

## MYANMAR 1962: FEMINISM IN THE POST MILITARY JUNTA ERA

<sup>1</sup>Afifatul Fadlilah, <sup>2</sup>Karyn Sari Artha, <sup>3</sup>Olvira Romadhona Lorenza, <sup>4</sup>Riko Nakajima

International Relations, President University, Cikarang, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>*afifatul.fadlilah@student.president.ac.id*, <sup>2</sup>*karyn.panjaitan@student.president.ac.id*,  
<sup>3</sup>*Olvira.lorenza@president.ac.id*, <sup>4</sup>*hinakoi0422@gmail.com*

### Abstract

Aung San Suu Kyi is a feminist activist who opposes the Military Junta government. She highly upholds gender equality and strives for all people to have the right to live. However, she ended up in prison for years because of his bold actions. After being released from the detention center, Aung San Suu Kyi campaigned on Feminism, which has influenced many women to fight for their rights. Because of Aung San Suu Kyi, more and more women, both students, workers, and business people, also voiced their goals, especially women's participation in various sectors and women's freedom in leading the country. The participation of women they strive for participates in the media, public administration, politics, and the student movement. This movement was implementing because women can also contribute to advancing the country's economy and politics. The U.N role is also very influential in this case through its campaigns that include men to voice gender equality. Because gender equality is not only for women, but everyone has the right to gender equality. Due to, to achieve the same goal, namely peace between humans

Keyword:Feminism, Aung San Suu Kyi, Junta Military

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper, the author uses a case study of Feminism in the Myanmar Military Junta era. The author chose this title because I wanted to analyze why there are still high cases of gender inequality in Myanmar. Because according to the 2018 Gender Inequality Index (GII) data, Ranked Myanmar 3rd in gender inequality. In this paper, the author uses a case study of Feminism in the Myanmar Military Junta era. The writer chose this title because the writer saw many cases of gender equality. According to the 2018 Gender Inequality Index (GII) data, Myanmar ranks 3rd highest in gender inequality. This problem is due to the military dictatorship that once led to the history of the Myanmar state.

Aung San Suu, Kyi, as a women activist, defends women who are always underestimated in life and still compared to men. The author will discuss how Aung San Suu Kyi fights for Human Rights and Gender Equality through her actions demanding the Military Junta system's abolition into democracy. There are many theories of Feminism. The first is from the book by J. ANN TICKNER & LAURA SJOBERG. According to the approach described, Feminism. This concept is always associated with gender issues. Because basically, this will affect security, the country, and sovereignty and influence global politics running too. The Theory of Liberal Feminism is the most continuous theory with Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership case.

Why is that? Liberal Feminism focuses on the role of women, especially in foreign policy, because freedom is a right that must be felt by all people, both men, and women. According to Caprioli & Boyer (2011), in measuring gender equality, they measure using national indicators, especially according to the number of women sitting in parliamentary seats or the number of votes. The second is feminism constructivism theory is formed based on the perspective of gender ideas that shape and influence global politics. This theory is related to Aung San Suu Kyi, who has dared to change society's view in Myanmar that women can occupy the highest positions in all fields, including politics. Although many obstacles had to overcome, Aung San Suu Kyi influenced global politics thanks to her strong determination, as evidenced by Aung San Suu Kyi, who now serves as State Advisor for Myanmar. As stated in Elisabeth Prugl's book, gender is an institution that can regulate global political power, from house to country to the international system. This book's purpose is the process of Feminism that can influence global politics and the ways of global politics in building thinking about gender.

The third is Postcolonial Feminism theory. Why? Although this case is not entirely about the idea of postcolonial Feminism, this theory does little to do with the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi. This theory focuses on the struggle for the oppression that still occurs after World War II in a former western colony. Colonialism itself is part of racism, feudalism, and imperialism, making a settlement suffer because of the colonizers' actions. Myanmar is one of the many countries colonized by Britain and finally became independent on January 4, 1948. The fourth, Critical Feminism, is a theory that focuses on the material condition of fellow human beings between dominant and subordinate cultures. What aspects of the world are inherently patriarchal in which men dominate and focus on exposing misogyny in writing about women. Women are destroyed by patriarchy through economic, political, social, and

psychological aspects. This theory relates to cases during the military junta era. At that time, women only saw as "substitutes" for the position of men. The meaning of the word "substitute" is that if it weren't for something that forced to replace men with women, then women would remain under men. Elaborated on topics the topic previously, each country has a different system of government. Some adhere to the presidential, parliamentary, communist, liberal democracy, and others. The government system is useful for uniting various state structures to depend on each other to achieve the same government's same goals and functions.

