1983

Aliabad Women: Revolution as Religious Activity

Mary E. Hegland

Santa Clara University, mhegland@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/anthro_fac_pubs

Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mary Hegland. (1983). Aliabad Women: Revolution as Religious Activity. In G. Nashat (Ed.), *Women and Revolution in Iran* (pp. 171–194). Westview Press.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthropology at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Aliabad Women: Revolution as Religious Activity

Mary E. Hegland

An apparent paradox of the Iranian Revolution has been the tremendous participation of Iranian women in the revolution, in terms of the numbers of women who were active in demonstrations, contrasted to the subsequent setbacks in the position of women in Iran and their decreasing participation in public life. In this chapter, I ~~argue that the great majority of women participating in the revolution did not consider their actions to be outside of traditional social, cultural and religious parameters.~~ Neither did they expect their participation in the revolution to be the first step in gaining improved status and more important roles in public life. Before the revolution, the great majority of Iranian women remained outside the modern work force and were not educated. They were still constrained by traditional expectations; their primary responsibility was to children, home and husband. Ideally, any outside activity was restricted to socializing among neighbors and kin or was contained within religious activity. Such women, although participating in the revolution for much the same reasons as men, were able to take part because revolutionary activity was defined as religious activity. As such women were accustomed to participating in religious activities and containing their activity outside of the home and their socializing within a religious framework, they felt little social pressure or self-censorship against participating in this new type of "religious" activity. Because the women themselves as well as the religious ~~leaders who subsequently took over control of the country did not perceive the revolutionary activity of women to be outside of the traditional cultural and religious framework, it is not surprising that such activity did not result in increased activity of women in the public sector.~~

Material for this paper was gathered mainly in the village of Aliabad,² located half-an-hour away from the outskirts of Shiraz, capital of the southwestern province of Fars; also included is information from interviews

with women in Shiraz and elsewhere in Iran between June 1978 and December 1979. It should be noted that the village of Aliabad is something of an exception to the majority of Iranian villages. It enjoys a high level of economic prosperity due in large part to its close proximity with Shiraz, which allows the men to commute to jobs in nearby factories and in the city. A long time association with the bazaar and with religious and educational circles in the city was part of the reason for the relatively high level of participation in the revolution by men and women in the village. Although this paper deals mainly with those women who took part in demonstrations, it is important to remember that such women were in the minority; most women of Aliabad did not join in revolutionary activities. Most of the women who did participate found it possible to take part in the revolution because it was defined as religious activity and therefore as legitimate for them.

In the first section I discuss pre-revolutionary conditions for the women of Aliabad. Next I describe the involvement of the women in the revolution and their attitudes concerning this involvement. Finally, I look at the position of the women during the months following the revolution while I was still present in the village.

Pre-revolutionary Conditions for Women in Aliabad

Previous to the revolution, few women in Aliabad worked or were educated beyond a few years of elementary school. As the following table shows, there were eleven women out of almost 500 in the village who either earned enough income to make them self-sufficient or to contribute a substantial part of their own support.

WOMEN OF ALIABAD WORKING OUTSIDE OF THE HOME DURING 1978-1979

Kindergarten teachers	2
Cloth salesperson	1
Seamstress	1
Hammam [public bath house] attendant	1
Kindergarten cook	1
Midwives	2
Baker of bread	1
Keeper of dairy cows and other animals	1
Opium smuggler	1
Total	11

The opium smuggler was the only woman working outside of her home who was not forced to do so through economic necessity. Most working women were widows, although the kindergarten cook was married to an incompetent man, unable to support himself and his family. The two kinder-

garten teachers were young siyyid women in their early twenties, somewhat older than the average age of village women at marriage. Since they were siyyids (purportedly descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatimeh) and therefore reluctant to marry non-siyyids, there were few potential husbands for them in the village. Furthermore, neither of them had either beauty or a winning personality. Therefore, since they were poor, there was no recourse for them except to support themselves, which they did by teaching kindergarten.

On the whole, employment outside the home was considered an indication of low socio-economic position and a source of shame both for the women involved and for their relatives.³ The female opium smuggler was envied for the quantity of gold jewelry she wore, reportedly purchased with the proceeds from her illicit trade, but many villagers disapproved of her trading activities, although they did not display their disapproval openly because of the close relationship between the woman's husband and the powerful Askari brothers, who ran the village.

The one financially rewarding activity for women commonly accepted among the villagers was the crocheting of cotton uppers for the hand made shoes sewn by some men in the locality and usually sold to migrating Qashqa'i. Such crocheting could be done in a woman's own home, in time she could spare from housework and child care. However, the demand for the hand made shoes was rapidly declining, and women in general were no longer very active in crocheting. In the past, young unmarried girls would have brought in some income by crocheting. Since the market had lessened in recent times, that option was no longer open to them. They could go to school if their families would permit them to; they could stay at home, perhaps doing a bit of knitting or other handicraft, but relatively idle; or they could go to work at the carpet workshop owned by the Askari brothers.

Some twenty girls from less-well-off families worked at the workshop. If they were masters, those who could call out the pattern and the colors to be used, they earned 500 tomans; the girls with less experience earned 300 tomans a month.⁴ They worked from 5 to 1 and from 1:30 to 6 six days a week. Although there was no rule against employment of married women, none worked at the workshop. The girls from the workshop who married while I was in the village stopped working.

