

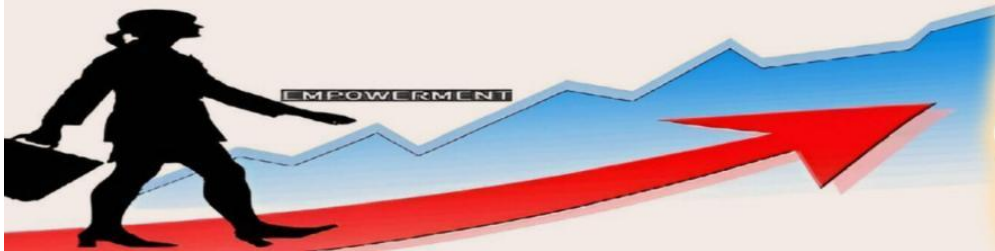
A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Reason, Virtue & Knowledge



With Notes

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman



Mary Wollstonecraft

Wollstonecraft starts *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with some basic questions. She asks what makes humans better than other creatures, and she says it's because of our ability to think, or **Reason**. Then she asks what makes one person better than another, and she says it's **virtue**, which means being good. Why do people deal with their passions? Well, it's to learn from struggles and gain **knowledge** through experience.

So, she says that *“the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of **reason**,*

virtue, and knowledge". And when we have these three things, being good comes naturally. She argues, Women have a soul just as men do, and if the soul is unsexed, then both sexes have a capacity for reason and should endeavor to exercise it.

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote against monarchy and aristocracy. She argues that the idea that kings have a special right is harmful because it destroys equality and virtue. She says that any profession where one person has power over another "*is highly injurious to morality.*"

Wollstonecraft says that some people excuse men's unfair treatment of women by saying that men and women should have different virtues. They believe that "*women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire*" real virtue. But Wollstonecraft thinks that Providence has appointed only one path to human virtue; so if women have immortal souls, there can be no secondary path to virtue.

Wollstonecraft says we can't compare men and women's goodness until women have the chance to develop and become stronger in their virtues. Even if it turns out that women can't be as good as men, they should still aim for the same kind of goodness. Basically, let a woman strive for

her God-given rank in the world, instead of artificially suppressing her.

Mary Wollstonecraft says that one big problem that limits women's education is that it's not organized well. Men usually have a structured education from the beginning, while women's education is more random. This shows that people don't take women's intelligence seriously when they're young. As a result, women end up learning and do not grow as strong beings.

Wollstonecraft believes that **education** should focus on:

- Sharpening the senses
- Shaping the personality
- Controlling emotions
- Engaging the mind in thinking
- While education can't do magical things but it develops virtuous habits.
- Being virtuous leads to personal freedom and independence.

Wollstonecraft criticizes a prominent philosopher of the *Age of Enlightenment*, Rousseau, and male writers like him who say that the entire goal of women's lives is to please men. She argues that writers like Rousseau don't understand

human nature. She says that when women grow older and the excitement of youth fades, what are they supposed to do? If women aren't encouraged to use their abilities and talents, they might end up seeking attention and approval from men other than their husbands. The focus on being pleasing that society puts on women is not enough; it's only useful for someone who wants to be a mistress. Instead, women should focus on making themselves better people, but this is hard when most women are taught to care only about superficial things and they are not encouraged to control their emotions.

Wollstonecraft argues that people have confused the effect with the cause when it comes to women's perceived weakness. She believes that having a strong mind is often linked to having a strong body.

"When women are physically dependent on others, it affects their mental independence too." A woman who is overly sheltered and always worried about her health won't be good at being a wife or a mother. These women become *"slaves to their bodies"* and even take pride in it. When women are taught from a young age to focus only on their looks, their minds will only care about making themselves look good, like decorating a prison.

While men rightfully boast about their physical strength, women are overly focused on their physical weakness. They sometimes use this weakness to manipulate men, but in doing so, they sacrifice their moral values for temporary pleasures. This lowers the character of women and is harmful to society overall. Therefore, when educating their daughters, parents should not let girls believe that a weakness can turn into a strength.

Wollstonecraft says women should allow to study medicine, politics and business in order to contribute in society. She argues that if women are not *“prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue.”*

Mary Wollstonecraft wants women to have a big change, like a revolution, so they're not treated as less important just because they're women. She says women aren't naturally weaker, it's just that men unfairly think that way. When women are allowed to learn and grow, they'll become more independent like any other smart person, and everyone will be better off because of it.