WOMEN AND PUBLIC SPHERE IN KUWAIT: A STUDY OF LAILA AL-UTHMAN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Dissertation Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
Award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

AYYOOB THAYYIL KARUVADI

CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI 110067

2010

Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110067

Phone : +91-11-2670 4379
Mobile : +91 98 18 77 83 15
Email : cwas.jnu@gmail.com

Date: 29.07.2010

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled **"Women and Public Sphere in Kuwait: A Study of Laila Al-Uthman's Contributions"** submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

AYYOOB THAYYIL KARUVADI

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

PROF.P.R.KUMARASWAMY
Chairperson, CWAS

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067, INDIA

PROF.A.K.RAMAKRISHNAN
Supervisor

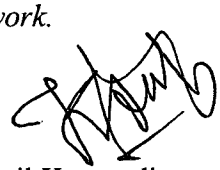
Centre for West Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067

Acknowledgement

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor A.K Ramakrishnan for guiding and supporting me throughout the period of this work. His inspiring words made me work hard and try to think independently. The genuineness of his thoughts is an inspiring lantern to me.

I am thankful to all my teachers including Prof. A.K Pasha, Prof. P.C Jain, Prof. Gulshen Dietl, Dr. Bansidar Pradhan and Dr. A.K Mohapatra in the Centre for West Asian Studies, (S I S) for their academic rigorousness and for their guidance and support during and after the course work. I am extremely happy to acknowledge my indebtedness to the beloved Chairperson Prof. P. R. Kumaraswamy, who is more than a teacher to me, is a source of energy for all around him. His passion for academics has energized the Centre for West Asian Studies. I also thank my teachers in the School of Arabic Language and Literature, (SL), JNU. My thanks are due to the librarians in JNU main library and Jamia and all the staff in the Centre for West Asian Studies. I can not but mention my mentor and guide in life Abdul Hakeem Faizy and the institution Markazu Tharbiyyathul Islamiyya, as a source of energy and inspiration. I am thankful to my friend Suhail who has supported me giving many of the primary sources.

I express my heart felt thanks to my class mates and friends including Zubair, Faisal, Raoof, Ahsan, Salih, Lirar, Sumant, Alviet, Jack, Kapil, Jacob, Biju and many more for their support. I express my gratitude towards my mother, father, brother and wife for their support and inspiration. Last but not least, I thank the Almighty for helping me to complete this work.



Ayyoob Thayyil Karuvadi

Contents

	Acknowledgements	
	Contents	
Chapter I	Introduction	1
Chapter II	Public Sphere: Conceptual Issues	5
Chapter III	Women and Public Sphere in Kuwait	19
Chapter IV	Socio-Political Issues in the Works of Laila al-Uthman	42
Chapter V	Socio-Political Implications of Laila al-Uthman's Engagement in the Kuwaiti Public Sphere	62
Chapter VI	Conclusion	79
	Bibliography	82

Chapter I

Introduction

The stereotypical understanding of the Arab women as being oppressed under the religiously sanctioned patriarchal system has obscured the fact that there are a number of courageous women who are raising their voices and carving out a place for themselves in the public sphere. The dissenting voices from women are yielding positive results and such a phenomena rarely gets due attention in the literature on the region. This is an attempt to study the engagement of women in the socio-political structures of Kuwait through the works of a prominent Kuwaiti literary figure Laila al-Uthman. For the purpose of this study, the concept of public sphere introduced and elaborated by Habermas and later modified by Nancy Fraser, has been employed. The public sphere framework would be more helpful for this study rather than that of civil society as the major questions raised by Laila al-Uthman have much to do with socio-political changes and the question of citizenship. The significance of the engagement of al-Uthman in the Kuwaiti public sphere and her efforts at creating counter discourses triggering debates on women's issues would be explored in this study. Both fictional and non-fictional works of Laila al-Uthman are scrutinized in this work. The overall activism of al-Uthman is also contextualized in order to shed light on the fact that she wants to accomplish her social mission of educating her compatriot women about their condition and exploring solution to the oppressive system which has hindered the full development of women in tune with their aspirations and potential.

This study is undertaken as there is no research done exploring the importance of the works of al-Uthman in the socio-political changes taking place in Kuwait. It seeks to understand the increasing pressure put on social and political authorities from the women's side through the study of the works of al-Uthman using the theoretical framework of public sphere. This study attempts to show that women's writing is one of the powerful components of the public sphere where ideas get expressed and they help bring change through educating and initiating new debates. The dominant public sphere is affected by the counter public sphere of women in Kuwait. The oppositional ideology

presented in the counter public sphere has positively affected the life of woman in Kuwait. This study tries to unravel another picture of women different from the stereotypical portrayal of them as passive and submissive and as being unable to or not willing to question or correct the male-dictated socio-political structures. How the unending struggle unleashed by al-Uthman and others has opened up more space and how the society is compelled to be more accommodative to women's concerns is a significant matter for study and analysis.

This study provides a critical reading of the works on public sphere and the contributions of al-Uthman in the Kuwaiti context. The textual analysis is complemented with critical analysis of studies already made on the works of al-Uthman buy focusing on those aspects which are relevant to the study of social and political issues. In this research, both primary and secondary sources have been made use of. Primary sources include the literary and other works of al-Uthman. Secondary sources like books and articles both in Arabic and English which deals with the subject under study are also utilized.

Employing the theoretical framework of public sphere, the changing dynamics of state/society relations and the shifting space for political action by women could be studied. The writer like al-Uthman and the public sphere that she engages in denotes the general quest for democratic agency in a society which has an unsatisfactory electoral participation, a frustrated citizenship and no viable option to change the overall power structure. The engagement of woman through critical writing, questioning age old practices in the society as well as demanding change in the treatment of the woman, point to the changing circumstances of political mobilization in Kuwait.

This study is an attempt to bring out the significance of the daunting task that al-Uthman has taken up by demanding more space for woman and inclusive policies in the country. Challenging the authority, either political or social, in Kuwaiti society is considered as an assault on religion, due to the nexus that is prevailing among the socio-political and religious establishments. Throughout the works of al-Uthman we can discern a different kind of approach to women's issues than those documented in major works on or by Arab women.

Major questions of inquiry of this study are: What are the specificities of Kuwaiti public sphere? What are the major issues that al-Uthman has dealt with in her writings? Why al-Uthman's engagement in the Kuwaiti public sphere attracted so much controversies surrounding women's role in society? What are the socio-political implications of al-Uthman's writing? The study proceeds with the following hypotheses: (1) Kuwaiti public sphere is undergoing gradual democratization as more and more women are engaged in developing new discourses on women's rights through their writings and activism; (2) Laila al-Uthman works generated intense debate on the nature of the public sphere in Kuwait and helped to trigger new arenas and discourses concerning women's issues.

The dissertation includes six chapters including an introduction and a conclusion. In this introductory chapter, an overall idea about the whole work is given. The second chapter is an exploration of the concept of public sphere. In addition to the discussion of the public sphere as Habermas explained in his seminal *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* a review of the major contentions surrounding the whole concept of public sphere is also undertaken. The study is mainly focusing on applying the versions of public sphere as enunciated by Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib.

The second chapter gives an overall idea about Kuwaiti public sphere, its specific nature and how women have been engaging in it. The issue of exclusion of some groups and the issues in understanding Arab women in the framework provided by the western scholarship on the one hand and how Islam, tribalism and the specific socio-political realities have moulded women's reality in the region on the other are also explored. This chapter also explores Islamic views of politics in general and women's engagement in it in particular. Some of the major women activists have been introduced, situating them in the specific context of their activism against a number of odds. The importance of *divaniyya* and mosque as spheres in the private realm with immense potential for deliberation over public issues is also explained. This chapter also outlines the socio-political background of Kuwait and state-society relations in the country. The issues of gender and citizenship in Kuwait are discussed in some detail as women are still facing problems attaining full citizenship due to gender discrimination.

The third chapter provides an exclusive discussion of al-Uthman's works, both autobiographical and fictional. The chapter would look into the major issues that the author has dealt with in her writings. The themes covered in different writings include gender, family, domestic violence, child marriage, lesbianism, sexuality, women's socio-political experiences, freedom of expression and religion. The author has triggered controversies time and again through her bold and outspoken ways of writing. The banning of many of her works in Kuwait and in some other Arab countries and her confrontation with religious extremists in the country would also be discussed. The encounter with court and trial experience of the author as delineated in her autobiographical *Al Muhakama* would be discussed in detail.

In the fourth chapter, the significance of al-Uthman's engagement in the socio-political milieu of Kuwait would be discussed. This chapter discusses how the author has brought into the public domain women's reality and has presented an oppositional ideology. The counter public that is in creation through women's engagement is the most important aspect of this study. The study outlines the two things that the author is seeking to achieve. The first is stating and describing women's reality in Kuwait and the Arab world and secondly seeking to change this reality by provoking the dominant practices intentionally time and again. This chapter focuses on how al-Uthman provides a critique the existing socio-political realities and interrogates its basis inviting the wrath of the beneficiaries of the current system. The final chapter summarises the major findings of the study.

Chapter II

Public Sphere: Conceptual Issues

Public Sphere is a concept that has its roots in the Western political philosophy and is a useful tool to study the political transition of a society from an exclusive authoritarian to an inclusive democratic one. The basic element of this conception is the fact that when a society is under repressive rule and it affects people's life and economic transactions, they would engage in discourses on issues considered to be part of their public interest. This virtual space that exists between the public authority, represented by state, and the private people is considered to be the public sphere. This sphere has tremendous influence in gradually affecting and converting the nature of public authority to one that is more accommodative of the interests of the people and one that is accountable. It is in this space that common understanding and consensus over the socio-political and economic policies of a society is negotiated. It could also be a tool in the hands of those engage in politics to device strategies to bring together and engage in a society that always would be full of diversity. The corner stone of deliberative democracy is an inclusive and pluralistic public sphere hence the importance of this conception for democratisation (Ayish 2008: 10)

There are different meanings accorded to the term public sphere. In the terminology of common people anything that is floated in the public could be considered as in the realm of public sphere (Calhoun 1992). As Eley observes,

> in contemporary discourse, "public sphere" now signify the general questing for democratic agency in an era of declining electoral participation, compromised sovereignties, and frustrated or disappointed citizenship. The term is called upon wherever people come together for collective exchange and expression of opinion, aiming both for coherent enunciation and the transmission of messages onward to parallel or super-ordinate bodies, whether these are a state, some other institutional locus of authority, or simply a dominant culture (Eley 2002: 224).

But it has a specific meaning in Western political history and Habermas is considered to be the master of this conception. But like any other theory it has its roots in the earlier philosophers like Kant, Hegel and Marx (Calhoun 1992: 2). However, in this study the

earlier philosophical roots of the conception would not be coming up for discussion as it would be beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, the later developments that took place in supporting as well as rejecting, in part or full, the Habermasian concept of public sphere would be addressed as it would help to shed light on its merits and demerits in discussing the democratic transition in different socio-political contexts.

The task is not an easy one as there are a number of arguments and counter arguments on and over this conception of public sphere and many social and political scientists and activists in different fields have tried to read meanings that are not always uniform. Some have even leveled their criticism on ungrounded understandings and claims. However, this is an attempt at understanding the theory and its dimensions and placing the different views that many critics have on them.

Let us start with how Habermas conceptualises public sphere. In his famous dissertation work for professorship in German language in 1961, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* Habermas introduced a number of new ideas that were not welcomed at that time and attracted little academic attention (Habermas 1989). But later as his work got translated into English around the second half of 1980s and he occupied the prestigious position among the second generation of the Frankfurt School, the whole scene changed. It spurred a number of studies all over the world and made people sit back and think about politics and its transformation through a new prism as it provided huge emancipatory potential. The basic concept of public sphere and the later brain-storming about its usefulness gave people hope that they can change the public authority and its orientation. Broadly, the book deals with two important issues with regard to public sphere. The first one is a discussion of the historical background that led to the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas 1989). Secondly there is an analysis of the structural change the public sphere has undergone with the increasing use of public sphere for vested interests of the capitalists through publicity (Habermas 1989). The state sponsored capitalism in the West occupied a major position facilitating the blurring of the public private divide as both state and society started intruding into the affairs of the other.

The most important contribution was the concept of public sphere itself and the theorization that it could be used for the study as well as bringing about democratic

change through communicative action and rational discursive engagement. Public sphere is concerned with the public opinion and how the engagement of people in creating opinion effects change in the political sphere.

The public sphere is, in Habermas' words, "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (Habermas et al 1974).

Habermas defines the public sphere as a forum in which the members of the public could meet one another and debate the affairs of the state rationally (Eger 2001: 7). It is important to make clear that the sphere in public sphere is not an actual one but it is a metaphorical one to describe the virtual space where people can interact and form public opinion. It is a metaphor for describing the coming together of the individuals with different views to share their views and opinions and forming consensually agreed upon institutions to manage their own things (McKee 2005). It is the liberal model of organizing the affairs of the government as it believes in the role of an individual in forming the general will as against the totalitarian views.

Habermas defines "public opinion" as the "tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally-and, in periodic elections, formally as well-practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state" (Habermas 1989). Public opinion is made through the public sphere and this would in turn result in the intrusion of public opinion into the discourse of the ruling class and would lead, in due course of time, to a pro-active governing body that would be legislating in a way that would not jeopardize the public interest of the private people. As Habermas himself attests in *The Structural Transformation* that the public sphere he was presenting was "a stylized picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public sphere and of their transformation in the social-welfare state" (Habermas 1989: xix).

According to Habermas, characteristic features of the public sphere include the unrestricted ability of the people to express their views on issues that are considered to be of common concern. The private people, that is those who have gathered not as state representatives, should not discuss the issues of their personal concern like business for businessman and nor the issues of state (Habermas et al 1964).

The bourgeois public sphere was a part of the private realm that functioned as an arena of rational-critical debate but all the while it was a check on the public power (Habermas 1989). But the degeneration of the critical function of public sphere took place as the bourgeois public sphere instead of expressing the needs of civil society to the state, started to work to achieve the personal and organizational benefits. The structure of the bourgeois public sphere was based, according to Habermas, on a strict separation of the privatized civil society and the state.

Talking about the ideal bourgeois public sphere that had immense democratic potential Habermas delineates four features/preconditions: 1) the first condition was the 'bracketing of social status in debate', 2) rational argument as the mode of interaction, 3) wide ranging social criticism, and 4) a principle of participatory inclusiveness (Habermas 1989: 36–37). The bourgeois public sphere, which began appearing around 1700 in Habermas' interpretation, was to mediate between the "private concerns of individuals in their familial, economic, and social life contrasted to the demands and concerns of social and public life," (Hahn 2000: 263, Kellner 2003).

Though the public sphere germinated in coffee houses, salons and literary clubs, the increase in the number of the literate people led to wider transmitters having expanded reach like newspaper and literary works (Habermas 1989). Thus wide ranging issues came up for rational deliberation and this helped to forge consensus on contentious issues in the society and the state was compelled to take a position accordingly without maligning any party. As Calhoun argues, Habermas made both an inquiry into a historical public sphere that existed at some point of time and a search into a normative ideal (Calhoun 1992: 183). Habermas has discussed the whole issue with regard to a specific public sphere, that is the bourgeois, and its transformation. We are not concerned about the historical public sphere that emerged at some point of time in the development of the capitalist system in different parts of the West. Instead, we are searching for the ideal normative public sphere, and its defining features that the influential thinker is talking about indirectly. Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere

> as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in

> a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor (Habermas 1989: 27).

Habermas examines three types of public spheres, namely the feudal public sphere, the bourgeois public sphere and the capitalist public sphere in different historical moments. However the most significant criticism levelled against Habermas is regarding his argument that the ideal public sphere was that of the bourgeois one and with the increasing number of the private people it has degenerated into a form of publicity stunt and it lost its political importance. However, as Fenton Downey (2003) submit, we have to keep in mind that Habermas was not idealizing any particular public sphere but he was calling the people to find out a way from the manipulated public sphere and make deliberative democracy purged from the alien elements and vested interests of the capitalists. It is important to "separate the ethical impulse lying behind the creation of the public sphere, of inventing a space where citizens may meet and discuss as equals, needs to be separated out from the exclusions that characterized the actual bourgeois male public sphere" (Fenton and Downey 2003: 15). It is important that the rational kernel should be preserved and though the public sphere has degenerated into a weapon in the hands of the capitalists, other alternative public spheres has to be built on the ideal norms put forth by Habermas and his critiques in order to bring a condition for living in a truly democratic society (Fenton and Downey 2003). Public sphere is a useful concept to understand how different societal groups are organised in the period of modernity where cultures are often guided by values of equality, justice and freedom rather than primordial values (McKee 2005). As the normative public sphere theory of Habermas emphasizes the role and function of individuals in bringing democratic ethos and practice, it is a radically different basis for rethinking about politics and democracy especially when there is a conflict and the existing system is not capable to deliver the needs of the people (Loehwing and Motter 2009).

This very intermixing of the ideal normative public sphere with the historical one of German, French and the British have led to confusion and the subsequent the proliferation of the discourse over public sphere. Some criticised Habermas for the idealization of the bourgeoisie public sphere. The critics argued that it was not inclusive and the issues considered in the public discourse were so limited that they do not include

"common interest" and the public private divide also posed a number of challenges. However, we would be addressing the merits and demerits of this normative public sphere and would be analyzing it in the light of the critiques like those made by Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib and others. Though almost all of these social scientists are very critical about the public sphere as projected by Habermas and have highlighted its shortcomings, there is an agreement among them that this conception is a useful one for the study of democratic transition as well as for bringing about change in the existing democracies.

One can discern four models of public sphere. The first is a representative liberal one. This includes those who are arguing for the engagement of the elites only and believe in the "school of democratic elitism" The participation of "the rabble" in democratic politics is restricted through filters and barriers but believe that there should be a public sphere with limited and indirect access to the general public. The second model is participatory liberal theory where the maximum participation of the citizens is desirable in the public decision making that affect their lives (Ferree *et al*: 2002). This version calls for the active participants in the public sphere and visualizes a system of politics that is the approximation of the general will. The third is discursive theory. Joshua Cohen defines it saying, "The notion of a deliberative democracy is rooted in the intuitive ideal of a democratic association in which justification of the terms and conditions of association proceeds through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens." The central point is the popular inclusion and the process of deliberation. However, the dividing line between participatory liberal model and discursive one is very thin. Habermas and other thinkers in the critical school of thought were the prominent proponents of this theory.

The last one is the constructionist theory. This is important for our discussion as the situation in Kuwait could be explained using this framework. The theorists in this school share a critical approach, interrogating the validity of the existing arrangements and unveil the hidden inequalities inherent in them. They maintain a pessimistic view regarding the possibility of separating oppressive power from speech. They see discourse as the practices of power. As Michel Foucault says using the neutral categories of knowledge and expertise outside formal political institutions, those in power control

others as well as to construct the self as a political actor. The ongoing relation of discourse to power is the starting point for the core normative criteria of this tradition. This theory of public sphere and public discourse is important and useful as active theorists in this tradition like Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib started their premises from a feminist perspective and developed their theories to highlight the marginality of women in politics and critique the existing unequal systems (Ferree *et al*: 2002). This last framework would be useful for our study as both women and large scale exclusion from the decision making process is practiced.

They question the very definition of politics as a sphere apart from and opposed to private life. This boundary drawn between politics and other daily practices of the life obscure the power relations involved across these domains. They call for seeing the private and public not as separate spheres but interconnected and hence the need to address the practices of daily life in the public decision. They see the most repressive practices are taking place in the private sphere of life. The existing power relations exclude those who are best able to name and challenge the suppressive system. These theorists are of the view that power relations operate throughout the "private" life of an individual and it could only be addressed if personal issues and those considered to be in the private realm so far are subjected to public discourse. Rejecting the representative liberal model of public sphere the constructionist approach wanted popular inclusion putting stress on the voices of marginalized in society as they can give the inclusive vision of outsiders within the system. Giving individual's point of view particular value the constructionists are valuing the social differences in experience and identities. To address and comprehend the reality of differences in experience there should be not a uniform system of ideas and meaning but a diverse one.

Major Contentions against Habermasian Notions of Public Sphere

The intense debates that took place just after the translation of *The Structural Transformation* into English led to the proliferation of unprecedented literature on the conception of public sphere and it in turn led to the correction as well as addition into his earlier positions (Fenton and Downey 2003). Those critical argumentations range from

those targeting his idealization of the bourgeois public sphere to its exclusive nature, the problematic of the public private divide, the shortcomings of the rational argument itself and the systematic marginalization of the women, children and socially backward groups and their cultural specificities (Kellner 2003). Thus *The Structural Transformation* belongs to those rare books which were systematically discussed, intensely debated and refuted, and it triggered so many studies in both theoretical as well as historical analysis leading to better understanding of its various dimensions and the resultant inclusive democratic ethos.

