

From 24/7 To 9-5: The Co-Optation And Indigenization¹ Of Feminism By Women Rights NGOs In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Aisha Alam

Department of Gender Studies
University of Peshawar

Noor Sanauddin

Department of Sociology
University of Peshawar

Abstract

The study explores the nature and form of the contemporary women's rights movement utilizing a contextual understanding of feminist activities accentuated by selected women NGOs. The thematic working areas of these organizations were aimed to gauge the status of women in the region to see how coherent and impactful the women's movement is to achieve its goals in the presence and pressure of government and donor policies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 participants working in Peshawar-based women/feminist NGOs using the purposive sampling technique. Herbert Blummer's theoretical model of stages of social movements was used to validate the findings. The study findings revealed that the contemporary women's rights movement in the region of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is diverse, fragmented and its existence is dependent on the efforts made by individuals and organizations. Furthermore, the women's rights struggle has been NGOized because NGOs are donors dependent for their activities, and volunteerism became a rare virtue as feminism is commercialized and carried out mostly for social media stories and for attacking more funding for the NGOs. Street activism which used to be the backbone of the Pakistani women's movement has now changed into paid activism. In short, the definition of the contemporary women's rights movement is different from the water-tight definition discussed in the textbooks. It is rudimentary that may potentially be evolved into a vibrant and organized movement subject to favorable circumstances.

Keywords: Women's Rights Movement, Women NGOs, Feminism, Feminist Activism.

اس مطالعے میں منتخب خواتین این جی اوز کے ذریعہ دیئے جانے والی حقوق نسواں کی سرگرمیوں کے متعلقہ تفہیم کا استعمال کرتے ہوئے معاصر حقوق نسواں کی تحریک کی نوعیت اور شکل کا جائزہ لیا گیا ہے۔ ان تنظیموں کے موضوعاتی کام کرنے والے علاقوں کا مقصد خطے میں خواتین کی حیثیت کا اندازہ لگانا ہے کہ حکومت اور ڈونر پالیسیوں کی موجودگی اور دباؤ میں اپنے مقاصد کو حاصل کرنے کے لئے خواتین کی

تحریک کتنا مربوط اور موثر ہے؟ پشاور میں مقیم خواتین این جی اوز میں کام کرنے والی ۲۷ شرکاء کے ساتھ پہلوی نمونہ بندی تکنیک کا استعمال کرتے ہوئے کئے گئے۔ ہربرٹ بلمر نے سماجی تحریکوں کے مراحل کا نظریاتی ماڈل ان نتائج کو درست کرنے کے لئے استعمال کیا۔ اس تحقیق کے نتائج سے یہ بات سامنے آئی ہے کہ پشاور، خیبر پختونخوا (کے پی) کے خطے میں معاصر خواتین کے حقوق متنوع اور بکھرے ہوئے ہیں اور اس کا وجود انفرادی اور تنظیموں کی کوششوں پر منحصر ہے۔ خواتین کے حقوق کی جدوجہد کا انحصار زیادہ تر غیر سرکاری تنظیموں، این جی اوز اور ڈونرز پر ہے، رضاکاریت ایک غیر معمولی خوبی بن گئی ہے کیونکہ خواتین کی حقوق کی نقل و حرکت ایک کاروبار کی طرح ہے اور صرف سوشل میڈیا کی کہانیوں پر چلتی ہے۔ مزید برآں، پاکستانی خواتین کی سرگرمیوں کو ریڑھ کی ہڈی کی حیثیت حاصل ہے اور اب یہ سرگرمیاں کافی تبدیل ہو گئی ہیں۔ نیز عصری خواتین کے حقوق کی جدوجہد کی تعریف درسی کتب میں دی گئی مقررہ تعریف سے مختلف ہے۔ یہ ابتدائی ہے جو ممکنہ طور پر سازگار اور منظم تحریک میں سازگار حالات کے تحت تیار ہوسکتا ہے۔

کلیدی الفاظ: خواتین کی حقوق کی تحریک، خواتین این جی اوز، حقوق نسواں، غیر سرکاری تنظیم، خواتین کے حقوق کی سرگرمیاں

Women Right Movement: An Introduction

The history of the women's rights movements² dates back to the 18th century in the West. It is a struggle that questions sex-based discrimination and injustices in society. The belief or a movement that women's legal, political and social status should be made equal to that of men (Offen, 1988; Osborne, 2001; Hannam, 2007) is also synonymously referred to as feminism. It is relevant to highlight that throughout its history women's rights movement has received impetus from a variety of feminisms such as liberal, marxist, socialists, radical, psychoanalytic, standpoint feminism, postmodern feminism, and queer theory, etc (Evans, 1998; Tong, 2018).

This variety of perspectives implies that there is no single definition of feminism rather it is feminisms that highlights women's issues and to strengthens women's status in society (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993). This paradoxical nature of different theoretical frameworks caters to social, cultural, political and economic rights furthering the women's rights struggle.

The contemporary women's rights regime works at both international as well as national levels. Internationally, the efforts of the United Nations (UN) for women are not only consistent but also substantial in content and approach. Since its inception, the UN has taken initiatives to improve women's status globally through binding all member states in different international commitments (West, 1999). The initial efforts of the UN such as International Women's Year (IWY) (1975), Decade for Women (1975-85), and the four global women's conferences³ are the remarkable achievements made by the UN (UN

Women, 2018; Stienstra, 2000). As Chen (1995: 478) points out, “the international women’s year...marked the beginning of a new ‘women’s era’ in the UN and the emergence of global women’s movement”. The UN’s effort for women’s empowerment has improved the status of women at a transnational level to keep the spark and spirit of the women’s rights movement alive (Friedman, 2003). Among these international commitments, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) considers being one of the most important international treaties which legally binds all States Parties to fulfill, protect and respect women’s human rights.

