

Significance of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy and the Role of Women in Politics of Sudan

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Abstract

"I would boycott that legislature which will not have a proper share of women members". These words by Mahatma Gandhi can be seen in the terms of women representation in politics of Sudan. This paper examines the role of women in politics of Sudan and relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's thought. Women's participation in politics is not only viewed as a right but is also crucial for society's growth and gender equality. When it comes to women's liberties, Mahatma Gandhi becomes uncompromising. According to him women are companion of man and have equal rights to freedom and liberty. Women are not the weaker sex, but the strongest part of humanity. The first man in India to advocate for women's involvement in governance was Mahatma Gandhi. Further he said, women's active involvement is crucial for the success of democracy. As we see, from 1956 till 2019 Sudan has faced various changes in political dynamics. Political representation offers opportunities in north and south of Sudan, for Sudanese women to form a common agenda, engage politically, promote a vibrant civil society, challenge human rights violations and develop a voice through participation. Women have potential to make an important contribution to the political development and stability of the nation. In this paper the main focus is on participation of women in politics of Sudan and implication of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy to motivate the large number of women into mainstream politics. As we can see, according to the modern theory, both men and women are integral parts of social, economic and political set up of any state. Keeping this background in thought, this paper is trying to analyze the share of women in the politics of Sudan.

Keywords: *Women, Gandhi's Philosophy, Political-Representation, Opportunity, Development, Challenges, Sudan*

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Introduction

Once Mahatma Gandhi said, *"I would boycott that legislature which will not have a proper share of women members"*, in this regard we can see the role women in politics of Sudan and significance of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. Women's participation in politics is not only viewed as a right but is also crucial for society's growth and gender equality. In this environment, nations must support women's rights so that they can act as change agents for the advancement of the nation's socio-economic and political conditions. Without gender equity and women's empowerment, society will not be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Discrimination against women must be fully eradicated by allowing them to participate in politics and excel their liberties.

When it comes to women's liberties, Mahatma Gandhi becomes uncompromising. According to him women are companion of man and have equal rights to freedom and liberty. Sudan must have to learn from Mahatma Gandhi philosophy of women development. Women are not the weaker sex, but the strongest part of humanity. Here we can see the scenario of activism of women in Sudan, which started in 1907 shows the development of politics and role of women into it. The first man in India to advocate for women's involvement in governance was Mahatma Gandhi. Further he said, women's active involvement is crucial for the success of democracy. By the words of Mahatma Gandhi, we can analyze the condition of Sudanese political system in which women's participation is required positively for the success of democracy there. As we see, from 1956 till 2019 Sudan has faced various changes in political dynamics. Political representation offers opportunities in north and south of Sudan, for Sudanese women to form a common agenda, engage politically, promote a vibrant civil society, challenge human rights violations and

develop a voice through participation. Generally, the insights of the Sudanese people were against female participating in political sphere, and there was no recognition of women participation in electoral process because all the huge share were distributed among men only, and women were excluded and trapped in the traditional work at home.

But somehow we can see in all over the world women have potential to make an important contribution to the socio-economic and political development and stability of the nation. In this paper the main focus is on participation of women in politics of Sudan and implication of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy to motivate the large number of women into mainstream politics. As we can see, according to the modern theory, both men and women are integral parts of social, economic and political set up of any state. Keeping this background in mind the share of women in the politics of Sudan is discussed here.

Women Movement and Political Stability

The women's movement in Sudan began in 1907, when the idea of hiring female teachers and teaching girls was accepted. Teachers were then required to relocate to the schools established in remote areas, and they were therefore seen as models of powerful women. These movements and the trials of female elites on an international and regional scale led to the trials of female elites in Sudan. Teachers had an important role in changing directions towards education, so they were like a social movement that was led to change concepts about women rights of education and labor.

In all the elections held since independence, women had equal voting rights. Women play a dual role in politics - as voters and political representatives. According to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, democracy implies equality for all, men and women. As against this basic notion of democracy what is normally seen is that women are excluded from different walks of life, more visibly in Politics. The same condition in Sudan can be seen in terms of political development. It is deeply rooted in the history of the Sudanese Women Movement, a movement that started before independence.

As it has been mentioned above not only Women had the right to vote since the first Sudanese elections, but also very soon women started elected in the parliament. In 1965 the first Sudanese woman Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was elected to parliament. She was member of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP).

This movement grew further with the Sudanese Socialist Union, of the late President Ga'afar Nimeiri, when many were elected to the People's Assembly, and which period also saw the growth of women leaders of the opposition to the Nimeiri regime. It is gratifying that the NCP followed the natural course of history, and endorsed the 25%. In the South women are contesting as independent candidates, despite the machine and machinations of the SPLM/A.