There are some theorists who are excusing Habermas saying in his *Habilitationschrift* the focus was "on the bourgeois public sphere and his intention was to show the rise and fall of the public sphere, the rise of a critical public and its decay" (Fenton and Downey 2003: 17). Habermas is justified further by stating his argument that

> increasing complexity and rationalisation of societies over the course of the twentieth century together with the growth of the mass media have transformed the public sphere: the public sphere becomes the court before which public prestige can be displayed rather than in which critical debate is carried on (Fenton and Downey 2003: 17).

However, there are critics who have levelled many criticisms against the master of communicative action theory.

Let us take up some of the major criticisms. Generally speaking, contemporary public sphere debates are revolving around two major areas of exclusion: both historical and conceptual (Asen 2002). Many critics are looking into the direct and indirect exclusions. The former is in the form of preventing particular individuals and groups from participating in public discussions and deliberations. Women under the patriarchal system are an example of this kind of exclusion. Indirect exclusion means that by imposing some discursive norms and practices for interaction in the public sphere some are excluded. This would result in the exclusion of those who are not educated or hails from a different background or having an entirely different mode of expression from those dominant in the public sphere forums. This most of the time ends up in excluding once again those previously directly excluded individuals and groups (Asen 2002). The condition that the debate should be "objective" and "dispassionate" is excluding some other ways of expression that would be more subjective or with full of emotional

engagement. This, in addition to excluding some groups of people, would also lead to the exclusion of some issues that may not be objective. The experience of women in the household may be an example. However, there are currently theories proposing more inclusive models of the public sphere that is conceptualized taking into consideration the shortcomings of the bourgeois public sphere.

Many critics, as stated earlier, accused Habermas for his idealization of the bourgeois public sphere. This is, as the critics argue, by giving a picture of a rational discussion and debate which was inclusive and that bracketed the socio-economic statuses. This is despite the fact that a number of groups were systemically and systematically excluded from engaging in the deliberations (Calhoun 1992). Habermas himself agreed that there were a number of shortcomings and conceded that he was presenting a "stylized picture of the liberal elements of the bourgeois public sphere" and as he did not mention that it is normative ideal to be resuscitated and brought back to life. However, as Kellner (2003) says, this very idealization has led to the positive reception and a good deal of the critique. This has in turn led social scientists to think about more inclusive, egalitarian public spheres and the whole idea of the counter publics is also an indirect fallout of this idealization. It was seen in this way a decisive impetus for discourse on the prerequisites of democratization both at the public sphere level and the societal level.

Another bone of contention in the conception of the Habermas' public sphere was the question of rational discussion and consensus in the bourgeois public sphere. Some critics are of the view that democratic politics was not a result of public opinion formed in the public sphere by rational debate and consensus as Habermas theorizes. Instead, it was a result of both discussion and debate and the interests and power of the influential groups in the society. The claim that at some point of time such an ideal bourgeois public sphere took shape with the characteristic features of rationality, inclusiveness, democracy and egalitarianism is also contested saying that it was dominated by the white, property-owning males and the there was no diversity, tolerance, debate and consensus assumed to be the features of public sphere (Kellner 2003). These critics say that the indirect idealization as well as the universalisation of the bourgeois public sphere would be detrimental for the creation of a good society which realizes agreed upon democratic and egalitarian values. Negt and Kluge criticised Habermas for neglecting the parallel public spheres to the

bourgeois one, including those of the working class, plebeian, and women's public spheres developed alongside of the bourgeois public sphere to represent voices and interests excluded in this forum (Negt and Kluge 1972).

Here, it is important to focus on two major issues raised by Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib with regard to public sphere as they are related to the study of the excluded groups in society, especially women. Fraser has repudiated a number of characteristics of the bourgeois public sphere as a model for the normative ideal one. The first and the most important one was the question of inclusion and exclusion. However, it is important to note that Fraser is neither repudiating the idea of public sphere nor the historical background that led to the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere. Instead, her first contention is that "the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, as described by Habermas, is not adequate for the critique of the limits of actually existing democracy in late capitalist societies" (Fraser 1990: 136) However, the feminist writer questions the bourgeois conception as a normative ideal and undermines it by discussing the characteristic features that Habermas propose for an ideal public sphere. The bracketing of the social inequality is not sufficient for a conducive rational deliberation by the individuals but they should be altogether abolished in order to get equal weight to the argument of each participant (Canaday 2003: 62-65). Fraser proposes multiple publics in case the social and economic capitals are not equally distributed to facilitate the debate among the equals as well as unequals. Another contention is regarding the public private division of issues to be debated in the public sphere. Fraser calls for including many issues in the public debate that were excluded by the bourgeois masculinist ideology.

> At one level, my argument undermines the bourgeois conception as a normative ideal. I have shown, first, that an adequate conception of the public sphere requires not merely the bracketing, but rather the elimination, of social inequality. Second, I have shown that a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere both in stratified societies and egalitarian societies. Third, I have shown that a tenable conception of the public sphere would countenance not the exclusion, but the inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels "private" and treats as inadmissible. Finally, I have shown that a defensible conception would allow both for strong publics and for weak publics and that it would theorize the relations among them. In sum, I have argued against four constitutive assumptions of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere; at the same time, I have

identified some corresponding elements of a new, post-bourgeois conception (Fraser 1990: 77).

This feminist theorist gives us a different normative public sphere that is, on the one hand, built on the overall idea of public sphere for democratic participation and inclusion of the whole society and on the other hand questions four of its constitutive assumptions as proposed by Habermas (which are (a) the 'bracketing of social status in debate', (b) rational argument as the mode of interaction, (c) wide ranging social criticism, and (d) a principle of participatory inclusiveness) (Fraser 1990 and Canday 2003).

Repudiating the private and public distinction in public sphere and that excludes a number of issues pertaining to women and their sufferings, Seyla Benhabib says,

> The institutional distinction between the public and the private, between the public sphere of justice, the civic sphere of friendship, and the private sphere of intimacy, has also resulted in the incompatibility of an ethical vision of principles and an ethical vision of care and solidarity (Benhabib 1985; Ingram and Simon-Ingram 1992: 395).

Benhabib has questions a number of conceptual bases of the public sphere and its dynamics in the current form for bringing democratic social system. The feminist theorist argues "any theory of the public, public sphere and publicity presupposes a distinction between the public and the private" (Calhoun 1992: 93). This discourse on the distinction between the private and public conceals the language of male domination and its legitimisation. She further argues that there are a number of oppressive practices in the name of family which is still predominantly patriarchal and hence the need to address them in the public sphere rather than relegating them as private issues because the public sphere is basically meant for the democratisation of all social norms. This is possible when the familial norms and the norms governing the gender issues in all its dimensions are put in to public discourse.

Thus Benhabib is interrogating a number of givens in modernist philosophy and imagine a society that is not kept in watertight compartments of some or the other claims. This would be a useful starting point along with the one proposed by Fraser in order to look into the issues of women as well as the excluded societies and people. Habermas is also accused by some of maintaining an ambiguous stand towards women in the public sphere (Eger 2001: 7). However, these critics have not rejected the concept as a useful tool for the

study of the society. The contention is regarding the ideal form of it.

The proposal made by Fenton and Downey would also be useful for our analysis as they are making a case for the promotion of the counter publics in a detailed way. It would be posed as a challenge to the symbolically dominant public sphere. They are contenting that the inability of the traditional nation-state political parties is triggering new social movements which in turn create counter publics in order to check the political power of the elite. They have expressed their hope that "new social movements are the best hope we have to extend democracy at both local and global levels." But all the while there are apprehensive of the possibility that it could not be efficient in the face of the unequal resources that the Nongovernmental Organisations and transnational corporations possess (Fenton and Downey 2003: 21). In the face of overarching globalization and the accompanying neo-liberalism, there is a wide spread apathy and feeling of helplessness among the people. This is worsened as the trust in social democracy in the dominant public sphere is diminishing. Against this backdrop, Fenton and Downey wanted to revitalize the public sphere through counter publics and call to forge solidarity between disparate identities.

As Kellner argues

> despite the limitations of his analysis, Habermas is right that in the era of the democratic revolutions a public sphere emerged in which for the first time in history ordinary citizens could participate in political discussion and debate, organize, and struggle against unjust authority, while militating for social change, and that this sphere was institutionalized, however imperfectly, in later developments of Western societies (Kellner 2003 and Hahn 2000: 268).

The structural transformation of the public sphere theme also indicates to the paramount importance of the media in politics to sustain democratic ethos in a given society in their everyday life. It is also important as it talks about the hegemonic role the corporates are playing to colonize the public sphere and reduce the people to the consumers of corporate knowledge production (Kellner 2003 and Hahn 2000: 268-69).

Though critical about Habermas, Calhoun believes in the possibilities of public sphere. Fenton and Downey say "Calhoun argued against Habermas Adornian-inspired pessimistic position of the early 1960s, maintaining that the consequences of mass media

were not uniformly negative and that there is a certain amount of room for manoeuvre for alternative democratic media strategies" (Fenton, Downey 2003). The possibilities of civil society influencing the mass media and establishing discursively connected counter public spheres were in the mind of Calhoun.

Though we can argue the embeddedness of the public sphere in the changes that took place consequent to the large scale societal transformations between the late middle Ages and the eighteenth century, certainly the concept has long emancipated itself from this more specific meaning and background.

> Habermas himself now deploys the concept in relation to citizenship and "democratic legitimation" more generally, using it to express the "equal opportunity to take part in an encompassing process of focused political communication" and the need to fashion a resilient "communicational infrastructure" toward that end (Eley 2002: 224).

Any discussion of the Kuwaiti public sphere would require a brief idea of the historical background of the state. Though the state of Kuwait emerged only in the early 1960s, the region has its own historical importance and is mentioned in a number of historical accounts as *Al Kalima*. The people inhabiting the region have a specific socio-religious background and this has to be factored in the study of its public sphere. There are some defining features of the society where religion plays a very important role. The Kuwaiti society has, despite the economic advancement it achieved, many tribal attributes in its social fabric and they play an important role in determining the role of the individuals and groups in society.

The employment of the notion of the public sphere in the Arab World dictates going beyond the traditional way of looking at the public sphere to include the analysis of the cultural, moral and political foundations that give unique characteristics to the evolving Arab public sphere. The difficult task is in reconciliation of the Arab moral traditions and the contemporary Western socio-political philosophy (Ayish 2008: 218).

Al-Uthman has tried to employ all the three methods of subversion through her writings and activism. The three means of subversions, (Guidry and Sawyer 2003: 227) first by using the legal political options, that includes her engagements in the various organizations meant for the women empowerment this is by making the state and the

dominant players in it accountable and observing the rules of the game. Second one is through fiery rhetoric and demonstration challenging the authority of those who are not willing to make change. The third method is by developing behaviors and attitudes that demonstrate to the public as well as the government that alternatives are possible (Guidry and Sawyer 2003: 227). Al-Uthman herself has made it clear time and again that until and unless women are coming out demanding for their due rights, there won't be any change in the society.

Chapter III

Women and Public Sphere in Kuwait

The study of Kuwaiti public sphere and woman's role in it necessitates a review of the historical developments that helped to crystalise the current realities in the country. The emergence of the nation-state and its importance in terms of defining and forming the identities of people is to be kept in mind in addition to the colonial background of the country and the dependency syndrome that the tiny country has developed over a period of time (Pasha 1995). The concept of nation-state was so attractive and intrusive that there is no place on earth inhabitable by human being that is not part of nation-state (Migdal 2001: 262). Before the nation-states, people were living together and cooperating in their day to day life and terms and conditions of most of these day today transactions were not defined by the state or any sovereign superior authority in most of the world and especially in the West Asia. However, the sweeping change that the emergence of the nation-state has brought was so pervasive and all inclusive that our day to day life is inextricably tied to and determined by the state machinery willingly or unwillingly (Migdal et al 1994: 68).

To understand the nuances of the current public sphere that has been emerging in Kuwait, it is necessary to have a look at the past and how the relations between the ruled and ruler were defined. The region has a long standing recorded history thanks to Islam and its scholars. When we are dealing with any socio-political issues related to West Asian countries, the dominant religion of the region, Islam, has also to be factored in. This is because of the pervasive presence that it has over a period of 14 centuries in all matters of life and as well as because of the attention it has received in the academic world. Even the history before the emergence of Islam is recorded and preserved by the Muslim scholars and it is mostly in the form of poems, the most powerful medium as well as weapon of the Arabs for centuries (Mukarram 2005: 54). It is important to have an idea of the pre-Islamic history as well to a proper understanding of the evolution of the socio-political and cultural systems in the region. Islam is always accused by the critics for many of the deficiencies in today's West Asian countries, including, the absences of

democracy, rule of law, freedom of expression and human rights (Offenhauer 2005). Detailed discussion of this issue would be coming later.

For centuries, it was the tribal affiliations that ruled the relations between the people in the Arabian Peninsula for a number of socio-political, geographical and economic reasons. Earlier, the people in the region were divided into two broad groups, *Hadar* (those living in cities) and *Badav* (those wandering in the desert or gypsies) (Hourani 2002: 9). It was the extreme inhospitable weather of the desert that determined their pattern of life. The *Hadar* were living in cities and in places where there is water and the land is cultivable while the *Badavs* (Bedouins) were not able to settle anywhere and they moved from one place to another in search of their livelihood and the best place for their livestock. The issue of Bedouins in Kuwait and other Gulf countries has to be seen against this backdrop. But both these peoples were having a strong sense of attraction towards poetry and rhetoric. It is recorded that the birth of a poet would be celebrated with huge hue and cry and, in the occasional fights between the warring tribes for a number of reasons ranging from the dispute over water to that of humiliating the member of a tribe in the name of their tribe, the poets played an important mediatory role. There are a number of poems called *Sabul Muallaqath* still preserved that shows the orientation of the people towards rhetoric (Barakat 1993: 53). However, the pre-Islamic strong tribal affiliation called *asabiyya* was questioned by Islam and it called all the people to abjure violence in the name of the honouring the tribe and called for a universal brotherhood based upon Islam and the belief in Allah, the Almighty God. This call by Prophet Muhammad was stiffly opposed by the tribal entities and it took a long period to convince the tribes to bring change in their mindset. However, soon after the demise of Prophet Muhammad, there were a number of problems and many tribes were trying to go back to their pre-Islamic tribal way of life. Thanks to the insightful interference of Aboobacker and other *Kulafa al Rashideen* this trend was averted (Sonn 2004: 24). However, there was simmering dissatisfaction among many of the tribes and they tried to go back to their olden days taking advantage of Islam and building their power structure on the claim of upholding the Islamic values, predecessors to the current *Khadimul Haramini Al Shareefine,* the custodian of the two holy Mosques, the Kings of Saudi Arabia.

The important point is that despite the call to abjure violence and befriend all and consider the human beings as the creation of God from one father and mother Adam and Hawa, the strong tribal affiliation prevailed. One of the strong components of the tribal affiliation was the rhetorical poetry that would extol the tribe the poet belongs to or the one the poets' tribe is in peace and would be denigrating by all possible means the enemy camp. This is important for the study of the public sphere as it prevailed for a long time and it was a defining feature of the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula. Many of these elements are still there in the Arab cultural milieu.

Another important issue in this regard is the stereotypes about the people in general and women in particular. The understanding in academic circles of the Arabs and Muslims and especially women in the region is formed by the Western intellectuals, many of them were writing to justify the colonization of the East. As Edward Said argues the intention as well as the orientation of the Western scholars in the study of the East was not always purely academic and objective (Sabbagh 1996: xxi). Lila Abu-Lughod in tune with Said's argument says,

> The fundamental structural inequality between the worlds of Western scholars and their Third World subjects affects in complex and indirect ways the disciplines within which such individuals work. Questions like who is writing about whom, whose terms define the discourse, and even .....who translates whose concepts and whose language bends to the other, need to be explored (Abu-Lughod: 1989).

The colonial past is still hanging heavily on some of the Arab countries including Kuwait and most of the governments are indebted, in one way or the other, to their past colonial masters or their protectors and saviors later. It is a fact that West Asia came under the Western colonialism, the same was justified in the name of inability of those colonized to take care of themselves and their countries. It was also believed that these people were unable to protect their own women and the backwardness and anti-modernity of Arab and Islamic cultures was a gendered concept which posited that Arabs and Muslims were both unable to govern their own countries and unwilling to protect 'their' women. Deniz Kandiyoti contends that the insights of feminist scholarship have been used in a partial and selective manner and hence the need for reexamining the existing studiers on woman factoring in the peculiar socio-political and economic scenario of the region (Kandiyoti 1996: 20-26). There is a lack in the literature on the women's

TH-18865

Jawaharlal Nehru University Library

movement in Kuwait and insufficient attention was paid to it. Questions like women's interests in West Asia in general and Kuwait in particular and the background that led the women mobilise including the democratization, nationalist, religious, and socialist movements are very important. The state and organizational autonomy also beg the attention as this would give us insight to the dynamics of women activism. Most of the time, the major socio-political questions are being addressed on account of more mundane and realistic causes (Ray and Korteweg 1999).

As we are dealing with women and their participation in the formation of public sphere, it is imperative to understand the most influential and defining characteristic of the country. There are three important factors to be accounted for: Islam, the tribal affiliation and the patriarchal nature of the society. The transition of the country from a poor economy depended on the sea trade and pearling industry to that of a high GDP one as a result of the oil discovery have much to contribute to the evolving political culture of the country (Scarce 1985). There are a number of historical factors to be taken into consideration when we are looking into the specific realities governing the society as a whole and the life of women in particular (Ismael 1982). The extraction of the oil has led to institutional aspects of structural dependence. The present dependent economy of Kuwait and the social life based on it has led to a different kind of relations between the ruled and the ruler (Findlay 1994: 97). One major resource with all the economic activity integrally tied to that resource has enabled the state to build an allocate state transforming the population into silent clients and consumers (Ismael 1982).

Before looking into the specific question of women in the Kuwaiti public sphere, it would be in place to look into women's activism in the larger Arab world. Study of Muslim women's participation in the public sphere is important as the possibilities and scope for formal political participation as decision-makers and high office-holders are limited. The increasing literature on the role of women in the social movements is partly due to this low prospect in formal politics. It is said that the women in the Arab Islamic world have reached in the third phase of their activism. The phases are identified as the mobilization of women in their nation's modern projects of decolonization, subsequent nation-state building and economic development (Offenhauer 2005). Women came

together and protested for national liberation and when the country was free, engaged with the state and its policies to push for greater gender equality. In the second phase of women's activism in the Arab world women in various Muslim countries formed groups to advocate and work for women's advancement. These groups varied from secular leftists to the Islamic or those associated with the Islamist movements. The third phase of women's struggle is characterized by a rapprochement between opposite groups of activists for women's rights namely the secular and the religious (Offenhauer 2005: 96).

Islam and Women's Public Participation

There is a tendency to see the Islamic world in a unitary form. But any comparative study of the Islamic world would tell us that there are a number of differences among the scholars as well as the common people in looking at various issues (Manger 1999: 84). There is no uniform opinion on any major issues of concern among the Muslims. The different *Madahibs* (Schools of Thought) and the Sunni-Shia divide is giving ample space for arguing for or against anything controversial. The participation of women in politics, for example, is a polemical issue among the Muslim scholars of the Sunni brand. When it comes to Shiites also there are various views among them from country to country and from time to time. To see the whole Muslim world in a unidimensional way in itself is problematic and any conclusion made through any study of a particular Islamic or Muslim country may not be necessarily applicable to any other country (Bodman et al 1998: 56).

The question of Islam and its role in the political formation of West Asia in general and women's role in it in particular is important and this has to be discussed when we are talking about the public sphere and the overall political formation of predominantly Islamic country. The importance of religion for the people of Kuwait and the larger West Asia is a well known fact. However, it is erroneous to attribute everything that is happening in the region to religion and to strip the people of the region off their agency in revolting against the oppressive system on the one hand and the ability to live with their realities with full cognizance on the other (Esposito and Voll 1996). There are some social scientists who see women's empowerment as one of the three most important

issues in the Arab world in addition to education and freedom (Browers 2006: 191). Nawal al-Saadawi has argued that the lack of realization from the Arab male intellectuals about the need to bring intellectual women to the public attention remains a problem (Amireh 2000).

