CHAPTER SIX:

THE CONTEMPORARY STATUS OF

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE SUDAN
INTRODUCTION:

Religion has always played an essential role in the Sudanese social life. It is a very influential factor in the Country’s identity formation and social classification. It eventually affects all aspects and views of life, relationships and mutual interactions. It also mixes greatly with the local traditions and social practices of the different groups.

Roughly considering the religious status of the Sudan, it can be described as a Country with two major sectors. About two-thirds of the Sudanese population are Muslims concentrated in the Northern parts, and the remaining one-third are non-Muslims in the Southern Regions of the Country. The Southern Sudanese groups are mainly Christians and advocates of local religions, tribal spiritual beliefs and traditional practices.

Islam is the official religion of the Sudan as it is the religion of the extreme majority. It had entered the Country since the middle of the Seventh Century, through three trade routes:

1. Egypt through the Nile Valley and the Eastern Desert.
2. Saudi Arabia (Hijaz) through the Red Sea trade relations.
3. Arab Moors after the spread of Islam in North Africa.

The expansion and diffusion of the Islamic faith throughout the Country took place through the movements of the Beduin tribes, who continuously shifted from one place to the other. They carried with them, together with their culture, the religion and practices they upheld.

By the middle of the Fifteenth Century, Muslims had succeeded to crash the Christian Sultanates and overtake power in the Sudan. Thus the different groups in the North developed themselves into stable Islamic communities. The
Formation of the Funj Sultanate (1504-1821) and the Fur Sultanate (1650-1874) represented the climax of the Islamic overtake in the Country. The Islamic diffusion, however, stopped at the Tropical forests of the Sudan (12°N) due to the difficult climatic conditions beyond that point. This has approximately formed the demarcation line between the Muslim North and the non-Muslim Southern Sudan.

Now the Muslim population in the Sudan form almost 100% in some of the Northern regions. The Sudanese Islamic faith and practices are greatly based on mystical understanding and fraternal groupings (tariqahs), which indicate the necessity of relying on holy men and holy families who are the founders of Sufi orders. The most famous of these are the Khatmiyyah tariqah, brought by Mohammad Uthman Al Miragani (1793-1853) from Mecca, and the Ansar, who are the followers of Mohammed Ahmad Al Mahdi (1848-1885).

Although Northern Sudan is part of the Arab-Islamic worlds, yet some of its specific religious and social practices are of old traditional African bases. The Islamic life of the Arab nomadic tribes, for example, reflects the traditions of the Sahara Desert, while the religious life of the Nubians clearly shows the influence of the ancient and Medieval customs of Nubian Muslims. Along the Nile Valley the Islamic beliefs reflect clear combined effects from Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Nuba of the Western regions incorporate Islam into their African values and come out with a joint belief, which can include non-Islamic practices and rituals like the Kujur institution.

The Sudanese people are characterized by their immense diversity, even among people of the same belief. This can be seen in the obvious conflict between the popular religion of the masses and their practices, vis-à-vis the religious understanding of the elites, including the scholars, rulers and the educated groups. The later category considers popular religious practices as

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160 The Kujur is a clan of hill community priest. He is believed to have supernatural powers of healing illness, distress or misfortune. He can neutralize all evil powers and bring good luck. He also administers rituals of the society like rain-making ceremonies for example.
representations of the need of people in pre-modern societies. Yet, it can be stressed here that these practices have played important roles in the lives of these elites themselves, a thing which makes their points of criticism come under major questioning.

Since independence there have been many attempts to Islamize and Arabize the non-Muslim and non-Arab regions of the Country. The main reason given for these attempts has been the search for social unity and national integration. In many cases these processes resulted in more antagonistic outcomes and the awakening of self-identity consciousness. An ultimate outcome of such attempts can be seen in the tense relationship that exists between these groups and the rest of the population.

**CHRISTIANS:**

The Christian groups form about 15% of the population of Southern Sudan, and a very small portion of the Northern people (mainly the Copts of Egyptian origins).

Christianity came to the Sudan as early as the Roman Empire. Continuous travels of merchants as well as the people fleeing persecutions under the Roman Rule arrived into Ancient Sudan, bringing their faith with them. Yet, mass conversion to Christianity started only in the Sixth Century, in the interval (580-643 A.D.).\(^{161}\) This was during the rule of King Justinian, the Emperor of Byzantine and his Queen Theodora. The King sent many missionaries to the Southern lands of the Nuba to spread his faction of the Christian faith.\(^{162}\) Missionaries of the Queen came from Egypt and the Mediterranean Region. The Sudanese society at that time was mainly

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\(^{162}\) The Byzantine King Justinian and Queen Theodora differed on the nature of Jesus Christ. The King believed in the dual nature of Jesus while the Queen followed the mono-faithists who adhered to the wholistic nature of Christ. There was a big rivalry between the two faiths in spreading their belief.
consisting of the kingdoms of the Nubians and the Central Nile-Valley groups. These people gradually abandoned their local tribal beliefs and indigenous religions, and advocated Christianity. Consequently, they formed strong religious states governed by Christian orientation.

Christianity flourished in Medieval Sudan and developed as an essential way of life as well as a theological system of rule. As a result, huge churches were established in several places during the Christian kingdoms. Christianity continued to dominate the Sudanese lives till a short time after the Fifteenth Century whereby A’lawa, the last Nubian Christian Kingdom fell in the hands of the Funj-Abdallab Islamic expansionists.

The Islamic conquest of Egypt in 640 A.D. and the establishment of the great Muslim Empire in the Middle East marked the decrease of the prevalence of the Christian faith in the Region, giving way to the gradual Islamic breakthrough. Early Christianity can still be seen in the several churches and Medieval establishments in the Nubian land today. It is also observed in the traditions and social practices like birth and marriage rituals in the Region.

The diminishing of Medieval Christianity and its fast decline in the Sudan can be attributed to three main reasons:

1. It was a royal religion, i.e., mostly advocated by the royal people and upper classes with no schools or deep social contacts and roots.

