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POLITICIZATION OF WOMEN IN 20TH CENTURY: A STUDY WITHIN COLONIAL CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

In society women serve as the foundation of social structure. Historically women have provided the critical links in structuring social and political organization. The role and status of Muslim women surfaced at the end of the nineteenth century as a part of the large anti-colonialist movements. The role and status of the women are not isolated social phenomena and women's struggle does not take place in a vacuum. Both are determined, enhanced or impeded, by the social, political and economic development of the people's history. If the present Islamization campaign in Pakistan seeks to curtail women's rights and in resistance a women's movement is formed, it would be the result of ongoing process and must be viewed as such. Research paper in hand encompasses the struggle of women to felicitate their constitutional rights which unfortunately were not recognized and realized by the "colonial elite".

KEYWORDS

Politicization; Women's rights; Constitutional Reforms; Muslim Renaissance; Women Education

To understand the forces arranged on either side of the current battle for women's rights, one must trace the steps of Muslim women in the sub-continent and the role of Islam in contemporary

history. Inter-linked the two have to be seen in the light of the evolution of Muslim politics and political thoughts in India and subsequently political development (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987, p.1).

There have been various attempts at social and legal reform aiming at improving women lives in the sub-continent during the twentieth century. These attempts generally have been relating two broader interwoven movements:

1. The social reform movements in British India; and
2. The growing Muslim nationalist movements

As a matter of fact, the changing Muslim reforms in the nineteenth century struggled to introduce female education to ease some of the restrictions on women's rights under status of woman in Pakistan largely has been linked with discourse about the role of Islam in modern state. The two Muslim leaders of the freedom struggle who sought to bring political awareness to the women of the Muslim majority provinces were Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the North West Frontier Province of the then united India and Shikh Muhammad Abdullah in Kashmir. Both were zealous advocates of education for women and had several schools set up for girls' education. Both were successful in drawing women to their meetings. Badsha Khan, as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was known, used to say that men and women were like the two wheels of a chariot and unless the movements were coordinated the chariot would not move. He would attribute the success of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement to the sympathy of the women who made it deep rooted.

It was during Sheikh Abdullah and Badshah Khan's time that women began to attend Friday prayers at the mosques in Kashmir and Frontier Province. Though both of these leaders refrained themselves from approaching the desirability of removal of purdah in general, it was obvious what they felt about it from the example they set for their own families. Sheikh Abdullah's own wife did not observe purdah. Badhsah Khan sent his daughter to convent and then to college in Lucknow and to London. The family women did not observe *purdah* (Samiudin & Khanam, 2002, p.9). In December 1903, the Muhammadan educational conference session was held at Bombay and proved a momentous gathering because it was the first occasion on which Muslim women also participated in the conference. For the first time, through the conference platform, a Parsi lady, Miss Susi Sohrabji, delivered a lecture on female education. In the same conference an article by Chand Begum, a lady from Madras who could not attend the session, was read out to the conference by another Parsi lady. In this article, she hailed the "Reform Party", a group of Muslim supporters of female education, and hurled bitter invectives on reactionary Maulvis. She called upon the Muslim women to follow fervently the female reform movements which were advocating modern education amongst Muslim women and to say good bye to the immovable. In the end, the conference passed a resolution for the establishment of female schools keeping in view the tradition and customs of the Muslim of India. It was also proposed that a *Normal School* for lady teachers should be established at a suitable place and the responsibility of implement? This proposal was accepted by Shaikh Abdullah (Mirza, 1981, p.112).

The following December the female section of the conference held a separate session at Lucknow and agreed to setup *Normal School* at Aligarh. In the Annual Educational conference of 1905 held at Aligarh, Shaikh Abdullah organized an exhibition in which various handmade articles by women were displayed. The women of the Faizi family of Bombay took special interest in this exhibition and Zahra Begum Faizi presided over the women action of the conference. On this occasion, the

proposal of opening a *Normal School* was greatly hailed. The construction of the building of the female normal school had been taken in hand, and in July 1913, when a portion of the building had been completed, the Begum of Bhopal was invited to inaugurate it. This was an important occasion in the history of education of Muslim women. Prominent women leaders came to participate from Lucknow, Delhi, Lahore, Meerut and Muradabad including Bagum Nazli Rafia of Janjira and Atia Begum Faizi from Bombay. The Bagum of Bhopal delivered a thoughtful address in reply to the welcome address presented. By Bagum Shaikh Abdullah. The Bagum of Bhopal held high hopes for the success of female educational programme started by Shaikh Abdullah and his wife (Mirza, 1981, pp.12-15).