As noted by Paidar no theories whether it is Marxian or the usual modernization approach could be applied unaltered for the study of the non-Western societies and their politics including the Arab Islamic world (Paidar 1997: 8). The methodology of the study of the societies that are trying to come into terms with their realities of life after being exposed to major watershed events like that of colonial rule and the one that has evolved on its own constraints of social change with predominantly domestic ones has to be different. It is impossible to identify or explain any of the social movements in these countries without having been influenced by the colonial penetration (Edwards 2006: x). The social structures of West Asian and Islamic societies were disrupted by colonization and the subsequent forced integration into the growing world market unsettled the existing system. This has to be taken into account when and where we are studying these societies. The yardstick used to fathom the development in the various sectors has to be tailored accordingly (Edwards 2006).

When it comes to the question of politics and Islam, we can say that there are generalities in the Qur'an and the Sunna regarding political organization of the state. But it is a historical fact that for a long period of time the religious text was used to justify the *status quo* and, for any extreme position, there was justification by the religious scholars. As Bassam Tibi argues "in the course of history different Islamic governments derived their own rationalization from the legitimizing writings of some Islamic scholars who based their work on these generalities" (Tibi 1986: 15).

One can argue for and against the incompatibility of Islam to the modern concepts like socialism, democracy and human rights. This phenomenon could be seen in the framework provided by Talal Asad that the Islamic tradition is a discursive one; it has evolved and developed over a period of time and is potent and open to further interpretations (Asad 2003). The fact that Maududi, one of the ardent advocates of incompatibility between Islam and the Western value system including democracy came into terms with democratic setup and interpreted the same texts in a way that would

abolish his theory of incompatibility is a proof of the flexible nature of the sacred text (Ahmad 2009: 219). Islam is both a faith and a cultural commitment, but the question that whether it provides a framework of political ideology could not be answered in simple yes or no (Tibi: 1986). Some sociologists employ the notion of "politicization of the sacred" to depict this claim. Ideology is a very modern notion that Muslim thinkers have adopted from Western culture. Citing the writings of the intellectuals in the golden period of Islam Bassam Tibi says, "most Islamic writings on government "were mostly descriptive of the status quo which they sought to justify. They did not, except on the philosophical speculative level lay down a prior normative model based on principle." Then, he comes to the conclusion that Islam provides a larger framework where a number of governmental forms are textually justifiable and there is no one particular set of constitutional rules (Tibi 1986).

The importance of Islam as a long standing religion that has a definitive role in shaping the attitude of the people and their way of life to a great extent has to be factored in when we are looking at Kuwait, as Islam was and still is what defines their culture predominantly. It is clear that the question of politics and related issues came to the Islamic discourse comparatively in recent past. It was in a sense a response to the Western way of doing things. The crushing impact of the Western colonization on the age old ways of Arabs is a well known fact. The earlier Islamic works are auspicious with the absence of discussing political questions compared to the modern times. As Tibi cites, most of the political terms were adopted from the Europeans and the Islamic thinkers Arabized them. Thus terms like *al-Socialiyya* for socialism, *al-Nationaliyya* for nationalism, were used before Arabic words such as *al-Ishtirakiyya* or *al-Qaumiyya* were developed. "Even today there is still no original Arabic word for democracy to replace *al-Demoqratiyya*" (Tibi: 1986). Many Arab intellectuals also propose in the context of the increased politicization of the religion that Islam should be understood as a cultural system rather than a set of beliefs for the better understanding of the politicization of the religion (Tibi 2001: 54). However, this does not mean that there was no discussion of the politics at all, instead there were political discussions, but those terminologies and the way of looking at politics and state have changed.

The effects of the colonial penetration since the 19th century are comprehensive and the indigenous system got damaged beyond repair. Acculturation involves the beginning and evolving of an exogenously induced change in the cultural and political realms. This is where we have to locate the public sphere and the whole debate about women's participation in it. This makes it more complex to explain. To expect the same features of the adopted systems in the colonized world is erroneous but elements of the penetrating culture can seen imitated, adapted, and incorporated into the local structure but with extensive and far-reaching changes.

This is not to deny the fact that there are a number of problems inherent in the Arab Muslim world, that seen through the prism of today's social sciences, is very much oppressive and need correction. Due to a number of internal and external factors, the states in the West Asian region could manage the people in an oppressive manner and restricted political participation and in turn development of civil society organizations was highly problematic and unachievable. This is not to deny the important role that the citizens are playing to pressurize the government to open up more space for the people to build an inclusive political structure. However, the states managed to control the movements either through co-opting the opposition or making some cosmetic changes now and then. In most cases the state frustrated any attempt to develop participatory institutions or culture.

Socio-Political Background of Kuwait

The current monarchical system came into being as the Kuwaitis who settled in this significant area in terms of trade and activities related to sea more than two centuries ago chose the founder of the present ruling family Sabah the First, as their ruler. It was based on an agreement that the king would handle the daily affairs of the society and ensure the smooth transactions and in turn the people pledged financial support. This dependence on the ruled and the condition that the King should consult the heads of the tribes created complete interdependence and it could rightly be called as "joint governing"(Zahlan 1998). However, the modem state-building of Kuwait was initiated by Emir Mubarak as he enlarged and consolidated the power of the ruling family by

reducing the importance of thee merchant clans that had dominated Kuwaiti politics and society (Tetreault 2001). Mubarak ensured that the right to rule the country remains in his direct descendants after his death.

This right to rule was guaranteed by the British, as the King even before the discovery of oil in 1938, signed an agreement giving the British government the right to handle Kuwaiti foreign policy and in return the British offered protection from people's revolt and outside intrusion (Anscombe 1997). In wake of the growing autocratic and dictatorial non-participatory government, an indigenous movement in 1938-39 to create a parliament and calling for a written constitution to write a constitution took place. The most important demand was to bring a more conducive atmosphere between the ruled and the ruler "setting out the parameters of state-society relations challenged the authority of Emir Ahmad al-Jabir" (Tetreault 2001). The first ever movement for political participation was ruthlessly suppressed within less than a year and its adherents either were put behind the bars or had fled the country and the role of the ruling family strengthened its position in all fields (Tetreault 2001). However, the dependence on the elite merchant clan was indispensable as the state was dependent on the revenue generated from trade and this remained as a handicap for the al-Sabah family. Internal dynamics were forming the political structure of the country though external factors in the later period got prominence over the former. Initially, the internal dynamics worked as a political infrastructure, directing and checking the political process. This internal constrains, despite the autocratic nature of the rulers, resulted in the creation of the first Shura Council and an elected Legislative Council in 1921 and 1938 respectively (Alnajjar 2000).

The discovery of oil in the twentieth century was a watershed in the socio-economic and political life of the Kuwaitis. The country got unprecedented wealth and attention and became an important player in the international market later. However, the new possibilities opened up by the oil discovery and the huge foreign currency and socio-economic transformation that accompanied and the resultant improved lives were not equally distributed among the people (Tétreault 2000 and Crystal 1995). It varied according to the gender lines and while middle and upper-class women were comparatively advantaged lower class women suffered significant losses (Badran 1988).

Compared to men, the upper and middle class women did not enjoy the full range of benefits that men of their class were getting. Despite these changes in political, economic, and social sectors, the al-Sabah ruling family tried to strike a balance between two extreme ends: "that Kuwait can be simultaneously a 'developed' country and a 'traditional' tribally organized social formation run by an autocratic ruler" (Tetreault 2001). This procrastination is very well reflected in the treatment as well as the state policies regarding women, by both the Kuwaiti male citizens and the state mechanism. However, this could not be considered all together a negative one as women are considered in some other respects important players in the state as well as the society.

The oil revenues and the dependence of the global oil market for industrial advancement brought this tiny nation as an important player in the global political map. The socio-economic structure of the country was reformulated with the oil revenues as it gave a free hand to the ruler independent of the merchant elites to design the political system according to his wishes. This in turn changed the political balance of power beginning in the early 1950s as the King became the sole manager and owner of the new wealth (Alnajjar 2000). With this change in the economy of the state, all equations got unsettled and the earlier joint government suffered. The state allocation of the revenues and the welfare policies of the state pushed the country into a political impasse as the people lost their voice. The ruler's leverage increased remarkably and the elite merchant class in addition to the dependence on state allocation lost their former activities as a result of the massive development of other sectors fueled by the increasing preeminence of the oil industry. There were attempts either willingly or unwillingly from the part of the ruling family to bring political change in the later periods too. However, initiatives for holding elections during the 1950s, which came from the ruler the now insignificant merchant families, and the emerging political elites of younger generations, did not succeed. These developments took place when the country was under the protectorate of the British (Ismael 1985). The larger Arab world was witnessing unprecedented changes in the socio-political and economic fields in the region. This has to be seen against the internal factors including the vibrant press, and openness of Kuwaiti society and the major revamps in the political fields elsewhere in the Arab world.

The internal as well as the external factors led to the independence of Kuwait on 19 June 1961 and the aspirations of the people skyrocketed as they were seeing an independent Kuwait more open to change. The state formation was under major challenges including Iraq's claim of sovereignty over Kuwait (Alnajjar 2000). The newly born constitutional monarchy was making its initial steps towards political change and Amir 'Abdallah al-Salim al-Sabah supported the demand for a Constituent Assembly and it was elected in early 1962 and the first parliamentary election took place in the very next year (Scarce 1985). Though there were a number of impasses in the parliament and as there were disputes and disagreement between the elected members on one hand and representatives of the ruling family on the other over the power sharing, many times the parliament was dissolved by the ruling family (Alnajjar 2000).

Given the nature of the state and the internal dynamics of the society as embodied in the press and the parliament though in a very limited manner, one can reach to the conclusion that political culture in Kuwait has matured over a period of time. The types of institutional political activity now prevalent in Kuwait is far from being a stagnant one, has a great deal of dynamism. The shift towards a full-fledged democratic system may be problematic but we can glean from the various political activities in Kuwait that the ruling family is very well aware of the unstoppable power of the society and the benefits of widening participation. The al-Sabah ruling family could be seen as the most progressive in terms of making from the above reforms in the political filed. The establishment of constitutional democratic monarchy in Kuwait itself indicates the willingness as well as the awareness of the ruling family about further political participation (Ehteshami 2003). Because of these factors, Kuwait has moved notwithstanding some hiccups here and there since independence to become a monarchic liberal democracy with few exceptions. Having an elected National Assembly which has been there ever since independence, criticizing the policies of the government, asking for furthering the political participation, and a written constitution and a relatively free press etc. have been the features of Kuwaiti politics (al-Monoufi 1988). This is not to argue that all is well with the political system of Kuwait, as there are issues related to minorities like Shias and Bedouins who are yet to be integrated into the political system though there are attempts for their integration they are too slow and too late (al-Monoufi 1988).

The discussion of Kuwait's social setting has to take into consideration many internal as well as external factors. When we are looking at the Kuwaiti society as an Arab and a predominantly Islamic one, there is need to note a long standing history of tribal affiliation based on the patriarchal system. The societal change that took place as a result of the interaction with both the regional as well as global settings is also important (Ghabra 1997).

State-Society Relations in Kuwait

The most important and often invoked motif in the Arab political system is that of an extended family. The Kuwaiti ruling family has made it clear that the whole Kuwait is a family and hence all kinds of grievances should be solved amicably in a peaceful manner. This is one way of containing any kind of opposition to the government and it has succeeded to a great extent in doing so. This claim has to be seen against the huge welfare policy of the government and this has helped to make the majority of the people content with the way of living as all the major areas including, health, education, marriage and day to day livelihood is ensured by the state. However, beneath this calmness there is a dormant clash of interests as the people are more and more aware of the fact that the ruling family has kept the entire state and all its properties as their personal belonging and there is no question of accountability. Aa al-Mughni has opined, "state interests in the survival of government, regime and the integrity of control over territory and population often conflict with the interests of citizens in the survival of individuals, families and the moral and material bases for life" (Al-Mughni 1995). As Kamrava points out, in the larger West Asian context, there are three methods generally utilized by the state mechanism to engage with the question of demand for political reform. The most important one in the case of Kuwait as well as most of the West Asian countries is nationalism. In the name of nationalism and anti-Western sentiments most of the genuine opposition to the state policy is suppressed (Kamrava 2005: 346). There is no mechanism to handle properly the state-society relations as the political structure is yet in the making and the people have no other alternatives other than that of civil society and the public sphere. Another pretext that the state uses to face the people's demand is

patrimonialism (Kamrava 2005: 346). The systemic bonds of client-patron relations have been deteriorating over a period of time due to a number of reasons including the media and information technology causing awareness of the people about their rights and duties and the whole question of politics. The third mechanism that the authoritarian West Asian states including Kuwait have been using as a bargaining chip is the corporatist arrangement (Kamrava 2005: 346). This has also lost relevance as the mobilization skill of the activists has far exceeded the state capacity to contain them properly. However, under these overarching patterns of state bargaining with the society, there are two major methods of containment, namely, cooption and coercion (Bowker 2010: 72). However, these methods of containing and stalling the political reform are becoming, by and large, a failure (Bensahel and Byman 2004: 54). Citizenship is a controversial and contested idea in countries like Kuwait where state-formation is incomplete. In Kuwait, for example, the social contract is patriarchal and hence the whole state business is conducted in such a manner. It is the family rather than individuals which is defined as the basic unit of society. As Abu-Hamad observes, citizenship in Kuwait is based on a restrictive male oriented blood relation. The citizenship is passed to the offspring through the male member of the family and not through the mother (Abu-Hamad 1994: 66). Laila al-Uthman along with a number of other activists has waged a war against this law and they have also demanded for conferring the citizenship to the Bedouins. This has resulted in the amendment for the Nationality Act, but still the Bedouins are suffering.

Gender

Gender is an important issue floated in the Kuwaiti public sphere and in our discussion it deserves attention. Gender is considered as a major analytical tool in the definition of differences between men and women. It is embedded in all the societies both past and present (Moghadam 2003). The major question addressed by the scholars who study gender is the dominant, normative definitions of assigned male and female roles in every society. By studying the gendered implications of religious and legal definitions, previously ignored multiple symbolic meanings could be interrogated. It is an attempt to interpret the cultural categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, devoid of

divine and eternal definitions (Ghanim 2009). The question of gender has been addressed in the Kuwaiti public sphere and there were many positive changes in the perception of the people. The study of gender has resulted in producing a huge body of literature dealing with the questions of sexuality, masculine and feminine honour, the role of man and woman and their self-representation. The study of Kuwait reveals the unequal, gendered hierarchies of power and the heroic attempts of the women to negotiate these structures in inventive ways. Women are coming out of their *Harem* and occupying responsible positions unsettling the longstanding categories of division of labour and societal roles among man and woman (Sakr 2004: 120-130).

The Kuwaiti newspapers have covered a number of issues and exposed, though in an ambivalent manner, the embedded inequality among men and women and other issues related to gender and helped in bringing awareness among the people, both men and women, that was handy to reinvent new roles for women (Sakr 2004). Laila al-Uthman and a number of bold activists have demonstrated their opposition to the patriarchal social system that has kept women in a disadvantaged position for long. The role of women through history was given a second look helping to unveil the male articulations of the role of women. As a predominantly Muslim country, the roles of Prophet's wives are of vital important and the roles of Kadeeja and Aisha have been dissected to yield new insights in the construction of gender in politics, society and especially sexuality (Mernissi 1992; Stowasser 1996 and Abou al-Fadl 2001). The question of veil and harem came in for heated debates and the understanding that both are not part of Islam; they came as a result of the interpretations of the male chauvinists (Ahmed 1992). Virginity is also a highly controversial issue when it comes to the West Asian countries.

> Virginity is a strict moral rule which applies to girls alone. Yet one would think that the first criterion of a moral rule, if it is indeed to be moral, should be that it applies to all without exception, and does not yield to any form of discrimination whether on the basis of sex, colour or class (al-Saadawi 2007: 41)

Nawal al-Saadawi says describing the practice in the Arab world. However, the longstanding mentality of the people in this regard would require much more vigorous and focused campaign to bring the necessary changes in the social attitudes. A number of Kuwaiti women have already started interrogating this practice of singling out women for any moral trespassing (al-Mughni 2001). The question of veil is being raised in Kuwait in

a critical manner. Al-Uthman took a bold step in this regard stating that she would be compelled to leave Kuwait in case the veil is imposed on women. The fight for gender equality and equal status in terms of legal issues is yielding its results in Kuwait as it is evident from the fact that most of the political rights that were given only to the male members of the society is now being given to women as well.

Citizenship

It is estimated that more than two-thirds of those of the people inhabiting in Kuwait are not able to cast their votes as they do not hold Kuwaiti citizenship. Through a motion in the parliament in 2005, women's suffrage was adopted but still they are not considered full-fledged citizens equal to their male counterparts. The question of citizenship is also very important in discussing the public sphere and Kuwaiti women's involvement as women as well as Bedouins are suffering discrimination and they have through a number of interventions negotiated and achieved citizenship if not fully. Women's activism has attracted the attention of the public as well as the state authority to the question of citizenship for Bedouins (Abu-Hamad 1995: 81-91). The question of citizenship is complicated in the case of Kuwait as it presupposes the equal rights of all citizen vis-à-vis the state and the patriarchal structure as well as the Islamic tradition is seen inhibiting the realization of this very fundamental aspect of citizenship (Haddad and Esposito 1998).

The limited right to citizenship is discriminative especially in the case of women as the children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis are not entitled to the citizenship as against the conferring of citizenship on the children of a male member married to a non-Kuwaiti women (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Report 2007). The issue of marrying Bedouins is also problematic as the Bedouins are not considered citizens of the country despite the fact they were residing in the place for years and they don't have any other place to go (Rubin 2002: 113). Here, the most important issue is that many women activists including al-Uthman and women members of the parliament have triggered discussions and debates about citizenship and they have called for the scrapping of the unfounded and discriminative citizenship law of the

country and for bringing an egalitarian one that would consider all members of the society irrespective of their gender equal before the law.

Public Sphere in Kuwait

There are a number of normative questions to answer when one discussing the public sphere and women's role in it. The qualities of the public sphere to nurture and sustain a vigorous democratic public life were discussed by political theorists for a long time. Questions of participants, occasions, form and content of their contributions to public discourse were subjected to heated debates. The desirable and required outcomes of the public discourses are also important. The close link between the public sphere and democratic transition has made the discussion of the former all the more important. Democratic theory insists on accountability, inclusiveness and responsiveness in the decision-making process and the public sphere is seen as the arena where these qualities could be inserted to the government (Ferree et al 2002).

The Kuwaiti public sphere is constructed around a system of gendered meanings in all segments of the life whether it is the intellectual discourse of politics in the public, or in the personal sphere of family life. The Kuwaiti society is still maintaining its religious nature and some of its tribal past is still alive in the society. The patriarchal nature of the society has always seen women as not deserving to participate in the public/political issues and they are supposed to keep themselves to the private/household sector. The religious fabric and the predominant role that the clerics have in the society wanted to maintain the male-dominated social system and any kind of disruption to the same is strongly opposed and silenced. Against this backdrop, the challenge that al-Uthman poses becomes important and it has its socio-political implications. In the West Asian/ Kuwaiti context where one's agency as a citizen is disappointing, public sphere as proposed by Fraser becomes an excellent starting point for thinking about what politics is, about where it takes place, and about how it can function as a space available to ordinary people and not just to official or professional politicians. In the Kuwaiti context, the public/private divide is so complex. The household, for example, considered to be the part of private sphere is different in these areas. The *divaniyya,* part of household, cannot

but be dealt with as part of public sphere. In the *divaniyy,* relatives and neighbours of the house meet to discuss various issues ranging from family to politics. Another important factor is the religion and the religious establishments that play a crucial role in the framing of the political culture. The secular nature of the public sphere as explained by Habermas is not applicable in the Kuwaiti/West Asian context as heated political discussions of both modernists and conservatives are taking place in mosques, often under conservative religious *ulema* or the secular educated modernists. With the modification of the concept of public sphere made by Fraser, we can discuss the Kuwaiti public sphere and its impact on the political process and through the articulation of "interests" and the presentation of demands on the government.

Many of the taken-for-granted meanings would be put into question and it in turn brings forth new understandings and recognition. The politics of recognition help to build a healthy public sphere by de-centering dominant speakers and their assumptions of what is what. Branding some issues as private limits the range of problems and approaches to solve them and hence the deliberative blurring of the boundaries between private and public becomes important. The question of agency is very important as the questions pertaining to women could not get the same stress and power when it is addressed by men. In order to bring such a change some constructionists challenge the single public sphere, and they want to stress on multiple independent public spheres.