2. The period between the introduction of Christianity to the Sudanese kingdoms and the spread of Islam is relatively short (not more than one century). Thus the movement of Christian clergymen was highly restricted and watched by Muslim rulers.

3. The big disputes among the advocates of the Christian faith itself in the Region (monofaithists and multi-faithists) played a big role in weakening the interrelationship of the Christian states.

Christianity of the modern Sudan lost its tracing links with the Medieval historical establishments. It is mainly a recent introduction of the great European expansions in Africa and Asia, and the intensive activities of the
Western missionaries in the first half of the Nineteenth Century. It is greatly influenced by the European Christian orientation, and represented the rivalry to conquer the African regions. President J. Kenyatta stated,

“They (clergymen and European Colonialists) came with the Bible in their hands and the land in our hands; soon the Bible became in our hands and the land in theirs.”

Mohammad Ali Pasha, the Ottoman ruler over Egypt and the Sudan, used several Christian consultants from Europe in his administration, particularly in the affairs of the Southern parts of his Rule. This opened the door for European missionary work, which intensified in the Nineteenth Century. The earlier work of these missionaries mainly concentrated on the Southern Sudan regions rather than the Muslim North. The Catholic Missionary started its work in 1849 in the regions around Juba, and in 1852 and 1854 they established centres for their activities among the Bari and the Dinka tribes, respectively.

The most famous Catholic priest who was working there was Father Comboni who established several missionary schools, which still exist now. The missionary activities stopped during the Mahdist period (1881-1889), but reserved its work legally in 1903 during the British Rule. Moreover, the Colonial Government issued a decree to organize the missionary work in the different regions of the Sudan as follows:

1. The Western Coast of the Nile in the Upper Nile Province and Bahr-al-Ghazal (except Rombek) were given to the Catholic missionary.
2. The Eastern Coast of the Nile in the Upper Nile Province was devoted to the American Missionary i.e., Protestant Church.
3. The Western Coast of the Nile at the Equatoria Province was given to the British Missionary – Clergy Church.

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164 The Eastern Coast of the same region was under the administration of the Ugandan Government and thus was exempted from the decree.
4. All regions above line 10° i.e. Northern Sudan were supposed to retain the placement of the previous missionaries.

In 1930 the ‘Southern Sudan Policy’ of the British Rule defined the South, the Nuba Mountains, the Southern Darfur as well as the Angasana areas as closed regions. This indicated that those regions could not be entered without official permission. Consequently, huge numbers of Muslims were removed from the North-South borders and the local Southern Sudanese people were prohibited from any practice that related them to the North. Thus Arabic language, dress, names and culture were absolutely outlawed.

The separation and isolation of the two parts of the Country constituted the biggest chance for the British Rule to implement its laws on each side differently. Thus, the Christian missionaries were granted great freedom to work in the Southern regions in order to convert its people to Christianity. In fact the poverty and low status of the people were exploited for the benefit of these missionaries. Food, aid and any kind of help were strictly stipulated to the adoption of Christianity. The ‘Southern Sudan Policy’ continued till the 1940s when it was abolished due to its failure. Yet, Christianity in the Southern regions, and the Christian institutions in the Sudan in general became greatly influenced by European and non-Sudanese laws and guidance.

For the rest of the Sudanese, Christianity and its culture were considered as foreign. Christian converts were viewed as tools of Colonialism and as imperialist agents had to be fought similar to Zionism. This is the reason why Christians were not respected and the missionaries were opposed, particularly in post-independence Sudan. The opposition notions included the Sudanese converts as well. Consequently, Christians in return reversed this by mistrust and violence.

After independence in 1956 many attempts were made to Sudanize Christianity by establishing Sudanese churches, training local clergymen, controlling educational institutions and restricting foreign missionary activities. The Sudanese Government restricted and closely watched the movements of
foreigners in different parts of the Country, and who were mostly workers in churches.

The year 1964 witnessed a remarkable escalation in the process of Sudanizing Christianity. During the civil war between the North and the South (1955-1972), the Ministry of Religious Affairs issued an order commanding all non-Sudanese church workers and clergy to leave the Country. It handed all the Christian affairs to the local leaders and individuals. In 1971 the 'Fifth Republican Decree' commanded the establishment of a Ministry for Religious Affairs that included the administration of Churches within its basic responsibilities.\(^{165}\)

Beside these actions the Christians had several attempts of autonomy. The Sudanese Christians among themselves formed the 'Sudan Council of Churches' to manage their affairs internally. The Sudanese Catholics, then, succeeded in re-establishing their relations with the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican independently. By the 1970s most of the Christians laws were Sudanised, and consequently, foreign professionals and Christian workers were allowed back with the only condition that they would not be of European nationality.

Around that same period the Sudanese Government, represented in the Ministry of Religious Affairs started introducing intensive programmes of Islamization, particularly in the Nuba Mountains regions of Christian domination. These projects were concentrated on that area so as to combat the great spread of Christianity there. According to this project, many students were oriented to act as Islamic preachers, but the Christian wave had over-passed these attempts. The 1973 Sudanese Constitution\(^{166}\) reflected the inter-religious relationships in Articles 9 and 16.

\(^{166}\) The Sudan Permanent Constitution, 1973.
Article Nine of the Constitution stated that the Islamic Sharia’a and Customary Laws were to be regarded the main sources of legislature in the Country. Non-Muslims were to be treated according to their own laws and rules.

Article Sixteen stated in some of its sections:

- Christian religion in the Republic of the Sudan is accepted as the official religion of a big number of citizens. The State acknowledges this and expresses its value.
- All Heavenly religions and spiritual beliefs are considered sacred and should not be abused by anyone.
- No restrictions are allowed to be imposed on any citizen or group of citizens based on religious belief.

The September 1983 Islamic Laws and Constitution had made a clear exception of non-Muslims from the application of Sharia’a Laws on them. Such exceptions included the Islamic Penal Code and punishments like those of drinking alcohol. The Southern Sudan provinces were completely exempted from these laws.