An example is a country that adopts a democratic system in Myanmar. Myanmar received independence from Britain in 1948. After Myanmar became independent, the country was led under Sao ShweThaik as the first President and had a prime minister named U Nu. However, his office term was only until 1952, which was finally replaced by Ba U in 1967. The beginning of the Military Junta era was when Myanmar's third President took office, Win Maung, he served until 1962. Because many things disturbed his government system, ranging from ethnic conflicts to wars civilian and armed war so that eventually Myanmar was influenced by an authoritarian government controlled by an oligarchic military dictatorship or better known as the Military Junta. According to the Cambridge dictionary, the Military Junta definition is "a government, especially a military one that has taken power in a country by force and not by-election."

When controlled by the Myanmar military leadership, the people felt that they were not free because they controlled every aspect of the State and even controlled community activities, namely the military. This method is very much at odds with the democratic governance system. In the part of democracy, every citizen has the right to have freedom, called Human Rights. But even so, sometimes, democracy does not work according to its meaning because according to John Standard Mill, space does not mean that all people can feel smart by using that term. But this freedom expresses innovative thinking and can respect others' opinions, making society develop or grow. In 1962 the military rule was getting worse. In the military junta, the leader is General Ne Win, who does not uphold democracy. According to Ne Win, the purpose of why the military is power in one form of overcoming the division of the State. However, when the government's implementation was not following their original thinking, they acted arbitrarily towards the people.

There was a large demonstration on August 8, 1988, in Myanmar and resulted in many human rights violations that occurred at that time due to acts of violence committed by the military against demonstrators. The public demonstrated to eliminate the Military dictatorship that had been in power since 1962. Finally, because of the big demonstration, General Ne Win succeeded. However, even though the Military Junta government had fallen, the military junta continued, and there was an expert power taking led by Saw Maung on September 19, 1988. In this era, on June 18, 1989, Burma's name changed to Myanmar. After Saw Maung resigned from his post was replaced by General ThanShwe, there was a second military coup. There are many cases of violence committed in the Military Junta government, as reported by the United Nations, that in Myanmar there have been cases of human rights violations by making civilians into slaves, forcing children to join the military, and issues of rape by the army.

Because this oligarchic government system also has an impact on women who want to join politics. At that time, patriarchal culture was still influential, and it was a challenge

for women to fight against the perspective of religion and culture that still adheres to patriarchal elements. A patriarchal culture, based on the view that every aspect of men's life is the main focus, makes women only fill job vacancies previously filled by men and forced to be replaced by women to maintain the quality of work. Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of a general, Aung San, who in 1948 helped to liberate Burma, which is currently Myanmar. And her mother was named KhinKyi, a very influential and respected woman. As well as wanting to fight back for democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi, as a woman activist, wants to campaign about gender equality where women just made subordinate positions or under men. Because women's status is always associated with men, gender problems make women unacceptable in the political realm. Since the beginning, women in Myanmar taught that women must be gentle and polite ways to be silent and easily overcome. Aung San Suu Kyi's journey in upholding human rights and gender equality was challenging. She had to face many challenges and was detained from 1989 to 2010 without a straightforward final decision. But behind his detention, she got a lot of awards. Like the following:

1. Human Rights Award Raft October 12, 1990,
2. Sakharov Human Rights Award from the European Parliament on July 10, 1991,
3. Winner of the 1991 Peace award
4. The Norwegian Nobel Committee on October 14, 1991
5. Medal of independence from the Presidency of the United States of America
6. Jawaharlal Nehru-India Award
7. Nobel Peace Prize December 10, 1991

After being released from house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi's supporters greeted her with great pleasure. However, after she was released, under a law enacted in the military government, she could not run for President even though she already had a party called the National League for Democracy. Because she has a husband of British descent and the law's content is that if a Myanmar citizen marries another national, she cannot become President. However, she continued to take part in the political world even though she was not the President but instead became Myanmar's State Advisor

## **2. Literature Review**

Research written by the author is entitled "FEMINISM MYANMAR POST JUNTA." We have also found similar themes and read the following:

Title: "Feminism in Myanmar."

