

UNITED NATIONS WOMEN

AGENDA:

**PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.**



SECRETARY GENERALS'S ADDRESS

It is my pleasure to welcome all you budding delegates to the 5th edition of SelaQui International School's signature MUN conference-QMUN. One of the country's premiere Junior MUNs, QMUN has grown from strength to strength in a short span of time. Since its inception, QMUN has had a special place for everyone in SelaQui, promoting negotiation, diplomacy and collaboration. Seeing the current state of the world, there has probably never been a greater need to simulate the world's foremost diplomatic organization- The United Nations. With hostile ideals progressively plunging the world into anarchy, the people of the world must rally as one if we hope to extract ourselves from the precipice. In this grand and often daunting scheme of things, one can make the mistake of neglecting the importance of the individual. This notion of reluctance - in various forms- acts as a catalyst for a myriad of issues that plague us. A delegate, therefore, has to shoulder enormous responsibility while evaluating events and formulating strategies to deal with their ramifications. With QMUN'19, we hope to provide young delegates a glimpse of what it takes to strategise and coordinate at a global level while developing intrinsic skills of diplomacy and negotiation.

Looking forward to welcoming you,

SECRETARY GENERAL

CHAIRPERSON'S ADDRESS

Greeting Delegates,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to serve as the Chairperson of United Nations Women at SelaQui International School, MUN conference, 2019.

Before moving into the details of the committee, I'd like to introduce my team and myself: I am Rashi Kudesia, a class 12th commerce student. I am particularly interested in economic and international relations. Beyond academics, I am a part of the school's English debating, Hindi debating and the MUN team. In my free time, I like to catch up on with my blog writing or devote my time on the Volleyball court. Along with me, Pratya Chandrayan will be serving as the Deputy Chairperson of our committee. She is studying sciences in grade 12th, and is a very competent Shooter. Meet Dobariya will be serving us as Rapporteur of our committee. He is studying commerce in grade 12th, and he a very dedicated Basketball player and a patient debater.

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide.

The agenda touches upon an issue which in my opinion, will

require decisive thinking; and thorough research, because coming to a conceivable solution won't only deal with the current situation of the issue, instead it would require a very thorough understanding of the historical backdrop of it too. I expect all the delegates to be aware of the foreign policies of their respective countries and mandate of the United Nations Women. , I want all delegates to keep in mind, that in the end more than the style and the manner, it's the content and the diplomacy that matters in a MUN. I would also encourage all the delegates to sustain the highest possible standard of debate that is expected at QMUN, with the involvement of as many delegates as possible.

Considering the dynamics of the committee, I will be giving a fairly high weightage to diplomacy and manipulation. In order to, guide the debate in the right direction and to make the committee more engaging, all the delegates should be well prepared and researched about the agenda.

I assure you, apart from having a fruitful discussion about the agenda; you all will have a memorable time here in QMUN'19, this spring.

Would be delighted to see you in spring,

**Warm regards,
Rashi Kudesia**

WHAT ARE WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

Throughout history, women in different societies and civilizations had different rights which they could exercise; these rights are collectively labelled as 'Women's Rights'. In more recent times, this definition has narrowed into:

"Legal, political, and social rights for women equal to those of men"

(Merriam Webster's Dictionary)

This definition stems from the broader definition of human rights, which consist of legal, political and social rights, and from the fact that women, historically, have not enjoyed these rights to the same extent as men, often as a result of traditional bias. Before we can delve into the discussion of how religion places limitation on certain Women's Rights and what they are, we must understand how religion affected the status of women in society in the first place.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF RELIGION

The power of religion as a sociological construct cannot be underestimated: it is interlinked with culture in such a way that the word *cultus*, on which 'culture' is based, literally means 'a cult, especially a religious one. The effects of religion on a society are twofold – it safeguards certain existing societal norms and reforms others.



The early stages of modern-day religion are characterized by the reforms which they brought to ancient society. A new societal structure will, undoubtedly, be based upon the previous one, but it can only be considered a 'new' structure if it changes aspects of the previous one. The reforms brought forth by religion were groundbreaking – the existence of the Ten Commandments, for example, hints to the fact that some of these actions were widespread

in ancient Canaan, something that is almost explicit in the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3), which hints to a polytheistic society. However, these early reforms had implications far beyond the relations between man and god in society; they impacted many issues within society itself. One of these effects was a lasting influence on the status of women.

The status of women in the pre-Islamic period of the Arab Peninsula was characterized by an almost absolute lack of freedom. Before the introduction of Islam to the Arab Peninsula women were considered property in many ways, the most significant of which was the marital contract: the dowry would be paid directly to the bride's male guardians, and she could be divorced at will. With no limits on polygamy, this was nothing other than a purchasing process of goods.

Female infanticide (*Waad*) was common as well, and stemmed from a number of reasons. While it was expected of boys to grow up and work, the poor economic situation of families in Arabia meant that they could not provide for a daughter, which was either killed at birth or sold off to marriage at an extremely young age (with accounts going as low as 6 years of age). Moreover, the birth of a daughter was considered disgraceful in the pre-Islam period, as is illustrated in this Quran verse:

“And when the good news is given to any of them of a daughter, His face turns dark and he is filled with grief.”