In the following year, the first Urdu journal for women *Khatoon (Woman)* was launched by Sheikh Abdullah. The purpose was to popularize the cause of women's education. Molvi Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and his wife Muhammadi Begum made the cause of female education their lifelong mission. Their contribution set an example to be followed by others. It was during Sayyid Ahmad Khan's life time that the Maulana wrote a memorable book in support of women's rights, namely "Haqooq-i-Niswan". Throughout his life, his major concern was to see Muslim women well educated, cultured and respected in society. The Maulana also urged Muslim women to organize *Tahzibi Anjumans* all over the subcontinent in order to collect them on one platform. He came to be known as the *Rahbar-i-Niswan* women guide in women circles ("Tahzib-Niswan Weekly" 1935, pp.736-37).

Altaf Husain Hali, the famous poet of Muslim renaissance, in his poem, *chup ki Dad*, voiced a stirring appeal in favour of Muslim women. He pinpointed the hardships to which Muslim women were being subjected. Alma Rashid-ul-Khairi, another champion of female rights, especially rights of inheritance, wrote extensively in favour of the uplift of Muslim women. He dedicated himself to the moral and mental development of women. His magazine *Ismat*, founded in 1908, gained wide popularity and appreciation amongst women as well as men. The Allama started another women's journal *Tamaddan* in 1911 in support of female rights. He published numerous books dealing especially with the aspects of the life of the Muslim women of the subcontinent (Mirza, 1981, p.112).

The year 1904-1911 saw various Muslim girls' school being opened. Both men and women contributed to this effort and schools sprung up in Bombay, Calcutta, Aligarh, Lahore, Karachi, Patna and other places. The growth of the schools was accompanied by a veritable mushrooming of women's newspapers and journals. In Lahore alone at least three newspapers emerged: *Akhbar-i-Niswan*, *Sharif Bibi* and *Tahzib-i-Niswan*. Most of the newspapers and journals were started by men, but women helped run them and soon started contributing articles. It was the first time that Muslim women in India were being addressed as a group, and were being encouraged to write and speak for themselves. In terms of actual member's progress was slow. In 1911 only two out of every thousand Muslim women were educated. Although the number doubled in the next ten years, the percentage remained a dismal 0.4% by 1924 there was a total of 137,800 literate Muslim women of whom only 3,940, or just under 3% had received modern education. Two families who were pioneers in Muslim women's education were the Faizi family of Bombay and the Suhrawardy family of Bengal. In 1922 the first Muslim woman to receive an MA (in law) was a Bengali woman by the name of Sultan Begum, while the Faizi sisters (Attiya, Zuhra and Nazli) were the first

Muslim women to go abroad for higher education. These sisters played an active role in promoting women's rights (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987, p.1).

In 1924 women were excluded from the Mohammadan educational conference. Angered by this exclusion, Atiya Fiazi gate crashed the 1925 silver Jubilee of the conference having travelled all the way from Bombay to Aligarh for this purpose, she stood up in the middle of the proceeding and started to speak from behind a curtain. She continued speaking without let or hindrance until the embarrassed presiding officer escorted her to the dais. It was a courageous act on her part for it defied social norms and values. Muslim women were not expected to speak out and even less to disrupt all male meetings. By defying convention and taking a stand Atiya Fiazi ensured that women were never again excluded from the conferences (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987, pp.40-41).

The education was extremely important for Indian Muslim women. Without it they were lost and had neither the knowledge nor the tools with which to fight for their rights. The government of India Act of 1909 again increased the total strength of the legislature council to 60. A major part of it was elected directly and the rest indirectly. In the case of direct elections, the franchise was restricted based on the high property and educational qualifications. However, in some of the constituencies, the number of voters did not exceed 9-10. Even this Franchise was extended only to the male population. There was hardly any protest at the time against this discrimination from the quarter. The government of India Act of 1906 provided separate electorates for the Muslims. Soon after this, some drastic political developments occurred in the subcontinent (Khan & Sarwar, 2009, pp.112-13).

