



Radical Feminism of Pakistan: Islamic and Cultural Prospective, Case Study of Islamabad

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Abstract: This research seeks to establish the prevalence of radical feminism in the capital city of Islamabad, in Pakistan, considering the Islamic instructions and culture. By using interviews with the activists and scholars the paper delves into difficulties feminist movements encounter when seeking to disestablish gender equality with religion and culture. It shows the easiness and the difficulty of such a narrative for a female creator, commitment to the principle of feminism, and social conservatism, and main obstacles like cyberbullying and stigma. This calls for activism and social movements that take different forms including borrowing religion and the Holy Qur'ân to ignite change and fight patriarchy. The research has significance potential for understanding the feminist approaches in the conservative Islamic countries and therefore requires the future research in the other areas of Pakistan.

Keywords: Radical feminism, Islam, Gender equality, Online harassment, Culture, Islamabad, Pakistan

1. Introduction

In other words, feminism is a movement for the liberation of women in social, political, and economical domains with several forms existent in the world and one of them is radical form of feminist that questions the reasons of women subordination. In Pakistan, religious and cultural of values form the social context, where radical form of feminism tends to meet a lot of opposition particularly from the traditionalists and the Muslim clerics that explain that the western feminist ideologies are against the teachings of Islam (Shaheed, 2010). This is the tension between, on the one hand, the Islamic cultural values that are prominent especially in the Middle East and on the other hand radical feminist ideologies that are very active globally.

Radical feminists in Pakistan argue that patriarchal system is rooted in both, religion and culture and therefore requires challenge of the religious narratives that are used to perpetuate gender oppression. Islamic feminism, on the other hand, seeks change of gender roles in Islam but insists in reinterpretation of both the Qur'an and Hadith for modern Islamic feminism (Mernissi 1991; Wadud 1999).

As in other cities such as Islamabad where both family oriented conservative values and liberal progressive trends in Pakistan coexist, radical feminism will be accepted and appreciated by some groups and negatively perceived and rejected by others. The question remains: how do these women traverse tension between being modern feminism and strictly patriarchal Islamic? How do these women experience a reality that puts them in

opposition to fundamentalist doctrine? This research will aim at addressing these issues and LO 1 will try to do this by exploring the views of radical feminists in Islamabad.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is soil where religious and cultural values, strongly influence woman's roles as well as their rights (Zia, 2009). Feminism that challenges such norms especially radical feminism is often labelled as 'western' or 'unIslamic Radical feminism that seeks to question the patriarchal interoperation of religion gets disapproved, ridiculed, socially boycotted and in certain cases threatened with violence (Shaheed, 2010). On the same note, Islamic feminism challenges for women rights while upholding religious affiliation without discarding it (Islamic feminism: An introduction 2011, Ahmed, L 1992).

1.2 Objectives

- 1) To investigate how radical feminist ideas interact with Islamic cultural values in Islamabad.
- 2) To analyze the lived experiences of radical feminists in Islamabad.
- 3) To assess the role of Islamic teachings in shaping the feminist discourse in Islamabad.
- 4) To contribute to the academic discourse on feminism in Islamic societies by exploring the specific challenges faced by radical feminists in Islamabad.

1.3 Hypothesis

H1: Radical feminist ideologies in Islamabad significantly challenge the prevailing Islamic cultural values regarding women's roles in society.

H2: Islamic cultural values in Islamabad significantly resist the adoption and spread of radical feminist ideas.

H3: Women in Islamabad who identify with radical feminism face significant social, cultural, and religious challenges in advocating for gender equality.

H4: Islamic feminism is more widely accepted in Islamabad compared to radical feminism, due to its alignment with religious values.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The objectives of this research are to uncover the challenges that surround the feminist discourse in Pakistan especially in Islamabad. It will fill the existing shortage of literature on radical feminism in Islamic societies where religion and culture form a very significant part of the society. As such, the findings of this research will provide useful lessons for radical feminism and Islamic cultural values for not only the scholars and activists but for muslim majority countries when it comes to gender equality (Badran, 2011; Wadud, 1999).