(Quran, 16:58)

Islam dealt with female infanticide harshly. Islam considered the spirit of both Islamic men and Islamic women to be of equal value, and it was, therefore, unlawful to kill either. There are even specific Quran verses against this practice:

“On the Day of Judgment ‘When the infant girl buried alive is asked,’ for what crime she was killed.”

(Quran, 81:8-9)

Marriage was also transformed. The marital act was to be looked at as a contract between a man and a woman; the dowry was to be paid to the woman herself. The maximum number of wives a man could marry was set to four, and the husband must be able to care for all his wives equally.



Other religions followed the same pattern of revolutionizing the role of the woman in society – prostitution, which, at the time in the Levant, consisted mostly of coerced children and pubescent girls, was outlawed by the Jewish Bible; the Buddhist faith allowed women to be admitted as members of a monastic order, whereas the pre-Buddhist Hindu society banned it; the role of women in the early, formative stages of Christianity is extraordinary, as the amount of women in leadership roles in the New Testament outnumbers that of the men. The Women's Rights reforms of early religion, therefore, cannot be overlooked. However, while religion did improve the situation for women within their society, they were still far from being equal to men.

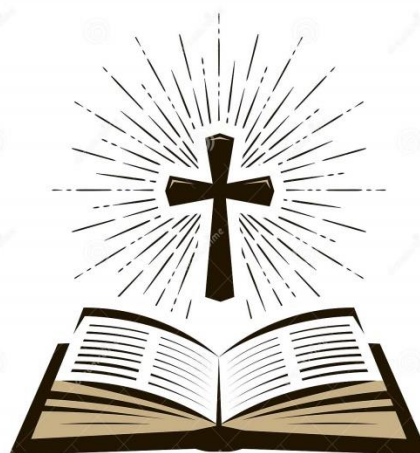
Religion clearly defines social roles, and so a specific role for women was created in every religion. In Judaism, the familial cell is highly valued, and woman's lives tend to revolve around it. The woman is in charge of all household activities, which means that she does all the cleaning, cooking and washing, and is responsible for the upbringing of the children. This derives from the very essence of marriage in Judaism – a man has to provide for his wife and treat her with dignity, and she, in turn, must succumb to his authority. Women are encouraged to bear children, as men are required to have children:

*"As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."
(Genesis, 9:7)*

Housework and childbearing are time-consuming activities, and so women are discouraged from partaking in activities which might deter them from fulfilling these duties; this includes higher education. However, until they were married, women did enroll in formal education and illiteracy amongst them was very rare. Religious studies, on the other hand, were still forbidden for the most part.

Christian theology, especially that of the Middle Ages, bluntly refers to women as inferior to men. Many prominent religious philosophers, such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, argued that women biologically value sensation over reason; they were considered less reasonable than men, if not entirely incapable of reason. When assessing how the human soul could be in contact with its divine source, Christian theologians claimed that only through logic and reason could the body be overcome and spiritual unity be achieved. The fact that women lacked reason meant they lacked a connection to the spiritual and religious world whatsoever, and women thinkers were utterly disregarded.

Holy Orders of the church do not include women within their ranks. These positions are the ordained ministers of the church, and are primarily Bishops and Priests. The Cardinal position, an extremely influential position in the Catholic Church, isn't open for women, and the pope must be male as well. With relatively all the senior positions of the church occupied by men, some have claimed the church to have created gender-based hierarchy in Christianity as a whole.



The contradictions embedded within the status of women in religion – that is, the simultaneous existence of rights and the lack thereof - could best be explained by assessing the situation of women in the society which predated that religion. The spread of patriarchal societies began around 4000 BCE⁴²; by 3000 BCE these societies became the norm in Mesopotamia, and thus became the building block for Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The ancient Far East faced similar circumstances, with the Chinese religion of Confucianism

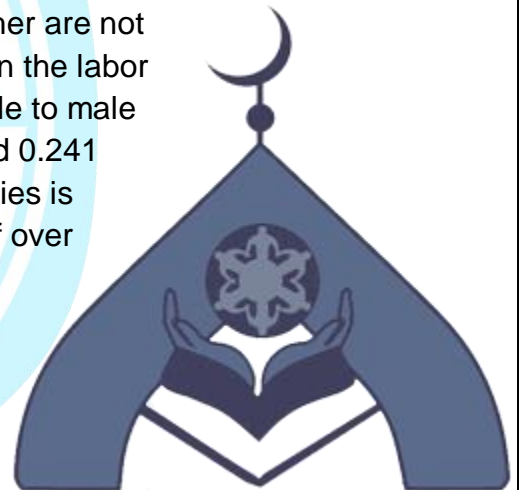
advocating that women be obedient to male figures, be them fathers, husbands or sons (Three Obediences and Four Virtues). We will now go on to examine how these circumstances affect the status of women in the present.

