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**Topic: Women's Empowerment in the GCC States: A Comparative Study of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**

#### **ABSTRACT**

The manifest objective of any academic research work is to make significant contribution to the existing corpus of knowledge. My choice of this particular research topic was mainly inspired by my inclination towards Arab-Islamic World, knowledge of Arabic language, literature & Culture and my academic background of Political Science with specialisation in International Relations and research experience in Gulf Studies for long. The very mention of the term Arab women brings into the mind of a non-Arab, a helpless victim of Arab socio-religious orthodoxy, wrapped up in her *Abaya* and *Yashmak* and confined to the domestic sphere. This happens perhaps because we live in an age of constructed images where populism prevails over thirst for genuine knowledge and simulacrum obscures the objective truth. My work, however, is not a challenge to the stereotypical representation of Arab womanhood. I leave that task open to any considerate scholar. On my part I have neither vilified nor advocated any ideology, individual, state policy or apparatus. My entire enterprise was focussed on an objective search for truth in the midst of a sea of subjective reality. Following the Weberian formula of I have tried my best to pay equal attention to the observed structures and the hidden meanings and motives. If any truth should emerge from my efforts which I have put down in black and white, I leave it entirely to the subjective perception of the reader.

#### **Chapter-1 An Outline of Research and Overview of Women's Status in the Contemporary GCC States**

It has an outline of research which offers the background and an overview of the status of women in GCC states. It contains a review of available resources related to the topic for better understanding and to pinpoint the gaps in existing literature. There is a short introduction of the position of women in each Arab Gulf State including description of constitutional provision for women, family law, state policies, role of civil society, informal women organisations and other local bodies, education, health, social security, economic and political participation. The role of religion, culture, ethnicity and indigenusness are also considered. It has a set of research questions, hypotheses, research methodology, rationale and scope of the study including a brief description of following chapters.

#### **Chapter-2 Question of Gender in the Arab World: Conceptual and Theoretical Reflections**

This chapter primarily deals with certain important theoretical paradigms in the context of Arab women. The framework of West-inspired secular feminism so called universal feminism is compared and contrasted with the Islamic-feminism which actively incorporates religious ideas and doctrines in its ideology and Islamism is also debated. That apart, the role of religious ideas and institutions, social norms, customs and traditions and their relative roles in empowerment and disempowerment vis-à-vis the present status and future aspirations of Arab women are investigated. Some important parts of the chapter are Gender lens on the Studies of the Arab World, Gender Question, Gender and Islamic Theological Texts, New Approaches and popular Movements, Gender and Rentier State, assessment of women empowerment reforms through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. It ends with a critical analysis of Arab Human Development Reports 2005 "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World".

### **Chapter-3 Oil, Globalization and Arab Spring: Whither the Arab women's Emancipation?**

As the title of the chapter reflects it investigates the prominent factors responsible for the changing position of Arab women in recent past. It makes an enquiry into the important contributions of Arab women in recent history before Oil era in the initial part. The latter part deals with the negotiation of gender identities in a pre-dominantly patriarchal society. It is also an attempt to analyze changing role of women with respect to important historic events of the region, namely, discovery of oil, globalization and Arab uprising. It, thus, analyses how important their participation was before the discovery of oil which was curtailed after industrialization, material affluence and development. Last section tries to make an understanding of the legacies – intellectual, social and economic – which Arab women are privy to and which capacitated them to play the role they did in the Arab Spring. It also takes stock of how women are faring in the aftermath of the spring in various Gulf States.

### **Chapter-4 Women Empowerment in the Arab Gulf States: Obstacles and Opportunities**

The empowerment of women in the Arab Gulf States goes beyond redressing historical injustices against them and ensuring equitable treatment. This chapter deals with the crucial factors responsible for the recessive position of Gulf women, Contemporary Scenario and Future Opportunities. Existing accounts contend that state level patriarchy is rooted in traditional family power arrangements. These accounts portray patriarchy in personal status laws, parliaments, ruling families, as well as traditional norms and informal practice across societies. Thus, entrenched patriarchy deeply rooted in Arab social and cultural traditions has been the real impediment to Arab feminist aspirations. Religion by no means interferes with the advancement of women and on the contrary has always played a positive role establishing symmetry in gender relationship in the annals of Arab history. Advancement of Arab women is possible when states work within the tenets of Islam to create economic, political and educational opportunities. The chapter pinpoints the gap between empowerment and emancipation efforts by Gulf women. Further research is carried out to assess the subjective experiences of femininity and masculinity in the KSA and Bahrain.

### **Chapter-5 Report of Field Study Conducted in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**

This chapter is a report of field studies conducted in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. This field research has been accomplished mainly through travelling extensively within the major cities of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The interaction with participants helped familiarize with root cause of problems-regressive position of women in their society and viable measures of women's empowerment in that region. During the field trip the researcher employed qualitative methods like interviews and participant observations and analyzed subsequently and new findings are ascribed with recommendations.

### **Chapter-6 Conclusion**

There have been considerable gains in the past few years in the condition of Arab Women as revealed by various indicators. However, despite these gains, Arab women continue to lag behind, particularly in terms of economic and political empowerment. This chapter has summarized the entire thesis including the research findings and their critical analysis. While pointing out the differences observed between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain related to the position of women, this chapter calls for the adoption of time-bound affirmative action, tailored to the specificities of Arab society in order to expand the participation of women to assess the dynamics of their empowerment, various initiatives taken by Women's collectives, measures and policies formulated by the state administrations to improve the status of women.