

A SURVEY OF THE ASIAN WOMEN INSTITUTE'S ACTIVITIES IN 1979

The Asian Women's Institute (AWI)⁽¹⁾ which links together nine women's studies institutes distributed among various women's colleges and universities of Asia, is defined, in the coordinator's report of 1979, as "a non-governmental organization accredited to the Department of Public Information of the United Nations."

The coordinator of the Institute, Mrs. Eva Shipstone, Lucknow, India, is assisted in her task by a Presidents' Consultation (P.C.) which oversees its activities and points out the priorities that it should pursue. These priorities include documentation, research, communication and educational projects.

Reports received from the coordinator, research assistant and executive directors of the nine institutes about 1979 activities, reveal a steady effort spent by the various institutes to implement the above-mentioned objectives in the following ways:

1) Research projects, documentation and publication on women's status, problems and needs have been continued. Mention should be made of the work achieved by the Korean Women's Institute at Ewha University, Seoul, South Korea, which completed and published a valuable "Study on the Patterns of Women Engaged in Social Participation in the Early Modern Era, 1890-1910." Also a revised edition of the book for the Women's Studies course published at the end of September 1979.

2) Women's studies courses have been offered at Ewha Woman's University for the third time, at Beirut University College (Lebanon) for the second time, and at Damavand College (Iran) and Kinnaird College (Lahore, Pakistan) for the first time.

3) An activity that is worth mentioning and encouraging is the participation of students in volunteer social work. At Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, India, fifty students voluntarily joined the Center for Women's Studies and Development to help in the rural projects and office activities. At St. Christopher's Training College, flood relief was offered by students. A sale organized by students and staff contributed to the money raising campaign.

4) Probably the most important activity displayed by all the institutes in 1979 is the growing emphasis given to career counseling for women students. The all important Career Conference held in Singapore, June 27-July 3, 1979, and which has been reported in *Al-Raida*⁽²⁾ and referred to in this issue, had been planned in May '78 by: Eva Shipstone, coordinator of AWI, Phebe Gregorian, chairperson of committee of 1975, Nancy Tohen and Patricia Mcancy, Wellesley College, and three institute directors; Julinda Abu Nasr (Lebanon), Mina Riahi (Iran) and Tehrim Dass (India). About career counseling Mrs. Shipstone says in her report, p. 24: "The creation of course services on college campuses may help to design and offer training courses to facilitate employment of women. It is essential to provide training in fundamentals, in mathematics and sciences and in language skills to increase women's competence for various jobs."

5) Emphasis on career counseling for women awakened the need for continuing education. A study

prepared on this topic by Esther Schlorholtz,⁽³⁾ research assistant of AWI, confirms the necessity of creating continuing education opportunities for women wanting to participate more effectively in community service, to re-enter a professional field after an absence or to keep in touch with their professions and with life and learning outside the home."

Areas of Need

The areas of need vary in significance for each country. Ms. Esther Schlorholtz has prepared a continuing education program offered in Middle East and Far East countries, which we have tried to condense in the following paragraphs.

In India

Problems of poverty and illiteracy are the main concern of social leaders in India. There are at least six organizations which take care of adult education, three of them exclusively for women, the rest for all the illiterate and needy people of India without discrimination of sex. The Women's Section of the Textile Labour Association, one of the biggest labor unions of the world, has organized programs for the development and welfare of working class women. In 1975, training was provided in 25 centers for 1873 women in sewing, embroidery, knitting, doll-making, spinning, printing, composition, typewriting, radio-servicing and home help service.

Other organizations are the Central Social Welfare Board which gives condensed courses of education for adult women; the National Council of Educational Research and Training which has been carrying on a continuing education program for teachers. The same type of work has been carried on by the All India Association of Christian Higher Education.

Besides those private organizations, the Government of India has planned a project of adult education programs to be used all over the country.

At Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow, the Centre of Women's Studies has implemented many programs dealing with problems of illiteracy, poverty and lack in income earning skills. The same activity is being carried out in other universities of India.

It is significant to note here that in the preparation of future programs, the tendency is not to confine women to the home sphere but to encourage them in activities outside the home. *Cont p 13*

(1) See *Al-Raida* vol. 1, No. 2, Sept. 1977, p. 8; No. 4, June 1978, p. 10; No. 5, Aug. 1978, pp. 7 & 10; No. 6, Nov. 1978, p. 3. vol. II, No. 11, p. 12.

(2) No. 11, Feb. 1980, p. 12

(3) "Continuing Education for Women", Asian Women's Institute, June 1979.

more women are going out to work. Education for women, due to the renaissance-like nationalist movement, is increasingly recommended, even in traditional society. The Moroccan law, however, does not favor desegregation when it states that woman's place is in the home and her access to offices and factories is subordinate to her husband's authorization.

In spite of restrictions, there were in 1975, 27,700 women working for the Moroccan government, 15,200 of whom were teachers. The government's attitude presents certain contradictions. While it supports the mobility of its employees, it clings to the traditional division of labor by stating in article 35 of the Moroccan code that men are the sole providers of their families, the wife being economically dependent. The code thus emphasizes man's ability to earn money as the sole symbol of masculinity, while a woman who shares this ability is considered masculine and castrating. The Moroccan husband is consequently torn between the law which gives him control of the wife's moves and the necessity of letting her work. A recurrent subject of dispute in Moroccan courts is the husband's claim to his wife's salary.

Conclusion

In spite of drawbacks and contradictions, it is possible to conclude that the events of the last two decades have brought about a serious erosion of male supremacy.

