



**H.E. Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa
President, Bahrain Authority for Culture & Antiquities
Kingdom of Bahrain**

Gulf Affairs: What are the objectives of the newly founded Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities?

Shaikha Mai Al-Khalifa: In many ways the strength, richness, and authenticity of Bahraini culture has always been a major component of modern day Bahraini society. One cannot understand Bahrain and its people, the make-up of the society, its open minded, tolerant, and progressive nature, without acquiring an in depth knowledge of its history and its culture. That is precisely why Bahrain recognized that it was absolutely necessary for the Kingdom to place culture, history, and archeology in the center of the Kingdom's national agenda. The establishment of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities as an independent body with a wide and encompassing mandate is therefore a natural and logical manifestation of this national priority. The Authority is therefore mandated with exploration, protection, and promotion of Bahrain's rich history and both tangible and intangible cultural wealth. The mandate of the Authority is crucial for the image, the perception, and the appreciation of modern day Bahrain for its citizens as much as for the world at large.

Gulf Affairs: What are the major achievements of the Bahraini authorities in the area of culture in recent years?

Al-Khalifa: We can confidently say that in the relatively short history of the Authority, many achievements and success stories were realized. In addition to the continuous, day to day work of maintaining and protecting cultural heritage, important infrastructures were established on the ground, such as several specialized museums as well as the establishment of the National Theater designed and built with state of the art standards. To date, the Theater hosted several renowned national and international performances that were enjoyed by the people of Bahrain and its visitors. The Authority also succeeded in naming Manama as Arab Capital of Culture (2012), Arab Capital of Tourism (2013), and Asian Capital of Tourism (2014), while Al Muharaq was named Islamic Capital of culture. In addition, the Authority was able to launch an important project on knowledge transfer as well as embark on several research and translation projects placing Bahraini culture and literature on the international stage. The Authority is today bringing the world to Bahrain and taking Bahrain to the world.

Gulf Affairs: How would you describe the role of Bahrain in promoting culture in the Gulf region and beyond?

Al-Khalifa: The progressive, open minded, and international character of the Bahraini society makes it one of the best ambassadors for transmitting the wealth and authentic deep-rooted culture of the Gulf societies to the world at large. This is a crucial task today in a world that is becoming increasingly intolerant and is suffering from serious stereotyping of each other's culture. The proper understanding of the richness and the beauty of the diversity of every culture is essential in building a better world. Bahrain understands very well its role in today's world and in taking the culture of the Gulf societies to the world, and the Authority is one of its important vehicles in achieving this important task.

Gulf Affairs: Bahrain is a country rich in cultural heritage and with a very long history: what is the impact of this heritage on the Bahraini identity? How would you define the Bahraini identity in the 21st century?

Al-Khalifa: Societies are the product of their history, their people, their place, and their unique resulting culture; Bahrain is no exception. As an island that was home to the most ancient civilizations, Bahrain acquired many rich cultural features of openness, ability to connect easily with other cultures as well as a variety of skills connected to sea life, trade, and services. Such characters are still very important features of the Bahraini society. That is why Bahrainis today are tolerant, accommodating, and friendly. They are also naturally skilled at trade, crafts, and services. The recognition and listing of the "pearl trail" as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is an example of a rich heritage in skills, trade, and services. Bahraini people today are without doubt the product of a culture that is rich, unique, and worthy of international recognition.

Gulf Affairs: What is the role of women in promoting Bahraini culture and shaping the Bahraini identity?

Al-Khalifa: Regardless of gender, we are living in an encouraging atmosphere in the Kingdom of Bahrain, where both men and women can work creatively in various fields based on the principle of equal opportunities. The Bahraini woman has always played a significant role economically and socially. In the era prior to the discovery of oil in the 1930s, she worked hard to support her family while her husband was away on long diving trips, thus the Bahraini woman has left her mark throughout history. In fact, any national achievement is hardly devoid of the contributions of Bahraini women.

IV. Interviews

Gulf Affairs: In recent years GCC countries have undertaken a variety of efforts to preserve and celebrate their history. What initiatives were undertaken in Bahrain and how do they fit in the national tourism strategy?

Al-Khalifa: Bahrain has always been very active within the GCC group, especially in the field of cultural preservation and cultural promotion, which, as you correctly noted, has been a GCC priority. The best manifestation can be seen in Bahrain's success and distinction in the tourism industry. We believe that culture is the story of the people, and tourism is the publisher and distributor of the story. The importance that we place on tourism is, therefore, the best way of demonstrating the respect and value we place on our cultural heritage. We want the world to know about it; we want the world to enjoy it; we want the world to come visit Bahrain, and that is why we promote tourism.

Gulf Affairs: What are the future plans for the promotion of culture in Bahrain?

Al-Khalifa: We will continue to work hard on the preservation and the promotion of our cultural heritage. There are many initiatives in the planning. We are planning to establish a dedicated cultural TV channel, promote cruises to visit some of our cultural sites, and introduce "light and sound" shows to selected cultural and archeological sites. These are some examples of our future plans on the ground. Our mission, however, remains the preservation, the presentation, and the promotion of the beautiful story of our people.