

GLOBALIZATION & HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN WITH REFERENCE TO MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT’S VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN

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***Abstract:** This paper throws historical insights on the theoretical perspectives of rights of women since the birth of the concept of human rights. The first generation of human rights demanded civil and political rights whereas the second the generation of human rights demanded cultural, social and economic rights. However, the notion of human rights in its initial days excluded women from demanding such rights. The paper makes an attempt to analyze the works on human rights that neither recognized the rights of women nor considered the intellect and rationality of women noteworthy. The process of globalization nevertheless has raised the demand for workforce and the focus of any programme is to include women in the economic process of development with the ultimate objective of bringing about equality. In spite of recognizing the rights of women, the paper observes that violence against women has not ended and there are reports of such incidents.*

***Keywords:** Human rights, Rights of man, Missing Women, Gender and Development, Gender Equality*

Understanding the notion of rights

If man is born free, then how can woman be slave? If man is entitled to lead a life of dignity, why should the fate of woman be determined by the whims of man? If state grants the right of liberty, equality and fraternity to each individual, why is this right not extended to woman? The notion that human rights of women are an integral part of human rights was unthinkable in the late eighteenth century. Much water has flown down the Thames since then, but even today women have to fight for their rights that men have already been granted as they are considered human. Unfortunately women are not yet human, if we consider the widespread perception of the status and role of women in society as an indicator. Beijing Conference in the year 1995 declared that women’s rights are human rights. Before analyzing the importance of human rights of women and the various phases of feminist movement, it is imperative to understand the concept of human rights, its origin and evolution. The Elgar Companion to Development Studies define human rights as, “...a determined effort to protect the dignity of each and every human being against abuse of power.”(Clark, 2006, p 260) This definition is based on the belief that each individual has a “right to exist”. (Clark, 2006, p 261) The notion of human rights acknowledges the fact that human dignity and equality is a fundamental right and it is the responsibility of the society to ensure that these rights of individuals are protected. The category of rights that protect fundamental freedoms has been termed civil and political rights. These rights are also called the ‘first generation of human rights.’

The concept of human rights has evolved over time, and according to the historical context. In 1776, this concept was initially expressed in the Declaration of Rights of Virginia (USA) and again in 1789, in the Declaration of the Rights of Men and Citizens, an outgrowth of the French revolution. The Virginia Declaration of Rights states all men by nature are equally free and independent. Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen adopted on August 26, 1789, states men are born and remain free and equal in rights. The purpose of all political association is the preservation of the natural rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. By the end of the late eighteenth century, Europe had witnessed changes in political and economic spheres. Emergence of democracy and gradual erosion of monarchy ushered in a new era. Decline of feudalism and Industrial Revolution had transformed Europe. This was also the age of enlightenment. There was religious upheaval as well. The Protestant challenge to the Roman Catholic questioned the authority of church, monarchy and aristocracy. Living in this period of tremendous social and political change, philosophers of the eighteenth century expressed views against absolute monarchy and divine rights. Philosophers and political thinkers of this period emphasized on reason, natural rights, and citizen's right to revolt. The issue of human rights was central to all these theories but rights of women were never an area of concern.

Wollstonecraft and Rights of Women

Amidst all these developments, the credit for claiming for the first time that women had equal rights as men as citizens goes to Frenchwoman Olympe de Gouges. In her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen, Gouges states that the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen are not being applied to women. She demands voting rights for women, a national assembly of women, stresses that men must yield rights to women, and emphasizes women's education. She had to pay a heavy price for her demands. She was guillotined. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft published her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The spirit of both documents continues to inspire the agenda of feminist movements the world over, regarding recognition of women's human rights. Published in the year 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was written by Mary Wollstonecraft as a critique of Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord's report (1791) to the French National Assembly which stated that women should only receive domestic education. In this book Wollstonecraft responds to those theorists of the eighteenth century who believed women should not get rational education. Wollstonecraft challenged the then prevailing perception of woman's nature, rationality and intellect and her place in the society. She also questioned inconsistent arguments of philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Milton about the status of women in society. She exposed the lack of reason in their writings on women. She is considered a pioneer of feminist movement and a crusader of human rights.

It is important in this context to see that Mary began with a defense of 'rights of men' in general, using the language of referring to women *inter alia* under the generic description, "men". This was also the language of French Revolution and the French Declaration of the "rights of man" was defending women's rights as well as men's. By the time Mary wrote her second book on rights she had clearly seen the need to separate out the particular problems of women, in addition to the general problems of disadvantaged human beings—men as well as women. In this book Wollstonecraft responds to those theorists of the eighteenth century who believed women should not get rational education. Wollstonecraft challenged the then prevailing perception of woman's nature, rationality and intellect and her place in the society. But unlike Wollstonecraft, the viewpoints put forward by most philosophers of enlightenment period were based on race, sex and class. Human rights were limited to white races, to the male and to the middle and upper classes. Of the various issues, Wollstonecraft was concerned about the status of women, their place in society and their right to rational education. Wollstonecraft not only advocated for rational education for

both men and women but was also courageous enough to fight the perceptions of men about women. These men were held in high esteem in society for their knowledge and wisdom but they failed to visualize the need and importance of rational education for women which is vital for the development of society as a whole.