Furthermore, the study will provide a body of knowledge for feminist organizations that are functioning in Pakistan by identifying existing hurdles for radical feminism. Addressing these problems might help come up with better ways of promoting women's rights free from politically incorrect themes that alienate culturally and religiously conservative groups (Shaheed, 2010).

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Feminism and Islamic Contexts

Feminism in whichever form it comes has for ages endeavored to fight the patriarchal society and advocating for the rights of women and equality (Butler 1990). However, the discussion of feminism in Islamic countries such as Pakistan is a little complex because of the religious influence in determining the culture of the society (Ahmed, 1992). Islamic feminism for example is a very loud voice which tries to a portray justice in the texts of the Islamic holy books arguing for equality of women and men based on the religion (Wadud, 1999). On the other hand, radical feminism condemns all forms of patriarchy including those that are religious in nature and calls for the total eradication of all structures that reinforce the subjugation of women (hooks, 2015).

As already indicated, this conflict between two strands of feminism is clearly seen in Islamic societies. This is why Islamic feminists often accuse radical feminism of being 'Westernized', and not taking into consideration the cultural-contingent character of the Middle Eastern societies, as well as respecting the Islamic legacy (Badran, 2011). On the other hand, some of the radical feminism critics have argued that the Islamic feminism is very weak in addressing the question of the patriarchal understandings of religion that are used to rationalize the subordination of women.

2.2 Feminism in Pakistan

Feminist organizations in Pakistan have therefore been resisted especially by religious factions that claim that feminism is against the culture of Islam (Shaheed, 2010). Nevertheless, Pakistani women have continued to protest for their rights in one-way or the other as women's rights organizations continue to push for causes such as education, health, and legal reform (Zia, 2009). Nevertheless, when it comes to the issue of feminism in Pakistan, what one has to understand is that there are those who have different stances and approach in the fight for gender equality in the said country.

To a certain extent, radical feminism in Pakistan is considered as a manifestation, deeply contradicting with the cultural values of the country regarding to Islamic rules and regulations because it fights against the main principles of the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic law and culture (Moghadam, 2003). This makes it rather hostile for radical feminists and they are even likened to hatred by more moderate feminists as well as certain religious groups. Various researches indicates that radical feminists in Pakistan are suppressed by societal and religion pressure. For example, Mahmood Shaheed, in her study WLUML Women Research Task Force Global Survey 2010, reveals the ways of social isolation and accusations of being a tool of the West that women pursuing radical feminism openly face. Such factors are observed to be most acute in the arguably conservative regions, such as Islamabad, where religion has considerable influence on community standards of morality (Zia 2009).

2.3 Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism provides one way of looking at the issue of women's rights and equality as this is based on the reinterpretation of religious passages. Academician including Amina Wadud [1999] and Fatima Mernissi [1991] have suggested that Islam is liberal to women. This branch of feminism is centered on protesting Islamic fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith in which they claim that these are scripts have been used in the past to subjugate women (Ahmed, 1992).

There are Islamic feminists in Pakistan who began demanding the change of the law especially in the matters of family law, inheritance and marriage (Shaheed, 2010). However, Islamic feminism remains a rather restricted approach in addressing the core problems that contribute to the continued oppression of women, especially because it continues to go back to religious analysis. While on the other hand radical feminists advocate for complete eradicating of the systems that support patriarchy in general and religion in particular.

2.4 The Intersection of Radical Feminism and Islamic Values in Pakistan

It comes as a question as to how radical feminism has been used in representing Pakistani women when its assumptions about gender and sexuality have been shaped by Islamic values. Some of the radical feminism agendas change the freedom that women deserve from the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic laws and structures. However, this approach is highly resisted especially in a society such as the Pakistani society in which the religion has permeated most of the social aspects of the community as noted by Moghadam (2003).