Nationally, nature, pace, direction, success, and failure of women’s rights struggle in Pakistan are influenced by national and international politics. It is evident from the historical analysis that in the pre-independence movement, both genders worked collectively for a sole cause but, in the post-independence era, it was characterized by women demanding rights from men and against patriarchy particularly in the case of women’s rights struggle (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Khan, 2018). The women’s rights movement in Pakistan has witnessed many stages and different ideological standpoints have affected its pace and growth. After the independence, the women’s rights movement was carried out by wives of political leaders as part of their social work, and women NGOs⁴ like APWA, WVS, DWA, UFWA and, YWCA were active and approved by the state (Saigol, 2016). The paradigm shift from charitable to advocacy organizations came into the limelight in the mid-1980s after the promulgation of Hudood ordinances⁵ when state and women rights groups confronted to reverse oppressive state policies (Jalal, 1991; Imran, 2005). General Zia’s regime reminded of an organized, enthusiastic, vibrant, and aggressive women’s struggle in its manifestation and demands (Batool, et al. 2018).

Afterward, Pakistan acceded to CEDAW⁶ and was represented in the fourth UN women’s conference during the second political term of Benazir Bhutto. The martial law of General Musharaf was considered the so-called golden period for securing women’s rights through legal reform⁷ (Qadri & Umer, 2015) but in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it was the ‘Martial Law of Maulvies’ which did not encourage women outside the private domain (Khan, 2014). Later, many pro-women legislation (Mirza, 2011) concerning different aspects of women’s lives were introduced but due to lack of government’s political will and proper implementation, they could not serve the purpose. Lately, after the 18th amendment, women’s issues have become the provincial subjects by devolving the Ministry of Women’s Development from Federal to the provinces where Women’s Development Departments will be responsible for women concerns.

Literature Review

Women’s movement in the western historical context has predominantly emerged in Britain and United States which was divided into four key periods referred to as waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism (1948-1920) was influenced by the collective

activism of women in other reform movements like the Evangelical, Temperance, and Anti-slavery which paved the way for feminist consciousness-raising (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004; Osbourne, 2001). The organized women groups were functional and their funding was solely arranged by personal finances and fund-raising. The second wave of feminism (1960-1980) focused on the popular slogan “The Personal is Political” highlighted a strong emphasis on issues such as women’s legal rights, reproductive rights, protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and discrimination against women. The first wave of feminism was known to be based on street activism by its adherents whereas, the second wave was known for challenging existing norms through strong intellectual debates.

The Third Wave of Feminism began in the mid-1990s and was based on the ideologies of post-colonial and post-modern thinking. In this phase, many constructs were destabilized, including the notions of universal womanhood, body, gender and sexuality (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). It was led by so-called Generation-Xers who were born in the 1960s and 70s in the developed world and benefitted significantly from the legal rights and protections that had been obtained by first- and second-wave feminists. (Snyder, 2008). The fourth wave of feminism began in 2012, with a focus on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture, among other issues. A key component was the use of social media to highlight and address these concerns. The event of Women’s march on 21 January 2012 was the major event demonstrated by people of all sexual orientations to express unity in collective rights for women.

The wave analogy of feminism is applicable in Pakistan, the first wave (1947-1978), a period in which feminism was directed and owned by the state. The second wave (1978-88), was characterized by consciousness-raising done by the WAF in response to oppressive legislation. Third-wave (2001-2008) addressed legal reforms in the country under the banner of enlightened moderation. The fourth wave refers to the period from 2008 to date marked by the generation of **Aurat** March: a group well-articulated and proactive about feminism. The adaptation of the western wave analogy on the Pakistani women’s movement proves that feminism can be contextualized.

Women’s Movement and ‘NGO Boom’⁸ in South Asia

Chimiak (2014) discussed the expansion of INGOs and IGOs as the result of globalization and which weakened the state and strengthened intergovernmental organizations. With moral responsibility and interest of developed countries to level disparities in less developed countries. Likewise, Clarke (1998) argues that NGOs proliferated in the late 1980s in Asia, Africa and Latin America with a variety of activities. Also, the relation between NGO proliferation and democracy became ambiguous in many countries, including South Asia. South Asian countries like India,

Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have their own women's movement depending upon their socio-political circumstances.

Haider (2011) highlights that in Bangladesh women's movement has expanded tremendously due to the activities of the NGO which dates back to the British colonial rule. The NGO sector and donors in Bangladesh are an inseparable part of the society because of their work in the field of community-based group formation, credit, education, health, family planning, gender development, women's business activity, environment, human rights and advocacy. Thus, in recent years feminist movements in Bangladesh have been influenced by donor funding (Mohiuddin, 2002; Sobhan and Bhattacharya, 1990).

Indian Women's Movement (IWM) was autonomous when it was run by mostly urban employed women, but with the expansion the question of financial support became imperative. NGOisation and international funding seriously affected women's movement autonomy and as the result, an emergence of the morning to afternoon career feminists specialized in a single issue like health, sexuality, micro-credit, reproductive rights, sexual harassment came at the forefront. Also, the considerable shreds of evidence supported the fact that in donor-driven campaigns, they hold the power to cease the funding abruptly (Roy, 2015; Chakarwati, 2005).

Women's movements in Nepal emerged in response to the deeply embedded historical inequality, discrimination and subordination of women from all strata of society. UN agencies and different INGOs have provided technical and financial support to the women's movements since the 1990s. However, such actors have also been criticized for co-opting the movement and setting the agenda according to international interests, rather than the agendas of diverse Nepali women based on their particular lived realities (Bhandari, 2014). The three countries and their circumstances depict the cooptation of the women's movement by international donors and organizations. The indigenous women's movement is rarely working in the current scenario of globalization.