Authors: Aye Lei Tun, La Ring, and SuSuHlaing.

The author chose this book as literature because it is very diverse and follows the discussion theme that the author will research. This book also describes the concepts and history of Feminism that occurred in Myanmar.

We have known this case against gender equality has indeed become almost in every country. Where in the concept of Feminism, in general, is to equalize rights between humans, especially women. The Feminism in Myanmar book explains that Myanmar is a country with quite complicated and complex Feminism cases. Not only injustice against women but humanitarian instances in which these cases are quite well-known among the international

community. Myanmar also ranks 106th in gender inequality. Where is the cause of gender inequality that makes women less to get their rights?

Myanmar, 1919, emerges Burmese women's association. Lead by women from the top ranks and also a group of women who have become successful entrepreneurs. Not much different from women's groups in other countries, this group was created to raise their voices and hope that their voices can hear women's rights in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Besides, they also voiced their rights to their wishes to be allowed to participate in elections. The priority they underlined is the role and participation of women in progress, especially in the economic and political fields.

Previously, the lack of gender equality in Myanmar occurred because there were still many cultural and traditional practices, religious myths, and patriarchy, where this concept kept women from freedom. For other reasons, always adhere to Male Power as Mobile and the Concept of Female as Inferior. This concept is still attached, especially to the Buddhist people in Myanmar. This concept means that men have the power from their birth. Bigger than women, a power that makes men more respected. So this concept makes it very difficult for women to express Feminism, especially in 1926, the national council of Women in Burma stated that they are an institution that strongly supports the whole concept of Buddhism and Patriotism. So this concept explains that the government and institutions also adhere more to religious and cultural ideas.

For those who reject Feminism, this concept believes to be a tool to eliminate Myanmar's existing culture. According to them, Feminism is a western ideology that will impact local culture and traditions. They think this concept will free women to express themselves to make women abandon their former values. Besides, there is a patriarchal religious institution, where this sacred institution supports patriarchal values, completing the circle of women voicing Feminism narrower. Because those institutions' actions make women's rights in Myanmar weak, power has dominated men, especially in the political field. Before independence, the government had not succeeded in creating peace and justice for women's rights. The government's military concept also makes it very difficult for women's movements because the government also creates these policies.

Immediately in 1991, after independence, there was a difference of opinion between the traditional feminism group in the country of origin and the Feminism group. On this fact, the concept of progressive foreign Feminism strongly advocates for the freedom of women's rights. And traditional Feminism is sufficient to prioritize the interests of their group or prioritize their concept of ideological concepts. They do not take action in cases of assault against the oppression of women. But they only solve problems such as solving HIV and AIDS.

However, these women's desires are getting excited because Aung San Suu Kyi has successfully influenced them. Since Myanmar stepped into independence, women's organizations are increasing. They continued, walked together until finally, women gradually gained freedom of speech and felt the rights they hoped for again. There are organizations such as Karen Women's Organization in 1993. The Burmese Women's Union followed this in 1995, followed by the Tavoy Women's Union in 1995 and other Women's Organizations in 1997, and many other organizations and institutions that aim at women's freedom. The struggles they have been doing are women's participation in the media, public administration, Student movement, or other fields. Women's involvement in the media sector enables

women to participate in writing in the media, especially on current global issues. Besides Burmese marriage freedom, the women's column in women's magazines serves as a forum for women to convey their aspirations and voices. The women's participation in public administration and politics, because before women could enter the world of politics because of family factors. The involvement of women in the peasants and labor movements, namely women's participation in strikes, especially strikes in the oil field in 1938. Apart from that, other women's participation was in the form of a student movement, in which women, especially young people, made campaigns about boycotting universities. Therefore, from this book, we can see that this concept of Feminism is part of women's struggle in Myanmar.