The present Government in the Sudan (1989- ) is trying to apply the same conditions and exemptions on the non-Muslim Sudanese. Attempts are being made to apply federalism as a system of rule. According to this system each state was granted the right to determine the type of laws that mostly suits its people. The Southern provinces and states were again exempted from any Islamic laws and Penal Code.
THE ANIMIST PAGANS:

The Animist and Pagan groups of Southern Sudan, who are neither Muslims nor Christians, constitute the majority population of the Region. They are believed to have migrated to the Sudanese territory from regions near Lake Chad in the Seventeenth Century. This is one of the points taken against their claim that they are the original dwellers of the Sudan, before the commencement of the Arab migrations.

The Animist and Pagan tribal combinations are extremely heterogeneous in almost all aspects of life, though with several overlappings. Their dialects, tribal laws, customs, traditions and social values are of different nature and understanding from one tribe to the other. The biggest difference lies in their religious beliefs, performances, rites and rituals.

Most of these tribal beliefs demonstrate the conviction in one supreme God, but his name and function differ from one tribe to the other. For the Dinka tribes, for example, the God is called "Danjaot" or "Yanalikh", while for the Shilluk it is "Wojok".

The basic idea, around which all the religious beliefs orbit, is the strong belief that the main source of supremacy and supernatural powers is the spirit of the ancestors. The role of the ancestors' spirit determines many of the life decisions, and hence requires several rites and performances. These spirits are believed to transmigrate to the different disciples who in turn transfer into persons with superpowers of bringing (sending down) rain and controlling the elements of time and place. For the Ashooli and the Latoka tribes the maker of the rain is considered as the chief of the tribe. For some tribes the real religious leader of the tribe is strictly prohibited of normal interaction with the outside the tribe world. This is because he is considered to be so sacred that he should not be exposed to the normal people. A person who is lower in status is

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selected to be the connection between this leader and the world, including the political authority.

The religio-political authority differs greatly from one tribe to the other, and by all means is not allowed to exceed the religious leader. Some tribes like the Shilluk have a centralized political system on the top of which is a sacred King. For the Dinka and the Bari the absolute power is in the hands of the rain-controller. The Nuer tribe base power acquisition on religious hereditary, and not on political rights, while for the Zande it is confined to a group of notables with hereditary influence, and is not permitted for the common people.

Most anthropologists consider the religious beliefs of the Southern Sudanese Animist and Pagan groups as 'tribal' religions, based on the local tribal faith, and, hence, cannot be considered as a common factor that joins them, or a unifying base for a common identity. Thus, the power and influence of the religious leaders like the rain-controller, does not exceed his own tribal frames.

THE CONTEMPORARY STATUS:

The procedure of religious grouping of the Sudanese society reflects two large counteracting sides that distributed themselves on geographical bases. These are the Northern Muslim majority vis-à-vis the Southern Christian and Pagan minority. O’ Balance summarized their problem as,

"Two cultures met and clashed; the Muslim north tried to identify itself completely with the Arabs; the other ... had affiliations with black Africa."\(^{168}\)

The relationship between the majority and minority groups is very tense and hostile. It has escalated into a direct conflict resulting in a several decades-old civil war between the two sides. The Southern groups are appealing for an

independent ‘South-Sudan’ Country, as the case of Pakistan. The new Country would be a Christian/Pagan nation with its own international boundaries. The escalation of the claims made the problem a genuine issue of research and examination. The Southerners claim of independence is based on the following factors:

1. The severe environmental differences between the two regions.
2. The antecedents in the historical hostility of the two sides.
3. The racial, cultural, social and religious differences of peoples of the North and South.
4. The economic inequalities, misallocation of resources and unfair developmental distributions.
5. The assimilative and repressive policies of independent Northern-dominated governmental affairs in the South.
6. The foreign intervention in the problem.

The religious minorities of Southern Sudan see themselves as being invaded, enslaved and exploited by the North. There has always been according to the Southerners a traditional contempt of the Northerners towards them, as they felt being regarded as inferiors and slaves who needed to be guided and administered arrogantly and thoughtlessly.

Slavery, in fact, had been customary in the Sudan for long historical periods. Slaves from Southern Sudan had been either captured in war, slave raids or bought in slave markets such as the Sennar Slave Market. During the Ottoman Rule in the Nineteenth Century, the Arab slavers captured about two million blacks from Southern Sudan. They were considered as a big source of wealth and productivity. Slave trade had officially been banned during and after the ruling period of Khedive Ismail, i.e., in the period 1874-1881.

The Southern Sudanese discontent has started in the form of a mutiny implemented by the Southern soldiers at Torit District in the Province of Equatoria, against the Northerners. This mutiny took place as early as 1955. Active and direct clashes between the two sides began in 1963 and reached its
peak in 1965. Then the situation continued to worsen and escalate up to 1970. After a peaceful decade 1972-1982, following the Addis Ababa Agreement with the May Regime Government, war broke out again in 1983, and continued to the present day. All attempts at making peace like agreements, negotiations, conferences and policies failed. The result of all these was a complete loss of confidence between the two sides.

The problem of religious minorities in the Sudan in its severe form can be described as a post-independence phenomenon. All groups of the Sudanese nation had united together and successfully diluted all forms of primary loyalties in order to achieve independence. They joined hands in a kind of a "Civil Theology", as professor Abdel Salam\(^{169}\) has named it, against the foreign Colonial Rule. Independence was visualized as an ultimate achievement of affluence and equality.

The departure of Colonial power created political vacuum and heaps of formidable problems of scarcity in resources and distortion in economic, social and political developments. Thus dreams of equality and democracy of the political parties were reduced to the maintenance of power via capital accumulation. Consequently, the new status of the Southerners became one of exchanged leadership and domination from the British to the Northern rulers. Structural inequalities in the socio-economic fields intensified the problem. For the first fourteen years of independence all the developmental attempts were confined to the Capital, and thus people from the rural areas including the Southerners started leaving their agricultural activities and migrating to Khartoum to look for jobs. The same unevenness was true for the fields of communication, transport and education. Domination over economic, administrative and political power was in the hands of the growing new middle class in the Central belt of the Country.

