid concurs and explains the issue regarding Islamabad:

So one is the issue of whether political parties should be invited to participate and if so should their presence be visible. Tied into it is the issue of older established groups like WAF and the more organized and visible NGOs that so far have been at the forefront. In Islamabad there was debate on whether groups (and this includes NGOs) should be allowed to bring their flags etc. The fear is co-option by the more organized and less progressive political parties, discomfort with the depoliticised agenda of NGOs linked to their funding.⁴⁹

The relationship between the young new wave feminists and the professional organizations where nine-to-five paid activism is the norm, remains ambivalent and fraught with tension. This may be resolved at some future time, however currently there is ambiguity and debate around the idea of wearing multiple hats and receiving donor funding.

47. Gulnar Tabassum, Interview, 16 November 2020.

48. Farieha Aziz, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

49. Maria Rashid, Interview, 22 November, 2020.

4.4 Relationship with political parties

Majority of the respondents were of the view that political parties do not have a feminist agenda. Among the mainstream political parties, the PPP (Pakistan Peoples' Party) was viewed by many as relatively more amenable to feminist agendas and supportive of women's rights. It was praised for the passage of many pro-women laws in its last tenure. The Left-wing AWP (Awami Workers' Party) was regarded as the most supportive of a feminist agenda mainly because of its affiliated WDF (Women's Democratic Front). However, AWP is not a mainstream party and, therefore, cannot have any impact on policy and law.

The PML-N is generally viewed as conservative except for its last stint in office during which some good legislation was carried out, for example, the rape law of 2016 which was progressive. Additionally, its work on women's shelters in the Punjab and violence against women was viewed positively. However, it was accused of passing some good laws only to get GSP+ status (Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus status) from the European Union because the latter emphasizes women's rights. The PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) is also viewed as pandering to international donors and insincere about real changes for women and non-binary people. Most of the respondents accused political parties of tokenism and lip service to these causes to get votes and international donor funding.

Right-wing religious parties were not perceived as supportive of the rights of women and other genders; rather they were described as hostile. It was mentioned how the JUI-F (Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam) demanded action against Aurat March, Jamaat-e-Islami disapproved of it and the Lal Masjid brigade attacked the march in Islamabad vandalizing its mural and tearing its posters and flyers.

Some respondents pointed out that nationalist parties in Sindh supported gender-based causes, for example, the Sindhi Awami Tehreek from which the impressive Sindhani Tehreek arose in the 1980s. The Jeeay Sindh Mahaz was likewise supportive of gender issues but its leader was declared a traitor and it was banned. The consensus among the participants was that most of the political parties do not have any understanding of the feminist agenda and are not inclined towards it.

Among the participants of the Aurat March, there are ideological differences and tensions regarding NGOs and Political Parties. The NGOs tend to depoliticize and are accused of using such spaces for funding and self-projection. The political parties are perceived as self-serving and in search of votes, foreign

funding, and legitimacy. Activists of Aurat March seek autonomy from all such entities be they corporate, government or non-government.

The Aurat March is thus a varied and complex phenomenon. There are tensions among those who want to remain within the capitalist system and gain rights for the excluded, others want to dismantle the entire system that engulfs humanity. The more radical among the feminists believe in going on an 'international strike just to make a statement that if women stop playing their role, this world stops. On the other hand, some feminists believe in using the propaganda to gain popularity (for themselves and the movement) using the same capitalist tools that is family contacts, mainstream media. Some of them believe that you cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. Despite the differences in ideology, approach, and strategies, fourth wave feminism reflects the vision of a world transformed towards greater equality and justice.

4.5 Inter-generational Relationships and Divisions

The main difference from the previous articulations of feminism in the form of APWA (All-Pakistan Women's Association) and WAF (Women's Action Forum) is an approach that is close to Radical Feminism in that Aurat March participants challenge the home, family and private sphere where patriarchy is perpetually produced and reproduced. Feminisms of past were less concerned with challenging the private sphere for various reasons. Their complete focus was on the state – the public sphere of law, regulation, and policy. The new wave addresses the issues of bodily autonomy and sexual oppression. They re-connected the personal and political by identifying that what happens to one woman in the home and family, happens to thousands of others in their homes and families. The same political/economic/social/ and cultural structures are producing the oppression. It is, therefore, not just personal but equally political, a Radical Feminist slogan that was reiterated and brought to life by the assertion of bodily rights.

Another major departure from previous articulations, that represent an older generation, is the inclusion and upholding of the rights of the LGBTQ community. Nighat Said Khan claims that in 2019 and 2020 it was the LGBTQ community which organized and played a leading role in mobilizing for the marches.⁵⁰ A formerly shunned and invisible community, pushed to the margins, was brought front and center, and gained acceptance among those who previously relegated their existence into the shadows.

50. Nighat Said Khan, Interview, 28 November, 2020.

A third major change between the earlier generations and the current activists is the use of social media as a strategy. The use of digital art, humor, satire and colloquial language to express dissent turned out to be a very effective and catching way of fighting against misogyny and refusing to bow down to suffocating hetero-normative beliefs about the body and sexuality. The use of social media increased outreach as the message spread quickly and effectively. Technological advancement enabled the new wave to reach out to the masses without too many resources involved. The older generations did not have access to these tools, and some remain hampered by their inability to use social media effectively. In the Information Age, the internet has provided a platform which enables the voices of young feminists to be heard far and wide in a matter of seconds.

As one young feminist activist reflects:

I think the inclusion of trans and queer folks as well as internet culture has forced the movement to directly confront the question of sexuality. This is something I feel quite strongly about as well, it is a non-negotiable for me, but I feel like in the past it was seen as something that can wait. Again, in the past feminist movements were much more concerned with the state. Which was both in the form of direct confrontation as well as engagement in the form of legal reform. Interestingly feminists today seem wholly disillusioned with the state as a point of engagement, they do not think legal reform will make any difference because they see the law itself as a patriarchal institution. This disillusionment oftentimes gets termed as disinterest in confronting the state--but I've seen as the state is fighting back in the form of defamation lawsuits and trying to regulate the Aurat March, we are being forced to confront the state. Hopefully that resistance politics will develop over time!⁵¹

Gulnar Tabassum asserts that movements are a product of their time and says,

I think movements are a product of their social history. This generation of women, is tied closely with the earlier work done by feminists, women's groups and even the somewhat depoliticised NGOs. They emerge from that landscape and stand on its shoulders. Whether they recognize it or not is another issue. Having said that the younger movement is different- it is

51. Young feminist wishing to remain anonymous. Interview, November 2020.

ALSO about personal freedoms (sexuality, dress, independence, roles within the family) and much more comfortable in saying it. This shift has been eased, and in some ways, triggered by technological advancements. Internet is a brilliant platform / strategy for mobilization, and it is a medium that allows safety, anonymity and solidarity for public expression of issues that we as women have hesitated to bring up so visibly in the past. The medium also allows for transnational solidarity/ exchange in ways like never before. It is also a generation that has in some ways been born or come of age post Zia- and lived through less repressive times during periods of admittedly fledgling and interrupted democracy, but democracy nonetheless.⁵²

An older generation of feminists belonging to WAF appear to agree with the accusation that the new wave feminists do not challenge the state, laws and policies. Nighat Said Khan considers this to be a manifestation of individualism which characterizes the neo-liberal ethos.⁵³ While wholly supportive of Aurat March and deeply engaged with it, Nighat Khan hopes that there will be greater engagement with the state in the future and the annual event will become a movement. Farieha Aziz seems to agree that the state is not challenged enough by the new movement:

One thing that stands out is the engagement with law and the state, which was far more pronounced earlier than it is now. Perhaps earlier women's and feminist's movements evolved in response to the state's encroachment of rights and that set the tone for it, but over a period of time, and especially now I feel there is a disconnect with the law and the state. An almost post-law, post-state attitude.⁵⁴

Maria Rashid thinks that the older generation sometimes talks down to younger feminists and fails to understand their concerns, while the younger ones tend to be dismissive of the work of earlier feminists and try to reinvent the wheel. She points out the tensions between them:

There is an interesting difference between these two groups (with the caveat that these groups extend to beyond those work with or are associated with women's organizations/ funders). The earlier generation is made of those who set

52. Gulnar Tabassum, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

53. Nighat Said Khan, Interview, 28 November, 2020.

54. Farieha Aziz, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

up NGOs and those who started their activism through their participation in NGOs, whereas the new (er) groups work in NGOs and often international donor organizations but do their activism after hours. It's an interesting and perhaps necessary shift keeping in mind how these older groups have become de-politicized. But it explains the tensions between these two, where the earlier see themselves as genuine activists but are not regarded as such by the younger feminists who see no contradiction between where they choose to work and what they do in the evening!⁵⁵

Some members of the younger generation argue that the earlier feminists tried to maintain the status quo, retained privilege, established NGOs and built their careers, while the new ones are focused on bringing social change and are far more inclusive. The older generation is viewed as less technologically advanced than the social media generation. They believe that at times the older generation looks at the internet and call out culture as less respectful. However, some of them feel that the members of the older generation were much more accommodating toward one another and listened to opposing viewpoints before coming to a consensus; this tolerance is lacking in the younger generation of feminists.

While agreeing with the critiques, many younger feminists acknowledged the enormous support and cooperation they received from the older generation. Notwithstanding these contradictions and tensions, there were instances of deep cooperation and collaboration between the older and younger generations. WAF members in different cities provided full support to Aurat March participants in any way they needed and attended the marches in large numbers. The generation gap is always there, but it takes only a leap to bridge it.

4.6 Religious and Sexual Minorities

Clear contradictions and tensions seemed to underlie the relationship between the majority religion and sexual minorities. There was rigorous debate between including religious groups that claim to further a feminist agenda, and sexual minorities in the forefront of the movement. Since women's religious organizations tend to uphold the ideologies of their political parties, they have an entirely different understanding of feminism. Most religions tend to be very restrictive towards sexuality and the body as they pursue an essentially patriarchal agenda of reproductive sexuality. For them, alternative sexualities

55. Maria Rashid, Interview, 22 November, 2020.

are aberrations and any sexual behavior that does not conform to mainstream sexuality is deviant. They, therefore, negate the very existence of non-binary, non-reproductive genders and sexualities. This was the basis of a great deal of contention between them and organizers of Aurat March. The following is a succinct rejection of religion by an activist who does not conform to the established notions of sexuality:

Yes, especially when we were exploring the question of queerness this became quite a heated debate. Personally, I am very dogmatic about this in a way, I have no interest in religion and don't think it has any place in the movement especially because it erases the role of queer folk (even though so many of them are religious themselves). I find myself in a lot of arguments about this, so a little biased here when I say there is a very big tension. Religion has been used to traumatize and police so many of us, I don't find the question of finding 'progressive interpretations' useful at all, religion is an institution and an institution that is imbued with power. Women and progressives are not within that sphere of power, we can read some really nice interpretations but what good are they? But a lot of my peers see value in couching our work in religious terms, whereas I see a clear tension.⁵⁶

For many young feminists, particularly those who express alternative sexualities, religion prescribes hierarchical roles and women's religious organizations are completely dominated by the male arms of the organizations. They have internalized misogyny and advocate a patriarchal approach to gender relations. The new wave feminists find the idea of religion and the liberation of oppressed groups mutually exclusive. According to one of them, religion is used to subjugate them and they do not see any situation where they could work with religious party women. Even those belonging to minority religious groups feel that they cannot work with or relate to women belonging to religious groups, especially the dominant majority religious group. While they were comfortable with the Aurat March activists who did not exclude or marginalize them, they were wary of working with mainstream religious groups.

A male feminist who formed a part of the movement says: 'There is no space for religion in the running of the state; these need to be separated'.⁵⁷ Most of the LGBTQ community espoused a secular position and rejected the injection of religion into the politics of the movement. The fear was that any attempt at an

56. Lahore-based Aurat March activist wishing to remain anonymous, Interview, November 2020.

57. Muhammad Hasan Abdullah Niazi, Interview, November 2020.

alliance with rightwing women would likely end up being a compromise on the part of feminists. The attack on the Islamabad march by religious activists was used as an example to illustrate that such a strategy would be counterproductive. Religious spaces are viewed as patriarchal and anti-feminist, and therefore inherently in conflict with the objectives of Aurat March.

Farieha Aziz agrees that there is much greater participation of the LGBTQ community, but underscores the dangers that beset the community regarding the reaction to the march:

This is reflected in the language as well. For example, the marchers and others use womxn and not women which is inclusive of non-binary individuals as well. There has been more visibility and acceptance regarding the LGBTQ community however as the backlash to the marches has increased, the LGBTQ has been the first to face the risk of invisibilization for the sake of being able to continue with the marches by minimizing the reactions to content. This I think for some has felt as though it was an expedient and exclusionary approach.⁵⁸

Maria Rashid, however, does not find the LGB agenda fully incorporated within feminist activism:

I don't see any real shift or movement as far as the LGB part of the acronym. There is complete silence there as far as the street is concerned but yes within cyberspace there has been more inclusion. Certainly, in the last decade and increasingly more so in the last 3-4 years we see much more transgender persons present within feminist street activism and visible solidarity with transgender persons. But this is an 'inclusion' rather a move towards a shared agenda/goal setting/ or leadership. Some of it has to do with the transgender movement which is relatively new and some of it has to do with the reluctance of feminist groups to own the agenda or consider it more mainstream.⁵⁹

Gulnar Tabassum believes that the inclusion of religious and sexual minorities exists and there is now more space in the movement to address their concerns, however a deeper analysis is required for a better understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation for the agenda to become a part of mainstream feminism.⁶⁰ It seems that tensions and ambiguities within the new movement exist regarding

58. Farieha Aziz, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

59. Maria Rashid, Interview, 22 November, 2020.

60. Gulnar Tabassum, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

the various identities which the participants occupy. However, there are points of convergence and harmony in that those belonging to minority religious groups did not feel marginalized to the extent to which non-Muslim citizens experience exclusion.