### **3. Research Method**

The approach used in this research is qualitative, as suggested by Kirk & Miller (1986; 9). He states that qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on humans' observations in their area and terms of it. In this qualitative research process, the examiners do not calculate the data they have, but rather the reasoning concept to analyze the information collected.

This type is a case study, where the relationship between qualitative and this case study is that the researcher will analyze a case in the form of Feminism in Myanmar after the Military Junta to produce research with its concept, namely descriptive analysis. In the State of writing that will describe the selected theme.

The qualitative method's characteristics are qualitative methods with a natural background with direct data sources, and the key instrument is the researcher. This method is descriptive. The focus of this qualitative method is the process of seeking information, how to do it. To analyze this method, the writer will look for various kinds of data.

In qualitative methods, data is the most important thing. Because the researchers will collect a lot of data to expedite the research process, in this research too, the writer uses the document technique. In this technique, the data source that the author uses is a document. Documents like news reports, articles, and journals. Other sources, either written or in the form of films or images.

### **4. Results and Discussions**

#### **4.1 Feminism**

A theory is a supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, mainly based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained. In this theory, the author uses a view that is considered very relevant to the problem researched, which is Feminism. Understanding of Feminism according to some experts:

Harriet Martineau (Society in America, 1837):

"All women should inform themselves of the condition of their sex and their position. It must necessarily follow that the noblest of them will, sooner or later, put forth a moral power which shall prostrate can't and burst the bonds of feudal prejudice and usages asunder. Meantime, is it to understood that the Declaration

of Independence principles bear no relation to half of the human race? If so, what is the ground for this limitation?

June Hannam (2007):

- A recognizance of an imbalance of power between the sexes, with a woman in a subordinate role to men.
- A belief that a woman's condition is socially constructed and, therefore, can be changed.
- An emphasis on female autonomy

Women are only valued as people who would work in the kitchen and as servants of their husbands. But as time goes by, now we can see that women are increasingly playing an active role in various aspects of life, such as the business world, world of work, social organizations, government, communications, etc. All of that happens because the word Feminism is becoming so popular, there are many hash tags on social media. This issue about gender is getting more attention in social-cultural knowledge until being the cynosure of current International Relations studies.

It was started in the early 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft published her perspective about Feminist with the title "The Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792). She proclaimed to make girls can study in the government schools as what boys do. Because in the beginning, the woman's position is lower than man, many things that can man do but woman don't. After that, many women are fighting for rights, such as Penelope Kemekenidou from Germany, AranyaJohar from India, and R.A. Kartini from Indonesia (1879-1904). In International Relations, there is a lot of Typology of International Relations Feminist Theories. Even the emancipation of gender has many types, but basically, the purpose of Feminism is to create equality gender between women and men. Feminism also fights for freedom and independence.

- **Liberal Feminism** is a movement that has a liberal concept that emphasizes that women and men have the same opportunities and rights. It claims morality and prudential. Liberal Feminism gives all humans the freedom to choose, express, claim everything as long as it does not harm anyone.
- **Critical Feminism**, in the book of Sandra Whitworth "Feminism and International Relations" (1994). The comprehension of gender was only referring to real material conditions between man and woman in a particular situation.
- **Feminist Constructivism** more takes up about how ideas affect global politics and create equality gender globally. In the book "The Global Construction of Gender" (1999) by Elisabeth Prügl's consider how a state interacts with its people mutually and how gender affects global politics until global politics make the concept of who talks about gender.
- **Feminist Post-structuralism** pays attention to linguistic constructions like weak and strong, public, and private to empower women under the masculine. In 2008 Laura J. Shepherd published "Gender, Violence, and Security." She described the gender issue of international policy practices and claimed that languages are more constitutive than representative of social and political reality.



- **Postcolonial Feminism** is one of the forms focusing on women in Western cultures and former colonies. Postcolonial Feminists came from knowing that Western Women have special privileges. This stage focuses on understanding, delete legacies of colonialism in the activism of feminists, and claim it.