Although education for boys was greatly valued, villagers were not enthusiastic about educating their girls. Most fathers were not adverse to allowing their daughters to attend school for a few years, but most girls left school before puberty. Only persons from the upper socio-economic class of the village allowed their daughters to attend high school. Among the siyyids from the Lower Neighborhood (the most prosperous section) of the village,

only the daughters of the three Askari brothers, the political bosses of the village, attended high school in Shiraz. The daughter of one of the brothers, Siyyid Ya^cqub Askari, had received a high school diploma and was a teacher. She had married and moved away from the village. Siyyid Assadullah Askari's daughter attended high school in Shiraz, living at the home of her uncle, Siyyid Ibn Ali Askari, whose daughters were also in high school there. Six to ten girls from the Upper Neighborhood also attended high school in Shiraz, living in homes owned by their fathers or with relatives. These girls were the daughters of Aliabad teachers or families with more progressive attitudes toward the education of women. However, there was strong pressure against the continuing education of these girls. Shirin, the leader of this group of girls and the best student among them, was determined to attend a university and to have a career. Her fiance had earned a diploma and worked in the administration of a nearby factory; he was only mildly opposed to her plans, but her future father-in-law was immovable. Any daughter-in-law of his would certainly not work outside of the home; his son was quite capable of supporting her. Opposing opinions on the matter almost caused the engagement to be broken, and the conflict had not been settled by the time I left the village.

Since most people did not anticipate that girls would have jobs in the future, but would be wives and homemakers, little value was placed on education for women by the majority of villagers. The 14-year-old daughter of my courtyard neighbor had been taken out of school. When a visitor suggested that she start work at the carpet workshop, she replied that she wanted to go to school. "Why?" the visitor asked, "No matter how long you go to school, you'll still end up doing just what the rest of us do." And indeed, the girl was engaged shortly afterwards.

Changes supposedly brought about by the Shah's government had not affected village women to any great degree.⁵ Although the Family Protection Law of 1967 stated that women could not marry before the age of 15, with exemptions allowed, it was not unknown for girls to marry at the age of 12 in the village of Aliabad. Various means, such as obliterating the age on the identity card or using the identity card of an older sister, were used to circumvent the law.

As far as I am aware, there had been only four cases of men with two wives in the village in recent times. Two cases were of long standing. In a third case, which occurred a few years before I came to the village, a woman had committed suicide when her husband took a second wife. In the fourth case, the law which stipulates that a wife must give her written agreement before her husband takes a second wife failed of its intended effect when an outsider working in the village as a welder changed his identity card and married a local woman with-

out either woman being aware that he had two wives. The authorities were subsequently informed, and he was threatened with either a large fine or six months imprisonment. However, he had managed to retain both wives without suffering any consequences at the time I left the village.

For most village women, being supported by a husband was the only option in life. When the brother of a 13-year-old girl objected to her marriage to a young man whom he suspected would make a poor husband, his step-father asked him, "Are you going to support her for the rest of her life then?"

In the case of marital unhappiness, likewise, little choice was available. A woman could either put up with abuse, make a suicide attempt, or return to her father's house, if her father was willing, with an eventual return to her husband's home or a divorce. In her father's home the separated woman had to comply with her father's wishes. If she chose suicide or if she divorced, a woman could be quite certain that her children would suffer; it was unusual for a person other than the mother to show loving attention to a child. A divorced woman generally had no option but to hope for a second husband. However, one divorcee from the village was teaching kindergarten in Shiraz, leaving her children in the care of her mother in the village and returning to see them on her day off.

In the case of the death of a husband, village women informed me, the widow must go to court shortly after her husband's death and declare that she would give over guardianship of her children to her husband's father. Or if she wished to keep guardianship herself, she must promise not to marry again. In the latter case, she must then solve the difficult problem of how to support herself and her children.

On the whole, the reforms of the Shah's government did not have much effect on the lives of village women, although there were several women whose male relatives worked in town and who were thus more aware of the legal possibilities for protecting their rights. They were beginning to use the court system; it is likely this tendency might have increased in the future.

The social activities of women were restricted. The rightful business of women was to attend to their children, homes, and husbands. Women were concerned about fulfilling their expected roles in order to earn good reputations.⁶ Several siyyid women prided themselves on rarely leaving their own courtyard. One of the kindergarten teachers was so modest in behavior that she did not even attend the weddings of kin unless they were very closely related. Required to be circumspect about any activity outside of their homes, women were anxious to avoid the reputation of poor worker or of "stray" or runabout.⁷ Women could sit in the sun and chat with their neighbors as they crocheted cotton uppers when their housework was completed, or they could make visits to the

homes of close female relatives, but they felt constrained from visiting elsewhere. One woman, in explaining why she did not come to visit me in my new village home located outside of her own neighborhood, said,

I couldn't come to your neighborhood. I've never been there, except a couple of times for mourning ceremonies, like Ali Naqi's last year. I would feel as if I were stealing something. It would be zisht [socially inappropriate].

Women generally were allowed to attend weddings and other life-cycle celebrations of relatives, although sometimes their husbands would prevent them from these activities. The best excuse for leaving the house, socializing, and escaping from the responsibilities of children, housework, and husbands was religious activity.⁸ The siyyid women, whose husbands were primarily traders and thus influenced by the religious culture of the Shiraz bazaar, were far more active in religious observances and ritual than other village women. What follows is a description of their religious activities which provided a background for their participation in the "religious" activity of revolution.

Many village women, especially older women, widows, and other women free from the care of young children or from the constraints of husbands, attended evening prayers at the mosque. They enjoyed this session as a major social activity of the day and a chance to catch up on news and gossip. The siyyid women, however, and those women more careful about modest behavior did not go to the mosque. To attend the mosque would entail going outside of their own neighborhood and mixing with village men who were not relatives or even neighbors. The women's section was curtained off, but men and women came and went together through the mosque courtyard.⁹

The siyyid women and their social circle took part only in religious activities which could be held in their own or neighboring homes and which were completely segregated from men. Regular prayers provided the women with some time to themselves, since they were not supposed to be interrupted. Rowzehs, the chanting of the passions of the Imams, were conducted in homes and attended by close female relatives and neighbors. Generally the only man present was the rowzeh chanter. Women would gather to drink tea and smoke a water pipe, exchange news, and chat about household matters or village affairs. During the revolution this list of topics was expanded by the addition of news about political and religious matters. Sessions conducted by teachers and students from the Zahra Religious School in Shiraz were also held in a home in the siyyid neighborhood for members of the social circle of the siyyid women. When it was suggested that the meetings be held in a public place such as the kindergarten so that other village women would feel free to

attend, the siyyid women replied that they would be unable to attend if the meetings were not held in a home in their own neighborhood.