After one decade of independence it appeared that almost 75% of the industrial establishments were concentrated in Khartoum. After two decades the Southerners came to realize that most of the developmental projects were intensely located around the Central Sudan and the Nile Valley. This trend favored the Central parts of the Country, and hence Northern Sudan at the expense of the peripheries, particularly the Southern parts.

During the independence negotiations the Southern representatives in the Parliament demanded the establishment of a federal system of government in order to regulate the constitutional relationships between the North and the South. Based on the acceptance of the Northerner representatives to that demand, a unanimous vote was held in favor of independence. After freedom was granted the Northern rulers are accused of not being genuinely committed to federalism or to any constitutional arrangements.

Under the regime of General Abboud (1958-1964) there were intensive political tendencies towards taking serious steps of Arabizing and Islamizing the whole Country, including the Southern regions. This was based on the logic of creating a new Sudan characterized by one culture (Arabizm) and a strong religious homogeneity (Islamizm), in order to replace pluralism. Practical steps were undertaken towards the achievement of this goal, as to oppose the Colonial establishments in the Country and the South. Arabic language was greatly encouraged, Islam enhanced and the weekend in the Southern regions was changed from Sunday to Friday, hence creating a lot of resentment among the Southern Sudanese.

One of the first attempts to reach a peaceful solution to the problem between the North and the South in the Sudan was the Round Table Conference of 1965. The Conference did not achieve great success due to the mutual feelings of suspicions, aggression and mistrust, as well as the social and political pressures from the two sides.

An important element, which added to the problem at that stage, was the establishment of an Islamic Constitution in 1967. This created a kind of solidarity among the Northerners, but the Southern groups were impressed by being outsiders and excluded from any consideration. Abel Alier stated,

"In being told to accept the rule of a constitution based on religion, the Southerners were being told they would become aliens in the Arab World and its cultures, exiles from the Negro-African world." \(^{171}\)

The May Regime (1969-1983) at its inception as a military coup declared that two of the main causes of its outbreak had been related to the problem of Southern Sudan. These reasons were:

1. The revolutionary Government was committed to work for social justice and the self-sufficiency for the people, particularly those underprivileged in the rural areas (especially the Southern Regions).
2. The failure of the previous governments to solve the Southern problem.

To apply these goals, and in June 1969 a policy for Southern Sudan was declared. This policy according to Wai, acknowledged for the first time the recognition of:

1. The existence of a problem in Southern Sudan.
2. The cultural and historical differences between the North and the South.
3. The right of the Southern people to develop their separate cultures and traditions.
4. The right of the Southern people to regional self Government.

Based on that, the May Regime founded a Six-Point Programme of work for the creation and implementation of a policy of ‘Regional Autonomy’ to the South:

2. Economic, social and cultural development of the South.
3. Appointment of a Minister for Southern affairs.
4. Training of personnel to help in the administration of the South.
5. Creation of a special Economic Planning Board.
6. A special budget for the South.

By this the Major-General El-Numeiri Government reflected a new understanding to the problem. The recognition of the legitimate interests of the people of Southern Sudan had shown for the first time that the Northerners could hold a positive attitude and goodwill towards the Southerners, and that they could undertake progressive steps to deal with the problem in a concrete way. The great Southern enthusiasm towards the policy of Regional Autonomy indicated its degree of success.

The May Regime had started as a Democratic Socialist Movement, taking the trend of socialist awareness and political education of the masses as a way to create common bases, and to eliminate mutual distrust. Socialism, for the May Regime could not be established in a suspicious atmosphere. By undertaking this step the General's Government succeeded to a great extent to win the confidence of the Southern groups. He appointed two Southerners, namely, Mr. Abel Alier, and Mr. Joseph U. Garang\footnote{Later Mr. Joseph, U. Garang was executed for his participation in a Communist counter-coup against the May Regime, in July 1971.} in the post of Minister of State for the Southern Affairs. Added to that, the Government appointed other three Southerners as Commissioners in the South, and one as a Deputy Minister for Southern Affairs.

The Government of the May Revolution had also undertaken a very essential step, which led to a remarkable achievement in regard to the Southern problem. The Regime contacted the Anya-Anyaa Southern Party, which was previously leading their faction at the Round Table Conference, for negotiations. This has happened in spite of the severe clashes that were already
taking place between them and the Government. On the 28th of February 1972, delegations from the North and the South met in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, negotiated and signed an ‘Agreement for Autonomy for Southern Sudan within the Republic of the Sudan’.

In general terms, the Agreement stressed an immediate cease fire between the two sides followed by the gradual establishment of regional autonomy, under which the three Southern provinces (Equatoria, Bahr El-Ghazal and Upper Nile) would be united in a Southern Region under its own Regional President. This President was to be chosen by an Executive Council, which would control all aspects of the Southern policy except defence, foreign affairs, currency and finance, and the economic and social planning issues. These fields, which were exempted, were to remain under the control of the Central Government where the South would be represented. Another agreed upon element was the language issue. While Arabic would be the official language in the Country, English was to be the ‘common language’ to be taught at schools in the South.

This Agreement was welcomed by almost all the Southern factions, as Numeiri himself went to the Southern regions to explain its items and validity. It succeeded in establishing a decade of peace in the Country, and absorbing all the rebellion troops into the Sudanese armed forces and police.

This Agreement has marked the end of the first phase of Southern military conflict against the North. The South was given a Regional People’s Assembly of its own, and a Regional Cabinet in the form of a Higher Executive Council. The notions of the Agreement like ‘Unity in Diversity’, ‘Self-Government’ and ‘Power Sharing’ became the slogans of the Constitution (Article 8). Also based on that, the Act of Self-Government for the South was formed. The implementation of this Agreement, which was known as the Addis Ababa Agreement, represented one of the most remarkable achievements of the May Regime. Consequently, a whole decade of peace was imposed in the Country.

173 Keesing’s Contemporary Archives.
for the first time since the beginning of the civil war. Unfortunately, Numeiri himself in 1983 violated the decade of peace as well as the Agreement. His new policies of regionalization and abolishment of the Southern self-autonomy led to the flaming of war between the North and the South. This has marked the beginning of the Second Phase of the war, i.e., 1983 till the present day.

