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**RISE OF DIGITAL ANTI-FEMINISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH:
ASSESSING CAUSAL AND REMEDIAL PROSPECTS OF
GENDER-NEUTRAL LAWS**

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Abstract

In an ever-evolving digital landscape, feminists confront new obstacles in their quest for gender equality. This paper addresses the escalating issue of digital abuse, where organised groups disseminate hateful content to undermine feminist progress and foster gender inequities. Digital anti-feminism manifests as online misogyny, targeting feminists and pro-feminist ideologies through hate-filled posts, blogs, and videos. Using a comparative approach, the analysis explores the legal frameworks governing sexual harassment, domestic violence, and workplace discrimination in different jurisdictions, focusing on their impact on feminist advocacy. By situating the discussion in the Global South, the paper highlights the unique challenges feminists face in regions where anti-feminist sentiments intersect with cultural, religious, and political ideologies. Special emphasis is placed on the rise of men's rights activism (MRA) and its evolution into organised anti-feminist movements, particularly in India. The paper identifies the misuse of gender-biased laws and the demand for gender-neutral legal reforms as central to these movements, contributing to the perpetuation of harmful

narratives against women and feminists. By presenting a nuanced understanding of the intersections between anti-feminism and legal biases, the analysis uncovers patterns that fuel digital abuse and violence against feminists. The discussion underscores the urgent need for safeguarding feminist spaces, countering online abuse, and promoting justice through inclusive legal frameworks that address the root causes of anti-feminism without compromising marginalised groups' safety and rights.

Keywords: Digital anti-feminism, gender-neutral laws, online misogyny, men's rights activism (MRA), Global South feminism, gender-biased laws.

I. Introduction

“Back then, we fought to gain rights; now, we fight against them being taken away” (Molyneux et al., 2021, p.19).

The path for feminists has never been smooth. UN Women identifies increasing digital abuse as a shadow pandemic (*COVID-19 and Violence against Women and Girls*, 2022). Digital anti-feminism, a “backlash” against feminism, is reflected in hate-filled posts, blogs, and videos circulated by organised groups sharing common ideologies (Byerly, 2020). As feminists increasingly fear self-identification, scholars have detected an urgent need for systematic analysis and comparative research on resistance to anti-feminist backlashes (Anderson, 2015). While Indian Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) organised digitally and convened a mass ritual to get rid of the “evil” of feminism, Kenyan anti-feminist posts translated into increased femicide and women hatred (Basu, 2016; Bose, 2018; Nyabola, 2018). Saudi Arabian State Security recalled its Twitter post equating feminism with extremism, but Israeli anti-feminists openly vandalised images of women in public posters (Kellman, 2021; “Saudi Arabia apologises for video labelling feminism as extremism,” 2019). This substantiates that the intensity of backlashes varies with jurisdiction (Susan B. & Sheehy, 2016). However, this paper aims to detect a common trend in the rising anti-feminism in the Global South.

A. Statement of the Problem

On 23rd April 2018, Alek Minassian rammed a van into a Toronto crowd, killing 10 women and injuring 16, shortly after posting on Facebook: “The incel rebellion has already begun” (Mezzofiore, 2018). Minassian's post

says it all and highlights how extreme misogyny can escalate into violence. Although this incident occurred in Toronto, anti-feminists continue to thrive in their safe space, the “manosphere”, their thoughts targeting several feminists daily and persuading more men and young boys to join the group. A similar concern is growing in India, though not yet violent. Men’s rights groups such as Save Indian Family, which started as a Yahoo support group for husbands wronged by their wives, now function as an NGO which holds protests against the misuse of laws by women and lobbies for gender-neutral laws (*About Us*, n.d.). More concerning are the methods that these groups have lately started to adopt. Events such as 150 men performing rituals in the Ganges to “cleanse” themselves of feminism illustrate a radical shift towards anti-feminism (Bose, 2018).

As feminism faces growing stigma, research highlights a rising reluctance to identify with the movement to escape the stigma of being perceived as a man-hater (and other negative stereotypes). This raises legitimate concerns about the anticipated downfall of the feminist movement in the Indian jurisdiction (Anderson, 2015; R. Lewis et al., 2016). Amnesty International’s 2017 study found that over 70% of women who were surveyed had faced one or the other sort of online abuse (*Amnesty Reveals Alarming Impact of Online Abuse against Women*, 2017). Meanwhile, hashtags like #Feminism Terrorism, #Feminism Is Toxic and #Dont Mancrimiante trend globally amplifies hostility toward feminists.

B. Significance of Study

With the fourth wave of feminism being largely digital, safeguarding women’s online participation becomes crucial (Barker & Jurasz, 2019; Benn, 2013). Hatred against feminism spreads quickly on digital platforms (Copland, 2022; Hardesty et al., 2019; R. Lewis et al., 2016), but the claim that such backlashes are majorly received from MRAs requires scrutiny (Allan, 2016; Lodhia, 2014). A preliminary assessment of anti-feminist protests in the Global South prompted this investigation, revealing conservative, religious and political variations in anti-feminist ideologies (**Fig. 1**).