Joining in mourning was perceived to be a religious duty, bringing religious credit to the participant. Women thus felt quite free to attend the mourning gatherings of other villagers, generally walking to such gatherings in the company of their neighbors and kinswomen. Women's mourning gatherings were held in homes, separate from the male gatherings which were held in the mosque or in a separate courtyard. Thursday afternoons were set aside for visits to the cemetery in remembrance of the recent dead. Cemetery visits and paying respect to the family of the dead at their home were important social activities for women. As one woman on her way to the cemetery aptly commented, "And this is what we women have for recreation." No men participated in the Thursday afternoon cemetery visits, so women who were not allowed to go to the mosque for evening prayers or who did not wish to go for fear of being seen in public with men not related to them felt no constraint in going to the cemetery on Thursday afternoons.

Pilgrimages to nearby shrines or to shrines in Shiraz¹⁰ also served a social as well as religious purpose. On these trips women would join together with several relatives or neighbors, usually taking tea and snacks. Visits to more distant shrines, requiring private transportation and possibly even an overnight stay, were family affairs rather than exclusively female pre-occupations. A pilgrimage, whether with other women or with husband and family, allowed a woman to escape from her daily routine for some diversion and exposure to new sights and experiences. The trip to Mecca, actually completed by several village women, was also greatly valued. Women told me that the permission of one's husband was not required for making the haji, although for every other destination or activity women had to obtain their husbands' permission.

Tasu^{Ca}, the ninth, and Ashura, the tenth of the holy month of Muharram, anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Husain (d. 681), were also perceived by women as offering a legitimate opportunity to get out of the house and find release from household labor. Village women believed it was their religious duty to listen to the lamentations for Imam Husain and to cry. Ashura was the one day of the year when women were forbidden to work.¹¹

Such religious activities allowed only a brief reprieve from responsibilities and drudgery. In actuality, even religious activity did not generally allow escape from child care. If there were children, women had to take them along to mourning ceremonies, to rowzehs, and on pilgrimages. Even on Ashura women had to attend to their children and cook for them. The pri-

mary task of the Muslim woman was the raising of her children, a duty even more important than participation in religious activity.¹²

Women could participate in religious activities more easily when they were held in their own neighborhood. Wearing their veils, they could take their children, come and go rather informally, and do household tasks intermittently. Unlike the daily prayer and attendance at the mosque, the neighborhood activities did not require a state of ritual cleanliness. Thus, menstruating women and mothers in constant contact with the soiled clothing of their babies were free to attend. Since these activities were defined as religious, participation by women was sanctioned by social, cultural, and religious norms of behavior. Partly because of this previous experience in religious activity, women overcame reluctance to join the revolutionary demonstrations when religious leaders defined their activity as religious.

Aliabad Women and the Revolution

Attitudes of Aliabad women towards the revolution fell into several categories. The wives of the political elite (a total of five or six families) were firmly against the revolution. One of these women berated young men who took part in the revolution and scolded their mothers for allowing them to do so. Another fought continuously with one of her sons over his involvement in revolutionary activity. These women and their husbands had reason to be pro-Shah. They owed their power and prominence to their support for the monarchy, and their efforts to encourage sympathy for the regime and to prevent dissension.

The poor peasants in the village, both men and women, remained cynical towards participation in the political struggle. They considered revolutionary activity peripheral to their own lives.¹³ Their cynicism did not lessen when the struggle was couched in religious terms. They were convinced that the best action was no action and that risking their lives in support of the revolution was fruitless. Shortly before Ayatullah Khomeini's arrival in Tehran from Paris, I heard a peasant remark to his mother, "Khomeini's supposed to come soon."

"So," his mother replied, "What's he bringing with him?"¹⁴

The peasant women and other poorer village women did not engage in the round of religious and social activities enjoyed by the siyyid women; they participated in far fewer gatherings of any sort. Their social networks were smaller and less cohesive, and their social interaction was more confined. They seemed far less well informed and articulate about national level politics than the siyyid women. It seems likely that because these poorer women rarely participated in organized religious activity

they would not be easily influenced by religious figures. Similarly, because they were cut off from any network, they were not widely exposed to the interpretation of revolutionary activity as a required [vajib] religious duty. However, it is unlikely that they would have found that argument persuasive because they were far less accustomed to involvement in religious activity.

The peasants were not turning their backs on their religion by declining revolutionary involvement. They considered themselves to be good Muslims, but their emphasis was more on general belief and moral behavior than on the ritual and organized religious activity stressed by the siyyids and traders.¹⁵ If anything, peasants had a rather suspicious and derogatory attitude toward persons who emphasized ritual. For example, they felt that shopkeepers accumulating enough money to go on hajj were obviously cheating customers.

A difference could be discerned between the older peasant women and their daughters who had moved to the city or associated with relatives in Shiraz. The latter seemed far more articulate and informed about the national events. Several of these were quite enthusiastic in their attitudes towards the "Aqa" (Ayatullah Khomeini) as early as October 1978, even if they did not actually participate in demonstrations.

Some of the wives of commuters into Shiraz or to nearby factories became politicized during the fall and winter months of 1978 as their menfolk began to bring back information about the on-going revolutionary process and condemnations of the Shah's regime. Although some of these women eventually joined the nightly demonstrations in the village initiated by the siyyid women early in January of 1979, very few of them traveled to Shiraz to participate in demonstrations in the city.

Eight or ten young unmarried women from the Upper Neighborhood of the village were the first women of the village to become involved in the revolution. Students in high schools in Shiraz, they were influenced by their fathers, most of whom were teachers, and brothers as well as by the other students in their high schools. In addition, they attended Qur'an classes led by a visiting mullah from Qum during the summer of 1978 and that fall and winter during the school strikes. During one class in February of 1979, before the fall of the government, Shirin, the leader of the high school group, asked the mullah if political parties were to be free under the future Islamic Republic. The mullah responded that political parties which are in accordance with Islam would be free. Shirin looked dubious and commented that she had understood all political parties should be free.

