

Emily Fares Ibrahim Receives The National Cedar Award

Ms. Emily Fares Ibrahim outstanding writer, poet, feminist and a pillar in Arabic literature was awarded The National Cedar Award by the President of the Lebanese Republic on November 19, 1992. Who is Emily Fares Ibrahim?

She was born in 1914. Her father was an officer in the Lebanese Police force during the administration of the first President of Lebanon (1926-1934), Charles Debbas. Her grandfather, Habib Fares, was a leading lawyer and Doctor of Law and her uncle, Felix Fares, was a prominent scholar and writer. Consequently, Ibrahim's background was rich with substance and she was exposed to leading literary circles. Her first experiences in literature were in French having attended school in Beirut at a time when influence from France was at its peak. She was heavily exposed to symbolic romanticism and to the works of classical writers like La Fontaine, Moliere, Racine and Corneille, and novelists like Henry Bordeaux and Paul Bourge.

Her uncle, Felix Fares was responsible for Ibrahim's background in Arabic literature. Her expansion into Arabic literature came from the literary salons he held in her home, for he lived with them, and her accompanying him to lectures and other prominent literary events. She says that the literary uprising and awakening of the thirties were the days of Felix Fares, her uncle. Gibran Khalil Gibran's writings had

*Author of Adibat Libnaniyat -
Literary Lebanese Women*

*President of the Lebanese Council
for Women*

the first major influence on Ibrahim's ideas.. It was the era (1930's) when Gibran inspired the masses and the young with his revolutionary moral philosophy and poetry. Other giants in Lebanese literature who were to influence Ibrahim's awakening to Arabic literature were Elias Abu Shabakeh, Yousef Ibrahim Yezbeck, Amin Rihani, Amin Nakhleh, Michael Naimy, and the leading female writer of the thirties, May Ziadeh.

Ibrahim strongly identified with Ziadeh and her literature. She vividly remembers attending a historical lecture by Ziadeh that deeply moved her, at the American University of Beirut. She also attended the literary lectures organized by "Al-Nadwa Al-Lubnaniyah - The Lebanese (Literary) Club", which hosted leading literary figures, writers, poets and scholars from Lebanon, the Arab countries and the world. She gave lectures and speeches at the "Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnaniyah - The House of the Lebanese Book". She also

remembers, with nostalgia, the "Literary Salon of Charles Corm" that hosted the giants of Arab literature. She was the only female writer in the Salon of Charles Corm in the forties.

Of the leading publications of Emily Fares Ibrahim that we will highlight in this article are Adibat Lubnaniyat - Literary Lebanese Women (1961) and Al-Harakah al-Nisa'iyah al-Lubnaniyah - The Lebanese Women's Movement (1966).

Adibat Lubnaniyat - Literary Lebanese Women (Dar Al-Huriyah li-al-Tibaa' wa al-Nashr, 1961) is the first in-depth bibliography and analysis of the works of leading Lebanese women in the world of literature. This historical bibliography reviews women and their work as early as the second half of the nineteenth century. Warda Yazigi, Zeinab Fawwaz, Hana Kasbani Kourani, Princess Alexandra de Frino Fizifoka, Labibah Sawaya, Labibah

Hashem, Julia Tohmeh Dimashkiyeh, Afifeh Karam, Aniseh and Afifeh al-Shartouni, May Ziadeh, Salma Sayegh, and others are only a few of the women in the book. Adibat Lubnaniyat has become a major reference for women in literature and for historical analysis of the respective epoch.

Al-Harakah al-Nisa'iyah al-Lubnaniyah - The Lebanese Women's Movement (Beirut: Dar el-Thaqafah. 1966) is a historical narrative of the women's movement in Lebanon. It begins in the 18th century with the work of Sit Nasab, the mother of Prince Fakhreddine II and includes the famous Hindu nun

who almost divided the Maronite community. Ibrahim examines the status of women during the Ottoman Empire where they strictly adhered to the customs of the day all the way up to the reforms of Ataturk. She also reviews the emergence of women's groups in the nineteenth century, as well as the first Conference to discuss women's issues in 1922 in Beirut organized by Princess Najla Abi Lamaa', who was the owner of a local magazine Al-Fajr - the Dawn. She also reviews prominent Lebanese supporters of Women's liberation like Amin Rihani, Gibran Khalil Gibran and others.

Ibrahim's contributions to women's

plight and movement were not restricted to literature. She was President of the Lebanese Women's Council for twenty two years. Unfortunately, her work was obstructed by the seventeen years of civil war leaving the Council with little influence and status in the country. At the age of seventy eight she was finally able to retire and was thus awarded the High National Cedar Award for High Achievements •

R.A.H

Reference: Dr. George Haroun, Profile of Emily Fares Ibrahim, Al-Nahar daily newspaper. Beirut: November 19-20, 1992.

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