

## **At Beijing 25+ Battling the Backlash in the post-COVID World:**

### **A Perspective from the Third World**

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In this paper, I am interrogating the global women's human rights paradigm envisioned under BPfA from my location as a feminist researcher and a practitioner situated in the Global South, connecting it with the ground realities here.

At the outset, I convey that twenty-five years back an extraordinary event took place that has not only created a space for advocating women's rights while paving the way for new resolutions, conventions, and declarations that deal with significant issues relating to the life and everyday realities of each woman. This framework of rights reaffirmed a commitment to substantive equality, intersectionality, inclusivity, and challenging stereotypical norms. Indeed, the language of rights and justice has raised hopes and optimism to transform women's lives.

However, when I locate the framework of the BPfA in the Global South, I realize that the narratives of progress are interwoven with the realities of oppression. At the ground level, the advancement made at the front of women's rights seems illusory. The promise of emancipation and universalism appears to be myopic as seemingly progressive laws and policies boomeranged resulting in an environment that severely oppresses women. The dissidence and rebellious spirit of women's rights are being crushed by the grand ambitious developmental projects, that occupied the spaces for rebellion and resistance while suppressing the voices and the agency of women. More specifically, from the Third World perspective, the human rights projects led to NGO-ization of resistance and have harmed the women's rights agenda brutally (Choudry, 2010; Roy, 2018)

#### **Research questions**

In this paper, while setting out the larger context of development, I interrogate several normative claims within the framework of women's rights and examine how the backlash is crushing aspirations woven passionately a quarter of a century back. While considering the ground realities, I argue that enmeshed with the agenda of neoliberalism, and clubbed with the politics of backsliding, the women's right framework could not achieve its desired goals. Rather the situation is leading to harsh penalties for the poorest of poor women in the Global South, thus challenging

the assumption that women's rights are universal, neutral, and inclusive. Secondly, I contextualize the scenario of backlash that is rising and impacting women's rights all over, while the third question visualizes how the discourse of global women's rights specifically otherize the women in the Global South. Finally, certain tentative solutions are being made to deal with the backlash.

## **Core Arguments**

### **I. Narratives of Progress are inter-woven with the Realities of Oppression**

BPfA aims for the emancipation from the primitive barbaric civilization to the evolved world, emerging from the heart of human rights to battle the deeply embedded stubborn patriarchy. The project of women's rights emboldened in the post-BPfA era, yet at the same time, the utopian goals of achieving egalitarianism are also accompanied by the discourse of neo-colonialism that aimed to ravage the human spirit through extending the old models of exploitation as evidenced by the forceful implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the Global South. The transnational capitalist class that emerged globally under the banner of free trade has placed subalterns in the developing world at a disadvantageous position. (Chimni, 2004) This exploitative agenda is enforcing devastation, exacerbating poverty, and ruining the welfare regime in the Third World countries. Austerity and privatization are siphoning the colossal amount of resources, and power out of poor countries into the rich ones. Even otherwise, inequalities widened because poor countries are denied trillions of dollars because of the failure of rich countries to deliver their promise. (OXFAM, 2020) The small-scale agriculture, informal sector workers, vendors, and those on the margins are affected the most in the Third World while at the same time, the corporate cronies accumulated wealth (Prakash, 2020)

Besides many fallouts of the neoliberal economy, the disastrous impacts of the devastation became evident during the COVID-19 outbreak that shows how the poorest in the poor countries are paying the high price for the economic hegemony of the capitalist countries. As global poverty soars, the billionaires around the world recorded an upsurge in their incomes highlighting the paradox of poverty amidst plenty. (Deen, 2020) The pandemic has exposed the big divide in terms of access to food and health care (Bloomberg, 2020). 'Vaccine nationalism' is another contradiction that is specifically marked by the resurgent nationalist idea whereby the richer countries such as the US, UK, EU, and Japan are spending billions of dollars on the deal with the big pharmaceutical giants even before the effectiveness of the vaccine is proven. (Buranyi, 2020) This has happened in 2009

during the breakdown of the H1N1 pandemic when the US alone obtained the right to buy 600,000 doses, while Australia, the first country to discover the vaccine, blocked the export. (De, 2020) The hollowness of the mantra 'we all are in this together' popularized during the pandemic, failed to consider the difference in the economic capacity of stakeholders. This empty rhetoric could not realize that the rich are in a better capacity to deal with the impact of the pandemic as compared to the poor who lose their limited resources. (McCloskey, 2020)

