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Challenging Norms: “Aurat March Slogans” From Balochistan’s Women Perspective

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Abstract and



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Abstract

The contentious slogan "Mera Jism Meri Marzi" ("My Body, My Choice") from Pakistan's Aurat March is the main topic of this study, which investigates Baloch women's opinions about it. Since its inception in 2018, the Aurat March has grown into a prominent movement supporting social justice, gender equality, and women's rights. But because of its controversial chants, which some believe go against Pakistani cultural and religious norms, it has also generated a lot of discussion. The study investigates how women from various socioeconomic levels in Balochistan perceive the march and its slogans through qualitative interviews. The results show a variety of viewpoints: Some question the march's conformity to Western ideas and possible conflict with Islamic and cultural norms, while many see it as an essential forum for bringing attention to women's issues. Particularly, the motto "Mera Jism Meri Marzi" has generated a great deal of controversy; proponents see it as a cry for bodily autonomy, while detractors contend it encourages immorality and goes against conventional wisdom. The study also emphasizes how media portrayals affect public opinion, with some media outlets focusing on issues while others show the march favorably as a progressive force. The study comes to the conclusion that although the Aurat March has helped to increase awareness and challenge patriarchal norms, the intricate interplay of cultural, religious, and societal factors affects how effective it is at promoting change. According to the study, feminist movement in Pakistan has to take a more nuanced strategy that promotes progressive change while taking local sensitivities into account.

Keywords: Aurat March, Mera Jism Meri Marzi, Balochistan, Bodily Autonomy Cultural and Religious Norms

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I. Introduction:

In Pakistan, women right have been ignored by media for many years, until recently when Media highlighted the emergence of the Women's March in the United States and around the world. These marches also inspired Pakistani women to act for their rights.

On 8 March 2018 on international women's day, first Aurat March was celebrated in Karachi by women to raise their voices for not only women's right but also for helpless groups in Pakistan under the banner of Aurat March. (kazim Hamdani, 2021).

The main aim of Aurat march was to assemble women and to demand an end to violence and harassment against them. But now it has transfer into an extensive movement, which also includes transgender community people to create awareness and better laws to protect them and change people's attitudes and behaviour towards them.

The march gradually transfers into a movement with women of all races and culture from all over the Pakistan to demand legal and cultural reforms. The march has been divided into different geographical based chapters. The Lahore chapter has been responsible for producing comprehensive programme targeting different themes in relation to women's development, such as health care, education, etc. (Aleena khan, 2021)

The Karachi chapter formed a strong social media campaign to create awareness for gender violence. But all chapters have common goal such as economic Justise, labour right for women, recognition for women work and day care centres to ensure women involvement in to work force of all types. (Aleena khan, 2021).

The non-hierarchical leadership of Aurat March is present throughout the country. The campaigner of this movement in their annual march have written a declaration to communicate their demands to the government and Pakistani society. To louden the women's voices different Art and performances are used, for instance theatre performances are performed by the activists to highlight women issues and poems, speeches and song about feminism are shared by women across Pakistan.

However, Aurat march become controversial when the famous slogan 'Mera Jism and Meri Marzi', which translates to my body, my choice, created distress in 2019 and continuous to instigate controversy. The slogans are viewed by some groups as an attempt to force 'western culture' in Pakistan. Such slogans are also claimed as un-Islamic by some religious groups. Apart from it is more difficult in hierarchical society to digest that woman would openly talk about their rights and stand for their rights to be heard. (Anmol Irfan, 2021)

From the last three year some Pakistanis have claimed that Aurat march activists are elites who try to bring western agenda. Moreover, the campaigners of Aurat march are also countered by traditionalist and conservative groups such as Jamiat ulema-e-Islam.

Resultantly, such reactions and hateful speech from such groups also creates many mental issues among activist- who feel endanger and defamed by such speech. As some women have been fired from their jobs and other were punished and shamed for participating in the march.

1.2 Significance of Study:

This research provide an insight in to changing stereotypes and persuading social attitudes towards gender equality and women's right by examining how females of Balochistan take the slogans of the Aurat March. More over the slogan will help to clarify the misconceptions about slogans used in the aurat march.

1.3 Objectives:

- To find out how females of Balochistan interpret slogans used in the Aurat March.
- To find out the opinion of females of Balochistan about the famous slogan of Aurat March 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi' (My body, my choice).

1.4 Research Questions:

- RQ1 How do women of Balochistan perceive the slogans used in the Aurat march?
- RQ2: Do the people of Balochistan support the famous slogan of Aurat march "Mera Jism, Meri Marzi" (My body, my choice)?

