

"Liberation of the Arab Woman within the limits of Islamic law."

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"The women's liberation movement in the Arab countries is not solely concerned with the liberation and welfare of women alone. It also includes the liberation and welfare of men and the education of children, who will be the leaders of to-morrow, since it is impossible to draw a dividing line between the problems of both sexes.

In his thirty-nine-page lecture, Dr. Nuwaihi insists on the idea that the revolution advocated by the Arab women's movements should not be based on violence but should make use of peaceful argument and reasoning, which will convince the minds and move the hearts, and lead people to believe "that our efforts for women's liberation fall within the requirements of Islamic law."

In his opinion, Islamic religion is not a static religion, as some people think. Moslem jurisprudence (Fiqh), derived from the Quran and Sunna and divided into 4 schools, is also characterized by tolerance and consideration. The leaders, in spite of their differences regarding the interpretation of certain legal points, were nevertheless tolerant of each other's opinions. They avoided controversy and kept the door of investigation open for later qualified scholars and for further interpretation (Ijtihad).

None of the leaders claimed infallibility or finality of judgement.

At present, we are witnessing a movement in favor of reviving the investigation method (Ijtihad), which was given up during the "Stagnation Period." This has led to the promulgation of certain laws which serve the women's movement, without causing any prejudice to Islamic law. A careful study of the principles of Islam shows that they make use of two main principles: First, the principle of gradual or indirect elaboration of laws. The Koran contains no definite text condemning slavery, but attacks on this institution are so vehement and so frequent in the Holy Book that the scholars and interpreters were thus convinced that the abrogation of slavery was a necessity.

A second koranic principle is the fact that its commands and prohibitions do not all belong to the same category. Some are absolutely required, while others are permissible but not required. Between the two categories, comes the "approvable" which is worth doing and the "disapproved" which implies a certain degree of condemnation. The ancient jurists show a great deal of controversy as to the classification of Koranic commands.

In the light of the above information, we would like to point out the following: first, that the liberation we claim for women is not absolute liberty, including the sexual freedom which has become permissible in some western countries. This kind of freedom we condemn because of its social evils and also because it is directly opposed to formal Islamic law.

Second, we do not presume drastic and uniform amendments in Arab family laws, due to the fact that Arab countries differ greatly in their cultural and social levels. Reform has to take into consideration the needs and level of each country, and the plan worked out should follow a list of priorities.

The chief demands of Arab women may be classified as follows:

- 1) The right to education at all levels.
- 2) The right to go out of their houses without restriction.
- 3) The right to be paid for their work.
- 4) The right to participate in political elections.
- 5) Economic equality for men and women.
- 6) Reform of family laws which are unjust to women.

The first four demands have been granted to women in almost all Arab countries. The right to vote is enjoyed by women in most of them, though the opportunity to reach leading political or managerial offices is still highly restricted. The Arab women's demands now concentrate on two major issues: economic status and family status.

When we come to discuss the amendment of economic status, we are readily confronted by those who will argue that the Arab woman enjoys, by virtue of Koranic laws, the right of independent control of her property, as well as the right to keep her family name after marriage. Our answer is that the inheritance law, which makes woman's share in inheritance half of that of man, is incompatible with the present circumstances for various reasons.

Inequality in the distribution of inheritance has encouraged men to deprive women of their whole inheritance by way of intimidation, threat, or insinuation. Many fathers have been bequeathing their whole property to their sons by contract, pretending that they have sold it to them and received payment. Many husbands have taken advantage of the unequal status to withhold from their divorced wives the alimony prescribed by law. This condition has led to bitter family conflicts and contributed to the disruption of many homes.

A just amendment of the inheritance law becomes a necessity, because women today are no more a burden on their kinsmen. Their work in the home as housekeepers or outside the home in agriculture, industry, or in the various professions makes their role in social development equal, sometimes superior, to that of men. In many cases they share in supporting the family while they continue to perform their traditional task as home makers.

The Koran insists on the principle of justice toward women, and in accordance with this principle, the law should be changed. Here we should remember that religious laws regarding dealings between social groups are not fixed laws that cannot be changed. They are side laws or branches that are subject to revision.