By the time, the Act of 1909 was due for review and new package of reforms was promised, a section of women had become conscious of the importance of constitutional reforms and sought to find a place for themselves under the proposed reforms. Numerous factors brought about this change in their outlook. Firstly, education among women contributed to this change in their views and attitudes about their place in the society. Initially, various socio-economic elements had blocked the advancement of their education. The general seclusion of the Muslim female particularly the practice of Purdah (Vail), the symbol of her identity in the Indian environment, had hindered the process of her education. In 1890, Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan began to promote female education. The Anjuman-i-Himayat-Islam in the Punjab and others similar organizations in other regions established female education institution.

The political unrest before the First World War persuaded the major political parties, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League (AIML), to come closer to each other. This reconciliation culminated in the Congress League pact at Lucknow in 1916. One clause of this pact suggests that the provincial legislatures should be elected directly by the people through as broad a franchise as possible (Ahmad, n.d., p.5).

Although women were not specifically mentioned but the phrase as broad a franchise as possible and the word, people were interpreting to indicate that those who drafted the pact did not intend to exclude the female from electoral role. Lastly, the educated women in their struggle were influenced by the extension of franchise to the English female 1909. During the First World War, various women organizations emerged that were involved in the female welfare. Some of these organized a movement to secure the right to vote for women in the next constitution reforms. The Indian Women's Association, enrolling women of every complexion in its fold, was more active

than the other organizations. In the same time at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Turkey took arms against the Allies the end of the war turned out to be disastrous for Turkey particularly and for the Muslim world generally. The British government was bent upon the complete annihilation of the Ottoman Khilafat a symbol of Muslim unity.

They pursued their objectives; these organizations were also extending in practice the feminist agenda from social to political rights. This enabled them to bring the issue of their civil rights to the center of the national political stage. Their cause also received publicity and support at the International political stage. Their cause also received publicity and support at the International level; particularly from some British women's group. Religious sentiments of the Indian Muslims were shocked at the attitude of the British government. They could not tolerate the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Khilafat. In order to force the British government to change its attitude towards Turkey. This came to be known as the Khilafat Movement and took such huge proportions that it submerged the whole of Indian political activities for some time. Therefore, the British government had to resort to force and the Ali Brothers were arrested.

In these days when Muslim leaders had jailed and Khilafat was at the verge of the extinction at the hand of the British. Muslim women entered the political field under Bi Amma, the mother of the Ali Brothers. Abadi Begum popularly known as Bi Amma, proved to be a brave soldier of the struggle against the British government, who at the Age of 73 made a powerful appeal to the drooping spirits of the Indian mass. Born in 1852 and scion of renowned Nawab family of the united provinces, she came to occupy a remarkable place in the history of the freedom movement for she was the first Muslim women to take active part in politics (Mirza, 1981, p.32).

In 1917, Bi Amma broke with tradition and addressed the annual meeting of the all-male Muslim league in place of her son (Mohammad Ali) who had been arrested by the British. At this time that Muslim women had addressed a political meeting of men. Bi Amma continued to address male and female gatherings at which she condemned the British and urged people to join the Khilafat Movement.

In 1921, three years before her death, Bi Amma addressed a mass meeting in Lahore, and lifted her Veil for the first time she said:

Let us take the oath that until our country is free from foreign bandage we shall not think of pleasure and luxury. The time has come when each man and women should consider himself or herself as a soldier in the army of God (Jafri, 1969, pp.183-85).

Bi Amma, however, did not survive for long and died in 1924. Her death was a great loss for the nation. But Muslim women who had come out to work with Bi Amma were political pioneers and their activities were a necessary prelude to their active participation in the coming political struggle of the Indo Pakistan Subcontinent.

In 1917, the women's struggle entered a new phase. New phrase fast spread after the announcement of 20 August 1917, by the Secretary of State, Edwin Montague that the ultimate object of the British Government was the establishment of responsible government in India.

When Montague visited India in connection with the proposed reforms, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu led a fourteen-member women delegation to represent women's demand before them. There was only

one Muslim woman in this delegation, the wife of Maulana Hasrat Mohani, the famous Poet-Politician.

In addition to other demands including the demand for educational institution for the females, the delegation asked the right to vote for women in the future constitution. It demands recognition of women as people at the time of drawing up suffrage and the same opportunities of representation in public life and services as were allowed to men. It was clarified that their demands were motivated by a desire to have an equal opportunity with men to serve their country in different walks of life, and not to gain merely political rights for the females.

The deputation for the first time demanded official recognition for the principal of female suffrage. Although the reply given to the deputation was sympathetic but no mention of women's claim was made in the Montague-Chelmsford proposals for the electorates. Therefore, in 1918, the All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress announced their support for this demand.

