

Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation

The success and effectiveness of social work and development programmes in the countries of the Middle East are often linked to support from the political regime or political leadership in question.

In a previous issue of *Al-Raida* (Women: Where, When and How?) we ran an article about the spectacular tasks of the General Federation of Iraqi Women. The article implicitly noted the support of President Saddam Hussein as one of the major causes behind the success of the relevant programmes.

Other success stories appear in Egypt where Mrs. Mobarak founded Children's libraries, librarian workshops and sponsored other social work programmes for women and children⁽¹⁾, and in Jordan with the Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation in Jordan.

Political power and available fundings are the precedent for sophisticated programmes and wide spread coverage. The charisma of the leaders plays the primary role of motivating professionals as well as the masses to participate constructively.

«The Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation was created by a Royal decree in 1985 to coordinate and oversee the many projects and programmes which Queen Noor has helped establish or which she personally supports in the fields of culture, education, social welfare and human and community development. the Fundamental mission of the Foundation and its programmes is to mobilize human skills needed for development»⁽²⁾.

The Queen has performed the vigorous task of establishing more than twenty one social programmes along with their facilities and professional bodies. The programmes address the needs of children, women and rural development.

The children's programmes are the most elaborate. They include a centre for Early Childhood Education, the Royal Endowment for Culture and Education with emphasis on gifted students, Day of the Arab Child and International Day of the Child, Arab Children's Con-



gress, Children's Clubs, the Children's Heritage and Science Museum, the Queen Noor Award for Children's Literature, the National Hospital for Children, Health Communications for Child Survival Programme, the Institute for Child Health and Development, SOS Children's Village, the National Music Conservatory, Theatre in Education, the Jubilee School and the Mobile Life and Science Museum.

Other programmes incorporated in the Foundation are: Women and Development Project, Al-Noor Project for Development in Rural Areas, Handicrafts Development project, Salt Handicraft Training Centre and the famous Jerash Festival of Culture and Art.

Queen Noor travels throughout the world to secure funds for the Foundation's projects. She heads out to explain the need for social assistance in her country and the purpose of the programmes. According to Her Royal Highness, she wants to introduce the Arab culture to the West. «The Arabs know more about the

West than the West knows about the Arab people. It is our duty to introduce the peaceful and romantic culture of the Arabs» the Queen insists.⁽³⁾

To many, Queen Noor is a credible link between East and West. Of American birth and from Arab ancestry, she converted to Islam when she married King Hussain. This conversion, she says, came after extensive thought and research of various religions in the world. Consequently, Islam occupies an important place in her life. She discusses the faith with her children at length in order to uphold its true principles and avoid misconceptions. She is earnest to clear up many of the misconceptions of the West which link terrorism and hostility towards women to Islam.

When asked (in an interview with the French magazine ELLE) if Islam protects the rights of women, the Queen replied «Absolutely». She said that according to Islam, the protection of women is the responsibility of the husband, father or brother. She also insisted that, in principle, Islam encourages women to defend themselves, seek an education and even to govern. She is concerned that extremists have distorted the principles in their discriminate treatment of women in the Islamic world.

About the status of women in Jordan, the Queen insisted that all the doors are open. Women occupy seats in parliament and the senate. They nominate themselves for elections. They run industries and enroll in universities. «In fact» the Queen noted «There are more females than males at the university. We try to assist the poor students and the women who have difficulties attaining their freedom. We also try to devise action plans to help them find jobs and earn their living»⁽⁴⁾.

Obviously, Queen Noor Al-Hussain is neither a radical nor a strict conservative. She would seem more like a liberal. Her thoughts, her work and her Foundation purpose the preservation of culture and the correction of misconceptions. These tasks seem to represent the founding grounds for the development of human skills needed for self-sufficiency, autonomy, and progress for the Jordanian people. In addition to relief and development programmes, there is a clear emphasis on nurturing the potentials of the younger generations. Hopefully, this will be a successful long-term endeavour. ●

Has Feminism Failed?

Twenty years have passed since the movement began. The relevant questions today are: «What have they (women) done?», «Where do they stand today?» and «What is the outcome in Africa, in Europe, in Asia and in America?»

Cons

In East or West, it seems that women still have to fight for their rights. While women in some areas have achieved more than their sisters in other areas, the overall outcome seems to fall short of the goals of the Women's Movement. There seems to be no guarantees for women anywhere, still. In many parts of the world, women are still victims of traditions, religions, myths and ideologies.

For instance, male births are still preferable in China, where females are considered an invaluable addition to the population. In Tibet, women are forced to abort, even during the eighth month of pregnancy. In India, twenty five percent of girls are ill-treated and killed before the age of fifteen because they are a financial burden to their parents who have to cover the expenses of marriage. In Africa, financial bankruptcy affects females for they are the first to be taken out of schools and put into the labor market.

In Africa, the ritual of female circumcision is still practiced. In the East, the pressure to wear the veil and its role-expectations are perpetuating. In Algeria, «every girl who goes out at night is killed» says a young Algerian. Furthermore, girls are separated from boys in schools because «women love to dominate, manipulate and destroy men.» One student said that she had to submit to wearing the veil before she was admitted to class⁽¹⁾.