Our elders found no difficulty in effecting such a revision. An obvious example is the Caliph Omar Iban-Khattab who took the liberty of revising or abolishing

certain penal laws when circumstances imposed the change.

Of course this revision cannot take place suddenly, nor can it be applied uniformly because it has to take into consideration the degree of development in each Arab country. Tunisia made a first step in this connection when it promulgated in 1956 a law preventing uncles from sharing in the inheritance of a brother who had left only female heirs.

As to the laws of personal status, they present two issues which require treatment: polygamy and the unrestricted right to divorce given to husbands. Many writers have pointed out in detail the evils of these two practices, but up to now, no formal legislation had dealt with them except in a very few Arab countries.

In discussing them, the author quotes mainly an exposition by Imam Muhammad Abdo (in the nineteenth century) whose scholarly investigation of the Koranic verses dealing with polygamy leads to the conclusion that since justice toward women as required by the Koran is impossible with more than one wife, the whole institution of polygamy

should consequently be abolished. Judging from experience and observation, households with more than one wife have been abodes of misery and great suffering. Both religious and secular authorities should feel free to decide on the abolition of the institution which has caused so much prejudice. The Arab states have so far adopted divergent attitudes toward the family status. In Jordan, Syria, Tunisia, Iraq and Maghreb, polygamy and divorce are subject to certain restrictions. Iraq and Tunisia have gone ahead of other countries in this respect. The former (Iraq) places severe restriction on polygamy and subjects divorce to the decision of authorized courts. Tunisia completely forbids polygamy and prohibits divorce unless the court has declared its inability to effect reconciliation between the two parties.

Dr. Nuwaihi concludes by saying that the law of personal status is the basic struggle worthy of the efforts of both men and women reformers. The amendment of this law is the corner stone in the liberation of society as a whole and in the edification of a strong and progressive nation.

EGYPTIAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

For the conference on "Women and Development," proposed by IWSAW in 1975, Mrs. Nabila Toonsi, agricultural engineer and member of the "Syndicate of Agricultural Professions" in Egypt, presented a study which gave valuable information on the participation of Egyptian women in agriculture, including some statistics about their agricultural activities in other Arab countries.

The working power of women in Arab countries is comparatively low. It does not exceed 9.6% of the total number of women in the more developed Arab countries like Syria and Lebanon. However, this percentage does not take into account the large number of women working in agriculture where their number in Egypt attains 46.9% of their total number in this country. In Sudan, they reach 78% of the total number of Sudanese women; in Iraq, 45.5% while the percentage of agricultural production accomplished by women all over the world represents one third of the whole.

Egyptian Women in Agricultural Engineering

In 1973, there were 2346 women compared to 3700 men specialists in agricultural engineering. Their work took various channels.

They were engaged as professors in agricultural colleges, researchers, agricultural counselors to women villagers, and counselors in nutrition, child care, and family planning. In the Ministry of Agriculture, they participated in planning, inspection, agricultural instruction, the publication of information, and the use of insecticides. They worked in projects of land reclamation, agricultural reform, and agricultural cooperatives.

In 1974, the number of women students in the agricultural schools of the various universities attained 4021.

Self-help Projects in Rural Districts

Increased efforts have been recently displayed for the creation of projects intended to improve women's conditions in rural districts.

The Raidat (pioneers) Project is an intensive program launched in 1964, sponsored by the Unicef, for preparing young rural women for a leadership role in community development.

Forty-five young women received about nine months of intensive training in all matters relating to community development, af-

ter which they went to their respective villages to help in rural development under the guidance of a director of the social center.

There are 21 leadership training centers for rural women at present. The main aim of the project is to train at least one village girl for each of Egypt's 4200 villages.

Rural women's clubs were created in villages where the Raidat plays a major role. The number of clubs reached 200, out of which 75 are actually functioning.

The Sandyon Village Project

In 1964, the first family planning center in rural Egypt was established in the village of Sandyon. It was initiated by the Cairo Women's Club which conducted a program based on self-help and community participation along with coordination of all community services: social, health, education, etc.

The Rural Women's Club was subsequently organized and family planning programs were introduced, including help for childless couples. The Cairo Women's Club is running multi-purpose services, of which family planning is one, as well as nursery schools, literacy classes, cooperative poultry raising classes and vocational training for drop-out girls.