2.0 Literature Review:

Touba Tariq and Khadija Akram, (2020) studied the linguistic analysis of language used in placards observed during Auarat March. They used five slogans which were analyzed using the 'ideological square model' proposed by Van Dijk. The results shows that the placard chosen for this research have mild language used, unlike the slogan 'mera jism meri marzi'. Harash usage of words is avoided.

lahrat Noreen et al., (2020) represented Anti-Islamic perspective: A critical discourse analysis of Aurat March (2019-2020) in Pakistan. The research found that the slogans of aurat march created non-Islam values in the Islamic society of Pakistan. Fair Cloughs 3d model of critical discourse was used by the researcher to analyse sample of 19 slogans.

Fatima Zafar Baig et al., (2020) researched on Role of media in representation of socio-cultural ideologies in Aurat March (2019-2020): A multi model Discourse analysis. For this the researcher selected 3 articles from different local newspaper about Aurat march and analysed it by using fair clough's model of critical discourse analysis. The finding show that media can play positive and negative role in language and power.

Syeda Mujeeba Batool and Aisha Aness Malik, (2021) explored the revolution and regeneration of Feminist movement in Pakistan. The researcher examined feminist movement in the country by going through Aurat march. The researchers showed that

how the issues of sexuality and body politics has regenerated the feminist movement in Pakistan.

Methodology:

Current study is on opinion of females of Balochistan regarding slogans used in Aurat March. For that the researcher has taken interviews from females of Balochistan as a methodology. The format of interviews is open-ended questions, asking opinion of females about slogan of Aurat March. Which in turn will help out the researcher in data collection and for recommendations of the research.

However the respondents for this research are categorized based on age and socio economic status. The respondents are women aged 25 or more than 30 years old and are intellectuals, lawyers, university teachers, journalists, activists and house wives.

Moreover, thematic analysis is applied to analyze the interview. The key themes for analyzation of interview are perception about aurat march, opinion about slogans, impact of slogan on cultural norms and religious values, resistance and criticism on slogans mera jism meri marzi and females of Balochistan, media representation of slogans and aurat march and future course of slogan.

Result and finding:

Perception of females of Balochistan about aurat march:

Every year Aurat March gets significant attention and support in various parts of the country, including Balochistan where many women in Balochistan view the Aurat March as a valuable platform for supporting women's right and raising awareness about women issues. For such women Aurat march is symbol of solidarity and empowerment.

"The Aurat March is a good first step toward candid discussions about women's rights. However, the organizers ought to take these actions to enable women to fulfill their rights."

"The Aurat March offers women a platform to fight for their rights."

"Women raise their voices and demand their autonomy and dignity in the Aurat March."

Despite the support, some women of Balochistan have great concerns over Aurat March issues these criticism revolve around cultural sensitivities or socio-economic and security constraints.

"The Aurat March has no bearing on our society or religion."

"Aurat March is currently being severely vilified, and there is so much drama surrounding it that I'm still not sure what their exact goals are."

In other words, they do make their point, but there is always a problem with the stories that make it to the news and social media. The aurat march is a fantastic idea if it is led with good intentions and with society in mind. Public discussion and a platform for women's issues are necessary.

"Although feminism is not inherently evil, the image and intent of the Aurat March were ruined by the female participants who brought demands that were not acceptable. Aurat March isn't horrible, but sure, the organizers spoiled it".

"The most obscene and pitiful social event taking place in Pakistan is the Aurat March. As a woman, I acknowledge that there are certain rights for women, yet our religion forbids us from engaging in vulgar behavior".

Opinion of females of Balochistan about slogans:

The aurat march is known for its provocative slogans which are designed to address issues of gender inequality, violence and empowerment. Opinions about these slogan is based on individual perspectives, cultural contexts and societal norms. Viewpoints about these slogan can vary from supportive to critical perspectives.

"While I agree with many slogans, there are several that I will not support. They should, in my opinion, bear in mind that society does not recognize women's difficulties, and how can people accept the lighthearted viewpoints expressed in the slogans? In order to prevent the focus from shifting, some terms ought to be prohibited".

"Some of the Auart March's slogans are incredibly inventive and speak directly to the issues of gender inequality."

"Those cheesy slogans shouted by participants in the Aurat March make me feel incredibly humiliated. I think it is not appropriate to take images of someone's private space. The previously concealed information is now regularly revealed".

"That's a social absurdity, vulgarity, or nudity".

Impact of slogans on cultural and religious values:

The Aurat march has featured a range of slogans addressing varieties of women issues.

Pakistan is a Muslim country where cultural and religious values plays a significant role in shaping societal norms, however, intersection of feminist slogans with these societal norms has created a complex landscape.

According to some interviewees, the aurat march through its slogan has created awareness of gender issues in Pakistan, encouraging equality and women rights.

"Many women expressed to us their desire to participate, but we are unable to do so due to criticism of AM, claiming that the March is led by women who oppose Islam".

Despite its impact, the Aurat march has faced considerable critics, where they argue that slogans undermined the cultural and religious norms. This resistance has highlighted the tension between modern feminism and entrenched cultural practices.

"Totally irrelevant according to our religion and society".