The opposition to the Agreement came from the Islamic Fundamentalist groups who were against all the Regime’s policies like the advocating of Scientific Socialism and the domination of the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) as a one party ruling system. Another opposition party was the Anya-Anyaa II who started with great preservation towards the Agreement and ended as a decisive Separatist Group.

The most influential group that stood against the Addis Ababa Agreement, and who emerged as a result of Numeiri’s policies was the Southern originated ‘Sudan People’s Liberation Movement’ - (SPLM) under the leadership of Colonel John Garang. Later, this group developed its own army under the name of the ‘Sudan People’s Liberation Army’ - (SPLA), and started leading an organized army-to-army war against the Northern Government (whoever). The composition of this Movement was mainly of the Dinka tribal people, but with time, it succeeded to attract other Southern groups like the Nuer and the Shilluk.

The SPLA had witnessed differences within itself. These differences were mainly over sovereignty and domination. Consequently, it clashed and parted from the Nuer dominated Anya-Anyaa II at early stages of its formation. The Anya-Anyaa wanted a Southern Sudan united within the Country but with greater rights, while the aim of the SPLM was the liberation of the whole Sudanese people from the ruling pseudo-Arab nationalists.174

Numeiri decided in 1983 to re-divide the Southern Sudan into its original three provinces of Bahr El Ghazal, Equatoria and Upper Nile, hence putting an end to the right of autonomy and self-rule provided earlier to the Southern Sudanese by the Agreement. By this behavior, the Regime lost its popularity in the South as well as the support of the Northern Muslim majority. Some groups of the Southern elites supported the latter decision of the Regime, aiming at greater participation in the new arrangements. Thus it can be concluded that the May Regime created a kind of conflict even among the Southern groups themselves, and escalated it by supporting one side against the other each time.

The role played by the May Regime in the problem of religious minorities is very essential. At earlier stages the execution of Joseph Garang the Numeiri's Minister of State for Southern Affairs had disheartened many Southerners who saw him as a peacemaker. Another fatal problem of the Regime was the breakdown of the Addis Ababa Agreement, a thing that also destroyed all links of confidence between the two sides. The annexation of the oil-rich Bentui area at the Nuer/Dinka border to the Northern territory, the transformation of the Southern military command to the North and the policy of taking sides in the Southern inter-tribal conflicts had compounded the problems. The Southern groups felt betrayed and concluded that the autonomy story was,

"merely a price... to the South in return for the support against his (Numeiri's) enemies in the North." 175

Another point that can be taken against the Numeiri’s May Regime was the way he got rid of his opponents like the air-land attack that he launched against Abba Island where the Ansar opposition gathered. Also the executions

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by which he sentenced any suspected counter-coup plotters (including the Southerners).

The Southern Sudanese specifically accused his policies of gradually and systematically pulling out the economic decisions from their hands. The intention to locate the oil refinery at Kosti across the border with the North provoked the Southerners as being deliberately ignored and not consulted. The biggest blow to the Southern sentiments was the continuous concessions that the May Regime gave to the Islamic Fundamentalists who demanded the declaration of the Sudan as an Islamic Country, governed by Shari’ a Law.

The final and ultimate provocative step of the Regime to the Southerners was the declaration of the institution of the Islamic Code (Al Shari’ a Al Islamia) in September 1983, as the system of rule in the Sudan. The idea itself had antagonized the opinions, was seen as a threat to the values and norms of the South, and as a contradiction to Numeiri’s initial goals of consensus. The huge turn from ‘Socialism’ to ‘Islamizm’ was indigestible to the people, and the South rejected these laws and decided to fight the Regime, as an outcome of which the second civil war started.

This war, which is still going turned to be incredibly brutal, costly and consuming huge numbers of civilian as well as non-civilian lives. The SPLM/SPLA, which was founded in this period mainly as a reaction to Numeiri’s policies, is leading the war till the present day. The Movement claimed to champion the cause of the whole nation. In his speeches Colonel Garang, the SPLM/SPLA leader has differentiated between the ‘Arab culture’ as the Sudanese (North and South) culture, and what he called the ‘Arab Racial Supremacy,’ which the Northerners are trying to impose over all other communities.176

After the overthrow of Numeiri in 1985, and his replacement by a Transitional Military Council (TMC), the claim of the rebelling religious minorities became a severely separatist one.

The SPLA posed five conditions to be fulfilled before any negotiation of their problem. These points became the central issues of the SPLA for solving their problem, but the TMC Government rejected them. The five conditions were:

1. The cancellation of the Islamization law.
2. The organization of a national conference to discuss the Sudan's problems.
3. The resignation of the Transitional Military Council and the Current Cabinet.
4. The lifting of the state of Emergency.
5. The canceling of all military pacts with foreign countries especially the military pact with Libya and Egypt.

The next elected Government of 1986 brought the Ansar and the Khatmyya [renamed as the Democratic Union Party (DUP)] into a ruling coalition. They made several attempts to solve the problem by diplomatic means and mediations (USA Secretary of State, for example), but all these endeavors failed. The only solutions reached were the Koka Dam Declaration and the Garang-DUP Agreement signed in 1983, which both failed to achieve anything or to last long. This period of rule had the disadvantage of great internal instability in its political setting; and hence the situation in Southern Sudan had accordingly deteriorated. In April 1986, thousands of the Dinka people were massacred in EL De'ain, in Darfur Province and in Wau. The Southern Region was close to anarchy and starvation as it was hit by a famine. The economy was crippled and the war cost had been estimated at an amount of one million dollars a day.177

The 1989 Coup of General Omar El Bashir started as a representative of Islamic fundamentalism, who insisted on applying the Sharia 'aa Law. This issue had provoked the Southerners’ sentiments once again and increased the war. It became a norm that the response of the Southern Sudanese to any Government in the North would be negative and oppositional. Although the Government of Al Bashir has attempted many solutions and negotiations, including the application of federalism and the exemption of the Southern states from the implementation of the Islamic Laws, yet the war is still active. Colonel John Garang stated that,

"any religiously based system was unacceptable since it would perpetuate religious discrimination and inequality."\(^{178}\)

The support of the Southerners was therefore conditional upon the Government’s attitude towards the war. By the 1990s the SPLA / SPLM has developed into a strong organized army receiving moral, financial and ammunition support from international agencies, and with headquarters in several countries.

