

Editorial

Why I March?

Faiza Ahmed

Greenwich University, Karachi, Pakistan



Citation: Ahmed F. Why I March?.
IJWE. 2019; 5(1):1-2

Corresponding Author Email:
faiza@aeirc-edu.com

DOI: 10.29052/2413-4252.v5.i1.2019.1-2

Received 28/09/2019

Accepted 04/10/2019

Published 14/12/2019

Copyright © The Author(s). 2019 This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.



Funding: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

Conflicts of Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Disclaimer: The material & information shared in the article is my personal point of view written on the basis of best of my knowledge and experience. The aim of sharing this piece is to increase understanding of Women March. The author can be reached at faiza@aeirc-edu.com.

The tale is as old as time, women have been fighting for their rights for centuries. Their lives have always been restricted, and the rationale is unelucidated. They constantly face inequality in the society, be it in the western world or more conservative countries of the world. It never came easy for women; they not only had to raise voice for the basic rights which their counterparts are already endowed with.

In 1913, first big rally was arranged by **Woman Suffrage Procession**, it was the first big public meeting in Washington D.C. for sanction voting for women in the entire country of United States of America. The March was attended by many women and sadly the March was attacked by police of Washington State, injuring around 300 women. The state police also mentioned "*There would be nothing like this happen if you would have stayed at home*". Even though in some states of USA, women were permitted to vote since 1869 however, the entire country did not get the right to vote until 1919, which was a big achievement for the women globally. Women of USA and Europe have had many public gatherings to increase awareness about importance of being an equal citizen in the society.

Women have been protesting and rallying for their fundamental rights, the rights they are entitled to like Reproductive rights, Voting, equal pay, sexual violence, domestic violence, marital rape etc since the 18th century. It is a right of every citizen that they can show their emotions, march and protest. Every political party, religious organization and NGOs have demonstrated their power to show support or object to a certain cause.

When Donald Trump was elected as a president in USA, against the presidential candidate Hilary Clinton, despite of being accused of using foul language against women and harassing them, large number of US population came out on streets. it was one of the biggest march histories had ever seen. About 100,000 people including men, women and children were seen on the streets Washington DC, and several other cities of USA, chanting slogans like "not my president". There was a huge wave and fire in the Hollywood when film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused by many women for rape and sexual harassment in 2017 and media highlighted the whole scenario, interviewed many women who had worked with Weinstein. Around 80 women accused Weinstein of sexually harassing them. Movements like #metoo and #womenmarch became acknowledged amid the case of Weinstein.

It took time for the wave to come to South East Asia; however, everyone knows that women in South East Asia face many hurdles, they are always suppressed by men due to cultural and religious values. In 2018, first Aurat March (Women March) was organized by Women Democratic Forum (WDF), Aurat Foundation etc. First year the audience was limited because of lack of awareness among people but we saw people coming out for gender equality in cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Hyderabad etc, which was an achievement in its own in a country like Pakistan. Rather than focusing on the goals and demands of Aurat March, media mostly focused on the placards the young girls were holding during the march. Men got offended and insecure by watching girls on streets demanding secure environment at workplace, equal pay and relief from domestic and emotional abuse they face on daily basis.

No matter, how much women are degraded in our society and how much we need movements like Aurat March and #metoo, women will always face obstacles rather than finding their counterparts and media supporting them.

The Manifesto of Aurat March demands certain rights from government which includes; economic justice, including implementation of labor rights, the Sexual Harassment Against Women in the Workplace Act 2010, recognition of women's input to the 'care economy' as unpaid labor, and provision of maternity leaves and day care centers to ensure women's inclusion in the labor force. recognition of women's participation in production of food and cash crops, access to a fair justice system, inclusion of women with disabilities as well as the transgender community, reproductive justice, access to public spaces inclusion in educational institutions, rights of religious minorities.

Why media, especially social media took it upon them to demean women rather than supporting the cause? Posters like *Mera Jism Meri Marzi* (My body, my consent), *Khana Khud Garam Kerlo* (heat up your own food), *Mujhe Nahi Pata Tumhare Mozey Kahan Hain* (I don't know where are your socks) started trending very quickly, women were demeaned and slut shamed for attending and organizing marches. Many activists, media personalities, celebrities joined the cause to raise awareness about gender equality. However, somehow a couple of weeks before Aurat March 2020 this debate came up on television, social media that the slogan "Mera Jism Meri Marzi" is non-sharai (non- Islamic) apparently more than half of the country was in favor of all the religious scholars and people who were saying that this is not the part of our culture and religion. Men were seen abusing women activists on national television to satisfy their fragile ego. The only thing that was disturbing this lot was the words Jism (body) and Marzi (consent) was used in the same sentence, both words are considered filthy in our culture and seeing it used by women hurts more. The actual reason behind this slogan was claiming that we do not want anyone to touch our body without our consent, and we have full right over our bodies. Most importantly Pakistan which is a hub of marital rape, where consent has given no value even in a marriage the slogan is the voice for those women. It's not a WAR against our counterparts, we are asking for equality because we want us to grow and learn together!

Some placards or slogans should not make us uncomfortable. We never make it a nationalized issue when little girls are raped, we do not debate openly on the subject when some man heave acid on a woman or an underage girl is married to a guy twice her age. Why do we want to repress the voices that want justice and equality? The question remains the same until we attain our goal.

