

Egyptian women... rebels

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Historical overview

Although the old Egyptian civilization, it seemed that women enjoyed somehow gender equality, Egypt has been ruled at different stage by several queens: Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, Cleopatra and others, women were not only queens but also gods; Isis and Maet the goddess of justice.

Ordinary women had the same rights as men as regarding different aspects of life: heritage, education and marriage. Max Muller said: "the role women played there has never existed among people all over earth except in the valley of the Nile River"

In the modern Egypt, and by the time of Mohamed Aly 1805, a school has been developed to train and graduate nurses specialized in obstetrics, historians considered it as the start point for the women to go out and work, however I believe that is might be true as regarding women in urban areas as women in rural ones used to work all over their lives in agriculture.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the "Intellectual Association of women" has been settled, and women played an important role in the revolution of 1919, lead demonstrations, delivered speech in the streets and squares, and shot by the British army forces that were occupying Egypt.

Despite their great participation in the 1919's revolution, they haven't obtained their political rights in the 1923's constitution.

Same year; 1923 witnessed the composition of the "Egyptian women union" and the famous activist Huda Sharaawy became the Egyptian representative sharing in the international women conference in Rome.

1928 the Egyptian women joined for the first time the universities, it should be mentioned here that princess Fatma (daughter of khidawy Ismail; Egypt's ruler) had donated a piece of land to build the first university in Egypt.

1942; Fatma Rashed established the first women political party under the name "national women party", its priority was to give the Egyptian women the right to assume the high official positions in the state, as equal as men.

1947; the "Egyptian women union" asked for modification of the election's, law to allow women to vote, as men are allowed to do, and to get all their political rights including the membership in the parliament and national councils.

1949; Dorreya shafiq has established another political party "bent el Nile".

1951; huge demonstration came out to streets during the meeting of the national women conference (February, 19) and raised one slogan "parliament is for both women and men".

1956; the Egyptian constitution finally recognized the political rights of the Egyptian women, based on this recognition, 2 women became members of the parliament of 1957 (Rawya ateyya, fayda kamel).

1962; Hekmat Abou Zeid was the first woman to be a member in the government (minister of social affairs).

Statistics from Mubarak's era

- 30 – 40% of families are supported and funded by women.
- 60% of the informal labor force that is unprotected by the state is composed of women.
- Women produce about 42% of wealth in the countryside, and 32% in the city.

- 41% of all registered voters are women.
- Unfortunately 60 – 70% of illiterates' are also women.

Years before revolution Egypt witnessed the following

- Establishment of the women national council on the year 2000.
- Adoption of the divorce law that gave women the right to ask for divorce.
- Adoption of a law that incriminates female genital mutilation.
- Abolishing the decision that prevented women from traveling outside the country without the consent of husband.
- Punishment of a sexual harassment (a young man sentenced for 3 years in 2008).

However, the miserable situation of women in the Egyptian legislations continued to exist, especially in labor, criminal law, penal code, laws of family and personal status. The feminization of diseases is still there, giving the priority of treatment to boys over girls, leakage of girls from the primary schools is a chronic case.

First 18 days till the fall of Mubarak

Starting the revolution, the Egyptian women participated with men in all aspects, they were fighting in the front lines, defending hardly their freedom, sharing as doctors and nurses in the medical teams, composing security groups to ensure safety of the square, providing food and water and joining all the battles that took place. All through these days, women were there, never absent, having same dreams, sitting, eating beside men, sleeping in the square too, facing no harassments from anybody, a romantic and ideal 18 days. They were also exposed to the same extent to all kinds of violence and cruel treatment by the falling political system (no gender difference was seen).

After the fall of Mubarak

The previous marvelous scene of the 18 days faded up gradually, women faced once again -and still facing- the trials of exclusion from social and political life:

- The national reconciliation conference accepted notes about “preventing TV. women reporters from appearing with non Islamic dress”, a request introduced by Youssef El Badry one of the famous Islamic figures.
- Shaping the awareness of people continued: Islamic parties considered the women national council as the weapon of the falling system used to destroy the Egyptian family, and declared that all its achievements in the field of legislations should be abolished.
- No women could be seen after the revolution in the position of a governor, mayor or secretary general.
- The governor of El Giza said –in one the famous Egyptian newspapers- that women are not qualified for such positions. On the other hand, a considerable number of well qualified women reached good positions and complained from ignoring their rights in promotions.
- The minister of local development stated that the critical nature of the stage, Egypt is passing through, doesn't allow the presence of women in high positions.
- During the re-composition of the government, women were never presented in a fair, just and equal ways, the members of the government were almost all men except for one woman who belongs frankly to the old system.
- Even those nominations made by the rebels in the square (which is considered as the symbol of freedom and justice), have never mentioned the name of a woman to be a minister.
- the media discourse and the language used by the famous newspapers, carried a sarcastic spirit as regarding gender issues, words describing the feminist NGOs were referring " المنظمات الحريمي " which means: “the religiously forbidden organizations”.
- only 2% of the parliament's members are women, compared to 30% in Algeria, and 56% in Ruanda in the year 2008.
- Our women members seemed lost during the meetings of the parliament, and completely disoriented as regarding issues of women rights to the extent that one of them mentioned that every woman is responsible for all sexual harassments she

receives; woman has no right to ask for divorce, genital mutilation is mandatory for females.

- About the square itself, should take into consideration some important events, the first women demonstration that was carried in the international women day on march 2011 was exposed to harsh harassments, insults, physical violence, attackers were the ordinary people (no criminals), in the 8th of July same year, a call from one of the social revolutionary movements has suggested to restrict spending the night in the square to men only, however it was not applied. Lately, in June 2012, sexual harassers attacked a demonstration that was held against “sexual harassment”!

Should refer here to the strong possibility that, the behavior of group harassment was first initiated by the state, and specifically the ministry of interior, who brought groups of criminals in 2005 to attack women protesting against the modifications of the constitution. Modeling came to be a very clear process later on, groups of young men started to imitate the state, and the behavior is now settled as an ordinary one.

The political system is still using oppression on gender basis

From its side, the authority is following all the available ways to break women’s will, we can find the sexual harassment, virginity tests, dragging from hair along streets, and threats of rape.

Trials made by the political Islam to delete women’s gains never stopped

- Calls to review all the international conventions related to the protection of women’s rights claiming it is inconvenient with Shariaa.

- A new project is introduced that abolishes the right of the women to ask for divorce, and allowing the forced delivery of a wife to her husband home (it was canceled on 1967).

- Another project to reduce the age for marriage to 13 years old, depending on the early maturation of the “body” of female children in warm countries.

- Finally, a project to cancel the incrimination of female circumcision is being now studied.

The founding committee of the constitution

- Only 7% of its members are women.
- 3 among them belong officially to the political Islam (Horreya and Adala party).
- Complete ignorance of the nominations given by the women national council, and of the list given by the coalition of feminist organizations.

Women in the discourse of the non Islamic political currents is catastrophic

- Many of the human rights activists joined political parties.
- Their views came to be less radical in defending their rights and they became more flexible, making deals and compromises.
- Some of those activists (women & men) declared that this is not the appropriate time to fight for women's rights, and the reasons they gave were like to avoid the social problems that would result, claiming that the society is still immature to accept real gender equality.
- So withdrawal of the liberals from the battle of women rights appeared to be a step made just in order to keep popularity in a deep and strong patriarchal society.
- The structure of most of the liberal parties shows inequality (most of higher positions are kept for men).

This attack on women, positive aspects.

- Breaking fears and shame: many of the testimonies appeared on the face book, telling personal stories about circumcision and, its painful consequences.
- A young woman publishing her photo in complete nudity to protest against the restricted view that summarizes women in sexual object.
- Women wearing Nekab sharing in 8th of March and raising slogans saying 'we want 50% of the founding committee of constitution for women'.
- A young woman Samira Ibrahim suing SCAF for the virginity test she was forcibly exposed to.

- Another young woman chased a man who has sexually harassed her and succeeded in delivering him to the police station, regardless the negative attitudes of the bystanders who seemed sympathizing with him.
- Women constituted a considerable voting mass, and were seen in huge numbers the days of the election, moreover, 1000 women supervised the presidential elections among 13,000.
- a lot of women who are not politicians, not activists, not feminist, could be seen at these times talking about their rights, and trying to organize their selves to fight for.

Finally

the question here is that, do we expect a real progress in the issue of gender equality and women's rights at this stage, and under a ruling system that has a religious project, or it might be an era of more oppression, coercion and persecution for women?.

We might see that, at times when Egypt had a national project for development, as Mohamad Ali's and Nasser's projects, gender equality took place automatically and spontaneously, women's rights become integrated to be part of the public rights for all citizens. On the other hand, absence of such a project has usually been accompanied with persecution of the vulnerable groups, with women in the core.

This might not be a good time for compromises, **Women are in need for a radical act**, it is the revolution either to fight to gain our freedom or to go back and lose all previous achievements.