

HUMAN RIGHTS AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

¹Dr. Sushma Gupta

Nearly all democratic societies prioritize the issue of human rights in their quest to create a society that is just and egalitarian. The degree to which the general public exercises their human rights will dictate the course and speed of all future human progress in the ensuing decades. However, despite being a crucial and worldwide issue, human rights violations are pervasive in every society. They must therefore be safeguarded. Human rights are, broadly speaking, those rights that are part of our essence and without which we are unable to exist as respectable human beings. These are the fundamental rights that every person, regardless of circumstances, is entitled to in relation to the government or other public authority simply by virtue of being a member of the human race. It has become evident from revolutionary movements around the globe that individual rights are sacred and unalienable. The American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) are the two most significant revolutionary declarations pertaining to human rights. The United Nations Organization's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with the 1966 adoption of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, represent the most significant international step towards the protection and realization of human rights.

Keywords- Human Rights, Women Empowerment, UN declarations, Indian Constitution and Women Rights

Human rights are defined in India as the liberty, equality, and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Indian Constitution as embodied in the International Covenants and the Fundamental Rights. This definition is based on the Protection of Human Rights Act 1993. The United Nations published the comprehensive list of human rights in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the goal of setting a common bar for achievement for all people, genders, and all countries, no matter how big or small. It is predicated on the idea that every human being has inherent freedom, equality, and dignity. They ought to behave kindly toward one another since they are endowed with reason and conscience. Even though all human rights are inherent, universal, interconnected, and dependent upon one another, there are some areas that demand extra attention. One such area that demands immediate attention is the development of women and their rights. It is imperative that women actively participate in social, economic, and political decision-making in order to ensure a better future for humanity. The Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were first introduced in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1995 Global Human Development Report in order to raise awareness of gender issues. Human development is a process of expanding options for all individuals, not just a select group within society, according to the report. If the majority of women are not able to take advantage of this process, then it becomes unfair and discriminatory. Furthermore, the persistent exclusion of women from numerous political and economic opportunities is a constant critique of modern progress. It is imperative that women participate fully in society at all levels if their nations are to become more open, stable, and self-sufficient. It's time to close the gender gap.

The foundation of the democratic political system is equality. However, in democratic nations, wealth, knowledge, resources, and opportunities are frequently distributed unequally. This uneven resource distribution has an impact on citizens' ability to influence government

¹ Associate Professor, Sdam College, Dinanagar

decisions at various levels. Consequently, in these conditions, "a social and economic elite runs the things beneath the facade of democratic politics" in every democratic society. However, in most cases, this elite group does not truly represent all communities and sections of society, even though it should. In this era of advancement and modernization, assessing social change increasingly revolves around the question of gender equality. It is essential to every country's progress and peace. Accepting their place in the economy and society is more important than ever. Since women are viewed as the weaker sex globally, they are oppressed and taken advantage of. Although society has always changed, there have always been unfair obstacles in the way of women's equality. Because of the inherent discrimination that permeates all societies, women have been disproportionately impacted by poverty, a lack of opportunities, and inadequate facilities. Cruel practices like female foeticide, child marriages, the ensuing maternal mortality and morbidity, dowries, domestic violence, rape and related crimes, and the like have been brought about by the devaluation of women. The advancement of gender equality can have a significant impact on the evolution of human society as a whole.

It cannot be overstated that women's rights must be protected in every nation on Earth³. Despite making up almost half of all people on the planet, women only have a minor and subservient role in politics. But women's engagement in politics is essential to their fight against oppression and to the preservation of democratic traditions⁴. But in the 20th and 21st centuries, women have spoken out against being exploited and oppressed. They are starting liberation movements and promoting equality for all. Nonetheless, there is a glimmer of hope visible despite the gloom. The world is changing quickly, and it appears that people's attitudes are changing as well. Under such a hopeful scenario, we can hope for justice for women. Women are joining the workforce in unprecedented numbers across all societies and working in a wide range of jobs as a result of the expansion of the occupational structure. Women are represented in politics at every level, from local town councils to the federal government⁵. A cause and an indicator of societal change are the increasing numbers of women entering the political sphere. A global trend toward greater compassion will be indicated by the increasing number of women in politics. This is not because women are naturally more compassionate than men, but rather because any society that prevents half of its members from taking part in the processes by which it governs itself will be governed in a less compassionate manner.

Notwithstanding the stated policies of liberty and equality, women are still largely excluded. Without sufficient female involvement in the country's mainstream, we cannot imagine a balanced social development. Therefore, women must be politically empowered in order to create a just society. Empowering women entails integrating them into our political system and granting them the ability to impact the decision-making process. The process by which power is acquired, developed, seized, facilitated, or granted is referred to as empowerment. Empowerment is actually a dynamic, multifaceted process that helps women realize their full potential in all areas of life. This phrase has been used by development organizations worldwide since the middle of the 1980s, particularly in relation to the advancement of women. Nonetheless, it is strongly tied to the phenomenon of leadership since the goal of political empowerment for women is to create female leaders in society, which is desperately needed in the modern world. History demonstrates that without leadership, no society can run smoothly. The path of development and modernization can only be followed by the social structure that leadership creates, elaborates, re-defines, and transforms. According to Tead, "leading is the activity of persuading others to collaborate toward a goal that they ultimately find desirable." Leaders transform society's character and impart values to it. Since women's increased participation in governance structures is seen as the key to resolving gender

inequalities in societies, this leadership should include an equal proportion of women leaders. Since women are more sensitive to women's issues than men are, it is assumed that women in politics will bring female values to the political arena and help society recognize women as an integral and equal part of it. Therefore, in order to transform society, they must be inspired to take the lead in politics. To eradicate gender disparities in all spheres of life and create an egalitarian society, it is imperative that women become leaders.