Engel's in his book 'Origins of the Family, Private Property and State' analyzed the origins of women's oppression, which is rooted in the development of private property, class society and the family as an economic and social institution. As wealth increased it made man's position in the family more important than the woman's. On the other hand, it also created an impulse to use this strengthened position to overthrow mother's rights so that the tradition of inheritance can be changed. This was in fact a silent revolution. The overthrow of mother right, according to Engel, was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home. The woman was degraded and reduced to slaves. She lost all rights.

Lenin also believed in the inseparable connection between position of women and private property. Lenin said that communism alone can grant real freedom to women. In his interview to Clara Zetkin, Lenin said, "The communist women's movement must itself be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movement. Not only of the proletariat, but of all the exploited and oppressed, all the victims of capitalism or any other mastery..... A woman communist is a member of the Party just as a man communist, with equal rights and duties. There can be no difference of opinion on that score." Wollstonecraft demanded equal rights for women. Her outlook gained further momentum in socialist thinking which stressed on a mass movement against all forms of oppression thereby integrating the rights of women with the rights of proletariats. Socialist thinkers argued that free competition with man is not the final aim of women's liberation. The ultimate aim is the achievement of the political rule of the proletariat. Like Wollstonecraft, Clara Zetkin also believed that women should not be separated from her responsibilities at home. "Indeed, it must certainly not be the task of Socialist propaganda among Socialist women to alienate the proletarian woman from her duties as mother and wife. On the contrary, she must be encouraged to carry out these tasks better than ever in the interests of the liberation of the proletariat. The better the conditions within her family, the better her effectiveness at home, the more she will be capable of fighting. The more she can serve as the educator and molder of her children, the better she will be able to enlighten them so that they may continue to fight on like we did, with the same enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice for the liberation of the proletariat."

Human rights became a world-wide concern during the Nazi regime. Thousands were killed; innumerable people were imprisoned during this period thereby once again raising the cause of human rights. The focus now shifted from first generation human rights to second generation human rights that included economic, social and cultural rights within its fold. The first generation of human rights is in no way alienated from the second generation human rights. They are intertwined. Implementation of civil and political rights would be meaningless without a simultaneous realization of survival rights. But economic, social and cultural rights, civil and political rights can be realized only when individuals have empowerment rights. This indivisibility and interdependence of distinct categories of human rights received formal recognition in the final declaration of the United Nations Human Rights Summit in Vienna in 1993.

In 1948 when United Nations decided to approve the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, four women namely Minerva Bernardino, Bertha Lutz, Virginia Gilder sleeves and Wu Yi-Tang struggled to get this term changed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As Minerva Bernardino once stated, it took months of hard work to get the term "sex" included in Article 2 of the Declaration. This shows that perception of men about women did not change even so many after Mary Wollstonecraft.

Attempts have been made since 1970 to include gender as an integral part of development studies. '*Gender and development* is best conceptualized as an approach to development analysis, which uses a gender lens to inform and shape policy and practice in a manner which takes into account both the centrality of gender relations as an organizing dimension within households, communities and public policies, and the implications of the near universal dynamic that places woman in subordinate position in relation to men.' (Clark, 2006, p 189) Gender and development can be studied under three broad heads namely ways in which development policy have evolved and changed over the past decades, gender analysis of development issues, policies and practices and gender and global change which encompasses planned and unplanned changes in the global economy.

The gendering of development policy

The gendering of development policy includes three terms namely Women in Development (WID), Woman and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD). These three terms refer to the way in which policy related approaches have included women within the realm of development activity. The WID approach reflects the objective of including woman both as participants and beneficiaries of development programmes. During 1970 the focus was on anti-poverty strategies. Hence the policies were designed to meet the basic needs of women in the form of income generating projects. The efficiency approach to gender and development stressed on women's potential as productive labour in a commodified economy.

WAD frame argues that the problem persists not because women have been marginalized from the process of development. The problem lies with the development model itself and the terms on which women were integrated. There is discrimination in paid work as well and this discrimination has become more glaring in the recent years. Family responsibilities make women vulnerable in the job market as they often agree to work for less money because they have little formal training to work as skilled labour in industrialized economy. Furthermore, domestic work and looking after the family limits women's access to training and to the information necessary to improve their position in the job market. That is why 98% of wealth on earth is in the hands of men, and only 2% belongs to women. According to Women's Human Rights Platform, held in Madrid in 2001, the 225 richest "persons" in the world, who are men, own the same capital as the 2,500 million poorest people. Of these 2,500 million poorest people, 80% are women. Wollstonecraft rightly argued for education of woman for she believed that education alone can bridge this gap. Education empowers, enlightens and makes us realize the domination women are subjected to in a patriarchal social set up.

GAD is concerned with gender ideologies, structure ad norms in developing countries. Because of these gender ideologies positioning of men and women are different.