As Rabinovitch argues in a different context, there has to be some kind of compassion and care incorporated in order to make the marginalized integrated in the society. He has been contending the approaches of both Fraser's "multiple publics" and Alexander's "fragmented public sphere" by saying that the "successful processes of incorporation and integration are achieved through symbolic connection made between and across publics in order to establish a unifying bond of solidarity and political sympathy"(Rabinovitch 2001). Thus he calls for, in addition to the sacred attributes of the discourse of civil society, a discourse of compassion or affection to achieve a systemic integration into the public sphere. This kind of approach is argued to be more helpful for integration as well as the study of women's engagement in public spheres as family values mothering, sisterhood etc. are held in high esteem in societies like that of Kuwait,

therein presenting a different way of looking at democratic actors, institutions, and social relationships (Rabinovitch 2001).

The women activists' reference to the early Islamic period as well as the equal treatment of the women and men by Prophet Muhammed is a result of the realization that in order to win full recognition and integration in any given society, they must feel that they share social attributes that is sacred by both. These attributes are culturally determined and hence subject to renewed interpretation, contestation and representation.

The cultural dynamics of Kuwait, or for that matter other Muslim countries in the region, shows that the discourse of affection is being used to bring into the public attention some issues that were previously considered to be the part of "private" domain into issues of common concern. The politics of motherhood at the time of war is a best example how the compassion is invoked to achieve some otherwise unachievable socio-political gains. The status of Kuwaiti women is difficult to judge in the traditional pattern of catogerisation as either being traditional or modern. There are a number of women who are in the mainstream of Kuwaiti life and participate extensively in activities outside their homes (Tétreault 1993). We have to keep in mind that the activist Kuwaiti women are of diverse orientation ranging from political and social feminists to that of hard core Islamists. They are, compared to other GCC countries, well integrated to the socio-political life. The intricacies of the reality of Kuwaiti women are apparent in the attitudes of religious Kuwaiti women. The political rights for women are sometimes interrogated by some of them under the strong religious conviction. Many Kuwaiti women are of the view that they are protected and feel secure in their traditional role and any attempt to empower themselves in socio-political spheres would lead them to a double burden and this is why they show indifference and even antagonistic attitude toward the idea of women's rights. Under the patriarchal social system a woman's husband and family give her protection and meet her minimum standards, and if the normal social practice is not against their will and are not inclined to politics, then there is little to seek from the public arena.

Despite these overarching trends there are some courageous women challenging the inherently discriminative and male chauvinist social practices under the influence of Western writers and their exposure to the external world. There are a number of women

coming to the public domain to contribute to community development projects. The Women's Cultural and Social Society has worked for the well being and improvement of the life situation through extending aid to women, children, and families.

We can trace two substantially protected social spaces in Kuwait from state interference. Both tradition and law considered the mosque as the domain of civil association and therefore as a space where state should not interfere. The second space is home, the domain of a private institution. In most of the Muslim countries, the mosque is part a public space available for mass political mobilization. This space is used by the ruling family on a regular basis to confer religious legitimacy on their rule. The Friday sermon could not avoid mentioning the government and praying for its protection. The same space is used for political dissent as well. The sacredness of the space has insulated it from state intervention and any violation of the same would lead to the resentment of the people. The sacredness of the mosque gives to it an added advantage over secular associations. This is the legitimacy that the religious leaders and groups independent of the state enjoy when they are challenging the system from the mosque. However, this space is not available for women as the mosque is seen as the domain of men. The authority of those spaces to challenge the state is morally unassailable and hence it has huge potential for bringing social change.

These spaces are not used or restricted to the religious people only. Secular democrats have also used these spaces and used the religious authority to buttress their positions. As we have discussed earlier, to draw boundaries between the public and private in Kuwait according to the usual conception is difficult as we have seen in the case of mosque. The home, the embodiment of private space, is never considered to be part of the civil society or public space like other Kuwaiti institutions. Here the public and private divide is blurred and there are overlapping shades. On the one hand, the home is constitutionally protected against state intrusion under Articles 38 and 44. This constitutional protection of home has made it an attractive space for political organizers, especially when public meetings are restrained or banned. The Kuwaiti home thus has become a sphere where public issues of private persons are made possible in a big way substituting for civil society. The *diwaniyya*, which criss-cross the public-private divide is thus a unique institution.

What Peshkova observes in the study of the Muslim women in an Uzbek village could be applied to the women in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Arab world.

> The sacred places created in domestic spaces carried promises of personal and social changes and thus provided devout and bornagain Muslim women with safe arenas for religious observance. These sacred places were also safe public places enabling socio-political discussions, a first step for launching into the unsafe public spaces outside individual homes. The domestic space became a safe place for information exchange precisely because it was defined as a homosocial religious occasion, and not a political one (Peshkova 2009: 268-69).

Women in Kuwaiti Public Sphere

Kuwait is seen by some as going back from "the most freewheeling and Westernized society" on the Arab side of the Gulf as there is a rise of fundamentalist forces in the country jeopardizing the smooth transition of the society (Ramazani 1985). But, a keen observer can see that despite the cross currents of modernism and traditionalism creating tension and frustration due to its diametrically opposite nature, there is indeed an opening up of the society and it has become more and more sensitive to women's issues and is fast moving to an inclusive political structure. The rising strength of Islamists and traditionalist would lead to many fundamental questions on women and their roles being raised. This in turn would compell the society to be more accommodative and this would necessarily result in assigning traditional roles for women (Ramazani 1985).

There are a number of well known women activists in Kuwait including Dr. Lubna al-Kazi, a member of the Women's Cultural and Social Society and a founding Member of the Vital Voices Global Advisory Council, has fought unceasingly for the last three decades for women's right to vote and run for elected office in Kuwait. Still she is actively engaged in politics by educating the new generation about the necessity of being active politically.

Fatima Hussien al-Essa al-Qanaie, another activist in Kuwait was the first to work in Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one among the few who got educated abroad. She has called for the first time for equal rights of men and women in professions

like the media and diplomacy and is the chief editor of *Samra*, a leading magazine handling women's issues in Kuwait. Thanks to her presence in the media, a number of women's issues were brought into the public attention and was redressed. Dr. Rola Dashti is a unique activist and a Member of Parliament who demanded for democratic reform not only in Kuwait but in the whole region. Apart from her demand for political reforms this leading activist has been waging a war against gender discrimination and she has been arguing for gender equity and for furthering women's role in public life. The first woman Chairperson of Kuwait Economic Society, Dashti has also attracted attention as she was chosen as one of the fifty most powerful Arabs. She has run and won in the first national election of Kuwait in 2007, when women were given the right to vote and run for elected office. Another important figure Noureya al-Saddani has played a major role in realizing the political rights of women as she submitted the demand for rights to the Kuwaiti parliament in 1971. Lulwa al-Mulla was the leader in submitting the petition to the government for registering for vote and has occupied the prestigious Secretary General of the Women's Cultural and Social Society post. This first women's non-governmental organization in Kuwait was established in 1963. She is also well known outside the country as well as an activist in conflict ridden regions like Kosovo and Iraq. Lulwa Abdelwahab Eassa Al-Qettami is another important name to be mentioned as she is the Founder and Chair of the Women's Social and Cultural Society and was the first Dean of a women's college. She is considered to be the mother of women's activism in Kuwait due to her leadership role in the agitation of 1963 for freeing women from wearing the *abaya.*

There is a sense that, compared to other countries in the region, Kuwaiti women have achieved what others have not. Though many significant political and legislative rights were won recently, women activists are of the view that they are denied some basic civil rights and the fight would continue until they are achieved (al-Shammari 2010). Assessing the present scenario in the country Elham al-Qattan after commenting the tremendous achievement that women have secured in the political field such as voting and running for the legislative offices and their enthusiastic participation in the elections, in addition to the right to occupy high level positions in both governmental and private sectors, observed that, "the Kuwaiti woman believes that there is discrimination against

her in two fields: the first is related to actual practices, and the other is related to the laws that favour men over women".

The women activists are still bargaining for furthering their status and achieving full social rights. Many of them are trying to bring the necessary changes in the social fabric for women to be "treated on an equal footing with men, to provide the Kuwaiti family with social stability" (al-Shammari 2010). A cursory look at the media in Kuwait will give us the impression that still most of the evils the women activists were up in arms against are still there. Their activism has led to the wrath of the religious extremists but the struggle continues unabated. The activism of women and their presence in the public sphere is not only important in achieving its immediate results, but the power of presence and the challenges thrown by the very presence of women in many fields are much more significant.

Women in Kuwait, apart from demanding equality and political participation, are devising a number of strategies to make these changes happen. They have most often campaigned for various issues in their capacity as women. This importance of women as mothers comes from the social system of the West Asian and Muslim world as family is seen as the bricks to build a composite harmonious society. What Zaatari observes in the context of Lebanese women is also applicable to the women in Kuwait and elsewhere in the region in more or less similar manner (Zaatari 2006).

> Motherhood discourse allows a woman to be politically and culturally active within her community and to create changes in her environment. The subjectivity of women in South Lebanon and perhaps in Lebanon in general is shaped by the culture of motherhood. They are able to be citizens and to be agentive in civil society through the discourse and praxis of the culture of motherhood. At the same time, however, this avenue is not the only one for women's political participation (Zaatari 2006).

The women in this regions have their own pace and way of working. Golley observes,

> As in developing countries, the pace and extent of change in the Arab world grew with the intervention of Western imperialism. National consciousness was a reaction to Western colonialism, which started early in the 18th century. Since then, national liberation movements have changed not only the political map of the Arab world but the socioeconomic structure of the whole region. This change has also included the situation of Arab women (Golley 2004).

The feminists and other women activists are engaged in debates regarding the modalities and the possible strategies to achieve gender parity with men. They are very well aware of the fact that all modern states possess patriarchal tendencies though in different degrees. But when it comes to the Islamic world patriarchy is the norm both in family and society and even in the state apparatus. It is argued that patriarchy is entrenched in religious authoritarian polity and in many authoritarian states, where conservative Islamic laws are in place, women are considered to be second-class citizens in various domains of public life (Bayat 2007). In Kuwait how to achieve gender equality is a central question for women's rights activists. In the Western world, movements are seen as the platform to fight against gender inequalities. But in most of the Muslim countries where the normal political activism is restricted or non-existent, the question of strong women's movements to fight for equal rights is insignificant. As movements consisting of strong leadership, collective activities of a large number of women, effective networks of solidarities, and communication and publicity which engage marches, banners, organizations, lobbying, and the like is very difficult to bring in. Here, there is need to chart different modes of expression and organizations. As Bayat says,

> While it may be that many women under Muslim (and non-Muslim) authoritarian states do wish and indeed strive for building similar social movements, their struggles are often thwarted by the repressive measures of authoritarian/patriarchal states as well as the unsympathetic attitudes of many ordinary men (Bayat 2007).

The question of engaging in the public sphere through writings and triggering discussions related to gender, politics, citizenship and socio-political changes gain much importance for women who are facing structural constraints to deploy their struggle in public.

Chapter IV

Socio-Political Issues in the Works of Laila al-Uthman

When reading Kuwaiti writer Laila al-Uthman one realizes immediately that she is a talented writer who has the ability to tell the stories in a marvelous way. Through her writings and activism, she has become a controversial figure in Kuwait. Her bold positions on women, religion, freedom of expression, etc. are well known. As a result, the reactionary forces and those who are benefiting from the *status quo* has tried to silence her through different means and some of her books were banned and confiscated and she was prosecuted for her writings including *Al Muhakama* (The Trial 2004), *Fillyli Thatee al Uyoon* (In the Nights Comes the Eyes 1984) and *Al Raheel* (The Departure 2000a). This has led to a wide range of discussions and debates in the Kuwaiti public sphere. This aspect would be dealt with in detail in the coming chapter.

Before going into the details of al-Uthman's writings and the major issues she has dealt with, it would be in place to give some background of the author. Al-Uthman was born in October 17, 1943 to a family with keen interest in literature and her father, Abdullah al-Uthman, was a well known figure in Kuwait as he was a poet himself. Laila al-Uthman started her literary attempts early when she was in school and started publishing in local newspapers since 1965. The major issues of her concern in the formative period were mainly moral and social ones. She became a regular contributor to local dailies and journals. She has ever since expanded her area of writing to touch some of the sensitive issues in the country as well as in the region. Most of her works got translated into many foreign languages including English, French, German and Italian. One of her famous works, *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahr* (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea 1995) was chosen as one of the hundred best Arabic novels of the last century. She has appeared regularly in the media and has presented a number of programs related to women and their issues in radio, television and the print media. Al-Uthman has assumed the post of the Secretary of the *Rabithathul Udaba Al Kuwaitiyyeen* (Association of Kuwaiti Writers) for two terms of four years. She is still engaged in literary as well as social activities and writes short stories, novels and engages in cultural

activities within and outside Kuwait. She retains membership in a number of national and regional bodies including the Association Kuwaiti Writers; the Arab Writers Union; the General Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists; the Kuwaiti Journalists Association; Amnesty International, Kuwait Branch; the Organization for Human Rights, Kuwait Branch; the Committee of the National Council for Culture; Arts and Letters; the Kuwaiti Women Cultural Association; the Arab Cultural Foundation, Beirut and the Society (Fez Sais), Morocco. In addition to this, al-Uthman has participated in a number of conferences and seminars both inside the country and outside in literary, social and technical fields. The author has participated in a number of forums in the Arab world, especially those concerned with women's issues. She has been awarded a number of honours from within and outside Kuwait.

She has written extensively in different genres including autobiography, novel, short story, poetry, war literature, travelogue and articles and research papers in newspaper and journals. Most important works of the author, in terms of triggering controversy and discourse in the public sphere include autobiographical works *Al Muhakama* (The Trial 2004) and *Daouni Atakallmu Bila Quyood* (Let Me Speak Freely 1999); novels *Sumthul Farashath* (Silence of the Butterflies 2007) and *Al Asas* (Al Asas 2002); short stories *Al Raheel* (The Departure 1979), *Fillayli Tathee Al Uyoon* (In the Nights Come the Eyes 1980) and *Lailathul Qahr* (The Night of Oppression 2005). Most of her writings are in the form of short stories and there is an autobiographical touch in all the writings. Apart from these controversial works there are the following short story collections *Imrathun Fi Ina* (A Woman in a Pot 1976), *Al Hubbu Lahu Suwar* (Love Has Many Forms 1982), *Fatheehathun Takhtaru Maythaha* (Fatheeha Chooses Her Death 1987), *Halathu Hubbin Majnoon* (Mad Love 1989), *55 Hikaya Qaseera* (55 Short Stories 1992), *Al Hawajiz Alsawda* (The Black Barriers1994), *Zahrathun Thadqulul Hayy* (Zahra Enters the Village 1996) *Yahduzu Kulla Laila* (It Happens Every Night 1998) *Hulmun Gayr Kabilun Lil Kasr* (Unbeatable Dream 2003) and *Qisas Qaseera JIddan* (The Short Stories 2007). Other novels of her include *Al Marathu Wal Kitha* (The Woman and the Cat 1985), *Wasamiyyathun Takruju Minal Bahr* (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea 1986) and *Kudha La Ureeduha* (Take It I Don't Want It 2009). She has written *Yamiyyathul Al Sabri Wal Murr* (The Days of Patience and Bitterness 2003) in

the war literature which falls in the category of war literature and *Ayyam Fil Yemen* (Days In Yemen 2004) in travelogue.

However, for this study, it is important to make some clarifications at the outset as there is a belief that literature could not be seen as a reliable source for inferring socio-political realities. In the case of al-Uthman, as the author herself has attested in a number of occasions, even her purely literary works are imbued with social significance and is aimed at social change. In an interview with Ahmed Majdi the author states very clearly that most of her writings are directly linked to the realities that she has experienced herself and hence its importance for social change (Majdi 2009).[1]

Al-Uthman is a unique writer and activist in the Arab world. She, through a number of books and active participation in the emancipatory movements in the socio-political and cultural milieu of Kuwait as well as the larger Arab world, has helped to trigger a number of discussions and public debates across the Arab world. The author, ever since she took up pen and came into activism and started fighting the inequalities and social evils, have confronted a number of problems including a jail sentence and threat to life. However, as an activist propelled by grand visions for her society, she was not willing to quit and instead, stood up to the challenges and fought them. There is a widespread apprehension in the academic world that change in the Arab world is very hard to achieve. But, sacrificing much for change in the society and helping women to achieve her deserving status therein and rooting out the inequality inherent in the society, she proves that change is possible. The relatively liberal atmosphere that has come about though in a limited manner in the country in terms of approving the demand for women's suffrage and is a proof of this change in the making. The comment made by the Arab novelist Hana Mina in the introduction that he has written to *Fillayli Thathi Al Uyoon* (In the Night Come the Eyes 1984) makes it clear,

> Laila does not reconcile with the reality, do not see it as fate, do not worship it as an idol, do not weigh heavily under its attack, do not run away from the reality but go ahead and faces, rejects, resists, fights against it, aspiring for better future and reality that is beautiful and radiant (al-Uthman 1984: 9).

---

1 (http://www.arabicstory.net/forum/index.php?showtopic=2618)

Al-Uthman has confronted many difficulties in her private as well as public life due to her activism and because of her great ideals for the Arab society. The fights that she waged are against the rotten and dead habits, traditions and cruel practices and against the hypocrites in the society. The incessant fight has resulted in the wrath of the clergy and conservative sections of the society to the extent that children of the author asked her to quit writing and come to submission. The bold outspoken nature of the author has led to court conviction and she was sentenced to a three months jail term to be replaced by a fine later (al-Uthman 2004). The author was also compelled to abandon her husband, Palestinian writer Walid Abu Bakr, following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent liberation after the US intervention (al-Uthman 2004). The unbridled energy of the author, instead of keeping quite and submissive, made her bolder and she became more emphatic and aggressive. Her steadfastness and the will to challenge and confront the unpalatable realities made her a champion of the oppressed. She has imposed her own presence on the establishment and refused to fade away.

The issues and themes covered by various stories and novels by al-Uthman highlight the dominance of the social dimension in her writings. She has delineated the old Kuwaiti society with a nostalgic feeling and captured its transition following the oil revenue. The writings show the social revolution following the explosion of oil and the subsequent shift from a traditional tribal nomadic society, and a community of maritime trade to an industrial capitalist one (al-Uthman 1995). The change in the economic dependence that happened in the life of most Kuwaitis following the invention of oil is an important issue. The sea has a prominent presence in many of her stories and she has succeeded in bringing out its significance in the life of the old Kuwaitis as their place of work and the source of life and joy, comfort, inspiration and love. *Wasamiyyathun Takruju Minal Bahr* (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea 1995) is basically a novel that describe the life of Abdullah and Wasamiyya and the predicaments they come across in the way of their love (al-Uthman 1995). The tragic theme of the whole novel embodied in the loss of life of Wasamiyya, a girl in her early twenties, as she sought shelter in the sea when she was caught by the people in her village roaming with Abdullah, the son of wretched lady Maryoom, who earns her livelihood by helping out the people in cleaning

their clothes and doing kitchen work. Abdullah and Wasamiyya came close as the former's mother used to go to the latter's house as part of her work (al-Uthman 1995). Though the relation developed as both of them entered their youth and they were not able to live without seeing the other. However, the conservative society was allergic to these kinds of male-female relations and the women are not supposed to go out from the house at all without a male companion from her family. The author is dead against the obsolete practices of the society which is not at all sensitive and cause tremendous sufferings to the people. The author wanted to redeem not only the female member of the society, but also the male members who are also under the unbearable yokes of these patriarchal practices.

The author has brought to the notice of the modern reader the economic dependency of the Kuwaiti people on the sea before the oil era, a fact forgotten in today's economic extravaganza. There are a number of social issues in the writings of al-Uthman and she focused more on women and their issues as well as those deprived in the society like the Bedouins and the expatriates. The social inequality in the Kuwaiti society where the poor suffer and are vulnerable to the exploitation of the rich is depicted in different ways. The pathetic life that Abdullah's mother was leading in the novel *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahr* (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea 1995) is an example. The story of the little girl in *Fil Layli Ttathil Oyoon* (In the Night Come the Eyes 1984) in the short story collection with the same title is also another picture of the society where the poor is bearing the brunt of destitution and superstition of the society. The girl who follows the protagonist of the story to her house while returning from *madrasa* in the night just because she was too hungry and needed some food desperately is seen as *jinn* who inhabits in another world and takes away the human beings to their world.

In *Fillayli Tathee al Uyoon* (1984), the author addresses a number of issues in Kuwait including the poverty that the people were facing in the past (al-Uthman 1984: 28). The author wanted not just to present some beautiful stories but to touch the conscience of the authority and bring their attention to those issues and solve them if possible. Bringing out the hidden cruel face of the society covered in veil, the author asks for being open and courageous to face the realities and not to run away from it. To solve the problems of the society, it is better to face it head long, rather than keeping them

stinking from inside and becoming more and more complicated. What Hana Mina says in the introduction to this story collection is fully applicable to the author:

> The writers throughout the history are the destroyers of temples and constructors of the temples, they expose what is hidden and go to it, they are like the *hudhud* (a bird famous in Quran) guiding the travelers and listening to the minute sound in the earth and inform the place where water is available even in the desert where it is fully dry (al-Uthman 1984: 6).

