

# **Egyptian Women's Movement during Hosni Mubarak Period: Role and Challenges**

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**JUDITH ANNE LAL**



**Centre for African Studies (CAS)  
School of International Studies  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
New Delhi 110067  
INDIA  
2012**

**M. Phil.**

**JUDITH ANNE LAL**

**2012**



Centre for African Studies  
School of International Studies  
**Jawaharlal Nehru University**  
New Delhi - 110067

Phone : 011-26738761  
E-mail : cas.sisjnu@gmail.com

24 July, 2012

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "**Egyptian Women's Movement during Hosni Mubarak Period: Role and Challenges**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Masters of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

JUDITH ANNE LAL

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiner for evaluation.

Professor Ajay K. Dubey

(CHAIRPERSON)

Centre for African Studies  
School of International Studies  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
Professor Ajay K. Dubey

(SUPERVISOR)



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*Judith Anne Lal*

## **Abbreviation Index**

EFU	Egyptian Feminist Union
WWCC	Wafd Women Council Committee
IAW	International Alliance of Women
NDP	National Democratic Party
AWSA	Arab Women's Solidarity Association
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
SRC	Social Research Centre
NCW	National Council for Women
NCMC	National Council for Childhood & Motherhood
ADEW	Association for the Development & Enhancement of Women
PVO	Private Voluntary Organization
SCAF	Supreme Council Armed Forces
NCHR	National Council of Human Rights
ERSAP	Economic Reforms & Structural Adjustment Policies
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics
UN CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Women Protesting at the Tehrir Square.....	51
Figure 2 Women’s Groups at Tehrir.....	54
Figure 3: Egyptian 1919 Revolution: Egyptian Women’s Archive.....	111
Figure 4 & 5 Tehrir Square 2011, Society Pages and Al Ahram Online Weekly: ‘Women at the square.....	111

## **Preface**

The Egyptian Women's Movement has been of activism and involvement in the state apparatus; demanding reforms in the state machinery for their legal, civil and political rights. The rise of the women's movement is linked to the rise of nationalism in Egypt. Egyptian women got involved in the mainstream nationalist movement against the colonial rule for the freedom of Egypt and also for working for the betterment of their own freedom.

Education is an important precondition for liberation making it (liberation) a far reality as more than half of the Egyptian population was not considered fit for rational and scientific education. Women were the ones who were debarred from education. As upper class women received religious and domesticity lessons at their homes. So, the first stage for advocacy; was educating girls and establishing schools for girls in humanities and the sciences. Most of the initiatives were taken up by upper class women who had access to material resources.

The women's movement was carried forth by women belonging to upper and middle class. Women's treatment and their freedom depended dually on their class and the fact that they were born different, born "female". As women became conscious of gendered relations and lived in different social circumstance, they began to question the norms governing these relations. The politics of relations between men and women and code of moral behaviour dictated through religious dictates and higher patriarchy within homes and in the form of the state apparatus has become the core of questioning by women and those who question such paternalistic views.

Women were an integral part of the early twentieth century revolution in Egypt against British and French occupation. The students' movement witnessed both male and female students protesting against the colonial designs of the British and French.

Early rise of the Egyptian Women's Movement was quite remarkable in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women's personal questioning of the inequality in their lives and the exposure to foreign nationals led to the rise of feminist consciousness. This however, cannot be minimized to an argument that the women's movement was influenced from outside

Egypt, or was the western influence. Though, these did have an impact. Women engaged themselves in a dialogue with regard to their status and treatment in their societies and the world over.

The women's movement in Egypt entailed many different kinds of operations some limiting their field of work to charitable initiatives and some to expanding their scope of operation in political activism or participation by demanding women's rights sanctioned by state laws and the protection for the same.

Amongst the earliest feminists in Egypt are Huda Sharawi and Nabawiya Musa, belonging to the upper class and the middle class respectively. Both Huda Sharawi and Musa in their memoirs, share how their identity as Egyptian women and their belonging to their particular class influenced their economic and social status as well as their sense of individual identity.

Both women advocated for girls education. Musa even established private schools for girls and influenced parents to send their daughters to school. Later on, we have more radical women speaking up for rights and equality; such as Doria Shafiq, Nawal El Saadawi, the contemporaries Moza Hassan and Fatma Emam to name a few.

The women's movement is a resistance movement against the state's policy of controlling women's lives. In the 1960's, the rise of Islamism permeated the state structures and led to the politicization of religion which invariably had an effect on the society and the gendered relations. Thus, it becomes important to study the antagonistic relationship between the state, Islamists, and feminists (women) and their constant oppositional relationship. Hosni Mubarak in his nearly 30 year long reign tried to appease the Islamists and yet, tried to project a secular and woman friendly state structure.

However, the Hosni Mubarak period reflected inconsistency with regard to protecting women's rights. Though, a few token appointments were made in the state structure to empower women but at the same time Mubarak conformed to Al Azhar and the Islamists to ban the opinion of women writers and activists. This duality was taken to task with the growing apathy against the regime of which the 26<sup>th</sup> January revolution was the result.

The recent 2011 uprising, witnessed participation by women and men demanding democracy, justice and equality. This led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak.

The rising trend in women's group's advocacy and literary initiatives along with the growing accessibility of new electronic technology has heralded in new avenues for women to speak up and reach out to a wider global citizenry. Therefore, it's quite evident that the women's movement in Egypt has been one of activism, advocacy, and spreading awareness and not one of dormancy.

Post the 2011 uprising, women once again persist with their rightful demands and advocacy against the majority consisting of Islamists. Women's 'dissent voices' are the most important component for a democratic system and culture. The future of democratic Egypt lies in the recognition of these dissent voices and the fulfillment of their just demand for the progress of the human society.



**Egyptian Women’s Movement during Hosni Mubarak Period:  
Role and Challenges**

**Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 .....</b>	<b>1- 27</b>
<b>Introduction: Early Women’s Voices</b>	
1.1) Introduction & Background.....	1
1.2) Women Activism against Colonial Rule.....	9
1.2.1 Egyptian Feminist Union.....	10
1.2.2 State Structure and Women’ Activism .....	11
1.3) Post Colonialism - Claiming the Public Space.....	13
1.4) President Nasser and the State.....	15
1.4.1 Consequences of Nasser’s policy of State Feminism on Women’s Groups.....	15
1.4.2 Rise of Islamic Groups .....	17
1.5) Muhammad Anwar Sadat (1971-1981) .....	17
1.5.1 Rise of Political Islamism.....	18
1.5.2 Policy Impact – (I) Social .....	21
(II) Economic	
1.6) Egyptian Social Setting and Women’s Status .....	22
1.6.1 State Feminism under Sadat.....	22
1.6.2 Jehan Laws 1979 .....	24

<b>CHAPTER 2 .....</b>	<b>28- 46</b>
<b>Mubarak Regime: Phase-I (1981-2000)</b>	
2.1) Mubarak and Political Islamists.....	29
2.1.1 Backlash on Women’s Rights: 1985 .....	29
2.2) State economic policy: 1990s.....	30
2.2.1 The Impact of SAP on Women .....	31
2.2.2 Women & Work (i) Private (ii) public sectors .....	32
2.3) State Policy against Women’s Groups .....	37
2.3.1 Growing Civil Society-Women’s Research Center .....	38
2.3.2 Emergence of NGOs & PVOs .....	39
2.3.3 Emergence of Government Organizations.....	40
2.4) January 2000 Constitutional Reforms by Hosni Mubarak.....	42
2.4.1Legal	
2.4.2Political	
2.4.3Social (i) Family Laws (ii) Divorce & Child Custody	
2.5) Loopholes in Reforms .....	43
2.5.1 Islamists Response .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 3 .....</b>	<b>47 – 62</b>
<b>Mubarak Regime Phase- II (2000 – 2011) &amp; Role of Women</b>	
3.1) Rise of Movements.....	48
3.1.1 Political Suppression – Women Call for Democracy 2005	
3.2) Projects on Women’s Empowerment Reform – 2008.....	50
3.2.1 Judiciary	
3.2.2 Political Representation	

3.3) Arab Spring 2011& Egyptian Uprising.....	51
3.3.1Political Suppression	
3.3.2 Economic stagnancy	
3.4) Women for Democracy: The Egyptian Uprising &Women’s Role....	53
3.4.1Women in the Uprising	
3.4.2 Campaigns for Women’s Rights.....	54
(i)Building Alliance	
(ii)Importance of Secular Alliance .....	55
3.4.3 Challenges to Gender Equality	
3.5) Coalition of Egyptian Feminist Union.....	58
3.5.1 Draft letter for Democratic Egypt .....	59
3.5.2 Democracy and Future of Women’s Movement	
3.6) Demand: Secular Civil Code or the Shari’a .....	61
 <b>CHAPTER 4 .....</b>	<b>63 - 84</b>
<b>Role of Egyptian women’s organization for reform in the social and political status</b>	
4.1) Women response to reforms .....	63
4.1.1Personal Status Laws	
4.2) Analyses of political status.....	65
4.2.1 Women’s Political Representation	
4.2.2 Initiatives by Mubarak .....	66
(I) Political Participation      (II) Decision-making	
4.2.3 Economic Status and Class .....	67
(I)Recent statics on women participation in labour force	
(II) Illiteracy & Lack of Awareness	

4.3) Role Secular and Islamists women organizations/Reformers .....	71
4.3.1 Role of Advocacy Groups/ Organizations .....	72
4.3.2 Campaigns against Female Circumcision / Domestic Violence .....	73
4.3.3 Female Reproductive Rights .....	77
4.3.4 Honour Crimes/ Killings .....	78
4.4) Role of Egypt in International Conventions on Women’s Rights .....	79
(I) CEDAW	
(II) Beijing Declaration: Fourth World Conference on Women: September 1995	
4.4.1 Women’s Rights Implementation in Egypt	
4.4.2 Comparative Study: Reality and Convention .....	81
(I) Gender and cultural conflicts: Challenges .....	83
<b>CHAPTER 5.....</b>	<b>85 – 103</b>
<b>Contextualizing Women’s Activism: in North African context</b>	
5.1) Islamic / Secular Feminist Discourse .....	85
5.2) Women’s Rights, the Shari’a and the Secular civil code .....	87
5.2.1 Women’s rights Debates within Islam religion	
(i) Shari’a-Islamic foundations for the rights of women .....	87
(ii) Position of Women in Early Islam .....	89
(iii) Dictates of Islamization projects: male guardianship over females .....	90
(iv) Islamists Women Scholars .....	92
5.3) Secular Civil Code .....	94
5.3.1 Minority Rights (Coptic Christians and others) .....	96
5.3.2 Secular Constitutional Demand	
5.4) Contextualizing Women’s activism in the North African region.....	98
5.4.1 Women’s Activism and Social Change.....	101
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>104</b>

# **CHAPTER 1**

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction: Early Women's Voices

### 1.1) Introduction and Background

The early rise of the Women Movement is linked to the years of growing women's consciousness and emerging nationalistic movement. The central force of the Women's movement is the 'discourse of rights' of 'women'. The Women's movement in Egypt has its origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *al-Haraka-Nassa'iyya* (Women Movement) or *al- Haraka- Nassawiyya* (Feminist Movement) emerged out of the personal experiences of women who started to question the patriarchal authority within their homes and the "culture of seclusion" for womenfolk as deemed by the conservative society.

The women's movement comprised/s of women' activism in the form of collective women groups and ones who openly profess themselves as 'feminist' organizations (*nassawiyya groups*). These groups were formed mainly by upper and middle class women, providing resources and services for spreading awareness for educating the girl children, working for improving women/girls health services in rural and urban areas and advocating for women's right to work. In a way this activism in the process engulfed within it a mix of secular groups, feminist, and Islamists women groups working in these areas concerned. The fact that these groups; were formed, is a major reflection of women' conscious decision to change the prevalent norms of the society for a better a future.

In most cases Egyptian women's status is determined by the religious code, the Shari' a. The Shari' a is the Islamic religious (divine) law governing the lives of women and men in matters of rights and personal status laws<sup>1</sup>. One of the conservative law permitted a husband or father to force his wife or daughter to remain home, be under lock and key to obtain obedience. The mixing of the sexes was not a norm in the Egyptian society thus the harem was an all female space for the women of the family. The veil and harem were two

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<sup>1</sup> Personal Status laws – laws governed by the Islamic law called *Shari'a* include legislations on marriage, divorce and child custody. These laws are discriminatory towards women.

important symbols of religious identity which were questioned and even debated. The veil and harem culture both have a gender and class base. The veil in Arabic means *hijab*, linguistically anything that hides or separates was introduced to Islam and went through different stages and meanings.

According to Mernissi, the first refers to a curtain that separates the Prophet from other men, the other which covers women's bodies and faces. The first women to be advised to wear the veil were the women in the family of the Prophet to distinguish themselves from others specially, the non believers and slaves. The slaves were at the lowest rung of the society and thus were harassed in the streets<sup>2</sup>. Eventually, Muslim women whatever their class began to wear the veil. However, emphasizing that Islam was not the first to introduce the veil. It was a cultural practice. Still there were Muslim women who did not veil. Upper and middle class women continued with the veil. Lower and rural women wear the veil but not in any strict fashion.

As opposed, to the orientalist "exotic view of the harem". The harem culture was confined to the class structure. It was the upper class which observed this kind of norm where women had a separate quarter in a big household; mainly headed by a eunuch or an older woman of the family controlling the household affairs and movements of the women of the family. Upholding the; patriarchal dogma of 'women's confinement' within their homes.

However, class was also a very defining phenomenon as middle class also observed gender segregation but there were no such strict 'defining separate spaces' for males and females. Nelson Cynthia argues that women influenced the public from their private positions. As women in their small groups had influence and were important networks of communication providing information to their men folk.<sup>3</sup> Within these groups women addressed their segregation and issues which were not discussed leading to awareness. Women and men belonging to the lower class were engaged in economic activity in partnership and thus, women were in the public realm for the fulfillment of their economic needs. This, however,

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<sup>2</sup>Mernissi. Women and Islam. For the development of wearing the veil, see ch.5, Pp 85-101 and ch. 10, 180-188.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson, Cynthia & Doria, "Egyptian Feminist". 1996.

did not mean they were completely free. They were in a position to bargain. Politically, Egyptian men and women were under colonial rule.

Unveiling in the 1920's-30's - Women started to revolt against such customs and conditions. Huda Sha'rawi was the first to publicly unveil in 1924. Later, on as the Islamists hold intensified during the 70s and 80s they emphasized on the idea of women re-veiling as to live up to the ideals of Islam establishing an authentic Islamic identity as opposed to the western style. This kind of cultural preaching by the patriarchs has led to a situation where unveiled women are not only targets of sexual harassment verbal and physical; women were not protected by law.

So, women Muslim and Christians took to the veiling in 1980s to defend themselves on streets. The veil which was viewed as a sign of segregation is now a religious symbol which women use to protect themselves. However, this strongly points out to the double standards of modernity the state emphasizes on and religious men preach off. Women's right to dignity is not protected by laws. Until she is veiled she has strong ground of being respected otherwise she is harassed. The fundamental ideology of the veil is to keep women at home.

The strictest forms of separation and segregation were practiced by the upper class deeming the practice as prestigious. 'Honour' is the main principle at play. As the honour of men and family were dependent on a woman's sexual purity. The patriarchal ideology sought to control women's uncontrolled sexuality by way of segregation and confinement of women, thus, by separating the sexes.

Gradually, in the nineteenth century with the introduction of new economic and social institution eroded the strict segregation of the sexes and the confinement of upper and middle class women.

In the beginning of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muhammad Ali encouraged modernization of the country's educational system, cultural and administrative structures and private property. New classes emerged as the state sold lands. Education included syllabus on sciences and art. The first school for girls in Egypt was opened in 1832; upper class women received private education at their homes because of strict class and gender restriction. Girls in



particular were not thought as rational beings for receiving scientific education but fit for receiving domestic instruction for marriage and the obligations. Girls were given religious instruction in the homes and received domestic grooming to be 'fine' future "wives" and "mothers". As it is very clearly mentioned in the personal memoirs of Huda Sharawi, she experienced the difference of treatment as opposed to her brother.

*" Girls were taught to memorize the Qur'an and were given lesson in domesticity. I wanted to learn Arabic grammar asked for instruction. When my instructor brought the book the eunuch in our home told him to keep the book back as the young lady has no use of it as she will not be a judge. "I became depressed and began to neglect my studies; hating being a girl because it kept me away from the education I sought".<sup>4</sup>*

At the turn of the century Egyptians grew more orthodox in their treatment of women; as a means to stress their cultural identity in the course of growing European ascendancy. Women were partly used as symbols of cultural identity and difference from the European identity. Many upper class women began questioning these differences thus there was the developing awareness of feminist consciousness. Women started demanding their right to education as granted by the Qur'an. With the state reforms and women pressing for education; eventually, education was granted to girls. Middle class girls started to enroll in state schools. The British colonial government along with missionaries opened primary schools for girls. The Coptic Christian minority gradually opened schools for both boys and girls. The Coptic Christian girls benefitted more from the opening of education to girls than Muslim girls who still largely received instruction at home. Education was not however, a privilege the lower class enjoyed.

According to Badran, Nabawiyah Musa a middle class girl was the first to receive a degree from the ministry of Education. She acquired education on her own, against her mother's approval. She enrolled herself in a state school promising to pay her fees. Musa in her memoirs says that the colonial government had passed the law; though, they were hardly

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<sup>4</sup> Personal Memoirs of Huda Sha'rawi...*"Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)."* Feminists Press, Cairo.

any implementation and facility to cater to the need to educate girls. She received education in a separate room and also took the examinations in a separate room. On completing her primary and secondary education; Musa went for teachers training, a profession just opening up for women. She became an ardent advocate for educating girls in the same line of instruction as boys. She on her own initiative campaigned for educating girls. Musa was also a staunch nationalist against British rule in Egypt. Her views are seen as stronger than the male nationalist of the time. Musa experienced discrimination in salary scale to male and female teachers to which she protested. Due to which she constantly was in friction with Ministry of Education.<sup>5</sup>

With the opening up of the right to education to girls many women forayed into professions dominated by men. Teaching became the profession through which women actively became part of awakening the younger generations to the essence of 'equality and justice'. As women entered the profession, male teachers were threatened of their economic security being hampered by the entrance of women in the profession.

### **Secular Women's Debate:**

The rise of secular feminism coincided with two phenomena: arrival of printing press in Egypt and the growing literacy rate among women, which led to a class of women writing and reading texts. This gave rise to female writing and public reading. Women who received basic education became women of the pen. These women began questioning the essential "Why" embedded in the hierarchical family structure. Why were girls, differently treated in terms of love? Why did Girls not receive the same education as boys? Why were they married off without their consent as opposed to the Islamic rule?

Women joined their efforts crafting a female voice. Women transcended the bounds of religious communities as they articulated the "feminist discourse" in new writings and

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<sup>5</sup> Margot Badran (1996), *Feminists, Islam and Gender: Gender and the making of Modern Egypt*, Chapter 1.

fresh networks of women (Badran and Cooke 2004; Baron 1994; Booth 2002).<sup>6</sup> The essential questioning of these experiences led to the emergence of women questioning the patriarchal structure within their homes and society at large. Literature became the site for early feminist struggles. An important woman 'A' isha al-Taymuriyah (1840-1902) questioned women's domestic seclusion. She became a writer as she made her way to learn Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

In *Nata'ij al-Ahwal fi al-Aqwal wa-al-Af'al* (The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds, published in 1887) she expressed her solidarity with women who suffered from the culture of seclusion. In a book published in 1890 called the *Mir'at al-Ta'amal fi al-'Umur* (The Mirror of Contemplation of Things) al-Taymuriyah touched upon the sensitive issue of 'marriage problem' and the domestic ills prevalent in her class as men tyrannized over women, trying to suppress them while men took their own liberties. She protested that men were too free and women too "incarcerated". Her writings promoted sisterhood to protest against such hierarchical relations, which is seen as marking the beginning of the feminist consciousness in Egypt. Many women began to write from their homes on 'women and their status within the homes and society' at large. Though, that was just the beginning.

There were a few male reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century emphasizing right to education. Male reformers who raised the issue of women's right to education were Ahmed Fares el-Shidyak, published 'One Leg Crossed Over the Other' in 1855, Riffa Rafi el-Tahtawi (1801-71) Sheikh Mohammad Abdou; they based their argument on basic teachings of Islam, which were considered to be misinterpreted. Qasim Amin (1865-1908) defended women's right to education and work. His book *Al Mara Al Jadida* (The New Woman) upset orthodox Muslims because he based his argument on natural rights of human beings and less on religion. Women writers and reformers such as Warda al-Yazigi (1838-1924), Zainab Fawwaz (1850-1914) many more founded literary salons, women's clubs, and

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<sup>6</sup> Margot Badran. Between Secular and Islamic Feminism/s: Reflections on the Middle East and Beyond. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol.1, No.1 (winter, 2005), pp.6-28

journals which addressed women secluded lives in their respective social and economic backgrounds<sup>7</sup>.

In their prose, stories, essays, articles and discussions they expressed their unhappiness with the situation of most women; addressing and voicing women right to education, amendments marriage laws to secure women's livelihoods. Writers also raised issues of veiling and segregation calling for reforms in laws for the rights of women. Malak Hifni Nasif, writing under the pen name Bahithat al-Badiya was a poet, teacher and activist. Malak and Musa delivered lectures and discussions on women's rights and their activism. Huda, Bahithat and Musa clearly expressed their feminist vision in their writings and activism. These feminists asserted that men and women were of the same natural order asserting that these differences are socially constructed. The adherents of the doctrine of biological determinists emphasized women's natural roles in procreation to assign them to the home and deny their wider social, economical and political roles. Nabawiyya Musa countered that men, too, had natural roles in procreation. She asked, 'Can women reproduce alone? She uses the peasant model to point out to the majority of women in Egypt as elsewhere in the world, historically and to this day, combined reproduction and mothering with work and life outside the house. This basic fact the Islamists typically ignored.

The inception of a movement for the liberation of women was not new to Egyptian women. Nor a western idea as Egyptian women protested against suppression. As there was already a haraka nassawiyya/feministe` movement in Egypt advocating for literacy for girls and freedom from seclusion.