4.7 Class Divide and Aurat March

Aurat March in Pakistan is distinguishable by the massive participation of people from all walks of life. It has been widely hailed as a truly intersectional movement that encompasses the issues of everyone irrespective of class, religion, sexual orientation or gender. Nevertheless, subtle and overt class divisions exist beneath the smooth surface of apparent equality. Veerta Ali Ujan has the following to say about the class issue:

Absolutely. there is a great class divide. It's not about net success. It's on every level. Visibility. Recognition. Opportunity to speak up against patriarchy. The women in rural areas often live with the threat of murder for honour if they do Anything public. The urban elite women who have a chance to speak can only try to represent their rural sisters..... but there is little overlap between the lives of different classes.⁶¹

Ali Ujan's view above is corroborated by several older and younger activists who question the lack of ongoing engagement with the subordinate classes. Shmyla Khan states that 'the movement broadly comprises middle class urban women in Karachi and Lahore, especially with some representation of working class women who are invited to the marches.'⁶² Some find it problematic that women are brought out of their homes for one day of celebration and the rest of the year there is no interaction with them.

Additionally, many of the organizers speak and write English on the internet and elsewhere, which immediately differentiates them from rural and lower classes who cannot express themselves in the rulers' language. Furthermore, access to the internet and other resources is obviously limited for women from well to do classes. As one Lahore-based activist reveals, Internet access in Pakistan is very low (a little over 35%), and Pakistan has the highest gender digital divide in the world. Thousands of women are not online.

However, according to Shmyla Khan 'the Aurat Azadi marches of Hyderabad,

61. Veerta Ali Ujan, Interview, November 2020.

62. Shmyla Khan, Interview, November 2020.

Sukkur and Quetta are much more working class in their appearance and character than those held in cities like Lahore, Karachi and to some extent Islamabad'.⁶³ This observation is confirmed by the organizers in interior Sindh. As one activist says:

Most of marchers in urban centers are foreign educated upper-class feminists who use their class privilege/connections to raise funds and media attention. They have huge social media followings, among the same class, while young feminists in Quetta, Multan, Hyderabad or Sukkur don't have the same privileges. Urban area organizers are mostly from upper class; their class background shields them from direct threats; but in the rural areas, organizers are dealing with immediate and expected threats after the march too; three women were killed after Aurat March Sukkur who joined the march without the permission of the tribal leader. The rest were threatened by religious groups and through social media. Rural and middle / lower middle class feminist activists are exposed to immediate threat from the family, near and dear ones and local religious groups. It is the main factor, and they cannot challenge or exhibit the same boldness as exhibited by economically independent young urban feminists.⁶⁴

A member of WDF, Ismat Shahjehan, agrees that women from rural areas are plagued by issues that are different from those faced by women in urban areas; 'this gulf is still quite stark in feminist movements in Pakistan and more needs to be done to bridge the gap'.⁶⁵ She concurs that rural women have far less protection against violence and backlash when they challenge the status quo. The class and urban-rural divide are not only in geographical space but also exist in cyberspace. One young activist feels that feminists have not been able to express solidarity with voices from the peripheries and cross-class unity is not visible. Multi-class organizations appear to be dominated by rich women and there are inherent structural issues involved.

Islamabad-based activist and writer, Maria Rashid reflects that street activism and struggles have historically been divided by class.⁶⁶ WAF was also accused of being elitist. Cyberspace activism is filtered through class and, as a result, many women feel hampered by their lack of access to this space. Located in Karachi,

63. Shmyla Khan, Interview, November 2020.

64. Activist based in Interior Sindh, wishing to remain anonymous, Interview, 28 November, 2020.

65. Ismat Shahjehan, Interview, November 2020.

66. Maria Rashid, Interview, 22 November, 2020.

journalist and activist, Farieha Aziz concurs: 'The class question is most certainly there. I have heard this in the context of WAF too, that it is elite women, or at least privileged women'.⁶⁷ However, as Aziz points out there is class diversity within the new wave, however it reflects inclusion but not equality.

It appears from the responses received that questions of class and religious and sexual minorities do plague the new iteration of feminism in the form of Aurat March. There is an attempt to address the issues of intersectionality, but the movement has a long way to go before the gulf can be diminished. There are contradictions, tensions and divides that have not been bridged. There is inclusion but not equality as envisaged by the Manifesto and the Charter of demands.

67. Farieha Aziz, Interview, 16 November, 2020.

5. Agenda of Socio-economic and Political Transformation

The Manifesto of Aurat March 2019 is based on a comprehensive agenda demanding far-reaching transformation in all spheres of life including social, economic and political, from the local to the national and international levels. The Charter of Demands by Aurat Azadi March, 2020 is mostly a reiteration of the demands put forward in 2019, and further elaborates in detail upon the following main areas: Economic Justice, Accountability and Justice, Healthcare, Student Rights, Civil Liberties, Political Participation, Access to Public Space, Climate and Environmental Justice, (Appendix B)

As fourth wave feminism in Pakistan is far more focused on intersectionality than previous movements, the demands reflect the dream of a total overhaul of economic and social institutions to create a just world premised on equality, inclusion and freedom from exploitation. The seven broad themes that underlie the demands of the Aurat March, encompass a range of issues, both personal and political: 1) Economic Justice; 2) Environmental Justice; 3) State, Violence, Accountability and Judicial Systems; 4) Reclaiming Public Spaces; 5) Reproductive Justice; 6) Rights of Religious Minorities, and 7) War and Militarization.

5.1 Economic Justice

The first and foremost demand of the marchers in 2019 is based on an end to the global capitalist system of exploitation. As the means toward the achievement of economic justice and equality, the activists demanded that the labor of women, sexual and gender minorities be recognized and accorded the dignity it deserves. Since Pakistan has a large informal labor sector which has minimum rights and social protection, the marchers sought legal protections for workers in informal industries, home-based work, and the agricultural sector work as these are the sites of harassment and violence.

They demanded the implementation of the 'Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010' because ever since this law was enacted there has been little implementation primarily due to the hurdles involved in proving harassment. In many cases, threats, intimidation and retaliatory measures such as defamation are used to silence women. Anti-sexual harassment laws were declared necessary not only in the workplace, but also educational institutions and other spaces where people interact and engage in collective work.

The new movement seeks the recognition of 'invisible' labor wherein women's contribution to the care economy is accomplished but remains unacknowledged. Household and Reproductive work is carried out in the private sphere mostly by women. The unpaid labor should be seen as equal to other types of work because if this labor were to be bought in the market, wages would have to be substantially raised, and if the state were to provide it to socialize the work of reproduction, it would necessitate enhanced taxes on the capitalist and ruling classes to enable such work to be adequately compensated. Increased taxation or higher wages would cut into capitalist profits, therefore unpaid household and care work has economic value which is denied as the work gets redefined as the 'labor of love', even as capital continues to exploit it for its own benefit.

Remembering and reiterating the fact that the International Women's Day was originally a socialist and working women's holiday, the demand was raised for better working conditions in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The need for maternity leave, day care centers and related rights was upheld to enable women to participate productively in the workforce.

5.2 Environmental Justice

Closely related to the issues of economic justice, are those concerned with the preservation of the ecosystem that sustains life. Since human survival and women's work are completely dependent upon environmental regeneration, the women's march demanded that Climate Resilience be respected and the rapacious capitalist exploitation of resources that leads to degradation and depletion be ended. Safe drinking water as the fundamental condition of ensuring the right to life was demanded, along with the rights to safe and clean air.

The preservation of environmental resources was demanded since human, animal and plant life are deeply inter-dependent, and the protection of animals in both the natural and urban environments was necessary to maintain ecological balance, indispensable for humanity as a whole. Urban and rural local governments were called upon to cease the culling of stray animals.

As the basic means to ensure the fundamental right to life, the Aurat March 2019 demanded Food Sovereignty which would enable the producers of food to have full control over the entire production process as well as the product, freed of the control of multi-national agro-based companies and their partners in national governments. The centrality of women in the production of food and cash crops was highlighted, and the activists demanded the recognition of the fact that women are integral to the production and preparation of food.

5.3 State, Violence, Accountability and Judicial Systems

Recognizing that Gender-Based Violence is one of the most pervasive forms of control over the sexuality, labor, and personal freedoms of those upon whom it is committed, the marchers demanded an end to it. It is deeply linked with productivity levels and violates the right to life, security, dignity, health and work. The fourth wave feminists demanded a complete end to violence against all genders and sexual minorities in both online and offline spaces.

The feminist activists belonging to the new wave of feminism underscored the need to include Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and the tribal districts (formerly FATA) in the reforms and legal restructuring envisaged by them. These areas have suffered exclusion in the past and have been steeped in conflict, which further reduces access to justice and public facilities by vulnerable groups.

The Aurat March demands included accountability of the state in cases of police brutality against women and trans bodies. The activists sought legal reform of defamation and procedural laws to prevent the silencing and intimidation of the victims and survivors of sexual violence. Meaningful access to the legal and justice systems, including the police and courts, was underlined to ensure that women, transgender persons, and gender/sexual minorities could seek justice without the burden of the cumbersome, long and expensive procedures which require substantial resources.

Police brutality was highlighted as one of the major failings of the state to provide protection and security to citizens. Expressing concern over the growing lawlessness perpetrated by those responsible for citizen security, the law enforcing agencies were called upon to fulfill their responsibilities in cases of violence and the massacre of people. An impartial judicial inquiry was sought for the victims of the Sahiwal massacre of a family, and the wanton murder of Naqeebullah Mehsud by agents of the state. It was emphasized that the police should be disarmed and the abuse of power by state agencies should be countered by means of far-reaching and radical reforms in the criminal and penal justice systems.

Human rights abuses by the state, and the impunity granted to such acts, was challenged, and enforced disappearances were declared to be one of the gravest violations of human rights in the country. The state was asked to put a stop to such practices and to produce the 'disappeared' people before civilian courts where the due process of law, granted by the constitution, could come into operation. The authorities and government were criticized for failing to take into account that women are not only subjected to enforced disappearances but are put through grueling processes when they set out to search 'missing

persons' related to them. Wives, mothers and daughters of 'missing persons' suffer physical and mental anguish and exacerbated hardships once a person disappears and they set out in search of their menfolk. Society and state both are held responsible for such violence and terrorism that is rampant especially in areas steeped in conflict.

5.4 Reclaiming Public Spaces

One of the main planks of the new feminists is the reclamation of public space from which women and non-binary people have been historically excluded. Aurat March, 2019 asserted the right to access the city and public spaces, and asked that it should be ensured that they are inclusive and safe for everyone.

One of the biggest impediments for women regarding the exercise of their rights to education, work, recreation or other matters, is the lack of mobility based on the absence of safe and affordable public transport. This demand highlighted the need for such transport, while simultaneously underscoring the need for clean public toilets essential for women and sexual minorities. The absence of the latter is a seriously discouraging factor for women to reclaim public spaces, as men feel free to relieve themselves in open spaces, while women do not.

The moral policing of women for their presence in public spaces is carried out through sexual harassment which may include offensive whistling, crude remarks, derogatory comments, and 'accidental' touching. These attitudes and behaviors force them to remain confined in the private sphere where families and communities discourage them from 'going out' because of the harassment they would face. This means that while the perpetrator may roam the streets freely without fear, the victim is punished by being restricted to the home. The 'good woman, bad woman' binary is invoked by families to convey the message that only 'bad women' venture out into the public sphere where the intrusive male gaze endangers their chastity and morality. Fourth wave feminists reject the public-private divide, the moral policing both at home and in the streets, and the exclusive use of streets, parks and other spaces by men. They consider the right to equal access imperative for the development of the self and the enjoyment of the rights to recreation including awaragardi (loitering).

The greater discrimination against transgender persons regarding equal access to public spaces was recognized, and state and society were called upon to end discriminatory measures that prevent transgender persons from accessing public resources, healthcare, work opportunities and legal protections. Access to public spaces was upheld for persons of disability and it was demanded that building and public spaces be made disability-friendly to prevent such people from complete isolation in the home.

University students living in hostels were declared to be adults and, therefore, it was demanded that they should not be subjected to restrictive timings. However, in places that do observe timings, there should be no difference based on gender.

5.5 Reproductive Justice

In 2019, the Aurat March participants demanded the right to autonomy and decision-making over their bodies. They refuted the idea that they need permission from the state or families to make personal decisions regarding bodily autonomy and sexuality.

To protect girl children from sexual and physical abuse, there was a demand to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 to raise the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18. This was in response to the large number of cases in which girls as young as 12 were subjected to forced marriage to a much older man.

The feminists agitated for quality reproductive and sexual health services for women, all genders and sexual minorities. Since private health services are expensive, women, transgender and sexual minorities frequently have little or no access, while public health services are a shambles and full of hassles that further exacerbate their health problems.

5.6 Rights of Religious Minorities

While demanding the equal rights of non-Muslim citizens, a reform of the personal laws for the minorities was highlighted to eliminate discriminatory provisions. The virtual absence of laws deprives minority communities from seeking legal protections in matrimonial matters, thus placing minority women at a special disadvantage.

An amendment to the Christian Divorce Act of 1869 was demanded as it violates the dignity of Christian women due to the social and cultural implications of the accusation of adultery. There was a demand for formulating the Rules of Business for the Punjab Anand Karaj Act of 2017 for the Sikh community and the Hindu Marriage Act of 2017.

Minority communities in all states tend to be the objects of discrimination by the majority and, as a result, they often tend to be defensive about the protection of religious laws, which are more often than not based on patriarchal norms and beliefs. The question of minority identity complicates a straight-forward approach to gender equality. Consequently, women belonging to minority

communities suffer double oppression and discrimination on account of being women as well as members of the discriminated community.

As an intersectional movement, fourth wave feminism recognized the double (in some cases triple) oppressions of women who straddle the divides of class, religion, sect and/or caste. The idea of multiple identities, based on the notion that women do not constitute a single, homogenized or abstract group, but have other identities based on religion, sect or ethnicity has been entrenched in feminist thought for more than two and a half decades.⁶⁸ However, it is the new, fourth wave feminism that has seriously addressed the issues arising from multiple belongings.

