

Are women today more empowered than ever before?

Ng Yu Fang (17S37)

Feminist sentiments are thriving greater than before. Women all across the globe are fighting back against traditional societal labels that women belong solely to the domestic space, and that their roles are limited to that of wives and mothers. Increasingly, we can see that women are now able to stand up for themselves and the causes they believe in, as well as increase their presence in sectors previously only dominated by males, which could not have been done in the past. Yet, there are instances where women are still very much living in oppression, and playing insignificant roles in society due to the traditional ideology that men are the superior gender. However, I would still take the stance that women today are more empowered than ever before.

Firstly, it can be seen that more women in the current generation are given a voice to speak up and defend themselves, which was rare in the past. They have been greatly empowered by the belief that women should be treated as equals with men, and not inferior to them. For instance, Emma Watson, the actress from the Harry Potter movie series, is the Global Goodwill Ambassador of UN Women - an organisation that started the HeforShe campaign aimed at standing up for gender equality. Her position of influence as a movie star was able to inspire many young females to follow her lead. Another popular example would be Malala Yousafzai. After surviving bullet shots to her head by the Taliban, she wrote a book relating her life story, and is now an icon of hope for the female community in many societies where females are still insignificant. Therefore, as times change, the fight for gender equality becomes more visible. This has also empowered women to defend such causes which has in turn inspired many other females to do the same. Hence, women today are more empowered than ever before.

Secondly, women nowadays are able to perform many tasks that men can do, even to the extent of being leaders in various fields. For instance, in Singapore, 15% of CEOs are women, which is the highest percentage in Asia and third highest in the world. One of them is Olivia Lum, the CEO of Hyflux, a company that converts polluted or waste water to clean water. Despite engineering being a field which is male-dominated, Olivia Lum has achieved great success as the leader of the multinational company. This shows that although it has traditionally been thought that men are the superior gender, women are also able to do the same things that men can accomplish. Furthermore, in Singapore's parliament, 25 out of the 99 seats in Parliament are held by women, and the current president, President Halimah Yacob, is a woman. Women today are much more empowered than before as they now play much more important roles in society, beyond being domesticated housewives. Females enjoy a higher status in society today and are increasingly seen as equals to men, complementing their male counterpart. Female leaders also have the capability to do things that even some men are unable to achieve, debunking myths that females cannot do as much as males. Hence, they are much more empowered than before.

However, it is also important to take note that in many parts of the world today, where countries are less developed and most people still harbour traditional mindsets towards women, women are still treated as the inferior gender. They are of lower status than men, and are not only despised, but even commodified. For instance, the Nepalese government launched a 'Marry a Widow' scheme to help widows find husbands, but ended up humiliating them by causing them to be viewed as goods to be sold to men. Many women are also captured and sold to sex traffickers without any consideration that they are also human. In Africa, 60% of young girls below the age of 16 are forced to be child brides without any say in the household, and are even abused by their husbands as it is accepted as the societal norm. Hence, it can be seen that women are still very much looked down upon in many communities, and they are not given the freedom of speech or choice, robbing them of their dignity as human beings. Hence, women today may not be more empowered than in the past, as nothing much has changed.

Furthermore, women today are still being blamed for offences committed by men, despite not being the ones at fault, showing that women may not be empowered as there is still unfair treatment of females as the "inferior gender". For instance, in Delhi, India, a girl was brutally raped on a public bus by several men while passersby simply stared without helping her, and the girl eventually succumbed to her injuries. Women are still viewed as insignificant, and continue to be manipulated by men. Men are let off after raping women, while the women have to suffer the shame of being raped for the rest of their lives. They are even blamed for not being able to protect themselves properly. They are still not given the due respect by men and others in society. Another instance would be in Saudi Arabia, where women are required to cover themselves in black from top to toe for modesty as well as cultural and religious reasons. Instead of inculcating in men the need for self-control and discipline, women are instead punished with their freedom being limited, forcing them to live in oppression. Their lack of status in society and the entrenched mentality that women are the weaker gender has resulted in them having a loss of control over their lives and how they want to live, hence gender equality still has yet to progress to any substantial level, especially for certain developing countries where traditional mindsets are still prevalent.

In retrospect, I still agree that women today are more empowered than before. This is because comparing the current state of gender equality to the past, there is already a much more significant increase in women empowerment all over the world now, and this is observed even in traditional societies. Women were never leaders and did not achieve high status in the past, but in the modern world, the trend of females with astounding achievements has been on the rise, due to an increase in gender equality in the world we live in. Therefore, I agree that women today are more empowered than ever before.

Comments:

Try covering a wider scope when exploring the situation in different parts of the world. In Scandinavian countries, where equality is very much entrenched, in certain developed but not highly progressive countries like ours, in the US where there is still a glass ceiling preventing women being equally represented in top financial and political positions, followed lastly by the less progressive nations. Language is quite good for the most part, which improves the reader's experience.