They are like the prophets destined to suffer and they are always lonely though they are in the middle of their spouses and children (al-Uthman 1984: 6). In the short story called *Al Awram* (The Swellings 1984: 76) in this collection the heroin is unable to express her love, but it is not only love, the whole range of feelings are under siege. The heroin goes to a male doctor, but he is unable to diagnosis the exact problem because he is a man. As the doctor expels the lady from the clinic and she decides to take revenge by writing about it but the *waram* (swelling which stands for impediment here) moves to her fingers making her incapable of writing. The feeling of the woman is conveyed to the reader and the reader feels to protest and rescue his own sister, wife, mother and neighbour from the unending suffering (al-Uthman 1984: 70-78). The author is indicating to the fact that the sick oppressive social practices made by men would not be solved by men because they are unable to understand its gravity and dimensions. It is only women who can deliver herself a livable society by challenging the inhumane practices that is prevalent in the contemporary society.

The story *Al Namlul Ashkar* (The Green Ant 1984) in the same collection is also open to many interpretations. The main character of the story does not realize the challenge that these ants are posing. The ant here stands for the colonial intrusion. The author has realized the fact that as long as the real face of the ants are shown to the society they would not fight it and the moment they realize its danger they will not leave any stone unturned in expelling the ants. It could also be interpreted as the evils prevalent in the society and the only way to fight it is by instilling the danger it poses to the society in the minds of the people (al-Uthman 1984: 31). This collection deserves special attention as it was cited by the religious fundamentalists as an example of how her writings are causing social unrest. Though the salafists want to make the life of those,

who are exposing the realities prevailing in the society in order to cure them and build a more egalitarian and transparent system, hellish, but the author has not succumbed to their pressure. Instead, the author has gathered courage to expose these games and shown the hypocritical face of those who are maintaining that all is well with us. In the process, there has come about awareness especially among the women that there should be change in the society in order to make life more comfortable and that alternatives are possible. The most important contribution of the author is in terms of creating an imaginary world where the social evils are rooted out. These short stories have, in a sense, triggered critical questions regarding chastity, modesty and a lot of other traditionally observed norms regarding woman. When there is any question of morality, it is always stressed upon women rather than looking at men and women on equal footing.

The short story collection *Lailathul Qahr* (The Night of Oppression 2005) is another important work worth-mentioning. The story with the same name in the collection shows the sufferings of married women in the way of keeping their husbands happy. The poor lady working as a cleaner in an air port once comes across a bottle of perfume which has fallen from a rich woman. The poor lady was always looking for means to keep her husband happy and when she got the perfume she was extremely happy and goes back home in a fit of ecstasy, but as ill luck would have it, the husband instead of hugging and keeping the lady closer asked to get out of the room and take bath as he finds out that she is the source of the unusual stinking in the room. The question of double burden for the poor woman in the society is exposed here as the working lady seldom gets the time to keep herself neat and clean. The husband despite being a source of suffering for the woman due to his bad habits is never asked to take bath and no body dares to do so. Another story *Malikul Batt* (The King Swan) is an important piece of work that shows on the one hand the oppressive nature of the kings and the manliness attached to rule (al-Uthman 2005: 75). The first person narrator of the story says,

> You are so innocent Zaynab (Zaynab is a small girl in the story with whom the narrator is walking on the shore of a river), you don't know the cruelty of the kings yet. All the men in their own view are kings. Some of them are so fragile but still at home he would be the cruelest of the kings and he will sit on his throne. He will ask his wife to clean the fouls in his feet (al-Uthman 2005: 76).

It is about the domestic violence that irrespective of their status most men practice on their wives at home. Domestic violence and the cruel behaviour of men, where women are at the receiving end, have not come for the public discussion in most of the countries of the region. Here comes the unidentified and often neglected importance of literary works in making the public sphere more receptive to domestic issues and the need to include these issues in public debates. *Al Safaath* (Slaps) (al-Uthman 2005: 99-104) is another story depicting domestic violence from the same collection. Here, the heroine is taking revenge of her father who used to beat her to 'straighten' her ways of behaviour. The narrator remembers how badly her mother was also treated by the father when she was alive. The only one who consoles the daughter is the grandmother who tries to stop the beating but with no avail. The domestic violence is widespread in many countries where modesty and obedience are seen synonymous to woman.

The autobiographical piece of writing *Bila Quyoodin Daoonie Atakallam* (Let Me Speak Freely 2005) is another account of the Kuwaiti society by the author. As the dedication itself – to those who dream freedom and hate the chains- indicates that the author is looking for a free society where there are no restrictions other than those that our own consciousness imposes on us. The book starts with some of the quotes indicative of the purpose of the book. Voltaire's 'the freedom of man is the freedom of his soul' is quoted to set in motion the purpose of the book. The title of the book is also indicative of the purpose. Though it is not political in the traditional sense of the word, the author is striking us by unearthing some of the unnoticed practices prevalent in the Arab society and in the immediate Kuwaiti one. Laila al-Uthman has dealt with a number of issues in this book ranging from her personal inclinations to the political questions. The writing itself is a challenge to the conservative society as evidenced by the assertive tone of its title. There are a number of philosophical musings about life, feelings, relations, love, happiness, animals and the natural phenomena. There are also discussions about the moustaches of men and their activities.

Among her controversial books *Sumthul Firashath* (The Silence of the Butterflies 2007b) is very important as it deals with a very important issue widespread in the Arab world and also because it triggered a wide ranging controversy in the Arab world. The plot of this novel, the violence and brutality involved, are commonplace in the reality of

Arab societies. It depicts multiple forms of forfeiture of freedom of women and the imposition of slavery and bias of tradition. The author has, using her aesthetic capacity, tried to invoke this issue and make the society aware of the seriousness as well as danger of marrying the young girls to the old, a practice widespread in the Arab world compared to other countries. The agency of woman, her feelings and sufferings are never counted when it comes to marriage. The Silence of the Butterflies is seen as a turning point in the experience of al-Uthman as the author has instead of dealing with the issue directly, made a story out of it and brought out its dimensions in a powerful way that would make the public aware of the gravity of such practices. There is no doubt that the Silence of Butterflies has questioned parts of the "unheard" in the society as there is the recurring theme of "keeping mum" by the woman despite the pathetic condition that she has to live in. The heroine invokes a feeling in the readers that will make them think about breaking the social barriers and achieving liberation of the individual and society.

Al-Uthman in her works tries to examine men and their mentalities in different capacities including that of father, brother, husband and ruler. In many of her writings, there are overt and covert criticisms of the chauvinist behaviour of men. Patriarchy in the Arab society has grown so reactionary that woman and their aspirations get little recognition. Arab societies, in the name of religion and tradition, maintain an obsolete male-female relation. The autobiographical stories as well as purely fictional ones are always giving us the dominating figure of men in the society and women are always subdued and made victim to the passions of men without considering her as a human being. *Sumthul Farashath* (al-Uthman 2007b) addressed this issue of child marriage not just to condemn it and make fun of it, but to alert and warn of a repeat of a similar past incidents. The fact that slavery has become a thing of past did not deter her from dealing with some of its forms as the doors are still wide open to have modern-day slaves among our midst. The author might have kept the migrant workers in mind who in many occasions are considered to be equal to slaves. It is imperative to point out that the theme of the novel is not just an Arab phenomenon, but is a human phenomenon associated with men and it could happen anywhere and anytime as money has always bought sex irrespective of the age and the feelings of the other party. The title of the novel itself represents symbolically the plight of Arab women as they are everywhere asked to keep

quite, whether it is in the presence of the family members, husband or the neighbours. The most challenging issue is the lack of awareness about the possible alternatives as the tradition has instilled in them a feeling that it is the only viable and feasible option. The strange thing in the novel is that despite the fact that the mother of the protagonist knows the sufferings that her daughter might have to undergo in the house of her old age husband she was the one to insist on this marriage indicating the servile mentality that persisted even among women in the Arab world.

The author has also highlighted in some of her writings the existing superstitions in Kuwaiti society. Witchcraft and black magic is a recurrent theme in her writings as they often result in tragedy and permanent handicaps (al-Uthman 1984). The author has also dealt with the issue of religious people using the ignorance of the laity and leading them to further deep in their stupidity and superstition. The plight of domestic workers in Kuwaiti society is dealt with by al-Uthman and it is very important socially as the expatriate society constitute a large segment of the society. The question of their life, needs and concerns are least addressed by the authorities. The demographic factors of Kuwait have to be kept in mind to understand the significance of this factor. There are metaphorical comparisons in many of al-Uthman's writings between the lives of Kuwaitis and others: In an interview with Nadeel Qasim she says, "We Kuwaitis are inert, cold, devoid of human relationships and having a spiritual vacuum, while in other regions, those that are inhabited by our Arab brothers and foreigners is rippling with life with perfumes, humans, restaurants, sweat, fatigue, sweet friendships, and children."

Family relations are an important theme in the stories of Laila al-Uthman. She interrogators the excessive power enjoyed by men as the head of the family and its misuse as in *Sumthul Farashath* (The Silence of the Butterflies 2007b) and *Laylathul Qahar* (The Night of Oppression 2005). The author has also discussed the impact of the economic changes on the family and how with the development of society, economic prosperity and wealth, numerous social problems and abnormal behavioural patterns are cropping up.

Gender is one of the important themes in the work of al-Uthman. The watertight compartment that has been built over a period of time segregating men and women in all arenas of life and preventing women from engaging in social activities remained

unchallenged for a long time. She has taken up issues of women and discrimination against women practiced in multiple levels and interrogated them triggering a wide-ranging discourse. The gender issue is dealt with in its various dimensions including the psychological, economic, religious and political. The author through her short story *Fatheeha Taktharu Al Mauth* (Fathia Chooses Death 1995b) depicts how injustice is institutionalized in the Arab society and questions the superiority given to men and their feelings compared to women. As the author put it succinctly, "sexual practice requires normally the parties: a man and a woman, but when and where there is any issue of morality the accusing fingers point to the women only, and it is deliberately forgets the fact that her partner was a man, as if it is permissible (al-Uthman 1995b).

The issue of prostitution and its causes are addressed in various writings of al-Uthman. She brings to our attention the difficult socio-economic conditions of many expatriates that push many of them to prostitution as a last resort for survival. The story of *Al Maouthu Fi Lahlathi Bad* (Death at the Moment of the Start) in the collection *Al Raheel* (2000a) shows how poverty and the disability of the breadwinner may push a woman to the world of prostitution, just as in the case of *Al Baiy* (Sale) in the *Fillayli Tathi Al Uyoon* (In the Night Come Eyes 1984: 46). The impact of patriarchal practices in the educational field is also highlighted by the author. In *Al Marathu Wal Kitha* (Woman and the Cat), the author shows how this practice of denying education is keeping a number of women at home literally incapacitating half of the population (al-Uthman 2000).

The disadvantaged social status of women has led to her being the victim of rape and other extreme suffering. The moment she discloses it, the whole society would turn against her ignoring the male perpetrator. The phenomenon of rape in Arab society is widespread and has caused untold sufferings for the women. While religion is invoked to punish and crucify the women the inability of religion to deter such human cruelty as well as the distorted interpretations of the texts to suit the patriarchal society is also unearthed as it is evident in *Halathu Hubbin Majnoona* (Crazy Love 1989).

A dangerous phenomenon, according to al-Uthman, in the Kuwaiti society and the larger Arab world is the exploitation of the wife by the husband *Sumthul Farashath* (The Silence of the Butterflies 2007b). Family life and its various dimensions are very much

present across her writings. The questions of veil, harem and participation of women in the public life have come for her critical assessment. Issues of emotions and love and how the social system is inherently being made oppressive to women and favoring men when it comes to the question of accounting sin are also discussed. Gender issues are also taken up by her every now and then. The boldness that she has shown in describing sex in her stories and the provocative vocabulary and expressions has resulted in the ire of clergy and religious extremists *Al Muhakama* (The Trial 2004). Prostitution, incest and the issue of disability and sexual infertility and the issue of rape are discussed in her different works (*Dauoni Atakallmu Bila Quyoodin* 2005, *Al Muhakama* 2004). Women's issues at various levels of mother, sister, stepmother, wife, daughter, sister, domestic help, lesbian and activist are discussed in detail (*Sumthul Farashath* 2007b). Rebelling women who reject the rule of parents as well as the submissive women who is incapable of living her own life without dependence on the male members of the family is also delineated in *Al Hawajis Assawda* (1997).

The issue of war and resistance and the special role of women in resisting the occupying forces and the highly dangerous situation that they face in such a time is brought out very realistically in *Al Hawajiz Al Sawda* (The Black Barriers 1997). It is a first hand depiction of the untold and unexplored sides of the individual sufferings in time of war. Women, children and the aged all suffers equally and when the country was freed from the occupying forces, their role in defying the occupation forces and their overall suffering for nation are conveniently forgotten.

Al-Uthman has also discussed various dimensions of the political and the national arenas in many of her works. The question of Palestine is also close to her heart. Her admiration for Palestinian women is also well known. al-Uthman writes to accomplish a mission. Her creative writings are a struggle to bring about a change in the society. The author has been under the scanner of both the clergy and the ruling establishment. However, she has fought a courageous war against the confiscation of freedom and rights of women in society.

Lesbianism and homosexuality are dealt with in detail in some of her works and the author was time and again persecuted by her opponents in this regard saying al-Uthman has tried to spread unnatural and ethically and religiously prohibited practices in

the society. The short story collection *Fillayli Tathi Al Uyoon* (In the Night Come Eyes 1984) is an example. The story of "Curiosity" in the *Imarathun Fi Ina* (Woman in a Pot 1979) is also dealing with the question of lesbianism and homosexuality. To understand the gravity as well as the seriousness of her engagement, we have to keep in mind the conservative society she is facing and the possible repercussions that it may trigger in a country where the political system is so rigid and authoritative in addition to being under the constant pressure of the religious extremists.

Al Muhakam (The Trial 2004) is a very important contribution to Arabic literature on freedom of expression. The author has spoken out vehemently against moral policing and imposing restrictions on freedom of expression and shows that it is a very serious issue that begs immediate attention of those concerned. Al-Uthman accused the Arab authorities and those responsible for the cultural sector for the lack of a space were issues could be discussed and said that censorship has affected the creativity of the Arab intellectuals and the writers. Citing her own experience, the author says that it is the lack of experience and intellectual capacity required for such acts that has led to the misinterpretation of her works and the subsequent trial. The author says that those in the authority responsible for monitoring decency in the society are not grown enough to do their work. Al-Uthman has pointed out that most often the restriction and control in the Arab world is due to the fact that the censoring body read according to their whims and their culture and level of understanding and judge accordingly. It has also happened that as a result of their disagreement with the person rather than the work in question restrictions were imposed. This was the core of her trial. She has been dragged to the courts and it happened for the first time in 1996 as some of the extremist Salafis raised objection against her book, *Al Raheel* (The Departure 2000a) and *Fillayli Tathi Al Uyoon* (In the Night Come Eyes 1984). The charges leveled by the Islamist were, encouraging homosexuality and writing in a manner that violates public decency and which is against the law of the country.

Al Muhakama (2004) (The Trial) enjoys an important position among other works of al-Uthman. This very book was the result of criticism and prosecution that she has undergone for her writings. The courage of the author is apparent in standing up to the challenge the conservatives in the country were posing. The author depicts very

realistically the various experiences of herself as she has started writing about some of the inhumane practices in the country and has stated telling the truth of women's life in family and society. The writings of the author especially her two works *Fillayli tathi al Uyoon* (In the Nights Comes the Eye 1984) and *Al Raheel* (The Departure 2000a) were accused to be against the social customs and traditions observed by all. The case filed by some Islamists against her was a thorny issue and there came two groups one supporting her and the other one opposing and this tussle resulted in producing a huge literature on the issues she has raised. This triggered long discussions and debates in newspapers and magazines and other media about various issues including freedom and women, isolation and openness.

In her book *Al Muhakama* (2004), al-Uthman has recorded in detail the exact course of the trial that she has undergone and the trauma that it has caused. It is facts rather fiction. The book could be considered as a record of how freedom of speech and expression is strangulated in the Arab world and the Gulf in particular. The author has made it clear that the society is suffering from a number of social ills and the treatment is possible only when we start talking about them. The author defies putting the head in the sand to avoid the problems that grind the family and the society in Kuwait. Criticizing religious extremism and its proponents she says, "Allah asked me to read, read means to think, to think means to act, and work means you are realizing the grace of Allah who has made you read, and write. Thus you became a writer seeking justice to you and to all the people" (al-Uthman 2004: 223).

This very soliloquy shows why the writer has chosen the filed of letters and pen. The author has described the painful experience of a woman confronting the court and judges for a 'crime' that she has not committed. In the beginning of the book itself, she quotes Milton's famous line, "Give me freedom to know, to express, and to debate as my mind dictates me, before giving me any other freedom" (al-Uthman 2004: 3). The author has shown her defiance in the opening page by dedicating the book "to those who have complained against my writings and have denigrated my literature, to them with full of thanks, because their complaints have led to the creation of this work" (al-Uthman 2004: 5).

The overall tone of the book is that of an aversion towards those who wanted to maintain the *status quo* and to keep women in the name of tradition or religion silent and make them suffer silently all the humiliations. The author is up in arms showing unique courage and at the same time expressing her own inner feelings of despair, hope and loneliness. The author has given a cross section of the Kuwaiti society including the government that is always trying to cope with the diverse and often opposite forces in the society including the religious extremists and the preservers of tradition and a host of modern movements including women's activism. The tragic family disaster of the author, as her Palestinian husband was expelled and she was compelled to divorce him following the Iraqi invasion of the Kuwait and the *en mass* expulsion of the Palestinians, is depicted vividly leaving in the minds of the reader sympathy for the author and her husband. Though many of the Palestinians were engaged in anti Kuwaiti activities forgetting the long-standing friendly relations between the two people, Waleed Abu Bakaer, the husband of al-Uthman was supporting the Kuwaiti cause during and following the Iraqi invasion. But accusing Abu Bakaer for treason for some comments made in the Moscow radio and for some other comments of the international organizations against Kuwait for the inhumane treatment of the Palestinians in different prisons across the country he was expelled from the country for ever (al-Uthman 2004: 22).

Al Muhakama depicts the challenges women activists have been facing in Kuwait and other Muslim countries where the *Salafi* movement is powerful. Four Salafis called Abdul Latheef Saif al Atheeqi, Abdul Aziz al Hamd, Fuad al Fawzan and Khalid al Sabeehiy have approached the court against the author for her "writings that contain sentences that is against the law and public morality" (al-Uthman 2004: 35-36). The major complaints include the writing of a short story *Al Sura* (The Picture) in the collection *Fillayli Tathee Al Uyoon* (In the Nights Come the Eye 1984) where there is a depiction of a mother who speaks to herself about engaging in sexual intercourse with some one other than her husband and for her consent to her son for sex abroad (al-Uthman 2004: 35-38). The author has answered that both the books are containing some issues of social relevance and it has nothing to do with the morality (al-Uthman 2004: 40-41). The author asserts the intention to serve the society and it is possible only if one

exposes dormant social issues. *Al Muhakama* has triggered debates across the country and the whole media started discussing the issue of freedom of expression and the limits that should be maintained while dealing with these issues. The calls that the author has received from different media persons and the subsequent discussions in a number of television programs, newspapers and magazines are described in the book. The author describing the situation says, "the courageous voice is rejected. To expose the veiled realities of the society through story is exposing the hair, sound and hidden parts," (al-Uthman 2004: 49).

In most of the writings of al-Uthman, the social dimension is prominent. The shift from a traditional tribal nomadic society engaged in the maritime trade to a modern industrial capitalist society is very much reflected in her writings. The author remembers with a nostalgic feeling the old Kuwaiti society and the problems that erupted following the economic boom in the country and the subsequent social revolution. We also witness the presence of sea in her stories *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahr* (1995) as it has been associated with people's lives earlier and were the source of life and joy, comfort, inspiration and love. The sea is still present in the hearts of Kuwaitis, and they love it in spite of all the changes that have seen in the recent past. Al-Uthman deals in her stories the inequality in Kuwaiti society where the poor suffer and are always vulnerable to exploitation in *Lailathul Qahr* (The Night of Oppression 2005) and *Fillayli Tathee al Uyoon* (In the Nights Come the Eyes 1984). Various aspects of exploitation are depicted in mind-boggling manner in many of her books and she has succeeded in inviting the attention of the authorities to such pertinent issues. The concerns of the poor and their social status are depicted in a number of books. The story of Abdullah, the protagonist in *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahr* is not only the story of love it also depicts the pathetic life situation of the lower classes in the society.