This paper, based on Shaheed's research (2010), reveals that most Pakistani women with radical feminism is a form of double exclusion. Besides being on the receiving end of prejudice from the overall society dominated by patriarchy, they also receive criticism from within the feminist movement especially Islamic feminists who opine that radical feminism does not conform to Islamic teachings. This issue contributes to the development of a rather intricate relation between radical feminists and authoritative institutions on one hand, and with female collaborators and internal 'enemies' on the other.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation for this research is in the feminism, religion and power following the gender and Islamic culture interface. Feminism theory, Islamic feminism and post-colonialism theory are used in this research to explore the connection between radical feminism and Islamic faith in Islamabad.

2.5.1 Feminist Theory

Hence, this research adopts the feminist perspective, which will draw mainly from the radical feminism by feminist scholars like hooks (2015) and Butler (1990). Radical feminism also rejects patriarchy as a method of domination, argues that it is across the board, and extends to religion as well. This strand of feminism assert for degendering of society, which is entailing the eradication of religion interpretation that fuel misogyny.

2.5.2 Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism, which has been developed by Amina Wadud (1999) and Fatima Mernissi (1991) also form part of the theory frameworks. Islamic feminism is an opposition to radical feminism since it supports the equality of women with men with a help of an Islamic law. This theory considers the reinterpretation of the religious scripture and establish the view that Islam when understood in another way means equality of man and woman (Ahmed, 1992).

2.5.3 Post-Colonial Theory

Some of the post-colonial theory used in this research are: “Can the Subaltern Speak”? By Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Leila Ahmed (1992). This theory processes one of the most significant defects of the post-Western channeling of a feminist discourse – the disregard for the difference cultural and religious orientation of the Computer societies. As post-colonial feminists have argued that the feminism has to be localized and enriched by the experiences and issues of women in different cultures and societies but it does not mean that it has to be colonialistic.

2.5.4 Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw popularised intersectional approach in 1989 as well and this also underpins this research. Intersectionality looks at how multiple forms of oppression including gender, race, class and religion compound one another to produce particular forms of oppression. In as much as this study is concerned, intersectionality plays a role of elucidating how being a women radical feminists in Islamabad suffer double injustice, both as women and as feminists exercising political discontent against religious and cultural dictatorship.

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative research paradigm to investigate Radical Feminism in Pakistan especially Islamabad. Phenomenology design was used due to its ability to describe the perception of the world by a specific group of feminist activists in the city by marrying the ‘ontological’ with the ‘epistemological’, comparing and contrasting the liberal feminism, Islamic culture, and the Iranian culture. The reason as to why qualitative methods were adopted is due to the fact that such methods provide nuanced insights from the public’s perception which are subjective in nature. The target population comprised of the feminist activists, scholars and professionals in Islamabad who participated in feminist discourses. Through purposive sampling 15 participants were chosen depending on their involvement in feminist activities and their willingness to be interviewed. This number of participants was considered to be adequate in order to ensure data saturation is reached. Administrative data were obtained through interviewing the participants using interviews that were structured and semi-structured, and the interviews were face-to-face and lasted about 45 minutes to 1 hour. Questions asked in the interview; attitude towards feminism regarding teaching of Islam, cultural barriers and effective lobbying approaches. Key themes emerged from the data: It included: (1) feeling that feminism clashes with Islamic culture, (2) culture as a hindrance to Islamic feminism, (3) social media awareness campaigns and (4).backlash experiences online. For example, one participant described the process of being a feminism with Islamic faith in the context of encounter with the community prejudice. Another said that cultural conservatism in Islamabad hindered the advancement of feminism especially in the public domain. They [LGBT] also aged social media as a force for good including as advocacy and method of harassment. Thematic analytical method was adopted in data analysis and it entailed data familiarisation, coding and theme development. therefore credibility was upheld by; member checking and observing a meticulous audit trail. Some of the shortcomings that were inherent in the study included small sample size as well as subjectivity. Nevertheless, the study is insightful in explaining feminist activism in conservative areas and will be useful to future studies and feminism in such countries.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results from Data Analysis