CURRENT SITUATION

ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

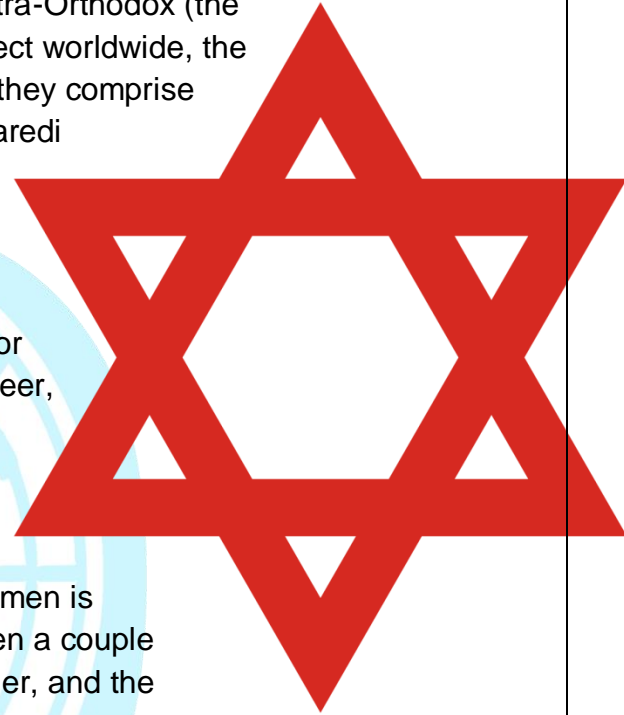
Women in religious Islamic societies face certain limitations on their rights. While women are permitted to work in Islam, the more religious societies tend to enable a woman to work only if her duties as a wife and mother are not negatively impacted by this⁴⁴. The effects of traditionalism on the labor force are deeply rooted in these countries – the ratio of female to male workers in Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia are 0.316, 0.244 and 0.241 respectively, while the average in Western Liberal Democracies is around 0.8. Azerbaijan, a secular Muslim state, has a ratio of over 0.9, further illustrating the impact of traditionalistic Islam on women employment.

Another point that must be addressed is clothing. In religious Islamic societies, women must, or, at the very least, are expected to cover most parts of their body, including the legs, arms, hair and sometimes face. The reasoning behind this is to shelter the private lives of women from the outside world and prevent them from being looked at in a sexual manner, something which is considered negative in these societies. However, these requirements are considered by many to be a direct infringement of personal freedoms, with some going so far as to claim that the action of veiling a woman aids in hiding her identity altogether. Many European states have promoted legislative action against Muslim headwear, with France, Belgium, Denmark and Bulgaria placing penalties on women who wear them in public; Austria and the Netherlands have already started the legislative process as well.



JEWISH SOCIETIES

The most conservative religious sect in Judaism is the Ultra-Orthodox (the Haredi sect). While there is gender bias throughout the sect worldwide, the situation is probably the most extreme in Israel, of which they comprise roughly 10% of the population. The main issue with the Haredi sect is the systematic separation of genders, which created two different societies – one for men, and one for women. The main goals for a Haredi woman are marriage and motherhood, and Haredi education emphasizes this very clearly. Thus, 'personal fulfillment' for women in the modern sense – pursuing a demanding career, a higher education or developing artistic skills – are considered bad for the familial cell, as it weakens it and affects its size (less children per family). It must be said, however, that Haredi women are often the sole provider for their household, and the employment rate of these women is exceptionally high. Family planning (the number of children a couple intends to have) is not accepted in the Haredi society either, and the woman has no control over it



CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES

The most pressing issue in Christian societies is the legality of abortions. Christian teachings consider human life, and thus the Right to Life, to begin with conception, and so abortion is considered a gross infringement of it by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, as well as by most evangelicals. On the other hand, the pro-abortion arguments revolve around the Right to Health of the mother (in cases where she might be at risk) and personal freedoms, especially those which involve her control over her body and her control over her reproductive decisions.



FEMINISM IN RELIGION



Many religious feminists seek to re-examine sacred texts from a modern, more egalitarian point of view. They claim that the patriarchal society of ancient times interpreted these texts in a patriarchal manner, and that there are other ways to interpret them: Muslim feminists, for example, argue that the patriarchal societies have overlooked the teachings of equality in Islam and the flexibility imbedded in the shariah law.

However, the opposite exists as well. Women in religious groups often do not find any fault with their situation – for example, many Haredi women argue that there are fundamental differences between men and women, and so their different roles are justified. A 2006 study found that most Muslim women do not consider themselves to be oppressed. The validity of these opinions is disputed by some who consider them to be a result of deeprooted societal norms of oppression.

ACTIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY



In light of all this, the international community has taken certain actions to protect Women's Rights in these societies. The UN Commission on the Status of Women has launched a global platform on Gender Equality and Religion in early 2017. This platform was built on the belief through collaboration with religious leaders, a new form of religious discourse could be created, focusing on women in society – their contributions, rights and particular needs.

TOPICS TO BE CONSIDERED AND PAID ATTENTION TO:

- Religious Rights and Women's Rights and its balances
- Religion a barrier towards the achievement of Women's Rights or a tool that could be used
- The international community and its addresses on the issue
- The global community encouraging religious nations to protect Women's Rights
- Global strategies needed to solve this issue.



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