5.7 War and Militarization

The new wave feminism today, challenges not only the personal, local, national and political exclusion and oppression in the economic and socio-cultural realms, it resists and rejects the global military-industrial complex which constantly produces war to profit and benefit multi-national companies and the states which these companies control.

The fourth wave activists believe that war is a business in which only corporations and fascist ideologues win. Wars militarize everyday lives and engender fear and hatred. War reinforces and perpetuates toxic masculinity that justifies violence against those who are constructed as 'enemies' to be vanquished.

The women's movement asserts that the ongoing decades long conflict between India and Pakistan has been intentionally created and sustained by those who wield power to serve their vested interests. The voices of Kashmiri women, therefore, are silenced. The movement stands with the people of Kashmir in their struggle for human rights and self-determination. The feminists condemned violence against the people of Kashmir by both state and non-state actors.

The policies of mass destruction, militarization and warmongering were denounced while resolving to struggle for peace. The rejection of the states' propensity for war demonstrates the understanding that unless countries end war from which only the rulers gain, there can be no development because such states do not spend on social security and human security to better the lives of the people. The working classes of the country, women and non-binary people have nothing to gain from war; they only lose as the biggest chunks of national budgets and revenues are wasted on armaments and maintenance of

68. Khan, Nighat, Said, Rubina Saigol & Afiya Zia (eds), *Locating the Self: perspectives on women and multiple identities*, p. 1.

massive armies. Peace not only brings economic dividends it also ensures social development and better living conditions. The non-economic ravages of war and militarization in terms of illness, depression, sorrow, and loss of work and play capacities can be substantially reduced by ensuring peace.

Majority of young activists echo the transformative agenda in their responses to questions. They envision a just and equal society free of violence, patriarchal oppression and marginalization. One activist envisaged

A society where your gender does not stand in the away of your dreams and the opportunities given to you, may it be at home, at school, in the workplace, in the legal systems and in wider societal perceptions. My goal is to tell women's stories so these narratives are heard so that the status quo where women are always at the bottom of the social hierarchy changes.⁶⁹

A Lahore-based activist imagines a society

Where we are not bound by our gender identities, sexuality and class. I know it's a very simple answer but honestly, I see so much suffocation and oppression based on our bodies, the bodies that we inhabit. We're all victims of the limits patriarchy places on us. I've seen small glimpses of spaces where these identities are accepted they're rife with joy and love. Additionally, I envision a society where we can recover collectively from the traumas patriarchy has inflicted on us. A place of healing.⁷⁰

A leader of the WDF, Ismat Shahjehan encapsulates intersectionality in a nutshell: 'I believe in a society which is free of all forms of oppression including gender based oppression, as well as class and caste based oppression. I believe that none of us is liberated unless all are liberated.'⁷¹ The agenda of total transformation is internalized by the activists. Several of them dream of a socialist society where they can live to the fullest and co-exist with nature. As one activist says,

Socialist Society: Class/patriarchy/war free egalitarian society, where equality, social justice and peace is guaranteed in all spheres of life/relations including social, gender, economic, production, sexual, and political relations. My goals toward attaining the envisioned society is organizing the masses

69. Activist who wishes to remain anonymous, Interview, November 2020.

70. Activist who wishes to remain anonymous, Interview, November 2020.

71. Ismat Shahjehan, Interview, November 2020.

(women, men and sexual minorities), oppressed nations, and religious minorities for collective political struggle to abolish all forms and structures of oppression and exfoliation.⁷²

The massive agenda of social, economic and political transformation all the way from the local and national to the global and international levels, indicates that feminism in Pakistan has come of age. Previous articulations of feminism focused on social welfare, development and legal reform agendas. Today, feminism questions the neo-liberal economic paradigm accompanied by the hyper-nationalist statist one; while the latter may appear to be an antithesis of the global economic one, in reality the nationalist state is often a party to such agendas by creating conducive conditions for capital through the suppression of labor rights. The fourth wave envisions a complete material and ideological change in state and society, wherein patriarchies - as they appear in feudal, capital, global, national and local forms - are contested and resisted to the core.

72. Activist who wishes to remain anonymous, Interview, November 2020.

6. Strategies for Social Transformation

The all-encompassing agenda of fourth wave feminism required an equally comprehensive and wide-ranging set of strategies to achieve the ambitious goals of the movement. The vast array of innovative and varied strategies used reflect the diversity of issues raised and the means to achieve the goal of a just and equal society.

The large number of strategies for change include the use of social media, writing, street activism, lobbying, teaching, arts and crafts, theatre, music, dance and poetry. Some activists used teaching, building feminist collectives and public interest litigation in pursuit of the agenda for social, economic and political transformation.

The most significant departure from the strategies employed by previous waves of feminism is the mobilization through social media: facebook, twitter, YouTube channels, WhatsApp groups and other similar methods. On account of the quick and far-reaching effects of social media campaigning, the messages of the young new feminists could be spread with an ease that was not available to the older generation of activists.

The MeToo movement on social media inspired younger activists to formulate their own separate feminist collectives.⁷³ Even prior to the international movement, some of these feminists for example, Girls at Dhabas were committed to reclaiming public spaces in Pakistan, 'but most of these groups were far more active online than offline'.⁷⁴ Commenting on online feminist resistance in Pakistan, Zoya Rehman writes:

The growing presence of feminist collectives online proves that online spaces have become important, and sometimes challenging sites of political resistance themselves. They lend support to community and causes that not only receive little traction in offline spaces, but which are actively being restricted. Such online spaces have the potential to produce and celebrate a range of politics and identities, and for individuals to become more visible to shun the marginality they experience offline.⁷⁵

In recent years, the Women Action Forum (WAF), comprising mainly an older generation of feminists, has started to use social media as a platform for its

73. Afiya Zia, *Who is afraid of Pakistan's Aurat March*, EPW, p. 49.

74. *Ibid*, p. 54.

75. Zoya Rehman, *Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan*.

work. This has been possible because of the collaboration with an increasing number of young feminists from the new wave who have much greater social media and internet skills than the previous generation. WAF's positions and statements now have much greater outreach as they are shared on facebook, twitter and WhatsApp. The Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is notable for the efforts to place women's issues online and, as a member organization of WAF, DRF has been invaluable in enabling less technically inclined WAF members to place their content online.

The Hamara Internet Project was conceived and initiated by DRF to promote a free and secure digital environment for women. It provided a platform for young women in colleges and universities to inform them about the ways in which the internet could be used against them by the state, families or men with whom they interact. This project is designed to teach feminist activists the use of digital tools, such as privacy and encryption, for security. The project enables young activists to communicate on the internet and express online dissent in a safe manner. Furthermore, the project maps how Pakistan's online spaces can encapsulate and usher in a feminist ethos in an era of restricted civic space for public dissent. The DRF epitomizes the new strategies of 21st century feminism in Pakistan.

Rehman, however, points out the limitations of online resistance arguing that 'while online spaces have made a plethora of voices available through feminist commentary and activism, this often takes place at the expense of larger, more intersectional issues, which is a challenge we must overcome.'⁷⁶ The movement is often accused of being elitist and exclusionary because of the predominance of English and urban classes in online spaces. The old accusation of pursuing a western agenda is deployed as a weapon to silence and discredit social media activists.

The state and powers that seek to discredit and suppress the feminist agenda, stigmatize this form of activism as spreading foreign values and propagating "white feminism". The movement can come to be viewed as culturally irrelevant and inaccessible for working women or those from rural backgrounds. To overcome such criticisms, and expand the outreach, there are efforts underway to create more content in Urdu, especially through podcasts and multi-lingual study circles. Class collaboration, argues Rehman, can be achieved through linkages with labor and peasant movements, in particular those led by the social media boycott campaign against Khaadi because of its exploitative labor practices, which reflect the routine structural violence faced by both male and

76. Ibid

female workers at the hands of the fashion industry.⁷⁷ In spite of its pitfalls and drawbacks, online feminism through social media activism characterizes the feminism of today, and marks a major departure from previous iterations of feminist consciousness.

Another medium through which contemporary feminism seeks expression is digital art. Although the use of art in the pursuit of feminist goals is not a new phenomenon, the creativity discernible in new forms of digital art is exciting. Historically, art has played a major role in social movements and feminists have used the medium to promote women's rights movements in the earlier days.⁷⁸ Commenting on the digital art platforms in South Asia, Ahmed writes:

The Aurat March (Women March) has used art as a medium to convey their message and educate the masses. As the nature of the feminist movement has changed since the early 70s and 80s, the form of feminist art that is in direct conversation with the movement has also evolved. Women today are determined to have their voices heard, fight for equality, get jobs equal to men, and gain rights and agency to their own bodies-aspirations that are reflected in the art produced.⁷⁹

Mehak Tahir, an illustrator and animator from Lahore began her journey with traditional painting and has now transitioned into a digital artist whose work revolves around the issues of child marriages, patriarchal society and online harassment. According to Ahmed, the kinds of colors and tones Tahir uses, speak volumes about her clarity on the subject.⁸⁰ Women are judged all their lives on their natural dark complexion which creates feelings of inferiority. Tahir, however, asserts that in her art work she shows women as very strong with natural skin tones and beauty. Shehzil Malik, a Lahore-based illustrator and designer, and a volunteer for Aurat March uses her art to project the movement's message. She reveals how she is very conscious about how the South Asian women in her work look as everyone's representation matters. According to her,

Digital arts is a new medium being explored by both genders and one can see the difference in their work. Girls and women are coming from a very real and personal place, many times they don't have anyone to talk to so they use this medium

77. Zoya Rehman, *Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan: How Online Spaces Help the Feminist Movement in Pakistan Reclaim Civic Space*.

78. R Umaima Ahmed, *Inspiring feminism through digital art*.

79. *ibid*

80. *ibid*

to express themselves. I have done a series on “brown is beautiful” only to explain how we should be accepting our complexion.⁸¹

Digital artist, Maliha Abidi wishes to show how women are not just pitiable creatures drowned in suffering, but powerful members of the society who need to break the chains of patriarchy to be free. There is enormous variation in the themes touched upon by digital artists, from the reclaiming of skin color to the imagery of strength and power.

Ahmed contends that the kinds of topics covered through digital art is an achievement as the galleries and exhibitions, where art was displayed and consumed, were dominated by male gatekeepers. She believes that ‘In online spaces those limitations are dissolved and feminist art can be produced and viewed with complete artistic freedom.’ Maliha Abidi, a digital artist who authored a book containing stories related to women, says that the best thing about digital art is ‘you let the picture do the talking, you don’t need to engage in debates or communicate.’⁸² Abidi says that people come for the color and stay for the story. It seems that the axiom that a picture is worth a thousand words can be and has been used effectively to depict resistance and dissent by the Aurat March artists.

The new wave feminist artists reflect that digitization is a part of the ‘renaissance period’ of art without a name but an impact. However, there is an awareness that the concepts of feminism familiarized by the two years of Aurat March still constitute an urban women’s canvas from which rural women appear to be absent. Marvi, a teacher from Sukkur, creates illustrated story characters which are relatable. As she says,

I wanted the characters to look like us too, to look relatable. I didn’t want 7ft tall unrealistically muscular heroes or over sexualized female character costumes that you generally see in comics. I believe progress or change doesn’t necessarily have to be shown through modern, western ways. My characters are shown empowered but they also dress like everyday people.⁸³

Digital art is fast making inroads into the global art world. The use of cyberspace makes it viral and it is easy to share because of the low costs involved. It has a big outreach as it can instantly reach a large audience. However, the suppression of dissent affects artists no less than other types of activists. Some of the artists

81. Shehzil Malik, quoted in Umaima Ahmed, *Inspiring Feminism through Digital Art*.

82. Maliha Abidi quoted in Umaima, *ibid*

83. Quoted in Umaima Ahmed, *ibid*

fear that while online spaces have provided a platform, they are not without their challenges since the culture of banning content is gaining strength in Pakistan and their work can either be taken down or they could be served legal notices for depicting taboo subjects. Banning and censorship are concerns that plague digital artists who find few other outlets for their art of resistance. The inconsistent regulatory online regime is a constant threat, nevertheless, resistance art that draws and paints dissent is here to stay.

Apart from online resistance and digital art, the new feminism uses various creative methods for its resistance against patriarchy and the neo-liberal capital ethos. Powerful theatre performances by young artists, singing, poetry and skits form an integral part of the oppositional politics of Aurat March. One innovative form of protest included women carrying the coffin of patriarchy on their shoulders showing, on the one hand that patriarchy was dead, and on the other that women could carry coffins to the grave, something considered an exclusively male function. This kind of dark humor was also an oblique reference to the murder of norm-shattering social media star, Qandeel Baloch by her brother on the pretext of honor.

Humor has been used provocatively by the marchers in the form of short, curt and punchy placards that mock patriarchy and infantile forms of masculinity. The latter finds it hard to laugh at itself even though there are howls of laughter at jokes about women and non-binary individuals. As Rimmel Mohyidin writes: 'She can tell you that she won't warm your bed if you don't warm your food, but what really gets you hot and bothered is that she, a woman, could laugh at your expense...she is the subject of many sexist jokes, but she cracks one, your masculinity does as well.'⁸⁴ Mohyidin underscores the pain that underlies so much of humor:

But here's what many have failed to see. Comedy is supposed to be tragedy plus time and for many women, their lives have never been anything but a series of tragedies...Every wise crack, every sassy one-liner, every catchy slogan masked years and years of invisible pain that women have suffered.⁸⁵

Mohyidin rightly points out that women serve men at the expense of their own dreams while men go out and pursue theirs. Men take inherent privilege for granted and a woman serves their every need: "That we can laugh about it speaks to the strength of women, and the fact that many men could not, to

84. Rimmel Mohyidin, Let me womansplain the Aurat March to you.

85. *ibid*

their weakness.”⁸⁶ Humor proved to be an effective technique of subverting the taken-for-granted strictures about women’s behavior in private and public. It was expressed not only in the placards carried by the marchers but also in the poetry, theatre, writing and artistic representation.