The research data were categorized into four primary themes:

4.1.1 Conflict Between Feminism and Islamic Values

One of the themes which were highlighted by the women when they were being interviewed was between feminism and Islamicism in both continental Europe and Great Britain respectively. Several respondents say that their advocacy of women’s rights is perceived by others as aggravating instead of promoting respect for Islamic traditions when it comes to roles and responsibilities of women, marriage and other questions.

Table 1: Conflict Between Feminism and Islamic Values

Theme	Key Insights from Participants
Perception of feminism as anti- Islam	Feminist movements were seen as promoting values contrary to Islamic teachings.
Interpretation of gender equality	Some participants believed that Islamic supports gender equality, while others argued patriarchal interpretations dominate.
Religious Identity vs activism	Participants expressed a personal struggle to balance their feminist activism with their Muslim identity.

From the data highlighted in Table 1 there is a fundamental question that the Feminist activists in Pakistan face whereby feminism is understood as countercultural to Islamic culture. Several participants said that they felt marginalized by religious groups, as did most female participants, describing feminism activism as un-Islamic. This perception therefore poses a major challenge to women who desire to champion for feminism while at the same time practice their religious belief. Some activists discovered the ways to accommodate what they wanted to do for them stating that Islam by its nature encourages enjoyment of equality between women and men. However, the societal Islamic view of these values promotes a patriarchy which is in contrast with the fight for women’s rights and emancipation. This theme therefore emphasizes the requirement for there to be better debates and discourses inside feminist camps as well as religious sectors with linkages to Pakistan, focusing on the fact that superior religion and women’s rights are compatible.

4.1.2 Cultural Conservatism as a Barrier

Culture as a conservative force in Pakistan became the major impediment to women emancipation. Some of them stated that the restrictions from their families and communities restrained them on their participation in feminism. There was also a very fine correlation between the cultural implications, and especially the pride of the family and the suppression of the feminist thoughts.

Table 2: Cultural Conservatism as a Barrier to Feminism:

Sub-theme	Example(s) of participant interviews
Family pressures	"My family discourages me from joining protests or feminist meetings, saying it's not appropriate."
Social stigmatization	"Being called a feminist here is almost like being accused of something dishonorable."
Fear of damaging family honor	"Many women I know would like to speak up, but they are afraid it would bring shame to their families."

It is evident in cultures, as shown in the table 2 that cultural conservatisms is rampant in suppressing feminism activism. It is interesting that participants pointed at family pressure as one of the primary concerns for engaging in feminist activities due to the fear of the families that activist work is shameful and will ruin the family’s reputation. Another problem was social marginalization marked by the fact that women claimed that labeling themselves as feminism resulted in the stigma and social rejection from their communities. This theme focuses on the authority of the patriarchal cultural values which makes family honor more important than women’s capacity to fight for herself. Pride in social sanctions also makes women lean away from joining feminism movements, and at the same time, contributes to a continuation of the result of sexual percentage.

4.1.3 The Role of Social Media in Feminist Activism

According to all the participants, social media is an important means of conducting feminism activism in Pakistan. Popular social media sites such as twitter, face book, and instagram were used to create awareness on women issues, to erased stereotype and to call for demonstrations. But it is pertinent to note that several participants also mentioned that they had experienced cyberbullying and harassment that reduced engagement across the board.

Table 3: Usage of Social Media for Feminist Activism

Platform	Primary Uses
Twitter	Raising awareness, sharing articles, organizing feminist. protests.
Facebook	Building community networks, posting events, and sharing news on gender-based violence.
Instagram	Visual storytelling through images and videos highlighting feminist issues.