Family relations occupy an important position in the stories of al-Uthman. She interrogates the excessive power enjoyed by men as the head of the family. The story of *Sumthul Farashath* (2007) is the story of a young lady who was married out to an old man as noted earlier. Apart from narrating the cruel practice of marrying out girls without their permission and even without asking for their opinion, al-Uthman exposed the cruelty practiced by the family head in the name of protecting and securing the woman.

Economic prosperity and wealth is sought through sacrificing young women causing numerous social problems and behavioral patterns that in turn would lead to betrayals by both husband and wife. As noted earlier, the issues of the domestic expatriate workers in Kuwaiti society, who make up a large segment of the people in the country and their specific concerns and needs are addressed in a number of her writings. The rampant corruption in the formal institutions of government is also dealt with and given much attention.

As explained earlier the author has given a fantastic self-depiction in *Al Muhakama* where she gives an in depth description of the trial that took place in Kuwait due to her writings. She asks puts the paradox succinctly, "two women are equal to a man as a witness, but when it comes to punishment women get the double of what men get." Because for some defamatory writings, Dr. Ahmed Baghdadi got one month jail term, while al-Uthman was sentenced to serve two months jail term (al-Uthman 2004: 218).

Those who study the social movements of Kuwait in general and women's movements in particular will find that there is a very strong movement going on in which women are up in arms in all possible manner in the limited space they are enjoying to make change. They have shouldered the responsibility of looking after the family and in return they have received neglect, mental and physical torture. In wake of the increasing social awareness, they have come up with new ideas and thinking to deliver themselves from the clutches of the social evils. They have dedicated themselves to defend their message of equality and to strip off all the usual inherited baggage of suffering. It should be noted that the story *Munira* of Khalid Faraj published in 1929 which shows the awakening among the Arab intellectuals in general and Kuwait in particular to women's issues and problems, and reflects social oppression experienced by women. While women's movements in Kuwait were successful in many ways, they were not able to generate the results they imagined due to a number of socio-political and religious reasons. Al-Uthman shed some light on the how the desperate women of Kuwait defended and tried to change the flow of history in the middle of strong opposition from the conservative forces and religious extremists. The story *Wasamiyya Thakruju Minal Bahr (*Wasmiyya Comes Out of the Sea 1995) is a good example how al-Uthman exposes life full of misery due to practices tradition has sanctioned.

Al-Uthman has discussed religion in a number of her books. However, the author is not so critical about Islam and has always shown to be religious in her own way in order to defend herself in the face of extremist religious fundamentalists. The *Yamiyyathu Al Sabri wal Murr* (Diary of Patience and Bitterness 2003) says the story of suffering during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The author has supported liberalism and democracy and always stood against the extremist Islamists. The direct brush with them during and following the trial has made her very well aware of the danger they have been posing. The author has applauded the government policy of maintaining a democratic atmosphere in the country despite the strong and grassroot Islamist trend in the country. The author said that many of her writings are still banned in Kuwait including *Al Muhakama, Sumthul Farashath and Filyli Tathee al Oyoun*. These bans, however, has not affected the author as she is still writings and is fighting against the social evils in the country. Criticizing the unnecessary importance given to religion, the author has slapped the education ministries across the Arab world for the undue stress given to religious education which has made the people very sensitive about religion and anything and everything comes under it and any discussion becomes impossible. She contends that the flexibility in religion is very important and this is why the Western world has achieved advancement in the scientific field while the whole Arab world is incapable of making even a match box. There are times when the author uses religious expressions and this is a common feature in Arab writings irrespective of their identification with and adherence to religion. The male interpretation of religious texts in a way that would make women a second grade citizen is always refuted and rejected by the author. In her own personal experience she has been the victim of it. Following the trial for her writings, the author herself says the inbuilt inequality in a system that is inherently undemocratic and oppressive. There is no direct attack against the governing ruling family of Kuwait but the author has through her active participation in movements demanded the inclusion of women in decision making and fought for the rights of the Bedouins and other marginalized sections of the society.

Al-Uthman has also written about modesty in many of her writings (*Sumthul Farashath*). This is a very important issue for the Arab women. As Lila Abu-Lughod has put it in the context of Egyptian Bedoin women,

> *Hasham*, which can be translated as modesty or propriety, is a complex concept which lies at the heart of the ideals of womanhood and of the moral system, tied, as I will show, to the system of social hierarchy. *Hasham* refers to both an internal state of shyness, embarrassment or shame and to a set of behaviors conforming to a code of modesty that are thought to grow out of these feelings. The cultural repertoire of such behaviors of self-effacement includes veiling, dressing modestly and aspects of demeanor such as downcast eyes, formal posture, and restraint of eating, smoking, talking, laughing and joking. It also, and very importantly, involves chastity – in other words, the denial of sexuality (Abu-Lughod 1986).

These are the expectations most of the Arab societies maintains towards their woman folk and the moment one violates them they would be in trouble from family, society and may have to face religious excommunication. (Abu-Lughod 1986)

The question of feminism is also dealt with by the author in her own particular way. Though we can see that the overall stress that the author has given is to the issues of women we can not see her making any claim to be a feminist. However, in terms of the result and the change that she has helped to bring in the living standard as well as the awareness of the people regarding women, their rights, feelings and other issues, her contribution is not at all small. The author has made it clear that she does not subscribe to the argument that men and women are equal and they should be treated equally in all spheres of life. The contention of the author is that women should be given her rightful position in the society as a woman (*Bila Quyodin Ḍaouni Atakallam* 2005). In a sense, we can argue that the ideal model of woman for al-Uthman would be *one where she achieves the full potential of a woman and is able to explore her capacity in all possible manner without fully adopting the Western style and way of thinking but all the while different from the traditional one.* The fight for the rights of oppressed in the society especially women is the most important issue in all the writings of Laila al-Uthman. She has waged her incessant war for the rights of woman in all spheres of life including political, legal, familial and educational. Most of her writings are directly or indirectly dealing with all these issues. The change that the author wanted to bring was sought

through public awareness. The author has addressed in many of her writings the role of religion in making woman subordinate to man. The author is asking in an angry tone where in Islam it was mentioned that the women should be kept in the harem and have to wear the veil. The misinterpretation of the sacred texts by the extremists has been strongly opposed by the author in many of her writings (*Bila Quyoodin Dauni Athakallmu* 2005, *Al Muhakama* 2004).

The issue of suffrage for women in Kuwait was controversial and the protests following the independence of the country in 1991 was very strong (Al Mughni 2004). In this fight for their political rights, al-Uthman was in the forefront and she has demanded her fellow Kuwaitis that until you achieve your full right for vote you should not stop your fight (Badran 1997). Restoring the rights of women is very important for al-Uthman. In an interview she has revealed that she is projecting Arab women as powerless and feeble in order to make them feel ashamed so that they fight back. She wants the women to feel proud of her and stop fearing the male member whether it is her husband or brother. Some of her stories and novels including *Asas* were banned in Kuwait due to the objection raised by the Islamists saying it has open sexual scenes. The author responds to this kind of allegations saying that it is a picture of our society and not a creation of her imagination. In order to bring change, we have to expose what is happening in our society. The issue of veil has got momentum in Kuwait following the author's submission that she would leave Kuwait if veil is imposed on her. This has also brought many discussions in the public sphere and the Parliament has also taken it up. In wake of the *fatwa* that came from the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowment) that recommend to impose *hijab* on women, the author has spoken out against it and has said that during the time of Iraqi invasion I have fought them and stood back in my beloved country but if there would be a law imposing *hijab,* I will certainly leave Kuwait.

Chapter V

Socio-Political Implications of Laila al-Uthman's Engagement in the Kuwaiti Public Sphere

Through her writings and activism, Laila al-Uthman has crossed the boundaries that have been drawn for women in the Arab and Islamic countries and made her presence felt across the Arab world and beyond. She has negotiated with the public authorities directly and indirectly for the empowerment of the women on the one and hand to purge the society off the evils that has made the life of both men and women trouble ridden. In this chapter, the significance of the engagement of Laila al-Uthman in Kuwaiti society would be analyzed in all its dimensions. On the whole, study is based on the concept of the public sphere. It is argued here that the public sphere and even politics could not be solely seen in its conventional meanings and an attempt to widen the public sphere to include the issues so far considered being in the private sphere (Fraser 1992) is significant.

Laila al-Uthman has presented through her writings the fact that

> there is a woman's reality, as counter-model against a dominant, male one...and she wishes to give voice or expression to this reality, to rescue women from silence. This in addition brings this counter model into direct confrontation with the dominant model, to show its differences; in order, finally, to challenge the dominant culture in its suppression of the voices of women and to replace the dominant male cultural mode (and in effect women's subordinate one as well) with a newly constructed egalitarian (and utopian) cultural model and discourse (Giorcelli et al 2002: 15).

The diversity of the Arab world in general and that of women's activism in particular need to be recognized. As pointed out previously, there are women supporting the Islamist, secularist and feminist movements and they have their own interpretations for the same (Moghadam 2003: 10). In such a diverse cultural milieu, the most effective method to bring a consciousness of their own condition would be none other than that of literary engagement. The very fact that the literary engagement would be giving an ideal form of what one should aspire for and the worst form of what one is trying to get rid of,

is important as this would be helping all the groups to identify their own position in a wide canvas.

Laila Al-Uthman has, along with a number of other Kuwaiti women activists and feminists, contributed to bring about gradual change in the Arab society in general and in Kuwait in particular.

One has to see these developments side by side with the highly projected socio-political reforms including democratisation and fight for the human rights in the region. These aspects of women's activism deserve attention as it would help to trigger a vibrant public sphere. The issues of women and their absence in the public arena are seen as one of the major deficits in the Arab world. Alleviation of this absence in Kuwait was made possible by the engagement of authors and activists like Laila al-Uthman and the discussions that followed helped other women too to come out. Al-Uthman's engagement has to be seen in the wider socio-political context of West Asia with its colonial past and Islamist opposition to the West and Western ideas. The fight for the social equality has been compounded with the fact that the majority of the people are still seeing women's activism in the form of feminism or otherwise as un-Islamic and as a project of neo-imperialists to subdue and control the region culturally. This was fuelled by the thesis of the clash of civilization initiated by Samuel Huntington.

Mary Ann Tétreault observes that "the position of women in Kuwait is conditioned by tradition, religion, and law. None of these is unambiguous in its approach to women and the family, and it is as easy to ascribe the positions of women in Kuwait to any as to all of them" (Tétreault 1993). We can see that al-Uthman has fought against all these three components that determine the status of woman in the society. She has time and again asserted directly, and indirectly through her characters, that many of the 'traditional' practices should be stopped as they are oppressive to both men and women. The fight against many patriarchal attitudes of religion is also evident from the direct confrontation of the author with the salafists as explained in her autobiographical work *Al Muhakamka* (2004). Al-Uthman has occasionally shown her religious convictions based on broad humanitarian-philosophical roots and interrogated the narrow mindedness of the religious extremists. In the field of Sharia law, the main code of civic and social activities

was also being interpreted in a different way by the author. Though the lack of deep knowledge of the religious texts made the author not to confront it in it wholeness, the author has expressed her dissatisfaction time and again against a number of biased interpretations of the religious texts. This is also evident in the *Al Muhakama* when she questioned the logic of different jail terms for men and women for equal violation of law.

Bringing the Issues of Private into Public Attention

Seen through the prism of public sphere which was made more contextual by the insights given by the critics of Habermas like Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib, the engagement of al-Uthman assumes more significance. The issues which were considered purely private including the family and domestic issues as well as the personal ones, came into the public debate. In the third world in general and the Gulf region in particular, religion affects the daily life of the people and therefore, and therefore it invariably emerges as a vital element in the public sphere. Religion is defining many of the dos and don'ts in the Muslim society and it is always monitored by the religious heads who have tremendous influence in the state (Fisher 1978: 117).

In the case of Kuwait, the Islamists became more assertive following the liberation of the country thanks to their resistance centered around mosques against the invading forces, which remained a sanctuary even during the time of the Iraqi assault. In Kuwait, religion functions as a legitimating force for the rulers. At another level, it resists any kind of liberalization in the case of women in granting them full and equal rights. One of the major questions that al-Uthman ushered into the public domain was that of religion and it triggered a wide range of discussions in the mass media both in support of its role in defining the status of women and opposing it. The issue of *hijab* and the attempt to impose it on the Kuwaiti women and the position Laila al-Uthman took by stating that she would leave Kuwait forever if it is imposed on women assume great significance.

Another important contribution of al-Uthman is in making many of the open secrets that prevail in the society a matter of public discussion. Defending herself in the

court against the charges of spreading indecency in the society, the author has said that it is intended not to defame Kuwait but to show that Kuwait is a country like any other in the world with its own vices and follies. Stripping the high moral pretensions would help discussing all the unpalatable truths. The author has triggered heated debates in the Kuwaiti media for her comment that "brothels were part of the history of Arab cities without exception. There was in Kuwait, an area called *Al Hurriyya* next to the current Ministry of Information for prostitutes" (Abdullah 2005). This is an intentionally provocative statement and Laila al-Uthman is not just engaging in a publicity stunt, instead it is an attempt to open the eyes of the moral police both religious and political. Through these provocative media statements and pronouncement, the author has succeeded in exposing and unearthing the latent realities of the society.

It is a fact that many of the third world countries are still trying to come out of their past cultural practices that have seen women's place in the house and her domain the household activities. In order to bring change to this condition, it is necessary that there should be widespread discussions and dissecting of the social practices so as to expose the unfounded and often cruel practices in the guise of cultural relativism. However, this is neither to argue that the third world women should embrace the practices of her Western counterparts nor to suggest that all is well with the West. Irrespective of the east-west divide, women's issues need to be addressed. As we have seen in the first chapter, many social scientists have argued to bring into discussion many issues considered to be in the private domain. It is important to see that the author has engaged in such activism of far-reaching consequences in a society that is on the one hand highly conservative and religious and on the other hand having a political system based on patriarchal affiliations and extended family concept (Moghadam 2007: 296). Many issues of private concern including the domestic violence were brought into the public domain and it was debated time and again making more room for diverse opinion.

Laila al-Uthman has some stated objectives as they are evident from a number of pronouncements she has made in media, the titles of the books she has penned and the membership in diverse socio-political and cultural forums inside as well as outside her country. The author has done what many social scientists have recommended for the

creation of a more inclusive public sphere namely discussing 'private' issues in public and blurring the boundary drawn demarcating the domains of men and women. Encroaching to the arena considered to be a domain of men al-Uthman has set new rules of play. She has made the maintenance of political boundaries very difficult for the government. The strong walls built between women and the society on the one hand and the monarchic rulers and the society on the other has been shaken. The most important contribution would be the unsettling activism of al-Uthman that has questioned those at the apex of state and family hierarchies. The driving force behind her activism was the empowerment of women. Hisham Sharabi's recommendation that "criticism is not a luxury but a vital need not for instituting a 'careful and critical discourse' that can yield fresh self critical consciousness but also for de-constructing and transcending the prevailing neo-patriarchal consciousness that has bounded and immobilized thoughts and practice for over a century" (Sharabi 1992 151), seems to have been taken up by al-Uthman consciously or unconsciously and it is yielding positive results. The most important thing is that she has not only helped to create a consciousness among the citizens, both men and women, but also tried to expose the inherent weakness and oppressive nature of the patriarchal system and goes beyond and transcends the consciousness of the patriarchal system that is so entrenched in all walks of life in the society.

There are two issues to be addressed in this regard. Across the globe, there are issues specific to women and we have witnessed waves of social and political movements for the emancipation of woman and for her socio-political and economic rights. This means that there is a global need to address women's issues and there should be methods devised to achieve them. However, in a politically open and liberal society, the space is there to fight. But when it comes to West Asia, the issues are more complicated and deep rooted. This is the second issue that is to be kept in mind. As there is a lack of democratic space in these countries, the fight for specific rights of any group would be more complicated and difficult. In the case of Kuwait, though comparatively open, liberal and democratic, there are a number of impediments for any full-fledged activism. This leads

us to the conclusion that achieving the rights of women in West Asia is not so easy because of the lack of democratic space to organize and fight.

When we are dealing with the specific case of Kuwait, we can see that there are some specific features that are detrimental for women's activism. The first and foremost is the emergence of the Salafist movement in the country and its influence at the grassroot level following the resistance movement of 1991(Joseph 2000: 241). We have seen in the last chapter how they have moved against al-Uthman in the court to stall her activism. It is also evident from the wide range of presence that the Islamists have in the Kuwaiti media and even in the nascent parliament. They are always opposing any 'concession' for women as it would be an encroachment to the patriarchal nature of the society where women are supposed to maintain their modesty and any kind of public display would be considered immodest and improper (Abu-Lughod 1986).

As Fathima Mernissi says that "to familiarize you with the present-day Muslim world and how women fit into the conflicting political forces (including religion), the best way is to have a special illumination of the structural dis-symmetry that runs all through and conditions the entire fabric of social and individual life" (Mernissi 1987: ix). Understanding this structural dis-symmetry is very important to understand and value the engagement of al-Uthman in the Kuwaiti public arena.

In most of the third world and West Asian countries, the relationship between the state and society is different from that of other parts of the world. In the case of all GCC countries, various forms of patron/ client relationships operate. Hence, the relationship between individuals and the state is mediated and experienced through communal leaders. Apart from institutionalizing the patriarchal system to the state business, it fosters a notion of citizen's rights as charity or gifts. The rights of the citizen in such systems of distribution emanate "because of sets of personalized relationships of unequal exchange and not because they are accorded and entitled to equality by virtue of their individualized citizenship" (Moghissi 2005: 55). In a country like Kuwait, there would be conflict among those who are supporting the client and patron relationship and not wanting to go beyond that and those who are demanding their rightful due as the citizens

of the society. In this divide, Laila al-Uthman is in the middle class women's organizations lobbying for women's rights as full citizens and does not want to consider it as a charity but as a right of being born in Kuwait.

Al-Uthman has strengthened the Kuwaiti civil society in favour of the people and especially made it more accommodative of, or at least sensitive to the issues of women. The civil society in Kuwait is different from any other country as there is strong inter-penetration from both state and civil society and there are no hard and fast boundaries between the two. This blurring of the boundaries has led to the creation of alternative spaces for discussion and debate.

*Al-usra al-wahida (*one family) concept is very central to the Kuwaiti nationalism. The whole nation as a united family was adopted to promote national cohesion in the early 1970s. As noted previously, it has much to do with the mythic idealizations of the old Arab tribal families in the dessert, where everyone took care of everyone else and all would be living under the protective wing of the family patriarch securely. This has led to the promotion of family values by the state through state media and other possible means. The Social Policies Committee of Kuwait was tasked to increase the awareness of their duties and responsibilities as family members of Kuwait. This move was a clear indication that the state is still maintaining its patriarchal nature and it wanted to remain like that. The Committee promoted family rights and obligations not in the context of the immediate family but in the whole society depicting the nation as a collective family with the Amir at its head (Tétreault 1995b). This makes the fight of woman more complicated as the patriarchal system is inherently favoring men and it becomes all the more complicated when the Islamists are also there to fight against any move from the state's side to improve the lot of the woman. As Hisham Sharabi contents in his famous book on neo-patriarchy,

> the central psychosocial feature of this type of society, whether it is conservative or progressive, is the dominance of the Father (patriarch), the center around which the national as well as the natural family are organized. Thus between ruler and ruled., between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal

> will is the absolute will, mediated in both the society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion (Sharabi 1992: 7).

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent sufferings of the people irrespective of men and women, rich and poor, Bedouin and others, have led to new realizations and understanding of the concept of society and the need for participation in the public affairs including running of the state. The sufferings during the invasion instilled the belief in the people, and the ruling family promised too to make necessary changes in the political field for granting full citizenship including women's right to vote and to run for public office. In the case of women in Kuwait, working outside the home was not a problem and many did it even before the invasion but with little or no visibility and popular support. Extending public role to women became a major issue following the invasion and the call for including them in politics became widespread. This was welcomed thanks to their prominent role in the resistance to occupation. As a result, following liberation, the movements and efforts to bring women to full political participation got wide support, formerly the concern of a small group of women and their male supporters (Tétreault 1993).