Given the fact that the Aurat March strategies involving mocking and humor revealed how fragile the masculine ego is, once shown to itself in a mirror inversion, there was bound to be a reaction. Patriarchy was hit where it hurt – in the most intimate ground of home and family where it is nurtured and constantly reproduced. That women and non-binary people could make fun of them, overturn their jealously guarded moral terrain, subvert their self-importance by turning them into pathetic caricatures, meant that a backlash was only to be expected. And backlash there was, full throttle. It is to the virulent attack on Aurat March and the new feminism that we now turn our attention.

86. *ibid*

7. The Backlash: patriarchy strikes back

The comprehensive agenda underlining the total transformation of the material and ideological universe of patriarchy and militarized capitalism, sought to dismantle the fundamental structures of power and domination in the world. It is not surprising, therefore, that the backlash against Aurat March was swift, fierce and predictable. Privilege is never surrendered easily or without a fight. And that is what became evident after the Aurat March of 2019.

Fourth wave feminism challenges the public-private divide, and dissolves the seeming contradiction between production and reproduction, upholds intersectionality and the expression of alternate sexualities, contests and resists the economic structures of capitalism, tribalism, feudalism and patriarchy; demands a total transformation of economic, political, social and cultural systems, and challenges the violence of the state, market and the global financial system; seeks a clean environment, labor rights, freedoms of speech and expression - it is not hard to understand that there would be a severe backlash from religious, traditional, material and cultural patriarchies.

The relentless backlash against Aurat March was unsurprisingly focused on its assertion of bodily autonomy and multiple sexualities. Pakistani society had long denied the existence of alternative sexualities and refuted bodily autonomy, especially for women. Aurat March rudely awoke people from their slumber to remind them that the forgotten and negated 'Others' not only exist but are standing up to be counted, to be heard, to be seen. The silenced and muted conversations around the body and sexuality were only whispers among an older generation too preoccupied with repressive state measures to fully explore and highlight multiple sexualities.⁸⁷

Zoya Rehman argues that forbidden and personal conversations have now made their way into public spaces and are discernible in the placards used. The self-censoring silence, for looking respectable at the expense of victimization, has been broken. There is a need to look at the slogans again and connect them to a larger discourse that sees 'compliant sexualities as a moral and national imperative'. The nation is not monolithic and all nations/states police sexualities to a lesser or greater extent because rebellious and dissenting bodies that could possibly betray the family/nation/state/patriarchy by succumbing to the charms of an outsider, a stranger or an enemy, exist in all cultures, and occasionally break through the confining moral walls erected meticulously by patriarchies.

87. Rubina Saigol, *Marching to their own beat: The past, present and future of feminist activism in Pakistan*, The Herald, April 2019, p. 29.

The Pakistani Muslim nation is gendered and violent and engages in the erasure of non-binary, non-reproductive alternative sexualities.⁸⁸ Rehman points out that 'critics have historically shut down any broad conversation around the subject of sexuality to set boundaries for who can partake in the discourse and who cannot'. Thus, while religious clerics and leaders pontificate endlessly on sexuality, women and non-binary people are forced into silence. An older generation of activists remained silent in public over the issues of body and sexuality, even as the clerics elaborated over Zina, adultery and fornication laws designed to regulate sexuality. The entire discourse revolved around measures to tame and control the potentially dangerous female body which, if it rebelled, would overturn the moral order.⁸⁹ The pervasive discourses around chaadar and chardivari (the veil and the four walls of the house) were obsessed with the treacherous and chaotic female body: how to control it, hide it, conceal it, make it invisible and preserve it for its rightful owner.

The long-imposed silences have been broken by participants of Aurat March. Strident, vocal and unwilling to be controlled by entrenched patriarchy, they declare: my body, my right; I'll warm your food if you warm your own bed; keep your dick pics to yourself. A shocked and indignant patriarchy was bound to react as its very foundation was rocked. Sexuality lies at the core of patriarchal control therefore reproductive sexuality must be regulated and alternative sexualities denied as aberrations. Heteronormativity is a requirement of patriarchy to reproduce itself and must be established with the force of law, while all threats from alternative forms of sexuality need to be suppressed by the state to preserve the socio-moral order constructed over centuries.

As Rehman says, the 'Aurat March publicly indicates the willingness of feminists across Pakistan to build larger coalitions that can work on a shared understanding of sexual rights for all gendered Pakistanis.' The issue of sexual rights has for the first time made its way into public discourses in the country. The backlash from the multiple patriarchies was directed much more against the dissolution of the public-private dichotomy, the demand for bodily autonomy and acceptance of sexual diversity, the desacralization of the private sphere, and the reclaiming of public space, than against the socio-political and economic demands made by the movement. This is partly because the patriarchal media highlighted the slogans and placards that focused on bodily autonomy and sexual diversity, and seemingly deliberately obfuscated the agenda of total transformation reflected in the manifesto and demands.

88. Zoya Rehman, *Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies*.

89. Rubina Saigol, *Marching to their own beat: The past, present and future of feminist activism in Pakistan*, p. 29.

The media sensationalized the issues for ratings. For a whole week after the Aurat March 2019, media talk shows and programs focused on the march with conservative and religious ideologues spreading the fear that the demands would destroy the moral fabric of society. The dimensions of class, religion, sect, ethnicity, and peasants, labor and workers, Kashmiris and Palestinians for whom rights were also sought, were overlooked as the spotlight fell squarely upon the body, sexuality and personal autonomy. Even though the charter of Aurat March is much wider than body autonomy which constitutes a part of it, the media promoted the idea that it was all about the body, sexual rights and personal autonomy. This misrepresentation led to the accusation that this is a class phenomenon; only middle and upper class want body autonomy and sexual rights and these are not the issues of laboring or peasant women. However, the large number of LGBTQ, transgender and women asking for body autonomy and sexual rights were from lower middle and working classes, facts which the media conveniently failed to highlight.

As Tooba Syed points out, prominent male politicians, former bureaucrats and television personalities took to social and mainstream media 'to cast aspersions and allegations, hurl threats and invective against Aurat March, its organizers and participants. In the days since, countless women have been the [recipients] of death and rape threats on – and offline.'⁹⁰ There were bomb threats, threats of acid attacks, stalking and releasing someone's personal details and pictures on social media.⁹¹ In Islamabad in particular, pictures of marchers were taken during the protests without their permission by infiltrators opposed to the march. Blackmailing on social media was the most virulent as the perpetrators could disguise themselves more easily.

The conservative and obscurantist critic, Orya Maqbool Jan spewed hatred against the march denigrating it as an imposition of the 'homo-agenda' upon society.⁹² Another equally conservative and dogmatic playwright, Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar hurled vicious abuse against analyst and commentator, Marvi Sirmad on public television for chanting the slogan, *mera jism meri marzi* (My Body, My Right). It speaks to Marvi's courage that she remained undaunted, replied to him without using abuse, and continued to chant the slogan.

Media and television personalities were not the only ones to attack the Aurat March. Prominent religico-political parties and their activists unleashed physical violence upon the peaceful marchers. In Islamabad, religious parties organized a 'haya march' (modesty march) on the opposite side of the road from the

90. Tooba Syed, *A Rising Movement*, Dawn.

91. Saira Asher, *Aurat March: Pakistani Women Face violent threats ahead of rally*.

92. Zuneera Shah, *Is piddarshahi a feminine noun?*

marchers. Men and women belonging to these parties pelted the marchers with stones, bricks and shoes. Some participants were injured but others were protected by the Aurat March members, male as well as female.

One of the placards of the Minhaj-ul-Quran which organized the rally against Aurat March carried a slogan that read: *mujhe ghar ki malika banne ka shauq hai, aur tujhe galli ki kuttiya* (I want to be the Queen of the Home, while you want to be a bitch on the street). The good woman/bad woman binary, crafted in the late 19th and early 20th century India by conservative Muslim writers opposed to modernity, was invoked to de-legitimize Aurat March as a reflection of the rise of immoral women who want to dissolve the public/private dichotomy designed to confine women to the home. In previous years, prior to the public challenging of the norms of patriarchal sexuality, women of the Jamaat-e-Islami and Minhaj-ul-Quran had celebrated International Women's Day for the celebrations remained within the bounds carved by patriarchy. Once these were transgressed, they moved to the other side.

The role of the state, as evident in the actions of the administration in Islamabad, raises questions about the responsibility to protect citizens. Members of the Women's Democratic Front (WDF) associated with the left-wing Awami Workers Party (AWP), held a press conference the next day and wondered why the anti-Aurat March rally, by those with a completely opposed worldview, was allowed in the same venue for which Aurat March had already taken a No Objection Certificate (NOC). Although the police erected barricades to separate the two groups, the space designated for Aurat March should have been protected by the authorities. While the First Information Report (FIR) against the violent physical attack on Aurat March was filed, the pelting of bricks and stones was omitted.

The violent attack on the march itself was not the only action taken by religious activists. A mural created by Aurat March artists was vandalized in Islamabad, and flyers and posters belonging to the marchers were defaced and torn down by activists of the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa, an extremist religious group that in the past laid siege to Islamabad involving kidnapping women from beauty parlors and foreigners, and taking over a madrassa where they displayed their baton-wielding force ready to attack any person who defied their version of religion. This kind of vandalism was witnessed in Lahore too where placards and flyers were torn down.

The religious political parties opposed to the ideology of the marchers did not remain confined to direct attacks on the march. The Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam (JUI-F) called upon law enforcement authorities to take action to stop

the marches.⁹³ The chief of JUI-F, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman stated that if the marches were associated with the rights granted in Islam and the constitution, they would have no problem with the march; however, these marches were against the norms of culture and society so he could not even bring himself to speak of them. Alia Chughtai reports that at least three petitions were filed in courts across the country with the aim of stopping the marches. In Islamabad, a petition was filed by JUI-F and Umme Hassan, wife of one of the leaders of Lal Masjid. The petitions, however, were not successful in their purpose.

Sahar Bandial writes that the planned march to mark the International Women's Day appeared to be a grave threat to 'the integrity of Pakistan'.⁹⁴ Concerned members of the public and legal community invoked the constitutional jurisdiction of high courts in Lahore and Islamabad to highlight 'the hidden agenda of the Aurat March' which they accused of having been funded by anti-state parties seeking to tarnish the dignity of women and to destabilize the country, spread anarchy and hatred against Islamic norms. They demanded that the march must be regulated to protect public morality as the women's demands represented 'vulgarity' and 'indecentry'. It is ironic that one never hears of petitions against the vulgarity and indecentry, so clearly evident in sexual harassment in public transport and streets, yet Aurat March posed a greater threat to the country than the constant lewd remarks, offensive comments and unacceptable touching of women in public spaces.

Azhar Siddique, a lawyer and one of the petitioners whose case was dismissed by the Lahore High Court argued that the entire movement was a part of a western agenda to ruin the culture of Pakistan. He pleaded that barring a few isolated incidents in Pakistan there was no discrimination against women in Pakistan.⁹⁵ As a Lahore-based lawyer, Nighat Dad, informed him that women and children are raped and killed every other day, girls are deprived of education, women walking to workplaces are regularly harassed. Women like Qandeel Baloch, Parveen Rehman and Sabin Mahmud, and scores of others killed in the name of honor, or murdered for small mistakes in serving dinner, would not lie in their graves if Pakistan is such a safe place for women. Global statistics from the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the UN Human Development Reports tell a sordid story that shows Pakistan lying way down compared to other countries on gender justice.

The Lahore High Court dismissed the petition to stop the march so long as it 'did not violate the norms of decency', however, the slogan *mera jism meri marzi* is

93. Alia Chughtai, *Pakistan's Women's March: Shaking Patriarchy to its Core*.

94. Sahar Bandial, *The Aurat March and the frenzy surrounding it*.

95. Alia Chughtai, *Pakistan's Women's March: Shaking Patriarchy to its Core*.

still used in court rooms and the electronic and social media to demand a ban on or regulation of Aurat March, and to spew hatred and venom against the organizers and supporters.⁹⁶ In 2020 the Al-Hamra grounds were not made available for Aurat March as they were in 2019. After permission was refused, the 2020 march in Lahore was held on an open road.⁹⁷ Such was the fear among government functionaries that the very public spaces claimed by activists were denied to them.

Less than two weeks after the March, the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provincial assembly unanimously passed a resolution declaring the March to be “shameful and un-Islamic”.⁹⁸ In a country ‘ostensibly created in the name of God there is no insult more damning than ungodliness’. A frequent criticism of the march was that there are so many “real issues” such as sexual violence, honor killings, acid attacks, and economic woes, but these marchers were somehow concerned only about their bodily autonomy and sexual rights rather than focusing on important issues. To patriarchies the violence centered on the body or psychic, verbal, emotional and physical abuse is not included among “real issues”. The overwhelming focus on the placards about bodily autonomy, sexuality and the division of labor rendered the entire manifesto invisible. This appears to be a deliberate ploy to discredit the march even though the manifesto covers the entire socio-economic and political spectrum of issues.

After the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provincial assembly passed a unanimous resolution condemning the march as shameful and obscene,⁹⁹ several of the organizers faced online harassment and death threats because of the hatred engendered against them. Similar voices of disapproval echoed in the Sindh provincial assembly against the placards carried by the marchers in 2019. The marchers were condemned, and a complaint was registered terming the event a manifestation of vulgarity. The provincial government was called upon to act against them. Lawmakers thus added their voices to the general atmosphere of animosity created by the media, journalists, lawyers and religious leaders.