## 4.2 Feminism in Myanmar

Colonized by the British and occupied by the Japanese for more than 100 years and then afflicted with more than 60 years of prolonged civil war with several ethnic groups, Myanmar has endured many challenges. Poverty, poor education, weak institutions, and gender-based violence remain challenges in State building. Women's issues also remain a low priority because women's rights are assumed to be unworthy of discussion or not as urgent as peace and economic development. There is little awareness that gender mainstreaming is needed as a strategy or approach in development programs to achieve gender equality.

Historically, Myanmar women were given a supporting role in the political and social fields to implement male leader agendas. Prioritized women's clothing and interfaith marriage law in nationalist movements because women were considered the culture's preservers. There is a widespread belief that Myanmar women enjoy equality and high status and can participate in public life as men do. Male and female officials and equal legal status in the Constitution as evidence. No one points out the traditional customs and practices that contradict such a belief, however. During the previous military regime, the government perpetuated the illusion of women's high status in statements and reports.

Femininity has been appreciated in State-sponsored organizations to maintain patriarchal power. Recent women's organizations have engaged a more progressive view and a more organized and strategic plan to promote gender equality than the women's groups established a century ago. Today's women's organizations come from the grass-roots and have collaborated with marginalized groups, such as ethnic women groups. However, female student groups, women with disability groups, and female laborers remain weak. Feminism still viewed as a radical perspective; many women's rights activists are even reluctant to accept Feminism. Although marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities or female students, have collaborated with women's networks, their capacity to counteract male dominance within their respective community needs strengthening. Male leadership's influence in the political parties restricts female members' coalition across party lines, requiring more attention to solve this problem. This study suggests that Feminism is the solution to bring about a structured change for gender equality.

Should adopt women and gender quotas to make peace agreements, legislation, constitutional reform processes, and political parties' candidate-selection method. The government should lead in eliminating all forms of violence. Should develop a robust legal framework to facilitate access to justice for the survivors of gender-based violence. It is also essential to ensure that survivors of violence can access critical support services. The judiciary, police, health professionals, and social workers are provided with the necessary training to respond to violence. And lastly, we must localize the international agendas for development issues to provide income-generating activities to women and create safe and



sound environments for working women rather than focusing on elite women's empowerment.

### **4.3 The Role of U.N. Women in Campaigning For Gender Equality**

United Nations Women is an association fostered by the United Nations dedicated to regulating gender inequality and women's rights to advance women to achieve their desires, which are always limited by social and culture. U.N. Women has made some good progress, such as having essential agreements, namely the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women or abbreviated CEDAW. The CEDAW agreement has been in effect since December 3, 1981, but this agreement is still unclear about how the agreement system works, and there are still many laws related to CEDAW that do not comply with standards.

Therefore, U.N. Women created that because seeing the conditions at that time, gender equality was still not seen because of insufficient funds and no one who raised the issue to present in the United Nations. Finally, on July 2, 2010, the United Nations created a U.N. Women forum to make it easier to promote gender equality globally. Countries that have enabled this issue include Africa, America, and the Caribbean, Arab Countries, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Central Asia. The U.N. Women has carried out many campaigns to advance gender equality, one of which is the "HE for She" campaign and involves men to ensure that everyone has the right to gender equality. Myanmar is a country that was once led by the military, which resulted in a lot of violence. Myanmar participated in ratifying the forum. United Nations Women established in Myanmar in 2013. And the United Nations Women in Myanmar is growing very fast in campaigning for gender equality.

U.N. women play an essential role in events taking place across the country marked by the introduction of CEDAW. This proves the role of U.N. Women as an organization that seeks to protect and restore women's rights, promoting the rights of children and women under the goal of achieving sustainable development goals. With the following priority strategy: The role of women in the government system, the role of women in humanitarian cases, the part of women in building a better economy, and the role of women to live freely without crime. U.N. Women also role in Myanmar case, especially in the case of Feminism. Play a position as an organization that empowers the women's economy, especially in Rakhine. They also prevent and identify the impact of trafficking through empowering women. They also realize the rights of workers and will focus on women's priorities.