Shirin held her own Qur'an class for younger girls. In a meeting on February 2 she exhorted the younger girls that just praying and knowing the Qur'an was not enough,

that the Shah's government had taught exclusive attention to these matters in order to keep people from becoming involved with political matters. Rather, she told them, one should both know the Qur'an and put it into practice. Imam Ali was both religious and political. One should be both. She cautioned that such television programs as "Little House on the Prairie" were used for the same purpose as attention to religious details--to entertain people and keep them from becoming involved in politics. She also spoke in favor of education for girls:

Don't accept it if your mothers say that the Qur'an is against girls studying. Some people say that since Fatimeh the pure didn't study, girls today shouldn't study either. But Ali said, "I have responsibilities and my wife must have responsibilities too." Girls should study.

The high school girls from the Upper Neighborhood began participating in demonstrations in Shiraz even before the Ashura demonstration in December 1978. Probably they would have participated in revolutionary demonstrations whether or not they had been given a religious connotation. As high school students in the city, they were accustomed to public life, and they planned careers for themselves (whether or not such plans would have become reality is not at all certain). They did not require the legitimization of a religious framework for their participation in activity outside of the home.

The largest group of female activists was made up of some twenty to thirty siyyid women from the Lower Neighborhood of the village. These women were influenced by their husbands, brothers, sons, and fathers, who were traders or businessmen in Shiraz. The religious emphasis placed on the revolution was a drawing factor for them, with their identification with religious ritual, activity and symbolism and their feelings of religious identity and desire to fulfill the religious expectations of their social group.

The major topic of conversation for the siyyid women during the winter of 1978 was the events of the revolution. Women would sit with men during the constant discussion of political conditions, even when male visitors were present. Male relatives and associates or customers of husbands, brothers or sons would visit, and women would quiz them on recent occurrences, even in the absence of the men of the house. Mothers and sisters likewise carefully questioned boys coming home from school for the latest news. For example, the brother of one young widow, Ismat, was a tailor in Shiraz and belonged to a group studying the Qur'an and engaging in religious-political discussions. Ismat declared that

everything she knew she had learned from her brother.

An important part of the revolutionary effort was the dissemination of information about on-going events, which served to arouse the outrage and determination of the populace, and interpretations of the events, which would likewise be persuasive in urging revolutionary action. Women were active in this dissemination of information and interpretations, which brought about a change in women's perceptions and attitudes before they actually became active in demonstrations. Upon hearing some news, women would rush to tell neighbors and relatives. Literacy was not necessary for the accumulation and spread of information. Much news passed by word of mouth. Women listened to BBC and to tapes collected by their sons and other male relatives, lending them to friends, neighbors, and relatives as well. Women learned the revolutionary couplets, chants, and songs; they collected the I^Clamiiyyehs [the mimeographed revolutionary announcements]. Those who could not read themselves would ask sons or male neighbors to read the announcements to them. Women's gatherings, religious or otherwise, also served as opportunities to pass on news about current events. For example, after the chanting of a rowzeh on December 28, 1978, the rowzeh chanter gave a full report of the BBC news from the night before, concentrating on an interview with Ayatullah Shari^Cat-Madari, and a discussion followed.

Towards the end of December 1978 and beginning of January 1979, a photo exhibit dealing with the revolution was held at the Aliabad mosque, with times set aside for viewing by women. A slide show about the revolution was given at the mosque one evening with women sitting on the floor behind the men. Aliabad women also went to the exhibit held at the university in Shiraz, where ropes served to separate the women moving along close to the photos from the men viewing at a distance of two feet. When the SAVAK building in Shiraz was attacked and taken over by the people in early January 1979, a group of women from the Lower Neighborhood went in to view the photos of torture victims, implements of torture, fingernails and pieces of human skin put on display. These women shared in the horror and great sorrow of realizing through first hand evidence what had happened to their countrymen. Some women reported that after seeing these gruesome sights they wept until late into the night, unable to sleep.

Most of the Aliabad women who participated in revolutionary activity accepted the prevalent religious interpretation of the struggle, that the duty of each Shi'ite is to struggle against tyranny, that the Shah was the Yazid of the age and that Ayatullah Khomeini was the Imam Husain of the age*, and that they should support Ayatullah

*Editor's note: It was during the reign of Yazid

Khomeini in his struggle against tyranny, repression and the corruption of religion.

In joining revolutionary demonstrations, women were not violating social, cultural, or religious constraints on women. Rather, those "traditional" women who took part could do so because their participation was defined as being within the bounds of traditional constraints and was sanctioned by their menfolk, by religious leaders, and by other women in their social control units. In a number of different ways women repeated to me the language used by religious leaders, stressing the importance of action rather than status: "The best one of you is the one who does the best deed." "In Islam, action is more important than whether you are a man or a woman." "Whoever follows the orders of God and does the same work that Ali and Muhhamad did can be an imam for him or herself." "The highest point of human and religious attainment is to become a martyr. A martyr becomes his own mediator with God."

The siyyid women of Aliabad began demonstrating early in January 1979.¹⁶ While he was still in France Ayatullah Khomeini had declared Friday, January 5 a day of mourning for the many persons martyred during the month of Muharram clashes between the demonstrators and the military and police forces. In the afternoon of that day a group of siyyed women were sitting outside chatting as they crocheted cotton uppers. They began to discuss the demonstrations in the cities and the day of mourning.

Laila, a young wife and mother, said, "We should shout chants too!"

Ra^cna, the leader of this social group, replied, "In the city this is okay, but in the village it is zisht [improper].

"No, it's not zisht. Are the women in Shiraz better than we are?" Laila insisted.

Akhtar added, "If we had any courage, we'd go too."

So the women agreed to go on their own demonstration after dark, about 7:00. When the time came, some of the women were having second thoughts, but a few resolute ones gathered the whole group together, and they started out.

