

Editorial

The discourse on human rights has undergone profound transformation in the twenty-first century, shaped by globalization, technological advancement, migration, climate change, public health crises, and shifting geopolitical realities. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established a common normative framework for protecting human dignity, contemporary debates increasingly reveal tensions between universal principles and culturally embedded systems of values. The challenge is no longer confined to determining whether human rights are universal or culturally relative; rather, it lies in identifying pathways through which universal norms can coexist with diverse cultural, religious, and social traditions. This evolving landscape calls for a renewed understanding of human rights that respects cultural diversity without compromising the fundamental principles of equality, justice, and human dignity. Universalism has long served as the moral foundation of international human rights law, emphasizing that every individual possesses inherent rights irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or social status. However, critics argue that many human rights frameworks have historically reflected Western philosophical traditions and legal institutions, often overlooking indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western conceptions of justice and community. Cultural relativists contend that social norms and moral values are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts and should not be evaluated solely through universal standards. Yet, an uncritical acceptance of cultural relativism risks legitimizing practices that perpetuate discrimination, inequality, or violence under the guise of tradition. Consequently, the central task for scholars, policymakers, and civil society is to distinguish between legitimate cultural diversity and practices that undermine the inherent dignity and freedoms of individuals.

The digital age has further complicated the human rights landscape by introducing new ethical and legal dilemmas. Artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, data governance, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and cyber-security have expanded the scope of rights beyond conventional civil, political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Simultaneously, climate-induced displacement, environmental degradation, and widening socio-economic inequalities have reinforced demands for recognizing collective rights, environmental justice, and intergenerational equity. Addressing these emerging challenges requires an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach that integrates legal scholarship, political science, sociology, anthropology, environmental studies, economics, and technology governance. Such collaboration can facilitate context-sensitive interpretations of universal human rights standards while strengthening international cooperation in addressing complex global problems.

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