The Genesis of Women's Movement in the Pre and Post Partition of Pakistan

The presence of feminist consciousness and struggle was evident in the pre-partition of Pakistan in the form of written material and practical activism. The newspapers and journals like *Rafiq-e-Niswan* (A Woman's Friend), *Khatoon* (Women), *Akhbar -e-Niswan* (Women's newspaper), *Haqooq-e-Niswan* (Women's Rights), *Rahber -Niswan* (Women's Guide), *Sharif Bibiyar* (Noble Women) significantly raised women's voice. Many prominent women like Jehanara Shahnawaz, Begum Mohammad Ali, Baji Rashida Latif and *Bi Amma*⁹, a catalyst of *Khalafat movement* were full of feminist zeal. The first-ever Muslim women organization came into being named *Anjuman-e- Khawateen-e-Islam* (Islamic Women Organization) by Sir Muhammad Shafi in 1908 for education and social reforms. Muslim League's women wing made significant efforts for the education,

mobilization and political training of women. After independence, there was no coherent women's movement in the early years of Pakistan (Saigol, 2016).

Women's Action Forum and Sindhiani Tehreek (ST) are the two most popular women groups in the history of Pakistani feminism. (Saigol, 2016) WAF was comprised of the urban middle class, foreign qualified women who used different tactics like picketing, public demonstration, rallies, conscious raising, telegram, signature campaigns, and poetry/writing to demonstrate protest. 1983s protest of WAF against Law of Evidence gained national as well as international media coverage and the same day is celebrated as women's day in Pakistan. ST, on the other hand, is the rural and indigenous women's movement that questioned patriarchy and dictatorship in the Zia era. Formally it struggled to resolve issues like; one, Sindhi nationalism and provincial autonomy, two, social class distinctions and conflict, three, patriarchy and the subordination of women, and four, the effort for democracy. Apart from these issues, ST also decided to take a stand against some old customary practices like *Karo Kari* (murder in the name of honor), *Haq Bakhswana* (marriage to the Qura'an), inheritance rights and polygamy. The explanation of two women groups WAF and Sindhiani Tehreek proves that feminism can be contextualized.

The Politics of Women's Movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have played an active role in the struggle for independence from British rule before the creation of Pakistan. The most noteworthy was the *Khudai Kidmatgar Movement* during the first quarter of the 20th century and women's active role in it despite cultural norm. The founder, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and other *Khudai Kidmargars* were the staunch advocates of female education which is evident from the writings in their column called *Pakhtun*. This column was about problems faced by women and another article criticized *Pakhtuns* for treating their women as 'means of entertainment'. During the civil obedience movement, elderly women were more active in participation as compared to the other age groups because of purdah issue. Ghaffar Khan advised khidmatgar's to start sending their daughters to school and they responded positively. The Frontier Muslim League was also active in the perusal of women's education agenda. Women Muslim League came to the forefront at the start of 1947, as Muhammad Ali Jinnah also appreciated the role of Frontier women for a separate homeland for Indian women (Shah, 1998; Banerjee, 2000).

The socio-economic and political fabric of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had never been supportive of women's rights. Begum Nasim Wali Khan of Awami National was a woman political leader elected in 1977 but neither her perspective nor her policies had any feminist undertones. The rise of political Islam in KP in 2002 has laid serious repercussions generally for the province and specifically for the women's rights movement. The amalgam of *Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA)¹⁰ (2001) was given political legitimacy after winning elections in 2002. The MMA's *Sharia* Act and *Hisba* Bill (accountability) passed in 2003 to dictate and protect Islamic values and

etiquette and act as a vigilante political group. The ideology of Enlightened Moderation at the federal level and MMA's policies at KP was the conscious political motive of General Musharraf to remain in power and maintain the status quo (Khan, 2014). The MMA government believed in segregated education, veiling for women, women sports coaches, women patients treated by women doctors, closure of cinemas, and beating of musicians and artists. They launched an anti-obscenity campaign which was a way of blatantly targeting women. According to Nazish Brohi, "the entire struggle is therefore to keep women confined to their biologically determined roles as mothers, daughters, and wives". Women rights NGOs were scrutinized severely for having a hidden agenda that could undermine Islamic values and cultural tradition. Incidents like declaring them non-Islamic by the ulema of Kohistan, not allowing women to vote in few union councils, attacking shelters home "Mera Ghar" run an NGO, etc were examples of activities labeled as western initiatives. Also, female members of MMA in Lahore demanded a ban on NGOs whom they considered the most harmful for Pakistan (Brohi, 2006, Khan, 2014; Zia, 2009, Ali, 2000). Furthermore, in 2014 women of KP also participated and put forth their concerns in an indigenous movement called *Pashtoon Tahaffuz Movement* (PTM)¹¹. Women of conflict-affected northwestern former tribal regions demanded accountability for damages and the return of missing persons but unfortunately, they were threatened by the state agencies (Khan, 2021).

The proliferation of women NGOs is seen around the 1970s and 80s around the globe but in Pakistan and particularly in KP NGOs were slow-paced due to numerous issues particularly the right-wing government policies. The provincial government had taken initiatives but apparently, the credit of voicing women's concerns, publishing feminist literature, spreading rights awareness, and organizing women in far-flung areas went to women NGOs which makes a strong case to analyze NGOisation of the women's movement (Lang, 1997). The literature shows that the struggle for women's rights in Pakistan is so strongly connected with NGOs that it appears to be the torchbearer of the women's rights movement in Pakistan (Alvarez, 1999; Bernal & Grewal, 2014). There exist a slight difference among the terms like the women's rights movement¹² the women's movement¹³, and the feminist movement¹⁴ but most people use them interchangeably. Thus, the study intends to answer that how local NGOs through their activities, strives for a coherent and impactful women's movement to achieve its goals in the presence and pressure of government and donor policies?

