

Women's rights

1) Introduction

Women's rights are the rights and entitlements claimed for women and girls of many societies worldwide. In some places these rights are institutionalized or supported by law, local custom, whereas in others they may be ignored or suppressed. Despite great efforts made by the international women's rights movement over many years, women and girls around the world are still married as children or trafficked into forced labour and sex slavery. They are refused access to education and political participation

Issues commonly associated with notions of women's rights include, the right: to bodily integrity and autonomy, to vote (suffrage), to hold public office, to work, to fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to education, to serve in the military, to enter into legal contracts, and to have marital, parental and religious rights.

2) Women's Right Violations in History

Women rights are being violated throughout the history here are some prominent examples...

2.1. Ancient Greece Especially in Athens

In ancient Athens, women had no legal personhood and were assumed to be part of the house headed by the male master. Until marriage, women were under the guardianship of their father or other male relative, once married the husband became a woman's master. As women were barred from conducting legal proceedings, the master would do so on their behalf. Athenian women had limited right to property and therefore were not considered full citizens. However, women could acquire rights over property through gifts, dowry and inheritance, though her master or guardian had the right to dispose of a woman's property.

Athenian women could enter into a contract worth less than the value of -a "medimnos of barley" (a measure of grain = one week supply of food), allowing women to engage in petty trading. No women ever acquired citizenship in ancient Athens, and therefore women were excluded in principle and practice from ancient Athenian democracy.

2.2. Ancient Rome

Women were not citizens of Rome. Only adult free men were citizens. The ancient Roman men believed that a women had to be under a guardianship. That guardianship could be a father or a husband. But they believed a women was unable to direct her own activities.

Women in Ancient Rome were often viewed and treated as property. Gender inequality ruled all aspects of life. A woman first belonged to her father and then to her husband. In cases where both her father and husband died, she became the property of one of her husband's male relatives. A father held the power of life and death over all of his children. A father could also sell his daughter into slavery at any time, for whatever reason he wished. He held absolute power over all female relatives under his guardianship.

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But with the passage of time, rights of woman evolved as Roman state evolved from a kingdom to a Republic then to an Empire.

2.3. Pre-Islamic Era

Prior to Islam, a woman's status in the sight of all nations of the World was nothing more than the value of household goods. They were treated like animals. They were bought and sold. They had no choice in the matter of marriage; they had to silently accept the highest bidder. They never inherited, even from their close relatives. In fact, she herself would become an item of distribution just like any other commodity of inheritance in a descendant's estate. Women were regarded merely as properties and possessions of men. Even in the so-called modern European countries they were not even regarded as human. Even in religious matters women were given no status by the men, for they were not considered to be worthy of prayer or fit to be counted as human.

It was generally accepted that it was permissible for men to bury their daughters alive (also known as Female Infanticide), and this heartless act of inhumanity was regarded as an act slight of humanity and respect. Furthermore, it was generally accepted that if a lady was murdered then her murderer could not be punished in any way. Neither was he to be killed in retaliation nor was he to pay blood money. According to many religions, when a man dies, his wife has to burn herself to death commonly known as "SATTI". For violation of laws of velling the punishment was cutting of ears.

There were also thousands of other violations....

2.4. China

The status of women in China was low, largely due to the custom of foot binding. About 45% of Chinese women had bound feet in the 19th century. For the upper classes, it was almost 100%. In 1912, the Chinese government ordered the cessation of foot-binding. Foot-binding involved alteration of the bone structure so that the feet were only about 4 inches long. The bound feet caused difficulty of movement, thus greatly limiting the activities of women.

Due to the social custom that men and women should not be near to one another, the women of China were reluctant to be treated by male doctor. This resulted in a tremendous need for female doctors of Western Medicine in China.

3) LEGAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN HISTORY

Different societies and religions tried ~~at their level~~ to give women their due rights at their level, let's discuss some of those here....