1. The state, by providing an individual salary for working wives and children and economic security for both, has been a threat to male supremacy.
2. The Muslim system which is sexist in the sense that it gives men certain privileges, is being questioned on the ground that it is oppressive to both men and

women because it imposes on both heavy restrictions: the man is sole provider for the whole family, repudiation and polygamy are costly procedures, the "Mahr" is often an obstacle to marriage, love is condemned and excluded as a weakness, etc.

3. In the West, the passivity of women has prevented them from reaching high positions in spite of their advanced social level. In the East, the Muslim social theory views women as a potent aggressive individual whose power, if not tamed, can corrode the social order. It is very likely that, in the long run, such a view will facilitate women's integration into the networks of decision making and power. The Muslim image of women as a source of power is likely to make Muslim women set higher and broader goals than just equality with men, since they have seen that this equality is not worth getting.

The holders of power in Arab countries, regardless of their political make-up, are condemned to promote change. The Arab ruling class is beginning to realize that their task is to build a sovereign future which necessitates the participation of both sexes and the utilization of all available human power without distinction of sex. The Arab woman is a central element in national development.

Sources

Mernissi, Fatima, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1975.

"Mosaic: Magreb Women in Motion, "The Middle East,, IC Publication, June 1979, No 56, p. 57-65.

Women's Studies at Beirut University College

A course on "Women's Studies" is being given at BUC under the direction of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, during the spring semester of 1980. While the course given in the spring semester of last year⁽¹⁾ consisted of the presentation and discussion of actual information given by various lecturers on the status of the Arab woman of today, this course will take the form of a seminar requiring the students themselves to prepare the studies to be discussed. These are based on research materials, publications and essays connected with woman's problems in the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology, health and demography. The aim is to examine the changing position of Arab women in comparison to other developing and developed countries. These cross cultural comparisons will add to the understanding of Arab women's status and role in the social context; special emphasis will be placed on discovering the cultural and social institutions that

determine woman's place in society.

The following are the main topics which will be discussed in the seminar:

1. The big challenge facing Arab society today.
2. Indicators of social change.
3. Existing trends of education for women.
4. Women in developing and industrial societies.
5. Legal reforms and women's status.
6. Health and women's role.
7. Sexuality, reproduction and women's status.
8. Urbanization, modernization and changing status of women.

(1) See *Al-Raida*, vol. III, no. 9, p. 12.

Pakistan

"The All Pakistan Women's Association" has provided a variety of vocational and skill training opportunities for women combined with production and marketing outlets for goods produced."

The Girl Guides' Association runs more than one hundred Adult Literacy Centres and holds Service Campus for Women in various villages every year. The government has carried out several adult literacy and adult education programs.

Iran

The Women's Organization of Iran conducts special classes for girls between 7 and 20. After a one year course, the students are given instruction in various crafts that help them to earn an income. Since 70 percent of the population live in rural areas, the Ministry of Agriculture has developed literacy programs in villages but traditional life-style has prevented many girls from being reached through these programs, which have been attended mainly by boys.

Lebanon and the Arab World

Illiteracy reaches a high percentage in the Arab world, especially among women (85 percent in some countries).

Studies recently developed by the ECWA on the participation of Lebanese rural women in development showed that 14 government and 12 non-government organizations provided developmental programs for women in various handicrafts. Beirut University College has been offering a number of career programs preparing men and women for semi-professional careers. It is hoped that the "Basic Living Skills Programs for Women" to be prepared by IWSAW will eventually be incorporated in ongoing basic programs of education and women's organizations in Lebanon.

Korea

Rapid industrial expansion has played an influential role in changing women's life styles. Among young married

women there is an increasing desire for employment outside the home. The increasing demand for professional and vocational training for women favored the creation of a large number of public and private vocational training centers which, in 1977, trained more than 230,000 people. Social welfare organizations like the YWCA, universities and colleges like Yonsei University's College of Nursing in Seoul, Ewha Woman's University, Seoul Woman's College, participate in providing vocational training and counseling service. The majority of working women in Korea are illiterate and exposed to exploitation. An improvement in the level of their education would awaken them to their rights and responsibilities. Re-entry women workers, who have lately increased in number, need skill training or refreshment in their professional fields.

Japan

Local education boards and women's organizations in Japan sponsored the creation of training courses for women of all ages, in subjects ranging from household work, consumer knowledge and child education, to vocational guidance, health and culture. Continuing education programs for faculty and students, for parents of both sexes, for senior citizens and youth, are available at Tokyo Women's Christian University; university extension courses, home education guidance programs, correspondence courses reach an increasing number of people.

In Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, similar movements have contributed to the development of adult and career education but on a limited scale.

In conclusion, Ms. Schlorholtz quotes R.H. Dave who defines the goals of continuing life long education as "leading toward full self-awareness, a respect for other people's identity, a capacity for self-evaluation and the ability to cooperate in groups for common ends. Through it, people are helped to adapt and cope with rapid changes in technology and in scientific and social knowledge. "Today, she says, women have a special need of achieving these goals."

French Ministry for Women(1)

The second of October, 1978, will count as a new starting point for Women's Equal Status. It was Mme Irène de Lipkowski, founder and president of "Le Comité International de Liaison des Associations Féminines" (CILAF), who introduced the minister for Women's Affairs, Mme Pelletier, to the French Women's Organizations.

In the "grand salon" of the President, in the Sénat, 120 women were assembled to hear the Minister's program and to present the main issues and aims of their organizations.

The Minister's response was encouraging. Two things she especially wants: to translate the principles of equality for men and women into reality of daily life; to promote understanding and open up ways that enable women to exercise free choice between maternity and work, and the combination of both — according to their own desire and responsibility.

(1) International Women's News, vol . 74, No. 1, Feb. 1979, p. 4.