CHAPTER 1

SUDAN AND ITS PEOPLE
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— Background
— Political Background
— Linguistic Aspects
— Geographical and Socio-Economic Aspects
— References
CHAPTER I

SUDAN AND ITS PEOPLE: A BRIEF ACCOUNT

BACKGROUND:

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief account of the political, historical, geographical, socio-economic and linguistic aspects of Sudan, which are of importance in furnishing the necessary background for this study. It is not intended to do a comprehensive survey of the country, for this would be both irrelevant and indeed impossible. The purpose is, rather, to select and describe those characteristics and aspects of Sudan which are considered to be of particular importance and relevant in giving necessary background for this study.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND:

The name 'Sudan' is Arabic and derives from the expression 'Bilad-al-Sudan' literally means "The Country of the Blacks" which was used by the medieval Arabs as a generic name for the regions lying south of the Great Sahara spreading from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. It refers to the fact that it was at these latitudes that the Arabs came in contact with the Black people of Africa when they penetrated into the Continent.

However, Sudan, particularly, the north of Sudan as on the present day map of Africa has a history which is closely connected with that of Egypt. Egypt’s connections with the regions south of the present borders indicate that in most cases Egypt was Sudan’s most important link with the outside world. The northern part of Sudan has a history dominated by Contd..2/-
cultural influence of Egypt. The extent of cultural  
"Egyptianization" 3 can best be indicated by the fact that today  
there are more pyramids in Sudan than in Egypt. The region, to  
the south of Egypt and to the north of Khartoum, was given  
different names at different times; Kush, Nubia or Ethiopia, and  
were in close contact with Egypt. Therefore, north Sudan had  
always been a member of, or at least strongly influenced by, a  
series of major civilizations-like ancient Egyptians, Eastern  
Christians, Arab-Islamic. Indeed, for a thousand years (i.e. 600 B.C.- C.A.D. 400), north Sudan had generated and sustained an  
important civilization of its own. It seems to have been a  
genuinely original African civilization, and as a state it could  
often deal on equal terms or better with Pharaonic and Ptolemy  
Egypt and even with Imperial Rome. 4

One cannot neglect the cultural and political achievement of  
the medieval Christian Kingdoms of Nubia. The link with some  
centre of high civilization had never been completely broken, and  
the state-building and centralized administration had never been  
lost.

In contrast, the present Southern Provinces, south of the  
tenth parallel, on the other hand, were isolated and had little,  
or no contact with regions to the north. The Southerners have,  
throughout their recorded history, been very resistant to external  
influence of any kind whether Arab or European, Muslim or  
Christian. Therefore, the South was a little known part of "Darkest  
Africa". 5

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The period of the major importance in the early history of Sudan was the coming of the Arabs in the Seventh Century. Since then, a process of Arabization and Islamization began in northern Sudan. Tribes from Arabia crossed to Egypt and later moved south along the Nile Valley. Sudan offered them many advantages; better pasture for their herds and less occasions for trouble with owners of the fenced-in-fields, escape from the exactions of the tax gatherers and the press gang freedom. They, also, made contact with the Christian Kingdoms in the north. They progressed peacefully, through conversion and intermarriage with indigenous groups. However, the whole of the black race gradually adopted the new religion and was engaged in spreading the new religion and developing Arab characteristics. In the districts of the North where the original Arabs had settled, the evolution was complete. By the end of the fourteenth century, they had affected a social, cultural and religious change which resulted in the total transformation of the Christian Kingdom of Nubia and the establishment, in 1504, of the Islamic Kingdom of Funj which lasted until 1821.

A vast area, striking in its homogeneity of culture, was established. The Arabs penetrated more to the centre and West of Sudan and established, in the Seventeenth century, the Kingdoms of Kurdufan and Darfur. In the same period they established the Kingdom of Sennar which once pushed out its frontiers across to the White Nile and Kordofan in the West, almost to Egypt in the North and the Red Sea in the East. The whole area was unified
within a single religious and cultural frame work. But in spite of this change, the considerable ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the indigenous people was not indeed suppressed.