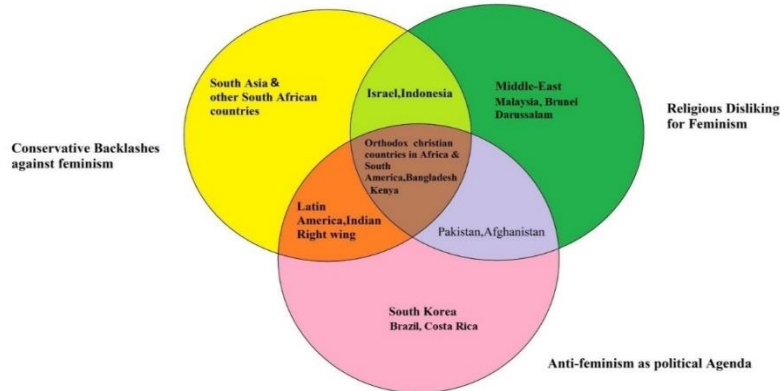
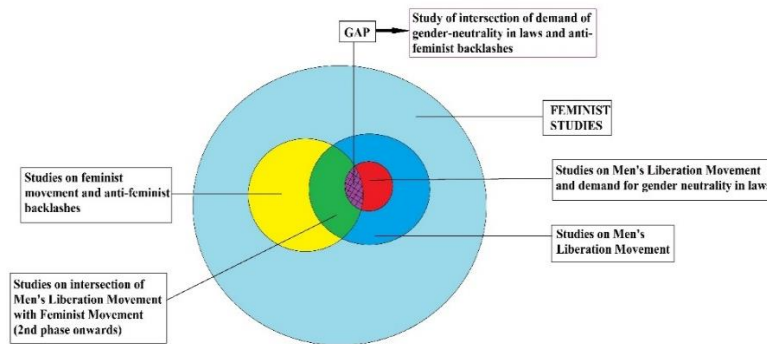


Figure 1: Intersections of anti-feminist sentiments as assessed by authors through preliminary research



Pictorial representation of GAP in literature. The proposed study attempts to fill the depicted gap.

Figure 2: Locating the present study in existing academic scholarship

C. Aim of Study

Scholars have cautioned against a single narrative of anti-feminism and expressed a need for a region-specific account, especially when the pandemic has optimised the spread of digital abuse (Brenner, 2003; Denkovski et al., 2021; Makama et al., 2019). The paper aims to fill this gap with a Global-South account of digital anti-feminism.

II. Understanding Anti-feminism and its Digital Presence

Since the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media, individuals who side with anti-feminism have proliferated online, spewing hatred against feminists and pro-feminists (Faludi, 1992; Ging, 2019). To trace its

origins, one must examine the *Men's Liberation Movement* (MLM), which emerged alongside second-wave feminism to challenge restrictive gender roles (Brod, 2018; Carrigan et al., 1985). While MLM initially sought to critique masculinity norms, it fractured over feminism's focus on male privilege as the root of women's oppression, splitting into pro-feminist and anti-feminist factions (Messner, 2016).

A. Manosphere and Anti-feminist subgroups

The manosphere, initially an online space for men's discussions, gained notoriety when Ian Ironwood used the term in *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (Ging, 2019; *Manosphere*, 2014). MRAs adopted this term, and it has since become synonymous with extreme misogyny (T. Farrell et al., 2019). The manosphere comprises various anti-feminist subgroups, including MRAs, who argue against perceived legal and social discrimination against men; Incels (Involuntary Celibates), who blame women and feminism for their lack of romantic and sexual success; Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), who advocate for male separatism from women and feminist influences; and Pickup Artists, who use manipulative tactics to attract women, often reinforcing misogynistic narratives (Ging, 2019).

Though originally a term coined by a Toronto woman named Alana to support people struggling with involuntary celibacy, *incel* communities turned toxic over time. The group gained global attention after Elliot Rodger's 2014 Isla Vista killings, an act of "misogynist terrorism" carried out in retaliation for romantic rejection (White, 2017). Despite Alana distancing herself from the movement, incel groups continue to expand, posing a growing threat to women's safety (Branson-Potts & Winton, 2018).

In India, where patriarchal norms persist, marital rape remains unrecognised as a crime, and women still fear walking alone at night, a violent anti-feminist movement would only add to their struggles. While these groups may label themselves differently, their shared anti-feminist ideologies frequently manifest as hostility toward women. Given the history of violence linked to such ideologies, scholars rightfully express concern over their rise.

India, where women still dread walking alone on streets, patriarchy still flourishes as the norm, and courts still disregard marital rape as a crime,

and a violent version of the anti-feminist movement would only be an added battle that women would have to fight. While these groups may label themselves differently, their shared anti-feminist ideologies frequently manifest as hostility toward women. Given the history of violence linked to such ideologies, scholars attach rightful concerns to the rise of anti-feminism.

B. The Red and Black Pill Theory

Members of the manosphere adopt terms from the movie *The Matrix*, referring to themselves as having taken the “Red Pill” or “Black Pill” (Marche, 2016; Ging, 2019). *Black Pill* adherents view attraction as biologically deterministic, arguing that women seek genetically superior “alpha” men, leaving “beta” men disadvantaged (Dishy, 2018). *Red Pill* followers, however, blame women for their sexual frustrations, arguing that feminism has turned women into exploiters and psychopaths (Van Valkenburgh, 2021). Moreover, they surmise that men are being harassed and victimised under the feminist understanding of gender because it provides women with all the advantages. They resent feminist legal protections and women in positions of power (Rosenbrock, 2012).

