

Studies about Woman's Status in Kuwait and the Arab Gulf ⁽¹⁾

The Socio-Cultural Women's Association of Kuwait has published a collection of studies about the status of women in Kuwait and the Gulf States. Three of these studies deal with woman's status in Islam and her contribution to ancient Arabic poetry; the other seven studies set forth the legal status of women in these countries, their role in development, in education and work, the attitudes of society toward women's liberation, women students' attitudes at the Kuwait University, woman and criminality in the Gulf countries.

Though the book was published around 1975-76, the legal status of women has not undergone any noticeable change since then. However, the decision taken by the Kuwaiti government, on February 17, 1980, to restore the democratic régime in Kuwait and to revise the Constitution, suspended in October, 1976, presumes the possibility of granting Kuwaiti women the right to vote, as implied in the statement of the Commission in charge of revising the Constitution.⁽²⁾

The question of women's vote is discussed in the book (page 108), where it says that the Constitution of Kuwait and Bahrain did not exclude women from the right to vote but entrusted the legislators with the task of defining the qualifications of both elector and candidates. The result was that the election laws ignored the principle of equality between the

sexes, approved by the United Nations Charter, and limited the vote to male electors. The author of the study regarding woman's legal rights considers the time ripe for Kuwaiti and Bahraini women to practice suffrage in accordance with democratic principles.

Laws of the Personal Status

A report on Women's status in Kuwait was published in *Al-Raida* No. 3, February 1978, pp. 10-11. The report given here has been limited to the laws of the personal status, which were not included in the above report. The following are the main contents of this report:

(1) Personal Rights of Women in Muslim Law

a) Muslim law grants the adult woman the right to marry according to her own choice and to reject compulsory marriage. In spite of this principle, recognized by Muslim law, the Constitution says that no woman, maiden or young widow, may contract a marriage without her father's or grand-father's consent. According to the author of the report (pp. 112-113), the section dealing with this topic should include the following statement: "The woman's own consent should be considered if she is adult."

b) The right to be her own boss, i.e. to make her own marriage contract, if she has reached adulthood, without the mediation of her guardian. This right which is recognized by

Muslim law has been overlooked by the Constitution.

c) The right to break her engagement or promise of marriage on an equal footing with men.

d) The right to have an appropriate or suitable mate and to reject an unsuitable marriage. This statement has been a source of controversy because of the different explanations given to "suitability."

(2) Rights which a woman should claim from her husband according to Muslim law :

a) Financial Support: the Mahr or dowry plus maintenance.

b) Non-financial claims: justice if he has other wives, sexual satisfaction, good treatment, the right to renounce obedience in reply to his renouncing maintenance, the right to terminate marriage by court decision, the right to child guardianship.

A man has no right to impose on his wife cohabitation with his co-wives or any of his parents of relatives, except his minor progeny.

(3) Divorce

Divorce is the sole right of the adult husband, unless the wife has included in the marriage contract her own right to divorce when she deems it necessary.

A woman is legally allowed to seek divorce from a husband who is impotent or suffering from a chronic disease like leprosy or insanity. The same right applies against a husband who has been away for more than a

(1) In Arabic, *Dirasat 'an Awda'a-el-Mar'at fil-Kuwait wal-Khalij al-Arabi*, Kuwait, 1976.

(2) *Al-Nahar*, Feb, 18, 1980.

year without a valid reason, and against one who mistreats his wife or injures her.

(4) Polygamy

Polygamy in Islam is tied to the principle of justice and submitted to severe regulations. A wife has the right to claim divorce from a husband who decides to remarry without her consent.

(5) Maintenance of Relatives

Every person should be self-supportive except minors and wives who should be maintained by their husbands. A child should be supported by his father, unless he has money registered in his own name.

An adult son should provide for his parents, even if they are able to work.

A disabled person should be provided for by his well-to-do relatives, according to the order of their shares in inheritance.

The above statement of women's

rights in Muslim law is supposed to serve as a guideline for those in charge of revising the Constitutional laws regarding the personal status of women in Kuwait and the Gulf States.

**Child Development
in the Arab Gulf**

A series of booklets (Arabic) on the general topic of "Child Development in the Arab Gulf," published in 1979 by the Iraqi Women's General Federation, Secretariat of Studies and Research. Each of the booklets contains a study of one of the various aspects of the general topic. Among the subtopics treated we read the following: "Development Planning and its Influence on Child Welfare," "Developing the Child's Intellectual Abilities," "Cooperation Between School and Parents," "Developing the Child's Personality," etc.

The collection also contains a bibliography of Arabic books on

children and a compendium entitled: "Using science and technology in effecting social change and promoting woman's evolution," issued by the same Federation in 1978.

(Address: General Federation of Iraqi Women and Basra University, Secretariat of studies and Research, National Library, Baghdad, Iraq.)

**From "National Women's
Education Centre," Japan**

A letter from the National Women's Education Centre, Japan, accompanied by a beautifully produced brochure, was received by IWSAW in September, 1979, informing those concerned with women's education that all the facilities of the Centre were completed by the inauguration of the new gymnasium, indoor swimming pool, tea ceremony house and Japanese house, Phone (049362) 6 7 1 1 Cables: N W E C Higashimatsuyama.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Copies from the study on May Ziadeh by Rose Ghurayyib, formerly advertised in Al-Raida, no. 6, nov. 1978, are available at the Institute or at Three Continents Press, 1346 Connecticut Ave. N.W. suite 1131, Washington D.C. 20036 U.S.A.

May we urge you to invite your friends to become members of our Institute by subscribing to Al-Raida, a quarterly publication which brings to you reports of activities, recent publications, conferences, articles on current issues related to women in the Arab countries and abroad. Your active participation in this matter will help keep our Institute alive, and together we can work to assist Arab women reach levels of development they aspire to.

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Al-Raida staff is glad to extend its warm thanks to subscribers who have sent donations, especially the Bahraini group of BUC graduates.

**AL - RAIDA, A QUARTERLY
PUBLISHED BY IWSAW**

P.O.B. 11-4080
Beirut University College
Beirut - Lebanon
Cable address : BECOGE

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Unsigned articles were written by the Editor.

Yearly Subscription :

L.L. 15 in Lebanon or U.S. \$10 or equivalent abroad, paid directly or by postal order to B.U.C.

IWSAW was founded 1973