

who, where and how. But the answers to the who, where and how can be different from culture to culture and yet legitimated by each group.

Jordan's contribution is to provide comparative perspectives on childbirth and to suggest that the medical model which is the culturally dominant pattern for childbirth in Canada, does not work in either the medical sense (as indicated by infant mortality rates) or a cultural sense (meaning that the mother herself feels an active participant and involved in the experience and has a sense of achievement once the child arrives). The relationship between the painfulness of the birth experienced by women and the cultural definition of pain is described. The Yucatan experience is as ritualized and formalized as birth in our own culture, but it seems favourable on what I consider to be two critical indicators of a successful birth experience, that of a safe medical experience for both mother and child, and a rewarding emotional experience for the family unit—mother, father and baby. As both Oakley and Leifer point out, these two criteria do not always work together in either a British (Oakley) or American (Leifer) birth experience.

I would like to conclude by commenting on two significant themes, first, the medicalization of birth and secondly, the lack of cultural support for the new mother. The transformation of birth from women's arena to that of men (midwives to medical men) has not ended with the general acceptance in Canada of birth as a medical phenomena. The rate of medical intervention is increasing—fetal monitoring, induced labour, caesarian sections, forceps delivery and episiotomies are all on the increase in Canada. The high technology model of birth is spreading, which diminishes the amount of control the individual has over the process, and the degree of achievement the mother feels over the process.

Oakley, Jordan and Leifer all suggest that the powerlessness of most North American women during the birth process is a part of the essentially passive, submissive role women have been taught in this context. By taking control of the birth experience and modifying the medical models to suit the needs of women, we would go a long way toward providing a sense of involvement in a uniquely female experience and birth as a stressful experience for women would disappear. This is in contrast to the high technology approach to birth and the anti-natalist attitude of many radical feminists. This brings one to the second point. Early motherhood is a difficult experience for many women because of the isolated units in which we live and the general cultural assumption that caring for an infant is the mother's work. Oakley found that the help fathers initially contributed with their newborns had declined significantly by the time the baby was 5 months old. We need to provide those cultural supports to bridge the isolation, the sense of fatigue and incompetence that plague new mothers. Oakley's subjects again say that the rosy picture presented of motherhood made the reality so much harder to cope with because each individual gets a feeling of personal inadequacy and incompetence. Certainly any mother or prospective mother who reads these books will not be surprised. And every feminist ought to be interested in these issues.

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Freedom From Menstrual Cramps. Kathryn Schrottenboer and Genell J. Subak-Sharpe. *New York: Simon and Schuster (Pocket Books), 1981. Pp. 172.*

This readable pocket book explains menstrual function and dysfunction in a clear, concise way. As indicated in the title, the book's focus is on what happens during menstruation.

Recent research suggests that one of the more probable causes of menstrual discomfort is excessive prostoglandin activity (a substance derived from fatty acids within the body). While there are many different theories, the authors review: what drugs are considered safe and effective; why women experience premenstrual tension; the causes of excessive menstrual flow and reasons for failure to menstruate; what to expect as menopause approaches; what some of the causes of infertility are; safety in tampon use; and include a selected bibliography for further reading. The authors urge women to seek a doctor's advice in these matters, but they also advocate responsible self-direction in dealing with common "women's problems".

I found the sections on premenstrual tension, special problems among adolescents, toxic shock syndrome and menopause especially useful and informative. This is a well-researched, generally readable book full of information.

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Women in Islam. Naila Minai. *New York: Seaview Books, 1981. Pp. 283.*

Islamic societies, if they are considered in the West at all, are generally viewed in the mode of Alexander Haig or Hollywood. Edward Said remarked in *Covering Islam* that: "There is an unquestioned assumption that Islam can be characterized by a handful of recklessly general clichés." One does not have to look very hard to find such patent misconception: The Insight Page of a weekend newspaper or a T.V. guide will often suffice. The West displays a particular myopia in its perception of Muslim women—visions of the Arabian Nights—but it is no cliché to say that

women in Islamic societies have fought and are still fighting a hard battle to gain equality with men.

Women in Islam by Naila Minai is a book designed to familiarize a western reader with the lives of women in Islamic societies. In it she illustrates the role Muslim women have had and continue to have in shaping the societies in which they live, rather than showing how an Emily Pankhurst or a Gloria Steinem may have influenced their thinking. Although the problems which effect Muslim women are more severe than our own, they nevertheless reflect a situation which is universal; for example, a judicial precedent was set recently in southern Ontario when a man received two years less a day for beating his wife to death.

Minai's book is a general survey, and not as comprehensive as Lois Beck and Nikkie Keddie's *Women in the Muslim World*, but as Minai herself states: "This book is not meant to be an exhaustive study of Middle Eastern women, but rather a personal view by a Muslim woman who has spent her life commuting between the East and the West."

She devotes the first of the three parts of her work to the history of women in Islam, and in contrast to the almond-eyed girls so often portrayed in Islamic literature, the women Minai describes in the early years of the Islamic state were of heroic proportions. Al Khansa, for instance, was a celebrated poetess, who accompanied her sons into battle, and through her verses exhorted men and women to fight for Islam, while one of Muhammed's first converts, Umm Umarah, reluctantly had to give up fighting after she lost a hand in battle.

Minai points out that in the embryonic years of Islam, women's rights were considered for the first time among the people of the Arabian peninsula, and although they were formulated in such a way that today may seem trifling or