Moreover, an important concern with the anti-feminist manosphere is its presumption of kinship as inherently heterosexual, marginalising men who defy traditional masculinity. In Germany, for instance, anti-feminists mock pro-feminist men as *Lila Pudel* (Purple Poodles) (Rosenbrock, 2012).

C. Indian Men’s Rights Movement: A Case Study

The Indian Men’s Rights Movement originated as a response to the alleged misuse of domestic violence and dowry laws. In the 1990s, R.P. Chugh founded the *Akhil Bharatiya Patni Atyachar Virodhi Manch*, which was a campaign to “prevent cruelty against husbands”, followed by groups like *Pirito Purush Pati Parishad* (Basu, 2016). By the 2000s, the Save Indian Family Foundation spearheaded the movement, propagating anti-feminist sentiments through rituals like *pishachani mukti pujas* (ritual to drive away evil) to “exorcise” feminists (Basu, 2016). Moreover, a subgroup, *currycels*, who identify themselves as Indian incels, use online platforms to target women who prefer white men, often resorting to harassment and threats (Ware, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2020). Without scrutiny, symbolic acts like *pishachani mukti pujas* risk escalating into

real-world violence against feminists. The reason(s) for such hatred against feminism in India needs to be analysed until it is too late and the symbolic *pishachani mukti pujas* turn into violent massacres of feminists at the hands of these anti-feminists.

i. Indian MRM's demand for gender neutrality: Gender-biased laws as a possible cause for rise in anti-feminism

India's legal system includes several gender-specific laws designed to protect women, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 ("DVA, 2005") and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 ("PoSH, 2013"). Additionally, laws on rape, sexual harassment, dowry death, and cruelty against wives exclusively recognise women as victims and men as perpetrators. Alimony, child custody, and divorce laws have also been criticised as favouring women.

MRM organisations have emerged in response, including the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Men (Delhi), Child Rights Initiative for Shared Parenting (Bengaluru), and Purush Hakka Sanrakshan Samiti (Nasik) (Basu, 2016). These groups advocate for men allegedly victimised by gender-biased laws, with SPCM and PHSS opposing perceived misuse of sexual violence and dowry laws, while CRISP focuses on fathers denied child custody. Scholars like Srimati Basu warn feminists against delaying responses to false complaint issues as it could reinforce MRM's claims that feminism obstructs gender-neutral legislation. However, others, like Agnes (2009), argue that legal equality should account for existing disparities, as treating unequal equally exacerbates inequalities.

ii. Review of Judicial Developments: Noted misuse of gendered laws highlighting a growing need for gender neutrality

The debate on gender neutrality in Indian law has been inconsistent; courts have acknowledged the issue but have hesitated to implement changes. The Delhi High Court (HC) first recognised this issue in *Sudesh Jhaku v. KC Jhaku* (1998), advocating for gender-neutral rape laws. However, subsequent rulings have been inconsistent. *Aruna Parmod v. Union of India* (2008) recognised male domestic violence victims but dismissed legal protections due to low reported cases. The *Harsora* ruling (2016) removed gender-specificity for the accused under the Domestic Violence Act but maintained a woman-only victim framework, excluding male and LGBTQ+ victims.

Courts and not just MRAs have been noting the misuse of gender-biased laws. In *Chander Bhan v. State* (2008), the Delhi HC issued guidelines to prevent wrongful arrests under cruelty laws, recognising many cases as impulsive disputes. The Supreme Court in *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India* (2005) described this misuse as “legal terrorism,” a term later adopted by MRAs like Deepika Bhardwaj. Cases like *Amarjit Kaur v. Jaswinder Kaur* (2020) further reaffirmed concerns over weaponised legal provisions.

Taking into consideration this increasing misuse, the Supreme Court in *Rajesh Sharma & Ors. v. State of U.P. & Anr.* (2017) proposed the formation of Family Welfare Committees to review domestic violence complaints before arresting the accused. While MRAs welcomed this as a safeguard against wrongful arrests, feminists opposed it. The decision was overturned in *the Social Action Forum for Manav Adhikar v. Union of India* (2018), with the Court deeming it “erroneous and impermissible”. This refusal to address gender neutrality in biased laws fueled further MRA dissatisfaction.

Recently, the demand for gender-neutral rape laws has intensified, with a fresh petition being filed in 2021 (Ojha, 2021). However, the Supreme Court had dismissed a similar PIL in 2018, showing reluctance to engage in the debate. While the Bench unanimously dismissed the petition terming it as “imaginative”, CJI Deepak Misra acknowledged that “a woman cannot rape a man” but vaguely referred to other IPC provisions without specifying them (*SC Dismisses PIL To Make Rape*, 2018). The Court deferred the matter to the legislature, highlighting the legal system’s unpreparedness to enact reforms

Despite judicial hesitance, some courts have noted the growing misuse of rape laws. The Delhi HC warned against false rape cases being used as “weapons for vengeance and vendetta” (*Nirmal Vaid v. State NCT of Delhi*, 2012), and in *Lalit Kumar Vats v. State of NCT of Delhi & Anr.* (2020), it condemned the abuse of IPC Section 376. In a rare ruling, a Chennai court awarded ₹15 lakh in compensation to a man falsely accused of rape after a DNA test disproved paternity (*Mr. Santhosh @ Sathiyam v. Ms. Priyanka & Ors.*, 2019). However, the courts are still silent over the statutory right of such falsely accused men to avail of any compensation in the first place and the need for the formation of set guidelines for deciding the amount of such compensation.