The backlash by both conservative and some like-minded quarters ranged from vicious attacks on social media, the use of sexually explicit language and sexual harassment, death and rape threats and cyberspace abuse to vandalism, physical attacks on the march, censorship of art and digital media content, court cases, resolutions in provincial assemblies, and vitriol lavishly hurled on mainstream

96. Sahar Bandial, *The Aurat March and the frenzy surrounding it*, op.cit.

97. Zuneera Shah, *Is piddarshahi a feminine noun?* op.cit.

98. Dur e Aziz Amna, *Good Woman, Bad Woman*, op.cit.

99. Sahar Bandial, *Aurat March and the Frenzy Surrounding it*, op.cit.

and social media. Reflecting on the intensity of the backlash and the response to it, Afiya Zia writes:

The terrorization campaign against the Aurat Marchers in 2019 became fast, effective and amplified because that is how trolling works. Some of the young generation were taken aback, even injured by the level of vicious intimidation, almost as if they were not expecting such a venomous whiplash.¹⁰⁰

However, in agreement with Tooba Syed, Zia believes that the severity of the backlash was an indication of its success. The young new feminists had 'exposed the nerve center of a patriarchal stronghold that relies on gender norms and fragile masculinities, under the preserve of culture and tradition.'¹⁰¹ The Aurat Marchers pushed back the 'gatekeepers of public morality' by subverting the dominant norms and values of a man-made culture and by questioning its beneficiaries. Leena concurs that the backlash is indicative of success. As she states:

We jumped right into damage control because of the false narrative that was created, because placards were mansplained and doctored. Even though we knew Aurat March had succeeded in doing what it set out to do, a lot of our messages got lost in the propaganda.¹⁰²

The vituperative attacks, while not killing the spirit of the marchers and, in some cases, rendering them more determined and resolute, led to a great deal of fear, loneliness, insecurity, exhaustion and depression among some activists.¹⁰³ Some of them began to use assumed names on social media and were afraid to reveal their identities because of the abusive language used by the detractors of the march. One social media post said: *Itna shauq hai tou main mar deta hun teri* (If you are that desperate, I am there to f---K you); Another read: *This is how rapes happen, Phir rape ho jaye ga to mat rona* (don't cry when you are raped). Such graphic and open threats to rape were viral on social media and some organizers were afraid that if their families found out they would be confined to the home even more. The violent harassers on social media seemed oblivious to the fact that their behavior could endanger lives since women get killed in the name of honor. Some TV channels aired pictures of women at the march without their permission. These women feared that if their families found out it

100. Afiya Zia, *Who is afraid of Pakistan's Aurat March*, EPW, op.cit, p. 50.

101. Ibid, p. 50.

102. Cited in Zuneera Shah, *Is piddarshahi a feminine noun?* op.cit

103. ibid

could have serious repercussions for them. There are layers upon layers of fear, restriction and control against which women have to push often at great peril.

Despite feeling targeted, anxious, hurt and alone, organizers of the march remained spirited and more determined than ever to break the molds that constrained their lives. Tooba Syed, a left-wing activist of WDF overcomes despair through her deep political engagement. She says, 'I know when you are trying to change the system, trying to shake something which upholds power, it's always going to receive this kind of backlash.'¹⁰⁴ She shuts out the vitriol and continues organizing because it is the only way.

Lahore-based activist Kanwal spent hours perfecting the Manifesto - which addresses issues such as living wages, high inflation, sexual abuse, enforced disappearances, death penalty and freedom of Kashmir and Palestine, unionization, climate and environmental degradation – yet, as Hiba says: 'We spend so much time on how economic changes impact women and trans people, but that message is always lost'.¹⁰⁵ Society's propensity to see and hear only what suits its purposes can be a very discouraging moment. Nonetheless, Kanwal who does not care much about respectability politics says: 'I'm so happy that all sorts of women came out and talked about their bodily autonomy, sexuality, along with other things'; she had to stifle her radical politics to appear acceptable and non-threatening.¹⁰⁶ She believes that in spite of getting hurt and angry over misogynist remarks and statements the need is to stay calm and not lose one's temper and to keep pretending that it does not have any impact.

Undeterred by the vitriol, Aurat Marchers own every placard and stand by their Manifesto and the stands they take. There is no regret. As one activist says: 'No amount of backlash can take away the magic that happens on that day. It fuels us for the entire year.'¹⁰⁷ Given the spirit of the Marchers in the face of stiff resistance from religious, cultural and capitalist patriarchies, it seems appropriate to briefly explore the way forward – future possibilities, excitement, fears and continuity of Aurat March beyond the restraining frontiers of today.

104. Cited in Zuneera Shah, *Is piddarshahi a feminine noun?* op.cit

105. Cited in Zuneera Shah, op.cit.

106. Cited Zuneera Shah, op.cit

107. Cited Zuneera Shah, op.cit

Way Forward

Aurat March has been the most exciting feminist event in recent years. It has altered the feminist landscape in Pakistan by inaugurating a whole new phase in which the private sphere has been challenged, and the personal declared political for the first time in Pakistan. Going forward into the future, a few suggestions may be appropriate to overcome some of the shortcomings discussed in the sections above.

Aurat March needs to transition into a movement rather than remain just an annual event. This means ongoing engagement with the participants and organizations on a continuing basis rather than sporadic interactions. Continuous debate and reflection can enrich activism and allow the participants to understand the different perspectives of those involved, thus rendering it more holistic.

There needs to be a greater effort to reach out to the subordinate classes, especially in rural areas. The issues differ for different classes and rural women face greater violence for their participation in such activities. A dialogue across the social class spectrum can yield fruitful results for every side. Similar dialogues can take place with non-binary people who espouse alternative sexualities to increase inclusion, equality, recognition and respect. People from different geographical areas and belonging to diverse religious communities need to meet and exchange ideas, fears, triumphs and aspirations. This can increase solidarity and inclusion and also overcome the isolation that activists are liable to feel.

There is a need for effective and rapid responses to deal with the backlash, especially against the more vulnerable members of the movement. Women from lower socio-economic strata, rural women, and those from marginalized communities, such as religious minorities and non-binary persons, face more violent attacks than others. There should be liaison with law enforcing authorities and the penal-judicial system in case of attacks on the march or on individual women who participate by their families, communities or religious groups.

Aurat March organizers and participants need to understand the importance of engaging with the state as that is where political power resides. As they seek to dismantle the multiple patriarchies at home, in the community and society at large, they must not forget the state which ultimately harbors and nourishes both patriarchy and capitalism. Examining and challenging oppressive laws, dealing with the police, judges, politicians and bureaucrats may seem mundane and difficult, it is nonetheless necessary for a future in which dreams

can be realized. The public sphere and the political organizes, controls and restructures the private sphere and the personal. The one cannot be fought without simultaneously resisting the other.

A deep and continuous dialogue is needed with the media which distorted their speech and represented it as obscene, while overlooking and thereby obfuscating the massive agenda of social change at all levels of the social structure. There are sympathetic voices in the media that need to be engaged with, even as hostile media is approached for a better portrayal of the meaning and purpose of the march.

The tensions between paid NGO activism and unpaid political activism requires dialogue and resolution. The movement should not split based on this division. It may be necessary to reach across the divides to understand each other's perspectives so that energy is not drained from a highly creative, spontaneous and innovative movement.

It is imperative to ponder the question of funding. The credibility of the movement comes from the fact that no funding is taken; however, the issue of sustainability is a real one. There is a need to find some mechanism of funding which is neither government or corporate nor international. The need to earn a living reduces the energy for the work of passion. The marchers must mobilize funding from alternate sources so that the movement can be sustained without external funding.

These are some issues that need reflection as the brave and undaunted women march into an uncertain but exciting future, carrying in their hearts the dreams of a just and equal society.

Bibliography

Ahmed, R Umaima, Inspiring Feminism through Digital Art, www.canva.com nd. Retrieved 6 November, 2020.

Amna, Dur e Aziz, Good Woman, Bad Woman, The Juggernaut, August 7, 2019, www.thejuggernaut.com

Asher, Saira, Aurat March: Pakistani women face violent threats ahead of rally, BBC News, 7 March 2020, www.bbc.com

Bandial, Sahar Zareen, The Aurat March and the frenzy surrounding it, www.arabnews.pk 6 March, 2020.

Chughtai, Alia, Pakistan's Women's March: Shaking patriarchy to its core, www.aljazeera.com 8 March, 2020.

Hussain, Neelam, Aurat March and its discontents, The News on Sunday, March 14, 2019.

Jalal, Ayesha, The Convenience of Subservience: Women and the State of Pakistan, In Women, Islam and the State, Deniz Kandiyoti (ed), London: MacMillan Press, 1991.

Khan, Ayaz, A push to the patriarchal wall, The Nation, 30 March 2019.

Khan, Ayesha, Khan, Ayesha, Rhetoric and Reform: Feminism among Indian Muslims, 1900-1940, Lahore: ASR, 1999.

Khan, Ayesha, The Women's Movement in Pakistan: Activism, Islam and Democracy, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

Khan, Nighat, Said, Rubina Saigol & Afiya Zia (eds), Locating the Self: perspectives on women and multiple identities, Lahore: ASR, 1994.

Khan, Nighat Said, Nighat Said Khan (ed) Up Against the State: military rule and women's resistance. Lahore: ASR, 2004.

Lodhi, Annam, Islamabad's Women's Day march was met with violent opposition from conservative agitators, globalvoices.org, 13 March 2020.

Mohyidin, Rimmel, Let me womansplain the Aurat March to you, PRISM, DAWN.COM, Updated 16, June 2020, www.dawn.com

Mumtaz, Khawar & Farida Shaheed, Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back? Lahore: Vanguard, 1987.

Rehman, Zoya, "Online Feminist Resistance in Pakistan: How Online Spaces Help the Feminist Movement in Pakistan Reclaim Civic Space." *International Journal on Human Rights*, No. 26, December 2017, Sur.conectas.org

Rehman, Zoya, Aurat March and Undisciplined Bodies: Articulating a History of Sexuality in Pakistan, [medium.com @zoya_rehman](https://medium.com/@zoya_rehman), 26, July 2019.

Rehman, Zoya, Feminist Memories in the Digital Age: Honoring the Feminism of Yesteryear and Today, www.digitalrightsmonitor.pk 31 July, 2019.

Saigol, Rubina, *The Pakistan Project: a feminist perspective on nation and identity*, New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013.

Saigol, Rubina, Strangers in the House, *The Herald*, Issue: May 2013.

Saigol, Rubina, Feminism and the Women's Movement in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies, Country Study, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Islamabad, 2016.

Saigol, Rubina, Marching to their own beat: The past, present and future of feminist activism in Pakistan, *The Herald*, Issue: April 2019.

Sattar, Babar, In the name of honour, *The News*, 16 March 2019.

Shah, Zuneera, Is piddarhahi a feminine noun? www.sochwriting.com 6 March 2020.

Syed, Tooba, A rising movement, *Dawn*, 18 March 2019.

Zia, Afiya, *Faith and Feminism in Pakistan: Religious Agency or Secular Autonomy*. Sussex Academic Press, 2019.

Zia, Afiya, Who is Afraid of Pakistan's Aurat March? *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. LV, No. 8, February 22, 2020.

Other materials consulted

Iqbal, Sarmad & Zahaid Rehman, Women march across country for rights, independence, *The Nation*, 9 March 2020.

Maqsood, Neha, Women Under Siege, Women's Media Center, www.womensmediacenter.com www.dawn.com 6 March, 2020.

Newsweek Pakistan, Aurat March 2020 to Focus on Women's Independence, 6 March, 2020.

Women's Regional Network, Aurat March – A Success Story of 'Bad Women', www.womensregionalnetwork.org 16 April, 2020.

Appendix A – Quantitative Data

Interviews of sixteen young activists and organizers, located in different cities, were carried out to explore the tensions and contradictions that were perceptible in some cases. They were asked questions about the dimensions of class, religion, sexual orientation, generational differences, and the non-governmental association of some activists. These interviews were done through the internet between November 10th and 17th, 2020.

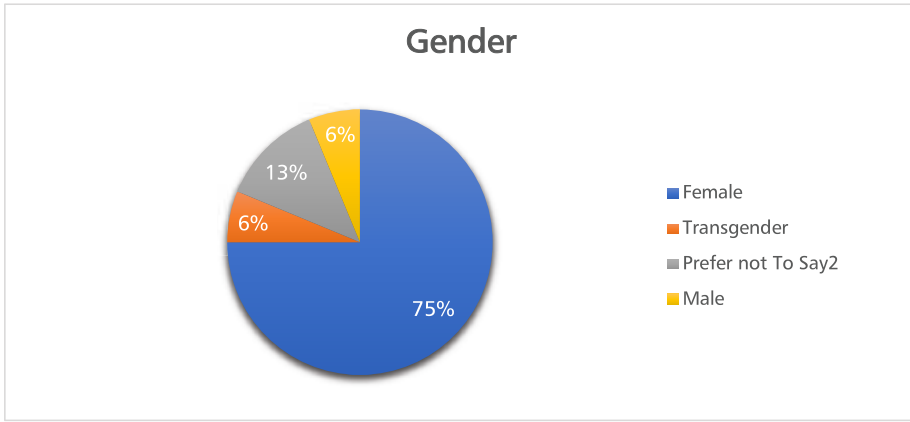


Figure 1: Responses Segregated by Gender show the diversity of respondents. While 75% of the respondents were women, we had representation of transgender as well as the perspectives of male feminists as the remaining 25%.

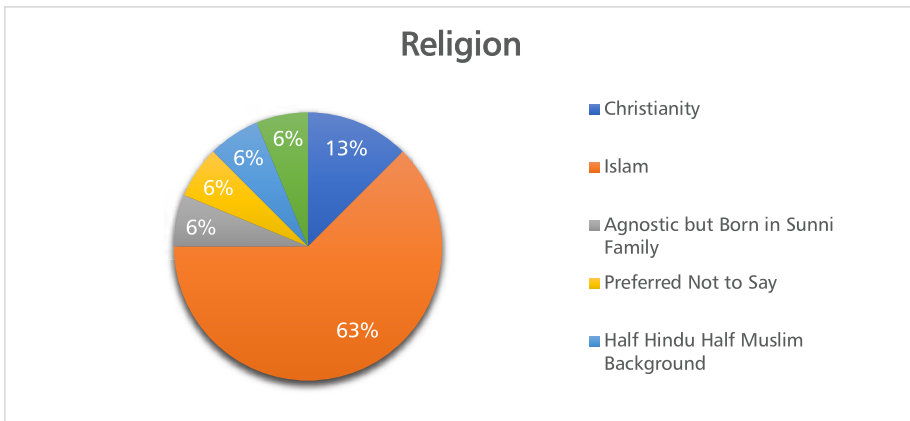


Figure 2: Responses Segregated by Religion show the diversity of the respondents in terms of their faith and religious beliefs. 63% of the respondents represent the majority faith in Pakistan, Islam and 13% were Christians. The remaining 24% consisted of those that were either agnostic or chose not to comment on their faith.