In Table 3 below, we present how social media has both positive and negative retribution in relation to feminism. On the one hand, it is possible to note that the usage of social networks has given a voice to the so-called ‘third-wave’ of feminism, which might remain unheard due to cultural restrictions and prejudices. Through such floors, activists post information on gender based violence, share concerns on patriarchy, and coordinate demonstrations in a given real-time. But the participants also reported negative feelings toward social media calling it the ‘new toxic wasteland’ where people get harassed, threatened and abused. Nevertheless, social media is one of the most effective strategies for Pakistani feminists to promote their causes in today’s world as they can avoid the restriction from media to reach people. The topic is relevant for the reflection of the possibilities and risks of digital activism in the conservative cultural background.

4.1.4 Online Harassment and Cyberbullying

Cyber harassment was found as a new worrying theme among the focuses of the research, as numerous participants of the study mentioned they faced threats, received rude comments and personal attacks via social networks. Because of this hostile environment, some people with families, or under social pressure, could not protest as much as they wanted or join other feminist discussions.

Table 4: Types of Online Harassment Experienced by Participants:

Type of Online Harassment	Number of Participants	Examples
Threatening messages	10	Participants received direct threats to their safety or well-being online.
Derogatory comments	8	Abusive language aimed at discrediting women's involvement in feminist activism.
Cyberbullying and trolling	7	Participants faced continuous online bullying from anonymous accounts.

Discussion: Turning to Table 4, one can observe that a majority of the respondents have ever been harassed online with the subgroup of feminist activists reporting high levels of this type of abuse. Receiving threats, harsh statements or anti-feminist slogans, and bullying were frequent practices which negatively affected the psychological state of the activists and made them leave the movements. Cyber bullying further complicates the struggles that women have dealing with a culture that already grips them with fear and makes it hard for the women to continue with activism. This theme touches on the call for increased protection of women activists on the social media as well as increased adherence to the laws that prohibit cyber harassment with a view of enhancing safety of feminism on the social media.

4.1.5 Navigating Public Spaces and Harassment

Interviewees believed that they experienced high levels of social insecurity and risks in movement while in public areas especially when protesting or during other Feminist related activities. In this study the following experiences were obtained from the respondents: Verbal abuse, physical intimidation, and fear of retaliation. Nevertheless, the feminist activists still organized themselves to protest and spread awareness on gender-based violence and women's rights in public domains.

Table 5: Experiences of Harassment in Public Spaces

Types of Harassment	Number of Participants	Examples
Verbal harassment	12	Participants reported being called derogatory names during marches.
Psychical intimidation	7	Some women were physically blocked from entering feminist rallies.
Threats of retaliation	5	Participants expressed fear of being targeted for their activism after events.

Table 5 sheds light on the risks faced by feminist activists when occupying public spaces. Verbal harassment, physical intimidation, and threats of retaliation were commonly reported by participants, particularly during feminist protests. The constant threat of harassment creates a hostile environment for activists, limiting their freedom to express feminist views openly. Despite these challenges, women continue to use public spaces as sites of resistance, demonstrating resilience in the face of systemic oppression. This theme underscores the importance of public spaces in feminist movements and the need for greater protection of activists in these environments.

5. Conclusion

The main focus of this study was to examine how radical feminism, Islamic culture and Pakistani culture operates in Islamabad. The results depicted that the culture of practicing feminism poses the activist into many difficulties and dilemmas of combining gender ideologies and religious proclamations and local culture. Cultural Conservatism, compounded by cyber bullying acts as a counterweight to their forays. Nevertheless, they do not relent as they continue to use social media to campaign for a change of the existing legal frameworks while grappling with these challenges. This approach can be said to support the concept of living the feminism dream by providing a work that tolerates feminist practices but also supports religious and cultural practices. Future research also needs to take more general viewpoints to give further insight in to the feminism of Pakistan.

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