At the other end, another incongruity arose is from India where the unforgettable pictures of millions of deprived workers, walking hundreds of miles in desperation, without food or water, to reach their native places as soon as the nationwide lockdown was declared, appeared on the television screens of the other resourceful half of the humanity that enjoyed the luxury of protecting themselves within the comforts of their homes. Of that half of the impoverished humanity walking dejectedly back home, it was the women and children who suffered the most. The direct punitive impact of neo-colonialism was felt when Shakuntla, while [walking from Nasik, Maharashtra to Satna in Madhya Pradesh](#), her hometown, was compelled to deliver her baby on the roadside. (India.com, 2020) After two hours of her delivery, she walked another 150 kms before she could find help. Her husband, working in a private company in Nasik, [lost his job during the lockdown](#). (Kalingatv.com, 2020) Her story is not unique, [others underwent](#) similar experiences. (GulfNews.com, 2020) In another incident, a video clip emerged that depicts a two-year-old baby [playing with the shroud of her 23-year-old mother who died moments](#) ago due to starvation, heat, and exhaustion at the railway station in Muzaffarpur, Bihar. This scene was sufficient enough to shake the conscience of humanity. The family was traveling from Ahmedabad, Gujarat to Bihar. (Kumar and Ghosh, 2020) As the woman laid still, thousands of people passed through in [rush to get away from the hardship](#) they faced in the big cities.

Metcalf (2017) noted that neoliberalism is an ideology that 'venerates market and strips away everything that makes us human'. This monstrous, inhuman aspect of the free-market approach resurged during the pandemic when [Radhika Jaiswal](#) (26) a mother of two from Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh visited Mumbai when the nationwide lockdown was announced. Her husband, a civil work painter, remained out of work. The family survived on charity. Radhika could not access folic acid tablets or calcium supplements. Moreover, she could not find a hospital to assist her in childbirth. Her story resonated with many others who could not access medical services during the lockdown.

Seema Jain, married to an autorickshaw driver was turned down by the hospital when she took her six-month-old baby for vaccination. (Iyer K 2020) The primary health care workers could not reach out to those who have been seeking relief despite the schemes on health and nutrition that exist due to the suspension of public transport.

The situation of [ASHA workers](#) (Accredited Social Health Activists), the frontline honorary female volunteers recruited under the National Rural Health Mission, 2005, to provide essential services to the marginalized community, also faltered. Underpayment, lack of social security provisions, and importantly, the absence of basic protective tools during COVID-19 compelled them to go on strike. Rajendra Sabde (45) an ASHA in Jalgaon, Maharashtra said, “For working from 7 am to 5 pm, we get only Rs 2000/ pm (27 USD) and no masks or sanitizer”. (Shrivastava, 2020) She is yet to be paid extra Rs 2000/ promised for virus-related work. Sania Anwar, another ASHA got masks and gloves but no protective gear. She died of COVID on June 1, leaving her four children behind. Many others faced adverse situations due to the impact of privatization, shrinking social security measures, and chaos created by the coronavirus. Scholars have been arguing that the privatization of health services in highly inequitable countries is jeopardizing access to the majority of people who could not afford costly treatment. (Baru, 2003) The COVID crisis highlighted these disastrous impacts of forcefully enforcing SAPs.