It is important to mention that education did two very important things. Awakened women to their rights and dignity and secondly, gave a platform for nationalistic struggle in Egypt. The schools and universities became the operating grounds for inculcating nationalist ferment. There was a huge student's movement involved in the freedom struggle.

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<sup>7</sup> Nawar al-Hassan (2004), Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women? *Third World Quarterly*, 25(3): 521-536.

## **Women in 1919 Revolution**

Women kept up an alternative movement alive, against the colonial state as well as the universal patriarchal structure. Women were very much involved in the nationalistic struggle against the colonial rule; protesting, demonstrating against foreign rule, also involved in some armed affairs proved their involvement in matters of politics; 'the public affair' which was not seen as their realm of space, in a way challenging the patriarchal set up. However, as the paternalistic attitude goes, women's contributions, political activism and even lives were not accounted as important contributions in the struggle. The rise of nationalist consciousness was also part of the realization women experienced that they were subservient not only to the colonial rule but also to their Egyptian men. Nationalism, modernity and development led women to foray into the public domain claiming their positions which were traditionally forbidden.

Women's participation in the 1919 revolution as members of the Left, Wafd Party, student's party and individuals contributed to the nationalistic movement. In 1918 the three leading nationalist men of Wafd party, Sa 'd Zaghlul, Abd al Aziz Fahmi and Ali Sha 'rawi desired to form a delegation for independence talks for Egypt with the British High Commission. The three were arrested. With the arrest of the three, there was large protest in the cities. On March 14<sup>th</sup> 1918, Hamidah Khilil, 'a woman of the people' was the first martyr. Following this, two days later, upper class women held street demonstrations protesting against the repressive measures of the British government and the arrest of the nationalist leaders. Muslim and Christian women were in the demonstration against the colonial rule holding placards which read "down with oppression and tyrants".

Lower class women rose up more spontaneously in street protests alongside men. It was these women who were targets; they were fired upon and killed. Those who became martyrs were Hamidah Khalil, 'A' isha bint 'Umar, Famiyah Riyad, Najiyah Ismail, and Sa 'idah Hassan. Many more women were killed and wounded. Schoolgirls were part of the independence struggle. Students from the Saniya School actively participated in the freedom movement distributing pamphlets and sending messages to the nationalist's leaders, spreading awareness among locals to support the struggle against the colonial rule. The three male nationalist were released on April 8, 1919, women and men joined in mass

demonstration. This demonstration however, was a stunning display of mass unity but also of class and gender hierarchy. As men marched in front accentuating their positions: members of the cabinet, then deputies from legislative assembly, ulema, judges, lawyers, doctors, army officers, and followed by male students. Women followed behind them again in class distinction. Upper class women followed by middle and lower class women<sup>8</sup>. This class and gendered hierarchy exhibit the prevalence of a deeply rooted patriarchal and class structure.

## **1.2) Women Activism against Colonial Rule:**

Egyptians continued their struggle. In December 1919, Muslim and Christian women held a public meeting in St. Marks Church in Cairo made a direct protest against the British governments Milner Mission to investigate the 1919 revolution and also for their ill treatment during the revolution. Women signed on protest charters. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1920 women again gathered at the St. Marks's Cathedral and formed a political organization naming it *lajnat al-Wafd al-Markaziyah lil-Sayyidat* (Wafdist Women's Central Committee) WWCC attached itself to Wafd group. Many women were part of the 1919 revolution. These women nationalist married to the Wafd male leaders. Huda Sharawi elected president, Ester Fahmi Wissa, Louise Majorelle, Ulfat Ratib and many were active women nationalists. The WWCC broadened the nationalist base for gaining popular support by networking through female associations and spreading awareness for nationalism. In one of the incidence British government used the Egyptian men in the army to suppress the women protesters. The women agitators reportedly shamed the Egyptian soldiers for backing a colonial government in their own country disgracing their own country. WWCC strengthened support in Upper Egypt with school teachers and students.

With a proposal being drafted for Egypt's independence between the Wafdist men and British was circulated to various groups for reaction. The proposal was not consulted with WWCC. The women wing published their criticism of the plan.

The WWCC is seen as more nationalist and articulate in their action and demand. WWCC kept up the protests and demanded complete independence from British rule as the

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<sup>8</sup> Badran,(1996) (77).

delegation led by Yakan was broken down and Zaghlul arrested. Women sent a petition to the British government and to British press demanding an end to martial law and protectorate, objecting to the formation of cabinet till Zaghlul was arrested. Women led an economic boycott against the British while organizing for committees to sell shares for national banks. Thus, buying the first shares. The Wafdist praised the contribution of WWCC to the nationalist movement.<sup>9</sup>

With the British unilateral declaration of Independence on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1922 which was conditional on four pointers limiting Egypt's sovereignty- continued presence of British troops, British security for imperial communication, protect foreign interest in Egypt, separation of Sudan from Egypt. Both WWCC and Wafd objected to this.

### **Egyptian Feminist Union:**

As already mentioned women organized an alternative movement against the colonial structure and patriarchy. Following independence, women's liberation slipped in order of priority to male liberals, women thus became actively engaged in their own struggle. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1923 Huda Sha 'rawi at her residence with the WWCC members formed the Egyptian Feminist Union. Sha 'rawi stressed , 'It is in our interest as Egyptian women, as well as in the interest of the Egyptian question, to attend the international conference to promote the status of Egyptian women and demand rights.' A year later, the Egyptian constitution was promulgated. The constitution declared all Egyptians equal with civil and political rights. However, a few weeks later a law electorate violated the principle of equality by limiting the right to political rights to male Egyptians. This was the eye opening reality for the Egyptian women who relentlessly participated in the nation's freedom movement.

Women were relegated to the position of second class citizenship with no political rights. Women again began advocating for their rights against the patriarchal set up claiming equality and representation in the political system as Egyptians claiming their nationality.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 6 Margot Badran (2005).

Women writers/activists expressed their disappointment as the political movement was sabotaged by male nationalists who do not wish to liberate women.<sup>10</sup>

The WWCC and EFU distributed the demands of Egyptian women, a nationalist cum feminist demand for restructuring the Egyptian state and society. By this time many other women's organizations and groups had been formed in areas for social work /philanthropy. These groups collaborated and advocated demanding the education right for girls and women, equal wages for women, complete independence and political representation of women. The Egyptian women thus, for the first time made a feminist demand in the public.

Women not being a homogenous group; categorized on class and religion lines have some different approaches and way of looking of things. However, the status of women belonging to different classes was categorized by one commonality of 'unequal opportunity and rights'. As the lives of women was in general governed by the state statutes and the dominant ideology of the time. And the dominant ideology had already been challenged when women entered the public space and actively participated in the nationalist movement.

The WWCC is seen as more radical and nationalist as they did not want any compromise with the British government. Women demanded complete independence and sovereignty of Egypt. The Wafd however, prevented any nationalist debate with the WWCC as part of the Wafdist. Sha 'rawi expressed the disappointment she and all women nationalist felt over the unfulfilled promises men had made during the liberation struggle. Egyptian feminism joined in solidarity with international feminist movement. As many countries were granting women the political rights and citizenship. The International Women Suffrage Alliance became the International Alliance of Women for suffrage and equal citizenship (IAW). With IAW's expanded agenda for women political rights and emphasis on citizenship, the agenda of EFU and IAW were similar. The EFU under Huda Sha'rawi also sought to organize a Pan Arab Feminist movement in order to spread women movement throughout the Arab Muslim world. Arab women's involvement in politics at large, and the role they

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<sup>10</sup> Al Ali, Najid. (2000), *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*.



played in national liberation struggles and revolution completely destroys the notion that women were completely secluded, passive and domestic beings.

**State Structure and Women' Activism:** The EFU presented its formal agenda constituting the needs of both women and society at large. The “demands of the Egyptian women” were announced jointly by WWCC and EFU. In all there were thirty two demands under three headings of political, social and female.<sup>11</sup>

**Political-** highlighted nationalist demands like complete independence of Egypt, refusal to the four pointers of the British, against capitulations (granting extra territorial privileges to foreigners).

**Social demands-** addressed societal and economic issues. Many with regard to education and opening of more secondary schools for girls with equal education as boys; demand for protection of local industry such as handicrafts, increasing the number of hospitals.etc.

**Female-** female suffrage; increasing literacy among women, call for reform of the personal status code with regard to divorce and polygamy for ‘justice to reign in the family’. The women movement was a national, secular movement in nature with Muslim and secular (Christians and atheist) women coming together. The movement was not communally based thus it did not articulate itself on religious discourse.

EFU engaged itself in social welfare agitating for the extension of health services and educational services to urban and rural areas. Upper class women with their philanthropy and work, along with middle class women took up initiatives in health and education for women and children. EFU expanded their base to rural areas and started the House of Cooperative Reform to train girls/women in sewing, embroidery, weaving and handicrafts and gave instructions in hygiene and health. Providing women with certificates and making them professionally prepared. Issues of day care facility for working mothers were also taken up by women organizations. The government followed the work women were doing. Huda Sha ‘rawi demanded from the government to employ women graduates in health and education sectors. Demanding labour laws for women guaranteeing women’s right to work.

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<sup>11</sup> These were the demands formed by women groups, headed by EFU.

In 1933, the Labour Laws were introduced and many jobs were made available for women. In 1939, the Ministry of Social Affairs was created; it took up responsibilities which the women's organizations had been providing. These associations now came under its jurisdiction. Women involved in social welfare were hired by the government agency. By 1940's many women were employed in the middle government echelons due to their education qualification and feminist pressure for reform in the policy. 'A' isha Ratib was the first woman to graduate from law faculty who was qualified to be in the council of State but she was dismissed on the basis of her gender. EFU protested and hired a lawyer which led to the questioning of conservative Islamic ideology. The government maintained gender hierarchies as men were employed in the higher positions of the government jobs even when they were not qualified as opposed to qualified women. Women were employed in the middle and lower rungs of the government jobs, thus securing power and authority with the males.

### **1.3) Post Colonial Period: Claiming the Public Space 1940s-50s**

From the 1940s the women's movement took a different direction. A phase of militant and heterogeneous women's activism arose. From the aristocratic charity based organizations, there was a revival of feminist consciousness raising and political protest. The *Lajnat al-Shabat* (Committee of Young Women) founded by Ceza Nabarawi and Inji Aflatun to revive the feminist consciousness and attracted pro-communist women. The formation of the Daughters of Nile by Duriya Shafiq was another such organizations. There was also the formation of welfare and Islamist oriented 'Muslim Women's Society' created by Zeinab Al- Ghazali. There was an expansion of women's activism in the public life.

The expanding base of women's movement was also seen with the formation of Arab Feminist Conference. Many Egyptian male participants addressed women's political rights. Lawyer Mufidah Abd al- Rahman noted that laws made by men reflected men's interests. To change this societal imbalances he emphasized it was essential that women participate in the political process<sup>12</sup>. The Arab Feminist Congress called for political rights of women,

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<sup>12</sup> Badran;(1996).

for all the Arab governments to work for gradual equalization between men and women, granting women the right to vote and to be elected.

Secondly, many more women's organizations were formed to advocate for a women's political rights. Fatma Ni 'mat Rashid formed the al -Hizb al-Nisa'I al-Watani (National Feminist Party) announced the organization as a political party in 1946. Duriyah Shafiq formed the Ittihad Bint al-Nil (Daughters of the Nile) in 1948. Both these groups advocated for women's political rights and increase in literacy among women. Daughters of Nile group initiated a new and invigorated Egyptian feminist movement. The group successfully established branches throughout Egypt, educating women on demanding political rights, promoted literacy programmes, campaigned to improve cultural, health and social services among poor and enhanced mother and child care. All groups campaigned for social reforms in the Egyptian society.

With the death of Huda Sha 'rawi' in 1947, the women's organization continued to press for political rights of women. In 1951, Duriya Shafiq led a political sit in for women's political rights at the parliament. The Union of Muslim Associations objected to women's continued political agitation calling to end the feminist organization. The conservative Islamic groups also intensified during the same time. These groups reformulated the idea of women going back to their homes and not allowed in the public places. They sabotaged the women's movement in Egypt, as an imperialists plot to Egyptian sovereignty.

Post 1952 revolution women's groups' placed the demands again before the revolutionary government. Duriya Shafiq presented the 'White Paper on the Rights of Egyptian Women'- compilation of arguments for and against women's rights. 1500 women along with Shafiq stormed the parliament demanding full political rights, equal pay for equal work and reform of the personal Status code<sup>13</sup>. The constitutional committee of the senate opposed the political rights to women. The Islamic groups such as the Fatwa committee of Al-Azhar too condemned the electoral rights to women. However, the Mufti Shaykh Allam Nassar the authority to interpreting Islam did not oppose the same. Conferences were held where the conservative religious authority denounced the political rights to women, as they

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<sup>13</sup> Najid al Ali, 2000

claimed it would cause *fitna* meaning ‘chaos’ in the society. Shafiq went on hunger strike. Women kept up their struggle for equality. After 33 years of advocacy and fasting in 1956 women were granted the right to vote and be elected. With the new regime there were different set of challenges Egyptian women and men faced.

#### **1.4) President Nasser and the State**

The 1956 new Constitution provided for a presidential republic. Nasser sought to work out a secular regime to develop modernization in Egypt. In the attempt to modernize Egypt Nasser’s strategy was to have welfare society wherein involving women in the public realm. There was an increase in NGOs and Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) directed by the state. Egypt gained a constitutionally elected electorate, the legal system developed. Nasser via the forces of the state vis-a-vis the police, military, repressed all the oppositions to his regime.

A degree annulled articles 54-80 dealing with associations. All associations, political parties and charitable organizations were banned and some were forced to re-register for license. He claimed that unity was important factor to build the Egyptian state. Secondly, Nasser in 1964 proclaimed a new Constitutional law no. 32, this ‘Law of Association’<sup>14</sup> gave explicit powers to the Ministry of Social Affairs and local governments and the officials, to license, regulate, monitor and dissolve associations (which still in effect today).

The constitution under Nasser provided for a very strong presidential form of government. By which the president had the powers to initiate and propose laws, approve them, or return them to the national assembly for reconsideration. Therefore, during Nasser regime repression of opponents and Islamists activism continued.

#### **Nasser’s policy of State Feminism & Consequences on Women’s Groups**

Many women’s groups and the feminist organization of the time experienced a set back with the implementation of the law of associations. Many groups were banned yet some

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<sup>14</sup> Law 32 restricted the formation and activities of voluntary organizations( women’s or human rights) with regard to their field of activity, record keeping, accounting and funding etc. law 32 gave the government the authority to intervene in the associations. Still continues to be a law. The law has been an object of contention.

were asked to apply for license. One of the most promising and active organization Egyptian Feminist Union formed in the 1923, was banned by the Nasser regime via the law. Several others faced the same fate.

The state through its mechanism of welfare strategy co-opted the women's question by offering some welfare policies via the strategy of "state feminism" aiming at providing job opportunities to women in the government offices and addressed issues such as female literacy. However, many women activists criticized the state led feminism as it sabotaged the workings of several groups and organizations aiming at bigger political participation of women and thus bringing about a social change and democracy. This was not acceptable to the Nasser regime as the law of association was implemented. The dissent groups were repressed by state machinery.

As in 1956, women were given voting rights and could run for political offices. The education system was reformed to increase enrollment in primary and secondary education, particularly affecting female participation in higher education. In government jobs women were given paid maternity leave. The impressive accomplishments of the Egyptian state in education, employment and social mobility, were also accompanied by the prevalence of the preservation of the conservative Personal Status Laws of 1920s and 1930s.

Hatem argues that, state feminism under the Nasser regime produced women who were economically independent in a way, but dependent on the state for employment, improving social services like education, health care. State feminism created and organized a system of public patriarchy; it did not challenge the personal and familial views of women's dependency on men that were institutionalized by the personal status laws and the political system.<sup>15</sup>

By not addressing the issues which discriminated against women, the state played safe by expanding the areas which were already being open due to the efforts of women activism. The ideas of woman's equal rights as man in a marriage, in matters of divorce and child custody were not touched upon. The state regarded the Al Azhar as the highest say in

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<sup>15</sup> Najid Al Ali, 2000

matters of such Islamic laws pertaining to the family. Secondly, the lack of independent women's groups led to suppression of protesting voices.

### **Rise of Islamic Groups**

Nasser's repressive measures led to the growing numbers of sympathizers with the Muslim brotherhood and other religious groups. However, the Muslim brotherhood was seen as a moderate Islamist group working for the welfare of the people and to achieve an Islamist state. The Muslim brotherhood members experienced executions and torture by the Nasser regime which also led to the emergence of a faith ideal and legitimate status of Islamist discourse with the civilian populace.

On the other hand, there emerged more militant groups though not operating in the open. There was a militant tendency in these groups as many of them were formed by unemployed young men under the direction of a vocal Islamic demagogue. The Al Jihad group stemmed up as a minority within the students union at the university dominated by Nasserite left and Marxist.

There emerged three opposing factors the State, the Islamists and Women activists claiming power and status within the state apparatus.<sup>16</sup>

### **1.5) Muhammad Anwar Sadat (1971-1981)**

Sadat tried to counter the effects of Nasserite and the Left. To counter their effect Sadat gave some concessions to the growing Islamist regime without any political position. Sadat allowed the formation of a multiparty system. Which led to the rise of three parties: Arab Socialist Union (center), Nationalist Progressive Union's Party (left) and The Free Socialist Party (right). He declared Egypt as a democratic, socialist state with a mixed economy and a free press. His alliance with the west to break away from communist Russia had immense socio-economic effects. His attempts to appease the Islamists groups were part of the

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<sup>16</sup> With the state oppressive tactics, there was emergence of Islamic groups working under ground claiming to nurture an Islamic society based on the Sha'ria as opposed to the man made rule of law. Emerged also political Islam as the Al Azhar was an all powerful religious authority. The authority denied women's political representation.

strategy to gain support. While also later working on reforming Egyptian women's status according to the UN stipulated standards.

Domestically, Sadat introduced the repressive emergency law which severely restricted the political activity, and made protest demonstration, sit-ins and strikes illegal. Sadat maintained the same repressive measures as his predecessor.

### **Sadat policy of “open door” –**

*Infitah* was the market oriented policy for alliance with the US. Sadat was heavily criticized by the left and right wing for the *infitah* policy. This opened the Egyptian market to the west. The policy led to the increased gap between the rich and poor. There were blatant socio-economic problems. Therefore, people felt dismayed with the regime and the policies adopted. In 1970s student movement started to emerge, demanding the liberation of Palestinian occupied territories and the democratization of the Egyptian political system. Many urban poor protested in the streets in 1977 they were joined by students and workers demonstrated against Sadat's economic policies. In the midst of political and social instability the Islamists claimed the center stage gathering support and claiming to provide an alternative solution to the Egyptian problem. Islam was seen as the solution of all the problems. Implementing, Islam as a state policy by incorporating Islamic principles and dogmas in the state and society structures. This also meant strict adherence to the Shari'a a demand from the Islamist block.

### **Rise of Political Islamisms**

The Islamist struggle for ideological hegemony began as these groups were in tandem with the state regime. Gradually, the operation of Islamist groups increased in their level of operation in the welfare stream or with a militant tendency. This led to the Islamization of the Egyptian politics.

The prominent figure is Sayyid Qutb who influenced men and women. His work based on the idea of direction to be taken for Egyptian progress in relation to social relations in society and the state. He dichotomizes between the Islamic (good) and the non- Islamic (bad). He advocated for the setting up an alternative Islamist society (state) governed by the

on the principles of the Qur'an and the Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad). A society of Umma ruled by the word of God as opposed to the existing society he called Jahiliyya governed on the bases of man made laws. Qutb's ideology advocated for the rejection of the non- Muslim culture. The rise of these streams of thought also led to the friction between Muslim- Christian relations. His thoughts were radical in way that it divided many Islamist groups. There were those which based their ideology on Qutb's line of thought and those who were more moderate. The Muslim brotherhood rejected Qutb's work. As they believed to provide welfare services to the poor in need to gather support.

### **The Society of Muslims:**

Shukri Mustafa was the figure against the peace treaty being signed with Israel. He was against the state mechanism. He believed in 'Uzla' (withdrawal from society) as a necessary step to build strength, till it shifted from weakness to power. During uzla there was extensive preaching. The society of Muslims attracted many youths to join their counter society. The society of Muslims rejected the idea of peace with Israel and aimed at building an Islamic society to end all problems of the Egyptian state. There was the emergence of the following Islamist political groups.

### **The Military Academy Group**

The leader Salih Sirriya was in contact with the Muslim Brotherhood. He organized a separate group of young students. Very much part of the society they believed that the head of the state blocked the spread of the Islamic society.

### **Jama'at Islamiyya**

The *Jama'at* began as a minority within the student body dominated by the Nasserite left and Marxist. By 1977, the left had lost control as *Jama'at* gained control in the universities. *Jama'at* recruited people. The group tried to become the force for transformation of *jahiliyya* into a Muslim society. It did become quite successful. The *jama'at* did not hesitate to fuel some flame of sectarian tension in order to demonstrate their capacity to supplant the state. The *jama'at* considered the Christians and Jews as tributaries to Islam.



## **Al- Jihad**

Khalid al Istanbul assassinated Sadat belonged to Al Jihad. The Hidden Imperative written by Salam Faraj is the reference of the jihad (holy struggle). The hidden imperative presents a programme of action to for the establishment of the Islamic state against the state (pharaoh). A member of the al jihad, Zuhdi had different take on the same. For him jihad had to be held against the Copts and then against the infidel state. Faraj and a minority thought the state had to be tackled first. But, Zuhdi felt that the Copts were the main obstacle to the establishment of the Islamic state. Al- Jihad group took the responsibility for assassinating Sadat.

## **Muslim Brotherhood:**

Though banned and members arrested by the Nasser regime were released by Sadat. Brotherhood believes in the gradually achieving of the Islamic state through preaching. Unlike, the other groups who believed in violence. The brotherhood has gained support as they are involved in providing services to the poor and needy. However, with regard to women's rights and role in the Islamic society most of the opinions of the Islamists agree.

The establishment of the Islamist groups within the Egyptian political scene had varied ramifications. These groups did not accept religious subordination to state exigency. Each group formed a body of knowledge as religious preaching became an important part to make the youth aware of the Islamic state. A form of disciplinary action and obedience was required from the individuals. Islam was seen as the solution to all the socio- economic and political state of jahiliyya. The groups were against the political system. Some of the groups were offended with the concessionary rights available to the Copts and Jews. However, there were many issues on which they disagreed with other. Mostly, in matters of operation the degree of their radicalism in adopting violent means or peaceful means.

