

## Bahraini Women and Education

Statistics about education in the Gulf region tell us that the first school for girls was opened in 1928 in the State of Bahrain. Our connection with the Gulf women, however, goes back to an earlier date, to 1956, when Beirut University College received the first three women students from Bahrain. Since then, the College has received a continuous stream of select women students coming from Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, many of whom have won distinction as educators, directors, artists and social leaders in their respective countries.

Of the early Bahraini students at BUC, I remember Munira Fakhro who contributed to the College magazine, and her classmate, Safiyya Duaigher. Both of them did post-graduate study abroad and have been occupying responsible posts in their country. Safiyya has recently obtained a Ph.D. in administration of higher education. Munira is working at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and is also a Ph.D. candidate.

I also remember May Arrayedh, and her sister Thurayya, a gifted poet like her father Ibrahim. She wrote good, modern poetry in Arabic and English.

Among other graduates from Bahrain, I particularly remember Faiqa Zayani, Fatima Arrayedh and Myriam Doy. for their meek character and diligent work. Faiqa spent some time in Egypt for further study.

As to Fatima and Myriam, they are teaching at the Bahrain University College. Other graduates that should be mentioned are Naima Fakhro, a talented painter and illustrator and Bahja Fakhro who joined in the publication of a book on *Customs of the Arabian Gulf*.

At the Conference on "Planning for the Integration of Arab Women in Economic Development", organized by IWSAW and held in Nicosia, June 1985, I had the chance to meet Faiza al-Zayani, acting advisor of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Bahrain, and author of *Social Indicators for Bahrain 1977*. She is also an active participant in social welfare activities which constitute a characteristic trend in Bahrain. At the workshop on "Children's Literature", organized by the above Institute during August 1985, I was acquainted with two Bahraini specialists in elementary education, engaged in administration and preparation of educational programmes: Hala Sawwah and Aisha Ghalloum.

The bright aspects of the women's movement in the Gulf region should not obliterate the needs and shortcomings which they share with other Arab women: a high rate of illiteracy which they are trying hard to eradicate, feeble participation in development and lack of political rights.

But the future prospects will remain good as long as the basic conditions for evolution exist, namely: peace, unity, co-operation and awareness of the main problems that need treatment. In these respects, educated women, particularly university women who form a remarkable proportion in the Gulf countries, can be a highly efficient force.

The educated woman of the Gulf represents, according to my knowledge, the Arab woman who shows eagerness to learn and willingness to adopt the best of Western culture, but remains faithful to certain values of heritage; reserve, restraint and genuine, unsophisticated manners.