

The Sudanese Woman in Mass Media⁽¹⁾

Background

The history of the Sudanese woman is a source of inspiration and motivation for the women of to-day. Among the famous personalities of Sudanese history are great queens like Amani-Shakhti who left a number of monuments that bear witness to her energy and wise administration. Sudanese women, besides carrying out the traditional home tasks, have always participated in heavy work outside the home: in agriculture, road and bridge building, and care of the fighters and the wounded on the battlefield.

Traditions, however, gave them little opportunity for education. Under the Turks, traditional primary schools spread in the country. They gave boys and girls religious teaching and elements of reading and writing. Special training in cooking and embroidery was given to girls.

In the period of independence which started in 1956, women's associations began to appear. Women's struggle for freedom took shape mainly in journalistic activity, displayed through their collaboration in important magazines and their creation of women's magazines such as *Al-Manar*, *Al-Qafila*, *Sawt-ul-Mara'a*.

1 — Abstract of a report prepared by Asma Abdul-Rahman, Faiza Shawkat and Mariam M. Osman, given at the Arab Women Journalists' Seminar, Algeria, July 1981, published by "Al-Marqaz-ul-Arabi lid-Dirasat il Ilamiya" (Arab Center for Information Studies) Damascus, 1981, Editor: Mr. Zubair Saif-ul-Islam.

Women's efforts in the field of mass media and in other fields of communication produced a number of results. The most important are the following:

- 1 — There are women members of the National Pact Committee and of the Executive Councils.
- 2 — Women occupy the posts of minister and vice state-minister.
- 3 — Women are members of the Political Council and of the Central Committee of the Socialist Union.
- 4 — 10 women candidates were successful in joining the People's National Council.
- 5 — Women have achieved equal rights with men in the fields of public service, pension and indemnity.
- 6 — Forty percent of posts in the central government are occupied by women. They monopolize nursing and teaching on the elementary level.
- 7 — A leadership position, the Presidency of the Higher Council for Youth Welfare, is occupied by a woman, Umm Salima Said.
- 8 — Another woman, Hajja Kashif, presides over the Social Welfare and Development Council.
- 9 — Women have served in the fields of civil and criminal law, medicine, information, engineering etc.

Notwithstanding these achievements, Sudanese women, like their sisters in other Arab countries, complain of sexual discrimination in spite of egalitarian laws. A long struggle is necessary for realizing the full participation of women in administration and development.

Family planning in Bahrain

In the early part of this century, the inhabitants of Bahrain counted only 70,000 who lived under miserable health conditions. Contagious diseases decimated them. Women were particularly exposed to disease for want of medical care during pregnancy and at childbirth. It was a common thing for a Bahraini woman to prepare her will before going through delivery.

Conditions have recently changed: 85% of deliveries take place in hospitals, and the rate of child mortality has gone down to a respectable international figure of 44 per thousand. The number of inhabitants has risen to 350,000, 78% of whom are established in cities. Of those ranging between 5 and 19 years of age, 60% are studying in schools; girls number 45% of secondary school students.

Since 1975, a family-planning association was created in Bahrain. In spite of its small size, it was able to convince the Ministry of Health to open family-planning clinics in ten health centers of the country. Contraceptive pills were freely distributed through the clinics, intra-uterine devices were supplied for a certain number of women and sterilization operations were performed in a few cases. It is expected that, in the

near future, health centers will provide prenatal and post-natal care besides family-planning information. The number of women using contraceptives will rise to a third of those who are of child-bearing age.

Preventive medicine is gaining more and more importance as an aid to family-planning. Rural districts and quarters inhabited by poor fishermen are in particular need of family-planning information and other health services. Adherence to traditions prevents the poorer classes from changing their way of life. They think that a large family is a source of pride. Women refrain from operations that might leave scars on their bodies and thus make them undesirable to their husbands.

On the other hand, reforms already initiated by the State are operating in favor of change. Encouragement of family-planning and laws restricting divorce and polygamy are among the progressive measures adopted by the State.

Condensed from the quarterly "Al-Nas" (Arabic publication) vol. VI, n° 4, 1980, p. 12-14. Printed in England by Stephen Austin/Hertford.

Research Projects in Egypt

IWSAW recently received three research monographs in English from the Supreme Council for Population and Family Planning, Research Office, Cairo, Egypt 1981. The first, by Wedad Soliman Morcos, is a critical review of "Mother and Child Welfare Studies", mainly devoted to the changes in the status of women with the objective of finding the effect of change in women's social status on the upbringing of children.

The author of the monograph makes the following conclusions:

- 1 — Studies concerned with social upbringing are very rare in spite of their extreme importance... Control of the increase in the number of children should be associated with better education and welfare. Discrimination between boys and girls regarding upbringing is more marked in rural areas than in urban

ones. In both areas, this discrimination should be fought because of its detrimental effects.

- 2 — Child mortality rates are still high if compared to the rates in developed countries.
- 3 — No studies have been made to reveal the causes of drop in the admission rates of children eligible for compulsory education.
- 4 — Employment of children appears to have decreased in rural children. No studies dealt with this item in urban areas.

The **second** monograph, by Hamed Abou-Gamrah, is a "review and evaluation of studies on the **determinants** of fertility in Egypt".

Fertility determinants include: mother's education, socio-economic development, husband's education, husband's occupation, female labor force participation, rural-urban factor, child mortality, and religion.

The conclusion stresses the importance of a better understanding of the causal relationships underlying

A Call for Boycotting Dowry Marriages In India

"Dowry is a society cancer", is the title of an article published in "Newslink", a magazine issued by Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, India. The article was condensed and appeared in No. 6 of "Al-Raida", Nov. 1978, p. 10. It carried the call made by an Indian woman, Mrs. Usha Francis, to wage war on dowry marriages, such a war being as necessary as the war on hunger, illiteracy, and growth of population.