Women Participation in Politics

During the British colonial era and beyond, Sudanese women have been actively involved in politics. Despite having obtained the right to vote earlier than other African nations, they are currently less active in politics because to a variety of factors, including civil war, political unrest, cultural conservatism, and economic hardship. Here it can be suggested to the Sudanese society through the Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts which advocates for equality and the rights of women in political sphere. Given the severe issues Sudan has with poverty, illiteracy, and logistics, it is not surprising that the majority of the grassroots still differs greatly from the elite in terms of priorities and objectives.

Significant Political Development

Although there is a vast range of development on the African continent, poverty rates remain among the highest in the world, and underdevelopment is pervasive. In contrast to places like Europe and the America, democracy is still a relatively young phenomenon in Africa. Election-related violence is a growing problem even if there are more democratic elections taking place in Africa and a record number of women have been elected to government positions. Although chances for women and girls have significantly increased in several African nations, disparities still exist. Sexual violence, honor killings, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, limited mobility, and forced and early marriage are some of the major issues that women confront. Despite the advances achieved by women's

rights movements in identifying, bringing attention to, and addressing impunity for women's rights breaches, substantial discrimination against women persists. Violence and discrimination against women are social epidemics. According to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy in which he exclaimed that the backwardness of women was a stumbling block in the path of political development. This can be seen from the political instability of major countries of Africa especially in Sudan in which political representation of women is quite low as compare to countries of Asia and Europe. Yet, in the political sphere, African women have made significant progress. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the representation of women increased from 9.8% in 1995 to 23.6% in 2016, which is in line with the global average. Rwanda leads the world with the highest percentage of female parliamentarians (61.3%), with six other African countries ranking in to the top 20 – Senegal (42.7%), South Africa (42.1%), Namibia (41.3%), Mozambique (39.6%), Ethiopia (38.8%), and Angola (38.2%).

Women in Political Parties

Because they were never involved in politics in the past, women are now defending their rights. Women must be politically engaged and knowledgeable in order to advance their rights so that they can stand with males and defend their own rights. As Mahatma Gandhi illustrated "Women should seek justice, never favor". Formalized political activities were identified according to clear lines based on the constellations of partisan Sudanese politics in the postcolonial era. They manifested in bodies such as the Umma Party, the Communist Party and the Sudanese Congress Party, the Republican Party.

Tremendous development occurred in the inclusion of women in the party organizations such as a new development found in the political system at local level in Sudan. In the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, he described, "The aim must be to build from below so that the panchayat foundation (in India) would be strong and the structure of the political scenario will be good. Though, there is no panchayat system in Sudan but the participation of women in politics at local level should be strengthen as from the view of Mahatma Gandhi from below to top by which the political system will be stable.

Sudanese Women in Legislature

Women's participation in the ballot in 1996, has ranged between 30% and 60% of women registered. This weak ratio was due to some traditions in the areas of Sudan, which hinder women's participation, which we find in the Sudanese historical legacy in the democratic elections and totalitarian experiments. The National Assembly and Council of States are the two legislative bodies of Sudan. The national assembly has 446 elected parliamentarians. 114 of the 450 seats had been elected through women's lists put forth by the parties. Although there were really 112 seats set aside for women, 2 more women were elected, bringing the total to 25.56%. From 1 woman representing 4% in legislative institution in 1965 to 77 women representing 17% in 2007 to 25.56% of the elected parliament in 2010, the representation of women has increased. To ensure that women were represented in legislation, quota systems were required.

Quota System

The quota system is regarded as an effective means for women's political participation in decision-making process regardless the biological and gender differentiations that help them to influence the political and other decisions and to get their freedoms and rights like the civil rights, the right to be elected, the right to vote into political institutions and all that enforces their role in society. Further if we talk about beyond quota system, it can be seen that, The Juba Agreement had ensured 40 per cent representation and that could increase to 50 per cent after the transitional period. The official representation of women in the movement was 30 per cent, but that in reality they performed on a 50–50 ratio of consultation and inclusion according to the principles of justice and equality espoused by the movement.

Elections

Election law in 2008 for the first time recognized the right of women to private chambers without compromising the right to public services and to allocate 25% of legislative seats for women. As a result, the Sudanese elections held in April 2010 attracted significant attention on the regional and international levels as well as domestically. These elections were the first democratic ones in more than 20 years. We discover that 3217 women made up the various lists of women in quotas, geographical constituencies, and party circles for the 2010 elections. Resources indicates

that women have been active and influential in the electoral process since independence as won the right to vote in 1954, followed by the right to be elected in 1965.