Not surprisingly, the task of institutionalizing women's representation was initiated through representations from the beginning. It was due to initial steps taken by the government in British India that both suffrage and candidature of women became possible. "The 1919 Montague-Chelmsford reforms largely as a result of an organized campaign spearheaded by the Indian Women Association". However, when the Montague-Chelmsford Report had been published, it made no mention about women's franchise, although it did point out the obstacles in the way of female education.

The women were not discouraged by this rejection of their demands. When the Southborough Franchise Committee came to the Subcontinent to determine the issue of franchise, women's delegation represented the issue of female franchise before the committee. The Franchise Committee did not recommend the extension of franchise to the female population. The reasons it gives for its recommendation included that: None of the local governments had advised the extension of franchise to women; it was not practicable to bring women to the polling station during election; Conservatism and the general social conditions, especially illiteracy, barred such a concession.

The women were still undaunted. Led by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, they appeared before the joint Parliamentary Committee to present their case. On hearing their representation, the Committee laid down certain general principles under which the women could acquire the right to vote. Final decision was left to the central and provincial legislatures.

Gradually, the provincial legislatures extended the franchise for the females. However, the conditions of education and possession of property worked against the women's right to vote. In provinces, the proportion of female electorate was only 6% of the total adult female population. It meant that 1 out of 200, or only 50% were enfranchised.

The rules framed under the 1919 Act had also barred women from membership of the legislatures. When the Government of India Bill of 1919 was enacted, it excluded women from the vote, but the statute allowed provincial assemblies to drop the exclusion clause if they so wished. Some of the provincial assemblies then dropped the exclusion clause: Madras was the first province to give women's right to vote in 1921, Bombay and U.P. gave the right of vote in 1923, while in Bengal the right was given in 1929. Among the Indian states the initiative was first taken by the state of

Travancore in 1920 and its example was later followed by the state of Mysore and Cochin (Ali, 2000, p.177).

In 1919, after the introduction of Government of India Bill in Parliament, a deputation consisting of some women's leader, led by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu in its evidence before the committee, supported the demand for the extension of the franchise for women. The Parliament, however, decided to leave the question of female franchise to the provincial legislature ("Tahzib-Niswan Weekly," 1938, p.1077).

By 1925, except Bihar and Orissa, all the legislatures had given to women the right to vote and in these two legislatures this right was granted in 1928. But women continued their struggle for complete emancipation because the property qualification operated heavily against them.

In 1928, the Statutory commission set up for the purpose of reviewing the working of the Reforms of 1919, laid special stress on the need of the enfranchising a much larger proportion of women for future legislatures. In its report, it recommended that "no system of Franchise can be considered satisfactory or as likely to lead to good Government where such a great disparity exists between the voting strength of the two sexes. We feel, therefore, that special qualification should be prescribed for women".

The first-Round Table Conference held in 1930-31, a Memorandum was submitted on behalf of the Indian women by Mrs. Subbarayan Madras and Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz daughter of Sir Muhammad Shafi from Lahore. In this memorandum, the women expressed the hope that the question of women's political status would receive consideration by the Conference and that no disability would be attached to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed or sex in regard to the holding of any public office or in the exercise of any trade or calling. They wanted the assurance of equal rights and obligations for all citizens without any bar on account of sex.

1931-32, the Franchise Committee headed by Lord Lothian came to India. The representatives of the All-India Women's Conference, a Hindu women's organization set up in 1927, met the president of the Committee and presented another memorandum in which they reiterated the principles enunciated in the previous memorandum.

Efforts ultimately gained fruit and it was in 1932 that the Working Committee of the All-India Muslim League passed a resolution in support of women's rights which stated that all political and social obstacles and disqualifications in the way of female suffrage in the struggle for social and political emancipation should be removed and they should be considered equal to men and be given adequate representation. In the following year women again advocated their demand and the All-India Women's conference sent its representatives to appear before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London. They pressed before this Committee that their demands should be considered which had been already incorporated in their second memorandum.

Similarly, the Government of India Act of 1935 did not come up to the expectations of women. Under the new constitution; 60, 00, 000 women were enfranchised and six seats out of a total of 150 were reserved for women in the Council of State and nine out of 250 in the Federal Assembly (Mirza, 1981, pp.34-36). Although it was mere an eye wash and it was far away from the real needs and demands. However; women became highly motivated and sensitized about their roles and responsibilities.

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