Methodology

The present study employed qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from 27 research participants. The universe of the study was Peshawar, being the provincial capital and hub of head/regional offices of women NGOs operating in far-flung areas of the province. The criterion for selecting NGOs was based on their status as women/feminist NGOs with a strong gender component and

substantial community outreach. These include Aurat Foundation¹⁵ (AF) (1986), Shirkat Gah (1975)¹⁶, Khwendo Kor (KK)¹⁷ 1993), Noor Education Trust (2001), Aware Girls (2002), Da Hawa Lur¹⁸ (2000), Blue Veins (1999), Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO) (1994). Most of the women organizations were run by women but Blue Veins and SPO were neither women organizations nor run by female CEOs. They were selected to have a counter opinion about women's rights NGOs and their contribution to feminism. The purposive sampling technique was used to select three participants from each organization from different cadres including gender specialists/analysts keeping an equal gender balance. The study findings were analyzed thematically after transcription and the theoretical model of Herbert George Blummer (1969) was used to further validate the study findings. The limitation of the paper includes the exclusion of discussion on *Aurat March* (Women's March) and other such street level activism because it does not come in the purview of the paper.

The Nexus between NGOs and Women Rights Movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is notoriously known for its rigid cultural code of *Pakhtunwali*, growing talibanization, militancy, and domination of religious political parties result in low involvement of women in public life. However, despite many restrictions, women NGOs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been working in the region to keep the spirit alive.

Khwendo Kor is one of the oldest most resourceful local¹⁹ NGOs working in KP because of its trained staff, least staff turnover, the number of ongoing projects, consistent donors, and a spacious office owned by the organization. Its vision is to have "a compassionate society where women live with dignity and self-reliance". They had four major program areas including health, education, economic empowerment, and civil rights. Alongside, policy advocacy with legislators and humanitarian crisis responses are also considered as a social responsibility by the organization.

Aurat Foundation (AF), which is one of the oldest national NGOs working in Pakistan, has three main objectives: economic empowerment of women, encouraging participation of women in politics, and ending violence against women. AF has been working on a unique initiative of keeping a record of reported domestic violence cases from five leading newspapers to share periodically with the public and policymakers. AF initially started working as a resource center²⁰ which later turned into a full-fledged organization for women's civil, social and political rights.

Shirkat Gah is also a national NGO and claims to be feminist not only in projects but also in organizational policies. They have been working on evolving research methodologies

based on qualitative research which they claimed to be fact-based and authentic. Their work has three major components; governance, bodily rights, and environment.

Aware Girls (2002) was established by a young feminist to create leadership skills among young girls and make them capable to voice their concerns with full knowledge and confidence. This organization has a unique feature in that it is a women-only NGO and as of now, no male is employed in it. This organization aims to provide a platform for young girls and prepare them as leaders.

Da Hawa Lur (2000) is different from many other NGOs both in terms of staff and in terms of representation in the public. This is the only NGO that has the least number of employees but their active representation is seen everywhere highlighting different women's issues on different forums. They worked very actively for the recently promulgated legislation against sexual harassment at the workplace. Currently, they are striving for legislative reforms for home-based workers.

Lastly, *Noor Education Trust (NET)*, deals with the vulnerable sections of society, it runs a women's crisis center '*mera ghar*' (my home) which supports women survivors of violence, through safe shelter, psychological, medical, and legal aid programs. A children's program called "Rarran" (meaning light) provides support to the displaced and abandoned children. Hope' is another 'initiative mainly to do with capacity building and empowerment of youth on human rights issues.

According to the findings, these leading women's NGOs have been working on various issues in the rural and urban districts of the province. They have developed liaisons with different government departments for their legitimacy as well as for strengthening their initiatives but even then faced backlash both from the government and community.

Role of Indigenous²¹ Women's networks and Activists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

There were few voluntary informal groups/networks established by the selected women NGOs as an extension of their work with no formal organizational structure which is referred to as indigenization of feminism in the study. Similarly, some women activists were also trained like Shad Begum and Zaitoon Bano to work as a community catalyst. Khan (2021) explains that "donor support is crucial for successful women's empowerment initiatives" and donor funding is also required to keep the women's activism alive by supporting advocacy organizations. These groups are short lived because of their dependent survival on NGOs.

*Takrha Qabailee Khwendy (TQK)*²² was the initiative of Khewendo Kor and it was aimed to involve tribal women in the development discourses so they could contribute positively

to the political, social, and economic decision-making process of tribal districts. These women have been trained to play a role in the rebuilding erstwhile FATA and facilitate the development process for women (Akbar, 2010). *KHOR*²³ is another network working on the same objectives and it is a split from TQK and now these two organizations are working independently. The rationale of these two networks is to prepare tribal women of erstwhile FATA by creating space and opportunities through strengthening and capacity building of its members. The main focus of these two different networks is governance, education, economic empowerment, peace, and tolerance.

*Jamni Aurtein*²⁴ was an initiative of Shirkat Gah working in District Swat. Women who belonged to this project work in a close-knit group for the help of other community women. In the rural setting of District Swat, they have participated in different programs and also received exposure visits to other parts of Pakistan. The representative of *Jamni Aurtein* shared that there was a time when men used to criticize them but and now they feel that they can also help them. This shows the success and social acceptability of the group over time.

The 16/12 *Tehreek (16/12 movement)* is the movement that started immediately after the massacre of Army Public School attacks by the terrorists. The goal of the movement was to reach mothers and to make the state accountable for this sad demise. A lot of street activism was seen like confronted the authority, blocking roads, and arranged different protests. Every year on December 16 this group arranges different programs especially for mothers to remember the martyrs of the unforgettable massacre.

Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Alliance started in the UN Women's office and comprised of individual and local organizations and UN Women staff. Members of the alliance work on different issues especially gender-based violence. It was further divided into KP, erstwhile FATA, and PATA chapters. There was no donor involved neither any secretariat of this alliance and different partner NGOs fund different activities to keep this pressure group alive. EVAW's upcoming initiative is to take complaints of harassment faced by different development workers and how to redress their issues.

Feminist Friday was a women's only group made by women development workers. Members of the group meet once a month to discuss reading related to feminism, share problems and do things that they cannot do in public. The group currently has no secretariat and no formal budget or any funding source rather activities are done on a volunteer basis. There are no financial gains involved and members are committed to the group because of their feminist interests. This group was more like the conscious raising group of second-wave feminism which encourages experience sharing (Martin, 2007). According to Blumer (1969), a life cycle of a social movement includes emergence,

coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline. In Pakistan and specifically in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women's movement camouflaged in women's rights NGOs follows the same life cycle of a movement to pave its way for women's empowerment.

Co-optation of Feminism through Women NGOs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The study findings proclaimed that the women's movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is striving and struggling to stay vitalized, but its pace and priorities are not determined by the people or the region they work in. In Pakistan, Initially, the donor services were very limited later, turned into major activities which led to serious scrutiny of civil society organizations after 9/11. In this context, NGO activities appeared to be the unconventional voices that question the status quo to guard feminist activism. There were both external and internal factors to gauge the co-optation of feminism in the region.

External Factors- Ghettoization of Women's Movement

The politicization of religion through faith-based political parties in the province was one of the biggest reasons which made the entire governmental structure skeptical about pro-women policies and programs (Ivanescu, 2010). The findings support the argument that the political inclinations of leaders and using Islam for politics have made woman's questions more complex than ever.

They meant politics, and mixing Islam with politics has given a new meaning to women's rights.

Furthermore, humanitarian crises like terrorism denied women accessing their basic rights to education, health and livelihood through imposing public patriarchy (Bari, 2010).

The biggest problem with a progressive movement like feminism is that extremism has given it a setback. There used to be a group of women, there used to be a voice but terrorism, bomb blast, and insecurity are the main things that threatened their gatherings, and their voice was curbed. Terror in this province has affected women's cause; it has suppressed their voices because of fear of their security. Terrorism militancy and extremism have increased insecurity leads to women suppression.

The study findings revealed that women rights NGOs and their workers faced numerous challenges from the state and anti-state agencies (mainly Taliban) which force NGOs to devise new strategies to continue their work (Jaffar, 2007; Jaffar 2016). According to Ayesha Khan, an employee of a Peshawar-based NGO "Restrictions on foreign funding and tighter legal controls on NGOs are impeding support for women's organizing, network-building, and advocacy in the region." Generally in the current circumstances of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa an NGO work is a challenge, but categorically women's NGO is more difficult to run. In the past, implementing a project was not a problem but lately, undue formalities have drastically implicated women's empowerment. It has now become

an essential requirement to get a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Planning and Development Division of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for all the NGOs working in KP.

The present study findings explored that initially the requirement of NOC was only for the war-stricken areas of FATA but now it is expanded to the settled areas of KP. NGOs reported that due to the delay in NOCs the project starts with delay and project staff bears the brunt of it by meeting deadlines as every project has a stipulated timeframe and donors give no relaxation to the staff. In other cases, if NOCs are not given, NGOs have to cease their work, close their offices and donors are left with no choice but to divert their funds to other countries.

Also, the politics behind issuing and rejecting a NOC was difficult to understand. Few donors had been asked by the government to pack up their activities from KP but they were still working in the other provinces of Pakistan. The question arises that if the donors were suspected and not allowed to work in KP then why are they still allowed in other provinces? The NGOs working in the Pakistani context are involved in the service delivery more than the government. However, their role in democratization and construction of civil society has made their presence challenged under the concept of security for development. In the post 9/11 scenario of law and order situation and working under the statist regime, NGOs will continue facing challenges unless and until international donor agencies and NGOs devise a strategy in realizing their real potentials and goals (Owais, Sanauddin, Nawaz & Chitrali, 2017).

Furthermore, the findings of the study also highlight that almost all the NGO heads complained that officials of different government agencies come to their offices and investigate their projects, donors, published or unpublished training material along with the official records. As an NGO worker, they are not supposed to be in an argument with them and women in such situations face more harassment as compared to a male. Therefore, many social activists have self-censored themselves which was not only harmful to the women's movement but also for any other social movement in the country.

Internal Factors – Donor Driven Agenda and its consequences on Feminist Activism

Apart from the external factors, there were certain internal factors impeding women's development. These are a dichotomy of junior and senior staff, commercialization of women's development, hybrid feminist activism and lack of novelty in the struggle, etc. hurdled women's movement.

The foremost reason is the knowledge-sharing gap between senior trained and junior, untrained staff. The senior staff members were mostly the owner of the organization and the authority to look after all administrative activities. The junior staff, on the other hand, were involved and well versed only in their project interventions.

Being the project staff, I can give you full information about it but as long as the women's movement is concerned, you have to contact the organization head.

In every organization, both junior and senior staff members work together but the aim of women's organizations should be to share knowledge to keep all the staff members on the same page because feminism offers theory and activism. NGO's senior members must train juniors in the philosophy of feminism. New leadership equipped with better perspectives and understanding of women's issues must emerge to manage women's rights agenda constructively.

The data finding explained that generally people and specifically NGO workers conceptualized women's development as "an idea that sells!" led to compartmentalization of feminism. This notion affirmed that NGOs, due to their project-centered approach negatively influence feminism being practiced in a region. Moreover, different women rights NGOs working in KP seemed to have the least coordination amongst them which looks like "feminism in small pockets". The lack of coordination among NGOs is one of the main reasons for not having a consolidated women's rights movement in KP. Thus, women's development has three important stakeholders; concerned NGO, beneficiaries/recipients of a development project, and funding agency.

