

The Status of Bahraini Women

There has never been a feminist movement in Bahrain, emancipation has been coming about in response to economic diversification and substantial improvement in female educational participation rates. In Bahrain, the first primary school for girls opened in 1982; and the first secondary school for girls opened in 1951. The Bahraini government has instituted legislation which makes education compulsory for all children through the eighth grade. It has also developed a comprehensive education plan and thus achieving massive improvement in the Bahraini educational system. According to the Ministry of Information, 14 per cent of the total budget is allocated to education. Great emphasis has been placed on teacher training by establishing two teacher-training institutes. During the decade 1960-1970, female enrollment has risen twice as fast as the enrollment of males. Women began to enter commercial schools in 1979/1. In the same year, vocational training was introduced for secondary students and was expanded in 1979.

In 1974, the Bahraini government initiated an anti-illiteracy programme, establishing teaching centres to teach reading, writing, English, vocational and homemaking skills, sewing, weaving and maternal and child care. As for higher education, women in Bahrain face no serious obstacles if they decide to pursue any specialization. In 1980/1 42.6 per cent of the total Bahraini students studying abroad were females.

A survey on the desired level of education for women indicated that 56.5 per cent of the respondents chose a Ph.D., 29.1 per cent a B.A., 12.1 per cent an M.A., 1.2 per cent suggested a limit to secondary education, and 1.2 per cent did not res-

pond.

Women in Bahrain have a very positive and self-competent response to education, and it has been observed that "education and employment of women in Bahrain are parallal achievements ... the higher the level of education, the higher the rate of employment"⁽²⁾ The rate of women's labour force participation is higher among educated women. Bahrain is making significant progress toward Bahrainization of the labour force by training Bahrainis to fill all skilled positions, providing a viable solution to the problems of employment and relieving the country from its reliance on an expatriate labour force.

Bahrain, a member state of the Gulf Cooperation Council which was founded on 4 February 1981, benefits from the Economic Agreement of the GCC. One of the major elements of the Economic Agreement recognizes the need for pooling of human resources to prevent harmful competition from scarce labour. Collectively, the GCC countries will be able to sustain a diversified economy; e.g. the current construction of a causeway between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Oil reserves of Bahrain are not very high; this has prompted Bahrain to diversify its source of income through the manufacturing and services (finance and banking) sectors. These economic endeavours have opened new jobs and opportunities for women, and have contributed to the rapid increase in female participation in the labour force. In return, economic growth may be sustained within the framework of the integration of women in social and economic development.

Aida Arasoghli

(1) al-Khalid, F (1980) 'Dirasaton 'an al-Dur al-Tanmawi' lil Mar'a al-Khalijiyya fil Musahama fi Tanmiyat-al Mujtama' (A Study on the Development Role of the Gulf Women in Participating in the Development of Society), paper presented at the

Second Regional Conference: Women in the Peninsula and the Gulf, Kuwait, March 28-31. pp. 21-2.

(2) Khuri, Fuad I. (1980) *Tribe and State in Bahrain*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 132.