In understanding the nature of public sphere in Kuwait, the modernization process is also very important as it has led to reconfiguring status and power boundaries. The wave of democratization as well as the realization that better options are possible, coupled with globalization and information technology made the people cross the boundary and look for new avenues of activism (Tétreault 2000). The most important significance of the fight in the socio-political field is that al-Uthman has done what others did not dare to. The fight that she engaged in was dangerous as her enemies are so powerful in terms of support and ability to suppression and violence. The author has been calling to adopt the way of understanding and give and take instead of resorting to force and violence. The democratic method that the author wanted to promote is far from reach, but the ideal she has set forth is worth following and appreciable.

As this work is related to the public sphere, relating the activism of Laila al-Uthman to the idea of public sphere would be in place. The author has, through her

engagement in writing on controversial issues, helped to create a vibrant public domain where the issues so far considered taboo is opened for discussion. The Kuwaiti media on the one hand and the larger liberal Arab media on the other have paid due attention to the writer. Though many has accused her for being engaged in a publicity stunt al-Uthman has made it clear that she has nothing to do with publicity and she is just speaking out what she feels to be true. In this discussion, we have to take up a number of issues starting from freedom of expressions to women's issues in the Arab and Islamic world. The author has fought for the freedom of expression but it was mainly a byproduct to her real fight against the social evils, especially the role society has imposed on women over a period of time.

The writer could bring to the attention of the authority that there are issues that could be solved and that they can not go on without making some necessary changes. As discussed at the outset, the fight against any social evil in the Arab world has to encounter many problems as there is no free space and freedom of expression is limited strictly. Laila al-Uthman has felt, as she herself has stated in a number of books, that she should speak out against the unequal treatment of men and women in the society ever since her childhood. However, many of her writings remained unpublished as her parents have very strictly prohibited her from speaking out on any sensitive issues. This made her suffocated and she started publishing as her father passed away. The author apart from bringing pertinent issues to the attention of the ruling class and general citizens helped to trigger discussions and debates among all of her opponents and supporters. To spur discussion and public discourse and create a new consciousness are very important for bringing changes in any society.

Literature is always a mirror reflecting a society and its people's aspirations. It also plays a major role in shaping the public discourse in any given society and it is considered as the first step towards wider engagement in the socio-political issues. Here the attempt is to bring out the importance of the literary engagement of al-Uthman and its role in developing a public sphere where the issues pertaining to women could be discussed uninterruptedly. Given the closed and conservative nature of the Kuwaiti society, the impact that her works made is significant. Al-Uthman has mediated through

her writings between the public authority and the Kuwaiti women on the one hand and between the society and the women on the other. The author since the very beginning of her career has taken up women's issues as the major theme for her writing. Her courageous and challenging way of writing has led to many personal crises for her and she was haunted by the Islamists that ended up in the court verdict against her for two month's jail term or a huge amount in the form of fine in 2000. She obtained her release paying the fine slapped against her. The charges leveled against her was "writing literature that contains statements prejudicial to public decency and stories inciting sexual appetite grossly". However, this has not led to any kind of backtracking from her side.

Through her challenges to the patriarchal society and the socio-political structures that it has created, protected, and defended, al-Uthman has been making a real impact in the Kuwaiti public sphere. One of her interviews with alarabiyya.net is an indicator that her engagement has produced its positive result as she says: "they (Islamists) have despaired of their campaign against me in Kuwait and all these confrontations were to make me stop writing just like others did but they stopped when they found these campaigns did not succeed." As she herself attests this do not mean that everything is fine with the society and her challenges has utterly changed the society. Rather, many of her works including *Al Muhakama* (The Trial)and *Al Asas* (Asas) *Yahduzu Kullu Lail* (It Happens Every Night), *Al Hubla wa Suwar* (Pregnant and Pictures) and *Al Raheel* (The Departure) are banned in Kuwait. In a public appearance when she was asked about the permission that was granted to circulate her novel *Sumthul Firashath* (The Silence of the Butterflies) in Kuwait, despite the fact that it contains many aspects that is detastasble to the Islamists including the explicit narration of sex, she said, " this does not mean that there is no censorship in Kuwait."

However, the fight is not with the ruling family or the monarchy but with the Islamist extremists and those who are not willing to differentiate between culture and religion on the one hand and the obsolete social practices based on tradition on the other. She sees the government suffering due to the Islamists as much as the people are suffering. The 1999 episode, when the ruler announced right to vote for women, the whole Islamists came out protesting until it was repealed later, is indicative of the power

of Islamists in the country. The importance of the writer comes from the fact that she was able to bring about a change in the public discourse that has far-reaching consequences. She has triggered a number of discussions regarding women and their status. When her novel *Sumthum Farashath* (The Silence of the Butterflies) came out, there was a perception that it would be banned given the content of the novel. It did create ripples in the society, but the Islamists were aware of the fact that the writer is so adamant that no kind of pressure would compel her to withdraw. In this wonderfully woven novel, the author has taken up a number of issues touching women. The main thread of the story is the practice of marrying young girls to the rich old men that was prevalent in the Gulf region. The author succeeds in bringing into the public discourse an issue that was very much problematic but all the while not addressed. *Sumthum Farashath* is not only about the marriage system where women stood in disadvantage, it is also about a whole range of gender questions, love, freedom of choice and expression and a lot more. The fact that the authorities were not able to ban the book in Kuwait itself at this time indicate the fact that the subversive action that the author engages herself is giving its dividend. In the print as well as the visual media, a number of discussions took place regarding al-Uthman's writings and the issues and controversies over it. It is through her writing that issues are raised. The discourse further extends to other areas with the resultant arguments and counter-arguments.

Al Muhakama (The Trial) is another important work that shows the conservative nature of the society and how the author was dragged into controversies. *Al Muhakama,* which is called as a novel despite the fact that it deals with the trials and tribulations that the author underwent in her real life as she was summoned to court, depicts the challenges that the religious extremists, poses to any kind of women's engagement outside the framework that religion has sanctioned. This has paramount importance given the religious nature of the society and the hold that the *ulama* has over the government. The book was and still is banned in the country. It also draws our attention to a number of other issues, including the veil, *harem* and women's participation in the social and political spheres.

Fillaili Thathi al Uyoon (In the Nights Come the Eyes) is another woman-centered account in the form of short stories that triggered controversies and heated debates in the Kuwaiti public sphere. In this collection, the author interrogates a number of such practices that are to the disadvantage of women as the suppression of women in the name of tradition and misinterpreted religious values and the male-dominated views on them. The author dared to deal with those issues which were considered the domain of men. It was inevitable that a number of enemies came out demanding the banning of the book but the author was not moved.

In controversial works like *Al Raheel* (Departure) and *Al Hubb Lahu Suwar* (Love Has Many Faces), the concept of love, the concept of woman, and the concept of man are being introduced in very unconventional ways. The author is up against the longstanding traditional values which have put women in a disadvantageous position in power relations. Here also, the questions of what are the domains of men and women and what the position of women in the society is and lots of other questions were thrown into the public discourse. With this very action of revolt and through her interrogation of the existing value system and culture, al-Uthman has helped in shaping and engaging in a different public sphere that was not available to her predecessors. Al-Uthman's writings violate the monotony of mainstream awareness and contribute to undermine the principles, values and judgments of a patriarchal society. The famous novel *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahr* (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea) provides another picture of the society and the silence that it imposes on women.

Al-Uthman is always on a look out for love and compassion that was denied to her and the society reacted to her appeal very rashly. Many of her writings have led to controversies as she dealt with issues that were considered taboo. Dealing with sex in her works was one of the ever present causes of controversies in her literary career. But the author has overtly and covertly depicted how the religious symbols are manipulated in both the public and private life of the people. As it is clear from her works where she describe the difficulties she has encountered in her early life, literature for al-Uthman was not a place to seek refuge from the societal ills. It is one of her chosen fields to fight the

injustice and the unequal status accorded to the womenfolk in Kuwait in particular and the larger Arab world in general.

She is an active member of a number of socio-cultural forums and has contributed a lot of new discourses on women. She is an active member in a number of writers associations including the Association of the Kuwaiti Writers, the Arab Writers, the General Union of Palestinian Writers, the Kuwaiti Journalists Association. As mentioned previously this is in addition to her active role and membership in the cultural and human rights organizations like the Amnesty International (Kuwait), and the Organization for Human Rights (Kuwait) and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters. Her pioneering roles in the Kuwaiti Women's Cultural Association and the Arab Cultural Foundation (Beirut) is well known. She is also an active member of the Kuwaiti Democratic Forum and the Information Committee of the Assembly of the Friendship Between the Peoples of Iraq and Kuwait. The author has participated and presented papers on a number of issues in national regional as well as the international forums and seminars. These factors indicate the wide range of activism of al-Uthman.

Impact on Civil Society and Democratization

The engagement of al-Uthman has also contributed towards the building up of the components of civil society and the move towards gradual democratization. The fact that the author is part of a number of NGOs and civil society organizations itself attests to this fact. This is in addition to the impact that her writings made on women, encouraging them to join hands and come out to form organizations to push for change and political reforms (Rizzo 2005: 90). The pessimistic view maintained by many of the Western thinkers about the possibility of deeper political change is unwarranted because "formally recognizing women's political and civil rights does not ensure the transformation of a nondemocratic country into a democratic one, there is some evidence that including women in the political process appears to have an impact on public policy" (Ottaway 2004: 8) and it would gradually force the authorities for further democratic consolidation.

Talking about the West Asian region and the emergence of civil society there Yom says,

> by the early 1990s, as reformist demands from a nascent civil society burgeoned, an astonishing range of liberalizing reforms swept across the region. Several governments like the Sabah family in Kuwait inaugurated national parliaments or consultative assemblies, establishing fresh openings for popular participation into previously opaque decision-making processes (Yom 2005).

This civil society in Kuwait, which was in the making for a long period even before the formal independence of the country from Britain in 1961, was made more receptive to women's issues by the intervention of the author too. Though it seems to be an exaggeration to say that one individual writing has made such changes, the nature of the engagement and the whole content of her writings both fictional and non-fictional is amble enough proof for its own repercussions in the society. Just after Kuwait was liberated, al-Uthman along with many others demanded for full-fledged political freedom as it was promised when Kuwait was under the invading Iraqi forces. The bridging of the gender gap would make positive change towards democratization (Joseph 2000: 238). The realization of a full-fledged democratic setup is possible when and where women are given full citizenship. Despite a number of impediments, women were granted suffrage in 2005 (Keddie 2007: 157). It is important to see that the actions, voice and portrayal of al-Uthman's new women regarding transcending the contradictions of patriarchal arrangement go beyond the realm of fiction. It has much more importance in the political realm than in literature. New Kuwaiti women have broken their silence through their demand for political participation and widening of the public sphere by bringing a number of issues hitherto considered to be a part of the private sphere. This was made possible to an extent by the engagement of the creative writers like al-Uthman in raising many unpalatable questions considered to be untouchable. This has helped to reduce the extent of marginalisation in different fields of state activities, repression at home and in the society, victimisation and exclusion from political affairs. As a consequence, al-Uthman's political actions through engagement in the public realm action has helped to blur the dividing line in the public-private dichotomy and empowered them through access to political participation. We can assume that through continues struggle of

defiance, subversion and politics of protest in diverse forms, Kuwaiti women can achieve their full political rights including citizenship, equal access to the state welfare allowances and in the long run full and equal status with men in all spheres of life.

The participatory politics in Kuwait has its roots in the establishment of the state of Kuwait itself more than two centuries ago. There was an agreement among the immigrant families that they will support the ruler who would consult them in all important issues. This system based on the mutual understanding continued until the discovery of the oil when the ruler became independent of the merchant class who supported him in running the affairs of the state. After independence in 1961, Kuwaiti society was trying to bring an institutionalized democratic process. But as the ruling family felt the danger of loosing the power the process was slowed down though many liberalizations were introduced both in social and political spheres (Alnajjar 2000: 258). Though the head of state always emanated from the ruling Al-Sabah family, there were many improvements in the overall political structure of the country. Kuwait, a constitutional monarchy, is considered as the most advanced among the other Persian Gulf Arab states as it has the oldest directly elected parliament. The political system has apart from Amir, a Council of Ministers and a National Assembly (Ehteshami 2003). Though the Amir is the supreme commander of the state, much of his power is checked by other bodies as well. The National Assembly consists of fifty elected members including four women. This system of government was always ambivalent towards women's issues due to the influence of the Islamists who have always opposed women's empowerment claiming their right place to be the home. Against this backdrop, when one reads the activism of al-Uthman the importance of such engagements with the male-dominated political system of Kuwait will become evident. The author has succeeded in bringing to the attention of the authority the pressing need for reform in all spheres of the society and politics as women were not participating in much of its activities making virtually half of the population of this tiny nation inactive and unproductive.

Citizenship and Gender Equality

Kuwaiti nationals were defined, under the citizenship law of 1959, as "those persons and their descendants who resided in Kuwait prior to 1920 and maintained residence there until 1959". However, there are some problems when we are going into the details. The dominant thinking does not consider woman as equal to man in different spheres of life and while politics and public issues are considered to be the domain of man, home, child rearing and related private issues are considered to be the domain of woman. While all the Kuwaiti men and their sons and daughters are given citizenship, the children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis are not entitled for the same. This has its roots in the assumption that woman is always under the protection of man and an independent woman looking after her own affairs is beyond the imagination. Hence the law has reduced the woman as a member in a family living under the orders of the patriarch. Laila al-Uthman has always tried to keep the view that woman is also capable of doing the public things and hence full citizenship should be extended to them. The argument that she is making is not direct to the authorities but first and foremost to the men and women of the society, because the major opposition for her idea would be coming from them only. The state has always tilted towards the major trends and when and where there is a consensus that woman should be made equal in all spheres, given the formation as well as the record of the state there would not be any objection to the same. The activism of al-Uthman is important, in the realm of demanding full citizenship to women in the country. The changes that the country has witnessed in the field of women's empowerment are a result of such women's activism. The demand made by al-Uthman and others for equal status of man and woman both at home and outside is the first step towards the realization of the full citizenship for women in Kuwait.

In order to understand the real impact of the writings of al-Uthman, we have to move from the traditional way of analyzing the text and see them in terms of its potential in making change in the public realm (Felski 1989). Seen in this prism, the literary works itself could be seen as having great potential in providing a counter argument and oppositional ideology to the dominant patriarchal thinking and ideology and the practices based on them. The specific background and the personal experiences on the one hand

and the socio-political background of the country and the region on the other hand could be seen as the main cause for the specific nature of the literature produced and the alternatives sought. Drawing insights from the conceptual framework provided by Habermas and his critics, we can say that a vibrant public sphere is in the making which is seeking wide ranging changes in many socio-political fields and it is producing, though slowly and gradually the desired results (Felski 1989).

The unique socio-political background plus the historical factors of religious and tribal influences have made possible the creation of women's reality in Kuwait. Laila al-Uthman tried to grasp this patriarchal reality and challenged thoroughly through her writings and activism. Thus there is a counter public that is projected in many ways. We can assume that the author is seeking to achieve two things: the first is stating and describing women's reality in Kuwait and the Arab world and second is seeking to change this reality by provoking the dominant practices intentionally time and again. Al-Uthman is giving a critique of the existing socio-political realities and she has interrogated its basis inviting the wrath of the beneficiaries of the current system. Laila al-Uthman, through her words and deeds, not only challenged patriarchal values and institutions in Kuwait, but also provided resources for imagining new citizenship based on equal rights and justice.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Through her writings and activism Laila al-Uthman has contributed much to the Kuwaiti public sphere in terms of presenting a counter argument to the dominant patriarchal notions of the society. The literary engagement as well as activism of al-Uthman has been an irritant to the state authorities on the one hand to the religious extremists on the other. The author has successfully ushered into the public realm discussions on a number of issues that were previously considered to be part of the private sphere. The main task of this work was the testing of the idea of Nancy Fraser that counter public spheres, rather than the dominant public sphere, should be there for more inclusive change. The example set by al-Uthman proved that creating a counter public sphere is possible and it would in due time intrude into the discourse of the dominant public sphere and would bring change gradually. The study proves that al-Uthman did present an alternative women's reality different from the dominant one that has taken shape and practiced in the unique context of Kuwait.

This study has shown that Laila al-Uthman through her engagement itself, proved that society does not mean male members alone. This is relevant in the context of West Asia where the state business as well as all public affairs are seen the prerogative of men and not women. The dominant public discourse has been challenged with her 'irritating' presence that has been sought to be silenced by those who felt erosion of their base and values. As noted above she has brought a number of issues considered to be in the private realm of the society including domestic violence, early marriage, sexuality etc. into the public realm. The unique experiences of the author, both personal and social, have set her realities and she has seen them as oppressive to woman, marginalizing their concerns and denying their rights. Religion and its practices have also been interrogated by Laila al-Uthman violating once again the boundary and prerequisites of the Habermasian public sphere where religion is purely the private concern of an individual. The religious convictions are reigning high in West Asian countries and the patriarchal interpretation of

the religious texts has kept women for a long time in the disadvantaged position. The author has questioned, not the basic tenets of the religion but the oppressive and conservative character of it. She does not propose an anti-religious view. She invokes religion and its egalitarian and forward looking views. It is the spirit of the religion, and not the text and its interpretation, that is important for the author.

The writer and the public sphere that she engages in and creates get more significance, as it shows the general quest for democratic agency in a society which has an unsatisfactory electoral participation, a frustrated citizenship and no viable option to change the power structure. The engagement of woman through writing and questioning the age-old practices in the society as well as demanding change in the treatment of the woman point to the changing circumstances of political mobilization in Kuwait.

In this study the conceptual aspects of public sphere particularly the insight provided by Fraser were addressed and it has shown that Fraser's notion is helpful for the study of women's engagement in public sphere in Kuwait. The specificities of Kuwaiti public sphere were also taken up for discussion and an attempt is made to bring out the significant role that *divaniyya* and mosques have been playing in political discussions. The gendered nature of the dominant public sphere has been explored and the circumstances that led to its crystallization in the current form have also been dealt with. The major issues that al-Uthman has raised through her writings were also explored in detail.

In the course of the study, an attempt was made to answer another important research question, namely, why al-Uthman engagement in the Kuwaiti public sphere attracted so much controversies surrounding women's role in society. The interrogation of the current practices would inevitably raise questions and the beneficiaries of the current socio-political system would not remain quite. They have tried using all the possible options to silence al-Uthman. The crossing of the boundaries set for different classes and groups has always ended up in tension throughout the history of humankind. This tension is a necessary step towards change. The same thing is happening here.

A study of the socio-political implications of Laila al-Uthman's writings and the extent of her influence make it clear that she helped to create a positive atmosphere for raising issues pertaining to women. We have seen the gradual change in the media and

public discourse in favour of women's issues, first by tracing the fact that there are issues pertaining to women that need public attention and secondly by introducing a number of changes in socio-political fields by addressing the concerns of women. This could be seen in the approval of the demand for suffrage and running for high level posts in the government and in muting a number of laws prohibiting the discriminative treatment of women.

Kuwaiti public sphere is undergoing gradual democratization as more and more women are engaged in developing new discourses on women's rights through their writings and activism. The effect of democratization is evident in the increasing number of women in different fields including the Kuwaiti Parliament and various government posts. This is in addition to their increasing role in the society as media persons, NGO activists, business persons, teachers and humanitarian activists. However, there are a number of areas where the presence of woman is still lacking. The religious scholarship and equal rights in citizenship and the gender biased allocations of the state funds are showing this lack. The vibrancy of the critical space women have created is evidenced by the increasing literature on women, the columns in various media for woman specific issues and the widening of scholarly articles and books on Kuwaiti women and their activism. It is indicating to the rest of the Arab world that this is a model worth emulating. Laila al-Uthman's literary and activist efforts contributed a lot to this energising of the Kuwaiti public sphere through critical discourse.

Bibliography

Abou El Fadl, Khaled (2001), *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women,* London: Oneworld.

Abu-Hamad, Aziz (1995), "The Bedoons of Kuwait: "Citizens Without Citizenship"" *Human Rights Watch/Middle East Human Rights Watch.*

Abu-Lughod, Lila (1986), "Modest Women, Subversive Poems: The Politics of Love in an Egyptian Bedouin Society", *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, 13 (2): 159-168.

_____ (1989), "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World" *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (18): 267-306

_____ (1998), "Contentious Theoretical Issues: Third World Feminisms and Identity Politics", *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 26 (3/4): 25-29.

_____ (1998a), *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Afkhami, Mahnaz (1995), *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World,* (ed.) London: I.B. Tauris Publications.

Ahmad, Irfan (2009), *Islamism and Democracy in India: the Transformation of Jamaat-e-Islami*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ahmed, Leila (1992), *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Ahmed, Mufti M. Mukarram (2005), *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD.

Akbarzadeh, Shahram and MacQueen, Benjamin (2008), *Islam and Human Rights in Practice: Perspectives Across the Ummah,* (ed.) London; New York: Routledge.

