Australia is home to many Indigenous populations and legally they are referred as Aboriginals and Torres Strait islanders. They are considered as Australia’s first people who have lived on the continent over 50,000 years ago and today there are about 250 different languages spoken among them throughout Australia[[1]](#footnote-1). They are mainly divided into two groups. The group of people that were already there before the British start settling in Australia and the descendants of people from Torres Strait Island. There had been a lot of disputes among the government and these people on property, culture and identity, throughout Australian history. Their mistreatment in the form of the stolen generation and unequal rights continued. The scope of this paper will cover when and to what extent did Aboriginal people achieve equal pay?

**Circumstances before Equal Pay**

The labour force of Aboriginal people was exploited throughout history. These exploitations were in the form of non-payment, under-payment and indentured labour. These exploitations were mainly down to government policies under protection acts. For example, government-controlled the employment and social involvement of Aboriginal people through Aboriginal Protection and restriction of the sale of Opium Act in Queensland[[2]](#footnote-2). These tactics and exploitations were used through government-appointed proctors and police forces. The Aboriginal people were confined to work in construction, farming, cooking, gardening, and maintenance. The Aboriginal people were forced to pay for welfare work from the already low income they were earning. But those who were living in settlements were also required to work for free up to 32 hours a week on developmental projects[[3]](#footnote-3). The justifications were mostly economic, that culture is mostly seen as a limitation and hindrance. Traditional culture may stand in a way of execution of policies[[4]](#footnote-4). Under different so-called protection acts, the governments had the right to control the lives of Aboriginal people. Their children especially girls were taken away from their families and mostly used as domestic slaves while boys were trained as farm labourers and used in different mission[[5]](#footnote-5) .These children were known as the stolen generation. This exploitation of rights continued until the 1970s. Any serious police report would cause the removal of individuals from their area and families. Many times, these families wouldn't even know where their loved ones are. There were no limits on the working hours and the treatment of labour or the provisions and living facilities provided by the government[[6]](#footnote-6). Almost like all other colonies in the world the European settlers also relied on local indigenous people for the labour work. Without their physical work, industrial development in the area wouldn't have been possible. The Aboriginal people working force was regarded as indispensable. However, despite that, the wage rate was significantly different. In 1949 only 31 per cent of the common wages at that time were paid to them while the figure rose to only 59 per cent in 1956 this trend continued until 1970's[[7]](#footnote-7).

**Achievement of Equal Pay**

**International Perspective**

One of the major factors in aboriginal people getting their civil rights include international pressure. United Nations declaration of the universal human rights, that people should not be judged based on their race was the first step in this regard. Then later the international convention for the elimination of all kind of discrimination which later became the basis Australia’s Racial discrimination act 1975 also help in improving towards the civil rights of Aboriginal people[[8]](#footnote-8).

**Social Security**

The social security movements and commonwealth legislation in the early 1960s were significantly important for the lives of Aboriginal people. Several politicians and activists’ groups also worked hard for the changes in the social security legislation. Some of the results were achieved but there were some hurdles also. A notable historian Russell McGregor said[[9]](#footnote-9):

“Certainly, there was agreement on the desirability of Aborigines acquiring the fundamentals of citizenship - the vote, social security benefits and so forth - but there was disagreement over the basis on which such rights should be conferred”

**Domestic Activism**

Domestic activists like Shirley Andrews and Joe McGinness were prominent figures in the '60s who raised their voices and represented "Council of Aboriginal Rights" and "Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders” respectively. Then in 1965, Australia’s best-known activist Charles Perkins led a chartered bus and drove it for two weeks through local clubs, theaters and grounds to realize people the countrywide discrimination and isolation of Aboriginal people[[10]](#footnote-10).