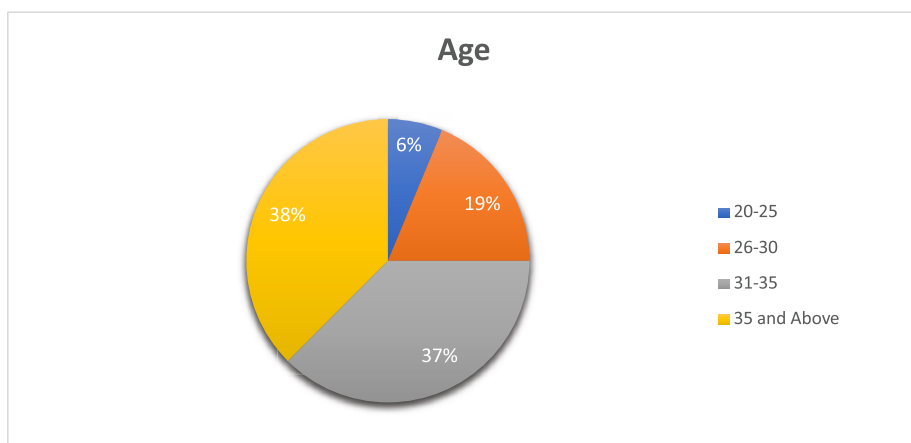


Figure 3: Responses Segregated by Age. In order to capture the inter-generational perspectives, respondents falling in different age groups were interviewed. 38% respondents interviewed via internet were aged 35 and above. 37% were between the ages 31-35. 19% were between ages 26-30 and the remaining 6% were aged between 20-25. This data is not inclusive of the interviews and ages of the senior WAF members that were interviewed separately via email.

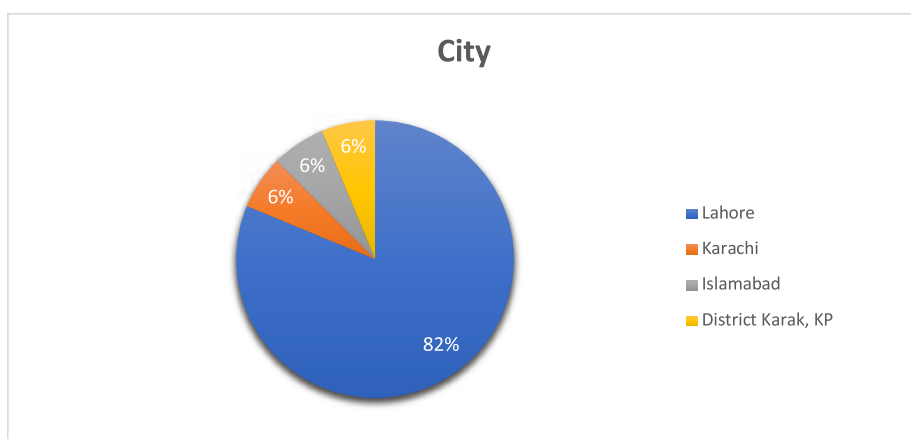


Figure 4: Responses Segregated by City. While 82% of the respondents were based in Lahore, we reached out to organizers and key players of the marches in different cities including Karachi, Islamabad etc. to get a comparative sense of the contradictions and ambiguities of feminism in Pakistan and their approach to the way forward.

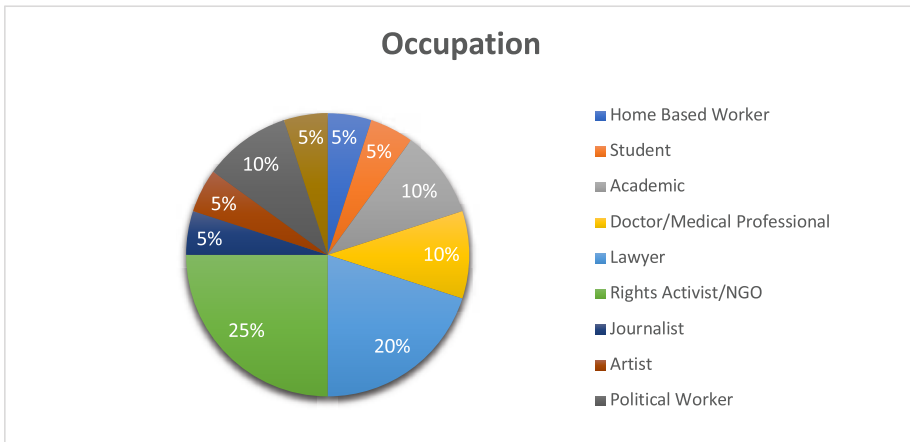


Figure 5: Occupation of Respondents. 25% respondents were rights activists or NGO workers. We had 20% representation of lawyers. 10% of respondents each respectively worked in the academia and in the medical profession and the remaining respondents were active students, journalists, artists, political workers and home-based workers.

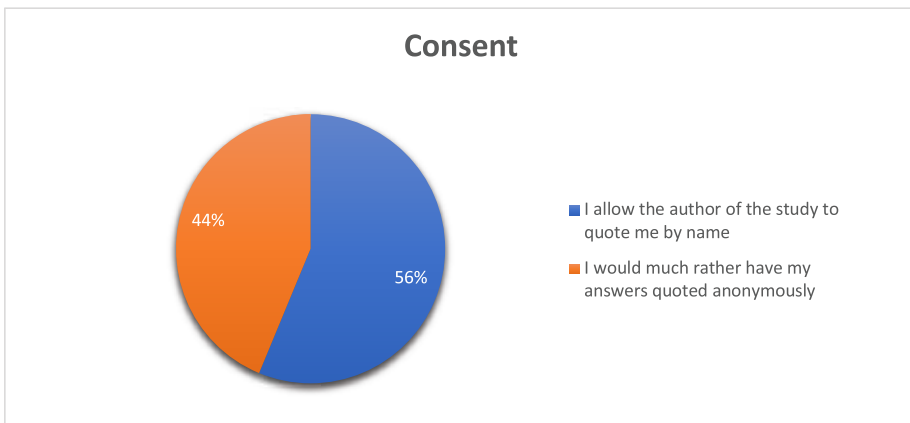


Figure 6: Consent. 56% of the respondents gave consent to the authors to quote them by name whereas 44% requested anonymity.

Forms of Activism	Count	% age
Social Media	11	69%
Theatre, Song, Dance & Poetry	5	31%
Arts & Crafts	3	19%
Lobbying	9	56%
Street Activism (Rallies, Demos, Processions)	11	69%
Teaching	7	44%
Writing	12	75%
Public Interest Litigation	1	6%
Building Collectives and Spaces Where Women Can Come Together	1	6%
Monthly Meetings & Speaking to Groups Within Our Circles	1	6%
Mobilization & Forming Relationships across the city, with women, trans community, developing political units	1	6%
Focused Project Activities	1	6%
Political Schooling, Forming Solidarities & Publishing	1	6%

Table 1: Forms of Activisms of Respondents. Majority of the respondents use social media (69%) and writing (75%) as a medium for their activism. Street activism and public demonstrations follows at 69% while 56% of the respondent's lobby and 44% do it through teaching. Theatre, song, music, dance and drama is resorted to by 31% of the respondents and other arts and crafts such as digital paintings stands at 19%. About 6% of respondents work for mobilization, focused group activities, monthly corner meetings and public interest litigation respectively as their form of activism and contribution to further their goals and demands.

Types of Challenges	Count	% age
Outreach	6	38%
Threats & Allegations	9	56%
Intimidation	7	44%
Backlash	11	69%
Family/Community Disapproval	8	50%
Religious and Traditional Patriarchies	11	69%
Cyber Abuse	7	44%
Lack of Support from Society, even by other Feminists	9	56%
Unfair Media Projection	8	50%
Lawsuits	4	25%
Patriarchal Mind-set of Lawyers and Judges	1	6%
Death Threats, threats to my Children's lives, rape threats, defamation, threats of defamation lawsuits	1	6%
Mobility is a challenge but we have our referral system and contact persons who help us, money is an issue	1	6%
Inner conflicts between feminists, lack of a cohesive goal of feminists across. Too many feminists looking for individual recognition	1	6%
State oppression & constant surveillance /harassment, lack of funds and economic pressure, political work - family life balance issue	1	6%

Table 2: Types of Challenges Faced by Respondents. 69% of the respondents stated that the backlash and the religious and traditional patriarchies were among the greatest challenges they faced in their work and activism. Threats and allegations as well as lack of support from society even by other feminists stood at 56% while family and community disapproval as well as unfair media projection was each considered a challenge by 50% of the respondents. Outreach was a challenge for 38% of the respondents while 25% percent considered revenge lawsuits as a challenge in their work. About 6% of the respondents highlighted other challenges including death threats, threats to their children, inner conflicts among feminists and mobility amongst others.

LGBTQ Concerns (5 Responses)	Count	% age
Yes, I feel that my concerns and demands are equally and adequately taken up and I don't feel excluded or discriminated against	2	40%
At times, not always and not by all forums	1	20%
I feel there is a power grabbing struggle initiated here as well. This said, much more can be done to represent adequately	1	20%
Not LGBTQ so don't think I should answer this	1	20%

Table 3: LGBTQ and Redressal of their Concerns. 40% of the respondents felt that their concerns and demands were adequately and equally taken up and they do not feel excluded. 20% felt as though there was selective acceptability and redressal of their concerns and not across all forums. The other 20% stated that there is a power-struggle in this sphere as well and that much could be done for adequate and equal representation. 20% refrained from answering since they were not LGBTQ persons.

What Should be Done to Strengthen 4th Wave Feminism?	Count	% age
More Laws	2	13%
Better implementation of existing laws	11	69%
Changing family structures to eliminate prejudices towards girl children via schooling, training, media awareness campaigns on VAW etc	12	75%
Eliminating social, political and economic structures that form the mainstay of patriarchy through public policy, legislation, awareness campaigns, creating awareness among political parties, parliamentarians, administrative/bureaucracy officials, police & judiciary.	15	94%
I observe that feminists don't involve themselves in politics directly. NGO-ization is a problem also that needs to end. Feminists must contest elections and build grassroots support on issues through that.	1	6%

Attack and dismantle the networks of supporters of misogyny and sexual predators. Start with the judges who rule no jurisdiction in cases of harassment and accept defamation cases. The secretary of the cabinet division, the head of the awards section in secretariat. The head of the FIA. The mullahs with a reputation for paedophilia. Police officers who victim blame and obstruct justice for sexual assault victims.	1	6%
More inclusion in decision-making at home.	1	6%
Pakistan needs a strong resistance movement which works at different levels and extends beyond legislation and policies. We need a solid program which takes in to account the levels of marginalisation faced by women especially the working-class women in our country addressing issues such as housing, sanitation, landlessness and ecology.	1	6%
Struggle for constitution of civilian and peoples' democracy, new social/economic/political contract between federation and federating nations, including right to self-determination.	1	6%

Table 4: Recommendations of Respondents. There was 94% agreement amongst the respondents that eliminating social, political and economic structures that form the mainstay of patriarchy through public policy, legislation, awareness campaigns, creating awareness among political parties, parliamentarians, administrative/bureaucracy officials, police & judiciary is what should be done to strengthen the 4th wave of feminism in Pakistan. About 75% of them highlighted that changing family structures to eliminate prejudices towards girl children via schooling, training, media awareness campaigns on violence against women etc. would also be an effective measure to strengthen the movement. 69% consider that better implementation of existing laws can also be beneficial while only 13% consider the need for more laws.



Appendix B – Aurat March Manifesto 2020

Aurat March is a collective of feminist women, gender and sexual minorities who stand against patriarchal structures that results in sexual, economic and structural exploitation of women. We come together in solidarity, on equal terms, without any funding or association with corporations, non-profits or political parties. We seek to ensure intersectional politics that view gender in relation to various oppressive and unjust structures. We aim for our struggle to eradicate brutal and inhuman economic and social systems that suppress all, including men, by imposing gender roles that censure feminine men, masculine women and transgender people alike. Aurat March is part of a movement towards collective action and consciousness building for a socially just and equitable society. We march for the following demands, built around the theme of (self-reliance) through which we seek to reconstruct the narrative on violence against our bodies, economic conditions and the environment by both society and the state.

1. End to Economic Violence

- a) We demand that the labour of all women, gender and sexual minorities be recognised and accorded dignity without discrimination. All persons should be accorded a living wage of at least Rs. 40,000 a month (with increments equal to the level of inflation). We demand legal protections for workers in informal, home-based and agricultural sectors, who face disproportionate exploitation, harassment and violence;
- b) We demand an end to discrimination in employment, particularly in regard to wages and benefits;
- c) We demand that the government of Pakistan end all neoliberal austerity measures, undertaken at the behest of the IMF or otherwise, particularly in the health, education and food sectors, which impact working-class women, youth and migrants the most. The government must take onboard working-class women as stakeholders when regulating the prices of basic commodities;
- d) We demand that existing laws such as the Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019 be immediately notified and implemented through effective oversight bodies;

- e) We demand that the government facilitate women's access to paid-work through provisions of free and quality childcare facilities;
- f) We demand safe and dignified workplaces. The definition of the workplace should be expanded and the consequently implemented to encompass formal, informal and semi-formal sectors; including independent and sub-contracts workers with written or other contracts under the 'Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010'.
- g) We demand that the right to unionise be upheld legally and in-practice. We demand that women and oppressed minorities be duly included in the labour movement. This is essential in building a strong and united anti-capitalist movement;
- h) We demand that women's contribution to the care economy through home-making and caring for families be recognised as unpaid labour, categorised as 'work' and financially compensated for accordingly;
- i) We demand the elimination of discrimination in and non-implementation of inheritance laws which lead to the denial of property rights for women and sexual minorities;
- j) We demand an end to the practice of dowry and bride price, which are a form of economic violence and perpetuate the commodification of women and marriage as a transaction;
- k) We demand that Pakistan recognise wealth created in marriage as joint property of both spouses.