Firstly, it was revealed that the staff of women's NGOs had no interest and sensitivity for women's rights if they did not have a project with them. They were only serious and proactive if they had funded activities to invite people or do activism about. *In KP women's movement is mostly based on NGO activism. People do not work for the cause, they work for projects. They would work if a project is there otherwise they would not. When money was not in movement then people would work for the cause and now they work for the money only. Feminism is not about doing work for few months or a year but it required persistent efforts in promoting women's agenda.*

The chairperson of an NGO and sitting ombudsperson of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa highlighted the weakness on the part of women NGOs. *All individuals or groups for women's empowerment have their own goals but I disagree with those organizations who after 30 years of work still do not know what they want to achieve.*

Local NGOs, to win the trust of donor agencies, made extra efforts to present project activities in the best possible way which also negatively contributed to feminism. Every organization struggles to make every event look bigger; they remained concerned about the quality of photographs, size of logo, colors, and content of background banner, capturing women in photographs, maximum participation, and media coverage.

There is no doubt that the NGOs project approach had not contributed the way it should have especially after the mushroom growth of NGOs...I would not deny the fact that women's lives have got better, but the changing situation or changing status are two different things.

Secondly, project participants are the essential stakeholders of any program or activity. Mostly, participants and guests are paid in cash or in-kind to attend women's rights events. The findings showed that financial benefit is the primary concern of all, which affected the pace of the women's movement.

We gave 500 rupees to community women to participate in our events. They know nothing about their rights but food, money, and pick and drop by the end of the day. From local counselors to MPA's, TA/DA is the main attraction for their participation

Thirdly, donor agency in any project is the most important stakeholder to make a difference in the social fabric of a community. When any call for proposal comes, everything is pre-set and organizations are asked to do as directed. The findings highlighted that donors have no interest in women's empowerment just like the other two stakeholders. A CEO complained that Sometimes donors also share unrealistic statistics to share

In the closing ceremony of the project, an American Ambassador said that they have changed the perception of 200 community people on the issue of domestic violence in one year. I interrupted him and said that they have participated; claiming to change their perception is quite debatable.

The impasse with the women's movement perpetuated because it was not just the women NGOs but every stakeholder which was equally responsible. According to Saigol (2016), the NGO-driven women's movement was not an autonomous struggle in terms of its agendas and ideologies. According to Ayesha Khan *"the threat to advocacy NGOs also significantly impedes the nurturing of future women leaders who are committed to building an inclusive democratic state"*.

A CEO of an NGO stated that "Bera gharak ker diya hai donor nay" means "Donor has destroyed us". This statement was said focusing on two perspectives; one, donors claimed to know us which they don't and second, social corruption has tremendously increased.

Unfortunately, the hybrid feminist activism has also weakened due to the professional activists who do activism as part of their 9-5 job not what they think and believe. The notion of feminism as a life mission has been replaced with an individual's professional growth and personal development. The findings explicated that the people are more social media catalysts than social community catalysts and the genuine activists are camouflaged by this new group.

Activism is mostly done for Facebook and Instagram statuses. If you observe in any protest, people are just busy uploading different social media stories and they are the “selfie masters”

The findings revealed that activism of few advocacy organizations and individual feminists have been silenced because they are offered key positions in the government or INGOs.

Aurat Foundation, since its inception, had never accepted a donation from the US with the stance of its unjust policies towards Pakistan. AF decided to accept US funding when they were on the verge of closure but as a consequence, AF became completely silent about US injustices. Similarly, leading women feminists have joined either government or UN agencies, the names include Tahira Abdullah, Khawar Mumtaz, and Rakshanda Naz, etc.

The findings strengthen the argument that old feminists²⁵ of KP have just one women’s movement to connect with which was WAF. It had chapters in different provinces but in KP the chapter has been only active on the wats app and its membership is also very limited. The findings concluded that the women’s movement does exist but it lacks novelty in strategies as well as leadership. The same old people are still holding the reigns of it, and the actors and debates about women’s struggle have become redundant.

We have an aged women’s movement in KP and so far we have the same old names associated with it as if new leadership is not ready to take the responsibility

Women NGOs and people working in individual capacity both in the community and in any line of work are the real stakeholders of the women’s movement. Women’s movement needs to be taken to the level where its adherents are open to new nature and forms of feminist activism like *Aurat March* (see Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). Sizable populations of feminists and non-feminists disagree with it and this internal ideological clash turns into backlash from the general public as well as from the media.

Conclusions

Feminism, feminist movement or movements, feminist struggle, feminist ideology/standpoint have synonymously and distinctly used by both, its adherents and critics. The women’s rights movement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa exists in its rudimentary forms that include different registered women NGOs, informal women networks/groups, and individual efforts. However, the feminist struggle in the region has been adversely affected by government restrictions on local NGOs and foreign donors by limiting their scale of operations, commercialization of women’s agenda for personal and organizational gains and multiple forms of activism according to need including social

media feminism. The lack of novelty in leadership and strategies is lagging behind Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's women's movement as compared to other provinces.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The study suggests the following measures for promoting the cause of women's rights.

1. The Women Action Forum in KP should be revived and responsive again to take women's concerns on board.
2. A separate women's ministry is the dire need of time to take substantive measures for changing the status of women in KP. The existing women's ministry is a combination of three ministries and women's development comes last in the hierarchy.
3. Government bodies like the Provincial Commission on the Status of Women, Women Parliamentary Caucus, and Women's Ministry should work in close coordination with each other to deal with women's issues. The standard operating procedures should be made and shared so that the effect of changing governments should be minimized and there should not be any lapse or delay in the provision of women's rights.
4. Coordination between provincial government and women's rights NGOs is needed to bridge the gap between government and non-government initiatives. The women's cause should be taken and treated as a secular human rights issue. This recommendation is also a long-termed demand and future course of action for the women's movement. Different faith-based political parties and the rise of extremism have hampered the pace of the women's movement.