### **4.4 ASEAN's Role as a Regional Group in Dealing with Gender Inequality in Myanmar**

ASEAN or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional organization that facilitates ten countries in Southeast Asia. ASEAN formed on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok. In the beginning, ASEAN only consists of 5 countries, the founder of ASEAN, the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, and Thailand's Kingdom. As time goes by, several countries participated in entering ASEAN, such as the Republic of the Philippines on August 08, 1967, Brunei Darussalam on January 08, 1984, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 28, 1995, and The Lao People's Democratic Republic on July 23, 1997, the Union of Myanmar on July 23, 1997, and the Kingdom of Cambodia on April

30, 1999. An organization must have a structure that is useful for achieving previously agreed goals. When the system has operated its functions, it means the organization is successfully carrying out its role. The actors (organizations or individuals) will comport themselves following the previously agreed goals with this role. In ASEAN Charter Article 1, some The Purposes of ASEAN are a form of peace and protection of human rights, as written numbers 1 and 7, To Maintain and enhance relaxation, security, and stability and further strengthen peace-oriented values the region. And to strengthen democracy, improve good governance and the rule of law, and promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the Member States of ASEAN's rights and responsibilities. As a regional organization, ASEAN has a role in the problem that exists in Southeast Asian Countries. ASEAN Regional Forum or ARF is a forum that formed in 1994. The objectives of the ASEAN Regional Forum outlined in the First ARF Chairman's Statement, namely:

1. To foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern and
2. To make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

As forums related to security and politic, ARF held several meetings to discuss the problem in Myanmar.

- 1) 9<sup>th</sup> ARF Meeting, July 31, 2020 (Bandar Seri Begawan - Brunei Darussalam), the ministers requested Myanmar further.
- 2) 11<sup>th</sup> ARF Meeting, July 02, 2004 (Jakarta - the Republic of Indonesia), The ministers requested Myanmar to take action in democratic expression and aspiration.
- 3) 13<sup>th</sup> ARF Meeting, July 28, 2006 (Kuala Lumpur – Malaysia), the ministers informed that the United Nations would take part in this problem and visit Myanmar on 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2006.
- 4) 14<sup>th</sup> ARF Meeting, August 02, 2007 (Manila - the Republic of the Philippines), The ministers requested Myanmar to let the international community handle problems, so ARF involves constructively.
- 5) 16<sup>th</sup> ARF Meeting, July 23, 2009 (Phuket), The ministers asked to realize Aung San Suu Kyi and held general elections in 2010.

In this problem, ASEAN uses the policy of "constructive engagement," where the country can solve their respective issues as long as to be considered worthy by ASEAN. It can say that ASEAN did not solve this problem and bring changes in Myanmar. From the forum, it just brings confidence-building measures. ASEAN should have followed up on the pain because this is not just a political issue but has become an issue of human rights. According to the author, this problem belongs to Feminist Constructivism because of Junta Military concerns about gender influence global politics.

## 5. Conclusions

The conclusion tells that the cause of gender inequality in Myanmar occurs because there are still many cultural practices and traditions, religious myths, and patriarchy, where this concept keeps women away from freedom. In the case, we discussed that she has the right to work rights in various sectors. Or contribute freely in any field. Aung San Suu Kyi is an example of how women can fight for their voice. Even though Aung San Suu Kyi was once a prisoner, she never fought for Feminism. Due to the actions he took when he was brave, he has earned many awards. One of them got the Nobel Peace Prize. By holding on to the concept of Feminism they hold, that gender equality is something that we must solve.

Feminism is not only about women, but men also take part in this problem. For example, the campaign carried out by the Women's U.N. by including men in campaigning. Myanmar has now ratified the law on gender equality. The reason is that it was once controlled and led by an authoritarian military from the historical side. From this military junta, we can conclude that a state-led by the army is not necessarily safe in its peace. In Myanmar, when the military-led the government, many cases of humanity and violence resulted in citizens having no freedom. This study proved that women act as actors who are always in a subordinate position and can also play a role and influence the economy and politics and the country's progress. Women are only considered people who want to work in the kitchen and as servants to their husbands. But over time, we can now see that women are increasingly playing an active role in various aspects of life, such as business, work, social organizations, government, and communication.

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