Further, penetration into Southern Sudan was not successful, due to the climatic conditions and the resistance of the Nilotic tribes. This made the region remarkable for its extreme ethnic and linguistic diversity. Most of the people of this region had never been in contact with any major civilization. Even beyond the ranks of the pastoral Nilotics, there was, often, no effective unity of action beyond the clan or even the village because they were an extreme example of the cultural isolation. The cultural change brought out in other parts of Sudan failed to influence them. Some of the Arabs therefore, turned eastwards and entered Abyssinia and settled there, while others pushed westwards as far as Lake Chad and Bornu in Central West Africa.\(^{10}\)

The outstanding result of these events is that while northern Sudan has become almost completely Islamized, and to a large, though lesser extent, also, Arabized, the south remained virtually untouched by these influences until the 19th century. However, the 19th century marks the dawning of the modern era in Sudanese history. Mohammed Ali, the Turkish Ruler of Egypt was facing scarcity of men and money for accomplishing his ambitious programme of modernizing his army, administration and education in Egypt. Therefore, there was only one place where he could get both money and men. It was on the Nile itself. Both, slaves and gold were obtainable in Sudan.\(^{11}\) Therefore in 1821 he sent two
military expeditions to conquer Sudan. He was ambitious to establish an empire for the sake of revenue whether in the form of gold or men to serve his army.

The period was known as the Turko-Egyptian in Sudan’s history which lasted till 1885. During this period, the Turko-Egyptians penetrated far into Sudan, well into the south reaching present Uganda. This resulted in bringing some degree of cultural influence from the north to the south of Sudan and there was development of simplified Arabic as the lingua franca throughout Southern Sudan. However, the lack of effective control from Cairo over the administrative machinery in Sudan led to many abuses in the administration. The exaction of taxes from the natives of the country was accompanied by considerable severity. In 1881, discontent with the Turko-Egyptian rule culminated in a revolt instigated by Mohammed Ahmed, a native of the north of Sudan. Meanwhile, events in Egypt itself gradually drew the attention of the British to the far East due to their desire to control the Suez Canal as it was an important route leading to its rich colony -India. Moreover, the Turkish government in Egypt, was also, financially reckless and eventually deposed as a result of the European pressure. There was an increasing employment in high military and civil offices of men who were neither Muslims nor Ottoman subjects, but for the most part Europeans and at least nominally Christians. It was in this context that General Charles Gordon was appointed, in 1877, as the first British and Christian Governor General of Sudan. But when the Turkish authority in
Egypt collapsed, he resigned and left Sudan. In 1883, the British, having manipulated what was in reality a puppet government into power in Cairo, decided to take over the complete control of Egypt. Meanwhile the revolution of Elmahadi was gaining ground and the Egyptian Army failed to confront it. The Government in Cairo became seriously alarmed by the situation which had arisen in Sudan. The British stand was that Egypt's only possible course in her own interests was to abandon Sudan and to remove the surviving garrisons to safety.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, General Charles Gordon was sent again to Sudan to evacuate the Turko-Egyptians who were facing annihilation by Elmahadi forces. But, by January 1885 Khartoum had been seized and captured by Elmahadi forces. Gordon was killed and almost the whole Sudan fell into the hands of Elmahadi who established a State, usually referred to as, the Mahadiya with its capital at Omdurman. But Elmahadi himself died in the same year and his successor Khalifa Abdullahi established his government and Sudan became independant at a time when the colonial scramble for Africa was in progress.

Therefore, it was not to be expected that Sudan's Independance would last for long. By 1894 the French reached the South-West part of Sudan. At the same time the Belgians crossed the Nile-Congo watershed, previously regarded as the limit of Egypt's dominions, and reached the Nile. Simultaneously, the Italians in Abyssinia were also trying to enlarge their sphere of influence in Eritrea.\textsuperscript{14} Both the British and the Egyptians were not willing to allow any part of the Sudan to slip from their

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sphere of control into the hands of any European power. On the one hand Egypt would be affected by the change that had taken place in Abyssinia, as the proportion of the Nile waters, which are vital to Egypt have their source in Abyssinia,\textsuperscript{15} on the other hand, one of the national demands of the Egyptians was the possession of Sudan itself, and the removal of Elmahadi state, because, its very existence depended on the waters of the Nile which came to it through Sudan and no Egyptian could contemplate with equanimity a hostile power controlling the river from Khartoum.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, as far as Britain was concerned, General Charles Gordon’s death was used, in England, as a rallying cry to create popular support for a new British military venture into the area and avenge the death of Gordon.