2. End to Violence Against Our Bodies

- a) We demand an immediate and complete end to gender-based violence against vulnerable genders, in both offline and online spaces;
- b) We recognise that children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. The state should take robust steps to protect them. Such violence is traumatic and often comes from within trusted circles, making it more difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. We demand compulsory education and counselling on 'good touch/bad touch' and personal health in all public and private schools;
- c) We demand robust policing mechanisms to prevent sexual abuse, investigate and prosecute perpetrators and rehabilitate survivors;
- d) We demand the enactment of anti-discrimination laws to ensure the eradication of discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual identity, in addition to other racial, ethnic and differently-abled identities;

- e) We call for an end to state-driven violence in the form of police brutality and violence, especially towards women and trans-people; we demand increased accountability for law enforcement by the state;
- f) We agitate for decriminalisation and reform of defamation and procedural laws to ensure that victims and survivors of sexual violence and harassment are not silenced or intimidated;
- g) We demand the introduction of witness protection programmes to protect witnesses in cases of sexual harassment and assault. We demand that 376A Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 be implemented to protect the identity of rape survivors. This is essential to ensure that the law is effective in the face of a patriarchal justice system;
- h) Evidentiary requirements which discourage survivors of sexual violence from reporting their cases need to be radically amended to reflect the patriarchal realities of sexual violence and accommodate survivor testimony as direct evidence;
- i) We demand meaningful access to the legal and justice system. The state should undertake radical reform of the courts and the police to ensure provision of quality legal services that do not reproduce and reinforce patriarchal and class structures;
- j) We demand safe and dignified shelters for women, children and sexual and gender minorities across Pakistan. We reject the exploitation and unconscionable detention of women and minors, as at Kashana Shelter in Lahore. We demand that the Punjab Government effectively investigate and prosecute such establishments;
- k) We demand the immediate criminalisation of domestic violence across Pakistan;
- l) We agitate for implementation of anti-harassment laws at all public and private places under both criminal and civil law. We demand the appointment of independent and trained inquiry committees to investigate sexual harassment complaints at all workplaces and educational institutions;
- m) We demand amendments to anti-harassment laws to ensure that they apply to gender and sexual minorities;
- n) We demand that the harassment law be applied equally to the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly where women and vulnerable populations face serious challenges in accessing justice;
- o) We demand that universities and campuses be immediately demilitarised. We demand an end to surveillance of gendered and racial groups under the garb

of 'security' and the extension of the right to privacy to all, in both private and public spaces. We stand in solidarity with the students of the University of Balochistan and demand an independent and transparent inquiry be conducted into the surveillance incident of 2019. We urge families of our sisters in Balochistan to not allow this incident to keep their daughters from seeking education.

3. Environmental Justice

- a) We demand that our right to climate justice be protected and enforced;
- b) We demand the devising and use of sustainable and equitable agricultural practices to protect against the destruction of forests, soils, water table, pollution, crop varieties and animal species. In particular, we demand effective food management to prevent shortages like the current wheat crisis which impact migrants, women and gendered minorities the most. Agricultural workers and peasants should have a direct stake in devising food practice and management. This involves moving away from water-intensive cash crops like rice, cotton and sugarcane to vegetables, pulses and husbandry;
- c) We demand immediate access to clean air for everyone. We demand that the government declare a health emergency in areas impacted by smog and take urgent measures to ensure all citizens' right to safe and clean air. Swift effective measures be formulated to regulate fuel quality across Pakistan with due citizen involvement;
- d) We demand sustainable, economical and safe public transportation which is energy-efficient, climate-friendly and does not endanger the ecology and heritage of a locality, unlike the Orange Metro Train. This can only be done through meaningful citizen engagement;
- e) We reject green taxes and other measures that end up forcing the working-class and poor to pay for new, eco-friendly and sustainable programmes and initiatives. We demand the burden to be placed on the rich and big businesses be taxed to fund such avenues;
- f) We call for the protection and respect of animals as an integral part of both our natural and urban environments. We demand accountability for local governments and persons engaged in culling of stray animals;
- g) We recognise that true climate justice involves the restructuring of the global economy, and not just the economy of Pakistan. It involves developed countries moving away from export of oil, cars and military equipment, which are particularly detrimental to countries like ours.

4. Reproductive Justice

- a) We demand the right to autonomy and decision-making over our bodies;
- b) Consent to sexual relations is an integral right of all individuals. We demand that marital rape be criminalized immediately. Marriage should be built on dignity, equal and free participation, without compulsion;
- c) We demand that the government amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 for all women across Pakistan;
- d) We demand equal access to quality reproductive and sexual health services for women, all genders and sexual minorities. Access to quality healthcare for HIV, and AIDS, and STIs should be prioritised as a public health concern;
- e) We demand that women be freely allowed to decide the number and spacing of children they wish to have;
- f) We demand an end to discrimination in access to healthcare for trans men and women. Medical institutions, colleges and Medico-Legal Officers should provide training to its staff to ensure that trans patients are provided timely medical care and in accordance with their self-identified gender, without compromising their inherent human dignity;
- g) Recognising the importance of nursing staff and Lady Health Workers to delivering healthcare to women, we demand that they be regularised as government employees and provided due employment benefits.

5. End to State Violence

- a) We stand in solidarity with victims of police brutality. Incidents like the Sahiwal massacre of 2018 are proof of growing lawlessness perpetrated by those who are supposed to protect people's lives. The continuity and recurrence of such incidents prove that law enforcement agencies do not provide safety to citizens. We stand by the families of Naqeebullah Mehsud and the victims of the Sahiwal massacre, and demand an impartial judicial inquiry of the Sahiwal incident;
- b) We assert that police reforms be put into action specifically focusing on disarming the police and greater accountability for abuse of power;
- c) We demand an end to enforced disappearances. Enforced disappearances are one of the gravest human rights violations in the land. Those who have been disappeared must be brought before civilian courts and given their right to due process;
- d) It is important to recognise that women may also be forcefully disappeared, though it is men who primarily suffer at the hands of this brutal practice. We

also believe that there is an enduring impact of enforced disappearances on women, which is not adequately addressed by governments and societies; Women—as the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of the disappeared—experience exacerbated hardships and suffer psychological harm after a disappearance.;

- e) We demand that truth-seeking and reconciliation commissions be formed to deal with the violence committed by state and non-state actors during military operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, former-FATA and Balochistan, addressing sexual violence among others;
- f) We are committed to peace. We condemn war and the militarisation of our everyday lives. War is business that only benefits the international bourgeois and western military-industrial complex, at the cost of provision of health, education and shelter to our people. Lasting peace can only be achieved when we transcend the confines of capitalism and the nation-state through an internationalist struggle against violence;
- g) We demand an immediate end to the occupation, illegal annexation, militarisation, arbitrary detentions, communications shut down and terrorisation of Kashmir and the people of Kashmir, including the heinous use of pellet guns and enforced disappearances on civilians. We passionately support the democratic and constitutional right of people everywhere to peacefully protest and unite for their political demands, including in Kashmir. Populations under occupation have a right to determine their political future, the conditions for which have to be made possible by both the nation-states, its people and the international community;

6. Inclusion and Non-Discrimination

- a) We demand dignified, safe and equal access to housing, healthcare, public services, educational institutes and public spaces for gender and sexual minorities and persons of disabilities through making buildings disabilities-friendly, adoption of anti-discriminatory measures, better practices and comprehensive oversight;
- b) We demand provision of clean and safe public toilets and in educational institutions;
- c) We demand quotas in schools, universities, public institutions and jobs to ensure persons with disabilities and trans-people are given equal opportunities;
- d) We demand more quality schools, colleges and hospitals, especially for women and gender minorities in war-torn and remote areas of Pakistan
- e) We recognise the option to move to urban centres for education and health-care more easily exercisable by men in our society;

- f) We demand equal recognition and accommodation for less visible disabilities, such as chronic and mental illnesses as well as invisible physical disabilities. We condemn how mental illnesses are often framed as women's problems which translates into their stigmatisation and de-prioritisation in terms of public health;
- g) We demand that the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2017 be notified to all government departments with immediate effect and urgent measures be taken to develop Rules of Business under the Act for effective implementation;
- h) We condemn discriminatory hostel timings of all students, particularly along gendered lines. We believe that university students should not have hostel timings as it amounts to paternalistic policies for adults;
- i) We demand pedestrian-friendly city planning in the form of working neighbourhoods by putting up street lights to ensure safety of working women who cannot afford private transportation to and from their workplaces;
- j) We demand responsible and non-misogynistic representation of women and gender minorities in entertainment. We also demand responsible, non-sensationalist reporting of issues and news concerning women and gender minorities on mainstream and social media. We believe such representation and reporting incites violence against women and gender and sexual minorities and reinforces patriarchal mindsets.

7. Rights of Religious Minorities

- a) We demand legislation on matters of personal law for religious minorities. The virtual absence of laws deprives minority communities of the right to seek legal protection in their matrimonial matters, get Form-B and CNICs, placing women from religious minorities in particularly disadvantaged conditions;
- b) We demand laws against forced conversions. This law should provide protection to minority women and the government shall establish a committee which prepares a report about the cases of forced conversions and punishes the people involved;
- c) We demand an amendment to the Christian Divorce Act 1869 that allows adultery as a ground for divorce. These narrow grounds for dissolution of marriage violate and damage the dignity of Christians, especially Christian women, due to the social and cultural implications ascribed to the accusations of adultery. Furthermore, we demand the formulation of rules of business for the Punjab Anand Karaj Act 2017 for Sikhs and the Hindu Marriage Act 2017;

- d) We demand safety of all religious minorities and their places of worship, and for the state to severely punish those that may seek to harm them;
- e) We also demand that all religious monuments and places of worship be retained under the sovereignty of members of that faith, under whose council the state will choose to take or withhold any actions related to these sites.

8. Democratic Rights

- a) We demand an end to censorship of the press, academic and online spaces. Freedom of expression is an inalienable right for everyone, and censorship suppresses critical voices while allowing hate speech that incites violence against women and gender and sexual minorities;
- b) We condemn arbitrary limits on the right to freedom of assembly, association and protest, and demand that the state, take all necessary measures to ensure that laws which limit this right, including the colonial-era sedition law, be repealed immediately;
- c) While we demand effective justice and accountability for perpetrators of violence, our politics rests on the provision of humane, proportionate punishment. We are firmly against the death penalty and cruel and inhumane punishment in all cases.

Appendix C – Aurat Azadi March Charter of Demands



CHARTER OF DEMANDS

Women and gender minorities from Islamabad and across the country will be marching on International Working Women's Day on March 8th against the patriarchal violence, inequality and oppression that we face in every aspect of our lives and to take steps towards the creation of a more just and humane social order. Join us as we raise our voice against all forms of violence, from killings to enforced marriages, from sexual violence to acid attacks, from harassment to moral policing. Join us as we demand an end to women's domestic confinement and servitude and call for fair and equal compensation for our labour and a just distribution of resources. Join us as we stand united against rising socioeconomic inequality, against the abuse of our religion in defense of patriarchal privileges, against the oppression of transgender and other gender and sexual minorities, against the securitization of our state and society and in support of the protection of democratic and civil liberties.

March with us and let yourselves be heard! Because patriarchy as a system is against all of us! Join us on the 8th of March, outside Islamabad Press Club at 2:00.

Here are our demands:

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

- 1) The right for women and transgender workers to unionize.
- 2) A living wage, dignified working conditions, labor protections and social security for all women and men workers.
- 3) Regularization of contracts, living wages, stable career paths and pensions for all women and men nurses, teachers and doctors.
- 4) Formal contracts, minimum wage guarantees and social security for all domestic workers.
- 5) Increased budgetary provision to ensure social responsibility for child care and provision of universal childcare in all formal workplaces in Pakistan.

- 6) Elimination of all social barriers that prevent women from earning a dignified living.
- 7) Widespread land reform targeted towards women to address land inequality, undermine landed social and political privileges and ensure a fairer gender distribution of land.
- 8) Reform of civil inheritance laws to ensure women receive their rightful equal share.
- 9) Urban land reform and land regulation changes to ensure provision of dignified public and low- income housing for the working classes of our city, including women, religious and ethnic minorities, and transgender, queer and non- binary people.
- 10) Regularization of katchi abadis in Islamabad and other cities, and the granting of proprietary rights to all residents, and the initiation of upgradation and regeneration programs with community participation.
- 11) The elimination of forced, bonded and unpaid labor.
- 12) Strengthening of and increased financing for all labor departments to ensure proper enforcement of labor laws in all workplaces.
- 13) An end to the destruction of khokas, kiosks and other sources of livelihoods for poor workers in the name of 'anti-encroachment'.
- 14) Institutional support and affordable credit for women entrepreneurs and co-operative enterprises to support improved livelihoods for women.
- 15) Affirmative action, including quotas and scholarships, for education, employment and healthcare for women, transgender and non- binary people, minorities and people with disabilities.
- 16) Creating education and employment opportunities for transgender people and queer/non-binary people, particularly while ensuring a safe and harassment-free academic and working environment.
- 17) End to regressive system of jahez, which makes daughters into 'liabilities', thrusts them into potentially violent marriages, also profited by the capitalist system.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND JUSTICE

- 18) Ensure zero tolerance for violence against women, trans people and minorities.
- 19) End to attacks on sexual harassment and violence survivors and legal protections against frivolous defamation suits.

