

Jehan Sadat



The First Lady of Egypt, a militant feminist and an active social leader, answers in an interview with a reporter from "Marie-Claire" (1) some important questions regarding woman's status in Egypt.

Jehan Sadat, wife of the Egyptian President, has been, since her husband assumed the leadership of Egypt, a prominent figure in international mass media. Appearing always next to her husband during his frequent official trips, she gives the impression of being to him a faithful helper and a qualified inspirer.

At the age of 40, she resumed her education at the University of Cairo where she obtained a degree in English literature. She is currently assistant professor at the same university and a member of the Supreme Council for Family Planning in Egypt; she also occasionally publishes poems under a pseudonym.

In defining her attitude toward woman's liberation, she says that she admires strong women leaders like Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, but she is equally proud of the fact that her country produced great queens⁽²⁾. At present, the Egyptian woman is trying to recuperate the rights she lost during the period of decline. Since 1960, Egyptian women have occupied ministerial positions. The year 1980 saw the promulgation of new laws which improved woman's condition in the family (restriction of divorce and polygamy), in politics and in development⁽³⁾. Mrs. Sadat declares that she waged a real struggle to bring about these reforms. Through her intervention, the number of women in the Egyptian parliament was raised to over thirty.

When asked about the recent reactionary wave started by Iran, she declared that she is very much against it. «If any of my students should come veiled to my class I would send her out.» About the Iranian Revolution she said: «In that country they are acting against Islam. But Egypt is not Iran. We have the Nile which unifies us.»

Concerning the capital punishment ordained by Muslim law against adulterers, Mrs. Sadat said that «adultery is a condemnable practice not only in Islam but in all religions. Yet nobody thinks to-day of executing an adulterous man or woman. This law is not applied in Egypt.»

She severely condemns women's sexual mutilation or circumcision, still widely practiced in Sudan and in certain parts of Egypt. «It is not likely to be accepted in educated society. My aunts, my cousins, my daughters and myself did not go through it. This practice does not really trouble me. It will disappear by itself.»

To Katie Breen, the interviewer, this conclusion is not convincing. According to her a tradition which is not intensively fought will not disappear by itself.

(1) Interview by Katie Breen, Marie Claire, no.336, Aug.1980, p.56.

(2) Like Nefertiti and Hatshepsut in the Pharaonic period, and the Mamluke queen Shajarut-ud-Dur in Islam (Editor's note).

(3) See Al-Raida, vol. III, no. 14, Nov. 1980, p.9.