In the interest of economy and to allay Egyptian fears, the reconquest of Sudan was carried out from Egypt, use being made of units of both the British and Egyptian armies under the leadership of Lord Kitchener, a British Officer who led the army into Sudan and defeated the forces of the Khalifa Abdullahi in 1898. Thus, again, Sudan was reconquered. Eventually, the French and the Belgians were persuaded to forego their claims to any parts of Sudan. Therefore, the French retreated at once and the Belgians surrendered their enclave as part of a general Anglo-Belgian settlement in 1904.\textsuperscript{17}

For both, political and financial reasons, no attempt was made by the British to annex Sudan outright, for this would make it necessary that a considerable expenditure would be required to

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be paid for the administration and garrisoning of Sudan. Therefore a solution was found by Lord Cromer, the British ruler of Egypt, in the drafting of the Condominium Agreement, which evolved a new form of government wherein, the Egyptian flag would be flown side by side with that of the British in Sudan. Officials to administer Sudan were to be recruited from both Britain and Egypt, Supreme military and Civil command in Sudan was vested in one officer, the Governor General who was a British. Since Britain was at the time in virtual control of Egypt, the ultimate power in Sudan remained in the hands of the British. Such were the terms of the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, signed in Cairo on 19th January 1899 which lasted for over half a century during which it provided the constitutional framework for the administration of Sudan.

As a result of this Agreement, the Country was henceforth known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Questions of boundaries were settled during this period. It was also the period when the British and the Egyptians established the administrative system that served their purposes. F.R. Wingate was appointed as the first Governor-General of Sudan. Although the educated Sudanese shared the minor offices of the administration, but till 1920 the Key-note of the administration was direct rule where the higher ranks of the administration were dominated by army officers and the system of Government could be described as a benevolent autocracy on military lines for civil purposes.

During the early twenties the administrative system of the
British rule started a vigorous process of segregating the south from the north. As early as 1920, in a government memorandum, it was suggested that "The possibility of the Southern (black) portion of the Sudan being eventually cut off from the northern (Arab) area and linked up with some central African system should be borne in mind". An other memorandum echoed the same note when it stated that the South "would have, eventually, to be assimilated to the government of other African possession such as Uganda and East Africa, as far as the Negroids are concerned. The Arab provinces would require different treatment. Therefore, consider the question of a central African federation under British Control." 

In line with these policies many steps were taken throughout 1920s, in order to exclude Egyptians, northern Sudanese from the South. In 1921 the Governors of the Southern Provinces were no longer required to attend all the meetings of Governors held annually in Khartoum. Instead they were to have their own meeting in the South and to keep in touch with their counterparts in Kenya and Uganda. In 1922 the passports and permits Ordinance was promulgated so as to restrict the northern Sudanese and Egyptians movement in the South. The Ordinance empowered the Governor-General to declare any part of the Sudan a 'closed district' and all these steps were coinciding with the growing sense of Sudanese nationalism during the 1920s, which was influenced by the Egyptian nationalism. The Sudanese started forming political bodies such as 'The League of Sudanese Union',

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The Sudan United Tribes Society', and 'The White Flag Society'. The British, therefore, preferred to decrease the Egyptian presence in Sudan and started a policy of Indirect Rule and to avoid the employment of both the Egyptians and the educated Sudanese, they promulgated the powers of Nomad Shaikhs and Tribal leaders so that to create a generation of local colonial servants. However, in 1924, Sir Lee Stack, the Governor-General of Sudan was killed in Cairo. The discontent of the British with the Egyptians culminated in the expulsion of the Egyptian troops stationed in Sudan. Their Sudanese Colleagues revolted in support of the Egyptians, but the revolt was suppressed by the British. However, again an Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in 1936. It ended the exclusion of the Egyptians from Sudan though the Egyptians could not restore the same share in the political and administrative services which they had held in 1924 in Sudan.

Finally, the Sudan attained its independence on 1st January 1956 and the country became the Republic of Sudan. The Political system left by the British was a parliamentary system which lasted till 1958 when it was overthrown by a military coup led by General Abbood. Civil war broke out in the South. Abbood remained in power till 1964 when again he was removed by a public revolution which re-established the Parliamentary system which ruled only for five years, but again it was overthrown by a military coup led by G.M. Numeiri in 1969. It made in 1972 a Peace Accord, with the Southerners, that settled the war which was going
on since the early 1960s. It ruled the country for sixteen years when again it was removed by a public revolution in 1985. A one year transitional period followed it when the country was ruled by both military and civilian headed by General G.A.M.H. Sowar Eldahab who surrendered the power to an elected Parliament in 1986. Civil War, again, broke out in the south in 1983, while the parliamentary system established in 1986 was again overthrown by a military rule in 1989 which is still in power while the civil war in the south is continuing. This shows, clearly, the political instability from which Sudan has been suffering and which has its inevitable impact on other aspects of life.