3.1. MOSAIC LAW:

In the Mosaic Law, for monetary matters, women's and men's rights were almost exactly equal. A woman was entitled to her own private property (including land, livestock, slaves, and servants). Right of inheritance to and from women were established but right were given if there had no son. A woman could sue in court and did not need a male to represent her.

In some situations, women actually had more rights than men. For example, captive women had to be ransomed prior to any male captives. Even though the situation was not ideal or perfect as when it came to specific religious or sacramental activities, women had fewer opportunities or privileges than men. For example, in monetary or

capital cases women could not serve as witnesses. A woman could not serve as queen, the monarch had to be male. A divorce could only be granted by the husband. The daughters could inherit only in the absence of sons.

3.2. HINDU LAW

Rigveda contains several points containing description of a Hindu Devi, Usha. The Usha is representation of an ideal woman. Some characteristics are;

- ✓ 1. Women should be brave
- ✓ 2. Women should be expert
- ✓ 3. Women should earn fame
- ✓ 4. Women should ride on chariots
- ✓ 5. Women should be scholars
6. Women should be prosperous and wealthy
- ✓ 7. Women should be intelligent and knowledgeable
- ✓ 8. Women should be protector of family and society and get in army
9. Women should be illuminating *Usha*
- ✓ 10. Women should be provider of wealth, food and prosperity

3.3. EGYPTIAN LAW

Legally, a woman shared the same rights and status as a man in Ancient Egypt. An Egyptian woman was entitled to her own private property, she had the right to inherit whatever anyone bequeathed to her, as well as bequeathing her belongings to others. She could divorce her husband and sue in court, a woman could do these legal matters without a male to represent her. However, on the whole, men vastly outnumbered women in most trades, including government administrators, the average woman still spend nearly all her time around the home and family. A few women became rulers, and women held important positions in government and trade.

3.4. ROMAN LAW

Freeborn women of ancient Rome were citizens who enjoyed legal privileges and protections that did not extend to non-citizens or slaves. However, Roman society was patriarchal, and women could not vote, hold public office, or serve in the military.

Roman women could appear in court and argue cases, though it was customary for them to be represented by a man.

Childbearing was encouraged by the state: the "legal right of three children" granted symbolic honours and legal privileges to a woman who had given birth to three children, and freed her from any male guardianship.

Roman law recognized rape as a crime in which the victim bore no guilt. Rape was a capital crime. However, rape could be committed only against a citizen in good standing. The rape of a slave could be prosecuted only as damage to her owner's property.

3.5. SIKH LAW

Guru Nanak [1469-1539], the founder of Sikhism, spoke against the practices defined in Hindu law. To root out these century-old habits, the Guru spoke clearly and in simple terms to influence the masses. His writings appear in the Sikh Scriptures, which date from about 1499. He is quoted to have said:

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From woman, m
to woman
Wom

From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived;
to woman he is engaged and married.

Woman becomes his friend; through woman, the future generations come.

When his woman dies, he seeks another woman; to woman he is bound.

So why call her bad? From her, kings are born.

From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all.

— Guru Nanak, RaagAasaaMehal 1, Guru Granth Sahib, Page 473

3.6. ISLAMIC LAW

Islam believes in equality between men and women - Equality does not mean identical.

There are Six Categories of Women Rights in Islam:

- A. Spiritual Rights of Women in Islam
- B. Economical Rights to the Women
- C. Social Rights of Women in Islam
- D. Educational Rights to a Woman
- E. Legal Rights to a Woman
- F. Political Rights of a Woman

Some Rights of Woman in Islam

1. The right and duty to obtain education.
2. The right to have their own independent property.
3. The right to work to earn money if they need it or want it.
4. Equality of reward for equal deeds.
5. The right to express their opinion and be heard.
6. The right to provisions from the husband for all her needs and more.
7. The right to negotiate marriage terms of her choice.
8. The right to obtain divorce from her husband, even on the grounds that she simply can't stand him.
9. The right to keep all her own money (she is not responsible to maintain any relations).
10. The right to get sexual satisfaction from her husband.
11. Custody of their children after divorce.
12. To refuse any marriage that does not please them
13. End to female infanticide.