Very recently, there have been attempts by some HCs to interpret gender neutrality. Specially after the series of judgments by the Supreme Court which voice the need for a non-binary understanding of gender, such interpretation is appreciable and a step towards gender-neutrality in laws, to say the least (*National Legal Service Authority v. Union of India*, 1863). For instance, the Calcutta HC commented upon the neutrality of the perpetrator's gender under PoSH, 2013. Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya, who heard the matter, held that:

A person of any gender may feel threatened and sexually harassed when her/his modesty or dignity as a member of the said gender is offended by [acts of sexual harassment] irrespective of the sexuality and gender of the perpetrator of the act (*Dr. Malabika Bhattacharjee v. Internal Complaints Committee, Vivekananda College & Ors.*, 2020).

Simultaneously, courts have begun addressing the growing menace of false allegations, imposing penalties on petitioners for misusing legal provisions and diverting law enforcement resources. In *Anita Suresh v. Union of India & Ors.* (2015) and *Laishram Premila Devi & Ors. v. The State & Ors.* (2021), courts fined individuals for filing frivolous complaints, acknowledging the strain such cases place on investigations of serious offences. These judgments mark incremental progress toward gender-neutral legal interpretations, though key statutory changes remain absent.

III. Review of Literary developments: Noting factors that influence anti-feminism

Arntzen discussed, at length, the factors that influence anti-feminist sentiments in his work published in 1973 (Arntzen, 1973). He argued that anti-feminist attitudes stem from "social environment" shaping personality, not gender, as both men and women display these sentiments. This justifies that it is not the gender but the personality of the individual which is an influencing factor for the development, nurture and display of anti-feminist sentiments.

Moving ahead in time, scholars such as Flood and Allan view MRA as a "backlash" against feminism's perceived threat to "maleness" (Flood, 1998). Allan, who, in his work, relies upon "men's rights activist literature", observes that the MRM/MRA is a "reactive rather than politically advantageous" movement (Flood, 1998). Allan notes that

MRM blames feminism without developing theoretical explanations while working within a restrictive framework that often dismisses pro-feminist perspectives (Flood, 1998).

While noting a theoretical void in the MRM scholarship, Allan criticises the MRM scholarship for focusing too narrowly on attacking feminism rather than addressing intersectionality. While Friedan rightly classifies MRM as “post-feminist,” the movement primarily advocates for heterosexual men, neglecting LGBTQI+ concerns, thus leaving a gap which only reiterates the reason for the development of feminist scholarship— the need for doing away with male dominance (Connell, 2008; Friedan, 2001). While feminist scholars aim to achieve the liberation of women by getting rid of dominance, queer theorists perceive males as heterosexual males, the dominance of which subjugates classes of the LGBTQI+ umbrella, thus criticising MRM for its non-inclusivity. Nevertheless, Allan’s paper was not received well by MRM scholars who rejected Allan’s work, claiming it disregarded their feelings to justify sexism (Toysoldier, 2017). Allan cites Warren Farrell’s “victim power” theory to justify his contention that MRM is located in what he calls a feeling of the male body becoming “suddenly penetrable” (Allan, 2016; W. Farrell, 1993). While Allan started by noting a need for the development of proper MRM theories, he utilises Farrell’s theory, which was a feminist theory aimed at convincing the world of the need for feminism by citing the victimisation of women at the hands of sexism, male dominance and patriarchy. This presents a lack of theoretical explanation for detected factors that could be said to influence anti-feminist sentiments and is a detected gap in the existing literature. The present project aims to fill the gap. Through a study of gender-biased laws as a factor influencing anti-feminist sentiments in India, it aims at contributing a factor backed by explanation.

It would be a biased review of literature if we do not turn to works of MRM scholars or scholars whom Nathanson terms “converts” (as they once were pro-feminists but later joined the MRM) (Nathanson & Young, 2014). For instance, MRM scholars like Fox and Jordan justify their movement by citing neglect of men’s issues due to feminist dominance. Fox notes that male oppression includes “selective service registration, unfair legal decrees of alimony and child support, and domestic violence against men” (Fox, 2004). In the Indian jurisdiction as well, demand for law reforms in the gendered domestic violence, marriage and divorce laws

has been the major reason for the rise of MRM. This provides a theoretical justification for the prospect of this present study by locating the possibility and prospect of gender-biased laws being studied as a factor influencing anti-feminist sentiments.

Basu observes that Indian MRM has demonstrated substantial misogynist and anti-feminist sentiments, which pose a challenge to feminists (Basu, 2016). However, this has more layers to it, such as intersectional factors of gender and class, which equally need to be examined in order to assess better the level of threat such movements pose to feminism. Boyd & Sheehy note that MRAs' demands are similar across jurisdictions, but the strategies they adopt and their level of resistance to feminism vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction (Susan B. & Sheehy, 2016).

Similarly, Michael Salter's work demonstrates how MRM changes shape in a given country, giving the movement more purchase (Salter, 2016). Messner attributes such changes to "shifting social conditions", thus explaining the splitting of the men's liberation movement into pro and post-feminist groups (Messner, 2016). Burrell & Maricourt, in a very recent study, note that such splitting might not have been caused by the #MeToo movement, but the amplification of demands of men came to the forefront during the #MeToo movement (Maricourt & Burrell, 2022).