Often, women end up paying the biggest price for political change. For instance, the unification of North and South Yemen had the happy outcome of ending the struggle between brothers. But the unified status of Yemeni women soon clenched a heated controversy (see Al-Raida, vol. IX, No. 50, p. 8). Southern women demanded the long-adopted democracy of their Northern sisters and refused to yield to Islamic fundamentalism, notably the veil. Eventually, however, they found themselves forced to wear the veil although their call for

(1) «Suzanne Mobarak», *Al-Raida*, No. 38, November 1986, p. 15.

(2) The Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation Brochure.

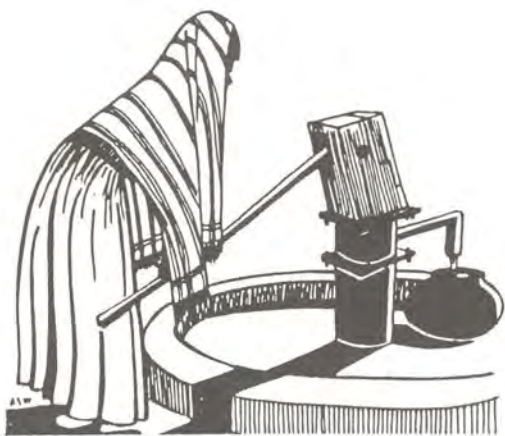
(3) Women's Sections of *Al-Diyar* Daily newspaper, Beirut.

(4) *Ibid.*

democracy was answered. And to top it all, their husbands gained access to taking additional wives from the North⁽²⁾.

The Western model of freedom has been transmitted as the ideal formula for women all over the world. Women think that all it takes to earn freedom, New York, London or Paris style, is financial independence. But are they aware of the problems women in the West face? Research has it that these women earn thirty percent less than men.

Which brings us back to the original question: «Has the Women's Movement produced positive or negative results?»



According to American, Kay Ebeling, a free-lance writer and member of the feminist generation (also known as the Experimental Generation), **Feminism has failed**⁽³⁾. Ebeling explains that «the message of Feminism was: woman, you don't need a man. It was a philosophy that made divorce and cohabitation casual and routine. It made women poor and saddled them with raising children alone.» Ebeling remarks that «Feminism made women disposable. The reality (today) is a lot of frenzied and overworked women often abandoned by men.»

It seems that what Ebeling is really saying is that «Feminism is lonely.» However, although more women lead a single's life and may be lonely, there is no denying that more women are integrated in economic, political and other spheres of public life.

Pros

The following are direct quotes taken from Time Magazine⁽⁴⁾ highlighting the achievements of the Feminist Movement.

... The efforts of women around the world to see that their rights are respected... involve a struggle to share information. If knowledge is the currency for power, images of change bring opening and inspirations....

... Although there remains corners of the world untouched by the revolution... some themes are becoming universal, namely the desire for women and men to achieve their goals without sacrificing their nature...

... The dreams transcend old boundaries though they vary from place to place... economics may be a primary goal in one country, support for families in another, protection from violence in a third....

... As feminism moved from theory to practice, it brought surprises: among the first nations to elect female heads of government were those that seemed least likely to do so, such as India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan... In Eastern Europe's emerging democracy, women may be getting a chance to share real, not cosmetic power.

Indeed, prior to the revolution, the world beyond was not aware of the existence of rituals like circumcision, crimes of honor, abortion and killing of female siblings, denial of women's right to divorce or work, abuse, white slavery, rape and other injustices.

After the revolution, victimized women learned that they actually have **rights**, which they can claim and protect. Consequently, women's groups, regardless of how powerful or powerless they are, began to emerge almost everywhere.

Indeed, women are slowly transcending old boundaries. Probably, one of the greatest boundaries that they have transcended is that of silence. For the sake of example, five sisters broke the vow of silence against their father who had abused them since childhood in the French suburb of Angier.

Another achievement of the movement is its success in linking women's rights to human rights issues. Women issues were incorporated into larger matters concerning the world community, such as literacy, hygiene, health, education, violence, politics, work and others. For instance, the illiteracy of women, although still comparatively higher than men, has become a concern for relief organizations, social associations and governments, and not only feminists. Contingently, human

rights groups may be more effective where women's groups are not.

Higher on the hierarchy of needs and rights, the Women's Movement has gained strongholds in the media, this century's most powerful weapon. Not only was information communicated to the world, but voices were raised, pressures were made and changes were achieved. For example, Ireland elected its first female President of the Republic, Ms. Mary Bronson. Ms. Sharon Brat Dickson is Mayor of Washington DC, the capital city of the United States of America; and Ms. Anne Richards is Governor of the State of Texas⁽⁵⁾. Ms. Margaret Thatcher was premier of Great Britain.