Internally all the Islamists groups agreed that the most obvious sign of corruption and inefficiency are demonstrated in the regime's oblivion to the Shari'a, because of the

adoption and enforcement of man made, western imported legal codes.<sup>17</sup> This main argument includes the rejection of the orthodox Muslim opinions to women's rights especially with regard to the reforms in the personal status code. The state's strategy to appease the conservative Muslim opinion remains a bargaining chip. Most of the groups portray women as occupying the sole functions of mother or wife, as they believe as ordained by the Shari' a.

In the scenario of post 1970s revolution and the rise of Islamism, women confessed that their personal life showed them 'there is something called women's issues', which had to be tackled independently of the general struggle of social justice. The realization that even progressive educated men oppress women – within the context of party politics or the institution of family- was a turning point in the lives of many activists. Many women political activists started to reject male headed political structures and discredited the double standards imposed on women by fellow male activists or their 'father, brother, husbands. This realization led to the growing emergence of convergence between women activists and professionals regionally and also internationally. Women rejected their personal restrictions for claiming their freedoms which led to the expansion of women's movement throughout 1990s<sup>18</sup>.

Also, impacting the turn of the century; marking women's activism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a renewed agendas and convergence. The women activists/feminists always fought the conservative Islamic opinion on women's rights. Women began to interpret the religious text to support their rights and activism. They took up *Ijtihad* personal interpretation of the religious texts for the discourse of equality and freedom for women as men enjoy.

### **Policy Impact**

Sadat policy of *Infitah* led to the removal of state initiatives; the welfare schemes which provided programmes for development of women and child welfare, provided job opportunities to women belonging to low income groups. The policy of open door led to

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<sup>17</sup>Azza Karam (1998): 97

<sup>18</sup> Al Ali (2000): 109

the removal of these programmes of social welfare but also the commitments of gender equality abandoned. This impacted women and children in a very big way.

As the private sector expanded, the capitalist's labour standards were required. In the scenario of minimal job opportunities, women were left job less as men sought job opportunities even more aggressively. In the job markets men were preferred over women even when women were more qualified this emphasized the idea of man being the bread winner.

Female headed households were hit hard, mostly rendering women to join informal sectors of job which meant less income and instability. Economically and psychologically women bore the effect.

Another important factor of the private sectors refraining from hiring women was the provision to maternity and child care stipulated by laws in 1960s. The private sector did not want to comply with these statutes.

Women activists campaigned for women's right to work and job. Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) formed in 1980 was banned for their activism for women's political participation and right to work. AWSA was banned in 1991 on the pretext of being anti-Egyptian and immoral.

## **1.6) Egyptian Social Setting and Status of Women**

### **State Feminism under Sadat:**

The Nasserite policy of "State feminism" was carried forth by Sadat in a more limited way. The organization working on basic issues relating to women were given the option to function under the gamut of the regime. Thus, regime operated NGO's process began. The organizations work and policies were directed and scrutinized by the government machinery. The organizations which refused the direction and policing by the state were banned as the AWSA. Women activists and feminist such as Nawal el- Saadawi (President of AWSA) criticized the Sadat regime of state feminism for sabotaging the women's movement on the whole. Once again the regime tried to remain in power and did not act upon the women issue on a serious note to bring about a social change. The state tried to

control the dissent movement coming from the block of women activists. Nawal el Saadawi self exiled from Egypt as she faced threats coming from conservative stream of the society for her feminist activism and her writings. The state and the Al Azhar<sup>19</sup> condemned her. This is a blatant example of State and Islamic Authority nexus against the issues of women in particular; her rights and voice.

The emergency laws continued under Sadat were criticized as it gave the state the license to detain anyone suspected of terrorism or any crime to be tortured and imprisoned. Many relatives of the accused under the emergency law were also tortured. The accused were also imprisoned without any trial procedure. However, Sadat tried to tone down the left influence by forging an alliance with the Islamist. He used the idiom of religion to gain support and legitimacy. Sadat released many members of the Muslim Brotherhood and allowed their news letter to be re published. This strategy led to the rise of political Islamism, marking the beginning of Islamism from the 1970s and 80s. However, from the 1977 the Islamists started to challenge the state. According to literature growing sense of alienation resulting rising imports of consumer goods and the consequent rise of materialism – led many to equate *infatih* (open door) with social disintegration. Further, social inequality and rising gap between the rich and poor led to the strengthening of Islamist political position. And also a renewed plan of action for women’s movement. As the, women’s right debate shifted from ‘secular’; to be dealt within an Islamic and minority discourse.

### **Sadat and Personal Status Laws:**

Sadat’s economic and emergency policies were criticized by Islamists and Women activists/ organizations. Paradoxically, it was during Sadat’s regime and under his presidency that the Personal status laws were reformed, demand which was more than a century old. Under the influence of Jehan Sadat, reforms to the personal status laws (governing marriage, divorce and child custody) were proposed. The proposed reform challenged the strength and legitimacy of Islamists.

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<sup>19</sup> Al Azhar, the Islamic Religious Authority in Egypt interpreting the religious dictates/ laws: political, legal and social.

However, the reforms were also to improve the image of Egyptian state and society on the matter of the status of women. As the status of women were taken as measuring a country's standard of development. The international organizations pressure along with the growing NGO and research institutes advocacy in Egypt for reforms in the personal status code were instrumental in the proposed reforms.

### **1979 Jehan Laws:**

The Personal Status Laws of 1979, labeled Jehan's Law, granted women the legal rights in marriage, polygamy, divorce and child custody. The law was implemented by presidential decree along with raising the number of women's representation in the parliament.

The 1979 Family status law reaffirmed a woman's right to divorce, get custody of her children till the age of 10 for the boy and 12 for the girl. The law gave the women the right to travel without her husband's permission, raised the legal age for marriage to eighteen. The law also ended the practice of *bayt al-ta'a* (house of obedience) wherein a husband could lock up his wife at home till he obtained her obedience.

However, the enactment of these reforms was attacked by Islamists and some women groups who questioned the presidential decree. The law was not passed in a democratic procedure in the parliament.

The reason for the push for reforms was also the beginning of the UN decade for Women in 1975. In order to gain support particularly from the US, Sadat formulated the reforms to address gender issues. Despite, this effort the government lacked an overall programme to ensure women's rights and did not encourage independent feminist activism. As there was no action plan as such to implement these reforms. The Islamists raised utmost uproar against these laws. The Islamists demanded the strict implementation of the Shari' a.

Post *infitah* women started to challenge the ignored spaces within their families for rights and equality. Matters such as violence against women, practice of clitoridectomy (FGM), and continuous advocacy to reform family status code persist in the wake of growing male conservative voices (extremists). New generation of Egyptian women are in a better

situation as they are educated and have the technology to spread awareness in such matters to be debated and discussed.

### **Society setting and status:**

The Egyptian society hails the image of a woman as a mother and wife. Not primarily as woman. Therefore her role as a mother becomes linked to the imagery of self sacrificing and nurturing. Same goes for the wife. Though many women have become part of the labour force conservative minds do not affirm with women working outside their homes. As their tasks is seen as household work and bearing children. With the rise of conservative elements in the political arena during Sadat's rule and their prevalence during Mubarak's rule led new generations of research centers to open up working on women issues and spreading feminist consciousness to continue their struggle for equal opportunities and freedom.

Nawal el Sadawi supported the progressive laws which granted equality to women. She was condemned as an apostate and condemned from her own country by conservative Islamists for her strong feminist views and activism against FGM.

The opponents of the reforms held the view that women would have an opportunity to annul the marriage at any point therefore, disturbing the institution of marriage and the base of the society. This perception clearly depicts the insecure and double standards of the patriarchal psyche prevalent in the society. Which allowed a man to divorce to his wife, but the wife got the same rights she is seen as an element of destruction and disturbance in the family and society. Women like Zeinab al-Ghazali opposed the idea of women getting the right to divorce. This view is also seen prevalent in many women as men because of their strong belief in the patriarchal cultural ideology and not religion.

Until the Sadat period women's public rights such as education, work and political rights were discussed and debated. Women's rights within the family were ignored or considered as non existent.

Early groups like EFU, Daughters of Nile laid the foundations for women's active political and social activism. The more recent groups such as AWSA, IWA, Nazra Organization,

many more research groups are spreading awareness on women's issues and women's positive role in the Egyptian society.

Despite Mubarak's pro-liberal policy, chapter two will try to study and discuss the repressive measures directed toward many dissidence groups including women activists. Women's activism continued during Mubarak's regime for political representation of Women and rights in family and marriage laws. Women have formed forces to campaign for democracy in Egypt. Therefore, very clearly, stating the desire to have a government representative of the people. Secondly, a government upholding the value of respecting all religious groups Islam and the minorities Copts Christians, Jews and the others.

Chapter three discusses the phase of post 2000 constitutional reforms and the development of social movements demanding democratic change in Egypt. The greater say of women in the political process has increased due to the access of technology, usage of blogs. The thirty year long rule of Mubarak is marked with stagnation and growing suppression. As the percentage of youth increases so does the demands for jobs. Women united with men in the call for democracy and progress against the Mubarak regime. Studying the participation of women in 2011 uprising demanding democracy and the demands put forward by the women's groups.

Chapter four, discusses the role new generation of women are playing in interpreting the religious texts, thus ushering in woman's perspective on the scriptures' traditionally being owned by men. And the response of women and groups to the reforms formulated by the government and the challenges women's rights face from the conservative clergy. This chapter will also study the international conventions on women's rights such as UN-CEDAW and Beijing 1995 Convention to which Egypt is a signatory.

Chapter five, will discuss the approaches such as the tradition vs modernity and the women in development approach to the women in the North African context. The development of Islamic feminism is a new analytical tool to justify women's rights in the Islamic and secular code of rights.

As tradition, is expected to be adorned by women and past on to generations in many Islamic and Asian countries. The Islamic tradition is distinctive a culture and way of life different from the west. However, with the growing economic changes and changing lifestyles it is becoming difficult to adhere to strict cultural norms. In the process many culturally rooted biases and prejudices are questioned and changed. Mainly with cultural norms and rules relegated to women are questioned. It can be viewed as a process of evolution of human rights existence.

The approach of women in development seeks to involve women in the process of their on development and that of their countries in order to make them rise out of feminization of poverty. As poverty affects both men and women but the effects are more severe when women are in extreme situation of poverty.

With modernization of industries and other aspects the traditional way of income owned by women were destroyed in the process. Therefore, it becomes necessary to trap poverty and get women involved in the process of economic development. Egyptian Women's movement is one marked with continuous activism employing women's agency in the economic, social and political spheres. Women's political activism also brought about changes in the law structure during Mubarak's rule which will be studied and analyzed in the following chapters.



## **CHAPTER: 2**

## CHAPTER 2

### Mubarak Regime: Phase I (1981-2000)

Mubarak worked for stability and consolidation. The Mubarak regime however, can be characterized with features like ambiguity and contradictory pursuits as the regime struggled with the competing forces as well as the legacies of the past. Sadat's moderate strategy to appease the Islamists and introduce certain reforms in the PSL, led to the rise of religious conservatism and women's activism opposing conservatism.

Women's activism is visible throughout the Egyptian political scene. Even though there were attempts to limit women's participation and activism. As the western dichotomy of public and private goes. Women gained their public rights but, their rights within the homes were not publicly debated nor granted. As Nawal al-Hassan Golley points out, the Muslim women's movement can be outlined in the following phasing:

First, the call for women's rights was part of the general movement to reform Islamic practices, hence the entire social order.

Secondly, the call for women's emancipation was voiced by women and men of the national bourgeoisie, later joined by petit bourgeoisie, struggling for liberation and democratic rights. Thirdly, Islamic feminism was born within, and continues to suffer the predicament caused by, the double struggle: internally against the old religious, social and economic order; externally against the colonial power.<sup>1</sup>

However, adding on this phasing in the post colonial state women continued their activism for participation as pointed out in the first chapter for their civil and political rights. The contemporary women's movement had taken a new direction with the new regime coming to power.

The Mubarak regime claimed to bring about stability and democratization in Egypt. The coming of the new regime and the Nairobi conference of 1985 are two important events which impacted the women's movement in the 1990s and the new millennium.

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<sup>1</sup> Najid Al Ali (2000), *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement*.

At the same time the Islamists forces kept up their political agitation to gain political legitimacy. So, there was always an opposing force to issues raised by the women's movement. The politics of power was at play constantly to maintain political and ideological hegemony. The Egyptian political scene was in a state of power struggle between the Mubarak regime, the religious groups as opposed to the women's groups agitating and demanding democratization.

### **2.1) Mubarak and the Islamists:**

Mubarak propagated his secular stance by claiming to fight religious extremism and the judicial trial of those who assassinated Sadat. Many radical Islamists regimes were arrested in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1981. Mubarak took the moderate policy to stride into his political office. At the international level Mubarak managed to ease relations with the Arab countries and normalized relations with the then Soviet Union. On the domestic level, he slowly released some prisoners and allowed the Islamic parties and newsletters to come back. Though there was a stipulation post revolution that no party would be based on religion; the *Umma Party* was licensed. The Communist, Brotherhood and Nasserites were not officially represented till 1994. However, Mubarak allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to form an alliance with any political party. The Muslim Brotherhood formed an alliance with the Wafd for the 1984 and 1987 elections. Apart from the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), Tajammu party was allowed to function. Both the elections were declared null and void. Mubarak remained as the sole candidate endorsed. The NDP remained in power from 1981.

### **Backlash on Women Rights 1985:**

On certain issues Mubarak conceded to the demands of the Islamist. With regard to censorship or banning of certain literature on the basis of them not, confirming with the Islamic modesty requirements. Mubarak confirmed to the Islamists pressure to the strict adherence of the *Sha'ria*. Thereby, invalidating the reforms passed in 1979 on the Personal Status Laws by Sadat regime.

Mubarak had no single defined policy towards the Islamists. Though, he tried to encourage secular oppositions. He favoured his own brand of Islamic groups; working for welfare

(education and health services). This is with the tacit acceptance of Muslim Brotherhood's participation in the political process. On the other hand use of violence and oppression to tackle opposition who were also the primary institutions for Islamic militancy<sup>2</sup>.

The Islamists regime agitated continually, acting as opposition to the state policy and grew violent as clashes between government forces and Islamist regime sprung up. The speaker of the parliament Ri'fat al-Mahjub was murdered in 1990 by the al Jihad militant group. In 1992, secular writer and activist, Faraj Fuda was also murdered by the Jihad militant. These groups were in an attempt to create a state within the state.

In the 1995 parliamentary elections, the government arrested the Islamists to counter their influence. Muslim brotherhood were rounded up and put into jail. The Muslim Brotherhood was seen as the strongest political and ideological opposition growing against the NDP, particularly Mubarak.

## **2.2) State Economic Policy/Development Strategy: 1990s**

With the introduction of *Infitah* (open door) policies by Sadat work opportunities for women declined as sharply as equal pay; as men aggressively sought the fewer job prospects. In parallel to the economic pressures on women, more conservative discourses emerged which promoted women's return to domesticity (Hatem 1992).<sup>3</sup> The economic policies and the introduction of Structural Adjustments policies had severe impact on women. With the Sadat regime privatizing the Egyptian economy to have greater alliance with the west led to the opening up of Egyptian markets to the western capitalist system.

Secondly, with the introduction of SAPs for acquiring loans and aids from the international agencies (World Bank, IMF) and donor nations like the USA, the Egyptian regime had to introduce certain changes in the socio-economic policies. In order to gain support (in the form of aid and loans) they had to comply with the conditionality stipulated by these agencies. Thus, the process of privatization and liberalization continued under the Mubarak regime as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Azza Karam (1998), *Women, Islamisms and State: Contemporary Feminists in Egypt*, p.74.

<sup>3</sup> Margot Badran, (1996), *Feminists, Islam and Nation*. Egypt, Cairo Press.

### **The impact of SAP on Women:**

The Nasserite Socialist policy was undone with the alliance with the west and the dependence of the Egyptian regime on aid and loans from the west. Nasser's policy of education for all and jobs for graduated students in the public sector received a set back. As the state under Nasser had begun the process of 'feminization' of the 'public sector' with most women graduates employed in the middle and lower rungs of the governmental services. This process of government providing jobs to graduates ended as most of the public sector departments were opening up to the private sector this impacted women in a big way.

Secondly, the subsidies which the government provided were also cut low and not provided. The welfare activities of providing low health and education facilities were also withdrawn. Uneducated and elderly women who benefitted from the state welfare system were hard hit. Many women and men graduates were left unemployed as the state provided less jobs opportunity. Especially women were in a state of unemployment as they relied on the government to provide for the jobs. This was due to the fact that the state had taken up the strategy of state feminism for it provided jobs for women. Large scale Independent women's organizations were not encouraged either by Nasser, Sadat or Mubarak. So, women majorly relied on the government to provide the jobs.

### **Women and Work**

With the paucity of jobs and the opening of the private sector men sought the jobs more aggressively than women. Men were in a better position to take up two to three jobs this is because of the fact that men were being employed more and the fact men were not burdened with the household chores. Women once again were constituted a lesser percentage of the labour force.

In the height of unemployment, the Islamists gave the call for women to go back home in order for the men to get employed as fewer jobs were available in the labour market. With growing economic instability social circumstances also dwindle thus, rendering most of the impact on women and their position.

**Private Sector:** With the private sector opening up; it provided lower incomes to women as compared to men and even lower than the government services. Women did not have economic security in the private sector, as women were a minority in the sector with practically no membership of the trade unions. Women were secondary workers as opposed to men workers. Private sector also refrained from hiring women workers because of the clause for providing of maternity leave and child day care facility. <sup>4</sup>

There was/is a gender segmentation of the labour market at the national and enterprise levels. As men and women experienced different labour experience despite of the labour law legislation on equality. The recognition of gender segmentation of the labour market highlights three socio-economic factors responsible for the male bias in economic policies and in ERSAPs in particular (Elson, 1991): <sup>5</sup>

1) *“Sexual Division of Labour:* some kinds of work are socially constituted as women’s work while other kinds are considered as men’s work. This is the result of the prevailing pattern of social values, the division of labour inside as well as outside the household.

2) *Non-recognition of unpaid work:* this includes work required for the process of reproduction and maintenance of human resources, as well as work done by women outside the house to help their husbands, especially in the agricultural sector. The explicit exclusion of this work by different economic policies leads to the subordination of women to men.

3) *Women’s responsibility within the household:* in some cases economic policies add to women’s responsibility within the household through an increase in the costs of living, without adding to the resources women require to undertake their responsibilities. With the raising price hike women are additionally burdened to provide for the family”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chatty and Rabo(1997), Organizing Women: Formal and informal groups in the middle East, 35-45.

<sup>5</sup> Heba Nassar. Egypt: Structural Adjustments and Women’s employment, in *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East* eds. Eleanor Doumato & Posusney. 2003,96-97.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 2

Women are mainly, employed at the lower levels under male authority. Most women in the service sector are still employed in the clerical jobs (public and private) and many other feminized fields like teaching, nursing, med- doctors.

With the implementation of the SAP in 1987 the government attempted to reduce wage bill, which led to the deduction of real wages for government and public-sector employees through the employment guarantee policies. All this measures led to the aggravated employment problem in Egypt, leading to an unemployment rate of 11 percent from 1986 through 1996.<sup>7</sup>

Majority of women employed in the formal sector were engaged in the service sector, which became overstaffed. With the lack of employment opportunity, many women are forced to join the informal sectors of work. The informal sector does not provide for economic security, low conditions of work and there is no regulation of the labour laws. This renders women in a more vulnerable situation. As the socio-economic levels drop cultural factors affect women and girls immensely. Women/Girls' education and health are neglected to support the family. This feature points out to the "feminization of poverty". As in most cases even in poverty, a son's health and education are catered to in contrast to a daughter's. Studies in Egypt have shown that in 1993 more than 20 percent of the households were dependent on women's income. Many rural women replaced men as they migrated to the gulf countries in search of jobs. Since, the 1980s job opportunity was limited and women turned to self employment activities as street vendors, in petty commodity production, and in personal services.<sup>8</sup>

The negative effects of economic policies were growing unemployment, declining real wages, unsatisfactory working conditions in the private sector, persistent occupational segregation, discrimination in promotional procedures, underestimation of women's contribution to the labour market. In the wake of all this women faced the following challenges.

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<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Badran 1994; Hudson 1994

**“Wage Discrimination:** despite, the labour law legislation to treat men and women workers equally. Women workers received lower wages than men workers in the private sectors. The promotional ladder for women was again shorter as women were rarely promoted, even if promoted it was to a certain intermediary level under the supervision of a male.

**Discriminatory employment conditions:** The private sector does not always provide/s for the necessary conditions. With extended hours of work and unhealthy environment. Harassment is another case which women face. Harassment at work place in the form of informal advances, malicious talk, demands of sexual favours; harassment in the streets also add to the problems of commuting. Many private companies avoid to hiring women. As the law requires of a firm for setting up of child care facility and an hours break for the woman employed. Transportation was also an area of difficulty as women experienced harassment in the buses and streets. Lack of child care and transportation continues to be a problem.

**Dilemma of maternity leave:** the law provided for three months paid leave for women with two or three pregnancies. The private firms did not confirm by the law. However, granted a month’s paid leave that to in rare cases.

**Women as unpaid workers:** As many illiterate women were working in the agricultural sector. Their labour contribution was/is seen as an extended part of their contribution to the household responsibility. This left women in much lower condition to be economically secure and more dependent on men for their economic survival.

**Lack of representation in workers union:** with the growing industrialization, workers men and women joining the industrial sector. Women were a minority in the trade unions to voice their opinion neither were they in a position of authority. Egyptian Trade Union Federation in 1998 only 4 women members was part of the federation as opposed to 439 males. This explains women’s position in their working places.”<sup>9</sup>

These difficulties did not deter women to join the mainstream labour force. The rapid increase in female labour force is mainly due to the economic necessity and security rather than changing social attitudes of men. Conservatives consider women’s work primarily as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid 4 Chatty & Rabo(1997).



engaging in domestic role as her natural and main, thus, fulfilling the roles of ‘mother’ and a ‘wife’. Women continued to prove these perceptions wrong by joining the labour force for sustaining their families and themselves. Though, women mainly filled positions in managerial, secretarial, teaching and lower positions in administrative services.