A. Online threat to feminism

Nagle traces online anti-feminism's origins to countercultural, pro-family and conservative responses to feminism enabled by online anonymity (Nagle, 2015). More specifically, in the Indian context, Basu's ethnographic study reveals that MRA groups challenge feminism through "unanticipated fallouts of protective legislation and symbolic equality standards" (Basu, 2016). She comes to these conclusions by examining the understanding of law, equality, and gender in the selected MRA profiles.

Recent years have seen increased online hatred against women. Ging documents the rise of the "mansosphere," a confederation of interest groups with anti-feminist sentiments who feel threatened by feminism (Ging et al., 2019). Groups like involuntary celibates (incels) use new technologies and sexually aggressive language to spread misogyny (Ging et al., 2019). A small-scale study by Byerly demonstrates how media and technology enable "online communities focused on hatred of women and promotion of violence" (Byerly, 2020).

More recent studies focus on the reason for violent trends in the anti-feminist groups. Agius et al., for instance, attribute anti-feminist violence to alignment with far-right ideologies glorifying “order, hierarchy and traditional values” (Agius et al., 2022). A recent article by Simon Copland examines how platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit mobilise support for anti-feminist ideologies, citing #ThotAudit as an example of manosphere groups politicising views for mainstream attention (Copland, 2022).

Specific groups are also developing in the manosphere that claim to voice specific concerns. For instance, Liu identifies the growth of MRAsians, an “anti-feminist Asian American men’s rights subculture” targeting Asian American women (Liu, 2021). An evident gap is detected due to the lack of work done on the online abuse and threat that feminists face at the hands of incels, currycels MRAsians and other groups that thrive in the instant Indian manosphere. This study would highlight how this gap leaves room for many factors that influence anti-feminism to thrive undetected.

B. Locating gender neutrality as a factor influencing anti-feminism

In her paper, Lodhia investigated another factor that influenced the rise of anti-feminist backlash in India besides the personality of the individuals who align with such ideologies (Lodhia, 2014). In her study, she notes how advocacy for men’s rights and gender-neutral law reform in India evolved into an anti-feminist movement demanding “complete abolition of vital legal protections for women” based on claims that women misuse these laws to destroy families (Lodhia, 2014). Her work shows that the Indian version of anti-feminist MRAs cites the grudges of unattended demand for gender-neutral laws as the movement’s justification. This demonstrates how unaddressed demands for gender neutrality fuel anti-feminist sentiment in India across offline and online platforms. Lodhia explains how these platforms are utilised to disseminate hatred against feminists. In this regard, Nagle identifies online anti-feminism as specifically inhibiting “cyberfeminist” culture development (Nagle, 2015).

C. Exploring the idea of gender-neutral laws as a means to preserve the falling-out sheen of feminism

Studies supporting gender-neutral laws highlight how gender-biased legislation contributes to anti-feminist attitudes among self-identified male victims. For instance, Rumney notes that resistance to gender-neutral rape laws reflects growing distress among male victims that transforms into anti-feminist sentiment (Rumney, 2007). The demand for gender neutrality in rape and sexual harassment provisions might be a rather difficult reform for MRAs to lobby for. Even though attending to the demands for gender neutrality in laws could be a probable solution for rising anti-feminist traits in MRAs, such a solution could not be immediately achieved or might be achieved partly by neutralising some gender-biased laws. This presents a need to search for other solutions, which would be possible by detecting other factors that influence anti-feminism. This is beyond the scope of the present study because it would primarily involve primary data collection methods to test the relation between behavioural and ideological factors such as religiosity, etc. However, the researcher notes that such a study would immensely contribute to a better analysis of the reasons for the rise in anti-feminism in India and provide even better solutions for the issue. Similar studies have been carried out recently. There has been an attempt at exploring other factors that influence “radicalisation to violence occurs from a gender perspective” (Johnston & True, 2019). Through a gender analysis of survey data collected in Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Libya, the study notes that factors such as level of education and religiosity do not reflect a significant relationship with support for violent extremism.

IV. Examining Gender-Neutral Laws on Sexual Harassment, Rape, Divorce, and Child Custody in Asia: A Comparative Analysis

In South Asia, most of the laws regarding sexual harassment, rape, divorce and child custody are not gender-neutral and are often inclined towards old conventional traditions. But recently, a change in trend has been seen due to rising concern over gender neutrality, and there is development in these respective areas. The laws regarding these areas have been discussed in detail, covering four Asian Countries. They are South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Indonesia.

A. South Korean laws

South Korean sexual assault, harassment, and domestic violence laws are gender-neutral. A recent Supreme Court of South Korea’s ruling established that sexual harassment cases require “gender sensitivity” for equality. Following this decision, the National Labour Relations Commission and other courts have adopted the principle of gender neutrality in various matters.

Article 297 of the Korean Penal Code defines rape as intercourse using violence and intimidation—a definition criticised by legal scholars for being narrow as it should constitute within it that the victim was unable to resist the act of the perpetrator. Rape laws are gender-neutral, with either gender potentially being the victim or perpetrator. The Supreme Court of South Korea recognises marital rape as an offence, though victims often fail to report due to definitional limitations and defamation laws.