"Every nation and society has its own ethics, culture, and values. If the aurat march adheres to Pakistani society's values and culture, it will appeal to a wider range of people. However, if it follows the current AM model, it will only have to include these particular people, and some crowds will join AM in order to satiate their sexual needs rather than for the sake of women's rights".

"Aurat march with its slogan is defaming Islam. In Islam rights are equal for men and women. Islam give women freedom of expression, freedom of marriage and all human rights to women".

Slogan 'mera jism meri marzi' (my body my choice):

"Mera Jism Meri Marzi" is a slogan used by feminists in Pakistan to decry gender-based violence and advocate for bodily autonomy. The phrase was first used at the 2018 Aurat March. Since then, conservative organizations have been aggressively denouncing the phrase, arguing that it violates the religious and cultural standards of Pakistani culture. Conservatives said that the tagline encouraged obscenity and nudity.

"The slogan used in Aurat march were considered provocative, obscene and immoral; they were seen as an insult to Pakistani religious and cultural values". (Syeda Mujeeba batool, 2021).

"The slogan should not be promoted because it has already killed and vanished the overall noble cause of the march".

However, feminists argued that the term should be interpreted widely because they opposed the mistreatment and harassment of women. More specifically, they employ the tagline because they believe it is improper to touch or pursue women sexually against their will. The feminist further said that these catchphrases revealed the underlying weakness of the patriarchal system and paved the way for a new generation of feminism.

"Slogan 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi' should be promoted as women must be allowed to defend themselves and to say NO to rape or marital rapes. But not to get naked or show their skin".

"It should be, but the words can be changed a bit so that it can be perceived exactly what the women mean by it. Activists have tried to explain the meaning but people don't want to believe it, they believe what they perceive of it. So according to this society, just some changes could give more support to this cause".

Media representation of slogan:

The way the Aurat March is portrayed in the media varies greatly, depending on the magazine and its viewpoint. Several media sites have praised the march as a significant movement for women's empowerment and gender equality since it provides a forum for women to voice their issues and demand change.

Conversely, some media outlets draw attention to controversial statements made or aspects of the march. They interpret the march as a threat to societal values and criticize it from a traditionalist or conservative perspective.

When asked about how the aurat march was portrayed in the media, women from Balochistan gave the following answers.

“The media broadcasts the drama attached to it more. Coverage in true means is low. I consume social media more, there I see how badly it is perceived. Traditional media should play a big role here and give more screen time to it”.

“They are showing negative picture. Social media such as Facebook Instagram Twitter etc. represents all the controversies that are related to Aurat March”.

“Media is showing only controversial things. And it settled an agenda with a negative impact on the nation”.

Analysis:

The research explores the perceptions and opinion of Balochistani women regarding the Aurat March slogans, particularly focusing on the debatable slogan “Mera Jism , Meri Marzi” (My Body, My choice). The finding disclose a range of responses showing the complex interplay between feminist activism and deep rooted cultural and religious norms.

Balochistan’s women view Aurat march as a valuable platform for supporting women’s right and promote knowledge about gender issues and challenging societal norms. However, there is also criticism about its calibration with religious and cultural norms. Some women criticize it for being misrepresented or poorly executive in terms of its goals and methods.

Likewise, the Aurat March has faced criticism for allegedly conflicting with Islamic and cultural norms. Intersection of feminist slogans with cultural and religious values in Pakistan creates a disputable environment. Critics argue that the term ‘Mera Jism, Meri Marzi’ threatens traditional values and furthers societal divisiveness. Furthermore, the slogans of Aurat March are perceived as vulgar or provocative, detract from the march intended message and hinders its acceptance.

Similarly, in term of media portrayal, some media outlets support the idea that the march is progressive force for change, therefore, portray the Aurat March positively. While other media outlets (especially social media) portrays controversies and criticism, where the public’s perspective may be skewed by this unfavorable coverage, which could obscure the march’s accomplishments and objectives.

Conclusion and suggestion:

The study emphasize how differently women in Balochistan saw the Aurat march and its catchy phrases. Though most people view the march as a significant forum for promoting women rights. Some people have conflicting feeling about its slogans,

especially ‘Mera Jism, Meri Marzi’. Proponents see these slogans as effective means of promoting physical autonomy and combating gender inequality. However, some criticize them for being offensive and out of step with being religious and cultural norms.

The march overall has a controversial effect because it challenges deeply ingrained social conventions. But it also has a good effect in term of promoting change and increasing awareness.

Public perception of the Aurat March is greatly influenced by media portrayal. Unfavorable portrayals can feed criticism and opposition, while positive portrayals can increase support.

However, the Aurat March and related movements need to be more effective, and this requires a nuanced strategy that takes into account local and cultural sensitivities while yet promoting progressive change. Clear communication of the march’s objectives and focus on inclusive dialogue may help bridge the gap between feminist campaigning and conventional society ideals.

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