They walked up the alley shouting their chants.

(680-684) and at his instigation that Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Shi^cite Imam, was murdered. In Shi^cite view, Yazid's reign exemplifies injustice, calumny, oppression, and the greatest deviation from the teachings of Islam while Imam Husain is the personification of a great hero who died unjustly in defense of his principles. Shi^cites annually commemorate his martyrdom during the first ten days of the month of Muharram, culminating in Ashura, the day he was killed.

When the men heard their voices, they came out and joined in shouting slogans. The women were somewhat nervous, but they were also pleased, excited, and very proud of themselves.

The following evening the women again assembled to march. This time they were joined by a few men and a group of teen-age boys. Their slogan shouting began to follow a pattern: the men and boys, marching together in the front, shouted the first phrase in a revolutionary couplet; the women and girls, marching behind, responded with the second phrase. Others joined the marchers as they proceeded through the village; even some of the most pious and modest women ventured out. The demonstrators gave special attention to shouting slogans when they passed the courtyards of known Shah-supporters. This time the marchers covered more distance than they had the night before. The women began to feel that much was possible.

Each succeeding night the women found courage to venture further through the village, until finally they were making an entire circuit around the village two or three times an evening. The demonstrations became large, with both men and women joining in; they become more organized and less spontaneous. Routes were planned, and boys with flashlights were stationed at rough places in the path to make sure no one fell where the footing was poor.

The day after the second evening of marching and the following day had been declared days of mourning; the women decided that they would go to Shiraz and join the huge demonstrations to be held there. Ra^Cna described what happened:

They said that women in Shiraz were marching and shouting slogans. I wanted to go and see what it was like. So we went to Shah-Chiraq Shrine. A lot of people were sitting there. The women were separated from the men by an iron fence that had been put up. The son of an important religious figure in Shiraz gave a speech, saying, "Shout slogans as much as possible for your own benefit. Don't give money to the government for kerosene, electricity, natural gas, or telephone. I don't approve of burning houses. Don't ruin houses, banks, or shops. Don't bother people. Don't be destructive. Whenever you see our brothers the soldiers, be respectful; they are our brothers."

When he was finished, he gave orders to go on a march. He himself didn't come because the Prime Minister had announced it was to be a day of public mourning, so we didn't want to commemorate the dead on that day, but on

the following day. So he said to march a little bit that day, but that the day of mourning would be the following day, and we should prepare ourselves for the following day. Everyone should come, brothers and sisters.

So we marched. Then we ate kabob, which was delicious, and then we came home. In the village we saw that women were shouting slogans, with the men in front, so we went too. Because it was a day of mourning, the women could march during the daytime.

On the second day, I said to my brother, "You must take us again today. Yesterday wasn't so interesting because there weren't many people."

As Ra^Cna's account indicates, women took part in demonstrations and marches as a religious duty. They took participation seriously, knowing that there might be danger. They were either nervous and frightened, or they were so angry that the possibility of danger didn't matter. The relationship with mourning served to further legitimize participation because joining in mourning was a religious duty in which women could take part without adverse comment. The first day the siyyid women demonstrated in the village was a day of mourning. Likewise, the first two days women went to Shiraz to demonstrate were days of declared public mourning for people killed in the revolution. In addition, participating in demonstrations did not require any deviation from other forms of religious activity in which the siyyid women would customarily engage. They could wear their veils,¹⁷ participate segregated from men, and could take their children. The atmosphere was relatively informal so that they could interrupt their chanting to tend to their children, or they could drop out of the march for a while, rejoining it whenever they wished. Likewise, they could participate protected from suspicion of impropriety through the presence of the customary companions who formed their unit of social control.

Over and above the religious aspects of marching, taking part in the marches became a major form of diversion and recreation, adding excitement and interest to the daily routine. Marching provided an excellent excuse to get away from the house and housework, to join companions for a day of socializing, and to see other acquaintances on the route. Food, drinks, and sweets were distributed to the marchers by Shirazis who supported the effort,¹⁸ adding to the enjoyment and festivity of the day.

In explaining the new involvement for women, Ra^Cna told me,

The religious scholars and the ayatullahs have said that men and women must revolt together, and must demonstrate together for religion and for freedom for all. Islamic government is for everybody, and the Islamic struggle is for everybody. Before, women didn't do this. People didn't believe the students when they criticized the Shah's regime until Khomeini also said the same things. If we don't speak, this government will go on for hundreds of years more. It is the will of God that the Shah has run into problems.

Although women declared that their role in the revolution was just like that of men, and that everyone, man or woman, could become like Imam Husain, actively and directly struggling against tyranny, the actual role of women during marches could be seen to differ somewhat from that of men. The attitude toward the involvement of women was one of protectiveness, particularly in the larger demonstrations in the city.

On February 11, 1979, the day of the final overthrow of the monarchy, the Aliabad women did not go into Shiraz to take part in the uprising. Many of the village men and boys went to Shiraz and joined the attacks against the central police station, the government troops in the old Zand Prison, and smaller police stations throughout the city. Aliabad women attempting to go to the city were prevented by people at the village gate, on the grounds that it was too dangerous for women.

A discussion with Sima, daughter of a religious Shirazi family, helped to explain this attitude of protectiveness. She intended going to the religious observance at Habib Mosque. Because of a rumor that soldiers were going to attack the Mosque (a rumor which proved to be true), her father was against her going. The ensuing argument with her father ended when he ordered her to stay at home because of her children. It was of greater importance for her to live and continue to raise and educate her children than to risk her life participating in a religious and political event. There is no duty more important for the Muslim woman than raising her children; no religious or other activity can take precedence over them. Her primary role in the revolution was to raise her children and indirectly influence society through the teaching of values that would inculcate revolutionary sentiments. A woman told me, "If a woman wants to go on a jihad [religious war] but can't because of her children, she will be more rewarded than if she had actually gone."²⁰

Women were believed to have a special and very important role in the revolution because they had raised the brave young men who were willing to sacrifice their

lives for the good of the country and their religion. A common phrase of sympathy and consolation offered to mothers of young martyrs was "rahmat beh shirat" [blessed be your milk], a way of congratulating the mothers for having raised their children well.