Divorce requires mutual consent under Article 834 of the Korean Civil Act. Korea maintains fault-based divorce, reasoning that guiltless spouses should not be compelled to unwanted divorce. Judges have significant discretion in divorce and custody matters. Korean law provides no spousal maintenance after divorce, with property division determined by judges who typically favour the economically weaker partner. Child custody decisions consider factors like age and parents’ financial situations, with courts able to assign custody to other relatives or institutions if both parents are deemed incompetent.

B. Saudi Arabian laws

Saudi Arabia explicitly criminalised sexual harassment through the Anti-Sexual Harassment law in 2018. Under Sharia law, such offences fall under *their* punishment (discretionary), with penalties including imprisonment of up to five years, depending on circumstances.

The country follows Sharia law for sexual crimes, with punishments ranging from flogging to execution. No specific law criminalises rape, and victims who enter the company of rapists in violation of *purdah* (segregation) may also face punishment. Marital rape is not recognised. Rape is classified as a *hadd* crime (Quranic punishment), but without sufficient evidence, it may be treated as *tazir* (discretionary punishment).

A male has almost all power and can unilaterally divorce his wife. Women can only petition courts for dissolution on specific grounds, requiring proof of “harm” and demonstration that continuing the marriage is impossible. The meaning of harm depends upon the interpretation of the judges after evaluating the evidence.

Fathers are default child guardians, while mothers have limited authority unless court-appointed. Fathers can appoint alternative guardians and terminate a mother’s custody if she is deemed incompetent or remarries someone in a prohibited relationship with the child unless this conflicts with the child’s best interests.

C. Israeli laws

In Israel, sexual harassment law is gender-neutral and is applied equally to all. The law is given under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law, which aims to protect the individual’s dignity, freedom and privacy and promote gender equality.

Article 345 of Penal Law (1977) provides a definition of rape, which states “penetration of female by a body part or object without consent”. The victim can only be a female, and she cannot be made liable for raping a boy.

In Israel, divorce is given by the religious Court, which follows religious laws. Jewish women cannot obtain a divorce unless their husband releases them. The state can only declare Jewish marriage over upon the actual delivery of the divorce bill to the wife. In certain cases, only the state can pressure husbands through police intervention, though this process lacks transparency and due process.

Parents are allowed to decide the child’s custody and make an agreement at the time of separation. Section 24 of the law provides that custody approval depends upon the child’s best interest. Section 25 provides that on failure of agreement, the family court or an authorised religious court will settle the issue.

D. Indonesian laws

Indonesian law recognises men and children as potential sexual harassment victims. Article 4 lists nine offences: physical/non-physical sexual abuse, forced contraception, sterilisation, marriage, sexual torture, exploitation, slavery, and online sexual violence.

The new law extends protection to male and child victims, whereas previous legislation only covered women. Currently, the penal code does not make marital rape an offence but recognises sexual abuse within and outside of marriage.

Muslims obtain divorces through religious courts, and non-Muslims through District Courts. The Marriage Law regulates certain legal grounds which, if violated by either of the spouses, can serve as the grounds to obtain divorce. Introduction of Law No. 1 (1974) on marriage for the first time allowed women to seek divorce. Compilation of Islamic laws limited husbands' unilateral divorce rights, providing equal separation rights for both spouses through religious courts.

Child Custody for Muslims is regulated by the 1991 Compilation and Principles of Islam. In normal situations, the custody of a child below 12 years is given to the mother, and for children attaining *mumayyiz*, it is up to them to decide with whom they want to live. Regardless of the custody, it is the obligation of the father to look over the maintenance of the child till he attains 21 years of age.

For non-Muslims, Marriage Law (1974) provides that both parents are responsible for the care of the child until they marry or are able to support their life. This responsibility continues during disputes, with district courts intervening when necessary.

Continuing from the previous discussion on gender-neutral laws regarding sexual harassment, rape, divorce, and child custody in Asian countries, we will now present a comparative analysis of components present in the Global South. In this table, a comparative analysis of gender-neutral laws in different countries pertaining to sexual harassment, domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace, divorce grounds, child custody, child support, and relevant family law sections will be presented. The table provides an overview of the existence of comprehensive legislation, the nature of the laws, and the gender bias (if any) within each legal framework.

Table 1: Laws on Sexual Harassment, Domestic Violence and Family Law in Global South Countries

Ethiopia	Country	Algeria	Argentina	Bangladesh	Brazil
CLE	Laws on Sexual Harassment	Comprehensive legislation exists (CLE).	CLE	CLE	CLE
CLE	Laws on Domestic Violence	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE
CLE	Laws on Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE
Yes	Gender-Neutrality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Criminal Code (Articles 596-600); Revised Family Code (Articles 173-175)	Relevant Sections	Algerian Penal Code (Articles 341, 342, 343)	Penal Code (Articles 119-125)		Law No. 10,778/2003; Law No. 11,340/2006
	Grounds for Divorce		Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage		Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage
	Laws on Child Custody		Civil Code (Articles 204, 215)		Civil Code (Articles 1,582-1,584); Child and Adolescent Statute
	Laws on Child Support		Civil Code (Articles 647-658)		Civil Code (Articles 1,694-1,710); Child and Adolescent Statute
	Relevant Family Law Sections		Divorce Law (Law No. 24,270)		Civil Procedure Code (Law No. 13,105)