Al-Ali, Nadje Sadig (2000), *Secularism, Gender, and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian Women's Movement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, Benedict (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Rev. (ed.) London: Verso.

Ansari, Shahid Jamal (1996), "Development Administration and Bureaucracy in Contemporary Arab Gulf", *Indian Journal of Public Administration,* 42 (1): 66-76.

Anscombe, Frederick F. (1997) *The Ottoman Gulf: the Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*, London: Columbia University Press.

_____ (1998), *Political Modernization in the Gulf*, New Delhi: Northern Book Centre.

Anwar, Etin (2006), *Gender and Self in Islam*, London: Rutledge.

Asad, Talal (2003), *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, California: Stanford University Press.

Asen, Robert (2002), "Imagining in the Public Sphere," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, University: The Pennsylvania State University, 35 (4).

Ashraf, Ahmad and Banuazizi, Ali (2001), "Iran's Tortuous Path toward "Islamic Liberalism"", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 15 (2): 237-256.

Assiri, Abdul-Reda and Al-Monoufi, Kamal (1988), "Kuwait's Political Elite: The Cabinet" *Middle East Journal*, 42(1): 48-58

Ayish, Muhammad Ibrahim (2008), *The New Arab Public Sphere*, Berlin: Frank & Timme Gmb H.

Azher, Mohammed (1986), *Political Economy of the Arab Gulf Aid: A Comparative Study of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait,* Ph.D Thesis New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Badran, Margot (1988), "The Feminist Vision in the Writings of Three Turn-of-the-Century Egyptian Women" *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, 15, (5):11-20.

Barakat, Halim (1993), *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State,* California: University of California Press.

Battani, Marshall et al (1997), "Cultures' Structures: Making Meaning in the Public Sphere", *Theory and Society*, 26 (6): 781-812.

Bayat, Asef (2007), "A Women's Non-Movement: What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State" *Comparative Studies of South Asia Africa and Middle East*, 27 (1).

Beck, Lois and Keddie, Nikki R (1980), Women in the Muslim World, (eds.) Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Benhabib, Seyla (1985), "The Utopian Dimension in Communicative Ethics Author," *New German Critique*, 35: 83-96

Bensahel, Nora & Byman, Daniel (2004), *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Change,* Cambridge: Rand Corporation.

Beverley Milton (2006), *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East, Edwards Polity,* Colorado: Lynne Riener Publishers.

Bodman, Herbert L. et al (1998), *Women in Muslim Scieties: Diversity within Unity*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Riener Publishers

Bowker, Robert (2010), *Egypt and the Politics of Change in the Arab Middle East*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bromley, Simon (1994), *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press.

Browers, Michaelle (2006), *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought Trans-cultural Possibilities*, Ney York: Syracuse University Press.

Brown, Nathan (2006), "The Beginning of Real Politics?", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009, URL: www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=20644

Brynen, Rex et al (1995), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Calhoun, Craig ed, (1992), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Canaday, Margot (2003), "Promising Alliances: The Critical Feminist Theory of Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib," *Feminist Review,* 74: 50-69

Casey, Michael S. (2007), *The History of Kuwait*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Chatty, Dawnand and Rabo, Annika (1997), *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women's Groups in the Middle East*, (eds.) Oxford; New York: Berg.

Crossley, Nick Michael and Roberts, John (2004), *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere,* Oxford: Blackwell Publications.

Crystal, Jill (1990), *Coalitions in Oil Monarchies: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1995), *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar,* London: Cambridge University Press.

Donohue, John J. and Esposito, John L.(1982), *Islam in Transition : Muslim Perspectives,* (eds.) New York: Oxford University Press.

Doumato, Eleanor Abdella (1999), "Women and Work in Saudi Arabia: How Flexible Are Islamic Margins?", *Middle East Journal,* 53 (4): 568-583.

Doumato, Eleanor Abdella and Posusney, Marsha Pripstein (2003), *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society,* (eds.) Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers.

Dunne, Michele (2008), "Women's Political Participation in the Gulf: A Conversation with Activists Fatin Bundagji (Saudi Arabia), Rola Dashti (Kuwait), Munira Fakhro (Bahrain)", *Arab Reform Bulletin,* [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009, URL:www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=20516

Eger, Elizabeth (2001), *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ehteshami, Anoushiravan (1999), "Is the Middle East Democratizing?", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 26 (2): 199-217.

_____ (2003), "Reform From Above: The Politics of Participation in the Oil Monarchies" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 79 (1): 3-75.

Eley, Geoff (2002), *Commentary Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere*, North Carolina: Duke University Press

Esposito, John L. and Voll, John Obert (1996), *Islam and Democracy,* London: Oxford University Press.

Farhi, Farideh (2001), "Religious Intellectuals, the "Woman Question", and the Struggle for the Creation of a Democratic Public Sphere in Iran", *International Journal of Politics*, Culture, and Society, 15 (2): 315-339.

Felski, Rita (1989), Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change, London: Harvard University Press.

Fenton, Natalie and Downey, John (2003), "*Counter Public Spheres and the Global Modernity*", www.javnost-thepublic.org/article/pdf/2003/1/2/

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock and Bezirgan, Basima Qattan (1977), *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak,* (eds.) Austin: University of Texas Press.

Ferree, Myra Marx et al (2002), "Four Models of the Public Sphere in Modern Democracies", *Theory and Society*, 31 (3): 289-324.

Findlay, Allan M. (1994), *The Arab World,* London: Routledge.

Fraser, Nancy (1990), "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, 25/26: 56-80

Gaffney, Patrick D. (1992), "Popular Islam", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 524: 38-51.

Gavrielides, Nicolas (1987), '*Tribal Democracy: The Anatomy of Parliamentary Elections in Kuwait', in Elections in the Middle East: Implications and Recent Trends,* (ed.) Linda Layne. Boulder: Westview Press.

Ghabra, Shafeeq (1997), "Kuwait and the Dynamics of Socio-Economic Change" *Middle East Journal*, 51(3):358-372.

Ghanim, David (2009), *Gender and Violence in the Middle East*, California: ABC-CLIO.

Ghoussoub, Mai and Sinclair-Webb, Emma (2000), *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East,* (eds.) London: Saqi.

Giorcelli, Cristina & Miller, Cristanne & Wolosky, Shira (2002), *Twentieth Century Women's Poetics of Engagement* http://www.paradigme.com/sources/SOURCES-PDF/Pages%20de%20SOURCE12-1.pdf Accessed on 05/06/2010

Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan (2004), "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?", *Third World Quarterly*, 25(3): 521-536

Goodwin (1994), Price of Honour: *Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World,* London: Little, Brown.

Guidry A., John Q. Sawyer, Mark (2003), "Contentious Pluralism: The Public Sphere and Democracy," *Perspectives on Politics,* 1 (2): 273-289

El Guind, Fadwa (1981), "Veiling Infitah with Muslim Ethic: Egypt's Contemporary Islamic Movement", *Social Problems,* 28 (4): 465-485.

Habermas et al, (1974), "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article", *New German Critique*, 3: 49-55.

Habermas, Jurgen (1992), '*Further Reflections on the Public Sphere*' in Calhoun, C. ed (1992) Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge, Mass: MIT

_____ (1989), *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Translated by Burger, Thomas and Lawrence, Frederick, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck, & L. Esposito, John (1998), *Islam, Gender, & Social Change*, London: Oxford University Press.

Hahn, Lewis Edwin (2000), *Perspectives on Habermas*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing.

Hashim, Iman (1999), "Reconciling Islam and Feminism", *Gender and Development*, 7 (1): 7-14.

Hijab, Nadia (1988), Womanpower: *The Arab Debate on Women at Work*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hourani, Albert Habib and Ruthven Malise (2002), *A History of the Arab*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Howland, Courtney W. (1999), *Religious Fundamentalism and the Human Rights of Women*, (ed.) Hampshire: Macmillan Press.

Hussain, Freda (1984), *Muslim Women*, Croom Hemn: Beckenham.

Ingram, David and Simon-Ingram, Julia (1992), *Critical Theory: the Essential Readings* Paragon

House.

Ismael, Jacqueline (1982), *Kuwait: Social Change in Historical Perspective*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Izadparast, Ali Akbar (1983), *Position of Women in Muslim Arab Societies*, Ann Arbor University: Microfilms International.

Janardhan N. (1999), *The Al-Sabahs and the Kuwaiti National Assembly: the Legitimacy Factor* (Ph.D Thesis), New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Jankowski, James and Gershoni, Israel (1997), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Joseph, Suad (1996), "Gender and Citizenship in Middle Eastern States", *Middle East Report*, 198 (1-3): 4-10.

_____ (2000), Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East, London: Syracuse University Press.

Jung, Dietrich (2006), Democratization and Development: New Political Strategies for the Middle East, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kamrava, Mehran (2005), *The Modern Middle East: a Political History Since the First World War*, California: University of California Press.

Kandiyoti, Deniz, ed (1996), *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

Keddie, Nikki R. (2007), *Women in the Middle East: Past and Present*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Keddie, Nikki R. and Baron, Beth (1991), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, (eds.) New York: Yale University Press.

Kellner, Douglas (2000), "Habermas, the Public Sphere, and Democracy: A Critical Intervention" http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html

Knödler-Bunte et al (1975), "The Proletarian Public Sphere and Political Organization: An Analysis of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's The Public Sphere and Experience" *New German Critique*, 4: 51-75

Landau, Jacob M. (1972), *Man, State, and Society in the Contemporary Middle East,* (ed.) New York: Praeger Publishers.

Loehwing, Melanie and Motter, Jeff (2009), "Publics, Counter-publics, and the Promise of Democracy" *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 42: 3.

Mabro, Judy (1991), *Veiled Half-Truths: Western Travellers' Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*, London, New York: I.B. Tauris.

Manger, Leif O. (1999), *Muslim Diversity: Local Islam in Global Contexts*, London: Routledge

Marshall, Gül Aldikaçti (2005), "Ideology, Progress, and Dialogue: A Comparison of Feminist and Islamist Women's Approaches to the Issues of Head Covering and Work in Turkey", *Gender and Society*, 19 (1): 104-120.

McKee, Alan (2005), *The Public Sphere: an Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mernissi, Fátima (1987), *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

_____ (1988), "Muslim Women and Fundamentalism", *Middle East Report*, 153 (6-7): 8-11+50.

_____ (1992), *The Veil and the Male Elite: a Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, New York: Perseus Books.

_____ (1992a), *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, Translated by Lakeland, Mary Jo, Cambridge: Perseus Publishing.

Migdal, Joel S. (2001), *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute one Another*, New York Cambridge University Press.

Migdal, Joel S. et al (1994), *State power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mikhail, Mona (1979), *Images of Arab Women: Fact and Fiction*, Washington: Three Continents Press.

Mill, John Stuart (1960), *On Liberty Representative Government: The Subjection of Women*, London: Oxford University Press.

Moaddel, Mansoor (1998), "Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1): 108-130.

Moghadam, Valentine M. (2003), *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

_____ (2007), *From Patriarchy to Empowerment: Women's Participation, Movements, And Rights In The Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia,* London: Syracuse University Press.

Moghissi Haideh (2005), *Women and Islam: Women's Movements in Muslim Societies*, London: Taylor & Francis.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade (1984), "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse", *boundary* 2 12 (3): 333-358 Duke University Press.

Mojab, Shahrzad (2001), "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'", *Feminist Review*, 69: 124-146.

Al Mughni, Haya (2001), *Women in Kuwait: the Politics of Gender,* London: Saqi.

Al Mughni, Haya Abdulrahman (2004), "The Politics of Women's Suffrage in Kuwait", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009, URL: www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=21231

Mule, Pat and Barthel, Diane (1992), "The Return to the Veil: Individual Autonomy vs. Social Esteem", *Man, New Series*, 13 (2): 218-233.

Al-Najjar, Ghanim (2000) "The Challenges Facing Kuwaiti Democracy" *Middle East Journal*, 54 (2): 242-258

_____ (2006), "Struggle over Parliament", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009, URL: www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=2084.5

Nashat, Guity and Tucker, Judith E. (1999), *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Restoring Women to History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Negt, O. and Kluge, A. (1972*), Public Sphere and Experience: Towards an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Obermeyer, Carla Makhlouf (1992), "Islam, Women, and Politics: The Demography of Arab Countries", *Population and Development Review*, 18, (1): 33-60.

Offenhauer, Priscilla (2005), "Women in Islamic Societies", Federal Research Division Library of Congress, Washington, *D.C. 20540–4840*

Osman, Kamal Salih (1991), "Kuwait: Political Consequences of Modernization 1750-1986", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 27 (1): 46-66.

Paidar, Parvin (1997), Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran, New York: Cambridge University Press.

_____ (1995), *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Papanek, Hanna (1973), "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15 (3): 289-325.

Pasha, Aftab Kamal (1992), *The Gulf in Turmoil: A Global Response*, New Delhi: Lancers Books.

_____ (1995), *Kuwait: Strategies of Survival,* New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.

_____ (1999), Aspects of Political Participation in the Gulf States, Delhi: Kalinga Publications.

Peshkova, Svetlana (2009), "Bringing the Mosque Home and Talking Politics: Women, Domestic Space, and the State in the Ferghana Valley (Uzbekistan)" *Cont Islam,* (3):251–273

Peterson, J. E. (1989), "The Political Status of Women in the Arab Gulf States" *Middle East Journal*, 43 (1): 34-50.

Rabinovitch, Eyal (2001), "Gender and the Public Sphere: Alternative Forms of Integration in Nineteenth-Century America", *Sociological Theory*, 19 (3): 344-370.

Ramazani, Nesta (1985), "Arab Women in the Gulf" *Middle East Journal*, 39(2): 258-276.

Ramazani, Nesta (1993), "Women in Iran: The Revolutionary Ebb and Flow", *Middle East Journal*, 47 (3): 409-428.

Ray, R. and Korteweg, A. C. (1999), "Women's Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilization, and Autonomy", *Annual Review of Sociology*, (25): 47-71.

Read, Jen'Nan Ghazal and Bartkowski, John P. (2000), "To Veil or Not to Veil? A Case Study of Identity Negotiation among Muslim Women in Austin, Texas", *Gender and Society*, 14 (3): 395-417.

Rizzo Helen Mary (2005), Islam, Democracy, and the Status of Women: the Case of Kuwait, London: Routledge.

Rubin, Barry M. (2002), *Crises in the Contemporary Persian Gulf*, London: Routledge.

Sa'ar, Amalia (2005), "Postcolonial Feminism, the Politics of Identification, and the Liberal Bargain", *Gender and Society*, 19 (5): 680-700.

El Saadawi, Nawal & Hetata, Sherif (2007), *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab* London: World Zed Books.

Sabbagh, Suha (1996), *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, New York: Interlink Books.

Sadiki, Larbi (2002), "One 'Islam', Many 'Islams': Understanding the Arab-Islamic Perspective on 11 September in a Globalising World, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 13: 43-60.

Sakr Naomi (2004), *Women and Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-expression*, New York: I.B.Tauris.

Saliba, Therese et al (2002), *Gender, Politics, and Islam,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Samiuddin, Abida and Khanam R. (2002), *Muslim Feminism and Feminist Movement*, (eds.) Delhi: Global Vision Pub. House.

Scarce, Jennifer (1985), *The Evolving Culture of Kuwait*, London: HMSO.

Shahidian, Hammed (2002), *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Al-Shammari, Khaled (2010), "Kuwaiti Women Continue Quest for Social and Civil Rights in Kuwait", Shorfa.com. 2010-05-14, http://www.alshorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2010/05/14/feature-01

Sharabi, Hisham (1988), Neo-patriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sharma, Ursula M. (1978), "Women and Their Affines: The Veil as a Symbol of Separation", *Sociological Forum*, 7 (2): 323-332.

Al-Shayeji, Abdullah (2005), "Beyond Women's Suffrage", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, [Online: Web] Accessed on 29 November 2009, URL: www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/?fa=show&article=21160.

Shukri, Shirin J. A. (1999), *Social Changes and Women in the Middle East: State Policy, Education, Economics, and Development,* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Siltanen, Janet and Stanworth, Michelle (1984), *Women and the Public Sphere: a Critique of Sociology and Politics,* London: Hutchinson.

Somers, Margaret R. (1995), "Narrating and Naturalizing Civil Society and Citizenship Theory: The Place of Political Culture and the Public Sphere", *Sociological Theory*, 13 (3): 229-274.

Sonn, Tamara (2004), *A Brief History of Islam*, Blackwell Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

Stoddard, Philip et al (1981), *Change and the Muslim World,* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer (1996), *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, London: Oxford University Press.

Sunder, Madhavi (2003), "Piercing the Veil", *The Yale Law Journal,* 112 (6): 1399-1472.

Tabari, Azar (1980), "The Enigma of Veiled Iranian Women", *Feminist Review*, 5: 19-31.

Tetreault, Mary Ann & al-Mughni, Haya (1995), "Gender, Citizenship and Nationalism in

Kuwait," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 22(1/2): 64-80.

Tétreault, Mary Ann (1993), "Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights, *Middle East Journal*, 47(2): 275-291.

_____ (1995b), "Modernization and Its Discontents: State and Gender in Kuwait", *Middle East Journal*, 49 (3): 403-417.

_____ (2000), *Stories of Democracy: Politics and Society in Contemporary Kuwait*, New York City: Columbia University Press.

_____ (2001a), "A State of Two Minds: State Cultures, Women, and Politics in Kuwait," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 33 (2): 203-220.

Tétreault, Mary Ann and Ranchod-Nilsson, Sita (2000), *Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation*? London: Routledge.

Tétreault, Mary Ann and Teske, Robin L. (2000), *Conscious Acts and the Politics of Social Change*, New York: Univ of South Carolina Press.

Te'treault, Mary Ann et al (1993), *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tibi, Bassam (1986), "Islam and Modern European Ideologies" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 18 (1): 15-29.

_____ (2001) *Islam Between Culture and Politics*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

*Al-Uthman, Laila (1995), *Wasamiyyathun Thakruju Minal Bahar (Wasamiyya Comes Out of the Sea)*, FKA; Cyprus: Al Mada.

*_____ (1995a), *Fathiha Thaktharu Mauthaha (Fethiha Choose Her Death),* Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (1995b), *Al Hubbu Lahu Suwarun (Love Has Many Forms),* Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (1995c), *Yahduzu Kulla Laila (It Happens Every Night),* Beirut: Darul Aadabi Li Nashri Wathazee.

*_____ (1996), *Zahra Thadkulu Al Hayy (Zahra Enters To The Quarter),* Beirut: Darul Aadab.

*_____ (1997), *Al Hawajis Assawda (Black Barriers),* Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (2000), *Al Marathu Val Kitha (Women and the Cat),* Beirut: Al Muassasa Al Arabiyya Li Ddirasathi Va Nasr.

*_____ (2000a), *Al Raheel (The Departure)*, Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (2000b), *Imrathun Fi Ina (A Woman in a Vase)*, Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (2002), Al Usas (Coccyx), Damascus: Al Mada.

*_____ (2007), *Al Muhakama (The Trail)*, San'a: Darul Kuthub.

*_____ (2003), *Yamiyyathu Al Sabri wal Murr (Diary of Patience and Bitterness),* Kuwait: Mathbathu Al Malik.

*_____ (2004), *Ayyam Fil Yaman (Days in Yemen,* Kuwait: Mathbathu Al Malik.

*_____ (2006), *La Yaslahu Lil Hubb (Not Fit for Love)*, Beirut: Darul Aadabi Li Nashri Wathazee.

*_____ (2005), *Bila Kuudin Dauni Athakallamu (Unrestricted .. Let Me Speak)*, Kuwait: Makthbathu Al Faisal.

*_____ (2007b), *Sumthul Farashath (Silence of the Butterflies)*, Beirut: Darul Aadab.

Volpp, Leti (2001), "Feminism versus Multiculturalism", *Columbia Law Review*, 101, (5): 1181-1218.

Wollstonecraft, Mary (1992), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, London: David Campbell.

Woodsmall, Ruth Frances (1975), *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, New York: Round Table Press.

Yetiv, Steve (2002), "Kuwait's Democratic Experiment in Its Broader International Context" *Middle East Journal*, 56 (2): 257-271.

Yom, Sean L. (2005)b "Civil Society and Democratization in The Arab World" *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 9 (4): 2

Yuval-Davis, Nira (1997), "Women, Citizenship and Difference", *Feminist Review*, 57: 4-27

Zaatari, Zeina (2006), "The Culture Of Motherhood: An Avenue for Women's Civil Participation In South Lebanon" *Journal Of Middle East Women's Studies*, 2(1).

Zahlan, Rosemarie Said (1998), *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman*, New York: Ithaca Press.