In the imaginary of the global rights paradigm, Shakuntla, Radhika, Seema, Rajendra Sabde, or Sania Anwar, and many others, could not find a place. These women have been compelled to face harsh penalties due to the economic reforms being pushed by the states and the international institutions over the past few years. Neither the national laws nor the international rights framework could help when people required them the most<sup>1</sup>. This exclusionary approach of the BPfA raises questions about the elements of universality and equality. The Prime Minister of India apologized to the nation’s poor for the economic and human toll as the criticism mounted (Aljazeera, 2020), but the decision already has made a negative impact on the lives of millions and deprived them of their right to survival with dignity. (Nigam S, 2020) These lived experiences being described here are not with the intent to invoke pity or to project women from the Global South as the ‘wretched of the Earth’, but these are the evidence to compel the policymakers to

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<sup>1</sup> The Government of India has claimed that no data is available on the death of migrant workers who walked during the lockdown. (FirstPost.com August 2, 2020) <https://www.firstpost.com/india/centre-in-parliaments-monsoon-session-says-no-data-available-on-death-of-migrant-workers-during-lockdown-8815971.html>

reassess the policies in the context of the inclusion of the Third world women, to recognize their agency and capabilities and to create an enabling environment to facilitate their access to the universal rights as envisioned in the BPfA, in reality. COVID-19 outbreak has exposed the deep fragments that ail the economic and political system worldwide. This hollowness of the system is sharp in the Global South and indicates that there is a need to rethink right-based development from the gender perspective. Twenty-five years down the line since BPfA guaranteed rights to women over the world, these pieces of evidence indicate the need to critically interrogate the backlash that is severely affecting many due to the dual contradictory approach that provides lip services to women's rights, on the one hand, yet at the same time, the poorest of poor are being excluded and oppressed through aggressively pushing the free-market approach.

## **II. The Many Forms of Backlash Against Women's Rights at the Global Level**

The outcome data on the morbidity and mortality rates due to COVID-19 depicts that a few countries led by women leaders responded 'systematically and significantly better', as compared to those led by men. (Henley 2020) Yet, despite the positive impacts being made by the women leaders, [very few occupy the leadership positions](#). (UN Women, 2019). The countries such as the USA, India, Russia, Brazil, the UK, and others ruled by authoritarian leaders, top the list in terms of the number of infections and deaths. Perhaps, these countries adopted the masculine nationalist approach rather than acknowledging the risks and taking scientific measures to prevent it. (Thomson, 2020; Dembroff, 2020) Citizens have been made to suffer because of the unpreparedness of those entrusted with the task to take effective actions to prevent the crisis.

The evidence indicates that the decades of rhetorical debates about equality or freedom could not eliminate the systematic discrimination or the culture of prejudices that persisted over generations, across the globe. Rather the autocratization is increasingly affecting several countries. The [V Dem Report](#) (2020) noted that for the first time since 2001, autocracies spread over 92 countries where 54 percent of the world population resides. Scholars suggest that the pandemic has further reinforced the preexisting exclusionary dynamics in four ways: by reducing the democratic freedoms and civil liberties, by the rising prejudices against certain groups, by enhancing the anxiety around closing the borders, and by increasing the politics of conspiracies and fear (Bieber F, 2020) Stringent anti-terrorism, anti-trafficking, and immigration laws are being proposed not only to prevent the spread of the virus but also to prevent non-westerners to enter the western

territories in contradiction with the approach of globalization. While fighting the 'war' against coronavirus, several nations are spreading the virus of racism, patriarchy, inequality, and misogyny. The combination of aggression and hatred is aggravated the xenophobic tendencies. The death of George Floyd during police arrest on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020 due to the '[pandemic of racism](#)' indicates the escalating culture of tyranny and persistence of the systemic racial inequalities driving prejudices against the blacks and minorities. (BBC 2020; Losavio, 2020).

Even otherwise, women's rights could not be enforced into practice for decades, because the very institutions trusted with the duty to enforce rights are the part and parcel of the discriminatory patriarchal culture. In many countries, the state, and institutions, are embedded in the social structure that is sexist and misogynist. Scholars have shown that the [state is male](#), comprised of men who resist sharing their power and privileges with women. (MacKinnon, 1983) The voices of women are not taken seriously. Rather those in power shield the privileged, and abusive men. The backlash is persisting for years. Continuous discursive attack on gender-just policies is dismantling the rights paradigm and reversing the gender equity framework.