During the period of rule of the present Regime, many agreements were signed, negotiations attempted, memorandums issued and conferences held, in order to solve the issue through peaceful measures, but all these efforts seem only to enhance the problem. The ‘Government’s Peace Conference’ followed by ‘The Government’s Peace Programme For Negotiations with the SPLA/SPLM’ of October/November 1989, ‘The Political Charter’ of April 1996, ‘The Declaration of Principles’ of July 1996, ‘The Khartoum Peace Agreement’ of 1997 part of which was ‘The Nuba Mountains Peace Agreement’ of 1997 and ‘The Fashoda Agreement’ of 1997, are all examples of the attempts towards finalizing and restoring peace and national integration in the Country.

\(^{178}\) M.W., Gift, *op.cit.*, p. 76.
Yet, mistrust and loss of confidence and reliability between the two sides remain to be the causes of the ongoing conflict up to the present day and for the failure to preserve security.

The Khartoum Peace Agreement of April 1997 is regarded one of the most remarkable of these attempts. This Agreement was considered as an essential achievement for the cooling down of the war. According to this Agreement 'The Fourteenth Constitutional Decree' was issued in order to facilitate its implementation. Based on that the status and question of religious minorities were openly discussed, and certain resolutions and principles were reached179:

1. The Sudan is declared a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious Country. Islam is declared as the religion of the majority of the population, and Christianity and African creeds accepted as the beliefs of considerable adherents.
2. Based on this freedom of religion, belief, worship rites, da’awa, missionary and preaching activity are guaranteed to all, and no citizen shall be coerced to embrace any religion or creed.
3. No legislation, which infringes fundamental freedoms and, rights of citizens shall be promulgated.
4. Citizenship is the basis of public rights and duties and all Sudanese participate, by virtue of the citizenship thereof, on equal basis in the political life.
5. The judiciary shall be independent and decentralized.
6. The Federal Government shall give priority to the lesser-developed states in the distribution of revenue, and in the choice of federal project sites.

179 The 14th Constitutional decree (Implementation of the Peace Agreement 1997), Ministry of Presidential Affairs.
7. The citizens of the Southern states shall exercise the right of self-determination through a referendum.

Hence, the Agreement guaranteed the basic rights for the religious minorities, including the right of self-determination, and the formation of a 'Southern States Co-ordination Council'. Scholars and politicians had expressed several reservations towards some of the terms of the Agreement as it was feared to legitimize secessionism. The factual implementation of the Agreement has been delayed due to several violations of the cease-fire decision by the two sides in the fighting fields.

Based on the principles of the Khartoum Peace Agreement, the latest attempt for negotiation has been the 'Machakos Protocol' of 20th July 2002, which was issued in Kenya. According to this Protocol the Sudan Government and the representatives of the SPLA/SPLM agreed on a six-years transitional period subject to extension after which a referendum for the self-determination of the South would be concluded. The Sharia 'aa Law has to remain as the source of legislation in the Northern parts. For the South a governing system based on a secular Constitution would be applied after abolishing the Government's 1998 Constitution.180

The Agenda of the Government of the Sudan was based on five points:

1. The unity of the Sudan as part of the unity of Africa based on the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).
2. This respected unity had to be maintained under justice and power and resources sharing. Rights and obligations are to be based on citizenship.
3. The recognition of the diversity in all forms; the respect for freedom of religion and human rights.
4. The system of the Government of the Sudan should be based on democracy with respect for popular will.

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5. The creation of a constitutional mechanism to enrich these principles and the commitment of all parties to these principles.

The Agenda of the Southern Sudanese representatives consisted of self-determination, the relationship between the state and religion (secularism) and the state formation of a provisional government during the interim period. In spite of the fact that all these items were agreed upon by the two sides yet the application of this attempt is also endangered. Before taking any step towards the implementation of the Protocol, it was violated by the Movement's breaking of the cease-fire and the Government's immediate response to that. Hence all attempts to pacify and solve the problem through peaceful measures are faced with failure and mistrust.

Religious minorities in the Sudan accuse the Northern politicians and governments as being sectarian and reactionary in treating the South. The Northerners are thought to consider the South a colony and make use of its problem as an issue for political gain. Governments of the North are seen as enforcing social order without social justice.

The Governments on the other hand, regard the problem as an imperialist attempt to destroy the independence, unity and the social harmony of the Country. The problem was treated as a British legacy aiming at separating the people of the Sudan.

To sum up, the condition in the Sudan elaborates, as described by scholars and historians, a rare historical event, in which a black enslaved nation decided to make war over an Arab one.

The problem of religious minorities in the Sudan, as classified by scholars like Abdel Salam,¹⁸¹ can be summarized into two main fields: material goals and psychic reasons. The materials goals are mainly caused by economic deprivation and misallocation of resources. Minorities are associated with low socio-economic status and discrimination, and hence they fight to extract material benefits and social promotion from the Center. This can be summed

up in describing the situation as the rise of the deprived groups in order to redress and reinforce their material status. Another material goal is the share of power and governance of the Country. The majority of the Southerners approached by the researcher, particularly the educated category seems to blame the Northerners for depriving them of any influential role in the decision-making as well as the running of the affairs of the Country. The interviewees described the roles allocated to the Southerners in the Government as ‘marginal’ and ‘reconciliatory’.