Participation of Women in Different Sections

Women's participation in the judiciary is a crucial subject, particularly in Arab nations where Islamic scholars disagree on whether women should be allowed to serve as judges. There was a statistical data about women participation in six Arab countries as follows: On top Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Sudan is the fourth country in terms of the proportion of women who work in the judiciary, reaching 17% in 1970. Since 1965, women have held positions in the judiciary. The first woman judge was Ehsan Phakhry, who rose to that position gradually while serving as a judge at the court before becoming the vice president of the judiciary in 1984. After Nagwa Fareed was appointed to the position of vice president in 1980, women began holding numerous positions in the judiciary until they attained a 20% representation.

Regarding the political and legal elements, up until the most recent constitution, no regulations had been passed that forbade women from serving in the judiciary. The female judge has also stated that she hasn't encountered any social challenges. However, there were some restrictions about women working in courts in personal affairs issues. Sudanese woman participation has been higher than some other Arab and African countries. Women started to flow in judiciary until they reached 67 female judges by year 2002.

If we see women in ministries, we can find, when Nafisa Ahmed al-Ameen was appointed as the first minister in 1971, women were first allowed to participate in executive authority. Subsequently, in 1973, Fatima Ahmed Abdel Mahmoud was appointed minister of social affairs, and in 1991, Eknes Locono became the first woman to lead a state. Since then, the number of women in cabinet positions has increased, reaching 15 in 2002. Women held many positions at both the state and federal levels, including advisor positions (such as Dr. Soaad El Fateh, advisor for child and women affairs), advisor positions in the legal field (such as Badria Soliman in 2001), and ministerial positions (such as Ehsaan EL Ghabashawy, minister of health) and state minister positions (such as Samia Ahmed Mohamed, minister of care and social development, and Eshraka Sayed Mahm). Despite the opportunities women had in the ministries, they only occupied the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare as a ministers or state ministers. No woman at all had occupied the position of Secretary General.

In addition, if we discuss women leading states, we are fortunate to have Dr. Fatima Ahmed Abdel Mahmoud as the first female minister of Sudan as well as the first female candidate for Head of State in the 2010 general elections, winning 30,556 votes, or 3% of the total, on behalf of the Sudanese Socialist Democratic Union Party.

Sudanese women have a high participation rate in the field of civil service and hold more senior positions. According to the International Labor Organization in 1976, one in ten urban Sudanese women participates in the labor force; nevertheless, this low participation was due to traditional culture, traditions, and customs that forbid women from working. However, they are active in traditional agricultural activities. For example, women make up 80% of the agriculture activities in Kutumin Darfur region, which was referred to as the historical right of women to work in fields and rising rate of male out migration. On the other hand, rural women's participation reached only 10% due to poverty, tribal affiliation, and culture.

In 2004, women held 44% of all employment, 24% of technical jobs, 35% of administrative jobs, and 90% of typing jobs, bringing their overall involvement in the public sector under the government to 51.1%. The participation increased steadily in 2010 as shown in the following: The percentage of women in the civil service was 35%, the private sector was 10%, traditional agriculture was 78%, ordinary jobs were 13%, and the industry sector was 6.68, but men still held the top positions.

Religious Conceptions

Religious practices and understandings within diverse communities were presented as influencing women's access to the public political arena. Religious families wanted their women to stay at home and at best attend *khalwas* (religious schools designed for learning the Koran by rote) briefly before reaching the age deemed suitable for marriage and staying at home to rear children. This was the general trend throughout Sudan. The role of civil society and education was also highlighted as contributing to a recovery in women's positions despite the presence of major

obstacles. Women were perfectly capable of managing their time and could engage in public work without it interfering with their performance of household duties.

Significance of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy

Mahatma Gandhi played an important role in motivating women to participate in the freedom movement and in politics of India. Similarly, the Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy can be applied to the Sudanese political context to encourage women to engage in active participation. Mahatma Gandhi believed that women could be a powerful force in the fight to establish a new social and political order, and that Sudanese women should use this as a model for their political activism. His thought was to articulate the connections between private and public life in order to bring women into freedom struggle in India, which can be applied also as a tool to make women more consciousness towards politics of Sudan. He believes in creating conditions which could help women break the shackles of domesticity. If his theory will apply in Sudan, it leads in to increase in the public participation of women.

Conclusion

This paper deals with the elements of the development of Sudanese women's political participation through time and the relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy. It highlights multiple political trajectories from their early days until the contemporary era. Further it has been discussed in this paper about the meanings of political participation, the presence of women in politics, variations in religious interpretations and their impact on political participation, quota system which alluded to the 40 per cent quota in the Constitutional Charter more frequently than other elements supporting women's rights. As Mahatma Gandhi said '*My life is my message*', similarly we can say that the life of woman is itself the great message for any society. Women have the capacity to significantly impact the country's political stability and advancement. The main center point of this paper is about the involvement of women in Sudanese politics and the application of Mahatma Gandhi's ideas to inspire a large number of women to enter the field of mainstream politics. It is possible to improve the status of women in Sudanese politics by implementing the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi..

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