According to the Labour Force Sample Survey, 71 per cent unpaid workers are women; women’s economic participation is 35.4 per cent in total, in the government sector it was 29.5 per cent, public sector 13.1 percent and in the private sector 39.3 per cent (CAPMAS 1990)<sup>10</sup>. The high percentage of unpaid work highlights the household work mainly done by women; which was not considered as ‘work’.

In the height of unemployment 74 percent of males and 62 percent women were involved in the private sector. However, two third of women; work outside the establishments in agriculture and informal sector. The level of participation in the informal sector has increased over the past decade with the paucity of jobs. With a total of 8.3 million people (men and women) involved, in the informal sector. Women constitute 1.8 million as the labour force in the informal sector in 2008.<sup>11</sup> The nature of employment for women is seen in education, social work and household services. While males, are employed in the fields of trade, construction, manufacture and transportation. More women in the rural areas are involved in the informal sector. This phenomenon is due to the dominance of agriculture in the rural areas, as women shares of self employment and wage workers are higher.

Sahar Nasr study findings reveal that women do not work primarily out of necessity but to acquire economic independence for contributing to the family, on self, protection and security, saving up for marriage or children expenses. On the contrary, a low percentage of

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<sup>10</sup> Shahida El-Baz. (1997) Impact of Social and Economic Factors on Women’s Group Formation in Egypt, in Chatty & Rabo eds. Organizing Women. Berg Oxford. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 10

men (15 percent) affirm women should work for economic gains to contribute to household expenses.<sup>12</sup>

This highlights the prevalent social belief that women's primary work is to take care of the household and the children whereas; men are the breadwinners of the family. This view has been persistent not only in the Egyptian society but is a global cultural belief in many societies. Women however, transcend such barriers and belief system to support themselves and their families for a better future.

The government's efforts to support development can be achieved only if there are a maximum number of employed citizens. The level of women's socio-economic status is determined by her freedom to earn her money and also have the freedom to spend or invest the same. This measure of development was crippled when the private sector failed to absorb large numbers of growing women labour force. The Mubarak regime came up with the macro business strategy. The government sought to encourage women to start their business and become employers; thus, providing job opportunity in Egypt.

In 2010, 20 companies were owned by women. 45 percent of them are textile and garment firms, 20 percent involved in pharmaceuticals and 15 percent in food industry. The companies owned by Business women employ more women to increase women's economic security.

Women Business Association Operate via the following associations forming a business women's syndicate. To name a few: Association of Women's Total Advancement and Development, Egyptian Business Women's Association, Alexandria Business Women's Association, Egypt based Arab Women's Investors Union.<sup>13</sup>

Business women like business men also face impediments like corruption, permits and license equally. However, legislative obstacles such as labour regulations and potential socio-cultural barriers are obstructing elements women face. The Labour law does not allow

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<sup>12</sup> World Bank Report: 2010, Egyptian Women workers and enterprises: maximizing opportunities in the economic sphere.

<sup>13</sup> Women business Syndicates, Al Ahram Weekly Online 2010 accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2012 from [www.alahramweekly.org](http://www.alahramweekly.org)

workers to strike. Although workers do, these strikes are considered illegal. In 2005, many women workers were arrested as they staged a strike at the closing of government enterprises.

### **2.3) State Policy against Women and Women's Groups:**

The Mubarak regime was in compliance with Islamists groups. The regime mostly compromised on the women's issues with the Islamists such as matters of veiling, women's modesty (in relation to their way of dressing), women's role in the society and the personal status code laws.

#### **❖ Personal Status Laws:**

The increased agitation and confrontation with the Islamists over the implementation of the *Sha'ria* (Islamic law) pressured the Mubarak regime to legislate and implement more conservative laws and policies towards women's political representation.<sup>14</sup> (The 1979 Personal Status Laws were declared illegitimate in 1985 due to strong opposition from the Islamists who perceived the laws amended as anti-Islamic. Women lost many of rights gained from the reform. Women gathered support and lobbied against this action and demanded the reformulation of the laws. Two months later a law was passed which preserved some benefits that the 1979 version provided.<sup>15</sup>

There are constant clashes between the government, Islamists and women activists on several women's rights issues. Re-emergence of women's activism is a continues battle over personal status laws and also taking up larger issues related to women's health in matters such as freedom to use contraceptives as women rights to reproduction and campaigns against the practice of clitoridedectomy. An alliance of groups and individuals advocating for reform and spreading awareness on the harmful effects of clitoridedectomy is growing.

Women's sexuality and honour were the main values which were attached to the practice of female genital mutilation. Therefore, the conservative Islamists and society at large

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<sup>14</sup> Najid al-Ali: 2000,75.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 14

practiced this customary ritual on girls once they reached the age of puberty. Despite the increase in education among women and men; the EDHS<sup>16</sup> in 1995 survey indicated that 97 per cent of Egyptian women ever married have been circumcised. So, this indicates a strong prevalence of cultural practice which is deep rooted in the Egyptian society.

❖ **Women's activism in Civil Society:** civil society is a social unit emerging from within the society independent of the state institution. As Zaki points out, "civil society is the aspect of social life which is distinct and removed from the realm of the state. It is based on the existence of a community of free individuals who are able to form non-state associations which interact with the state to promote citizens' participation vis-à-vis the state's influence". Nawal el-Saadawi is the most courageous activists for women's rights. Her publication of the book *Al Mar'ah wa Al- Jins* (woman and Sex) is regarded as the constitution for the radical contemporary women's movement or (*nassawiyya*) feminist movement.

❖ AWSA was founded in 1980 by Nawal Saaddawi. The objectives of the association being the integration of the struggle for women's rights within the struggle against Zionism, imperialism and economic exploitation. AWSA organized and participated in the banning of the PSL in 1985. Submitting drafts for modification and conducting seminars to gather support for women's rights. AWSA's active involvement was seen as a threat by the state and the Islamists which led to the banning of the organization in 1991 by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

### **Emerging NGOs & Private Organizational Initiatives:**

Many groups carry out important work while insisting on independence from the state's direct control. The 1990s also saw the emergence of non-governmental organizations. Many NGOs sprung up mainly working on women's issues; spreading awareness and working for women's rights. The Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance and the New Women Research Center established in 1983 and registered in 1990 engage in a variety of feminist

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<sup>16</sup> Egypt Demographic Health Survey (1996), Centre for Women's Rights, Cairo Egypt.

work. Women in Memory Forum sponsor lectures and publications on topics of women's history, literature and drama. Nur publishing group holds conferences and publishes periodicals and materials on women's rights and identity. Omdurman Women's Center deals with Sudanese women refugees. Alliance for Arab Women and the Nazra organization are research organizations promoting feminist studies; spreading awareness through advocacy and holding workshops and seminars on gender issues and women's rights. The Association for Development and Enhancement of Women gives credit to women entrepreneurs to enhance their professional skills.

During the 1990s to avoid governmental control many women's PVO's were organized and registered themselves as non-profit civil companies. The government tried to control their activities in various ways, including declaring them as illegal forms of organizations. In 1995, by a law decree it was summoned – a declared illegal organization could not attain foreign funds (Ministry of Justice, 1995). To carry out their work another way of organizational method is adopted by women' groups is to join an established organization or syndicate (eg. in Lawyers, businesswomen's, doctors or journalist syndicates).

**Issues:** many of these groups are small having limited funding. They are dependent on volunteers to carry out plan of action providing human and financial resources. Some of the groups avoid publicity in the fear of being criticized and banned by the government. Nawal el Saadawi sought to establish an umbrella organization in 2000 to galvanize the women groups from the grassroots level to spread awareness of the 2000 reforms. However, the state did not support the initiative. On the contrary the state created its own organization.

#### ❖ **Government Organizations**

By 1999, the number of NGOs had reached 14,000. This emerging phenomenon was seen as dangerous by the Mubarak regime as the independent working of these groups in way threatened the Islamists notions of women's role and participation in the society. Therefore, as done by Mubarak's predecessors, he too controlled these organizations by two ways.

First by introducing; GONGO – Government created Non-Governmental Organizations. The working of these state led groups sought to disempowering the existing NGOs.

Secondly, by Law 32 – Law of Association (1964) controlling the work of non governmental organizations. International organization like UN, IMF and World Bank pressured the Egyptian government to adhere to the UN conventions concerning women's rights and the working of the NGOs. To which Egypt is signatory. Under immense international pressure some NGOs were permitted to resume while others had to wait for the approval. The Arab Women's Solidarity Association was one such organization was banned (in 1991) and its assets were given to an Islamic women's organization. The Islamic women's organization functioned under the direction of the state and ideological hegemony of the Islamists.

Clearly, the organizations which promoted women's activism and feminist awareness were banned and branded as immoral. The stark nexus between the state regime and political Islamists is visible against the women's rights and issues.

The National Council for Women was established in March 2000, with Suzanne Mubarak as President and Mervet Tallawy, the former Minister of Social Affairs, as Consul General. At the 2000 UN Beijing +5 conferences on women in New York, Egypt's delegation were dominated by state sponsored representatives.

Two reports were prepared, one by the NCW and National Council for Motherhood and Childhood and the other included the views of 421 NGOs and was sponsored buy the Alliance for Arab Women and UNICEF. Suzanne Mubarak gave a politicized message.

However, some Egyptian observers of the proceedings were unhappy with the government – controlled groups lack of coordination and consultation with independent NGOs and PVOs.

Feminist Aida Seif al-Dawla commented that the state had adopted the women's NGOs rhetoric on women but not necessarily adopted the substance of the NGOs programs.<sup>17</sup> The government has initiated some economic development projects for women. The weaving

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<sup>17</sup> Sherif Zuhur. The Mixed Impact of Feminist Struggle in Egypt during the 1990s. *MERIA Middle East Review of International Affairs*. Vol.5, no.1-March2001.

center in Siwa is one such example. However, many of these programs lack proper implementation. On the other hand these initiatives do not challenge the social system as women are mostly involved in primary production. In Siwa the production process is involved in making rugs. The national projects lacked a substantial action plan and initiative to bring about gender equality and awareness.

On the other hand, a project sponsored by the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services was attended by Muslim and Christian women. The conference included discussions on women's self esteem, the need to end violence against women, including domestic violence, the irrelevance of media articles designed for women. Such initiatives were neglected in the national curriculum. Therefore, the women who are employed by the government and its agencies; their credentials and commitments to gender equality are highly contested.

### **Political participation:**

The 1979 reforms during Sadat reserved 30 seats in parliament and local councils for women. The total number of women in the 1979 and 1985 parliaments was 35 and 36. However, the shift from individual candidacy to party system in 1987 election, unveiled the anti-women positions of the parties. Women were excluded from the party lists or were in small numbers.

Women's representation in people's representation dropped from 9 percent in 1979 to 2.2 percent in 1992. In 1995, women's representation remained the same with four women appointed by President Mubarak. In the house of Shura (Senate) women's representation was 4.7 percent in 1992. A new law adopted in 2008 allocates 64 seats for women in the lower house of parliament.

### **Legal Reforms by Hosni Mubarak**

The Egyptian government under Mubarak made some concessions by being the first Arab country to ratify, albeit with reservations, the Conventions for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1987. In line of the ILO the Egyptian law grants women equal access to employment and training opportunity while simultaneously protecting her

role as a mother. Women employed in public services are protected against working in physically and morally hazardous occupations, women employees have the right to paid maternity leave.

However, the major set back is that these rules are not followed nor are these rights protected in the private field of work. Business men try not to hire women due to these laws. Despite of the existing legal equality, there is major gender discrimination existing in various forms. The public (civil) rights though were granted along with economic right to work. Egyptian Women continue to face discrimination in ways of lower wages, sexual harassment at work, harassment in the streets. Within the homes women's right were minimal. Thus, a continued resistance by women is still carried on. The continued pressures from women's group some reforms were enacted in 2000.

#### **2.4) January 2000 Constitutional Reforms:**

Personal status laws were again reformed by the Parliament on January 29<sup>th</sup> 2000. The laws enhanced women's ability to obtain a divorce but also elicited a strong public backlash from the strong profile of religious authority within Egypt. Chatty and Rabo emphasize that the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the International Women' Forum in Beijing (1995) pressured the Mubarak government to allow independent women's activists to flourish.

Secondly, the government felt pressurized by international constituencies to prove its commitment to women's rights. The setting up of, the National Council for Women headed by the first Lady Suzanne Mubarak was the official governmental platform through which some activities were carried out and reforms formulated. These reforms in the family Laws in 2000 were passed after much debates and discussions by Hosni Mubarak with liberals and conservatives; which came to be known as Suzanne Mubarak Laws as she had introduced in 1990s as part of the growing government initiative for women's empowerment.

#### **Personal Status Reforms in 2000:**

First, **the revival of the Khul**: the law facilitated the creation of a family court able to facilitate divorce cases. This law gave women the right to invoke *Khul*, meaning that women



may initiate a divorce. On the grounds of returning to the groom gifts of jewellery (the *shabka*) and the dowry payments (*mahr*) made at the time of marriage.

Secondly, the new law also prohibited men from divorcing their wives without immediately informing them (*talaq al-ghiyabi*). As men abused this right to their advantage by pronouncing “I divorce thee” three times, (*talaq al-bid’a*) thus bypassing any efforts to mediate and reconcile.

**Marriage** age was raised as 18 for girls and 20 for boys to abolish early marriages. Finally the law also recognized **Urfi marriages**. A customary *urfi* Egyptian ancient wedding type cost less than the *niqah* (the Islamic marriage). The trend among younger couples is to resort to *Urfi* marriages to escape the burden of *mahr*, formal engagement and wedding parties and other expenses attached.

The NDP also decided to drop law 26, dealing with a women’s right to travel without her husband’s consent. As in Islamic law women are required to have permission or presence of a *mahram*, a close male relative who acts as a guardian for travel.

## **2.5) Loopholes Remain**

However, these reforms did not address key issues such as restriction on polygamy which was campaigned by women’s group.

Secondly, the law did not mention women’s inclusion of protective clauses in their marriage contracts. Despite of the rising criticism of the practice of FGM, the government took no measures to abolish the practice in 2000. The right to *khul* had a conditionality attached which required the woman to payback the assets she got as gifts at the time of wedding. Many activists protest to this conditionality as lower middle class and lower class women are not in the position to pay back the sum. This law was more supportive of the upper class than the lower classes.

### **Reactionary Groups:**

Fierce opposition to the reforms appeared from the Islamists block. Cartoon featured females' harridans pursuing frantic husbands with their brooms, women rushing to the air ports, or men donning women's clothes and head scarves and assuming domestic chores. After the law's passage; one cartoon featured a woman determinedly packing her suitcase.

Her husband protests, 'You can't travel without my permission'! But the wife retorts 'I can't? Then I divorce you!' both humorous and serious debate revealed doubts that women should be entrusted with expanded rights to divorce or given their ability to travel like men. The implication was that they would flee the confinement of marriage if given the opportunity to do so.<sup>18</sup>

Women's mobility is seen as a threat to the patriarchal political state and society. Her (woman's) independence is seen as giving her the opportunity to run away from the natural obligations which she is called for according to the traditional customs and beliefs. This only brings out the conservative ideas and beliefs of the partisan and the double standards of morality, dignity and rights applied for men and women. Where men enjoyed the right to travel anywhere without a guardian and divorce his wife, though a woman was not seen as capable of acquiring these rights. The main idea can be seen as to uphold the patriarchal structure and; within it the family to carry forth such practices.

There were laws which were discriminatory till the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such as Egyptian women married to a non Egyptian man could not confer citizenship to her children where as a man marrying a non Egyptian woman could. As the woman could attain Egyptian citizenship after two years and their children were considered Egyptian. In the wake of all the opposition from the Islamists, women kept up their campaign alive against such attitudes.

Secondly, the emergency law was retained which sought to imprison any person on suspicion of terrorism and threat to state security. This law was used in times of upheaval

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<sup>18</sup> Sharifa Zuhur(2001), the mixed impact of feminist struggle in Egypt during the 1990s.

between the state forces and the opposing civil society or any other non-state actor against the hegemony of the state.

Conferring women with the same rights as men intimidated the Islamists. Especially as they believe that women enjoy rights within Islam more than any other religion. As women are allowed to have a share of the inheritance, allowed the right to education, work, and woman's consent to marriage and retain their matron name post marriage. However, the practice of these rights is questionable. As Egyptian women carried forth a struggle for almost a century to get education and work rights. A woman's consent was hardly an issue which was even considered as children were married earlier as the case in India. The point in case is that many of the rights which women have as per Islam were abused and not even made known to them. These Islamic rights were revealed to women, as women themselves started to re-read and interpret the Islamic texts. Change is seen as an inevitable force of existence. As interpretations, customs change so does the way and practicing religion.

As the main aim of the women's movement is acquire gender equality. As religious extremism and the ideas of Islamists on women in Islam is primarily based on the notion of woman's natural call to 'motherhood and domesticity'. Women on the other hand are not giving into the parochial male perspective on the role of women in Islam and society. There has been an emergence of younger generation of women discussing the rights and lives of women. Challenging the patriarchal structure from within their homes by acquiring better education and the availability of better technology has galvanized women on a broader platform. As the growing social networking sites have also become important means to share intellectual views and thoughts on human rights discourse and women rights within particular religion/religions or society at large. With the broader global network of communication and sharing; political activities and movements are galvanized to support such causes. These networks also act as pressure building mechanisms on the ongoing situation or government policy. In a way affects the outcome of such movements.

Badran outlines the fact that the start of 1990s, women were re/visiting a new feminism through their fresh readings of the Qur'an. Women as public intellectuals (joined by male clerics) articulating a new feminism in an Islamic voice. Demanding a different reading of

the Qur'an, or, "stretching the limits"; as in, Mir-Hussein's apt phrase, in calling for gender justice (1996)<sup>19</sup>.

Muslim women have sought to campaign for women's rights within the Islamic discourse claiming it to be feminist. Therefore, there is an emergence of Islamic feminism; emphasizing that Islam is not anti-feminism nor is feminism anti men. Muslim feminist have been criticized for being men haters and separating men and women. Muslim feminist and Christian feminist deny these accusations and work for gender equality.

The NCW (State censored Feminism) is charged with consolidating control over women's movement throughout Egypt. However, the few reforms are appreciated by groups of women for initiating demands for rights to women.

However, the prevalence of FGM in the form of genital surgery in private hospitals shows the heightened grip of this inhuman custom amongst the middle and upper classes. The lower classes cannot afford private hospitals. FGM continues to be an evil and violent crime against women which the women activists and feminist continue to fight against, spreading awareness of the impact of FGM on girls which has psychological as well as physical health problems.

These legal reforms can only be successful if they are implemented and a follow up is done. Along with the women's groups initiative to counter this practice the Egyptian legal system amalgamate actions and efforts to end this practice in totality. An alliance formed between the government implementation strategy along with the grassroots women's groups, can this be achieved.

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<sup>19</sup> Margot Badran. Islamic Feminism: what's in a name? Al-Ahram online weekly Cairo. Issue (569):17-23 January 2002.

## **CHAPTER: 3**

## CHAPTER 3

### Mubarak Regime Phase II: (2000 – 2011) & Role of Women

With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Egypt has witnessed the rise of social movements and the burgeoning of collective mobilization. The movement for change or Kifaya during 2004-05, the labour mobilization and socio-economic protest in December 2006 were against the state and participants had a high number of Egyptian women workers. Though, women were never portrayed as the focus of the rising initiative by the media.

In the midst of rising social movements Mubarak formulated certain legal steps to foster equal gender relations. At the same time the continuation of legal bans on certain human rights groups did not foster the democratic element of the Egyptian society. The growing religious based clashes also, add to the emerging social and political upheaval damaging the secular ideal and human rights. The state under Mubarak's 30 years rule made very stagnant growth, though they are some credits with small measures taken. Mostly influenced by the growing civil society dialogues and seminars organized by women groups and university students propelled the government to take measures to empower women through state mechanism and reforms.

The Mubarak regime restricted the working of many civil society organizations, many of them led by women. The regime being responsible for widespread human rights violations, including forms of harassment and violence against women, which many organizations such as Nazra for feminist studies, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, and the Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement have well –documented.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Imperial Feminism, Islamophobia, and the Egyptian Revolution, accessed on 9 Sept, 2011 from URL:<http://yfa.awid.org/2010/02/imperial-feminism-islamophobia-and-the-egyptian-revolution/>

### **3.1) Rise of Movements - Political Suppression:**

The Mubarak government allowed the participation of multiparty system in Egypt. The power mostly centered with Mubarak and his party. The Islamists parties as well gained major support from amongst the conservative sections of the society, majorly the Salafist' group (strongly fundamentalist) and Muslim Brotherhood gained major support. In the 2005 elections, the Muslim Brotherhood was in the forefront of the running polls, which the Mubarak regime stated as being rigged. Therefore, Mubarak continued to be in power. In the 2005 presidential elections many of the Islamists groups participated in the political process. The Muslim Brotherhood managed to gain some seats. However, Mubarak was again voted as the president.

In 2005, women started a joint protest movement called "Women for Democracy", these protest movements once again received very little media attention in a way to censor women' efforts to initiate democratic process in Egypt. The Women' movement continues to be part of economic protest for economic empowerment; campaigning against sexual harassment at work places and streets and for more political representation to initiate legislation which are more gender just. The call for democracy can be seen as demanding a transparent system of election to encourage multiparty system against the dictatorial rule of Mubarak since 1981.

#### **Protests and Strikes**

From the year 2005 Egypt has witnessed a wave of strikes and protests. Through monitoring of the media, the Centre for women rights noted that women's voices have started to rise in demanding their rights. Working class women were the first to demand their rights at work. In the medical field:

- 150 female nurses held a strike in January in the Central Hospital of Sars El Layan. The female nurses abstained from work, thereby halting all work at the hospital, and demanded the attendance of the health minister to solve their financial problems.

•70 female nurses staged a protest and refused to work at the International Mansoura Hospital. The protest was against the hospital administration's dismissal of their demands to have their financial rights recognized according to the law.<sup>21</sup>

The reign of dictatorship in the name of democracy led to stagnancy of the political electoral system and cases of suppression increased by the state machinery against the dissident groups demanding free and fair elections. The Mubarak regime many a times enforced the law of association 32 on groups.

