LEBANESE WOMEN IN EDUCATION

How much progress have the Lebanese women recently achieved in the field of education and public service?

Dr. Rafeeqa Hammoud, professor of education at the Lebanese University, tries to answer this question in a paper which has been abridged as follows:

In the field of education:

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of students at all levels in Lebanese schools, but the number of girls is still inferior to that of boys. Statistics given in 1970 show that Lebanese children between 6 and 14, who did not go to school, numbered 22,000 boys and 45,000 girls. Their number increased among the older groups, i.e. those between 15 and 19. Of those whose ages ranged between 20 and 24 and who sought university education, 26 percent were boys and 9 percent, girls.

Though we have no accurate statistics about illiteracy, we may deduce from various sources of information that the number of illiterates is higher among women than among men.

In normal training schools, the number of women students has lately exceeded that of men, while in vocational schools, it is just the opposite. As a matter of fact, vocational training in Lebanon is at the elementary stage, the number of vocations being highly limited, technological development very backward, especially for women, who number only 10 percent of the graduates of vocational schools.

In universities, the number of women students in 1973-74 did not exceed 30 percent. Their highest proportion was in pharmacy: 61 percent of the whole. Next came those majoring in art-literature: 40 percent. In science, 25 percent, in law and political science, 19 percent, in medicine, 12 percent, in engineering, 5 percent.

In the teaching profession:

At the elementary level, women teachers form an overwhelming majority as compared with men. Their number gradually diminishes at the upper secondary and university level.

The causes which lie behind women's low status in the educational field are various.
In the first place, we may mention the parents' traditional attitude which leads them to think that women were born for housekeeping, so it would be a loss to let them study beyond the elementary stage. Some think that they do not need any school education. Such attitudes, imposed on girls in early life, help to create in them an inferiority complex and to prevent the development of their talents.

Second, unfair laws and regulations favor the application of the double standard in the family, in social groups, in traditional path. What would she do? Unable to start a new life because she had not been taught to stand on her own feet and make her own decision, she decided to commit suicide.

This story is modeled on western romantic novels which flourished in the 19th century. Love as described by the author is of the romantic type. The heroine is romantic in the sense that she is weak and unable to achieve her independence. The idea that life without romantic love is void and meaningless, has now become obsolete.

Modern Arabic fiction is still in the infat stage. A few other novelists have appeared since Laila Baalbaki, Colette Khuri and others wrote their novels. Yet the number of men and women novelists remains small. In comparing the two, Evelyne Accad says that men writers are sometimes bolder and more ready than women to point out the evils of the double standard, but they both have common defects which may be summarized as follows:

1. Many of these novels, except a few with a conservative tendency, seem to propound Western theories in a way which diminishes their realistic quality. Colette Khuri's novel, A Single Night, serves to glorify romantic love. Laila Baalbaki's novels, particularly one short story entitled A Spaceship to the Moon, overemphasizes, in the manner of Freud, the role of sex in people's lives.

2. Though these stories reflect an awareness of the injustice imposed on woman, they give no solution to her problems except escape or suicide. This may be due to the fact that they have been influenced by similar Western models or that they represent the well-to-do or privileged classes in which women are not used to struggle. The toiling woman of the common people is rarely analyzed. Psychological novels which may compare with those written by Jane Austen and the Bronte Sisters are very few, even nonexistent.

3. In some novels and stories, the style occupies an exaggerated dimension which nearly eclipses the ideas. On the other hand, these stories, by concentrating on emotional and matrimonial problems, neglect other equally important ones, like those which the working woman has to encounter within her family and outside.

Finally, the new fiction we expect from the new generation should manifest more realism and wider horizons.