

## INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE RELATED TO WOMEN

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The global prevalence of women's relative backwardness compared to men is a widespread phenomenon. Women have consistently been regarded as unequal and given only a secondary status in societies worldwide. Throughout history, women have been deprived of their rights due to prevailing social and cultural backwardness. Due to a variety of social and cultural restrictions placed by their families and the persistence of conventional societal structures, they have been prevented from taking part in the decision-making processes of their families. Additionally, numerous restrictions have been placed on their involvement in certain social and cultural activities, as well as their ability to leave their homes for specific purposes. Women have not been treated on an equal footing with men; instead, they have been relegated to performing household chores and confined within the confines of their homes.

Giving women equal rights is necessary for a democratic society to incorporate all societal groups in the decision-making process. This is because judgements made without taking into account the viewpoints of all society groups are unlikely to be egalitarian. Newland stressed the need and necessity of including women in the decision-making process in a 1975 argument.

"Many profound shifts will occur when women hold an equal share of political power, and these changes will go well beyond politics. Barriers that obstruct the growth of unique abilities and limit the pool of people with the skills necessary to meet societal needs will continue to be removed. The growing involvement of women in politics both signals and serves as a catalyst for societal change. The rise of women in politics is a global phenomenon that represents progress towards a more compassionate world. The awareness that any society that consistently excludes half of its people from the processes of government would be governed in a manner that falls short is what is responsible for this improvement, not the fact that women are fundamentally more compassionate than men."<sup>55</sup>

In his masterpiece, the Republic, the Greek philosopher Plato argued for perfect parity

between men and women. There were a few examples of highly educated women in several civilizations, including China, India, Rome, and Western Europe. However, real efforts to raise the status of women didn't start until the latter half of the 18th century. Since the middle of the 19th century, major advances have been achieved towards establishing equality in areas including education, suffrage, property rights, equal employment opportunities, and the freedom to pursue careers and engage in public life. In general, the industrialization process accelerated the rise of two social movements: one that supported democracy and equality and the other that backed socialism and natural justice. In waves over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, these philosophies radiated across society.<sup>56</sup>

In her book "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," published in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft maintained that justice, not charity, was the real need of the world. The book looks at how women have fought for their rights in many nations. The women's rights movement underwent a new phase in the 1800s, which led to reforms in several countries. The laws governing marriage had to be changed in England, the right of women to divorce had to

be recognised in France, and women had the right to run for office in China. Women's movements took off in a number of nations, including China, Iran, Japan, and Korea in the early 1900s. Women won the right to vote in nations like Austria, Germany, Turkey, and Uruguay within the first 40 years of the 20th century. Campaigns for women's reproductive rights were led concurrently by individuals including Margaret Sanger in the US, Allen Key in Sweden, and Shizue Ishimoto in Japan.<sup>57</sup>

However, it is necessary to take into account and respect the following three principles in order to pursue women's empowerment.<sup>58</sup>

(a) The idea of women and men having the same rights should be established as a fundamental idea. Through thorough policy reforms and forceful affirmative action, it is vital to identify and remove the social, economic, political, and cultural barriers that obstruct the realisation of equal rights.

(b) Women should be acknowledged as beneficiaries and active participants in society progress. In addition to having inherent value, investing in women's abilities and giving them the freedom to make their own decisions is the most efficient way to promote economic development.

(c) The gender-sensitive development approach seeks to increase opportunities for both men and women. It shouldn't, however, govern how other cultures and societies make use of these options. The most important factor is making sure that men and women have equal opportunity to exercise their agency in the process of making choices.

However, the obligation for caregiving is predominantly placed on women in almost all countries due to the division of labour based on gender, much of it is done unpaid within the home or as volunteer work within the community. According to the Human Development Report from 1995, women are thought to spend two-thirds of their working time on unpaid work, compared to males who

only devote a quarter of their time to such jobs, with a large percentage of these hours going towards caring duties. Particularly in rural parts of impoverished countries, this employment involves physically taxing activities like carrying fuel and water. For instance, women labour an additional 21 hours a week in Nepal compared to men, and a differential of 12 hours exists in India. Girls in Kenya between the ages of 8 and 14 spend five hours longer on housework than males do. For women, these workload differences are a substantial barrier that limit their options and potential<sup>59</sup>.

It's critical to look at women's political standing in order to understand their place in society. Although women's political status and socioeconomic status are related, the political status of women has the power to change the socioeconomic system. The ability of women to vote and hold elected office is now largely recognised as being essential to their overall status.<sup>60</sup> Women used to be prohibited from taking part in their countries' political processes. The desire for political equality for women started to arise, nonetheless, in the 18th century. Changes in women's status generally occurred before legislative action, with the noteworthy exception of suffrage, in Western Europe and North America, where the idea of gender equality first gained traction.<sup>61</sup>

The first country to give women the vote was New Zealand in 1893. Australia and Canada followed in 1908. Before World War I, attempts to give women the vote in Britain had failed. All women over the age of 21 were, however, granted the right to vote by 1928 as a result of the tremendous achievements made by women throughout the war in many different professions. Women have to put up a constant fight in nations like the United States and France to obtain equal political rights. In the US, women won the right to vote in 1920; in France, it happened in 1944. Many Western European nations passed suffrage-related legislation after World War II. Greece, Italy, and France were a part of this. The Weimar Constitution of 1919 granted women in Germany the right to vote.

Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland all gave women the vote in 1913, 1915, and 1971, respectively.<sup>62</sup>

No legislation or agreement shall vary from the idea of women's equality with men, according to the Soviet Union's 1936 Constitution. Countries like Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary all took the same position. Women are denied the ability to vote in a number of Middle Eastern nations, including Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. By the late 1960s, however, other Arab republics had given women either partial or full suffrage. Universal suffrage is a legal practise in all of Latin America's states. By the 1960s, women had the right to vote across Africa, with Liberia awarding it in 1947, the Eastern and Western parts of Nigeria in 1960, Uganda in 1958, Botswana and Lesotho in 1966, and Uganda in 1960. Under white dominance and apartheid laws, South Africa denied the ability to vote to both men and women, especially to persons of colour. Women in South Africa did not fully have equal voting rights with males until April 1994.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout history, the English Common Law exhibited a lack of respect towards women, and this policy was adopted by Commonwealth countries, leading to the inclusion of discriminatory provisions. Consequently, women in all Commonwealth countries face similar legal constraints stemming from these laws. These nations have united to adopt shared ideals through summits of the heads of state, ministers, and experts. All Commonwealth governments were obligated by the 1971 Singapore Declaration to work towards achieving equal rights for all people, including women. In 1980, the Commonwealth Secretariat established a dedicated unit called the Women and Development Division, aimed at advancing women's development. This division has played a significant role in raising awareness among other specialist divisions about the crucial issues affecting women, which are intertwined with various aspects of development policy.<sup>64</sup>

About half of the 51 countries that make up the United Nations at the time of its founding in 1945

had given women the right to vote. Political rights were first the UN's main priority because they were seen as the most crucial. The UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women, which was ratified by the General Assembly in 1952, states that "women shall have the right to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination."<sup>65</sup>

The International Women's Year was established by the UN in 1975, and the Year for the Development of Women was established in 1980. The United Nations designated the years 1975 to 1985 as the Decade for the Development of Women. With the ultimate goal of integrating women into the social, economic, and political realms of activity, the global society sought to focus its efforts and allot resources during this time on tackling the issues encountered by women.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, notwithstanding everyone's attempts made, the status of women remains unsatisfactory, even in developed countries, not to mention the developing ones. Examining some of the data from a UN report released in honour of International Women's Day makes this clear. Statistics from the UN show that women and children make up 70% of the estimated 1.2 billion people who live in poverty globally. Surprisingly, problems associated with pregnancy and childbirth claim the lives of one woman every minute, and women are more likely than males to contract HIV. Significant discrepancies are also highlighted in the report, such as the fact that full-time female workers in Japan only make 51% of what full-time male workers make. In addition, only 14% of seats in the US Congress are held by women, and only 1 in 5 managers in Italy are female. These figures underscore the persistent challenges women face in achieving equality and representation across various spheres of society.<sup>67</sup>

Once more, the investigation identifies a number of startling discrepancies: 62 percent of unpaid household labourers are women, yet only 1% of titled land worldwide is owned by women. Only 9% of judges, 10% of corporation

directors, and 10% of top police officer jobs are held by women in the UK; 85 million girls worldwide, compared to 45 million boys, are unable to attend school; only 4% of girls in Chad have access to education; 67 percent of illiterate individuals are women; One in seven Ethiopian women pass away while pregnant or giving birth; 35 percent of lawyers in the US are female, yet just 5 percent of them are partners in legal firms; Only 3% of the chief executives of significant enterprises in the European Union are female. Only a small portion of the brutal realities that still exist on the ground are highlighted in these report excerpts.<sup>68</sup>

The paper emphasises that the Millennium Development Goals connected to lowering infant mortality, raising educational standards, and reducing poverty would remain unachievable without swift action on the condition of women. The research recommends that there be adequate representation of women in all decision-making organisations in order to improve the situation for women. It suggests that at least 30% of legislative seats in every nation be held by women. This measure is proposed as a means to alleviate the challenges faced by women and enhance their participation in shaping policies and strategies.<sup>69</sup>

### KEY INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Several international agreements support and uphold the rights of women. These agreements cover a range of rights, including as suffrage, equality, non-discrimination, and qualification for political office. It is a brief summary of some of these agreements and their relevant clauses in the *section that follows*.

### INTERNATIONAL BILL OF RIGHTS

Three important documents make up the International Bill of Human Rights: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two Optional Protocols.