The emergency laws identified as one of the most draconian law to be existing in the Egyptian legislative system. The emergency laws were applied on those suspected of terrorist links and imprisoned without trial subjected to torture. In the wake of this law, any civil society group or activist could be identified as a terrorist group/ or involved in non-state action against the state.

### **Economic Stagnancy:**

In the midst of political suppression the growing economic stagnancy also exaggerated the economic problems for Egyptian women and men. The SAP and economic reforms by Sadat and Mubarak had adverse effects on the Egyptian economic rates. With government companies being opening up to private firms, the government was less in a position to provide for jobs to its growing youth population.

Lack of educated population also adds to the problem of less qualification. The youth agitated as there are growing demands for jobs and less supply of jobs.

### **3.2) Projects on Women's Empowerment:**

The female empowerment movement in Egypt made some developments; over the last decade, due to the persistent efforts of the women's movement. The regime amended and formulated policies for women's empowerment due to the prevalence of strong advocacy by

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<sup>21</sup> Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (2008), Status of Egyptian Women in 2008- A Report, Cairo



women as individuals and groups. For example, the constitution was amended in 2010 granting women a quota for parliamentary political participation by allocating 64 seats for female representatives. However, applying the amendment proved difficult because of the individual candidacy electoral system used in the last election.

In 2003, Councilor Tahani al-Gebali was the first female judge appointed to Egypt's highest judicial authority, the Supreme Constitutional Court of Egypt. Gradually the number of female judges has reached 42 in 2012. There are a section of conservatives against women being judges and hearing cases. But, also a growing recognition of female judges ability to pass the just is visible; thus, toning down the conservative parochial demands.

In 2008, Female Genital Mutilation was abolished by a decree of law. Declaring the act; as a crime against women. However, the practice is very much prevalent as genital surgery. The practice has been abolished in the government hospitals. Though, private hospitals carry out 'genital surgery' claiming it to be safe and hygienic.

### **Women for Democracy:**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well women have joined forces. Organizations and individuals have come together to campaign for democracy in the true sense in Egypt. In 2005 after the elections were declared as rigged women joined together to fight for democracy in Egypt.

Women of all classes are part of this campaign. Democracy is seen as the only viable option which would insure political and economic growth and stability for securing equality between men and women also on religious basis for Muslims, Christians and others.

Many middle and lower class women workers have staged a number of strikes in the factories demanding better wages, better working condition.

The 2010 elections were kept open for independent candidates to run for presidency as well. Though, Mubarak had introduced this reform in 2008, by the 2010 elections Mubarak remained in power. The introduction of independent candidatures for 2010 elections left

very few women with the opportunity to contest elections. With a minimal 64 seats reserved for women candidates in the lower house of the Egyptian parliament.



Figure 1: Source: *Al Jazeera English*. Retrieved 13 April 2011. By *Fatma Naib*

### **3.3) Arab Uprising 2011 and Egyptian Uprising**

By the end of 2010 the political and economic scene in Egypt was on the verge of bursting. With the sparking of the uprising in Tunisia led to unraveling of the events in the other parts of Arab North African region.

The upheaval of Arab uprising is mainly caused by low economic conditions and the rising number of unemployed youth in the region. Corruption and dictatorship is again seen as an important factor against which people revolted. The spread of modern technology and growing social networking sites are the modern tools of spreading the word for mobilizations of masses which galvanized into the movement.

#### **Women in the Uprising:**

Women as mentioned from the beginning of the dissertation have been active participants in all the revolts and political system. So, the 'idea of women being passive in spirit' is falsified each time a woman/women rise up against injustice. Women have participated as individuals, as women's groups, feminist's organizations advocating for democracy, justice, and freedom.

The words by Asmaa Mahfouz on 18<sup>th</sup> Jan 2011 blog urged the Egyptian people to come down to the Tehrir square demanding free and democratic Egypt.

*“I’m making this video to give you one simple message: we want to go down to Tahrir Square on January 25<sup>th</sup>. If we still have honour and want to live with dignity on this land, we have to go down. We will go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights... the entire government is corrupt- a corrupt president and a corrupt security force... if you stay home you deserve what will happen to you... and you be guilty, before your nation, before your people... go down send SMS’s and post on the ‘net’...make people aware.. You know your own social circle, your building, your family, and friends, tell them to come with us. Bring five or ten people; if each of us manages to bring five or ten people to tahrir square... talk to people and tell them, this is enough!! It will make a difference, a big difference... never say there’s no hope... so long you have come down with us, there will be hope...don’t think you can be safe anymore!! No of us are! Come down with us and demand your rights, my rights, and your family’ rights. Am going down on January 25<sup>th</sup> and I will say “‘No’ to corruption, ‘No’ to this regime”.”<sup>22</sup>*

These words spread on blogs and via SMS’s mobilized the masses. The role of technology has been of the most important means through which women have been able to gain a voice and be part of a vibrant political activism.

Though, the movement at first was seen as a joint voice against the corrupt regime and corrupt president. However, soon the movement also galvanized the voices which were being suppressed due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Women and men protesting and chanting slogans together ‘down with Mubarak’! In a way overcoming the code of social behavior expected to be followed in the Egyptian society. Young women reaching the square along with their male friends and brothers demand democracy and dignity to life. Many women young and old spent days and nights at the square; demanding democracy, justice, equality and freedom.

### **3.4) Women for Democracy & Social Change**

The women’s organizations, feminists have taken this opportunity for advocating for democracy and campaigning for gender equality and political representation of women.

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<sup>22</sup> Protest coverage: Al Ahram Online News 2011. [www.alahramonline.org](http://www.alahramonline.org)

Nawal el Sadaawi, a feminist writer and physician joined the protest and demonstration congratulated the youth for speaking up against the oppressive regime. Emphasized the importance to have a secular constitution and secular government; based on equality which is to bring about more opportunities for women, thus bringing about social change.<sup>23</sup>

Many young Egyptian women have founded research organizations by coming together and claiming their rights, advocating women's rights. The research group such as the Nazra organization for feminist studies is one such research group. Mozn Hassan the Executive Director of Nazra for Feminist Studies emphasized the working of many women groups claiming public spaces via demonstration thus, being active participants and agents of change. Women will continue to demand our own space, happiness and freedom, write the history of Egypt. Women's history will not be a gray one; it will be an important part of Egypt's history.<sup>24</sup>

With the initiatives of new generation of young women Egyptians, Egypt has witnessed increased participation at the grassroots political activism. Local civil rights advocates attribute the phenomenon to novel means of communication and organizations, especially the social networking sites.

Therefore, Egyptian women are seen as active participants in a grass root people based struggle against poverty and state corruption, rigged elections, repressions, torture, and police brutality. In the 2011 uprising women have led marches and attended to the wounded, protecting historical monuments and state property.

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<sup>23</sup> BBC News, In conversation with Nawal El Sadaawi. 21th February 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Mozn Hassan. Between private and public, personal experience from Egypt's Revolution. Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2011 <http://yfa.awid.org/2011/02/between-private-and-public-personal-experience-from-egypt-revolution/>



Figure 2: Source: *the Society Pages*

Several women and men were martyred. Along with men, “Women revolt in the street. Professor Noha Radwan was attacked and beaten half to death by Mubarak thugs who ripped her shirt open and wounded. Several women and men have been martyrs. Amira killed by a police officer; Liza Hassan hit by a police car; Sally Zahran hit to death by police thugs”.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of continued protests by Egyptian men and women, Mubarak stepped down on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

#### **Campaigns for Women’s Rights - Building alliance:**

Women’s organization coalition was formed in Cairo to ensure women’s role in the democratic building of Egypt.

Secondly to have equal representation to ensure rights as women; and to be part of the decision influencing and making.

To quote Fouad Abdel Moniem Ryad of National Council of Human Rights (NCHR), “the society should understand that women are an integral part of the country, it is hard to achieve because it is long rooted culture to ignore them, therefore I believe there should be a women’s quota in all organizations not only the parliament.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid* 12.

<sup>26</sup> Bikya Masr, Egypt: Egyptian Women Organizations Coalition Announced. Women’s Groups re-launch Egyptian Feminist Union, accessed 26th October, 2011, URL [:http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/506231](http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/506231)

Fatma Khagafy emphasized “the revolution called upon equality and social justice for all portions of the society”.<sup>27</sup>

However, the demand for equal representation in the political process and decision making for women poses an obstacle due to the culture of the society that ignores women in the decision making process on all levels of the country.

### **Importance of Secular Alliance:**

Women’s rights and their status also become heavily dependent on the political scenario. The biggest challenge would come from the conservative Islamists who would want women to recede to their homes once the uprising subsides. It becomes imperative for women’s organizations to form alliance with secular civil groups to advocate for their rights and ensure their rights.

In the midst of growing conservatism alongside liberal thinkers it is seen important for minority groups to club together and act as an opposition toward fundamentalists groups to balance out the participation and safeguard their rights and position in the future of Egypt. In this respect the rights of minority and women in particular remain in grim position if these groups do not come together as a strong political force.

One of the demands in the 2011 uprising has been for a “secular” civil code to safeguard the rights of Muslims and Christians in Egypt. Women’s groups involved in advocacy also campaigned for a secular civil code in order to ensure women’s and minority rights.

### **Challenges to Gender Equality**

Post regime change poses a major threat for gender equality in Egypt. As the traditional conservative elements try to push back women into the domestic sphere once the political scene is normal. This case in point has been supported by Margot Badran; “Women in this

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid17

country have always participated in revolutionary movements, and they have to fight inch by inch to get what they should get when things return to normality”<sup>28</sup>.

As stated by Fatma Emam, two biggest challenges to the women(feminist) movement in Egypt is seen coming from the rise of radical Islamist voices like Salafi, Gamaa and the Muslim Brotherhood to an extent.

Secondly, the constraints put forth by Supreme Council Armed Force (SCAF) on women’s groups mostly NGOs supporting women’s rights within the family code<sup>29</sup>.

The post regime change conservative forces infringe upon women's rights laws passed during Mubarak regime trying to declare the reforms like, all remnants of his regime as illegitimate and should be repudiated. For example, several thousand Salafis demonstrated outside of al-Azhar University in Cairo in May (2011), demanding the return of educational authority solely to fathers. The general secretary of the High Council of Islamic Affairs, a government body, called for lowering maternal custody ages from the current age of 15 to age six for boys and nine for girls. Challenges come from supposedly liberal forces as well. In April, the Freedoms Committee of the Journalists' Syndicate held a conference condemning the current women's rights standards in Egypt. Three months later, Judge Abdallah al Baga, President of the Family Court of Appeal, submitted a draft bill to the Prime Minister that called for abolishing khula divorce and reinstating, under some conditions, a practice in which husbands can forcibly return "disobedient" wives to their homes - a practice that has been outlawed since the 1960s.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore this uprising very much becomes a part of women’s movement demanding justice, freedom from inequality and harassment. As Women in Egypt experience harassment perpetuated by the police force and men. Violence against women in the form of rape, sexual harassment and honor killings are attached with a stigma. In most cases a woman -

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<sup>28</sup> Margot Badran SRCC (2011), Egypt’s Revolution and New Feminism.

<sup>29</sup> Fatma, Emam, (Research Associate), Nazra Organization, email on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> How Egypt’s Revolution has dialed out Women. *Foreign Affairs*. August 2011.

raped, harassed or killed is blamed for the incident. Such paternal and women antagonistic attitudes still prevail in Egypt as in most part of the world.

The centre for Women Rights along with other NGOs drafted a recommendatory law to criminalize sexual harassment in Egypt. However, no major heed was paid to the draft.<sup>31</sup> The report notes the number of harassment, rape and domestic violence being reported to the NGO's than to the police. As the police in certain cases its self is seen as one of the perpetrators of violence against women.

This gender based violence was reflected in the post regime change Egypt. The incident of SCAF forces attacking the crowds especially women, tearing their shirts; subjecting women to such harassment tactics is to keep women away from the streets.

The most ruthless and ghastly patriarchal expression was seen when the SCAF subjected twelve women protestors to virginity test<sup>32</sup> on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011, when women activists had planned to mark the liberation of Egypt and “women” on the International Women's Day. This shameful incident indicates the level of human injustice and attitudes that prevail on women. Also, emphasizing the position of the State and the SCAF to pose such suppressive measures to the level of demeaning a woman's dignity and perpetuating such violence.

Amnesty International reported that at least 18 female protesters were arrested, tortured and subjected to “virginity tests.” One 20-year-old, Salwa Hosseini, described her humiliation when she was forced to take off her clothes in a room while male soldiers looked in and took photographs of her. Later, a man carried out a “virginity” exam, and she was threatened with prostitution charges.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Report on the Status of Women in Egypt(2008) Centre of Women Rights in Egypt, Cairo.

<sup>32</sup> Fatma Naib “North African women on the barricades”, Cairo; *Africa Renewal*, August 2011.

<sup>33</sup>Sheema Khan. Egypt's Revolution is Leaving Women Behind. Accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2011 from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/opinion/egypts-revolution-is-leaving-women-behind/article1973918/>



The cry for dignity being another demand of the uprising was striped when these women were subjected to virginity test.

The violence perpetuated by the state and SCAF are the major challenges the women's movement face alongside the growing conservative elements.

The 2011 uprising had a large number of women participants of all ages, thus, making women's voices very much part of the people's movement. The parliamentary elections in November 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood was leading the poll. The presence of large radical Islamists groups running for political offices poses a threat to women's rights.

The women's groups to counter such elements are joining forces to counter the spread of anti women laws. Many groups like the Nazra organization, the New Woman and more are focusing on advocacy. Spreading awareness and creating networks to involve more women in the political activism. These groups are reaching out to more women through conducting workshops, seminars and discussions to make them aware of their rights as women and human beings.

### **3.5) Coalition of Egyptian Feminist Union and Women's Groups:**

The coalition of Egyptian Feminists Organizations addressed an open letter to the Prime Minister Mr. Essam Sharaf on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2011, stating the demands and requirements for building a democratic Egypt. The following is the open letter:

The Coalition considers that the forthcoming cabinet should reflect the representation of women from diverse affiliations, a representation that did not occur in the past cabinet or in the various committees that were established following the revolution.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> NAZRA ORGANIZATION Submitted on Mon, 03/14/2011 - 12:23

The Egyptian revolution has launched a clear message to the world about the level of civilization of the Egyptian women and men who seek to build a civil and modern State, and achieve full citizenship relying on equality and non discrimination on the base of gender, religious or ideological belief, social affiliation, race or any other form of discrimination. Moreover, the message conveyed to the world says that Egypt has decided to restore its leading role in the Arab region and worldwide and to represent a model for the other people of the North African region. This requires the participation of all forces in the rebuilding of our country, with women on the heart of these forces. The Coalition considers that the new cabinet whose head was chosen by the people should substantiate this message. Therefore, we confirm the following:

The alliance demanded the following for women who fought against corruption and oppression.

- “Women should represent at least 30% of the members in all the committees formed, especially; in the founding assembly that will be responsible of developing a new Constitution for Egypt.
- The undemocratic policies of the former President’s party have led to the establishment of institutions affiliated to the regime. We consider that the new government should adopt as a priority the dismantlement of all these institutions pretending to represent the Egyptian people, especially the so called” National Democratic” Party for the crimes its leaders have perpetrated against our people as well as the National Council of Women.
- Moreover, room should be given for the democratic and free establishment of political parties, trade unions, general unions and Civil Society Organizations on the base of mere notification of the concerned authorities.

**In this context, we request the following:**

- The dissolution of the State Security Services that played a specific role in oppressing the freedom of association and expression, hounding democratic activists, and intervening in all the aspects of life in Egypt (work, education, artistic creation, etc.).

- The purification of the police corpus from the heads involved in crimes against citizens either during the revolution or before. Their prosecution should take place publicly and immediate action should occur to stop their attempts to destroy the evidences of corruption.
- The police corpus should be restructured as to comply with Egypt's international commitments in terms of human rights and be headed by a civilian minister in order to ensure that this body will play back its natural role, i.e., the protection of citizens. Moreover, the mobilized soldiers of the Central Security forces should be released and this institution abolished. This represents the main way to reestablish the lost trust between citizens and the workers in the police corpus and cut the ground under the feet of thugs or any other attempt to destabilize the internal security.

The Coalition considers that under the provision of the basic freedoms mentioned above, the forthcoming period will be decisive in enabling the revolutionary forces building their political parties and developing a social contract reflecting their consensus about the new Constitution. The coalition called on the new government to adopt urgent decisive measures to withdraw any powers from the leaders and representatives of the Mubarak regime, especially in the ranks of the police, the media and the local councils in order to break off the way in front of thugs and attempts of destabilization”.<sup>35</sup>

With the formation of Egyptian Feminist Union Ms. Badran emphasized, “We feel that it’s time for women to participate in the public debate just as much as men,” “We were partners in the revolution and we also want to be partners after the revolution.”<sup>36</sup>

The women’s movement is majorly secular, with liberal, leftist strands of feminist voices and groups. Islam has been recently involved to include in the discourse of women’s rights. Therefore, there is a growing strand of Islamic feminists who put forth their arguments on the equality of both the sexes on the basis of Islam being the most equal religion.

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<sup>35</sup> NAZRA organization (2011), “Egypt: Coalition of Egyptian Feminist Organizations Open letter to Prime Minister”, accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2011. URL:<http://www.wluml.org/node/7020>.

<sup>36</sup> Nazra

### **Democracy and the Future of Women's Movement:**

The women's movement in Egypt is a constant reality working out ways to be vibrant in political and social life of Egypt. The younger generation of Egyptian women and men are demanding justice, equality and dignity. The growing NGO's network and Women research groups advocating for women's rights in the political system and within families add to the rising vibrant political culture. The rising political activism by women finds expression with Ms.Bothiana Kamel, contesting for presidential candidature. She is the only female contesting for presidential office in the Islamic country.

At the moment post regime change there are merely nine women MPs in the new parliament. The committee for drafting the new Constitution was also male dominated. To quote Bothiana Kamel, "political alliance, have an Islamic bias which is detrimental to the status of women". In this situation it becomes important for women to participate and lobby for their rights.

Samira Ibrahim, one of the women revolutionaries has taken the army officer to court who subjected her and some more women to virginity tests. The message she states of the army she says is "if you take to the streets in the name of revolution or call for social justice, we (army) will violate your honour".

### **3.6) Demand: Secular Civil Code or the Shari 'a**

This point is also elaborated further, as according to Samir Amin, the project of Muslim Brotherhood remains the establishment of a theocratic state, as he quotes the attachment of Article 2 during Sadat and Mubarak constitution. The recent programme of the Brotherhood proposed to set up a 'Council of Ulemas' to ensure any legislation to be in conformity with the requirements of the Shari 'a. Such a religious council would be all supreme over the elected government. Lead to declaring all the parties standing for secularism illegal. Non Muslims and women would be once again excluded from the political life.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Amin, Samir (2012) "Arab Spring time Revolution", Lecture delivered on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012 at School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi.

The pluralist activism is seen as an obstacle by the political Islamist or the reactionary groups to their power and authority as pointed out by Samir Amin. The suppression of dissent is again a measure of controlling democracy giving into theocracy. The joining of Islamists social forces poses a threat to the women's (peoples) demand for a secular constitution as the Islamists thrive for the imposition of the Shari 'a.

In the midst of animosity against the regime and conservative voices against women's rights, there is a section of civil society thriving for equality and justice. The coming together of these groups of people; both men and women mark the importance of a vibrant political culture.

Democracy is seen as the only viable option as women's organizations and secular alliances demand secular civil government. Democracy is the demand to safeguard the rights of Muslims and minority belonging to Copts, Jews and atheists.

However, as the secular groups forge alliance against the strong Islamists opposition; there will be more chances of balancing out the political clout of radicalism. And the prevalence of a political culture vibrant in diversity and growing civil society which would never compromise on the demand of the uprising for 'democracy'.

## **CHAPTER – 4**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Role of Egyptian Women's Organization for Reform in the Political and Social Status of Women**

This chapter will analyze the response of women's groups and research centers to the reforms formulated and laws implemented by Mubarak. The growing network of advocacy by women activists in private areas is growing. These cultural customs were not addressed as traditions to be done away with earlier. Only now the fight against cultural practices like FGM and child marriage is taking strong hold. Women's reproductive rights are also an area of concern and awareness which are discussed and debated among women to be the prerogative of the woman concerned.

#### **4.1) Women's Response to Reforms**

Over the two decades, the battle for women's rights in Egypt has been centered on Personal Status Laws (PSLs), which govern marriage, divorce, and child custody issues which are based on prevailing interpretations of Shari'a (Coptic Church law determines PSLs for Christians, however, does not confirm to divorce). A series of laws passed by the parliament in 2000 have made progress in the intervening years. For example, the new guidelines created a form of divorce, Khula, which gave women the power to request a divorce without having to prove maltreatment. The legislation also gave mothers custody of their children until the age of 15, replacing earlier laws that awarded them custody of sons until the age of 10 and daughters until 12. It granted women the ability to obtain birth certificates for their children and permitted mothers who had custody of children after a divorce to make educational decisions for them. In several ways, for the first time these laws granted mothers similar parental rights as fathers.

### **Personal Status Laws:**

Most of the changes in the laws were due to the long lasting women's movement in Egypt; advocating for gender justice. Some of the initiatives were appreciated by many women's groups. However, these reforms also reflected a lot of bias which are not in a favour of women. With regard to a woman initiating a divorce, she is required to hand over the bride presents which she received at the time of the wedding. This particular clause fails as it becomes unfavourable to lower and lower middle class women who could not afford to pay back the presents received. Therefore, in many cases they remain in abusive relationships.

The upper and upper middle class educated women are in a better position to avail of this right. Secondly, the stigma for a woman initiating divorce is also a reality which is prevalent in Egypt. As women who initiate divorce are viewed as infidels or charged with having low character for having leaving the husband. The society finds fault with the woman's position.

Although, polygamy is a rare reality in today's Egypt, but the non - mentioning of it does influence pressure on women. The inclusion of protective clause by women in the marriage contract is missing from the list.