End Notes

1. This refers to the community based women groups established by NGOs as part of their project deliverables.
2. For this research, the women's rights movement refers to any institutional activity, struggle, or program (both, long and short-termed) that aims to highlight the plight of women and take initiatives to improve the status of women. Civil society as a whole is not taken for this research; only NGOs working on women's rights as their primary niche.
3. Four World Conferences on Women took place, respectively, in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995. Later, it was followed by review conferences (Pietila & Peoch, 2009).
4. APWA-All Pakistan Women's Association, WVS-Women's Voluntary Service, DWA-Democratic Women Association, or Anjuman-e-Jamhoori Pasand Khawateen in Urdu, UFWA-United Fronts for Women Rights and YWCA-Young Women Christian Association.

5. The Hudood ordinances are a collection of five criminal laws promulgated in 1979 and enforced in 1980 under the martial law regime of General Zia ul Haq. They include Offences Against Property Ordinance, Offence of Zina Ordinance, the Offence of Qazf Ordinance, The Prohibition Order, and the Execution of Punishment of Whipping Ordinance (Imran, 2005).
6. See (Khan, 2015; Weiss, 2003) for a detailed analysis of Pakistan's performance in the CEDAW committee and CEDAW's implementation in the country.
7. General Pervaiz Musharraf (2001-2008) increased the number of women reserved seats, 20 in the central legislature and 33% in local body government. Under Musharraf's rule, Women Protection Bill was passed and the cabinet approved the reserved 10% female quota in CSS and 5% female quota in all the government departments.
8. The idea is taken from "Alvarez, S. E. (1999). Advocating feminism: the Latin American feminist NGO 'boom'. *International feminist journal of politics*, 1(2), 181-209."
9. Her real name was Abidi Begum and she was a mother of Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali and she made her first public appearance in 1913.
10. MMA was comprised of six ultra-conservative Islamist political parties of Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-S), Jamiat-e-Ahle Hadith, Pakistan Islami Tehrik (ITP) and the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).
11. According to Yousaf (2019) Pashtun Tahafuz (protection) Movement (PTM), an indigenous peace and human rights movement involving both men and women, and its nonviolent nature also reinforce the importance of peace for the tribal Pashtuns.
12. The women's rights movement seeks to demand equal rights with greater autonomy for women within the operative structure of state and society avoiding patriarchy and connected issues of power (Shaheed, 2011).
13. Women's movement includes sensitizing institutions and individuals to identify women's rights issues along with other engagements and their primary focus is not to bring gender equality or inequality (Shaheed, 2011).
14. The feminist movement challenges patriarchy as the system of power privileging men over women. It is also to provide women with greater opportunities and representation in decision making with improved health and better laws, all these can help restructure power relations, systems, and structures (Shaheed, 2011).
15. Aurat Foundation means Women's Foundation.
16. It is an Urdu word that means "Place of Participation"
17. It is a Pashto word that means "Sisters' Home".
18. It is a Pashto word that means "Daughter of Eve"

19. The term local NGO in the context of this research refers to NGOs working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
20. ¹ Different newsletters were published and among these newsletters, *Hamjoli* (a friend), *Mashal* (a variant of a torch) were exclusively printed for the rural women (micro-level), and a newsletter called “Legislative Watch” (macro level) is published to address policymakers and parliamentarians. *Mashal* was also known as the “*dhaiti auratoon ka akhbar*” which means rural women’s newspaper. It is not published anymore, it was published earlier but the legislative watch is the only ongoing publication of AF.
21. ¹ Indigenous in the study means native women of the area are working together in their local communities with no resources and financial gains.
22. TQK is an acronym of three Pushto words which means “Brave Tribal Sisters”.
23. KHOR means sister in Pushto.
24. Purple women in Urdu.
25. The old feminists have at least 25 plus years of women's rights experience like Maryam Bibi, Rakshanda Naz, Maimoona Noor, Shabina Ayaz, Saima Munir, Khurshid Bano, etc. Most of them run their own women's NGO. Whereas, young feminists have a maximum of 5-10 years of experience mainly working in short termed projects. Herbert George Blumer (1969) the fourth and the last stage of any social movement is 'decline or institutionalization' which can further be divided into five sub-stages and co-optation is one of them. Co-optation occurs when movement leaders come to compromise with the concerned authorities or sometimes the leaders are distracted because of their vested interest. Carrying forward this notion, women’s movement is vividly co-opted in the socio-cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

References

- Ali, S. S. (2000). Law, Islam and the women’s movement in Pakistan. In *International Perspectives on Gender and Democratization*. Palgrave Macmillan,
- Alvarez, S. E. (1999). Advocating Feminism: The Latin American Feminist NGO 'boom'. *International feminist Journal of Politics*, 1(2), 181-209.
- Bari, F. (2010). *Gendered Perceptions and Impact of Terrorism--Talibanization in Pakistan*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.
- Batool, S., Batool, F., Zia, A., & Saeed, R. (2018). The struggle for women rights: A study of emergence of feminism in Pakistan,(1947 to 2010). *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, 31(1).