After the Revolution

The more progressive high school students from the Upper Neighborhood were the first to become disillusioned with the direction of the revolution, not long after the actual overthrow of the monarchy on February 11, 1979. Early in October, Shirin, the leader of this group, indicated deep unhappiness with conditions, asking, "Has anything really been accomplished?" She was distressed that government was in the hands of the akhunds, adding that Taliqani was the only good one among them. She was sorry for the guiltless Kurds who were being killed and was increasingly sympathetic to leftist forces. Mentioning that Shaikh Izziddin Husaini, a Kurdish religious and political leader, is a socialist, she declared that it is possible to be both socialist and religious.

The women of the politically elite families were not at all happy with post-revolution conditions. The wife of Siyyid Ya'qub especially complained about the unavailability of gendarmes to settle "difficulties" in the village. When her son was wounded in May 1979 by a member of the opposition faction in the village, she bitterly questioned, "And who can we go to to complain? The courts? Mr. Ruhani (the visiting mullah from Qum)? If this had happened before, we would have taken this person to the gendarmes, and he would have been put in prison right away. Now we can't do anything."

Peasant women and their husbands were concerned about the increasing insecurity. One peasant couple was greatly distressed over the theft of several animals from their courtyard. Mr. Ruhani told them to forget about it; nothing could be done.

Some months after the revolution, the wives of commuters began to complain about economic conditions. "Before," they would say, "At least there were factories and jobs." The mothers of younger men were concerned that their sons could not find work. Unemployment, especially among the younger, unestablished men became a growing problem.

The members of the siyyid social circle of women were also concerned about the lack of security. Stories of abductions of children and girls in Shiraz circulated; the number of local robberies increased. Most of these women retained their loyalty to Ayatullah Khomeini and to the Islamic Republic, however, and their faith in the eventual success of the revolution was unshaken when I left in December 1979.

At the height of revolutionary activity the siyyid

women began to wear the solid-colored "Islamic" scarves, which frame the face and conceal the hair. Some women began wearing the chadurs even at home, tied around themselves as they went about their work. However, after several months, interest in this new modesty began to wane, as did interest in participating in marches in Shiraz.

In a spasm of piety, hosts of several post-revolution weddings did without "unIslamic" music and dancing. Soon, however, this proscription was being ignored. The wife of Siyyid Muslim, an important revolutionary activist who had herself become entirely imbued with the spirit of Islam and the revolution, commented, "I'd like to know why, if dancing is such a sin, men can do it." The visiting mullah from Qum finally left the village in exasperation, partly over the refusal of villagers to give up music and dancing at weddings.

Cynical comments could be heard from some of the siyyid women and other pro-Khomeini women in the Lower Neighborhood. In March of 1979, one of the kindergarten teachers, a pious, modest, and fervently revolutionary young siyyid woman, dropped her Naw Ruz [New Year's-- March 21] bonus, a roll of bills, while standing in line to buy goods at an Islamic cooperative store in Shiraz. Her contacts with the religious organization and the kumitehs in Shiraz in her subsequent unsuccessful attempts to get her money back left her cynical and bitter about those holding positions of authority in the new regime.

During the rest of my stay in Aliabad, this loss of faith in the honesty and integrity of lesser figures in the new regime felt by the women who had supported the revolution did not generally extend to Ayatullah Khomeini himself. The former village boss, Siyyid Ibn Ali Askari, was put in prison; his brother Siyyid Ya^cqub went into hiding along with other close supporters, and the peasant faction took over and planted the land of Siyyid Ibn-Ali.²³ The siyyid women blamed the opposition faction in the village for the predicament of their relatives and not Ayatullah Khomeini. One of the kindergarten teachers, the grandniece of Siyyid Ibn-Ali, commented,

If Ayatullah Khomeini knew what was going on here, he wouldn't like it. Islam says to respect private property. Siyyid Muslim (Siyyid Ya^cqub's son) was so active in the revolution, and we went in to demonstrations everyday too. Now look how we are being treated.

On the whole, the attitude of the pro-revolution women from the Lower Neighborhood, up until I left in December, was summed up in the words of one of them:

We did it for religion. Most of the

village women who went to demonstrate had no purpose in mind other than religion. We didn't think that things would improve for us necessarily. Like myself. I had no expectation of better schooling for my children or property for myself or that the government would help me. And now I have no expectation either. My efforts were for Islam.

I was not in the village long enough after the revolution to see the extension of the power of the regime into the village. However, one incident which took place in the village might have been an indication of things to come.

In March of 1979, the welder from Zargun who lived in the village and had taken a village woman as a second wife was visited by his cousin, her fiance, and another young man. The young woman was very properly seated in the back of the car and wore a chadur, while the two young men sat in the front. When the young people got out of the car at the village gate, people stopped them and accused the young woman of being a "madam". The three were able to reach the welder's home, although they were taunted along the way. A group of some thirty men and boys gathered outside of the courtyard, shouting and swearing at the welder's village wife and claiming that she was lying, that the young woman was a prostitute and not the welder's cousin. The three young people claimed membership in the kumiteh and tried to get the village men to call the kumiteh from the gendarme station in the neighboring village. When the men finally did make the phone call, they were told that the three were respectable people and associated with the kumiteh.

Later, Ra^Cna, a leader among the siyyid women, commented that while the men and boys were wrong to harass the visitors, according to Islam a young woman should not go anywhere with a young man unless he was her husband or brother. Although control by outsiders such as the visiting mullah from Qum proved ineffective up until the time I left the village, it seemed clear that the trend was in the direction of self-policing by the more conservative and ardently "Islamic" members of the village community.