	India	Ghana	Country	Colombia	China	Egypt
	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment	CLE	CLE	CLE
	CLE	CLE	Domestic Violence	CLE	CLE	CLE
	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE	CLE	CLE
	Yes	Yes	Gender-Neutrality	Yes	Yes	Gender-Biased
	The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 (Sections 2-14)	Domestic Violence Act, 2007	Relevant Sections	Law No. 1257/2008; Law No. 1561/2012	Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, 2015	Egyptian Penal Code (Articles 306, 309, 310, 311)
	Various grounds including cruelty, adultery, desertion, etc.		Grounds for Divorce	In retrievable breakdown of the marriage		
	Hindu Marriage Act; Guardians and Wards Act		Child Custody	Civil Code (Article 156)		
	Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act; Guardians and Wards Act		Child Support	Civil Code (Articles 315-334)		
	The Special Marriage Act; Indian Divorce Act; Child Marriage Restraint Act		Relevant Family Law Sections	Law No. 1098/2006 (Children and Adolescents Code)		

Mexico	Malaysia	Kenya	Country	Iran	Indonesia
CLE	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment	CLE	CLE
CLE	CLE	CLE	Domestic Violence	CLE	CLE
CLE	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE	CLE
Yes	Yes	Yes	Gender-Neutrality	Gender-Biased	Yes
General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, 2007	Employment Act 1955; Penal Code (Section 509)	Sexual Offences Act, 2006	Relevant Sections	Iranian Penal Code (Articles 609, 610, 630)	
Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage		Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage	Grounds for Divorce		
Civil Code (Articles 266-270)		Matrimonial Property Act; Children Act	Child Custody		
Civil Code (Articles 320-326)		Children Act	Child Support		
National Code of Criminal Procedure; Law of Aid and Assistance for Victims of Crime		Marriage Act; Divorce Act	Relevant Family Law Sections		

	Philippines	Peru	Pakistan	Nigeria	Country	Morocco
	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment	CLE
	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE	Domestic Violence	CLE
	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE	Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE
	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Gender-Neutrality	Yes
	Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995; Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004		Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015 (Sections 1-52)	Relevant Sections	Moroccan Penal Code (Articles 484, 488)
				Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage	Grounds for Divorce	
				Matrimonial Causes Act; Child Rights Act	Child Custody	
				Child Rights Act	Child Support	
				Marriage Act; Matrimonial Causes Act	Relevant Family Law Sections	

Country	Country
	Rwanda
Sexual Harassment	CLE
Domestic Violence	CLE
Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE
Gender-Neutrality	Yes
Relevant Sections	Law Relating to the Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, 2018
Grounds for Divorce	
Child Custody	Child Custody
Child Support	Child Support
Relevant Family Law Sections	Relevant Family Law Sections
	Saudi Arabia
Sexual Harassment	CLE
Domestic Violence	CLE
Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE
Gender-Neutrality	Gender-Biased
Relevant Sections	Saudi Arabian Labor Law; Saudi Arabian Anti-Cybercrime Law
Grounds for Divorce	
Child Custody	Child Custody
Child Support	Child Support
Relevant Family Law Sections	Relevant Family Law Sections
	South Africa
Sexual Harassment	CLE
Domestic Violence	CLE
Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE
Gender-Neutrality	Yes
Relevant Sections	Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act, 2007 (Sections 1-61)
Grounds for Divorce	Incurable breakdown of the marriage
Child Custody	Children's Act; Divorce Act
Child Support	Maintenance Act
Relevant Family Law Sections	Divorce Act; Children's Act
	Sudan
Sexual Harassment	CLE
Domestic Violence	CLE
Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE
Gender-Neutrality	Yes
Relevant Sections	Sudanese Criminal Act (Articles 149-157)
Grounds for Divorce	
Child Custody	Child Custody
Child Support	Child Support
Relevant Family Law Sections	Relevant Family Law Sections

	Country	Uganda	Turkey	Thailand	Tanzania
Venezuela					
CLE	Sexual Harassment	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE
CLE	Domestic Violence	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE
CLE	Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE	CLE	CLE	CLE
Yes	Gender-Neutrality	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence, 2007	Relevant Sections	The Employment Act, 2006 (Section 6)	Turkish Penal Code (Articles 102, 105); Labor Law No. 4857 (Article 6)	The Domestic Violence Victim Protection Act, 2007; The Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act, 1996 (Sections 1-53)	Sexual Offenses Special Provisions Act, 1998
Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage	Grounds for Divorce			Irretrievable breakdown of the marriage	
Civil Code (Articles 185-198)	Child Custody			Civil and Commercial Code; Guardianship of Minors Act	
Civil Code (Articles 298-309)	Child Support			Civil and Commercial Code; Guardianship of Minors Act	
Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence	Relevant Family Law Sections			Civil and Commercial Code	

Country	Vietnam	Zimbabwe
Sexual Harassment	CLE	CLE
Domestic Violence	CLE	CLE
Sexual Harassment at Workplace	CLE	CLE
Gender-Neutrality	Yes	Yes
Relevant Sections	Law on Gender Equality, 2006	Domestic Violence Act, 2007
Grounds for Divorce		
Child Custody		
Child Support		
Relevant Family Law Sections		