Egyptian women married to non Egyptian men do not have the right to confer their citizenship to their children whereas, Egyptian men married to non- Egyptian women have the state given right of citizenship which goes against the clause<sup>5</sup> of CEDAW . The Islamic law requires women to have travel permission from their husbands or to have a male relative or *mahram*, who acts as a guardian to travel. This is mentioned in Article 26 which the government decided to drop in the wake of reform. This provision was criticized by the Islamists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sharifa Zuhur(2001), MERIA: The mixed impact of Feminist Struggles in Egypt during 1990s. *Meria- Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 5(1).



## **4.2) Analyses of politico economic status**

The National Council for Women is charged with consolidating control over an independent women's movement in Egypt. Though certain steps were taken to bring in reforms and include women in the state institutions. The government did not formulate any proper action plan for the implementation of these reforms. These reforms also highlight a class bias with regard to imposition of certain laws taking women to be a homogenous category. In a way these reforms would cater to only those women who have the information and the resources at hand. Many women are left out due to the lack of awareness of their rights and changes made in the laws. This is where the emergence of NGOs network has been evolving to spread awareness.

### **Political Representation:**

Women political representation has been low in Egypt. In 2000 Suzanne Mubarak insisted in the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, calling for increased representation of women in relation to conflict resolution. A delegation was elected. However, in the domestic political arena, women lack adequate representation. Women's groups lobbied for greater participation and reservation for women. Though, Egypt has been the only Arab country in the region to have minimal representation of women in the top positions of political offices. This minimal representation is also an 'under-representation of women' in top executive professions. With only token representation with a handful of elite women gaining power under the male patriarchal structure of the state.

Till 1986, only 18 per cent of women had registered for voting which increased to 39.8 per cent in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Though, women had gained the right to vote in 1956. The two decade non participation may be a reflection of the rule by Sadat and growing alliance between the government and the political Islamists forces. The increase in 2007 in women registering for voting is the initiative taken up by many human rights activists. On many

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<sup>2</sup> Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights (2008), Egypt National Sample Survey-2008, Cairo.

occasions the human rights and women's rights activists have received threat and condemnation from the conservative clerics for disrupting the Islamic ethos, charging them of westernizing Egypt.

**Political initiative by Mubarak:**

Apart from the, so called; clarion call for 'empowerment of women' during the Mubarak regime. Currently, there are only three women Ministers in the cabinet: Minister of Manpower and Immigration Aisha Abdel-Hady Abdel-Ghany, Minister of International Cooperation Fayza Abul Naga and Minister of State for Family and Population Mosheera Mahmoud Khattab.

Thirty women judges were elected by Mubarak to preside over marriage courts. However a section opposed the positive move: Human rights and women's association welcomed their appointment, while some male judges and Islamists activists objected to this appointment (on) the pretext that Islam does not allow women to preside over the judiciary. However, Egyptian constitution and law do not prohibit women from occupying judicial positions.<sup>3</sup>

Also, a woman wedding officer (Maazun) was appointed in 2008 to undertake Muslim marriage procedure. In 2008 Mubarak reserved 64 seats for women in the lower house of the parliament.

**Political Participation:** However, the reality of women representation in the political office is at 2 per cent at present. In 2008, for the local council election the percentage of women candidates was relatively low. Only 4.4 per cent of women had local council membership.<sup>4</sup> Egypt stands at 134<sup>th</sup> position in women's participation, out of 188 countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Ida Lichter, Muslim Women Reformers: Inspiring Voices against Oppression.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 2 report-2008.

**Decision-making and leadership:** The report also states that the government made some token appointments, by appointing a small number of women to power position and keeping most of them in clerical jobs. Faten Abdel Aziz Sharawy is appointed as a president of state commissioner in high constitutional court.

A number of law graduates were given positions to fill in clerical jobs. Second, stark example of women lacking top positions is in the appointment in local council governorates. In 76 positions for General Directors and appointment of 259 local leaders; only 4 women were appointed and were designated as Assistants to General Secretaries and the Governors.<sup>5</sup>

The findings of the report clearly point out to the contradiction in the state policy to implement gender equality in the political sphere.

Secondly, reinforcing male supremacy as women are seen filling in the lower job profiles. This also leads to the feminization of the lower rungs of public office to be perceived as best suited for women such as secretarial work. We find double standards at work. On one hand, Mubarak makes reservation for gender parity within the political office and on the other reinforces gender boundaries. However, the implementation of these certain reservation is a challenge in the regime changed Egypt.

With the uprising of 2011 and the majority of Muslim Brotherhood leading the polls may curb women's representation in the political arena and a backlash of the Suzanne Mubarak reforms. As the Islamists alliance was against such reforms in the first implementation of the same.

### **Economic Status and Class:**

The Muslim law grants women their economic rights. Wherein, women receive the half of their family inheritance as compared to her brother. She is allowed to keep her share without spending on the family. As man is seen as the sole provider of the family; according, to Muslim and Christian orthodox belief system. However, in reality this is not

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 2

the case. As women become part of the labour force, they contribute to family's economic needs and strive for a better standard of living.

The stark reality of Egypt is that most of the poor population is involved in informal sector, especially women. The percentage of women involved in the formal sector stood at 23 per cent in 2005.<sup>6</sup> As most of the women are involved in primary sectors such as; factories, agriculture and domestic work their labour is not recognized / appreciated as wage labour contributing to the nation's economic labour force. Though, the fact of the matter being, that the households are run on the income of these meager wages earned by women working in the fields and domestic fields. In Egypt 22 per cent of families are solely, headed by women, which is a growing reality at present. This fact is missed out by many Islamists because of their obsession with the gender boundaries being defined by the Shari 'a; and the rigid following of the same.

The economic status and the policy impact on women varies in rural and urban settings, as class, traditional income and education are important factors shaping the lives of women and her 'sex' in particular. As mentioned earlier, women form a major part of the informal sectors in rural and urban Egypt. Their work is not recorded by the government agencies as a cumulative labour force of the nation's economy.

The tribal, rural and working class women involved in the informal sector, modernization has reduced or eliminated their traditional means of making a living. As their economic contribution is not considered as work, government figures tend to ignore women's contribution in the agricultural sector unless they are salaried or in domestic production.<sup>7</sup>

The reforms in economic and educational access to women did not have major effects on the lives of majority of Egyptian rural working class women. As land was a crucial variable in the rural economic setting. Most of the land remained in the hands of men then women. As clearly noted by Hatem, land reforms primarily benefited rural middle class men and the working class men; it excluded women from the benefits. Land as an

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<sup>6</sup> Report of Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2008, Cairo, Egypt.

<sup>7</sup> Yazbeck Haddad & John Esposito. Islam and Gender: Dilemmas in the Changing Arab World. In *Islam, Gender and Social Change*.

economic entity was distributed only to the male heads of the household. In some cases, female heads of households, especially widows, were given access to some land as guardians of their sons. However, did not include female heads of the households who were divorced mothers with sons. This led these women to protest in 1952 against this law which was unfair to them.<sup>8</sup>

This law lays the rigid foundation of preference given to males, as sons are perceived to be the soul inheritors of the land with women as mothers acting as guardians and not ‘owners’ of the land/property.

Official labor statistics that underreported women’s economic participation contributed a new subordinate consciousness for rural and urban women. These statistics did not take into account the substantial amount of agricultural work that women did in the fields and at home, which is considered as family work not paid work. The statistics showed a drop in women’s economic contribution to be 4.2 per cent in 1966.<sup>9</sup> This parochial mind set was upheld and imposed as a norm on the pretext of certain duties being deemed as women’s responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

In the Egyptian society like in other societies, the strict division of labour is challenged by women entering the professional fields previously occupied by men. The building of the nation state and heightened self awareness of rights led to the growth in women demanding rights in the public arena. Yet, with women entering into professions previously dominated by men; the percentage of women contributing to the labour force is comparatively less than men.

As the norm of the Egyptian society maintain, “Men as the breadwinners of the family and women as the nurturers.” This ideology was visible when the Islamists block headed by the Salafist ordered women to leave the jobs for men and retreat back home to take care of the family as they perceive is deemed by the Quran.

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<sup>8</sup> Mervat Hatem, *Secularist and Islamist Discourses on Modernity in Egypt and the Evolution of the post Colonial Nation- State*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 6

<sup>10</sup> Chapter 2 Mubarak’s regime Phase I 1981-2000 - pp.5-6.

### **Recent statistics on women participation in the Labour Force:**

The share of women in total labour force stood at 18.3 percent in 1990s; which increased up to 24.7 percent in 2008 (CAPMAS 2008).<sup>11</sup> Unemployment reached to 7 percent in 2007 affecting the young, educated and rural population, especially women. With the 2008 global economic crises unemployment reached 9 percent, which the observers believe to be higher. Women unemployment was recorded four times those of males. (CAPMAS 2008). As state led enterprises were liquidated the percentage fell from 9 percent in 1995 to 4 percent in 2007.

Secondly, the impact of government policies in the wake of globalization also impacts women and their traditional income generation techniques. As many women in the traditional domestic market scheme are pushed into global market scene with no prior knowledge of the dynamics. For example, women involved in the construction work are going out of jobs with the emergence of builders companies taking over.

### **Illiteracy & Lack of Awareness:**

Secondly, with 30 per cent of Egyptian women being illiterate, being rooted in religious dogmatic beliefs the possibility of taking refuge in the law makes no sense. The law remains a mere statement if not enacted and followed. The women's groups also point out to the lack of awareness among many women regarding their rights within Islam itself. The prevalence of ignorance is the biggest misfortune women face. As many rights, which are granted to women by the religion are over shadowed by the dominant patriarchy. According to the stereotype, women need to be submissive, sacrificing and loving wives and mothers fulfilling their task as primary nurturers. However, this requirement rules out or negates rights women have as human beings. Precisely, this division of role blurs the concept of rights.

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<sup>11</sup> CAPMAS – Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics.

This however, does not reflect that women are completely oppressed in this age. But, there are reminiscences of subordination in the public sphere and subtle differentiation within homes sometime blatant.

Therefore we see women groups growing as part of the civil society. Even though, the association law curtailed many of the activities of an independent women's group movement. Many groups were formed by revolutionary young women working as groups, research organizations and NGO's to be involved in women issues and be politically and socially active. These women's groups have been major agents of 'change' challenging patriarchal systems embedded in the social settings.

#### **4.3) Role of Secular and Islamists Women Reformers/ Organizations**

Women's wing or groups are part of the political parties at present in Egypt. However, there is growing number of independent organizations from the political parties working in the NGO sector, research and advocacy fields for women.

The women/feminist movement in Egypt follows a secular tone largely. However, Islam is taken up as one of the discourse to re-emphasize gender equality on the basis of religion. As Egypt is mainly, Islamic therefore, the development of an Islamic discourse becomes important for women to campaign for their rights. There has always been a strand of Muslim women advocating for equal rights for women within Islam. However, with the growth of Political Islamists and radical conservatism; there is also an emergence of Islamists Feminists who seek to interpret the Quran and Hadiths from a woman's perspective.

According to Ekbal Baraka, discrimination against women is not an essential part of Islam, but rather, a result of particular interpretation of its provision by males. Baraka tries to reconcile her feminist convictions with her religious beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

Rabab el-Mahdi a professor and political activist from the left has been actively involved in the Kifaya Movement (Enough) for democratic reform in Egypt. She is also involved

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<sup>12</sup> Ida Lichter (2009). Muslim Women Reformers: Inspiring Voices against Oppression, 99.

in the Women for Democracy movement, which operates under the slogan “the streets are ours”.

### **Role of Women’s Organizations**

**Nazra Organization for Feminist Studies** is founded by Moza Hassan and a group of young women researchers; who are researching the areas of women’s lives social, political and economic. Spreading and promoting feminist studies in Egypt as part of gender sensitization of the society.

Many Islamist feminist are part of the organization, though having a secular discourse on women’s movement, they opt for Islam as a stream to promote women’s rights.

Other groups like **Women and Memory Forum**, **Nour Publishing group** many others the risk of being attacked by the political authority and fundamentalists’.<sup>13</sup>

**Women and Memory Forum**- formed by a group of women to explore the historical texts to discover the discourses on women through a gender sensitive rereading of history. The forum Intends to produce educational material to be disseminated for research. Also, writing biographies of women involved in feminist activities to record their activism marking the women’s movement.<sup>14</sup>

### **Nour: Arab Women’s Publishing House**

The Nour publishing house was established in 1992. The publishing house was established to fill in the void in the existing system, wherein, the existing publishing houses were not sufficiently sensitive to women’s issues and women’s writings. Therefore, they founders came up with their own. Apart from publishing women’s writings, maintaining records, Nour organizes seminars and workshops, and commissions research in various fields.

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter 2 page,13.

<sup>14</sup> Nemat & Nadia Wassef (2010), Unfulfilled Promises: Women’s Rights in Egypt, Population Council, Cairo.



**Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW): “Give Me Credit for Being a Woman!”<sup>15</sup>**

Most of the families are female headed and supported which the policy makers overlook. Government policies, however, are based on the image of the family that men are the only breadwinners. In response to this growing trend and women’s lack of access to credit and income-earning opportunities, a group of young women and men working in different development fields founded the Association for the development and Enhancement of Women (ADEW) in 1989.

The backbone of ADEW is credit and technical assistance, though it also caters to other unaddressed needs. Including, holding informal sessions on legal awareness for women to brief them of their legal rights. Providing help to access the opportunities given by the government.<sup>16</sup>

**Women’s Advocacy in the realm of private lives:**

The new generations of women are taking up issues which were not discussed earlier. In this process a new kind of feminism has developed. These new women’s groups such as Nazra for Feminist Organization, New Woman Foundation, and AWSA are groups involved in taking up issues such as domestic violence, clitoridectomy (FGM); women’s reproductive rights and the use of contraceptives apart from political representation for women. These are the new areas of concern which foray into the intimate private lives of women where the possibility of torture and discrimination exist.

**Female Circumcision**

Many female groups sprung up against this practice. Women’s groups spread awareness regarding the harmful effects of this practice on women’s psychological and physical health. The groups like FGM Task Force were formed in 1994 to end this practice.

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<sup>15</sup> Slogan of the Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women(ADEW) on their Posters.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 14

Nawal el Saadawi being a psychiatrist, activist and author while campaigning against the practice also wrote texts regarding the harmful effects of FGM. Her book on 'Women and Sex' mainly focused on the violence of FGM. She and her work have always faced opposition from religious and political authorities. On many instances her work has been banned in Egypt. This depicts a stark reality of patriarchy dominant in Egyptian society where any dissent coming from women is seen as a threat and is controlled. The power to control and maintain hegemony over dissidence is of central interests to political authority and the political Islamists. Nevertheless, Women's group campaigned for ending the practice.

### **Practice of FGM and Domestic Violence:**

Issue based networks have been established by women, such as FGM Task Force, and a network of organizations called 'Women and Violence' continue to persist and maintain their momentum spreading awareness against such crimes of domestic violence and FGM as violence to which women are subjected to. As stated earlier in chapter 2, the arguments given in favour of the practice are the following:

- First, the practice of FGM was an ancient custom. A woman's sexuality is controlled by circumcising her clitoris. Women were viewed as having large sexual appetite in order to control and keep the society from *fitna* (chaos) sexual promiscuity this practice was allegedly carried out.
- Secondly, clitoridedectomy was seen as a sign of honour and purity. Thus, a female who was circumcised was seen as pure and belonging to honorable family, ready for marriage.<sup>17</sup>
- Thirdly, the practice is a cultural norm of inclusion into the society as a girl enters into womanhood as believed by many African tribes.

So, the practice was very much connected to controlling female sexuality and keeping the female sexuality within the bonds of the marriage.

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<sup>17</sup> For more details refer to Olayinka Koso Thomas (1987). *The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for eradication*. New Jersey Press & London, Zed Book.

The annual newsletter of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics on the status of women and men in Egypt in 2008 showed that 95.8 per cent of ever-married women have been circumcised. The percentage of circumcisions has decreased to 92.2 per cent in urban areas in comparison with 98.3 percent in rural areas.<sup>18</sup>

The development of **FGM Task Force, Arab Women Solidarity Association, El Nadim Centre for Psychological Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (ENCPRVV)**— a center which provides assistance to victims of violence and torture such as domestic violence and circumcision has widened the scope of women’s agency.

Aida Seif Dawla the founding member of **New Women Research Center** and the co-founder of Task Force and ENCPRVV clinic plays an important role in the women’s movement. Through the research center, Dr. El Dawla is involved in developing strategies challenging the obstacles to women’s liberation posed by government policy. She is fighting the religious fundamentalists’ efforts to force women back to a veiled society.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Dawla advocates against FGM through NWRC and the Task Force by networking with other groups.

The FGM Task force began with three main activities:

- (i) An advocacy group: (working with decision makers and media),
- (ii) A grassroots mobilization group
- (iii) And a research group

One of the problems of the previous FGM eradication efforts had been based that the debates always were centered on ‘medical and religious beliefs’. The new approach adopted by FGM Task Force draws upon other aspects, framing it as a gender and rights issue.<sup>20</sup>

With the consistent efforts, opposition and the awareness of harmful effects of the practice by the Women’s groups and international media attention the government banned the practice in 2008 by a degree of law. Article 242 was added to the Penal Code

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<sup>18</sup> Status of Egyptian Women 2008 Report by Centre for Women’s Rights.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 1

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 14 Unfulfilled Promises: Women’s Rights in Egypt (2010).

Act No. 58 of 1937 to create a new law, law number 126 of 2008. This law states, "taking into account the provision of Article 61 of the Penal Code and without prejudice to any greater penalty stipulated by another law, anyone who performs female circumcision shall be punished by imprisonment for not less than three months and not exceeding two years or a fine of no less than 1000 pounds and no more than 5000 pounds according to articles 241 and 242 of the Penal Code."<sup>21</sup>

The efforts by Suzanne Mubarak are also crucial in pushing for reforms and criminalize the practice. However, the practice still continues despite the attention and advocacy against it. The efforts by feminists and journalist continue; the growing local feminists endeavour including creative anti-FGM advertising (posters) educating women not to subject their daughter to the violence.

Despite the increase in literacy, this deep rooted practice prevails because of the linkage of female sexuality to male control. Justifying the custom; on the grounds of being necessary for a woman to be called as a good faithful wife and chaste woman. The Muslim Brotherhood hurled opposition to the laws passed claiming "outlawing FGM was tantamount to promoting vice" and that the NCMC was pandering to western influence. These conservative and traditional attitudes are the major challenges.

### **Domestic Violence**

The case of domestic violence was also less reported crime as rape in Egypt till the recent past. As in the religiously dogmatic country wife battering was not seen as a crime but a normal happening in the home. These groups of young women's activists' formed a group called as 'Violence and Women' have cleared the way by raising the voices against violence women are subjected to as normal happening. The idea of self respect and individuality has taken central stage in the lives of women. Thus, making women rise and be agents of change for themselves and for other women.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid 13

AWSA is still functioning as a global network of Arab women mainly Egyptian and the Egyptian Diaspora along with women in solidarity with the women's movement in Egypt. AWSA aims at collective research and conducts workshops on the political, economic and social events which affect women. Also, act as a global lobby to pressure the governments to human rights demand by engaging in political and economic debates ranging from international to domestic policies and its effects on the people.

A report issued by the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood shows the proportion of female minors who are subjected to physical violence by their husbands is increasing.

According to the report, the percentage of violence against wives in Egypt is 21percent. A report issued by the National Council for Childhood and Womanhood entitled "The World Report" on violence against children stated that physical violence against female minors includes slapping, punching, kicking, dragging on the floor, strangling, burning with a hot iron, and threatening violence with weapons. In addition, one out of every five women had been subjected to some form of violence over the year preceding the survey. The main perpetrators of violence are husbands, and to a lesser degree mothers, fathers, and brothers. Results indicated that half of the women believed that their husband had the right to beat their wives in at least one of the following cases: if she burns the food, if she argues with him , if she leaves the house without telling him, if she neglects the children, or if she refuses to have sex with him. 17 percent of women believe that beating is justified in any of the above reasons. Therefore, Egypt was ranked first in the world for the prevalence of wife-beating husbands. The percentage of Egyptian women who reported domestic violence went up from 23 percent in2003 to 40 percent in 2008.<sup>22</sup>

As the report highlights the reasons to which half of the women respondents believed that the husband had the right to beat his wife. This notion is due to the tolerance of a patriarchal society which adheres to the orthodox readings and interpretations of the religious scriptures by men of the religion.

## **Reproductive Rights of Women**

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid 13

The laws abiding the Egyptian citizens are mainly derived from the Constitution (statutory laws) and the customary laws based on the Shari 'a. The Egyptian law is based on the most conservative possible interpretation of religious text.<sup>23</sup> It does not recognize the concept of reproductive rights. However, the parameters of women's reproductive rights are dictated not only by the religion, culture and tradition but also by legislation and related policy, sometimes with contradictory logic.<sup>24</sup>

In spite of the raised age limit for marriage. Many girls are married before they turn 18 and consequently, are young mothers. This makes girls more vulnerable and prone to violence be sexual, domestic violence and troubles of early motherhood.

Many NGOs through research and advocacy have spread awareness among rural and lower class urban women for the importance of family planning, and the use of contraceptives for a healthy life for women. There is an increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate with an increasing trend over time: from 47.6 percent in 1991 to 56.1 percent in 2000 then to 59.2 percent in 2005.

Abortion is another controversial issue which is cropping up in Egypt. The official religious position prohibits abortion, unless it is to safeguard the life of the mother. Those belonging to upper and middle class are in a better position to abort, than the lower class women. Every aspect of a woman's life is being dictated either by the state authority or the religious position, most of the time in conformity of both.

The women's groups advocate, for the right of deciding pregnancy and abortion to be with women not as deemed by the patriarchal society.

### **Honour Crimes/Killings**

A study by the National Center for Social and Criminal Research shows that honor killings make up 29 percent of all murders. In addition, in 70 percent of honor killings the reason behind the killing is rumor. Recently in Egypt, the study showed that 29 percent of

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<sup>23</sup> Seif El Dawla Reproductive Rights of Egyptian Women: Issues of Debate. Reproductive Health matters.(Nov.2000, pp.44-45).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid4

murders fall under the category of crimes of honor. These crimes are committed by husbands, fathers or brothers to preserve family honor. 70 percent of these crimes are committed by husbands against their wives, 20 percent are committed by brothers against their sisters, and 7 percent of these crimes are committed by fathers against their daughters. The remaining 3 percent of these crimes are committed by sons against their mothers. The most dangerous finding of the study was that men commit these crimes without proof that their honor has been betrayed. Instead they rely on rumors from friends, acquaintances, and neighbors.<sup>25</sup> The concept of honor is linked to keeping up the family name. Therefore; directly identifying women with the, sexual honor of the family concerned.

Any charges of immorality or sexual promiscuity subject's women to honour killings by own male family members. This act of honour killing though raises trivial questions of men not trusting their own wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. Suspecting women of degrading family name is one of the prominent concerns. This act can also be linked to the obsession of orthodox men to confining women to the homes and imposing the *hejab* on women with an attempt to seclude women from the society outside the home. Promoting a patriarchal summon on the ideals for a modest woman obeying the dictates of men with double standards who are insecure.

#### **4.4) Role of Egypt in International Conventions on Women's Rights:**

Egypt has been a signatory to many international conventions on Women's rights as Human Rights. Since the beginning of the first women's international conference women groups have been active participants. However, the state itself has been signatory to many such modern conventions such as UN CEDAW, Nairobi conference, Beijing conference. The women's groups have criticized the Mubarak regime by not allowing participation by

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<sup>25</sup> USAID Report (April 2009), Egypt Violence against Women Study.

women's working groups in the grass root level. As the governments representatives from the NCW were mostly represented at these conventions.

The following are the conventions declarations.

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is a Charter of Women's Rights to which Egypt is a signatory:

The Declaration follows the structure of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with a preamble followed by eleven articles.

Article 1- declares that discrimination against women is "fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offence against human dignity". "Discrimination" is not defined.

Article 2 - calls for the abolition of laws and customs which discriminate against women, for equality under the law to be recognized, and for states to ratify and implement existing UN human rights instruments against discrimination.

Article 3 - calls for public education to eliminate prejudice against women.

Article 4 - calls for women to enjoy full electoral rights, including the right to vote and the right to seek and hold public office.

Article 5 - calls for women to have the same rights as men to change their nationality.

Article 6 - calls for women to enjoy full equality in civil law, particularly around marriage and divorce, and calls for child marriages to be outlawed.

Article 7 - calls for the elimination of gender discrimination in criminal punishment.

Article 8 - calls on states to combat all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

Article 9 - affirms an equal right to education regardless of gender.

Article 10 - calls for equal rights in the workplace, including non-discrimination in employment, equal pay for equal work, and paid maternity leave.

Article 11 - calls on states to implement the principles of the Declaration.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Fourth World Conference on Women: Beijing Declaration: September 1995**

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<sup>26</sup> UN-CEDAW – [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)



**We reaffirm our commitment to:**

1. The equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men and other purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Declaration on the Right to Development;
2. Ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
3. Build on consensus and progress made at previous United Nations conferences and summits - on women in Nairobi in 1985, on children in New York in 1990, on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, on human rights in Vienna in 1993, on population and development in Cairo in 1994 and on social development in Copenhagen in 1995 with the objective of achieving equality, development and peace;
4. Achieve the full and effective implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women;
5. The empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations.<sup>27</sup>

**Comparative study: Reality and Conventions**

These conventions to which Egypt is a signatory has also had a major role in playing to bring about certain clauses and provisions in conformity to the cultural specificity of the Muslim region. With regard to articles 5 and 6 of CEDAW Egypt has its own reservation

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<sup>27</sup> UN Beijing Conference 1995, [www.un.org.com](http://www.un.org.com)

in order to justify the grounds of not granting citizenship to children of Egyptian mothers married to foreigners. Stated as matter of convention the children get the citizenship of the father's country not the citizenship of their mother. The right to citizenship to children of Egyptian mothers is one of the points in which women still seek citizenship rights for their children. As Egyptian men married to foreign women have the right to maintain and transfer the right to citizenship to their wives and children.

Secondly, article 6 also falls under the purview of the Shari 'a. Though Egypt is a signatory to the International conventions on promoting and protecting women's rights, there are gross violations. The convention seeks the nations to curb violence against women. Yet, on many occasions it is the state's machinery which is involved in harassing women in the streets, or on the basis of emergency laws, associational laws and even if women do not confirm to the desired dominant male beliefs of the society.

Activist and writer Nawal El Sadaawi has been harassed by the military and the Islamist of Egypt for her views on gender and Islam. Mona Elthawy the journalist was sexually assaulted by the SCAF during the protest movement in Egypt in 2011.

### **The new veil:**

Women have resorted to the veil as a means of protection to be saved from sexual harassment. However, the women who do not confirm to the veil are attacked. Many Christian women as well have resorted to this strategy to protect themselves. On the other hand veil is also a growing reality as an assertive role played by women to identify with their cultural attire. However, as women feel the need to protect themselves from sexual harassment by resorting to the veil is itself a reflection of the position women have in the society. Women are not free to have their own "independence of movement", thus the symbol of veiling which was considered as something unwanted in the 1920s is again taking ground as a protective shield by women.

However, this shows the nature of reinforcing patriarchal norms as stated by the Salafist (conservative Islamist), "if women do not cover themselves they will face harassment". This statement is a clear imposition of patriarchal cultural norms and violence being

inflicted on women, where the statutory law does not protect women. Even, though the conventions on women's rights states clearly to protect, the domestic law fails have its parallel laws.

Women's groups are growing as civil society groups to be agents of change. To bring about the initiatives from within the grassroots by working on changing the mind sets of perpetuating and accepting violence by speaking up against violence not accepting it.

### **Gender and Cultural Conflict: Challenges**

Many works by women writers have been banned and declared provocative and insulting Islam by the radicals and political authority. There are numerous examples to be found in Egypt. Several works by feminist Nawal Sadaawi have been banned and she was imprisoned for apostasy.

Another form of backlash has occurred through conservative and Islamists attacks on the writings that deal with Islamic themes in unconventional ways which might become controversial. Such as the discussion of sexuality openly, criticize traditional gender roles or practices, or the growing views of secular opinion of authors.

A wide increase in censorship and banning has forged ahead in Egypt thus, being withdrawn from circulation. Works by Hanan al-Shaykh, Nawal el Sadaawi, Allifa Rifat, Mohamed Choukri, Said Ashmawi many other authors have been banned. The works are deemed as objectionable on religious grounds. The fiction writers like Hanan al-Shaykh, Ahdaf Soueif, Miral Tahawy have forged ways to explore issues of gender and sexuality within hidden terms. Therefore, the writers involved in feminists themes take utmost care in forging subtle yet giving powerful message to the readers; avoiding the conservative backlash.

Abdul Kareem Nabeel Amer, was arrested for publishing articles on his own blog. He was arrested for criticism of Al Azhar and the then President Hosni Mubarak. He jailed for three years for "contempt of religion" and "defaming the President of Egypt".<sup>28</sup> Amer

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid2 Ida Lichter.

also enraged political Islamists when he provoked the Islamists for the lootings and damaged caused during 2005 riots. Such intolerance from the state and religious head clearly states the non tolerance policy toward secular and public opinion. The Egyptian society is conservative in both the religious domain; Muslims and Christians.

Women in Egypt put forth their demand for a Political, Social and Cultural Revolution.

Politically:

- Women want an equal representation in the Cabinet post regime change
- Women's quota to be given to female candidates

Socially/Culturally:

- Women want freedom from domestic violence
- Freedom from Sexual Harassment
- Eradication of FGM

Legally:

- Women want a secular civil code
- Women want to safeguard their rights granted by the reforms in the PSL

With the growing economic demands and women's public involvement in the economic and politics of the country there is no looking back. As women question private relations and are in better position to know and demand their rights. The new technological revolution has been an aid in galvanizing the women's movement and the demand for a secular code of law based on gender and sect based equality.

## **CHAPTER: 5**

## CHAPTER 5

### Contextualizing Women's Activism in the North African Context

The political dynamics at play, in Egypt have been in constant contestation for legitimacy and have required power to be central in maintaining their position. Therefore the question of granting women rights does become an issue with any change in the laws or change in the governance. With the majority being Muslims and the presence of a strong political Islamist force within Egypt, it is clearly an Islamist state.

Therefore it becomes important to question and determine the status and rights of women within the Islamist state for women belonging to the majority or minority groups in the religious category.

The constitutional reforms brought about during Mubarak regime and during the reign of his predecessors were due to the constant efforts of women's activism as part of the women's movement in Egypt.

Secondly, with the growing Islamists positions against women rights. Women writers and intellectuals have constantly questioned the patriarchal interpretation of Islam and the existing political and social system having a patriarchal base. There is continues growth in women organizations in networking and campaigning for democracy and equality.

To spread their networking skills and awareness about the rights of women within Islam and also aiming at a secular society, the women's groups reinterpret religious scriptures from a women's perspective to bring about parity. And aim to erase the misconceptions and spread awareness among women of their rights. There is an emergence of Islamic feminism to provide for the framework to support and protect women's rights within Islam, which tend to be ignored and misused by blatant misogynist conceptions and orthodox interpretation.

#### **5.1 Islamic Feminism/Womanism and Secular Discourse:**

As already mentioned, 1990s onward women began to interpret the scriptures to interpret women's rights within Islam. The secular feminist discourse was very much prevalent in Egypt which experienced threat from the radical sections of political Islam. Secular

feminism transcended beyond religious community as they joined efforts in crafting a feminist discourse articulated in new writings.<sup>1</sup>

Secular discourse did not take a religious framework to develop a woman's rights discourse. However, several elements catalyzed the rise of Islamist feminism.

Women, both secular and religiously oriented, grew increasingly, concerned by the imposition and spread of a conservative reading of Islam by Islamist movements and therefore, found the need to respond in a progressive Islamic voice. For women in different parts of the Muslim North African region who enjoyed employment in the public space and contributing to their families material contributions, the call for retreat to home in the name of Islam was decidedly disquieting<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, having a base in a well established secular feminist discourse within Egypt, and women having access to education. Women were in a position to think for themselves and re-envision a feminism through the fresh reading of Quran and other scriptures<sup>3</sup>.

Islamic feminism took from the secular feminism its Islamist modernist strand and made progressive religious discourse its paramount discourse. Thus, extending the secular modernist discourse; making it more radical by affirming the equality of women and men across the spectrum of the public and the private<sup>3</sup>.

However, Islamist feminism has become one of the recent theoretical frameworks/ tool which women have adopted to foster social justice and achieve gender equality. It is still a growing field of research and advocacy.

Feminism as a social movement and political tool rejects sexism and advocates equality between women and men. Upon which feminism builds its canon of ideology the alternative way forward as opposed to male supremacy over female. Therefore, in order to fathom out ways to promote equality of sexes, the development of Islamic feminism is marked with the increased realization of women to indulge in *itijihad* (self study and interpretation of religious texts) to counter male interpretations of the texts and argue that Islam is a religion of equality and is compatible with the ethos of feminism thus;

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<sup>1</sup> Badran and Cooke 2004; Baron 1994; Booth 2002

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 1,pp.9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp.14.

woman's rights are safeguarded by Islam. Yet women are not aware of these rights and the general ignorance and compliance to male dominance has led to the degradation of women in the society.

## **5.2 Women' rights: Shari 'a and Secular Civil Code –**

Laws governing personal and family matters are of critical importance for women because they play a major role in determining the boundaries within which most women can hope to define a socially accepted individual identity for themselves. In the Muslim world personal / family laws are almost invariably classified as Muslim and justified with reference to Islamic doctrine. Anyone who challenges any aspect of the personal matters is therefore deemed to be refuting, challenging the law and the very definition of a Muslim woman accepted in a particular setting<sup>4</sup>. Which women are questioning and setting the way for a social change thus, bring about trends in changed relations between women and men.

### **Shari 'a – Islamic foundations for the rights of women:**

Shari 'a is considered as a set of the divine law to be followed by men and women in the society. In the Islamic society, the family is considered as the main unit forming the political society therefore, Shari' a is the basic law which governs and influences the social, political and religious lives of the people.

The concepts of human rights are, by definition, universal that they are owed to all human beings by virtue of their humanity without distinction of gender or religion. However, the concepts of rights under Shari 'a is fundamentally premised on these distinctions.<sup>5</sup>

This means that the Shari 'a prescribes different rights for women and men and non-Muslims rather than equal rights for all.

The Quran outlawed female infanticide, emphasized a women's right to contract marriage, granted her inheritance rights and control over her dower and property, and

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<sup>4</sup> Farida Shaheed(1995), *Networking for change: the role of Women's Groups in initiating Dialogue on Women's Issues*. In Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in Muslim World.

<sup>5</sup> Abdullah An-Na'im (1995), *The Dichotomy between Religious and Secular Discourse in Islamic Societies*. In Faith & Freedom: Women's Rights in the Muslim World.



sought to protect the rights of widows and orphans. While only males were given the right to initiate divorce, with only an exception cases for women (if the man had deadly disease or mistreated her on the basis of proof she could initiate a divorce), the Quran counseled equity and responsibility and a period of reconciliation.<sup>6</sup>

This clearly points out to the fact that Shari ‘a provides some rights to women yet at the same time grants men more rights which are/were misused by men for their own benefit. In many cases the consent of women in marriage is not considered necessary. In the case of divorce men thought it to be their soul right to initiate divorce. The ‘threat of divorce’, being used as a tool to have control and gain obedience from women. Norms such as “men being the soul providers of the household”; and men posing as witness having more value than women as witness, all have their basis in the Shari ‘a.

On the other hand, in the context of family and society, the Quran is quite explicit in maintaining women’s religious and moral equality with men before God.<sup>7</sup> Thus, how does this ‘equality’ translate into subordinate being? The answer though lies in the socio-economic factors over the centuries. With the development of ‘land’ as ‘property’ and quest to earn more that gave into the development of a patriarchal institution. This sought to construct hierarchical relations between men and women with one gaining more than the other. The politics of power and hierarchy are the two variables which defined the position and relations between the sexes. Therefore, led to the development of theories based on this power relation giving men more rights than women. That does not mean that women willingly succumbed to these power relations. Ideology was framed and translated in such a way into the culture that women and men took these theories as a given and guidelines for survival.

Religion in these terms can be seen a tool used by patriarchs to translate and spread these theories into practice with a mass following. Though, religions have also been sources of emancipation and reform from a prior way of living. For example as stated by John

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<sup>6</sup> Haddad Yvonne H. & John Esposito(1998). Islam, Gender and Social Change.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid6

Esposito, Islam's advent in the seventh century BC outlawed practices of female infanticide. Limited the number of wives a man could have. This shows the existence of a clearly lawless society. Though, the subtle changes do not make up for huge gains. The human society still needs to seek measures and device alternatives for a better equal living.

### **Position of Women in early Islam**

Women were part of the political system, were warriors, engaged in economic transactions. Women were also involved in theological debates and discussions. Prophet Muhammad's youngest wife Aisha was well versed in the Islamic religious scriptures, thus, becoming a prominent figure in spreading Islam was also knowledgeable in public affairs. His first wife Khadija Bint was master in leading her own business; she had a leading role in birth of Islamic community. The prophet praised her by saying, "she believed when people did not, believed me when others did not, and consoled me with her money when I was abandoned by others"<sup>8</sup>.

Other women like, Umma Waraqa was a Quranic scholar and prayer leader. Prophets daughters and granddaughters were scholars and prominent women in spreading Islam. However, historically their role and movement were restricted.<sup>9</sup> Women were more confined to the homes with 'less public activity' expected from them.

To support their terms of dictates, the male religious scholars increasingly cited a variety of reasons, from moral degeneration in society to women's tendency to be a source of temptation and social discord (fitna), to restrict her presence in the public life and the mosque.<sup>10</sup>

This explains the reason that over the centuries women in Islamists states are not allowed to be political leaders/ heads of state. Women are denied to run the top most office of political authority in Egypt. The interpretation of the Shari 'a is seen to be very rigid and

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<sup>8</sup> Bouthaina Shaaban, *The Muted Voices of Women Interpreters*.pp.61. In Faith and Freedom

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 6, Introduction XIII.

<sup>10</sup> Valerie J. Hoffman Ladd, "Women's Religious Observances", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol.4, ed. John L. Esposito. Oxford Press, 1995, pp.327.

conservative by Islamist women reformers which they seek to change. Islamist women are involved in the interpretation of the *Shari'a and Hadiths* to support women's rights and make women aware of their rights within the Islamic jurisprudence. Therefore, the reforms are in the context of reforming the rigid male interpretation imposed upon women with a woman's perspective on the same.

### **Dictates of Islamization projects: male guardianship over females**

#### **House of obedience:**

As the insistence on '**obedience**' from the wife toward her husband, is seen as a marriage obligation in Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. This marriage obligation is seen as a duty of the wife by orthodox and conservatives. Within this context the *house of obedience* is imposed upon women by their husbands in many of the Islamic countries. The laws justifying confining women to the home till they surrender total obedience to their husbands. Expressing the male superiority over female by quoting verses like '*Allah has given one more over the other*', the orthodox Islamist do not grant women the permission to travel without a male relative or guardian. The al Azhar and the salafist objected to the law which Mubarak nullified giving women the right to travel without male guardianship and permission. Stating that Islam glorifies motherhood, the one nurtures the family. In other words they do not support the idea of women being economically independent. Men are seen as the main providers of the family, providing for women and the children.

#### **Women's right to work:**

Even so far women have become a major labour force in North African countries especially Egypt. The conservative Muslim writers and imams consider women's work outside the home to be contrary to her basic nature and against the role for which she is biologically determined. For example Shaykh bin baz of Saudi Arabia, says that women should not be teachers since teaching young boys might induce eroticism in the children, which is unacceptable. He also insists having women work in the same environment as men is a grave sin.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid 6,pp.9.

He who wants to know the countless evils that mixing has brought need only look at the plagues that have afflicted the nations that have made such choices.... He will find concern on the personal and collective level over the escape of women from the home and the disintegration of the family.<sup>12</sup>

Such views about women mixing in the public seen as a sin and granting women the opportunity to escape is itself the reflection of the perception held by these men of religion and pen. The reason for such insecurities arise only when there is a inward acceptance of perpetuating dominance on the other and the level of narrow thinking which prevails in the mind set of the society.

**Veil** – the veil was seen as a symbol of limiting a woman’s space and confining her behind a hejab to avoid *fitna* (chaos) in the society by the clerics. A woman was seen as sexually arousing a man if not covered. Women in Egypt and many other countries like Morocco, Algeria and the Middle East unveiled as a step toward women’s emancipation. The veil in recent decades is seen as a re occurring cultural symbol gaining popularity in Egypt and other North African countries. However, the reasons seem to be numerous.

Some women are adorning the veil as a symbol of authenticity, yet some are adorning it as a protective shield against sexual harassment in the streets and work place. Yet the idea of the veil being a protective shield protecting women from the advances of men is debatable. As many women who are modestly dressed and veiled are raped and molested. The statistics and studies are numerous which illuminate the fact that the dress has nothing to do with a woman being harassed. Women modestly dressed are harassed by men be it in Egypt, India, Pakistan or any western nation. It is the idea of subjugating power over the other in a way to attain self fulfillment and secondly, the general tolerance to sexual harassment as an everyday event has only led to its increase.

As choice of adorning to wear a particular outfit is completely agreeable however, the imposition of certain form of dress code, is confining women to a certain moral code which denies women their choice.

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<sup>12</sup> Adb al- Aziz ibn Abd Allah ibn Baz, Majnu ‘ Fatawa Samahat al- Shaykh Abd al- Aziz, Riyad: Dar-al Watan,1995,17 in “Islam, Gender and Social Change”.

To quote Nawal el- Saadawi “women in Islamic societies are caught between the globalized image of femininity or the female beauty as a commodity of the west and the Islamic notion of femininity protected by men and hidden behind the veil. In fact veiling and nakedness are the two sides of the same coin. Both mean that women are bodies without a mind and should be covered or uncovered in order to suit national or international interest” (el Saadawi, 1997: 138-40).<sup>13</sup>

Such dictates openly suggest the blatant misuse of religion to attain power. As neither Islam nor any other religion preach harassment or killing.

### **Islamists Women Scholars**

Many scholars women and men maintain that rules of the Shari ‘a and other theological doctrines have a socio- historical context in which it was formulated and over the years due to translations into different languages and dominance by male writers has twisted the doctrines in favor of men. Nazira zin al-din does not render Islam to be responsible behind the inferior status of women. The main reason according to her is the gender-biased interpretation of the Qur’anic text by men of religion<sup>14</sup>. In the name of religion we find men dictating terms on women not only in Islam but in all the major religions in the world. These dictates have generated a hierarchical structure within the realm of the faith which is translated in the realm of social society.

As most of the Islamist feminist quote that the Quran does not give the idea that men are better than women.

God prefers most pious regardless of gender. *“O humankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). The most honoured among you is the one who is most righteous. God has full knowledge is full acquainted with all things. Sura al-hujurat aya13. “o mankind! Reverence your lord, who created you from a single person,*

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<sup>13</sup> Moghissi “From Orientalism to Islamic Feminism” . in *Feminism and Islamic Feminism*. p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 6

*created of like nature, a mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women” (sura al-nisa’, aya1).*

Zin al-din through her study concludes that the veil or hejab was symbol to separate the women of the household of the prophet from the other women. Thus, the veil was to separate women which over the centuries spread as a cultural symbol. Islam calls for decency and modesty to the extend that “*god summoned both males and females to lower their gaze*” (sura al-nur, aya(s); 30-1) to avoid provocation.<sup>15</sup>

Abd al-halim Abu Shiqa advocated the thoughts of Zin al-din and al-Ghazali. He agrees with them that Islamists have made up sayings which they attribute to the prophet such as ‘women lack in both intellect and religion’ thus promoting sayings which were not part of Islamic culture till they got embedded in the thoughts of the society. These weak sayings are invented to support local backward customs and traditions and then considered to be part of the religion. This is the way religion is manipulated by pretentious imams who profess to know Islam but don’t.

Zin al din, al-Ghazali and Dr. Adu shiqa quote the verse,

*“believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil” (Sura Tauba aya71).*

Through this verse most of the scholars both women and men pointout that it is women’s Islamic duty to participate in public life spread goodness.<sup>16</sup>

However, the verse “*believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil*” also extends the nuance of equality as clearly says that men and women are protectors of each other.

Secondly, both men and women have the capacity to do justice, therefore the premise which the orthodox Islamist try to promote that women are not capable of sound judgment, thus denied to be chief justice is completely false and baseless.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid 6, pp. 74, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 6, pp75.

