The black veil is still by and large in place, but is the woman behind it in the stereotyped position of subjugation and dominance that much of the world associates her with? This article examines the position of Muslim women in the workplace in one of the richest Gulf countries, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Arab Work Force

The Arab work force is unique in the sense that it employs more expatriate workers than nationals. According to a study prepared jointly by the Arab Monetary Fund and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development in 1995, the Arab work force accounts for around 28 per cent of the population, which is a very low ratio compared with international levels. The study says this ratio stands at 49 per cent in industrialized nations, 43.7 per cent in other developing countries and 50 per cent in the world. The study further indicates that the Arab work force in the 22-member Arab League was estimated at around 67.8 million in 1995, out of which 10 million were nationals, all the rest being expatriates.

Women in the Arab world also form a major part of the labour market and under-utilized in higher education and professional employments. A recent study conducted in the Arab world by the Asia Pacific Forum, a body of women in the Arab world, indicates a trend which suggests that women are likely to contribute to the economy of the region on an unprecedented scale, a fact not yet realized by the governments in the Arab world.

Women in the UAE

This is evident from the figures on women in the labour force in the UAE. According to the International Labour Organization’s report on women in the Arab world, the percentage of women in the total labour force rose from 5.3 per cent in 1980 to 12 per cent in 1995, according to a UAE socio-economic development report. The Ministry of Labour of the UAE made a study to understand the reasons for this increase.

A women’s team from UAE’s General Department of Protective Security recently won a gold medal in the US in 1997. The General Department of Protective Security carries out specialist protection services on behalf of the government which includes protecting VIP visits, the protection of high-ranking officials in the UAE and the protection of critical installations.

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Subjugated to What Extent?

Women in the Workplace today in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates

Some Arab countries of today find more and more of their workforce stepping outside the threshold of their homes to find their own place under the sun. The United Arab Emirates, a country which is a federation of seven Emirates,南宁 Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al-Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain, seems to be leading the way in this regard.

In a significant move which springs to attention from my travels even ten years ago, when national UAE women were wary of interacting with strangers in the workplace, and few were even employed in the private sector as well, where their level of education normally determines the position and the numbers are rising each year. Women in the UAE today are found in almost all spheres of economic activity. Banking is perhaps their most preferred vocation, followed by other government services, such as police, customs and other regulatory services.

In the United Arab Emirates, participation of women in the labour force has risen from 5.3 per cent in 1980 to 12 per cent in 1995, according to a UAE socio-economic development report. The Ministry of Labour of the UAE made a study to understand the reasons for this increase.

In the UAE, UAE women today are found in almost all areas of education and health. Interestingly enough, their numbers in the federal civil service are also on the rise, currently accounting for almost 40 per cent of the total employees. Women are also breaking new ground in the police force, with a growing number of policewomen performing various functions from criminal investigations to customs control.

Male Bastions Stormed

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