- 20) Institution of harassment committees with women's representation in all workplaces, and penalties for organizations that fail to institute them.
- 21) Strict action against those found guilty of and complicit in sexual harassment in all educational institutions, including the University of Baluchistan.
- 22) Elimination of all anti-women laws and policies, including citizenship discrimination, laws of testimony and unequal inheritance, among others
- 23) Freedom for legally adult citizens to choose their life partner and end to forced marriages in the name of culture and religion.
- 24) Elimination of forced conversions and child marriages
- 25) End to trafficking of women into prostitution, forced marriages, and domestic servitude.
- 26) Establishment of a national sex offender registry.
- 27) Inquiry into murder and burial of thousands of female babies across the country.
- 28) Affirmative action for increased minimum representation of women (at least 33%) in the criminal justice system, including in the judiciary, police and other law enforcement agencies.
- 29) Establishment of women's desks at all police stations in the country and mandatory gender sensitization training for law enforcement officials.
- 30) Short-term reform of criminal justice system to ensure full rights and access to justice for women prisoners, juveniles as well as other prisoners.
- 31) Establishment of trauma centers, housing and rehabilitation facilities for victims of sexual and domestic violence across the country.
- 32) Address child sexual abuse by ensuring rapid, effective law enforcement responses to cases, mass public education, and ending the culture of shame and silence around sexual violence.
- 33) Longer-term shift toward a restorative criminal justice system that moves away from solely punitive incarceration and punishment and focuses on restoring the harm done to victims and healing from trauma.
- 34) An end to cyber-harassment against women, transgender and queer people to enable them to engage without fear in digital spaces.
- 35) Reform of laws that marginalize and discriminate against gender and sexual minorities.
- 36) End to harassment and intimidation of working class transgender people of the city at the hands of police and state officials, and establishment of trans protection and conflict resolution cells which ensure their safety.

- 37) Improve the national gender recognition process while protecting the private data of transgender persons.

HEALTHCARE

- 38) Free universal healthcare, including that pertaining to sexual and reproductive health.
- 39) Ensure women's rights and control over our own bodies, without the control of state or any other institutions.
- 40) Recognize the critical importance of early childbearing by ensuring paid maternity leave of 6 months and paternity leave of 3 months.
- 41) Increase in financing for strengthened family planning programs to institute proper birth spacing across the country and affordable contraceptive services across the country.
- 42) Inclusion of accurate, scientific and age- appropriate content on sexual and reproductive health into the education curricula, particularly for health workers.
- 43) Providing stigma-free physical and mental healthcare for transgender and queer people.

STUDENT RIGHTS

- 44) Increase education spending to at least 6% of GDP to ensure universal quality education for all.
- 45) Overhaul public education system to increase public and parental oversight and accountability.
- 46) Affirmative action for girl students to decrease the gender gap in education.
- 47) Reinstate student unions in universities across the country, with minimum representation of 33% for female students and representation in university decision-making bodies.
- 48) Establish harassment committees on each campus and ensure the representation of female students in these committees.
- 49) Ensure adequate housing for students.
- 50) End all forms of moral policing and harassment on campuses and in student hostels.
- 51) Abolish discriminatory curfew timings at student hostels.
- 52) CIVIL LIBERTIES

- 53) Uphold the constitutional rights of freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and protest for all citizens.
- 54) End the criminalization, political repression and censorship of dissenting voices.
- 55) End the unconstitutional practice of enforced disappearances and pass a bill to criminalize the practice.
- 56) End the forced abduction of Baloch women and stop the sexual harassment of Pashtun women by security personnel.
- 57) Repeal colonial era sedition laws and end the arbitrary use of anti-terrorism laws against non-violent political workers and activists.
- 58) Immediate withdrawal of all social media regulations and practices that arbitrarily curb the right to free speech and dissent.
- 59) Provide transgender people the right to marry.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

- 60) Constitutionally mandated minimum 33% representation for women in all elected bodies at the federal, provincial, district and sub-district level.
- 61) Establish a federal and provincial government-funded program to build women's capacities and networks for political participation at the grassroots level.
- 62) Reform in political parties to ensure minimum representation of women, transgender and non-binary people in their decision-making bodies.
- 63) Enactment of strict penalties against those who prevent women's electoral and political participation.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACE

- 64) Ensure women's safe access to public spaces, and enactment of penalties on street harassment.
- 65) Affirmative action and training for women's mobility to ensure women's access to and capacity to use public and private transport.
- 66) Creation of safe spaces and community centers for women, non-binary people and girls.
- 67) End to regressive, misogynist cultural depictions of women and societal relations on media that perpetuate and profit from patriarchy.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- 68) An end to the destructive treatment of finite natural systems as exploitable resources.
- 69) A shift from reliance on fossil fuel usage to renewable sources of energy.
- 70) Enforcement of fuel standards, re-forestation and green cover and improved public transport to ensure livable air quality in our cities.
- 71) Reform of our water management systems to ensure availability of clean drinking water for all citizens, including a review of irrigation and development policies to end water wastage.
- 72) Overhaul of waste management systems through state-led systems with private and community participation.



@auratazadimarch

Appendix D – Organization Profiles

1. Women Democratic Front (WDF)

Women Democratic Front (WDF) is a Pakistan-based, independent socialist-feminist resistance movement, formally established on International Working Women's Day 8 March 2018 at Islamabad through a foundation congress by delegates from our provincial units that have been working since 2014.

We are neither a philanthropic or a welfare organization, nor a non-governmental organization (NGO), nor a political party. We are a mass resistance movement, with a cadre. We do not accept any form of support and financing from any government, semi-government or non-government agencies in Pakistan or in foreign countries. We run our organization with membership fee and contributions collected from progressive individual sympathizers through finance appeals, approved by WDF.

Vision and Goals

We are a leftist political organization aiming to build an organic socialist-feminist mass resistance movement through organizing working-class women (who do physical or mental labor) in urban and rural areas, and also through bringing together struggles of women.

We consider patriarchal oppression, discrimination and violence as part of overall exploitation and oppression of the masses in Pakistan on the basis of gender, class and nation – pillars of capitalism, feudalism, imperialism and religious extremism. We see them as intertwined and interlocking forms of oppression. We are firmly committed to continue struggle till emancipation of women from all forms of patriarchal oppression and these socio-economic bases; for women's right to life, peace and progress, equality for all, establishing people's democracy and egalitarian society in Pakistan, based on socialist-feminist ideals and principles.

Contact

Federal Secretariat Address: 318-A, Street 16. Sector G-10/2, Islamabad

Ph: 0302 8508934 - 0332 0363955 | Email: wdf.pk@yahoo.com

2. Aurat March

The Aurat March Lahore is an independent collective of women, aligned to the banner of “Hum Aurtaan”. The March is not aligned to any political party, NGO or corporation.

Vision and Goals

To highlight issues of violence against female and trans bodies, economic justice, environmental justice, reproductive justice, inclusion for disabled persons and transgender individuals, police brutality, enforced disappearances and anti-war struggles.

Much like the Aurat March 2018, the marchers seek to express solidarity with women from across Pakistan to push for accountability and restorative justice against violence, standing with women who experience violence and harassment in the workplace, at home, in public spaces and at the hands of security forces. We stand arm-in-arm with women resisting economic exploitation at the hands of a patriarchal-capitalist structure as well as women speaking out against violence against them—from Khaisor to Lahore. We push for peace and against: war, militarisation of our everyday lives and rhetoric of jingoism. By marching the streets, we seek to reclaim public spaces that women are often excluded from and assert our right to collective political action.

The march is organised under the banner of Hum Aurtaan; a collective of feminist women, transgender individuals, non-binary persons and gender & sexual minorities who stand against patriarchal structures which results in sexual, economic and structural exploitation of women. The marchers identify their struggle as deeply political; however, are not aligned with any political party, organisation or corporation.

Contact: auratmarchlahore@gmail.com

Aurat March Karachi - marches for an end to violence and harassment, economic justice, reproductive justice and environmental justice and minority rights.

Aurat Azadi March Islamabad is held every year in Islamabad and other parts of the country to fight against the economic, social and political oppressive structures against women, especially patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism & colonialism. They are leftist and are organized mainly by Women Democratic Front.

3. Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)

Digital Rights Foundation is a registered NGO working on digital rights and cyber security. It aims to strengthen protections for human rights defenders (HRDs), with a focus on women's rights, in digital spaces through policy advocacy & digital security awareness-raising. In addition, it also aims to protect women from work and cyber-harassment that they have to deal with throughout their lives.

Contact:

Executive Director – Nighat Dad

+ 92-42-35852180

info@digitalrightsfoundation.pk

4. Bolo Bhi

Bolo Bhi is a civil society organization geared towards advocacy, policy, and research in the areas of digital rights and civic responsibility. This encompasses the right to information, free speech, and privacy online, so that the internet can be realized as a free and representative space for civic and political engagement for all segments of society, including marginalized communities and genders. Bolo Bhi believes that an informed citizenry with the knowledge, skills, tools and disposition towards civic engagement is integral for effective government transparency and accountability.

Vision and Goals

Freedom of expression, Right to information, Privacy, Business and Human Rights, Digital Safety, Gender and Minority Rights and Data Protection.

Contact:

Farieha Aziz Co-founder and director at Bolo Bhi

Email. farieha@bolobhi.org

5. Femsoc at LUMS

FemSoc at LUMS is a student-run society at LUMS concerned with increasing awareness about the institution of patriarchy embedded in our culture.

Feminist Society (FemSoc) at LUMS emphasizes raising awareness and creating debate on gender issues such as, but not limited to, patriarchal gender roles and power dynamics, female education, the gender pay gap, female participation in politics (youth & electoral), sexual harassment and violence, gender disparities on campus (such as in sciences), intimate partner violence, portrayal of gender minorities in the media etc. FemSoc seeks to encourage awareness of the role men can and have played in the movement for gender equality. We are also a society that pushes for structural change for gender and sexual minorities on campus. Though our individual members may ascribe to a particular strain of feminist thought, we as a society aim for our activism and work to be intersectional, LGBT-inclusive, anti-imperialist and anti-racist.

Contact:

femsoc@lums.edu.pk

President: Marha Fatima

6. Women in Law Initiative Pakistan

Women in law is a network of female lawyers working for equality of opportunity for female lawyers through increased visibility and networking opportunities, trainings, law reforms, and other measures. It has three chapters based in Lahore, ICT and KP and has liaison with similar associations based in Karachi and in South Africa. The initiative was established in 2016. Its core demands are fair representation, safe workplaces, ending discriminations, effective strategies against gender based violence, right to mobility, information, access to public spaces and climate action.

Objectives:

1. Advance the professional development of women lawyers
2. Promote gender equality and gender sensitivity among lawyers and within the judiciary;
3. Improve access to justice by utilizing the skills of women lawyers;
4. Provide mentorship and guidance to young women lawyers and students via professional development workshops; and
5. Promote greater participation and representation of women lawyers in the bar associations, as well as more representatives at the Bench.

6. safe and harassment free workplaces
7. ending discrimination against female lawyers
8. addressing systemic challenges and inherent biases that hold women back
9. creating a more conducive, inclusive, equal, safe, accessible and diverse legal profession.

Founder: Nida Usman Chaudhary

womeninlaw@learnpak.com.pk

nida@learnpak.com.pk

tweets at @WomenInLawPk

(Women in Law Initiative Pakistan)

7. Women Lawyers Association Karachi

Women Lawyers Association Karachi is a network of female lawyers based in Karachi. They apply feminist principles to legal profession to ensure greater and more equal access to justice by promotion of feminist jurisprudence and creating an inclusive and accessible safe space and support network.

Objectives:

1. Advance the professional development of women lawyers
2. Promote gender equality and gender sensitivity among lawyers and within the judiciary;
3. Improve access to justice by utilizing the skills of women lawyers;
4. Provide mentorship and guidance to young women lawyers and students via professional development workshops; and
5. Promote greater participation and representation of women lawyers in the bar associations, as well as more representatives at the Bench.
6. safe and harassment free workplaces
7. ending discrimination against female lawyers
8. addressing systemic challenges and inherent biases that hold women back
9. creating a more conducive, inclusive, equal, safe, accessible and diverse legal profession.

Contact: malkani.sara@gmail.com (WLA Karachi)

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung established its Pakistan Office in 1990. FES focuses on enhancing dialogue for mutual understanding and peaceful development in its international work. Social justice in politics, the economy and in the society is one of our leading principles worldwide. FES operates 107 offices in nearly as many countries.

In Pakistan, FES has been cooperating with governmental institutions, civil society, and academic organizations and carrying out activities;

- To strengthen democratic culture through deliberative processes and informed public discourse;
- To promote and advocate social justice as an integral part of economic development through economic reforms and effective labor governance;
- To enhance regional cooperation for peace and development

About the author

Dr. Rubina Saigol received her doctoral degree in the Sociology of Education from the University of Rochester and her Master's in Developmental Psychology from Columbia University. She has authored several books and papers on feminism, the state, human rights, and nationalism.

Nida Usman Chaudhary holds LL.B (Hons) and LL.M (Law & Development) from University of London. She is a diversity and inclusion advocate with over 12 years of work experience. Her focus areas include access to justice, gender equality and diversity in the legal profession.

Why the Fourth Wave of Feminists?

Since 2018 a new wave of feminism has swept across Pakistan consisting mainly of a younger generation of women and other genders. The new, contemporary iteration of feminism departs in significant ways from the earlier articulations of activism from the 1950s to the 1990s which were focused on challenging the public, socio-legal sphere, that is, the state. The current fourth wave inaugurated an entirely new phase in feminist struggles by challenging and deconstructing the hallowed private sphere of the family, community, and society.

Nevertheless, contradictions, ambiguities and submerged conflicts exist between and among groups of this fourth wave.

Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this paper are exclusively of the authors.