The psychic reasons are mainly concerned with the “esteem of the victim” concept.182 The religious minorities in the Sudan believe in the violation of their honor, dignity, respect and self-esteem. In several discussions conducted by the researcher with religious minorities it appeared that they believe that the status of hegemony of the majority groups is an outcome of their (Southerners’) own lack of awareness of their rights. Some of them allocated their status of inferiority to the non-awareness of the Northerners themselves, particularly the youth. The discussants supported this point by the fact that the elements of discrimination can still be seen in Universities and all educational institutions where the notion of “Northerner” versus “Southerner” strongly persist.

Many interviewed samples also insisted that the Religious minority groups, who migrated to the North to seek employment in the urban centers, were absorbed in the most degraded jobs in the job ranking in the Capital. Such jobs are like sanitary workers or servants. Thus, the result was what Abdel Salam described as that “the low social valuation fed low self-valuation.”183 Other discussants assured that this is mainly the cause that such groups isolated themselves socially, withdrew from politics and developed acute sense of resignation and aloofness from the society. Some of these minority groups went to the extreme of describing the situation as a longing for recognition of their

182 ibid., p. 50.
183 ibid., p. 51.
human worth. Some of the minority leaders called the Sudanese situation as "an internal colonial system... along racist lines."

Based on all these factors of deprivation and discrimination, several of the interviewed people called themselves "the oppressed", and strongly stressed their 'belief' to have a strong case for secessionism.

Separatism or secessionism is based on ethnic as well as religious centrism that animates the ethnic and religious group existence. Group consciousness is then turned into a hostile appeal for consideration of the legitimate grievances of the marginalized groups. The religious minorities in the Sudan suffer emotional as well as inferiority stresses. The bilateral confidence between the North and South was weak, and was even worsened by granting the South a federal status. Consequently, armed struggle prevailed making secessionism a cause with ideological dimensions. This ideological factor of the North-South conflict is stressed and illustrated by the SPLM/SPLA in its opposition to the existing ideologies that are considered hollow and useless.

The Movement (SPLM) is trying to unite co-ethnics into a broad political coalition that transcends any specific identification. It describes itself as having a nation-wide goal and objective, and incorporating ideologies that include socio-economic and political development for all the Sudan.\textsuperscript{184} The SPLM/SPLA insists on the issue that it does not allow the creation of any political coalition within its foundation, and it calls for unity beyond the scope and self-based claims of any single ethnic group.

The Southern Sudan question involves an important dimension, which if considered, plays an important role in the development of events in the South. This factor is the essentiality of the Southern Sudanese religio-political leadership. They are divided into two groups: those who are outside the Sudan and those who are inside the Country. These leaders are not free of blame in the

\textsuperscript{184} The Manifesto of the SPLM, July 31, 1983.
ongoing trauma, as they are potentially disintegrated among themselves. The elites among them are politically refined and more responsive to change.

The Southern leaders who are inside the Country seem to be more flexible and ready to accept compromises in order to achieve peace. They have allied with whoever was in power in the North in order to end the conflict. An example of this category can be seen in the Southern Front Party, which emerged during the October Revolution (1958-1964), and willingly made a coalition with the Regime and its successor in an attempt to solve the Southern problem. Moreover, in 1972 the Southern elites inside the Sudan had -at some point- discarded all their differences to implement the policy of Regional Autonomy of the Addis Ababa Agreement.

The Southern elites who are outside the Country are very strict in their approach. They are characterized by incompetence and acute factionalism even among themselves. They accuse the inside elites as being traitors and running after personal gains due to their collaboration with the Northern governments. These elites outside the Sudan are divided into several conflicting “governments”, each of which claims to be the legitimate spokesman for the South and its question. The factors that weaken their performance have always been the pursuing of personal leadership and pointless disputes which became a characteristic of their interrelationships. They are accused by the internal elites as being confused and out-of-date concerning the real issues of the North-South conflict. They are also seen as too involved in personal rivalry so as to attract financial help from their beneficiaries. They are tribally motivated and considered as ignorant to the genuine cause due to their sheer lack of political foresight and serious intentions to serve the people they claim to lead. The Southern elites outside the Country are also accused of intensifying their ties with the imperialist agents on whom they rely completely, and thus missing off any objectivity in their approach to the North-South relations.

The conflict among the Southern is one of the major causes of their hesitant and unstable attitudes towards their own problems. Some of the
political foundations of the Southern Sudanese, which participated in their factionalism, are the Sudan Unity Party (SUP) founded in 1964 after the October Revolution by Mr. Santino Deng. The Southern Front (SF), which emerged during the October Revolution Regime, was founded by Philemon Majok, but had little influence among the Southerners masses. It incorporated Southern civil servants and professionals and became their main voice. The Sudan African National Union (SANU) was formed by William Deng and succeeded to win the largest number of seats and memberships in the Parliament of the National Assembly. These parties continued to perform in sharp rivalry and internal disputes, each of which claiming to represent the true interests of the Southern people.

Outside the Sudan several parties were formed to stand for the Southern political representation. Examples of these foundations are the Azania Liberation Front (ALF), founded by Joseph Oduho to counter SANU (Aggrey Jaden’s faction outside the Sudan). This Party was calling for a “free independent African Nation in the Southern Sudan called the Azania.” In March 1969, succeeding Jaden, Gordon Mayen renamed the Southern Sudan as the ‘Nile State’, and its Government as the ‘Nile Government’. Other parties were formed in the same period like the Anyidi Revolutionary Government (ARG) with support from the Anya-Any Group, the Sudan Azania (SA) under Ezibon Mondiri, the Sue River Republic (SRR) and the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). The Anya-Any I and II are also among the strongest of the Southern Sudanese foundations. Added to all these was the active Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Movement (Army) SPLM (A), which is considered the strongest Southern party in the history of the Country up to date.

The problem of the Sudan and its North-South relation can be summed up as by Professor Toynbee,

"the problem of two Africans on a miniature scale. If she (Sudan) can succeed in reconciling the two elements in her own population, she
will have done a piece of constructive pioneer work for the continent as a whole.”

and, therefore, as Dunstan Wai had put it,

“the Sudan must adopt a system that suits its peculiar problems; excessive enthusiasm for national integration must not make us overlook the dualistic cultural traits of the country.”

