

# Dr. Saniyya Habboub : Death of a Pioneer

In the November 1, 1982 issue of Al-Raida, in "Pioneer" Section, a short account appeared on the life and achievements of **Dr. Saniyya Habboub, the first Lebanese woman doctor to study medicine abroad.**

Exactly one year later Al-Raida is sorry to report the death of this pioneer of women's education and emancipation in Lebanon and the Arab World. Dr. Habboub died at the age of 82 after 50 years of devoted medical service during the 1st week of September 1983.

In a posthumous tribute to this outstanding woman **An-Nahar** newspaper published one of her articles written in 1948 and addressed to young

university women students.<sup>(1)</sup> In this article Dr. Habboub says:

When I meet a young university student entering the campus, her head raised, free of worries and agile, wearing light clothes with no veil covering her head; a great happiness rises in me and I cannot but go 20 years back to when I was in the place of this young sister, dreaming of seeing her one day as I am today. The "Dream" has been realized my girl, you are now where you should be, a normal, natural

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(1) **An-Nahar** 11/9/83, page 11, Beirut.



Dr. Saniyya Habboub with Prime Minister during ceremony awarding her the "Health Medal of Merit" May 19, 1982.

Beirut University College (then the Junior College) from 3 students in 1925 to 200 in 1948.

A lot has been said about Dr. Habboub's relentless work as a gynecologist in her own practice in Bab Idriss and her work with the Red Cross, the Muslim Orphan's Home and the Young Women's Muslim Association. Yet, the most appropriate account of her was given by Dr. William Stoltzfus, ex-president of Beirut University College. He described her life as a "get-started signal" for the professional lives of many Arab Women.

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(2) Translated from Arabic.

element of the University ... You are not anymore a subject of surprise, mockery, or shame; nor an unnatural event, a strange undomesticated bird isolated from the flock. You are now with your sisters, a bead among many in the university necklace; preparing, arming and training yourself for the battle of life exactly like a young man, because the battle will unite you. There is no benefit for you my girl nor advantage for him to separate your potentials. You should rise and be his help and his associate for you will be a good mother as much as he will be a good father; you will be a good citizen as much as he will be one. You will be if you want a doctor, a teacher, an engineer, a lawyer ... like him. You will be an enlightened and educated woman capable of establishing a home, creating a society, and building a nation. Whether you will have a profession or not, you will be a cornerstone to modern society and you will walk hand in hand with the man as you are walking today at the university like two friends, without burdening him with your ignorance, weakness or fright. He will feel the lightness of your hand and the broadness of your mind next to him and your footsteps will become lighter and you will run forward together, as if you were about to fly ... (2)

This encouraging, even exhilarating vision of woman by Dr. Saniyya Habboub was written 35 years ago, 20 years after she had graduated as a doctor from the American University of Beirut. It was written after she witnessed the bitter fight between two factions at the university, one that wanted to admit women as students and the other strongly opposed it. It also came at a time when she saw the number of women students rise at