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## Essay: Rights Acquired, Rights Desired

According to recent **UN Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment** report, ***“gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decade, but the world is not on the track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Women and girls present half of the potential. But gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnates social progress.”***

Women empowerment is determined on the basis of four dimensions including: economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health care facilities. In the past, women were deprived of all the above mentioned rights. Islam was the first religion to recognize women by emphasizing their political, economic, social, and legal rights. Over time efforts were also made in the West to grant women basic rights. As a result, women have gained a spectrum of rights encompassing various domains . These include social rights, such as right to live, asking for marriage consent, education, property ownership, right to vote, and reproductive rights. However, many women are still deprived of even the basic rights such as access to education, politics and rights to express. Paramount among the desired rights for all women is the right to safety and protection. Most of the women have to face harassment at work place. Thus, women are not safe to work or travel alone. The challenges in the attainment of desired rights can be overcome through a multifaceted approach, involving social and legal reforms , heightened awareness campaigns and crucially, a shift in societal attitudes and mind sets towards gender equality.

Women constitute half of the world population and thus possess half of the potential. On one hand, there are women who are enjoying freedom of expression, taking decisions and choosing professions. But the ratio of such women is much small as compared to those who are striving for the basic fundamental rights. A large percentage of women is suffering from gender based violence, including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence. As a result, they are not able to get education, health services, choose profession of their own choice and thus their voices are suppressed.

As women have journeyed through history, they have secured a myriad of rights from the fundamental milestone of suffrage- the right to vote- to fundamental reproductive rights , equal pay acts , and beyond. In the past , women faced dire circumstances, denied even the right to live . However, with the advent of Islam, they were bestowed with the fundamental rights to live, making a profound shift towards dignity, respect, and empowerment for women in society.

Right to suffrage is one of the rights acquired by women. Women's right to vote has been recognised and protected in many countries around the world, granting them a voice in political decision making process. The second wave of feminism in 1960s is the movement behind the women right to vote. Furthermore, women acquired right to education. Efforts to promote gender equality in education have led to increased access to education for girls worldwide. The constitution of Pakistan, in article 25(A) states, **All the children aged between 5-16 shall be allowed to get free and compulsory education.** Moreover, unlike past, women of the contemporary era is free to earn. Islam as well as first wave of feminism are the proponents of women rights to employment, education and to own land. Equal educational and employment opportunities were demanded for the women. As a result women successfully acquired rights to education and employment. The **civil rights act 1964**, prohibits employers from discrimination against employees on the basis of sex, race, caste and religion.

Further, second wave of feminism contributed in the acquisition of sexual freedom and reproductive rights and thus, resulted in the empowerment of women. Women have gained greater control over their reproductive health and choices.

Last but not the least, women have acquired many legal rights and protections in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property ownership, enhancing their autonomy and status with in the society.

Through decades of advocacy and activism, women have secured significant advancements in various domains. But this is just the one side of the coin. On the other side, there is a large population of women demanding access to higher education, increased political participation, representation in executive roles, right to safety and protection, equal pay, health services, and freedom of expression. On one hand, we have women like Benazir Bhutto, Malala Yousafzai, Fatima Jinnah, Maryam Mukhtar, Ayesha Malik and on the other hand, there are women like Noor Mukadam, Rizwana, and hundreds of women who become the victim of acid attacks, gender based violence and discrimination.

**According to gender social Norms index (GSNI), 90% of the world population holds at least one bias against women. Despite various commitments to close gender gap worldwide, there is not even a single country that can be claimed as gender just.**

There are various acts and rights preserved in written form that lack letter and spirit implementation. There are various challenges that hinder the practical implementation of such laws. These challenges include; poverty, patriarchal mind set, cultural stereotypes, massive illiteracy, and many more.

**Rafia Zakaria**, in her article titled **Suffocating Afghan Women**, mentioned the grim reality of Afghan woman who are forbidden to get education. They are marginalized from the public

sphere. Ban was imposed on women working in NGOs , adding to the restrictions on women working for the government. Thus, women in Afghanistan have the desire to get the rights of education, along with economic and political participation.

Woman all over the world demand the right to equal pay. **According ILO, in every country in the world, women continue to be paid less for comparable work than man. According to UN , women still earn 23% less than man globally .** As far as Pakistan is concerned, according to **Global Wage report** published by ILO , **pay gap between men and women in Pakistan is 34%.**

Despite the acquisition of women right to political participation, most of the women are not enjoying this right. Discrimination includes the fact that there are about 3.5 million eligible women voters who are not registered on the electoral polls.

The major right desired by women of today is the right to safety and protection. **UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2023 report** reveals that **245 million women and girls continue to face physical or sexual violence from their intimate partners each year.**

Furthermore, women across the globe demand equal access to education. A large population of women is deprived of **STEM education**. They lack digital participation. They are not allowed to learn and study courses of their own choice. There are certain jobs, especially in the industrial sector, viewed as gender specific for example; managers, engineers, public administrators etc.

To achieve the desired rights, concerted efforts are required including: legislative reforms, social reforms, and cultural shifts. Changing the mind set is the most needed way forward to attain the desired rights. Mind set of the masses can be changed by spreading awareness and educating them about their rights. Furthermore, there is a dire need to review and amend existing laws to ensure they protect women's right effectively. There should be strict implementation of laws. Moreover, implementing educational programs promoting gender equality and conducting awareness campaigns are essential to close the persisting gender gaps.

To conclude, women's rights have long been a cornerstone of the global pursuit for equality encompassing various social, political, and economic dimensions. Despite strides in suffrage, education, and work, gaps persist, promoting calls for further reforms. Achieving desired rights demand legislative changes, grassroots efforts, and cultural shifts.