Other effects of the revolution also seem probable. Education for women in the village will apparently suffer. There will not be enough teachers to hold the sexually segregated classes now required for boys and girls at the junior high school level, so classes for girls will be discontinued. It will be necessary for girls to go to Shiraz if they are to continue their education. The declining opportunities in education and employment for women could mean that those village girls attending high school before the revolution will not be

able to attain their hopes for higher education and careers. However, it seems unlikely that such plans would have materialized in most cases even without the changes brought about by the revolution.

Before the revolution, villagers were gradually becoming aware of the usefulness of the Family Protection Law in providing some protection for women; at least two young women with knowledgeable brothers had used the courts in disputes with their husbands. This incipient utilization of the courts will also likely be stopped.

Conclusion

"Traditional" women from the village of Aliabad who felt required to place their extra-home and socializing activities in a framework of neighborhood, family, kin, or religious activity were able to participate in demonstrations during the Iranian Revolution because those demonstrations were defined as religious activity. This did not mean, however, that the women could abandon their primary Shi'ite duty; it was still necessary to take care of their children, even during demonstrations. Women were protected in order to survive and raise their children, and their involvement was defined in relation to their children.

However, the demonstrations were very different from the other religious activities in which women had participated in the past: the *rowzehs*, the Zahra School meetings, pilgrimages to shrines, and the Thursday afternoon visits to the cemetery. Such activities were generally exclusive to women. During the Ashura commemorations women played a passive role, standing in informal neighborhood and/or kin groups, watching and weeping on the sidelines while men marched in organized groups in a procession, beating themselves and stepping in time, chanting Ashura couplets. During the revolutionary demonstrations, however, including the Ashura march of December 1978, men and women both engaged in the very same form of "religious" activity. Both sexes marched in the procession, chanting couplets and often raising their fists in cadence. Men and women participated at the same time and place, although they were separated into different groups.

Interpreting the participation of women in demonstrations as religious activity and thus legitimate for Muslim women served to obscure the fact that such demonstrations were a new kind of activity for these women. It was entirely unprecedented that such great masses of "traditional" Iranian women, normally constrained by cultural and religious limits on their public behavior, should openly and directly participate in national level politics. In sanctioning the participation of women, religious leaders were obscuring changes in permitted female activity by a pretense of continuity.²² After the revolution, then, it was quite simple to take the

attitude that the participation of some women in the revolution had been within the limits of expected behavior for Shi^Cite women. Their participation in the revolution should, therefore, by no means be taken as an indication that new ground had been broken, or that Iranian women would continue in their public role of directly and openly influencing political events. Given an understanding of those religious figures now in authority in Iran as well as of the large majority of Iranian women who participated in the revolution about their participation, it is not surprising that the increasing restrictions on the public activity of women have been enforced with relative ease.

NOTES

1. Azar Tabari likewise notes,

Contrary to the presumptions of some Western feminists, the militant participation of women in the struggles against the Shah and their current involvement in the so-called "battle of reconstruction" do not conflict with their traditional seclusion and treatment as second class citizens, and their roles as obedient wives and daughters. So long as the participation of women remains within an Islamic framework, the limits of their responsibilities can be wide and the variety of roles they assume numerous." (Tabari, 1982, pp. 25-26)

Lois Beck states, "[Women] had and have in the revolution a ready-made set of religious institutions and customs which allow their public participation." (Beck, 1979, p. 8)

See also Hooglund [Heglund], 1981.

2. Research was made possible by a grant from the Social Science Research Council and the American Society of Learned Societies. The names of the village and of persons have been changed in the interests of privacy. I owe a great debt to the many kind and open-minded Iranians who offered their friendship and assistance.

3. Erika Friedl, in her study of the roles and status of women in the Boir Ahmad area, also points out that a woman's

overall status in the community is largely determined by how well she is taken care of and provided for by . . . the closest man whose economic (and moral) responsibility she is. . . . An older woman or widow who relies in part on income derived from, say, midwifery, shows that her own sons neglect her or else cannot provide for her adequately. (Friedl, 1981a, pp. 14-15)

4. In 1978 the rate of exchange was about 7.5 tomans to the dollar.

5. Benard states,

However, except for a small stratum of "middle class" urban women, the implementation was difficult and not very effective. Laws were circumvented or ignored, and studies of Iranian rural areas showed that the median age of marriage for girls was between thirteen and fifteen. (Benard, 1980, p. 17).

See also Gulick and Gulick (1979, p. 509).

Momeni (1972) documents the fact that actual age at marriage of women in Iran has not been very much affected by legislation.

6. As Janet Bauer (1978, p. 30) points out, "Women see that their only form of security lies in measuring up to the cultural and social standards of proper female behavior"

7. I was also subject to such social pressure. I felt pleased when, upon spending time cleaning after moving into my village home, I heard comments that I was a good worker. On the other hand, I felt the rebuke in the rowzeh chanter's comment made while I was attending his rowzeh. Looking at my watch, I noted, "My watch doesn't work."

He shot back, "You don't work either," suggesting thereby that my interviewing activities resulted in neglect of my household and child. Erika Friedl (1981a, p. 15) noted the same social pressure on herself.

8. Anne Betteridge has likewise pointed out that especially for lower-class women and for those who come from more traditional families, religion offers a much-needed opportunity to assemble. . . . [Women] are obliged to justify their socializing by placing it in a religious framework. (Betteridge, 1980, p. 154-55).

See also Betteridge (1981); Benard (1980, p. 15); Bamdad (1977, p. 10); and Fernea and Fernea (1978, p. 401).

9. See Betteridge (1980, p. 3-4) for an explanation of other factors hindering the attendance and attention of women at mosques.