On December 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was created as a direct reaction to the Second World War's events. It serves as the first comprehensive statement that specifically defines a list of inherent rights for people of all genders. It is important to note that the UDHR is not a binding treaty, which means that member states are not directly required to abide by it.

Generally, treaties are legally binding for the member states that voluntarily choose to accept and fulfill their obligations. Despite the fact that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) not considered treaty, it has been referenced and utilized in various significant international human rights issues, thus acquiring binding influence through customary international law. Additionally, certain UDHR clauses have been incorporated into or expanded upon by a number of international agreements, regional human rights agreements, national constitutions, and laws.

The United Nations General Assembly formally ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on December 16, 1966. The inherent rights to economic, social and cultural freedoms are universally protected by this treaty. In essence, it requires that member nations work diligently to ensure that their citizens' rights are realised. These rights include the right to social security, the right to a reasonable standard of life, the right to free education, and the right to healthcare.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was ratified by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966, is an enforceable treaty much like the ICESCR. Protecting the civil and political rights of both men and women is the main goal of the ICCPR, with a focus on defending the freedoms of conscience and religion. But even while the ICCPR is a binding agreement, not all of the

rights it protects are thought to be unalienable. The right to be free from slavery and the right to be free from torture are two examples of rights that are considered absolute and are incorporated in the treaty.

### **CONVENTION ON ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

On December 18, 1979, the General Assembly formally ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), after more than 30 years of effort by the United States Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The CSW was committed to monitoring the situation of women and promoting women's rights when it was founded in 1946. CEDAW is crucial because it highlights women's rights within the context of human rights and upholds the equality principle by requiring member states to take the necessary steps to guarantee the full growth and advancement of women. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (the Committee) expects member states to submit national reports describing the steps they have taken to uphold CEDAW's rules. During its annual meeting with state representatives, the Committee examines and considers the national reports that member states have submitted regarding the implementation of CEDAW. The Committee also makes broad recommendations to member states on topics related to the abolition of discrimination against women, where appropriate.

- (a) The legal system should integrate the principle of gender equality, removing any discriminatory laws and implementing appropriate legislation to prohibit discrimination against women.
- (b) It is important to establish tribunals and other public institutions that effectively safeguard women against discrimination.
- (c) Efforts should be made to eliminate all gender prejudice in its various manifestations.

According to CEDAW, there are a number of steps that must be taken in order to achieve gender equality, including giving women the same access to family benefits and financial credit as men, ensuring that rural women have adequate living conditions, allowing them to participate in development planning, and ensuring that they have access to healthcare and education. Women should have the same rights as males in regards to marriage, inheritance, and family ties, according to CEDAW.

Moreover, CEDAW emphasises the importance of fostering behavioural and attitudinal change in addition to recognising the negative effects of discrimination on women. This can be done by teaching men and women to get rid of their biases, preconceptions, and discriminatory behaviours.

### **THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

The Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, China, in September 1995, and participants came from a wide range of nations. The Conference, with the subject "Action for Equality, Development, and Peace," sought to critically assess the improvements in women's lives over the previous ten years and to develop strategies to make sure that women's issues remained high on the global agenda. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were consequently approved at the Conference on September 15, 1995. Notably, the 189 countries represented at the event unanimously endorsed this proclamation and platform. Despite being separate declarations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action build on the agreement and advancement made at earlier United Nations conferences and summits. The Nairobi Conference on Women, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985 and produced the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, is particularly important. The Beijing Declaration obligates Conference participants to actively advance the goals of gender equality,

development, and peace for women around the world. Additionally, they are required to focus their efforts on overcoming the obstacles and difficulties that stand in the way of the advancement and empowerment of women around the world.

Beyond the Beijing Declaration, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) offers a comprehensive implementation plan for the promises and commitments made by Conference participants. The BPA aims to remove any obstacles that prevent women from actively participating in every sphere of public and private life. It is a platform for women's empowerment. This entails making sure that women participate equally and fully in political, social, economic, and cultural decision-making processes. Notably, the BPA seeks to create a basis for shared authority and accountability between men and women, both inside families and in larger national and international societies. It emphasises that for gender equality to be achieved, men and women must work together and form partnerships on a global scale.

When considering women in global politics, notable leaders such as Jacinda Ardern, Angela Merkel, and Sanna Marin come to the forefront. It is crucial to remember that women make up fewer than 25% of legislative members globally. Numerous nations have implemented affirmative actions to consciously increase women's participation and representation in parliaments and governments in reaction to this underrepresentation. For instance, legislation reserving seats for women in each country's parliament has been passed in the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, the results of these reservation policies did not necessarily result in substantive women's emancipation. The early dearth of female candidates occasionally reduced the effectiveness of the reservation policy to some degree.

Legislation to set quotas for women candidates on political party candidate lists has been

introduced in many nations, including Argentina, France, and Nepal. On the other side, despite the absence of official quota laws in nations like Sweden, Germany, and South Africa, women are disproportionately represented in both national political parties and the national parliament.

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