As wives, mothers, daughters, wage earners, housewives, and other roles, women fulfill a variety of roles. They serve as the center of gravity for family life. Even the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1995 Global Human Development Report emphasized the need to invest more in women in order to create a better world.⁹ Even though they contribute, they are unfairly viewed as the weaker sex. Indian women have endured various forms of social discrimination for a very long time. They are restricted to the roles that are typically assigned within the four walls of the home. They are made to feel inferior to men in society and are the targets of prejudices. This subordination transcends the confines of the house and goes far beyond. Though it is a relatively new concept, empowerment seeks to end the historical injustices against women. It will turn out to be the only defense against the crimes against women in the future. It affects not just women's development but also the advancement of humanity as a whole. It serves as the foundation for achieving the goals of human liberation, regardless of differences in caste, class, gender, religion, or race. Once more, it is inextricably linked to and cannot be isolated from the movements for human rights, ecology, working class issues, global peace, and the democratization and decentralization of society. It should therefore be given the utmost importance.

The Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution all uphold the idea of gender equality. In addition to granting women equality, the Constitution gives the State the authority to enact laws that favor positive discrimination against men. Our laws, development policies, plans, and programs have all targeted women's advancement in various fields within the framework of a democratic society. The focus on women's issues has clearly shifted from welfare to development starting with the fifth Five Year Plan. Women's empowerment has come to be acknowledged as the primary factor in determining their status in recent years. An Act of Parliament established the National Commission for Women in 1990. A solid basis for women's involvement in local decision-making has been established by the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution, which provide for the reservation of seats for women in Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions, respectively. Furthermore, the ratification of the 110th and 112th Constitutional Amendments will raise the proportion of women participating in local decision-making even more. Additionally, India has ratified a number of international treaties and human rights agreements that guarantee women's equality. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1993, is a crucial one. The objectives stated in the Constitution, laws, plans, programs, and associated mechanisms, on the one hand, and the situational reality of women's status in India, on the other, still differ. While it is true that since independence, the status of Indian women has improved in terms of literacy, life expectancy, and maternal mortality as well as their appearance as accomplished professionals in a variety of fields, they still hold a lower status than Indian men in all spheres of life, including the social, political, and economic. In fact, the drop in the sex ratio over the past forty years suggests that, in some respects, the status of Indian women has gotten worse during this time.

Among the signs of gender inequality and women's low status in the so-called democratic Indian society are social stereotyping, an increase in rape cases, and violence in both

domestic and social contexts. In certain regions of the nation, discrimination against women, girls, and adolescents still exists. Women's access to health care, education, and productive resources is inadequate, especially for those who belong to marginalized groups in society (such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward castes and minorities). As a result, they continue to be largely ignored, impoverished, and social outcasts. In terms of fundamental human development, it appears that women from privileged backgrounds have benefited the most. In order to establish a society founded on human rights and attain gender equality, the following recommendations must be implemented:

The first step is to create an environment that allows women to reach their full potential through positive economic and social policies. The second is to ensure that women enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with men in all spheres of life, including political, economic, social, cultural, and civil; The third is to ensure that women have equal access to decision-making and participation in the nation's social, political, and economic life; The fourth is to ensure that women have equal access to health care, high-quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security, and public office. In actuality, achieving gender equality involves a protracted legal, political, and social process. It necessitates a shift in perspective that makes room for a new philosophy that views all individuals, regardless of gender, as vital change agents. And in order to achieve all of this, the social landscape must change and become more sensitive to gender issues. In order to strengthen democracy and equality in civic life, it is imperative that we let go of the antiquated patriarchal mindset, foster an environment that increases women's capacity and self-esteem, and use their abilities to build the nation. Women must participate equally and actively at all levels of society.

In order to truly empower, law and justice will also need to support and enhance one another. In addition, government agencies, women's organizations, research centers, and NGOs should all take a revolutionary stance and work tirelessly in this direction. In summary, in order to establish an egalitarian and compassionate society founded on justice, the work for securing human rights for all and establishing gender equality, and consequently, improving the status of women, should be promoted as a movement.

References

1. *Human Development Report 2004, Punjab*, Government of Punjab, New Concept Information System Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2004, p.112.
2. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961, p.6.
3. C. Jayanti, "Empowering Women", *Yojana*, Vol. 45, Published by Director, Publications Division, Patiala House, New Delhi, June 2001, p.32.
4. M.R. Biju, *Parliamentary Democracy and Political Change in India*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 1999, p.130.
5. Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 89-111.
6. Kathleen Newland, "Women in Politics : A Global Review", *World Watch*, Paper-3, Washington DC, December 1975, pp.19-20.
7. Jyoshna Rani Behera, *Political Socialisation of Women*, Khanna Publishers, New Delhi, 1997, pp.153-158.
8. Ordway Tead, *The Art of Leadership*, McGraw Hill Books Co., New York, 1935,

Phalanx: A Quarterly Review for Continuing Debate

Vol-17, No-4, October - December, 2022

(UGC Care Listed Journal) ISSN: 2320-7698

p.20.

9. Human Development Report 2004, Punjab, *op. cit.*
10. Ranjani K. Murthy (ed.), *Building Women's Capacities*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2001, p.17.