According to the discussions and interviews conducted with the people of the Southern Sudan Region, the problem of religious minorities and the justification that they give for their claim of secessionism can be summed up into some points as follows:

1. The clear differences in the racial backgrounds, culture, traditions and religious beliefs between the Northern and the Southern Sudan regions and peoples.

2. The severe bias and imbalances in the distribution of the developmental schemes, which greatly favors the North, and the misallocation of the national wealth and resources of the Country.

3. The injustices practiced in the process of the sharing of the political power, and in the political treatment of the Southerners generally.

4. The sharp inclination of the Northern Sudanese towards the religious tariqahs, cults, and parties which directly affect their opinion and stand towards the non-Muslims, particularly the Southerners.

5. The sheer lack of confidence between the Northern and Southern Sudanese at the levels of individuals, groups, political parties and leaders. This is reflected in the complete segregation between the two in the educational institutions.

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186 D. Wai, opcit, p.40.
6. The lack of sincerity in all the attempts which are undertaken to stop the civil war in the Country, and to reach an agreement for peace. Added to that is the lack of seriousness from both sides to compromise. Each of the two tries hard to impose its own issues, and to come out with the maximum benefits possible from any agreement, and this fails any peace attempt.

7. The stagnant attitude that each side undertakes towards certain points, like the issue of the complete separation between the State and religion. This separation is regarded as very essential for the Southern Sudanese leaders, but is unaccepted by the Northern Sudanese Islamic groups.

In a common reply to the question concerning what is exactly the cause of their problem in the Country, most of the Southern Sudanese interviewees agreed that the real situation was created by the British Colonial policies. The Colonial powers are accused of being the main cause that initiated the South versus the North bilateral feelings of hostility and mistrust. The British succeeded to convince the Southern Sudanese that the Northerners were treating them as inferiors and as a second-class race. The Southerners were made to understand that the Arabs of the North were thinking of themselves as a better and a higher community. The British supported these claims by historical elements like the over-exaggeration of the issue of slave trade, which had been going on before Colonialism.

Hence, the Colonial powers worked hard by using such methods as manipulating the historical events to serve their goals. The British were also careful to stress on the issues that proved to the Southerners that they (the British) were caring for the interests and privileges of the South. This point was supported by events like the abolishment of the slave trade, and the creation of the 'Closed Districts Policy' in order to give the Region and its people the chance to develop independently.

Some Southern discussants were taking a stand against the Southern Sudanese themselves. They accuse the Southerners of being weak and highly
responsive to the Colonial attempts. As a consequence of all the British endeavors and ideas, the Southern Sudanese people started believing that the Northern Sudanese Arabs and Muslims represent the real enemy that should be fought and made restless. This group of discussants also accused the Southern Sudanese for the fragility of their social structure to the extent of abandoning their culture and adopting the British system. Added to that they began to speak the Colonialist language rather than their national dialects or the learning of the language of the majority. They did this unlike the Northerners who were able to strongly preserve their culture, belief and language against the Colonial will.

Another strong cause given by the discussant groups in support of this point has been that the Colonial power was rather implementing a foresight policy when it applied the ‘Southern Policy’. That was the goal for the Colonial dominance even after they evacuated the Country. This point is supported by the emergence of phenomenon like the concept of Neo-Colonialism and other similar notions. The aim of the Colonial power was to hinder the process of development, to frustrate the social progress by creating internal problems and to handicap the economic prosperity of the Country, so that it would remain depending on the British.

A small category of the religious minorities, questioned for the purpose of this research, believed that the British had enhanced an already existing problem in the Sudanese society. This problem as they believed was created initially by the differences in culture, traditions and belief systems of the Northern and the Southern parts of the Country. The Northerners made use of the backwardness and the weakness of the Southerners and their Region and exploited them for slavery. Hence, the Colonial power found an already tense situation and exploited it to achieve its imperialistic purposes.

Other groups stated that the initial problem of the civil war in the Sudan is not a problem of religious minorities in the level of the population, but a problem of leaders seeking power. It is a problem of rivalry to obtain the rule of the Country, and the maximum possible chances of sovereignty. Few others
stated that it is a problem of racism, as the Southerner is considered a Negro that could be enslaved, humiliated and not respected.

Some of the Southern groups have condemned the claim for the secessionism of the Country, and they insisted on their belief and agreement on the concept of ‘Sudanness’ as a national identity of all the people. They also agreed on the urgent need for immense efforts to be attributed to the alignment of the whole population about the benefits of peace vis-à-vis the destruction and loss of lives caused by war. They insisted also on the necessity of propagating the concepts of national integration and unity and their effects on the development and the progress of human lives in general.

Another point of view on which other groups insisted was the intensification of the social intermixing of the different groups, particularly the Northerners and the Southerners, and the great encouragement of the process and practices of intermarriages. These measures are believed to help in the re-establishment of the lost confidence and the restoration of the self-dignity of the Southern Sudanese groups.

Some of the discussants, who were from the politically oriented groups, focused on that side of the problem. They insisted that the initial causes of the problem of religious minorities in the Sudan were political. These were represented in the deprivation of the Southern groups from any say in the process of decision-making or political participation. Moreover, they stated that the current problem of the South still remains to be a political one, manifested into a severe political race between all groups to grab the biggest political gain (the Southerners), and to stick to their positions of power (Northerners). This is - for the discussants - the main cause that each side is lacking the necessary flexibility to accept the other’s point of view.

On the political levels these interviewed groups have suggested the reconsideration of each side to its position based on the public interests. They have also stated that the political group that is in power has to reassess its
policies, particularly regarding the incorporation of the Southern political groups in the process of ruling the Country. It has to review its economic policies particularly the distribution of the different developmental schemes and plans, national wealth and the allocation of resources.

All the discussant groups who are pro-national integration have agreed that the success in this goal needs a lot of effort and a long process of resocialization of the community with all its sectors. Hence the process would take years for its accomplishment, but the hard and concentrated work would yield the expected results for the coming generations.

In fact Nkrumah has stated that no matter how long the process of national integration would take, we shall not tire of it, because the age of nations is not counted in years.”