[Faludi](#) way back in 1991 noted, "The truth is that the last decade has seen a powerful counterassault on women's rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories the feminist movement did manage to win for women". (p.9-10) Perhaps, gender ideology is perceived as a threat as reflected in UN bodies including the Commission on Status of Women tasked with reviewing the implementation of BPfA. Chappell (2006) noted that during the conference in 1995, the alliance between the fundamentalist groups, conservative right-wing governments, and other non-state actors made significant inroads by blocking the inclusion of sexuality rights in outcome documents. This trend to undermine the advancements is increasing globally in today's unsettled world where the politics of uncertainty is unleashing regression. (Buss and Herman, 2003) Articulated opposition to gender justice is rising where the old-world order comprising of religious fundamentalism and chauvinist nationalism is negating the progress made.

BPfA and other instruments have reiterated that women's rights are non-negotiable, however, over the years, these are being threatened on many fronts. [Roggeband and Krizsan](#) (2019) while establishing a link between democracies and women's rights noted that trends of de-

democratization are emerging across the Americas and Europe, threatening the progress made in the field of gender equality. Sustained attacks are being made by the opponents, who are exploiting the schisms in the feminist movement and launching attacks. ([Sanders R 2018](#)) The increasingly authoritarian environment is fueling the patriarchal control and abuse where femicides and other forms of violence against women are increasing, both in magnitude and severity while the legal protections are being diminished and the support systems are being crumbled. Anti-gender campaigners are overturning existing laws besides targeting the areas of institutional and policy framework for gender equality while presenting the increased risks for women's rights defenders. The rights framework is devalued as 'foreign'. Women's organizations are being discredited as 'foreign agents' threatening the national identity. The goal is to fossilize the traditional gender roles to promote a heteronormative patriarchal family. A well-funded, anti-feminist lobby is collaborating to [oppose the use of feminist language in official documents](#) replacing it with the terms such as 'family' or 'natural', to venerate women's roles and responsibilities as mothers. (Goetz, 2020) In several countries, despite the commitments being made to enforce BPfA, the states are refusing to allocate resources. Rather funds are being diverted by the fundamentalists to alter the reproductive practices and policies that affect the lives of millions of women around the world. (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) Increasingly well-organized coalitions, comprising of conservative actors such as men's groups, right-wing populists, and nationalist groups are using planned tactics to propagate the patriarchal norms in international politics. (Bob, 2012). While the gender equality paradigm has remained contested, over the years, opposition to women's rights is being better organized. (Basu S, 2016) Persistent negative sexist stereotypes and beliefs that women are less capable than men and that women should conform to traditional roles are hindering the promises made in BPfA. Equality is construed narrowly as formal equality rather than as an obligation to achieve substantive equality in all sectors. Though disagreement and debate are significant aspects of democratic decision making and can enhance the legitimacy of global governance, yet, those committed to deepening the principles of women's right need to analyze the politics in the light of emerging developments. (Wolff and Zimmermann, 2016).

### **III. The Otherization of the Third World Women**

At the global level, the stereotype and misconceptions about the Third World women continue to guide the framing of policies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century despite the vocabulary of equality being embedded

in the international rights paradigm. The backlash evokes the arguments of 'culture' to promote Western male supremacy while painting the third world culture as uncivilized, illiberal, and inferior. Orientalism associates the East with rituals, despotism, and barbarity while the West is associated with enlightenment, progress, and rationality. (Said, 1978). The governments world over are not utilizing the parameters of universality, substantive equality, or neutrality as embedded in the BPfA, rather the identities of women from the Global South are framed through the prism of colonial, neo-colonial, oriental, and cultural stereotypes in the policymaking process.

