

For Pakistani men, Aurat March is the real coronavirus

Sunday 7 February 2021, by [INAYAT Naila](#) (Date first published: 5 March 2020).

Women marching with placards, using slogans like ‘mera jism meri marzi’ are not ‘good women’. And how dare they oppose maulanas and misogynists, Pakistan’s real feminists?

We are still a few days away from 8 March and regressive Pakistani men are already uncomfortable. This is an achievement. Usually, the burn begins after the Women’s Day. But this time they’re climaxing beforehand.

The fact that Pakistani women come out each year during Aurat March and talk about violence, abuse, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriages, honour killings, acid attacks, pay disparity, and inheritance rights among others is a cause of concern for Pakistani men. But the women stop at talking about the violence and the suppression. The male thinking is – what happens to you is not much of a concern, but if you speak about it openly, that becomes our concern.

Women marching in open holding placards, demanding fundamental rights, starting a conversation around difficult issues are ‘not good women’ because good women don’t complain no matter what. The measure of how much freedom women can have is dictated by others in Pakistan.

Now, when the expectation from her is to not even speak up, how can she march? And still, she and others like her march in March, calling it the Aurat March. Just the mere mention of these two words – Aurat March – sends its opponents in a tizzy. Aurat March is the coronavirus for those opposing it and they warn everyone to stay away from this *saazish* (conspiracy) of the Western lobby.

The March scare

This year there were demands to ban the Aurat March because one triggered petitioner saw it as “against the norms of Islam”, saying its hidden agenda was to “spread anarchy, vulgarity and hatred”. And, of course, it is also promoting anti-state activities. The Lahore High Court thought otherwise and [ruled](#) that the march can’t be stopped “under the law and Constitution” of Pakistan. So, the march will go on.

But that didn’t stop the notorious Lal Masjid extremists from threatening the artists and [vandalising](#) in police presence a mural of two women painted by Aurat March organisers in Islamabad. Two ‘uncovered’ women in a mural were ‘*fahashi* (pornographic)’ enough to be ruined with black paint. Earlier, a mural painted with public service messages and images of women icons in Lahore was also [destroyed](#). Adding to the disdain towards Aurat March was Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) leader Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who said his party would not allow vulgarity and obscenity in the name of human rights because Quran and Sunnah don’t allow that. He [urged](#) his workers to stop the march by force.

We can assume that most people who oppose Aurat March are not even aware of the charter of demands that the movement has put forth. All it asks for is equality and fundamental rights for women – but then who cares about all that when a few placards is all it takes to go red.

Women want rights over their bodies. How dare they?

Continuing from last year is a feminist slogan of *Mera Jism Meri Marzi* – my body, my choice. Simply put, it means that a woman's body is not to be abused. The slogan highlights rape, marital rape, sexual assault and the violence based around women's bodies. As opposed to the societal diktat that a woman's body is ownership of the man. But many find it offensive. If it were *mera jism, apki marzi* (my body, your choice), all those offended would happily fall in line.

The abhorrent commentary around *Mera Jism Meri Marzi* just goes to show that men's obsession with women's bodies is here to stay. The issue is not with the slogan but with the patriarchal mindset that questions women's right to say no.

Television screenwriter Khaliur Rehman Qamar said on a talkshow how even the mention of this phrase boils his blood, to which journalist Marvi Sirmed repeated "*Mera Jism Meri Marzi*" and Qamar [abused](#) her saying "*Tera jism hai kya, bibi? Thookta nahin hai koi aapke jism par*" and then he went on with the profanities. The female anchor sitting next to Qamar didn't have it in her to throw him out of the studio. Interestingly, the co-panellist maulana didn't get offended much when Qamar called Marvi a "bitch"; he kept asking everyone to let Qamar complete his answer. By the way, Qamar calls himself a feminist who stands for women's rights. Yes, maulanas and misogynists are the real feminists in Pakistan.

This is the man who preaches morality and mannerism to women participating [#AuratMarch](#). Just see the true face of anti [#AuratMarch](#) crowd. <https://t.co/Ign5vl2wrw>

— Marvi Sirmed (@marvisirmed) [March 3, 2020](#)

The TV showdown on Aurat March placards isn't new, though. We all remember Orya Maqbool Jan [spiralling over](#) "*Dick pics apnay pass rakho*" placard used by participants during 2019 Aurat March. The placard was an 'abuse' of his fundamental rights, he said. Apparently, sending dick photos to women was a fundamental right that the marchers were trying to take away from men like Orya Maqbool Jan. Other placards on not taxing sanitary pads, not throwing acid on women, asking to stop equating women with lollipops, iPads, juice boxes, demanding that daughters be given inheritance rights, and reclaiming public spaces have stayed with many.

The reactions that Aurat March receives every year in Pakistan would make for comic relief if the issues concerning the women weren't as real and required urgent action. Women reclaiming lost public spaces every 8 March is a positive movement that we should all get behind.

Naila Inayat is a freelance journalist from Pakistan. Her Twitter handle is @nailainayat. Views are personal.

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

The Print

<https://theprint.in/opinion/letter-from-pakistan/for-pakistani-men-aurat-march-is-the-real-coronavirus/375862/>