Revolt against this tradition seemed to materialize in an actual boycott of dowry marriages, recently practiced by a growing number of Indian families. In a recent issue of "Manushi" (the Indian journal about women and society), readers who practice boycott of dowry marriages were asked to make a public commitment regarding their behavior. It was argued that such

a commitment is necessary to provide an alternative role model in a situation where many seem to be giving and taking dowry. The objective of the commitment being to assure mutual support and to build moral pressure.

The request issued by "Manushi" received immediate response. In number 8, 1981, of the said magazine, a report was published about a meeting held by women activists from March 1 to March 10, 1981. During the meeting, pledges were taken by a large number of young women to oppose the giving of dowry at their own marriages. The published pledges carried the full names of those who took them, in addition to a statement explaining their reasons for taking such a stand.

Women in the Gulf States⁽¹⁾

In Saudi Arabia, women's employment is no longer limited to teaching and nursing. Many are employed in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Fifty percent of women employees are probationers at various stages; two thirds of them are married, which shows that

marriage does not necessarily prevent a woman from working outside the home. Women are also employed in information, radio, television and journalism. The newly opened women's banks directed exclusively by women, permit them to practice their financial capacities and assume new responsibilities. In the urban districts of Dimām, Taëf, and Riad, 67% of mothers are literate.

In the Arab United Emirates, women have been

1 — Excerpts from a report prepared by Pervine Nasrallah, given at the Arab Women Journalists' Seminar, Algeria, July 1981, published by "Al-Marqaz-al-Arabi lid-Dirasât-il-'Iamiya" (Arab Center for Information Studies) pp. 63-70.

fertility decline in a country like Egypt which tries to reduce its fertility. It points out three levels for the analysis of the relationship between fertility and the socio-economic determinants:

- 1 — Cross-national data may be used. This type of study does not pick up the variation within each country and does not usually deal with political and cultural aspects which are so important in fertility studies.
- 2 — The study may be carried out within a country by considering the differences between the administrative units. This type of study considers socio-economic and fertility relationship under the same political and cultural conditions.
- 3 — The differences between families can also be used to study the relationship between fertility and the socio-economic status.

The **third** monograph, by Dr. Mary Taylor Hasouna, carries the title: "An Action Research on the Promotion of Conventional Methods of Contraceptives among Egyptian Married Women".

One of them, Dolly Nath, said: "I am opposed to the giving and taking of dowry because I have seen and experienced in my own life, many women driven to suicide because their parents could not give them enough dowry. So I swear that I will oppose dowry give and take in my family and community".

In a pledge written by Sandhya Kiran, we read the following: "I will tell my friends that dowry marriages are a kind of trading in women, creating for them many problems. These problems often make them victims of atrocities, like murder or even lead to taking their own lives".

To make clear the meaning of the dowry system which has been causing so much trouble in India, the author consulted an article by Sham Rathak, published in "International Women's News", vol. 76, no. 1, March 1981. That article notes that the pleasant custom of exchanging gifts between the bride's and the bridegroom's families, practiced for centuries in Indian society, has disintegrated into the ugly shape of blunt demands. Cash, kind, or anything else possible, could be required of a girl's parents in return for marriage.

seeking higher education since 1972. Besides teaching and nursing, many of them work in government administrative posts, in the police force, in information media, in commerce and banking sectors.

Bahrain has a large number of women's voluntary organizations like those of family-planning and child welfare. In Kuwait, women's associations have social and cultural aims. In Iraq, the General Federation of Iraqi Women was founded in 1968. Its activities are political, cultural, social and educational. In Abu-Dhabi, the UAE Women's Federation has five branches in distant regions of the Emirate. Other women's associa-

"This action research project was conducted for the purpose of providing insights about **barrier method** acceptability in order that population policy makers could make decisions about strengthening family planning service delivery".

The project included short term training of the family planning service personnel in how to communicate with clients and in service delivery management. Efforts were spent on informing people about barrier method availability.

While many women who participated in the project continue to practice family planning, some of them dropped out; others switched to another method.

On the whole, results show that the **foam tablet** is the most acceptable method introduced by the project.

"The project results support the hypothesis that introduction of a choice of contraceptive technology can lead to increasing family planning participation and to providing a milieu in which people are provided an opportunity to exercise their own selective judgment in management of their fertility behavior."

The dowry system is a source of evil and misery, especially for parents of girls. The only way to fight it is to improve the status of women by education, economic independence and integration of women in development.

The author noted that the dowry system practiced in India does not apply to the Mahr or Sadag instituted by the Muslim personal law (Shari'at) and imposed by contract on the bridegroom as the bride-price. We do not know of any study made in Muslim countries about the actual practice of the Mahr institution and the problems created by its application. The Arab press, however, has been publishing complaints and protests from families and young men against the high price demanded by the parents of marriageable girls. In an article published in "Al-Raida" on Aug. 1, 1981, vol. IV, no. 19, p. 17, reporting on the dowry system in Algeria, the author questions the validity of this institution in modern society, and states that the promotion of women into public function and the progressive availability of women's education, make the dowry system a superfluous requirement.

tions and charity organizations exist in the Gulf States.

There are at least five women's magazines published in the Gulf region.

The spread of education and of other cultural factors has greatly influenced social and family life in the Gulf States. The rates of polygamy and divorce have been reduced as well as those of the bride-price and arranged marriages. Women have achieved a certain degree of freedom and independence; their lives are no longer concentrated on husband and children. Their interests include travel, continuing education, development of new skills and promotion in work.