

Do women really hold up half the sky?

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International relations as a subject has undergone several changes to address the most pressing issues the world faces. These evolutions also saw the rise of feminism as a theory in international relations, to address the inherent sexism that continues to plague the world in various formats. Several leaders across various epochs in history have upheld the roles women play not just in nation-building but also in furthering human progress.



Women empowerment (Voices of Youth)

Mahatma Gandhi stated that labeling women as the weaker sex is a libel and an injustice. Mao Zedong stated that women hold up half the sky, Margaret Thatcher stated that if one wants something said, then a man should be asked, while if one wants to get something done a woman needs to be asked! These handfuls of statements from leaders across the globe show how pertinent women's roles were thought to be. However, in today's world, we live in an epoch when the most powerful country of the international system—the United States of America places restrictions on the right to abortion to women! The leader of the second most powerful state in the world—Xi Jinping of China has asked Chinese women to

create families, and in essence tried to push women back to be within the constraints of the home, sacrificing their careers, jobs, and desires and fulfilling only a biological purpose of childbearing.

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Countries across the world face shrinking fertility rates as women find it more and more difficult to work inside and outside of homes with little to no support. Beyond sexism at the workplace, around which different countries have different rules, beyond the gender wage gap which continues to exist in the most atrocious ways in the 21st century, beyond the threats of sexual crimes and never-ending litigation processes, beyond gender-based discrimination in a host of realms, women are also now faced with extremely high childcare costs, career hindrance and balancing precariously between home and work. Women even in the extremely competitive 21st century are expected to work as if they do not have children and are expected to parent children as if they do not work. This double whammy is a serious contributor to decreasing marriages and dangerously low fertility rates. Given the fact that positive demographics are closely tied to the future of any country's development, several countries have now started analysing the problem more seriously and trying to come up with solutions. However, what must be remembered in this context is that the attempts to address the problems women face is not to create gender parity, but only to ensure that countries have future generations, which women must birth!

Out of 236 countries and dependent territories estimated by the United Nations, 107 have a fertility rate of more than the population replacement level of 2.1 births per woman.

Replacement fertility is the total fertility rate at which women give birth to enough babies to sustain population levels. Hong Kong has a fertility rate of 0.78, while the Republic of Korea has a fertility rate of 0.89. Taiwan, Singapore, Ukraine, Macau Italy, Moldova, Puerto Rico all have fertility rates below 1.5, as per calculations by the World Population Review. Countries with higher fertility rates tend to have lower median age and a higher population growth rate. In the top 50 countries with the lowest fertility rate, only seven have a median age of less than 25 years of age.

A shrinking population or an aged population is a challenge for the state, which must not just spend more on old-age care but also deal with the shortage of workers, innovation capabilities, and a lack of tax income for the country. As stated by the World Economic Forum, lower fertility rates, coupled with increased life expectancies across the world are creating an aging population, which puts pressure on healthcare systems globally. While the world celebrates International Women's Day every year on March 8, gender parity is far from accomplished, and to the contrary, women's lives have only been made more difficult with changing circumstances and a lack of effort to address the problems. Even if it is just for the state's selfish purposes, countries across the world, including the two most powerful ones need to realise that the state cannot intrude into the private rights of women--be it in denying abortion or pushing women back to the confines of homes. Affordable childcare support,

compulsory daycare facilities at the workplace, fully paid maternity leaves, and swift legislative action against employers who deny employment and career growth opportunities to women are a few steps that can go a long way in addressing some of the problems women continue to face. This has to be done in tandem with enforcing the previously existing laws on gender sensitization, zero tolerance for workplace harassment, and equal pay. In the absence of these steps, the celebration of the one day in the year as women's day becomes nothing more than tokenism.

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