**Aurat March, morality and society**

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[Aurat March](https://dailytimes.com.pk/572433/aurat-march-and-international-womens-day/) has exposed the fragility of masculine ego. It is astonishing to see that a supposedly benign slogan – my body, my rights – can offend the “male-stream” so badly that it has taken upon itself to halt the advance of women’s movement. Both social and electronic media are flooded with impulsive and hostile opinions against the supporters of Aurat March. Abusive memes, derogatory remarks, sexist jokes and violent suggestions taking rounds on social media are all acceptable to the same lot which finds the slogans of Aurat March offensive to the public morality. This clearly explains that we have turned out to be a reactionary, judgmental and volatile society which cannot handle dissent with civility.

One can argue that Aurat March and its slogans do not fully represent the problems of middle and lower middle class women. For instance, the controversies surrounding sanitary pads are unknown to the downtrodden woman to whom nothing of the sort is available. Similarly, a woman who is being abused by her master both sexually and economically at a brick kiln may not be concerned about the heated debate on female outfit. In the same way, the harsh exchange between a drama writer and a rights activist on a TV Talk Show and subsequent trends on social media are meaningless for millions of our unknown women who actually bear the brunt of toxic masculinity in their everyday life. Yet, Aurat March and the waves it has generated in urban centers of our country are a welcome development because, after decades, we have seen this awakening in our society.

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We must realize that movements emerge, grow and mature over a large span of time.Aurat March is still in its initial phase and will surely undergo many changes in future. The more popular it grows, the more representative it will become. Disagreeing to some slogan or demands of the march, commenting upon the contents of the speeches and offering criticism to the entire program of the march is perfectly normal and must be taken this way by all. But using or threatening to use force against peaceful demonstrators is highly undesirable.

Opposing the march on the pretext that it is against the so-called public morality is incomprehensible. Basically, women have taken to the streets to highlight the crimes perpetrated against them in our society in the disguise of norms and traditions. Instead of being self-critical and introspective, we are responding withdeliberate attempts to suppress the voices of womenfolk. In this hurried response, we are completely forgettingthat social morality is dynamic and no one group can claim monopoly over defining morality. We should also be mindful of the fact that women constitute more than 50 percent of our population and cannot be denied the right to develop social morality for themselves and society. History stands witness to the fact that societies remain in the form of flux and that change cannot be halted through state machinery or forces of conservatism.

The argument that Aurat March promotes obscenity and offensive ideas in otherwise decent society is ungrounded. It is unfortunate that workplace harassment, catcalling, forced marriages, denial of inheritance rights, honor killing and domestic violence are rampant in our society. In addition, stigmatization of victim for unwanted sexual advance by close relatives, religious clerics, friends and job supervisors is almost a norm. As this was not enough, rape of minor girls and even dead bodies has been reported in our country. It is ironical that a society which letsall such immoral and indecent acts happen,finds slogans of Aurat March offensive to its morality. Even today, people are sharing provocative and instigating material, much more objectionable than slogans and demands of Aurat March, on social media against those who favor feminism or women’s movement. Such double standards only bring to surface the deep psychological split in our social being caused due to continued exposure to doctored narratives. The government, instead of being preacher of morality, must ensure safety and security of women demanding their rights. It must also be taken into consideration that peaceful demonstration is the right of women in any constitutional democracy. In the past, we have seen religious organizations and political parties occupying main arteries of provincial and federal capitals for days without being seriously confronted. Women March is much less disruptive than those demonstrations and sit-ins. This March should be viewed in its right context so that further controversies can be avoided. On the other hand, it is advisable for the organizers and participants of the march to acknowledge and respect various other flavors of feminism in the society.

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