The biggest surprise was what happened in Saudi Arabia. Hence, Saudi women were motivated to speak up when glimpses of western cultures, embodied in the armed forces, came to Saudi Arabia. In the past, Saudis would indulge their «western» behaviors while away from home, and submit to strict traditions and laws in their homeland. With the coming of the Americans, they found themselves face to face with the fact that eleven percent of these forces are women sharing the front with the men.

Conclusion

Here we have two extremes trying to evaluate each other. Women in the traditional parts of the world are overburdened with male domination. While, women in the West complain from singularity and alienation. Does this mean that the Women's Movement should be aborted because it has substituted alienation for submission?

Maybe it is time that the Movement be re-visited and re-evaluated. It stands to reason that after twenty years of trial and error, a more profound understanding of equality should be reached. After all shouldn't women and men be equals not competitors and not have a slave-master relationship? How can the Women's Movement preserve sex-roles and emphasize equality? How can the movement avoid the pitfall of sounding negative because of its «aggressive and patronizing» tone? Maybe «Moderation is the best policy.» ●

(1) **Al-Diyar** daily newspaper, Thursday, November 29, 1990 (Arabic reference).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Kay Ebeling. «The Failure of Feminism», **Newsweek** November 1990, p. 9

(4) «On The Move» (special section) **Time International**, December 3, 1990, p. 47-59.

(5) Ibid. Al-Diyar.

Dr. Nasrine Kamel Ghaddar The First Arab Woman to Hold a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from M.I.T.

She wears a veil on her head and a serene smile on her face. She is the first Lebanese woman to hold a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering (Thermal and Fluid Sciences-Computational Fluid Dynamics and Heat Transfer) from M.I.T. She is the fourth woman to graduate in this field in the history of MIT.

Dr. Nasrine Kamel Ghaddar is a Lebanese and a former resident of Kuwait. She is married and has one child. She completed her Bachelor's of Science in Mechanical Engineering at Kuwait University (K.U.) in 1980 and completed her graduate and post-graduate studies at M.I.T., Massachusetts institute of Technology, in 1985. Upon her graduation, she returned to Kuwait and joined the faculty of Mechanical Engineering at Kuwait University. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, Dr. Ghaddar returned to Lebanon and plans to conduct research and teach at the American University of Beirut (A.U.B.).

An outstanding student and dynamic scholar, she received a number of honors and awards from K.U. and M.I.T. She is a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineering (ASME) and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA). At K.U., she was the editor of the Mechanical Engineering Newsletter and held administrative duties in cultural and scientific organizations. Not to mention that Dr. Ghaddar has a significant number of journal and conference publications.

She came to our Institute to inquire about children's books for her son. Hence, we grabbed the opportunity to ask her a few questions about herself and her experiences as a female scholar at M.I.T. and as a highly educated woman in the traditional societies of the Middle East.

She was frank and relaxed. The veil on her head did not veil her modesty, openness and progressive character, if I dare say so.



Dr. Ghaddar and Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, director of IwsAw (left to right).

1. Why Mechanical Engineering? and why a Ph.D.?

First, I am interested in this field. After finishing my Bachelor's degree at K.U., I had some field training which inspired me to nurture my interest and knowledge. A Ph.D. came also as a challenge for me as a female because women worldwide tend to turn away from higher education in this domain.

2. What was your parents' attitude towards your decision to go for a Ph.D.?

My father did not encourage me at first. But when I received a scholarship from the «Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science», he was happy to see me go for it. My father is a teacher and education is his mission in life. Therefore, when the financial means for my education were secured, he supported me. He feels that a woman should be independent and progressive. My mother also felt that I should not turn down an opportunity like this.

3. Did you encounter the traditional attitude that a Ph.D. and consequently, intellectual advancement for a woman would scare men away and get in the way of marriage?

What I encountered was «Why invest so much money on women if they abandon everything after marriage?».

I strongly disagree with this theory for a very simple and non-sexist reason. I believe that if a woman invests so much time, effort and money to get a degree, it becomes virtually impossible for her to sit idle at home. Her specialization becomes a part of her and of her life.

On the other hand, the idea that education scares men away is more prevalent in the Middle East than in the West. Over here, men have difficulties imagining a woman in engineering. Consequently, they resist accepting her and supporting her as a colleague. Whereas, I was always treated as one of the guys at M.I.T. although I was the only female in one of my lab classes. Sex was of no concern. What mattered was the work itself. The atmosphere was void of sex-roles and stereotypes and based solely on competition and achievement.

4. Well! did your Ph.D. cause any problems with men as far as your marriage was concerned?

No, I got married after finishing my graduate work and particularly during the last year of my Ph.D. I met my husband in Kuwait on one of my vacations. My husband is a Mechanical Engineer too.

5. Are there any problems or competition there?

No, my husband works in the field, i.e. applied engineering, whereas, I chose research and academics. Our profession compliments and strenghtens our relationship rather than exert pressure on it. I am a source of reference for him when it comes to solving field problems and he provides me with ideas to research and explore.

As far as domestic matters are concerned, he is very helpfull. We share household duties and he even takes time off from work to stay with our son when I am busy at work. ●