

**For the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**By
Heifa Shakri**

**Under the supervision of
Prof. Farhana Siddiqi
Head Department of Arabic**

**Department of Arabic
Faculty of Humanities and Languages
Jamia Millia Islamia**

**Title
Bahithatul Badia: Her Contribution
to Literature and Women Reform**

Malak Hifni Nasif later known by her pen name Bahithatul Badia (Searcher in the Desert) was born in Cairo Egypt in 1886. Her father Hifni Nasif was a well educated man, and he believed in women's education. In 1903, Malak HifniNasif graduated from Al-Saniyya School, the first teacher training School in Cairo, she taught for a while at the school. She wrote essays, articles and gave public speeches which examined the challenges and potentials for women as they entered the national life and participated in the development of the country.

She was invited to be a lecturer in the women's section of Egyptian University and at Al-Jarida newspaper. After she married Abd Al-Sattar Al-Basil, she lived in Al-fayyum, and continued her social work till her death of influenza in 1918 at the young age of 32.

She played an important role in the development of feminism and the reform of social institutions she tackled a variety of social and cultural issues in her regular column for Al-Jarida. She defended the Egyptian women and criticized the

conservatives for denying women's abilities. Her efforts were focused on promoting women's education. She sent a list of ten demands to the Egyptian Parliament for the improvement of women's position in society. She spoke out against polygamy and stressed on being permitted only in every specific circumstances.

In 1910, a collection of Malak Hifni Nasif's speeches and essays was published under the title *Al-Nisaiyyat* (women's affairs).

In 1962 her brother Majd Al-Din collected and published her writings as *Aathar Bahithatul Badia* (Works of Bahithatul Badia).

She was active in literary and social groups through which she contracted other writers and reformers such as Mai Ziyada one of the most famous writers in the Arab world.

This thesis brings to the light the important role played by Malak Hifni Nasif in defining Egyptian and Arab political and cultural identity under the British colonial government. It shows how Nasif articulated the feminism that emerged in Egypt during the first third of the twentieth century, as she attempted to improve women's lives through increased educational and work opportunities within a modern Islamic context in her writings poems, speeches and letters which carried a unique literary style.