Looking at development through gender lens

There are certain aspects of development like poverty, population growth and health. The reasons behind gender differences can be better understood if these problems are looked at through gender lens.. Hence policies can be reframed to remove these inequalities. There have been improvements in technology in the health care sector over the past few years and literacy rate among women has also increased. Unfortunately this has not increased the survival ratio of women. In India and China, women's share of the population is continuing to fall. 2001 census in India says, the sex ratio of children up to the age of six years has declined from 945 females per 1000 males in 1991 to just 927 females ten years later. In some provinces in China

there are only 870 girls per thousand boys, and in some provinces the ratio is as low as 770. Nobel Prize laureate Dr. Amartya Sen published an article '*Missing Woman*' in British Medical Journal in 1992 to describe the great numbers of women in the world who are literally not alive due to family neglect and discrimination. Sen estimated that worldwide, there are 100 million missing women. The terrible phenomenon of missing woman results from unusually higher age-specific mortality rates of woman in societies, particularly in some societies, particularly in South Asia, West Asia, North Africa, and China. 'The low male-female ratios in countries in Asia and North Africa indicate the influence of social factors. It is easily calculated that if these countries had the male-female ratio that obtains in Europe and the United States, there would have been millions more women in these countries.' (Sen, 2000, p 105) For those of us not living in the conditions of hunger and severe gender discrimination, the murder of girl children can be extremely hard to understand. She has been taught her whole life that she is inferior because she is a woman; that she is cursed for being female. She is mistreated verbally and physically by her family - and taunted by the members of her community - for giving birth to a girl child. She is frightened by the economic threat of a dowry which could leave her family deeply in debt. She is unwilling to let another generation of daughters suffer her own fate. Under these conditions, she ends the life of her girl child.

Gender Analysis of Global Change

Recent changes in global economy have removed many women workers in developing economies further from the realm of the protected and organized sector. In fact most female labour force working in textiles, garments, sportswear and footwear work in unregulated factories and workshops. The shift from permanent to contractual employment and the opening up of opportunities, mainly of contractual nature, gives a different dimension to women's employment. Malini Bhattacharjee, member NCW, says "When women who really belong to the ranks of the dispossessed and the deprived migrate for certain kinds of work, they become open to certain kinds of abuse. It is very difficult to demarcate migration from trafficking. In the neoliberal regime, freedom from migration is talked about but it is very difficult to figure out where voluntary migration ends and trafficking begins." (Frontline, Volume 24 Number 25 December 22, 2007 – January 4, 2008)

The main focus of gender and development has been on including women in the economic process of development. But the voice of woman is largely unheard. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing recognized that the status of women has advanced in some important respects in the past decade but that progress has been uneven, inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people. The Beijing Conference emphasized on the 'empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations.' (Beijing Declaration, 1995)

The myth of gender equality

Gender equality can become a reality only when women are economically empowered to protest against any injustice and it is equally important that men realize women have a right to lead a decent life. Today a large number of women are seen in the public sphere. Women are working both in the organized and unorganized sector. Unfortunately in spite of receiving the same education, men do not realize that women are also entitled to lead a life of dignity because the social set up in which we are born and nurtured do not reflect sensitivity towards feminist sentiments. That is why newer forms of violence against women are on the rise. 21st century has also witnessed atrocities against women.

The World Human Rights Conference in Vienna had recognized gender based violence as human rights violation in 1993. In 1995, U.N's Special Report on Violence against Women added "violence perpetrated or condoned by State" to this definition. But we do have cases like Mukhtar Mai, a citizen of Pakistan who was gang raped in Pakistan in February 2002 because her twelve year old brother was seen in the company of women belonging to the powerful Mastoi tribe of Pakistan. She was gang raped on the orders of village council to avenge the wrong that her brother had been accused of committing. During war, riots and ethnic, caste or class violence, a woman may be raped for humiliating the community to which she belongs to. Male perception of female as being property of men contributes to gender violence and Mukhtar Mai was a victim. Women usually are scared of protesting against any torture – mental or physical for the fear of putting their dignity at stake. Such incident can occur in any society rooted in traditionalism. With no social or emotional support to fall back on, usually in such cases women end up enduring all kinds of indignities. Imrana, mother of five children, is allegedly raped by her father-in-law. Shariat Court denounces her marriage on the ground that as she had physical relationship with her father-in-law she can only be her husband's mother. Guriya Khan marries Tousif five years after her husband went missing. Her husband returns a year after her marriage and she was reunited with her first husband much against her wishes. Fundamentalists enforce complete ban on women education and restrict female movement in public. We have seen these during Taliban regime in Afghanistan arms of a woman were chopped off because it could be seen even though the lady in question was fully clad in traditional veil-burqua.

In conclusion one can say Mary Wollstonecraft focused on the well-being of women, which she believed can be achieved by giving them rational education. Education, she argued, would make them aware of their rights and women would become partners of men. This would also bring an end to her subjugation by men. Today the concept of women's rights has broadened. Welfare still remains the primary focus but women now want recognition as agents of development and social change. Women's education and literacy tend to reduce mortality rates of children mainly because an educated and empowered mother can influence family decisions towards welfare of children. In spite of all the developments taking place in all spheres of economy and polity, the plight of women is unlikely to change unless we do away with patriarchy and recognize the important role played by both mother and father in a family.

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