Both have the intelligence to discern and forbid what is evil. Therefore, the obsession of condemning women for the evil is baseless. Devaluing a woman's worth to control their rights and bodies.

Nabawiya Musa in her prominent work, *women and work*, wrote about the traditional customs which prevented women from attaining education and working:

*"We neglect the education of Egyptian women so that they become unqualified for work. But we encourage foreign women to enter our homes and look after our vital needs. Egypt's capital is lost for the benefit of those foreign men and women and their interests. If we educate our women they can replace them. Now we are fighting for our political freedom, but why are we so slow in fighting for our own economic independence?"<sup>17</sup>*

Musa in her early analysis of nationalism and independence during 1920s, clearly, talks about the political economy of colonialism and patriarchy. Musa's observance of slow response of Egypt's economic plundering by the colonists is evidence to the ignorance Egyptian male pioneers of her time gave to her work and intelligence. Thereby, undermining a woman's intelligence over their own presumed male knowledge; which ignored, a very essential point of analysis.

Secondly, pointing out to the discrimination of women on the basis of education which is largely held responsible for keeping women behind men for centuries.

Women scholars and reformists including male reformists categorically recognize that it is essential to recognize the different historical and cultural context that have articulated the laws of Islam, and that have usually altered and adjusted them to the social and political needs of the time.

### **5.3) Secular Civil Code**

The fierce opposition from the Islamists' block seems to be majorly against women from gaining rights. With the change in regime from Mubarak to dominance of Islamists' can be seen as a threat to women's rights. As at every victory of women's right they (the

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<sup>17</sup> Publication: *Noon*, no. 4 (February 1990), p. 17 by Arab Women Solidarity Association.

Islamists) have posed a backlash to women's rights and demeaning the claims to be western conspiracy.

Women's claims upon universal realm of full citizenship and right to work remain tenuous and fragile and could easily be sacrificed or clawed back in the name of culture or national integrity.<sup>18</sup>

This point highlights the orthodox cleric's perspective on women and rights. As post Mubarak's ousting the political Islamist have charged the reforms by Mubarak as unlawful and not abiding by the Shari 'a as they see it. The rights women gained in the matters of divorce, child custody, marriage age and the right to work are under threat from this section of the society.

The idea of branding the women's demands for rights as something alien is a typical patriarchal feature. As many of the Islamists put forth the argument that the Shari 'a; is the law of God which is to be followed and honoured.

To which educated well versed women in the Quranic laws maintain that women have equal rights in Islam. Islam, being the most equal religion preaching equality and peace to humanity. However, the obsession with difference from the west and tradition verses modernity debate has burdened women to be the bearers of culture and tradition. The most important being the interpretation of the Quranic laws by clerical men who have twisted and turned the meaning according to their own will; also, invalidating the periods in which the texts were written or received. Thus, leaving no room or opposing any fresh interpretation of the laws and sayings. Any voice against the rigid interpretation of the law finds harassment from the political Islamists' and the backing from the government. The Islamists' are a very strong opposition against women and minority rights.

As the Shari 'a does not give equal rights to non – Muslims; it does dictate terms to the minorities. The Islamic states confirming to the Shari 'a on social laws imposes the same laws on all people with certain accommodations. Though, with the growing militant and

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<sup>18</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti (1996), Reflections on the Politics of Gender in Muslim Societies: From Nairobi to Beijing. *In* Engendering the Middle East.



orthodox tendency of political Islamists in Egypt the growing attacks on minorities is a daily occurrence.

In the midst of imposing the Shari 'a on all, the non Muslim women also are forced to adhere to certain norms as propagated by the clerics.

Minority, women and slaves are the groups that have historically constituted a challenge and a limitation to Islam's claim to universality and equality. The Islamic state thus rested on a contradiction between the legal inferiority of some groups and the philosophical principle of equality of all beings, which is central to Islam as a universal religion. Since the abolition of slavery only minority and women are left as the test for the state to modernize itself and bring its laws in conformity with the principles of equality and democracy. Thus, most of the debates in Islamic countries centers on women and minority rights.<sup>19</sup>

The secular civil code is the need which people have expressed. Women especially demand a secular civil code in order to secure their rights. Secular civil code is primarily not based on the religious doctrines. Yet as Islam provides women with rights in marriage, inheritance women seek to claim and protect these rights.

The discourse of women's movement has been secular in general but using Islam as one of the framework became necessary to counter the attack women faced from the political Islamists.

### **Minority rights (Women - Copts and Others)**

In Egypt, the women Copts and women belonging to other minority groups are the targets of Salafist and goons who openly condemn women who do not wear the *hejab* and threaten to sexually assault women who are not veiled. Minority Christian and Jew women have to conform to the dictates of the conservative Salafists.

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<sup>19</sup> Fatima Mernissi, Arab Women's Rights and the Muslim State in the Twenty - first Century; Reflections on Islam as Religion and State. *In* Faith & Freedom.

In the case of divorce rights for Christian women they do not confirm to the Shari 'a, however, they have to adhere to the laws of the Christian Church which has strict divorce laws for both women and men.

Christian women's organizations Christian Women's Groups advocate for equal legal and political rights. Christian women quote the verses from Bible to justify equality and love which Christianity preaches.<sup>20</sup> The following quote of creation is one such vantage point women scholars emphasize on equality.

*"God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth"(Genesis 1.27-28)<sup>21</sup>*

However, the next story of creation of Eve being formed from Adam's rib. Which male interpretations connotes as woman being formed from man. In response to it women modernist emphasize that the creation from the rib does not render women to a lower being. In most cases, the wording of the scriptures is done in such a way by male writers in order to undermine a woman's dignity, to have control over her (woman) life. Reform in the wording of such texts involves the process of *ijtihad* (self interpretation) of the religious texts which women are taking up to challenge these male stream interpretation and way of life.

All the three religions of the Book- Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam profess "humankind – both women and men as helpers of each other". However, the story of the 'fall', in Christianity as depicted by the male writers blames women for the fall and indignation which came upon women.

Yet, the verses from the new testament which marks the time of Jesus, is seen as a revolutionary text. Wherein, Jesus is seen as breaking conventional traditions and moral conducts of the society at the time.

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<sup>20</sup> Habib Samuel (1988). "The Woman in Church and Society" Cairo: *Dar Ethaqafa*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Bible- Old Testament: Story of Creation, Genesis (Chapter 1- verses 27-28).

Jesus speaks to a (Samaritan) woman who also belonged to a lower class; men speaking with women, publically was not the norm of the society at that time. Jesus asks the woman for water at the well.<sup>22</sup> Thus, challenging gender segregation and class distinctions.

Both Muslim and Christian women spiritually inclined to the religion reject the male misinterpretations of religious texts for abetting gender inequality.

The literary groups of women indulge in re - reading and interpreting these texts. Also, they are part of the action groups addressing women's rights as emanating from the human rights of women. Women's rights debates thus, form part of both, the religious base and human rights discourse.

#### **5.4) Contextualizing Women's Movement in the North African context:**

The Islamic injunctions and Shari'a rulings, as interpreted by the local ulema's (jurists), continue to define women's legal status and provide a basis for gendered social and cultural practices. For centuries, women's sexuality and moral conduct has preoccupied Muslim men: men's needs and scripts have circumscribed women's lives and the extent of their participation in public affairs. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the contemporary North African societies has accentuated this preoccupation and translated it into legal practices and bureaucratic rules.<sup>23</sup>

The fear of female sexuality and concerns over women's moral conduct are not, therefore, limited to orthodox views of bygone generations. Fearing the tempting powers of the female sexuality, Motahhari, argued in favour of making the veil mandatory. Especially in higher education institutions and factories, as he thought, an unveiled woman is sexually provocative and diverts men from productive activities.<sup>24</sup> The same mind set goes into formation of the contemporary Islamists in Egypt and the region per se.

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<sup>22</sup> Bible- New Testament, John(Chapter 4- verses7-9).

<sup>23</sup> Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post Modern Analysis*.pp.7.

<sup>24</sup> Moghissi, *Oriental Sexuality: Imagined and Real*. p.27.

As, Moghissi points out the Islamists, whether as functionaries of state or members of an Islamic umma (community), take upon themselves the guardianship of the moral purity of women in their societies. Indeed, the Islamic principle of *amr-i bi marouf va nahy-i az monkar* (ordering good and preventing evil) rules out any recognition and respect for the concept of individual right to choice and equal protection under the law.

In this context, the clutches of the guardians of the Islamic Shari'a are felt in every aspect of women's (and men's) lives<sup>25</sup>.

As part of their states ruling most of the North African Muslim states have complied with the Islamic rule of jurisprudence which is mostly favor men over women.

Many of the ordinances are more severe on women. The part of ordinance which effect women the most is *zena*- for extra marital relationships and rape in most orthodox and conservative settings. The punishment bearing of hundred lashes or stoning the accused. The court headed by the religious men; require either the confession by the rapist or the presence of "four morally Muslim men". However the requirement of four Muslim male adults as witnesses, the law excludes the testimony of women, even in the case of their own rape. Such cases have let rapists off the hook.<sup>26</sup> However, the point apart from the ruling out women's testimony; which is missed out in the requirement of four male witnesses to rape. The presence of 'four moral men' as 'witnesses' in the first place should not let such a crime to be committed. The law in itself is contradictory in nature. The law is seen as supporting by-standers to be witnesses of such crimes as rape and harassment. Thus, law does not grant women security or the rights she has as a human being.

The legal sanctioning of various forms of gender violence is the most immediate consequence for women of Islamization schemes. Revitalization of ancient and bizarre practices like, stoning a woman to death accused of *zena* (extramarital affairs), or submitting a person to hundred lashes, reducing women's legal status, the practice of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 19, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.29. case of Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular under militants.

FGM, all promote hostility towards women. Women who do not have the rights and the choice to take decision independently are never free.

Similarly the case of Morocco is in point. Based on the Malikite School of Islamic law, it treated women as minors throughout the life. The code required her to obtain the consent of her patron (wali) to marry, and the consent of her husband or father to carry out business transactions, enter the work force or to even obtain a passport.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1990s a group of energized women took up a noteworthy petition campaign to change the *moudawwana* to claim their rights. Their demands included:

- 1) “Equality and complementarity between husband and wife in the family;
- 2) According women legal competency upon reaching the legal age of maturity (18);
- 3) Right to women without the consent of wali and raising the marriage age from 15 to 18.
- 4) Equalizing the divorce process and placing the matter in the hands of the judges;
- 5) Outlawing polygamy;
- 6) Equal rights to guardianship over children;
- 7) Making work an education a right that a husband cannot dispute.”<sup>28</sup>

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003, the King presented his plan to replace *Moudawwana* with a modern Family Law declaring that the “it meant to free women from the injustices they endure, in addition to protecting children’s rights and safeguarding men’s dignity” thus reforming it within the tolerant aims of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

It included a modern form of wording, instead of undermining the dignity of women, placing joint responsibility of man and woman in the family, marriage age was raised, divorce rights expanded to women, regarding polygamy he made it strict as well as allowing its prohibition in the marriage contract many other reforms were formulated. These laws were ratified in January 2004.

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce Maddy Weitzman (2005), Women, Islam and the Moroccan State: the Struggle over Personal Status Law, *Middle East Journal*, 58(3).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 26 Weitzman

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 26 Weitzman

In Uganda, women's organization had strong linkups with the parties, strong advocacy and activism helped the Ugandan women's movement to be independent yet very much involved in the politics of the country. These efforts of activism, has led Ugandan women to have 33 percent representation in the parliament.<sup>30</sup>

Just like the case in Egypt, where women led their social and literary movement for change, so has Uganda, Morocco and other countries witnessed the same. In both the cases the presence of strong opposition from the political Islamists was a challenge to the progressive reforms. Women in today's Morocco, Egypt and elsewhere are agents of change saying no to oppression.

### **Women's Activism and Social Change**

The impact of capitalism and modern industry on women is also believed to have been ambiguous. With advancing human productive activities, it rationalized the market and separated the domestic and private from the public and social. Capitalism has opened up new opportunities for women outside the family, challenging the patriarchal domination of the individual man.<sup>31</sup>

Yet capitalism did not challenge male power nor abolish it, as emphasized by Haideh Moghissi it was only modernized.

Individual women and groups as part of the women's movement have and continue to challenge patriarchal domination and the patriarch's of the state institutions which has started the momentum of social change in the entire North African region.

Women, more than any other group, pose the most urgent challenge, in words and in actions, to re-Islamification policies.<sup>32</sup>

As many feminist argue, that Engels was 'unduly optimistic' in his analysis that the family would alter and full equality between the sexes would result from the

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<sup>30</sup> Tripp, A.M, (2000) *Women & Politics in Uganda*. Kampala Uganda, Fountain Publishers.

<sup>31</sup> Moghissi(2000), *Women, Modernity and Change*. In *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*.

<sup>32</sup> Moghissi (2000), *Islamic Feminism and its Discontents*. p.132.

technological advance, and the transition to socialism (Sayers, 1986). Industrial capitalism did economically empower women later on. Though with the development of technology over the centuries and the level of increased accessibility of the internet and blogs in the twenty first century has aided women with better awareness and networking skills to forge alliances within the region for the cause.

Egypt has been the most active and vibrant country in the region of North Africa due to its strategic positions. Its positioning connects Africa and the Middle East. Egypt is also considerably close to the European continent. Therefore, its positioning has made Egypt to be politically, socially and economically active. In this context, the women's movement has also been active and vibrant. By forging alliances women's organizations have spread across North Africa to the extent of Middle East and the Diasporas in Europe as well as Americas.

The international domain has become the primary site for women to demand removal of legal and social obstacles to gender equity, providing the terrain for a more collective struggle. Organizations like Arab Women's Solidarity Association, Nour publishing, Feminist Research Centre – NAZRA, and many more have formed alliance with women's groups in holding seminars, workshops, advocating for social change at the domestic and international levels pressuring the governments and the thus, building the growing civil society at the international level.

This international alliances and grouping of women and men in supporting a gender just world have rolled in the era of changed gender relations between women and men.

As part of the project of women in development, the involvement of women in process of self sufficiency has grown as women seek methods independent of patriarchal employment. Female entrepreneurship is on the rise in Egypt as in other parts of the world. The growth of such positive change also explains and results into changed social relations.

The determined efforts by the Women's Movement in Egypt as part of the literary bloc, charity groups, research centers and growing NGOs sector had thus pressurized the Mubarak and his predecessors to make amendments and paved the way for gender justice and equality. Women's movement forming the dissent group has contributed to the growth of the most potent democratic force in Egypt. The future of democratic Egypt lies in the recognition of these dissent voices and the fulfillment of their just demand for the progress of the human society in Egypt.



## Conclusion

The striking her-story of participation in the nationalist movement, women's rights and gender justice in Egypt is an achievement of the women who questioned the mainstream belief systems.

Beginning with the writings of remarkable women as Zainab al-Fawawz and Aisha al-Taimuriyya in the mid nineteenth centuries and more women who have been left undocumented have contributed in the women's movement. Badran a contemporary Egyptian feminists demonstrates that feminism in Egypt is a rooted cause and movement, not external. She also questions the depiction of women's movement beginning from men reformers.<sup>1</sup> As it is the experiences and realization by women which led to the; questioning of traditional male systems.

The Egyptian feminist or women's movement is unique in the way the fight to change the personal status laws came from women themselves. Many Egyptian women call themselves feminist yet, there are some who refrain from the term though their ideology and agendas are feminist.

To conclude, it can be said as analyzed; that, the role of the Egyptian state under Hosni Mubarak in complying with the demands of women's movement has been mixed. Though, he did make some reforms in the legislature granting and guaranteeing women rights. Still these efforts were pressurized by women's groups and were done in conformity with agreeing Islamic clerics after years of discussion and deliberations. Even after the reforms in PSL were announced in 2000, due to the rise of political Islamism and conservative forces the reforms were viewed as destroying males' rights as opposed to females. The Islamists thus, tried to push back women's rights and demands in the wake of non conformity to the tenants of Islam.

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine Moghadam (2002), Islamic feminism and its discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate". *University of Chicago Press; Signs*, 27 (summer) (4): 1135-1171.

The challenge to women's networking majorly comes from the conservative wings of Al Azhar and the Salafist. Their ideas are very much popular among the conservative population and the older groups of people.

During the 2011, uprising women participated in the protest which included sit-ins and spending nights at the tehrir square. Initially women were not assaulted though as the days went by moral policing started which gave dictates to women to leave the square by 9.00pm. Women who were not veiled were molested by some goons and the police. Within days the salafist declared women to return homes and cover up or else face harassment.

Two factors contribute to keeping women immobile as pointed by Farida Shaheed:

1. "Lack of knowledge concerning statutory laws in their own countries and those of other Muslim communities, as well as the sources of these;
2. Second is the interlocking of customs, religions and law in such a manner as to render it impossible for the average Muslim women to conceive of being able to retain her Muslim identity if she rejects certain laws or customs" (for example, female genital mutilation in Sudan, Senegal and parts of Nigeria, Egypt and elsewhere).

Together these factors promote erroneous belief amongst women and men many times entangled in a web. These are products of socially constructed phenomenon which reflect the patterns of dominance and opposition in society. They are exploited by those in power (or those aspiring to such power) to their advantage.<sup>2</sup>

A challenge to the women's movement however, also comes with the fragmentation of the movement at the state/local level. With growing civil society at one hand and the non-connectivity on the other may lead to a weakened alliance at the grass root level. This may lead to the slow social change and non seriousness of the cause.

The fact that women are perceived as bearers and perpetuators of cultural values and social mores increases the resistance to any change in their status and the laws that

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<sup>2</sup> Shaheed,F. Networking for Change and the Role of Women's Groups in Initiating Dialogue on Women's Issues.

govern their lives. In times of rapid change, ideological structure, economic restructuring and a sense of loss of identity, the burden falls on women to guarantee the nation's cultural authenticity. Women are thus, often caught between the state and the religious conservatism. The result is visible in the public discourse on women, which treats them as secondary citizens. An example of which is the nationality law. Women's organizations have done and continue a great deal of lobbying for this issue. The government stance of it is much stronger.<sup>3</sup> Women being caught between the religious conservatism and state ambiguity, these two forces tend to de-prioritize women's concerns or have a general outlook for women to compromise.

Yet undaunted by challenges women and women's groups have kept up their active participation in the public and contributing their share and demands in the homes in the nation building process.

The pioneers of women's rights have realized the importance of inter-regional and international solidarity to generate greater support for gender justice this also means that these alliances also point out to the universal character of patriarchy which needs to be dealt globally. The development of conventions on women's rights and the declaration of the UN decade for Women led to the enhanced level of participation of women at the grass root level which positively effected women's involvement and participation in the governance and self empowerment.

The ouster of Mubarak and the coming of the Islamist groups to power pose a threat to all the gains achieved by the women's movement for rights, in the past one decade. However, the prevalence of secular and women groups and syndicate keep on their advocacy for their full rights and dignity to be maintained. As gender conscious women are part of the civil society the pressure by the Islamists block seems to be countered by the constant advocacy by women's groups and individual women challenging injustice in many ways in their day today lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Nemat Gamat & Nadia Wassef (2010), Unfulfilled Promises: Women's rights in Egypt. Population Council, Cairo. P.69.

## **Appendix I**

### **Draft Signatories of 2011 Women's Rights Alliance**

- New Woman Foundation
- Women and Memory Forum
- Center of Egyptian Women Legal Aid
- El Nadeem Center for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Violence
- Appropriate Communication Techniques for Development (ACT)
- Women's Forum for Development
- Alliance of Arab Women
- Egyptian Association for Family Development
- "Nazra" Association for Feminist Studies
- "Omni" Association for Rights and Development
- "Heya" Foundation
- Cairo Institute for Development
- The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights
- Helwan Foundation for Community Development (Bashayer)

Cairo, 5 March, 2011

## **Appendix 2**

### **Beijing Conference on Women's Rights 1995**

#### **We are convinced that:**

1. Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace;
2. Women's rights are human rights;
3. Equal rights, opportunities and access to resources, equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, and a harmonious partnership between them are critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy;
4. Eradication of poverty based on sustained economic growth, social development, environmental protection and social justice requires the involvement of women in economic and social development, equal opportunities and the full and equal participation of women and men as agents and beneficiaries of people-centered sustainable development;
5. The explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment;
6. Local, national, regional and global peace is attainable and is inextricably linked with the advancement of women, who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels;
7. It is essential to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes, at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women;
8. The participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important to the effective implementation and follow-up of the Platform for Action;

9. The implementation of the Platform for Action requires commitment from Governments and the international community. By making national and international commitments for action, including those made at the Conference, Governments and the international community recognizes the need to take priority action for the empowerment and advancement of women.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **We (Signatories) are determined to:**

1. Intensify efforts and actions to achieve the goals of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women by the end of this century;
2. Ensure the full enjoyment by women and the girl child of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and take effective action against violations of these rights and freedoms;
3. Take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and remove all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women;
4. Encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality;
5. Promote women's economic independence, including employment, and eradicate the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women by addressing the structural causes of poverty through changes uneconomic, ensuring equal access for all women, including those in rural areas, as vital development agents, to productive resources, opportunities and public services;
6. Promote people-centred sustainable development, including sustained economic growth, through the provision of basic education, life-long education, literacy and training, and primary health care for girls and women;

7. Take positive steps to ensure peace for the advancement of women and recognizing the leading role that women have played in the peace movement and work actively towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, and support negotiations on the conclusion, without delay, of a universal and multilaterally and effectively verifiable comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty which contributes to nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects;
8. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls;
9. Ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education;
10. Promote and protect all human rights of women and girls;
11. Intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, or disability, or because they are indigenous people;
12. Ensure respect for international law, including humanitarian law, in order to protect women and girls in particular;
13. Develop the fullest potential of girls and women of all ages, ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world for all and enhance their role in the development process.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> UN Beijing Conference 1995, [www.un.org.com](http://www.un.org.com)

Photograph's depicting women as active participants in the Egyptian revolutions across different time periods.



Figure 3: Egyptian 1919 Revolution: Egyptian Women's Archive



Figure 4 & 5 Tehrir Square 2011, Society Pages and Al Ahram Online Weekly: 'Women at the square!'



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