

**Review of Diploma Thesis Saudi Women's Role in Development of Society written by Mrs.
Sabra Naji Alshahrani**

Diploma thesis of Sabra Naji Alshahrani B A **Saudi Women's Role in Development of Society** concerns religious importance related to change of position of Saudi women and it emphasizes evolutionary perspective. It could be said that it has several structural components: detailed analysis of the role of women in various Islamic religious sources, historical perspective concerning transformation of position of women in the respective cultural area and empirical material obtained (selection of female icons from various professional areas) by means of interviewing Saudi women.

According to available historical sources at the beginning of the formation of the first and second Saudi states education of women was limited to religion, reading and writing. Major transformation occurred only under the condition of the Third Saudi State where women could make decisions about their right to education and learning including university level. Sabra Naji Alshahrani claims that Islam contributed to importance and prestige of women in the social system and it in this context she refers to the Quaran and Sunnah. "*Islam surrounded women with a fence of care and attention, increased her status, bestowed honour upon her, and treated her well, whether she was a daughter, a wife or a sister*" (1.2. In the Sunnah).

The text is structured in six chapters: **The Place of Women in Islam, Women in the History of Saudi Arabia, Social Status of Saudi Women, Women's Activities in the Prosperous Reign, Saudi Women and Women in the Gulf, Examples of Saudi Successful Women.**

In the first chapter - dedicated to interdependence between position of women and religion - the author points to the fact that introduction of Islam replaced so called time of Ignorance where society was unaware of woman's virtue in the Arabian Peninsula. Later on she refers to Sharia, private Surah named AlNisa as well as narratives of concrete scholars such as Tirmithi and Ibn Majah, Bukhary, Abi Jahm Baghdady, etc. Religious sources are analysed through the perspective of rights and duties of women concerning inheritance, dowry, child-rearing, civil performance, their presence in Islamic battles, etc. The author also mentions activities of several female religious icons such Umm Salamah, Zubaida, etc. In the conclusion of the first chapter Sabra Naji Alshahrani summarizes that today Saudi women play very important role in Saudi society and denial of this argument she ascribes to a misinterpretation of Islam.

In the second chapter the author deals with changes of position of women in various historical periods from the beginning of the 18th century till today and stresses decision of

Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab who made decision to reform interpretations of Islam. Later one Sabra Naji Alshahrani stresses importance of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Wahab and so called Wahhabi reform and is critical of those scholars of the Ottoman Empire who discredited it. In the second part of the second chapter the author demonstrates importance of the reign of King Khalid for girl's education by statistics. *"Within the same five years, the enrolment of girls in middle school rose from approximately 38 thousand to upward of 80 thousand students. In secondary school, the number of female students more than doubled, growing from 10206 in 1975 to 28957 in 1980."* Despite that fact under the reign of King Khalid professional training of women in Saudi Arabia was limited to educational field, some of them managed to travel abroad and study in Egypt, Lebanon, United States, etc.

The third chapter deals with recent developments and current situation of Saudi women and it analyzes issues such as change of the size of the family, decreasing functions of the family, shift from collective property to individual one and changes concerning division of labour between spouses. Later on Mrs. Sabra Naji Alshahrani proceeds to analysis of the contribution of the King Faisal (sixtees of the last century) when the state started to recognized girls' right to education that had been available only for boys.

In the fourth chapter Mrs. Sabra Naji Alshahrani provides brief information about the importance of various institutions and organizations such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of the State Budget, Forum Women and the Millenium, Forum for Saudi Broadcasters, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Development Fund for Women, etc.

The fifth chapter Mrs. Sabra Naji Alshahrani introduces information about Saudi women in the Gulf such as their importance in the economic system, their political participation as well as propositions concerning improvement of their situation.

The sixth chapter deals with examples of successful Saudi Women such as Dr. Hayat Sindi, Bayan Mahmoud Ali Zahran, Dr. Salwa Al-Hazza, Dr Nora Rashad, Magda Abu-Ras, Dr. Fatima Mohammed bin Mohsen al-Qarni and Nawal Ahmand Mohammad Bakhsh that have been active in various professional fields.

In the conclusion Sabra Naji Alshahrani positively evaluates experience of Saudi women in the education sector of the Kingdom but at the same time she argues that they should follow principle laid out by Islam and the traditions of Saudi society. According to her opinion it is the only way one can avoid the problems faced by women in other countries who have been given unrestricted freedom.

At the end of the review I would like to stress positive as well as negative aspects of diploma thesis of Sabra Naji Alshahrani. It could be positively evaluated that the author has dealt with various materials as well as methodological approaches and did not limit herself to details. Sabra Naji Alshahrani made efforts to apply interdisciplinary approach and collect empirical material in order to support her argumentation. Nevertheless, it would be also useful to confront religious reflections regarding Islam to different religious systems in the Weberian tradition and make clear links among above mentioned six chapters of the thesis.

I suggest the final grade very good.

Lucie Cviklová 10.6. 2015