10. See Betteridge (1976, 1981) and Friedl (1980) for further information on women and pilgrimage.

11. Thomas Thompson (1979, p. 200), in his dissertation on a village in Mazandaran, also notes, "[The commemoration of Ashura] is one of the few occasions during the year that women and girls can legitimately stay away from their homes for hours"

12. This point was clarified to me through a comment made by Isa Helfgott (personal communication, November 1981).

13. The report of A Special Correspondent (1982, pp. 27-28) about another area in southwest Iran indicates that peasants in that area as well were not enthusiastic about the revolution. The relatively low level of involvement of poorer peasants in the Iranian Revolution tends to support the conclusions of Wolf (1973, pp. 290-91) and Alavi (1971, p. 123; 1973, pp. 332-34) that poorer rural groups generally do not have the resources and are unable to risk revolutionary involvement.

14. This material, as well as some of the material following is taken from Hooglund [Hegland] (1981). I am grateful to the editors of RIPEH for permission to reprint these sections.

15. Erika Friedl (1981b, p. 3) also notes that peasants emphasize moral behavior rather than ritual in their religion.

16. The section on women's demonstrations in Aliabad is taken from Hooglund [Hegland] (1981, pp. 38-40).

17. See Bauer (1980b) for discussion of how the veil allowed "traditional" women to enter into public activity during the revolution.

18. As Betteridge (1980, p. 155) points out, referring to meals connected with religious vows, "To separate religion from social life would be to make a distinction not recognized in practice by many Islamic women." In the context of revolutionary marches, too, I feel that recognizing the social and recreational aspects does not necessarily question the seriousness of the religious and political motivation.

19. For more on the protective attitude toward women during revolutionary activity, see Hooglund [Hegland] (1981, pp. 41-44).

20. It is not surprising that women would accept the pronouncement that their primary function was as mothers and attempt to find self-worth and fulfillment through this role. In all other roles women were considered to be substitutable--identical to or at least similar to other women, and therefore interchangeable. As mothers, however, they were considered unique. If a home was left motherless through death or divorce, there was generally no one willing to assume care of the children, and it was not uncommon for the children to be sent to an orphanage. A step-mother would be inclined to be inattentive to the children of a previous wife.

21. For a description of this situation, see Hooglund [Hegland] (1980).

22. See the discussion in Kertzer (1982) of how "ritual continuity" is used to obscure "political changes".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alavi, Hamza. "The Politics of Dependence: A Village in West Punjab," South Asian Review 4 (1971): 111-128.
- _____. "Peasants and Revolution," in Gough, K. and Sharma, H.P. (eds.). Imperialism and Revolution in South Asia (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 267-90.
- Bamdad, Badr ol-Moluk. From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1977).
- Bauer, Janet. "New Models and Traditional Networks: Migrant Women in South Tehran, Iran," Paper prepared for the IXth World Congress of Sociology, Uppsala, Sweden, 1978.
- _____. "Some Brief Comments on the Post-Revolutionary Consciousness of Lower Income Women in Tehran, Iran," MEIRA Forum 4 (1980): 6-8 [1980a].
- _____. "Women, the Veil and the Islamic Revolution in Iran." Paper prepared for the 4th Annual Women in Anthropology Symposium, Sacramento Anthropological Society, California State University at Sacramento, March 7-8, 1980 [1980b].
- Beck, Lois. "Women in Revolutionary Iran." Paper presented at the Women in Islam conference, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, Denmark, November, 1979.
- Benard, Cheryl. "Islam and Women: Some Reflections on the Experience of Iran," Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies 4 (1980): 10-26.
- Betteridge, Anne. "Ziarat: Pilgrimage in Iran." Paper presented at the Tenth Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, Los Angeles, California, 1976.
- _____. "The Controversial Vows of Urban Muslim Women in Iran," in Falk, N. and Gross, R. (eds.). Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 141-155.
- _____. "Muslim Women and Shrines in Shiraz." Paper prepared for Islam: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations, Brigham Young University, October 22-23, 1981.
- Fernea, Robert and Fernea, Elizabeth. "Variation in Religious Observance among Islamic Women." in Keddie, N.R. (ed.). Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 385-401.
- Friedl, Erika. "Islam and Tribal Women in a Village in Iran." in Falk, N. and Gross, R. (eds.). Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 159-73.

- Friedl, Erika. "The Division of Labor in an Iranian Village," MERIP Reports (March/April, 1981) [1981a].
- _____. "State Ideology and Village Women in Iran." Paper prepared for the Middle East Studies Association Conference, Seattle Washington, 1981 [1981b].
- Gulick, John and Gulick, Margaret. "The Domestic Social Environment of Women and Girls in Isfahan, Iran." in Beck, L. and Keddie, N. (eds.). Women in the Muslim World (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 501-21.
- Hooglund [Hegland], Mary. "One Village in the Revolution," MERIP Reports (May, 1980), pp. 7-12.
- _____. "The Village Women of Aliabad and the Iranian Revolution," RIPEH (nos. 4 and 5, 1981): pp. 27-46.
- Kazemi, Farhad. Poverty and Revolution in Iran: The Migrant Poor, Urban Marginality and Politics (New York: New York University Press, 1980) [1980a].
- _____. "Urban Migrants and the Revolution," Iranian Studies 8 (1980): 257-78 [1980b].
- Kertzer, David. "The Role of Ritual in Political Change." in Culture and Political Change. Political Anthropology Yearbook, Vol. 2 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982).
- Nashat, Guity. "Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Iranian Studies 8 (1980): 165-94.
- Momeni, Djamchid. "The Difficulties of Changing the Age at Marriage in Iran," Journal of Marriage and the Family 34 (1972): 545-51.
- Ramazani, Nesta. "Behind the Veil: Status of Women in Revolutionary Iran," Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies 4 (1980): 27-36.
- El Sadaawi, Nawal. "Arab Women and Western Feminism: An Interview with Nawal El Sadaawi," Race and Class 12 (1980): 175-82.
- A Special Correspondent. "Report from an Iranian Village," MERIP Reports (March/April, 1980): 26-29.
- Tabari, Azar, "The Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Woman," MERIP Reports (February, 1982): 22-27.
- Thompson, Thomas. "A Persian Miniature: The Value of Tradition in a Mazandaran Village," Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1979.
- Wolf, Eric. Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).