LINGUISTIC ASPECTS:

As we have seen, earlier in this chapter, Sudan has, in many respects, a significant position in being the 'bridge' between the Arab world and the world of Africa on the south of the Sahara. Therefore, linguistically, geographically, as well as culturally, Sudan has, thus, constituted, a microcosm of Africa. This significance can be readily appreciated when it is realised that the Sudan contains within its borders representatives of all the major defined groupings of languages in Africa with the exception of the Khoisan languages of Southern Africa. Sudan is a typical African country in the sense that it is multilingual and a typical Middle African country in the sense that it is richly multilingual. The number of distinct languages spoken in the Sudan cannot be much less than 100. In northern Sudan while Arabic language enjoys an ancient dominance

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but still, there are some local languages spoken by the Nubians but they are not used in education. In Eastern Sudan, also, different tribal groups have their own local languages but they are, also, not used in education. Arabic acts as the lingua franca. The Western part of Sudan has its own groups of local languages. They are not used or taught in education and Arabic is more widespread while Southern Sudan has, also its own local languages and Arabic acts as the lingua franca. These local languages are written in the Arabic script, Sonex, and are used in education too. So except in Southern Sudan, the local languages in the other parts of the Sudan are taught neither as a subject nor used as a medium of instruction. Therefore they have given way to the spread of Arabic language. Arabic has emerged as the Sudanese language with the widest social acceptance over geographical distribution. 29

GEOPGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS:

The position of Sudan in the heart of Africa gave it the significance of being the land of many frontiers. To the North lie Egypt and Libya, to the West Chad and the Central African Republic, to the South Zaire, Uganda and Kenya, to the East Ethiopia, Eritrea and the Red sea. On the present day map of Africa, therefore, Sudan is the Largest country. It comprises a million square miles, an area equal to the combined expanse of Britain, Ireland, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Denmark. This huge area contains many differences of climate and conditions, and these have produced peculiar and

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diverse breeds of men, modes and languages. This area stretches from Latitude 22 degrees north of the Equator, and from the Red Sea to Chad in Equatorial West Africa. The Atmor desert which covers the greater part of North Sudan is an extension of the Great Sahara desert. The great Central Plain is a Savannah region which as it goes Southwards, the rainfall increases and enables the intervening spaces to support vegetation and consequently human life, till it merges into the thick Equatorial jungles.

The dominant geographical feature is the river Nile which has two main branches; The White Nile flowing from beyond the Victoria Lake, and it traverses Sudan placidly from Nimule and creeps Northwards to Khartoum where it receives the more tumultuous floods of the Blue Nile which surges down from the Ethiopian Heights where Tana Lake, its main source, lies. They join together at Khartoum and from this point of joint and forward, it is called The Nile which proceeds northward and on the way receives, again, Atbara river that comes from the Northern Ethiopian Heights, and continues its journey piercing the extension of the lifeless Sahara desert and forms life and goes on towards Egypt.

The population, in northern Sudan, lives almost entirely on the river Nile which is a means of their growth and a source of their progress. Therefore, the bulk of the population is concentrated on both sides of the river which are narrow strips of greenery, beyond which bare deserts and rocks make life impossible because West to this area is the Libyan desert and East
to it is the Atmor desert and both are extensions of the Great Sahara desert and also, are totally uninhibited. The peoples' main occupation on these banks, of course, is cultivation. They grow palm trees, wheat and corn. The climate of the area is characterised by hot dry summer and cold dry winter with scarcity of rain which is also not welcomed by people as it spoils the crops of dates and the houses which are mostly mud built.

Western Sudan is a land of extensive pastures. These are the domains of the nomadic Arabs whose wealth lies in Camels and sheep. Southwards, the vast territories of Kordofan and Darfur afford grazing grounds to a multitude of cattle and also gives a means of livelihood to a great number of groups of tribes known as Baggara, or Cow-herd Arabs. The life of these people is extremely harsh. They are in a constant rhythmical seasonal movement in pursuit of pastures and grazing grounds. In Autumn season they grow wheat and maize. To the south of this area soil replaces sand and cattle become the dominant animal. A factory for Canned meat, and another for pasteurized milk, was established, but both were closed down. The first was closed down because, for those tribes, cattle are valuable assets, therefore, they would not part with them for cash. The latter was closed down because tribes are not settled at one place, therefore the factory failed to get a permanent supply of milk.

Eastern Sudan stretches between the Blue Nile and the jagged mountains of the Eritrean border and the Red sea. It is an area of different tribes who breed camels and grow wheat, vegetable,
oil and Sugar cane.

