

## Women's Integration in Development an Imperative of our Time

### A. Women's Financial Status

A characteristic of our time is the emergence of a longer life expectancy for people in general. Due to physical and social factors, women's longevity, as indicated by statistics, is considered to be generally higher than that of men. Therefore, it imposes on them a renewed concern with old age. The problem of aging has always been a source of worry for all people; and particularly for women because, as a whole, they are financially and socially less privileged than men. "Women are the poorest class in the world", this statement is not an emotional expression meant to arouse pity. It is a fact based on global studies. Women are the poorest because men own most of the property of the world, particularly in developing countries. Most women working in the house or in the field, receive no cash salary.

In the laboring classes, which include the larger group of them, women receive little or no inheritance. Women's share in inheritance is reduced to half a man's share in Islamic communities. A majority of the working women in the Arab world are illiterate and untrained; they receive insignificant salaries and are subject to sexual discrimination. Who will guarantee their right to care and treatment in sickness and old age? Their dependence on husband and children is equivalent to want, because this dependence may fail them.

### B. Traditional Misconceptions

There are some traditional misconceptions which have now proved to be false and obsolete. One of them is the belief that women do little or no work, and that housework is no work at all.

In the first place, women who do not work at all are the wives or daughters of the very wealthy, who have servants to look after them and their children. These women form an insignificant minority. Some of them occupy themselves with useful hobbies or volunteer work. They become amateur artists or volunteer social workers. But the vast majority of women take care of household work, such as cooking, housecleaning, and nursing, they may add gardening, sewing, knitting,

embroidering and other useful occupations. On the whole, they perform a full time job and, if they work outside the house, they carry a "double burden". As a matter of fact, the number of their working hours is at least equivalent to, if not more, than that of men.

### C. Women and Education

In our days more women are having access to education. Parents are realizing more and more the economic and social values of educating their daughters. Many women are acceding to higher education which was forbidden to them in the past.

Now education imposes work. It induces women to make use of their knowledge in one way or another, just as life imposes activity on living creatures. A person who has developed the habit of thinking and cultivating his various capacities cannot remain idle or limit himself to routine activities or non-remunerative work. Here we are reminded of **Betty Friedan's** research study about the obscure disease invading educated women whose activity was restricted to housework, and who were deprived of the opportunity for intellectual development.

### D. Women and Family-Planning

Nowadays most parents are convinced of the necessity for family-planning and for restricting the number of their children. For this reason, many young females are retarding their marriage. Some of them become so absorbed in their work that they decide to devote themselves to it, and follow an untrodden path.

### E. The Need for Women's Participation

To all the above factors inducing women to expand the range of their activity, we may add the one resulting from the spread of war, emigration, displacement, inflation and high prices, depriving many families of their male heads or greatly reducing their earnings. Recent investigation has shown that no less than a third of the families in West Asia have female household heads who provide for them, while many women are engaged in permanent jobs permitting them to share in the family expenses.

Rose Ghurayyib