This is not new. Since the pre-world war phase, the concept of superiority has been utilized to justify domination where women from the Third world are perceived as victims without agency while essentializing the homogenizing culture. British colonial officials invoked this argument as a justification to colonize Egypt, India, and Algeria (Vlopp, 1999). In India, the compromised legal system proposed by TB Macaulay accommodated the colonial hierarchy grounded on the regressive patriarchal understanding that prevailed during the Victorian era. What was imposed was the rule of men rather than the rule of law. (Nigam S, 2019). The feminist literature shows the ways the Imperial rulers reiterated patriarchal hegemony through codifying and enforcing laws. (Chandra, 1998; Sarkar, 2001). Kapur (2006) alleged that Katherine Mayo, in her work titled *Mother India* in 1927, justified the continuation of imperial domination while projecting local women as helpless victims of utterly ruthless and barbaric culture and painted them as the infantile, lacking agency. This generalization reinforced the traditional stereotypes to deny a host of rights including sovereignty and self-rule. Kolsky (2010) demonstrated that while enforcing the laws, the British rulers created a culture of impunity and placed a heavy burden on women seeking remedy in the courts. In fact, in the garb of their civilizing mission, the Britishers imported draconian provisions such as that of restitution of conjugal rights. Till today, it is being abused by men to harass wives. In Kerala, it is lamented that the Imperial rule destroyed the matrilineal culture eradicating women's ability to possess the distinct right to property and control over the household. (Mukund, 1999) Grewal (1996) noted that while using the imagery of the colonial women as 'exploited' and 'suppressed' the feminists' suffragists in Britain claimed their citizenship rights on the 'grounds of being part of the 'political nation and empire'. Law is used to create hierarchies while delegitimizing those on margins, portraying them as sub-humans and outsiders.

This practice of evoking culture continued in the post-colonial world and is making a severe impact on immigrant women. Contentions are being raised that gender subordination is integral to certain cultures. (Okin, 1999; Vlopp, 2001) Narayan (1997) calculated that the death by domestic violence in the US is proportional to dowry murders in India, yet, only dowry violence is used as a signifier of the cultural backwardness to suggest that Third World women suffer 'death by culture'. (Vlopp, 2001, p 1187) Feminism is pitted against multiculturalism while highlighting practices such as veiling and polygamy. (Young 2007). The Third World women are seen as those who cannot liberate themselves. The fearmongering is generated through xenophobic rhetoric to enhance surveillance and to strengthen the anti-terror and anti-migrant laws.

The impact of this backsliding is being felt by the immigrant women and children, those who are being targeted in the guise of practicing inferior culture. For instance, in the US, President Trump has repeatedly portrayed immigrants as 'criminals' and proposed to build a wall at the US-Mexico border in his 2016 presidential campaign while amending the immigration policies despite opposition (Lardieri, 2019). In 2018, the US administration implemented the family separation policy to deter illegal immigration. Consequently, by October 2019, as per estimates, 5,500 migrant children have been separated from their parents and their re-unification depends on complex factors (Aguilera, 2019). The US District Court for Southern District of California issued a nationwide preliminary injunction and ordered to reunite children under five with their families. However, some parents are [yet to be tracked](#). (Ainsley and Soboroff, 2020)

The government of Canada promulgated the 'Zero tolerance for Barbaric cultural practices Act' in 2015. This law seeks to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code to criminalize early and forced marriages, polygamy, and female genital mutilation. It bars the migrants who observe these practices to enter Canada. The law is portrayed as an initiative to, "defend Canadian values and protect women in Canada and overseas from these heinous crimes". However, activists see this as an act of 'capitalizing Islamophobia'. (Mastracci D, 2015) Those working with migrant women argue that the law is resulting in exclusion, deportation, and criminalization of families, including women themselves. It depicts 'culture' as a culprit while stigmatizing and othering the migrants. Gaucher (2016) argued that the state relied solely on the 'harm framework' to defend monogamy and to preserve a particular type of citizenship. The narratives of rescuing women are used to justifying imperialist notions.

Cultural practices such as the wearing of niqabs are being stigmatized 'as being rooted in a culture that is anti-women'. The veil is projected as a symbol of victimhood and passivity. Canadian laws use the framework of secularism, neutrality, and equality to justify the regulation of minority groups, and, in particular, reinforced the stereotype about veiled women. For instance, in *R v NS* (2012), the Supreme Court of Canada was asked to determine whether a religiously devout woman as a sexual assault complainant should remove her niqab to testify so that the court could easily access her demeanor and her credibility. The matter was framed as an issue relating to competing selection between the right to a fair trial and the right to the freedom of religion rather than as a matter relating to the right to equality or as a difficulty of a veiled woman to choose between her right to practice religion or the right to report abuse and participate in the trial. Narain (2015) argued that "Muslim women, so it seems, will continue to be viewed as a potential threat to the secular, democratic consensus of liberal democracy". (p 68)

In *Ishaq v Minister of Citizenship and immigration*, (2015), the petitioner challenged the federal policy requiring all citizenship applicants to take the citizenship oath in public with their faces uncovered, the Supreme Court decided in the favor of the petitioner. However, such policies indicate the stereotypes that operate against the Third world women. Muslim women are depicted as victims while Muslim men are seen as a threat to national values. (LEAF, 2017) The dominant norms are seen as the yardstick against which all 'other' cultural values must be measured (Razack 2007). The discourse on rights is being utilized to demonize the marginalized communities rather than addressing the structural issues relating to violence against women. Similarly, a study of the counseling setting in New Zealand indicates that 'elephant in the therapy room' exists because the systems are built around the western models that use a predominately white lens. (Nair, 2017) Pillai (2001) noted that the difference in understanding exists between variation in cultural constraints experienced by different groups of migrants and refugee women.

Another example that indicates the ways patriarchy is reiterated while framing laws and policies targeting transnational women is observed when in February 2019, the Australian government finalized the Senate Report to inquire into 'the practice of dowry and incidences of dowry abuse in Australia' as 'a cultural practice, taking into account the national commitment to gender equality

and human rights and approaches to multiculturalism'<sup>2</sup>. The report made several laudable recommendations such as amendments in the law to expand the term 'economic abuse' to include 'dowry abuse', to protect the rights of the victims of dowry abuse in the family law property settlement, to amend Migration Regulations, and so on. The Committee conducted several public hearings to consider the suggestions made by women's organizations, academicians, and other service providers. Yet, at the same time, it also took into account the version of the men's groups such as Turban4Australia that made the following submissions: "numerous men within Indian community have...been falsely accused of dowry abuse by their former wives, or are themselves victims of 'reverse dowry' abuse". (The Senate Report, p 26). 'Reverse dowry abuse' is a phenomenon that is neither prevalent nor has captured the attention of researchers to date. Perhaps, it is a fictional phrase imagined by a group of men who may have wished to escape their legal liabilities and to blame the victim for raising her voice against violence. Yet, the committee somehow relied on these submissions, and noted, "The committee is mindful that the criminalization of dowry in India does not appear to have been particularly effective in preventing dowry abuse, and that the Indian law has been subjected of misuse and extensive criticism. The committee acknowledges the overwhelming evidence that women are the major victims of dowry abuse. In doing so, the committee considers that there is no benefit for society in creating a system that fosters false and vexatious complaints – often against men – when marriages breakdown as appears to be the case under the current Indian law". (ibid, p. 33)

The committee, therefore, paid extensive attention to the submissions regarding the 'false and vexatious' cases in India while ignoring the magnitude of the dowry abuse. The argument of 'marriage breakdown' is raised overlooking that the women's groups are battling hard to reform the legal system while consistently demanding the state to deal with the cases sensitively without making generalized assumptions regarding the misuse of the law. (Center for Social Research, 2005; Singh, 2013; Ghose, 2017; Nigam 2017; Agnihotri 2020) Replicating the misogynist norms, because these are prevalent in India, in no way can resolve the issue of violence against women. Invoking the provisions of neutrality and equality as weaved under the BPfA to regulate abuse could perhaps set the norms for the best practices. Tragically, these aspects are not considered.

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<sup>2</sup> The author came across this report when she attended a Seminar on Dowry Violence organized by the UNSW and ACHRH in February 2019 at Sydney, Australia. She thanks the organizers for inviting her to the same

The pre-colonial understanding of the situation of women is being made applicable to the transnational women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The need is, hence, to adequately examine the hegemonic First World understandings and colonial trappings. Women's rights projects cannot sustain without critically interrogating the nuances of the imperialist interventions and its impact on Third World women. (Mohanty, 1984) Revisiting the colonial history becomes essential to understand the fact that the laws do not speak of those whom it appears to speak for. Focus on culture diverts attention from the basic structural inequalities and issues relating to patriarchy, unemployment, education, or access to justice. The possibilities of women's rights need to be contextualized without applying the paradox of cultural backwardness through the framework of rights enshrined in the BPfA.

### **Feminist Agenda: Backlash Against Backlash**

'Never Again', this phrase emerged after the world has encountered the horrors of the Holocaust, freed itself from the chains of imperialism, ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and genocide after World War II, and echoed through the framework of human rights. The spirit of resistance against colonialism in India has articulated freedom through the slogan of '*Aazadi*' that is still resonating in the billions of hearts dreaming of a peaceful world. In the post-colonial world, the language of rights is woven into the constitutional laws of many nations to transform the age-old culture of oppression and to foster the spirit of justice, liberty, and equality. The women's human rights framework is being interpreted broadly to advance the goal of emancipation to make the world more equal, just, peaceful, and stable. The text of the rights envisioned in the BPfA has guided many resistance movements and has facilitated the women's human rights as the site of power as well as contestations. BPfA is being utilized as a radical tool to negotiate rights, to challenge stereotypical notions, and to obtain justice. Despite its inadequacy, the vocabulary of rights has inspired hope and has given the wings to the dreams of many who wish to end the oppression.

Yet, in today's world, authoritarian regimes are rising, making a severe impact on the advancement made in the field of women's rights at the global level. The backlash is forcing the women's rights to be reduced to a meaningless text without a soul, a vision, or purpose. It is shrinking the space for resistance, diluting the vocabulary of rights, weakening the legal protections, increasing the authoritarian control over women's lives, leading to lesser funds allocation for women's rights programs despite an increase in the magnitude and severity of violence, increasing risks for

women's rights defenders, threatening women's safety and in all other ways, and affecting the enforcement of the right guaranteed under the BPfA.

More so, the burden of the neoliberal economy is lying unprecedentedly on the Third World women since the 1990s when the SAPs have been imposed. This backlash has crumbled the welfare paradigm and has hardly hit those at the receiving end. The moral and social implications of the pandemic have further exposed the emptiness of the neoliberal paradigm as it adversely affected the subalterns. Hence, the economic policies framework needs to be re-considered from the perspective of its impact on the citizens of the Third world. Theoretically, the need is to interrogate the two-pronged approach that articulates the language of rights on one side, and at the same time, oppress the third world citizens by aggressively pushing the neoliberal agenda.

Besides, within the global framework, it is suggested that the need is to interrogate the discourse on rights that is otherizing the women from the Global South by projecting the argument of cultural backwardness. Women's human rights scholarship need to pay attention to the underpinning that lies behind the exclusion of non-western women. Creating a space to analyze the post-colonial perspective provides an enriching perspective to understand how the politics of exclusion operates, is sustained and justified. This research paper raises questions regarding the structural inequalities to reconcile the tensions with the repressive ideologies to eliminate patriarchy.

To counter backlash, the need is to imagine a strategy to preserve the sanctity of the justice paradigm while connecting it to the realities of billions of women. The constructive move requires focusing on substantive equality. This research attempts to understand the women's rights as framed under the BPfA from the bubble up perspective and highlights the need to utilize multiple axes intersectionality approach to imagine the women's human rights paradigm that disrupts binaries of public versus private, religious versus secular, modern versus traditional or us versus them. The backlash in the form of misogynist, xenophobic rhetoric, with all its arguments and assumptions must be strongly resisted while developing solidarity, building alliance and forging networks to imagine the possibilities of an egalitarian and fair world. The urgent need is to counter backlash with backlash using the vocabulary of rights enshrined in the BPfA or as Antonio Guterres, the UN Human Rights Chief says "[Now is the time to pushback against push back](#)".

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