- Bernal, V. & Grewal, I. (Eds.). (2014). *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*. Duke University Press.
- Bhandari, M. (2014). Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) movements in Nepal in terms of social transformation. *The Pacific Journal of Science and Technology*, 15(1), 177-189.
- Blumer, H. (1969). Collective Behavior. In Lee A.M., (Ed.), *Principles of sociology (3rd ed.)* Barnes and Noble Books
- Brohi, N. (2006). *The MMA Offensive: Three Years in Power, 2003-2005*. Action Aid International.
- Chakravarti, U. (2015). How autonomous is the autonomous women's movement? Some thoughts for consideration, unpublished paper.
- Chen, M.A. (1995). Engendering World Conferences: The International Women's Movement and United Nations. *Third World Quarterly*, 16(3), 477-493.
- Chimiak, G. (2014). The rise and stall of non-governmental organizations in development. *Polish Sociological Review*, 185(1), 25-44.
- Clarke, G. (1998). *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Politics in the Developing World*. *Political Studies*, 46(1), 36-52.
- Evans, J. (1998). Introduction. In *Feminist theory today: An introduction to second-wave feminism*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Friedman, E. J. (2003). Gendering the agenda: The impact of the transnational women's rights movement at the UN conferences of the 1990s. In *Women's studies international forum*. 26 (4). 313-331.
- Haider, S. K. U. (2011). Genesis and growth of the NGOs: Issues in Bangladesh perspective. *International NGO Journal*, 6(11), 240-247.
- Hannam, J. (2007). *Feminism: A Short History of a Big Idea*. Pearson Educated Limited.
- Imran, R. (2005). Legal injustices: The Zina Hudood Ordinance of Pakistan and its implications for women. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 7(2), 78-100.

- Ivanescu, C. (2010). Politicised religion and the religionisation of politics. *Culture and Religion*, 11(4), 309-325.
- Jafar, A. (2007). Engaging fundamentalism: The case of women's NGOs in Pakistan. *Social Problems*, 54(3), 256-273.
- Jafar, A. (2016). *Women's NGOs in Pakistan*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Jaggar, A. M., & Rothenberg, P. S. (1993). *Feminist Frameworks Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men (3rd ed.)*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jalal, A. (1991). The convenience of subservience: Women and the state of Pakistan. In *Women, Islam and the state*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Khan, A. (2015). Human Rights For Women Or The Human Rights Of Women?: Pakistan, CEDAW And The Gatekeepers. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 10.
- Khan, A. (2018). *The women's movement in Pakistan: activism, Islam and democracy*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Khan, A. (2021) 'Supporting Women's Empowerment in Pakistan: Lessons for Donors', IDS Policy Briefing 172, Institute of Development Studies
- Khan, J. (2014). The Rise of Political Islam in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: The Case of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). *Dialogue (Pakistan)*, 9(3).
- Lang, S. (1997). The NGOization of Feminism: Institutionalization and Institution Building within the German Women's Movement. In Scott, J.W., Kaplan, C. & Keates, D. (Eds.), *Transition, Environments, Translation: Feminism in International Politics* (101-120). Routledge.
- Martin, B. (2007). Activism, Social and Political. In Anderson, G. L. & Herr, K. G. *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*. Sage Publications.
- Mirza, N. (2011). Seven pro-women laws in seven years. *Legislative Watch*, 38(2).
- Mohiuddin (2002). An Introduction to the Non-profit Sector in Bangladesh, BFF; Allvida.

- Mumtaz, K., & Shaheed, F. (1987). *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?*. Zed Books Ltd.
- Offen, K. (1988). Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14(1), 119-157.
- Osborne, S. (2001). *Feminism. Pocket Essentials*. Harpenden.
- Pietilä, H. & Peoc'h, B. (2007). *The unfinished story of women and the United Nations*. UN.
- Pilcher, J. & Whelehan, I. (2016). *Key concepts in gender studies*. India, Sage Publications.
- Qadri, S. & Umer, N. (2015). Women Empowerment and Political Democratization in Pakistan with reference to General Parvez Musharraf Regime. *Public Policy and Administration Research*, 5(10).
- Roy, S. (2015). *The Indian Women's Movement*. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 10(1), 96–117.
- Saigol, R. (2016). *Feminism and Women's Movements in Pakistan: Actors, Debates and Strategies*. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.
- Saigol, R., & Chaudhary, N. U. (2020). Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Shaheed, F. (2011). Women Experiences of Identity, Religion and Activism in Pakistan. In Jeffery, P., & Basu, A. (Eds.), *Resisting the sacred and the secular: Women's activism and politicized religion in South Asia*. Kali for Women.
- Siddique, M. H. & Ahmad, M. M. (2012). Variables affecting fieldworkers of NGOs in Pakistan. *Development in Practice*, 22(2), 216-228.
- Sobhan R, Bhattacharya D (1990). Donors Perspective and Influence on Domestic Economic Policy, In Rehman S (ed) (1990), *From Aid Dependence to Self-Reliance : Development Options for Bangladesh*, Dhaka, BIDS.
- Stienstra, D. (2000). Dancing Resistance from Rio to Beijing: Transnational Women's Organizing and United Nations Conferences 1992–6'. In Marchand, M. H., & Runyan, A. S. (Eds.), *Gender and Global Restructuring: Sightings, Sites and Resistances*. Routledge.

- Snyder, R. C. (2008). What is third-wave feminism? A new directions essay. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 34(1), 175-196.
- Tong, R. (2018). *Feminist thought, student economy edition: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Routledge.
- UN Women. (2018). A Brief History of CSW. Retrieved from <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>
- Weiss, A. M. (2003). Interpreting Islam and women's rights: Implementing CEDAW in Pakistan. *International Sociology*, 18(3), 581-601.
- West, L. A. (1999). The United Nations women's conferences and feminist politics. *Gender politics in global governance*, 177, 196.
- Yousaf, F. (2019). Pakistan's "tribal" Pashtuns, their "violent" representation, and the Pashtun Tahafuz movement. *Sage Open*, 9(1).
- Zia, A. S. (2009). Faith-based Politics, Enlightened Moderation and the Pakistani Women's Movement. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), 225-245.

Ms. Aisha Alam is Lecturer in the Department of Gender Studies, University of Peshawar.

Dr. Noor Sanauddin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar.