

The 100th Year Anniversary of Women Getting the Vote in Britain is a Reminder of How Democracy Doesn't Work

News:

February 6th this year marked 100 years since the passing of the Representation of the People Act in Britain which granted the vote to women over the age of 30 who met a certain property qualification. It was not until 1928, ten years later, and a mere 90 years ago that women got the same voting rights as men in the country. On this 100th Anniversary of what is termed 'universal suffrage', many politicians, including the British Prime Minister Theresa May, as well as feminists, media commentators and others have been praising the 'courage' and 'heroism' of the Suffragettes who struggled for so long, against such intensive opposition from their government and many other institutions within the state, to secure the right to elect their leader and representatives.

Comment:

For decades, the suffragettes tried peaceful means to try and persuade those in power that women had the right to elect their political representatives and express their political opinions within society. However, they were ignored by those in power. Herbert Asquith for example, Prime Minister of the UK from 1908 to 1916, once stated that women were, *"hopelessly ignorant, credulous to the last degree, and flickering with gusts of sentiment like a candle in the wind"*, and therefore it was madness to grant them the vote. Consequently, many within the Suffragette Movement, turned to militant action, in the belief that this was the only means to get their cause heard by the British establishment. They disrupted public meetings, vandalized property, committed acts of arson, and chained themselves to railings. One woman, Emily Davison, even threw herself under the King's horse at the Derby Horse Race, dying in the process, in the hope that the ruling elite would take notice of their call. In the path of their struggle, the suffragettes were demonized, spied on by the intelligence, beaten by the police, imprisoned, tortured, and force-fed in prison. In fact, it is recorded that more than 1300 suffragette women were arrested between 1906 and 1914. Under extreme pressure, the British government eventually changed the law, granting a certain class of women the vote.

The fact that the suffragettes or the civil rights movement had to engage in such intensive struggles in the face of such intensive opposition from their governments to secure what should have been viewed as basic political, economic, and educational rights for every citizen of any state (male or female, black or white) - should surely highlight one of the major fundamental flaws of the democratic secular system: that it does not automatically guarantee people their rights. Rather, 'courageous' individuals have to fight the system to secure that which should have been granted to them by default. Even 5 million men from the poorer working class were not given their voting rights until 1918 because engaging in the political process was seen as a privilege of the wealthier male elite of the society. All this is a clear example of how democracy

doesn't work, for under this system, laws are made and broken according the whims of a ruling elite and hence subject to their fickle limited minds, biases and prejudices. Even today, we see in democratic states across the world, how the rights of citizens and religious minorities, once seen as untouchable, such as religious freedoms and the right to political expression and individual privacy, can be curtailed by those in power. This is why there is a dangerous fine line between democracy and dictatorship.

Contrary to the belief in many western states, women did not first secure the vote in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. No! Fourteen hundred years ago, Islam established that men and women have the same economic, judicial, educational and political rights, including electing their ruler and representatives, being members of political parties, and being elected representatives themselves of their community to hold their ruler to account. This was without the need for any 'Women's Struggle' or 'Women's Movement'. For example, in the second pledge of Al-Aqaba, two women - Nusaybah bint Ka'ab Umm 'Amarah and Asma bint Amr ibn Adi - were amongst the delegation of the Muslims of Yathrib who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (saw), accepting him as the leader of their state. Following the pledge, the Prophet (saw) requested the delegation to elect 12 Nuqaba (representatives) from amongst them to represent their people. He did not restrict this process to men alone. Furthermore, when Amr bin Al-As (ra) was consulting the citizens of the Khilafah as to whom they wished to be their leader after the death of Khalifah Umar bin Al-Khattab (ra), he sought the views of women and men alike.

Importantly, under the Islamic system, the provision of such rights is not subject to change according to whoever is in power at the time for it is the Shariah which is sovereign and not the ruler, parliaments or the people. This is the difference between a perfect System from the Creator of the Universe (swt), the all-Knowing, the all-Aware, who sets laws which are just to every human being, and a flawed system which is based on the deficient and biased minds of men (or women). Furthermore, these are the guaranteed rights that women can look forward to under the future Khilafah Rashidah. Article 115 of Hizb ut Tahrir's Draft Constitution of Al-Khilafah states, *"The woman can elect members of the Ummah's council, and be a member herself, and she can participate in the election of the Head of State and in giving him the pledge of allegiance."*

﴿وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

"Whoever does not rule according to what Allah has revealed, they are the oppressors." [5:45]

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