The heart of Sudan, both, geographically and economically is the 'Gezira' meaning 'peninsula'. It is the alluvial area that lies in the angle formed by the two main branches of the Nile, The White and Blue Nile. Cotton, wheat, corn and sugarcane are grown in this area. To the south of this area, conditions become subtropical with even heavier rains. The vegetation becomes more dense, the ground more broken and boggy and cattle are the main animals in this area where people are more settled than in West Sudan.

Southern Sudan, on the other hand, in a sharp contrast to the north, lies within the tropics and is thus dominated by forests, woods and swamps. It is plentifully watered and the whole face of the land is moist and green. The physical and climatic conditions have produced a variety in the modes of living. Some live on crop production or fishing, hunting, some others live on animal husbandry. In some regions, especially in the vast Central Plain of seasonally flooded grassland, it is difficult for men to survive at all, but the Nilotic inhabitants have solved the problem by developing a symbiotic relationship with their cattle, symbiotic - in the literal sense that neither could survive without the other. Only human-ingenuity and experience enable the cattle to survive the havoc of almost total flood. Milk and milk products are staple food of men, and neither men nor cattle could survive the harrassment of nocturnal biting insects without the man made smudge-fires of dried cattle-dung

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which protect both huts and byre. Even the ashes of the smudge-fires are not wasted; rubbed into the skin, they form a useful insect-repellant. Their surviving and also raising of cattle in these severe conditions implies a highly specialized and highly inflexible mode of life.

The capital and the seat of the central government is Khartoum. It is situated at the confluence of the White and Blue Nile. The Capital has its extension in the form of two cities, North Khartoum and Omdurman which are situated on the opposite sides of the confluence that forms the head of an angle. The main outlet to the outside world through the sea is the City of port Sudan which is situated on the coast of the Red Sea.

These vast areas in Sudan are connected together with, mostly, land transport such as Buses, Trucks which travel mostly on plain land while there are a few constructed roads that connect the main cities and economic centres while railway is not an effective means of human transport; rather, it is a goods carrier. Sudan Airways links the main cities of the country and the country with the rest of the world.

The main feature of the economy of the Sudan, as in most developing countries, is that it is predominantly agricultural. Industry is still an infant and confined mainly to manufacturing of sugar, textile, cement and vegetable oil. The country depends heavily on imported commodities, apart from various consumer goods, including transport equipment, machinery, chemicals and
petroleum products. After June 1989, when the Military Government came after removing democracy, there was more emphasis on privatization and the economy of open market. In addition, there was more emphasis on the establishment of a small-scale industry which depend on agricultural products. Sudan exports sugar, leather, gum-Arabic, vegetable oil.

Ethnically there is no pure race of any kind in Sudan. The population was estimated 27,400,000. It is a great mixture of early Caucasians, Hamitics, Arabs and Nilotic negroes. Both physical features of the people and some aspects of their culture provide ample evidence of a long process of intermingling over centuries. The Arabs of Sudan are a race formed by the interbreeding of Negroes and Arabs and yet distinct from both. In the more remote and inaccessible regions which lie to the South, the Black race remains as yet unchanged. And between these extremes every degree of mixture is to be found.

While North, East and West of Sudan contain so many tribes but they are held together by the Muslim faith, a sense of sharing in the Arab heritage and Arabic language, the inhabitants of the South consist of many tribes, speaking many different languages and professing many beliefs. However, due to the civil war which broke out in the south in 1983 and which is still going on, a large number of the Southerners migrated to the north and Arabic started becoming their main language.

Thus, the above discussion shows that the geographical
situation of the Sudan and its unique historical experience of being a bridge for the flow of cultural traffic between deep dark Africa and the Asiatic Mediterranean North Africa, have given this country no choice but to be an Afro-Arab State.
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2. In this sense the term is still used by Western scholars, notably Anthropologists and Linguists (e.g. Greenberg in his classification of African Languages), but rarely by contemporary Arab writers.


6. The term "Arabization", used here to refer to the processes of assimilation and acculturation is to be distinguished from the term "Arabicization" which is subsequently used in this thesis to refer to the process of switching over from English to Arabic language as a medium of instruction.


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20. Ibid., P. 57.
22. Quoted in Abd Al-Rahim, Ibid., P. 74.
24. Ibid.

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28. The list of Languages, Sublanguages and Dialects can be found in first population census of Sudan 1955/56, Method Report No. 11, PP. 277-87.


30. Sudan Concise, (Prepared by Bank of Sudan on the occasion of the sixteenth regular meeting of Assembly of Governors of the all Africa Central Banks 6-7 December, 1993, Khartoum: Sudan - Printed by the Sudanese Colourphotos Laboratories), P. 4.