**Equal Wages**

The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration bench in March 1966 decided that Aboriginal people working on cattle stations would be covered by its industry and would be eligible to get the same payment as other workers. Earlier in a meeting between the Australian Council of Trade Union (ACTU) and the Federal Council for Aboriginal rights injustices suffered by Aboriginal workers were discussed. Almost five hundred copies of the booklet with those details were presented, that later on became one of the reasons for ACTU accepting the proposal for equal rights[[11]](#footnote-11). This was not exactly the end of unjust wages in Aboriginal people, apart from cattle industries the discriminations continued. Even for those working in cattle industries, they have to wait several years to get the same wages as non-Aboriginal people. Slowly the effect of equal wage structure was also seen on other sectors as well. The two main factors for getting equal wage structure for Aboriginal people were mainly domestic tension and distress as well as international community pressure. It took a long time until the mid-70 that racial discrimination act became officially part of the domestic legislative structure. Later down the line first woodcraft and in the '80s acrylic paintings were the basic sources of income for Aboriginal artists especially in Papunya[[12]](#footnote-12).

**Effect of Equal Wage on Aboriginal People**

The equal wage structure helped Aboriginal people improve their standard of life. Their artboards and paintings received the recognition they deserve. Another product which became an identity of Aboriginal people is the shell-work of their women. The equal wage boosted the confidence of many people to take part actively in the society. The likes of Cathy Freeman, Adam Goodes. Patty Mills, Arthur Beetson and Johnathan Thurston are some of the examples of the Aboriginal people that contributed towards the society and made their name through sports.

Sports is the field in which we can mostly feel their presence. Music is another field where we can feel their presence through Jimmy Little, Christine Anu, Yothu Yindi, along with AB original and Kuren. Art is another form where Aboriginal people have made a name for themselves. With their art valued throughout the country’s art galleries. Albert Namatjira is considered as the most famous Aboriginal artist in the country. Indigenous culture is also one of the best attractions for tourists. Many natural features in the country are considered sacred by the people and can be explored with a local guide. Their participation in politics has been rare but it has also been on the rise with the participation of the likes of Linda Burney and Ken Wyatt.

Racial diversity is also rare in mainstream media networks but it has also been on the rise. Debora Mailman, Miranda Tapsell, and Stan Grant are some of the people who have recently made a name for themselves in journalism and other television programs. Nowadays most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people live in cities and towns. However, many people still like to preserve their culture and lifestyle in their traditional lands [[13]](#footnote-13). In 2014 Adam Goodes won the Australian of the Year award which is an indication of Aboriginal people and their contribution nowadays. Some problems still exist for example 42% of Aboriginals’ 17-year old participated in secondary education in 2011 versus 68% of the non-indigenous, 8% of Indigenous 19 to 21-year old took part in tertiary education in 2011 as compared to 36% of non-Aboriginal’s[[14]](#footnote-14).

**Legal Theoretical Framework**

Indigenous people have a complex relationship with their fellow human beings and the natural world. Their relationship can be related to a specific culture, land and continuity of their own historical identity. They are a group of people who mainly stick to their ideas of life. They have historically proclaimed themselves as a distinct group of people despite being a part of a country or a broader community. However, the point of view of a state is different. They have usually a district system of sovereignty and a set of laws to govern a country. This has caused a rift between these two different ideologies. From a state point of view, they see it as complying your citizen with certain laws for their benefit. While Aboriginal people view it in the form of violence and unjust acts of brutalism. The current political system in the world is state-centric and works on the principle of the distinct system, boundaries and laws. However, in our case, the case is more of a legal, political and international struggle to earn the right of equality. It is more of a case of seeing them as equal citizens rather than maintaining their laws and territorial sovereignty. However, after providing them equal pay rights and equal opportunities, their involvement in the affairs of the state are on the rise than ever before. Nevertheless, many Aboriginal people have made the choice to move into cities and live their life in conventional country’s culture many are still living in their specific historical areas[[15]](#footnote-15). There is still a need for a better policy to integrate Aboriginal people into mainstream society and help them in getting better education, health and life standard, so that they can also contribute towards the economy of the country.

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