V. Gender-neutral Laws As A Factor Aggravating Anti-feminism: Recommendations and Way Forward

South Korean anti-feminist protests take a political turn, with presidential candidates promising gender-neutrality to young male voters frustrated by discriminatory laws (Kim, 2022). Indonesia, on the other hand, witnesses religion-based anti-feminism, with unbanned Instagram accounts promoting anti-feminist views through Islamic principles. Similarly, in Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, the only form of acceptable feminism is based on interpreting the religious text by “pious critical agency” (Rinaldo, 2013). South Asian countries view feminism as “Western intrusion,” while conservative gender ideologies dominate Brazilian and Costa Rican campaigns (Arivia & Subono, 2017). Similarly, female candidates in Kenyan elections were presented in patriarchal frames, often influenced by religious scepticism about women being powerholders. In Saudi Arabia, a woman’s rights activist and fitness instructor was detained in Nov 2022 for her post on social media questioning the country’s male guardianship laws and objecting to women wearing abayas, which is representative of the religious factors. Defending their position, prosecutors claimed that the accused had tried to defame the kingdom and tried to create a rebellion against the public order, society’s customs and tradition. The authorities have been criticised for still applying archaic

laws and not abiding by the Saudi Vision 2030, an economic and social reform that increases women’s rights and participation in society.

In China, political factors led to feminist activism suppression under Xi Jinping, with censorship of terms like “Feminism” and “Me Too.” Feminist social media accounts were deleted, and the “feminist five” were arrested for planning sexual harassment protests. Another anti-feminist event was the arrest of Ms Li. of “feminist five”, a group of young Chinese Women, on International Women’s Day in 2015 for planning a public protest against sexual harassment on public transport.

In Pakistan, the “Aurat March Movement”, inspired by Me Too, faces religious and political backlash from conservatives. It has suffered a considerable backlash from the misogynist and conservative class of the country. Following the 2021 march, legal petitions were filed against organisers, with nationalists labelling them “cultural assassins” and falsely charging some with blasphemy.

Through this paper, the authors find another intersection that acts as a common base (**Fig. 3**).

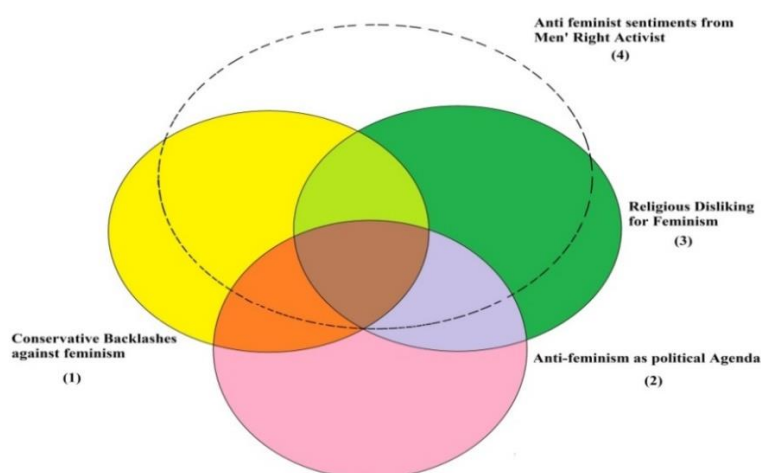
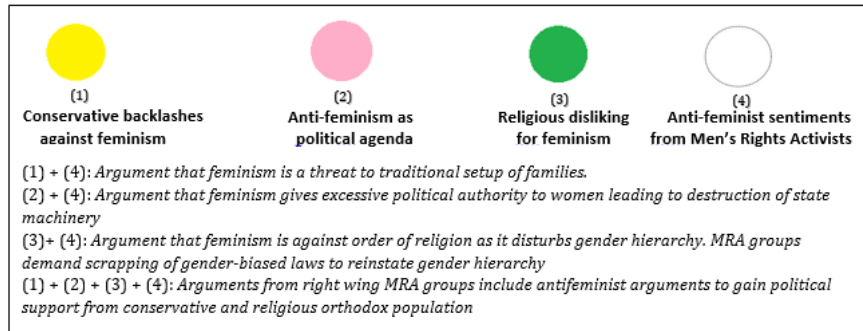


Figure 3: Common intersections between variations of anti-feminist sentiments and MRA demands for gender-neutral laws



VI. Conclusion

The idea of feminism has never been free from criticism. It has always suffered a backlash from various anti-feminist groups. The hatred towards women is rapidly rising, and it is reflected in posts filled with hate, blogs and videos. The safety and security of women are in question as it has become a major concern since the beginning of the fourth wave of feminism, which is mostly digital in nature. Feminists have to face various obstacles in order to stand on equal footing with others. This has been largely opposed by parallel movements that came into existence while opposing it. One such of them is MLM, which criticises stereotyped norms of masculinity and gender-specific roles for women. But this group got further split into pro-feminist and anti-feminist by not accepting the feminist claim that the dominance of males in society is the primary reason for the subjugation of women. Then, the Manosphere came into existence, which served as the breeding ground for hatred against women on online platforms. Gender-biased laws favouring women in order to improve their condition and bring them on equal footing with men in many countries are opposed by such anti-feminist groups whose major demand is gender-neutral laws for all and no favouritism to any particular gender. Thus, there is still a long way for feminists in order to be treated fairly and rise up against the obstacles created by male dominance and anti-feminist groups.

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