Chapter 14

REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC AND AFGHAN WOMEN

Nancy Hatch Dupree

WOMEN AND EMANCIPATION BEFORE THE SAUR REVOLUTION

Afghan leaders have addressed themselves to the subject of reform for women for a hundred years. These spokesmen, predominately male, have held that a nationalist ideology encompassing emancipation for women is essential to the creation of a progressive image for the nation. Yet contradictions between religion, custom, and reform have plagued the feminist movement in Afghanistan since its inception. Amir 'Abdur Rahman (1880-1901) introduced many laws in an attempt to align customary social practices with the prescriptions of Islam. Using the dictates of the Quran, he forbade child marriages, forced marriages, the leverite (forced marriages of widows to brothers of deceased husbands), exorbitant brideprices, and marriage gifts. He upheld hereditary rights for widows and ruled that women could seek divorce. He granted freedom to wives in cases of nonsupport by husbands and authorized the mahr (a gift of property or money promised by a groom at the time of marriage; a wife may demand it at any time, particularly when abandoned, separated, or divorced). However, he also imposed the death penalty for adulterous women—which is contrary to the Quran—and decreed that men were entitled to full control over their women because “the honor of the people of Afghanistan consists in the honor of their women” (Kakar 1979:173).

The concept that women should be considered as contributing members of society beyond motherhood was first introduced during the reign of Amir Habibullah (1901-19), the son of ‘Abdur Rahman. Mahmud Beg Tarzi (1865-1933), a leading reformer in the early twentieth century, argued against overly protective restrictions on
women; in addition, he pleaded for education for women, stressing that egalitarian Islam does not deny women education and that it is an Islamic duty to provide them with opportunities to function fully in the society. Only with educated women in the home, he said, could the family remain strong and the nation progress. To bolster his arguments he published accounts of famous women through history in his newspaper *Siraj al-Akhbar* (Schinasi 1979:212).*

The religious leaders read Tarzi’s essays with growing displeasure. They contended that education for women would lead to the breakdown of the family, sexual anarchy, and ultimately degrade women. The honor of the nation would be lost. Conservative aversion increased as Habibullah’s son, King Amanullah (1919-29), attempted to institutionalize reforms for women. Despite ‘Abdur Rahman’s efforts, unjust customary practices persisted. Therefore Amanullah once again pressed to abolish child marriages, forced marriages, and the leverite and to assure widows’ rights. He ordered that exorbitant engagement, wedding, and marriage gifts be curtailed. In addition, Amanullah attempted to go further by advocating monogamy, the removal of the veil (*chadari*), the end of seclusion (*purdah*), and compulsory education for girls.†

Amanullah’s queen, Suraya, and his sister, Siraj ul-Banat, were the first Afghan women to speak out publicly on the subject of equality for women. They had learned their lessons well from the liberal-minded men around them. Speaking in 1923, Siraj ul-Banat said the following:

> Some people are laughing at us, saying that women know only how to eat and drink. Old women discourage young women by saying their mothers never starved to death because they could not read or write. . . . But knowledge is not man’s monopoly. Women also deserve to be knowledgeable. We must on the one hand bring up healthy children and, on the other hand, help men in their work. We must read about famous women in this world, to know that women can achieve exactly what men can achieve.**

*For a general discussion of women in the early twentieth century and subsequent periods, see N. Dupree 1978.*

†*For the Amanullah period, see Poullada 1973 and Stewart 1973.*

**Published in the Kabul newspaper *Anis*; quoted in Afghanistan, MIC, *Progress Report* 1977: 9. The MIC publication was banned by the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), but one copy is available with this author.*
Queen Suraya, the daughter of Mahmud Beg Tarzi, spoke to women during the 1927 Jashn (Independence Celebrations) even more forthrightly:

Independence has been achieved. It belongs to all of us.... Do not think, however, that our nation needs only men to serve it. Women should also take part as women did in the early years of Islam. The valuable services rendered by women are recounted throughout history, from which we learn that women were not created solely for pleasure and comfort. From their examples we learn that we must all contribute toward the development of our nation and that this cannot be done without being equipped with knowledge. So we should all attempt to acquire as much knowledge as possible in order that we may render our services to society in the manner of the women of early Islam (Anis; quoted in Afghanistan, MIC, Progress Report 1977:9).

In spite of such references to Islamic heroines, the conservatives would have nothing of it, and their opposition erupted into open revolt. The Khost Rebellion (March 1924-January 1925) was their first overt protest. In 1929 conservative religious and tribal leaders spearheaded a rebellion which overthrew King Amanullah. To restore the sanctity of Islam and the honor of the nation, Amanullah's successor, Habibullah Ghazi (Bacha-i-Saqaw; 17 January-13 October 1929), insisted upon a return to reactionary customs regarding women. He demanded that women remain behind the veil under strict male control and that girls' schools, together with all other vestiges of the women's movement, be suspended.

For the next thirty years—that is, until 1959—under Nadir Shah (1929-33) and his son Zahir Shah (1933-73), women remained in seclusion and wore the veil. Nevertheless, the concept that women should participate in national development was reintroduced as a national policy. Separate schools were established, and education for women gradually gained respectability. Women were employed in professions considered appropriate for them—teachers, medical personnel, and administrators in female institutions.* Thus when the government, led by Prime Minister Muhammad Daoud (1953-63), launched a revolution for women in 1959 by announcing its support

*For the Nadir Shah period, see Woodsmall 1960:151-96.
of the voluntary removal of the veil and an end to seclusion, Afghan women were well prepared to take their place in multifaceted activities. In addition to furthering social justice, the emergence of women onto the public scene enhanced economic development by providing a potential 50 percent increase in the labor force. Conservative elements in the society who protested were jailed and challenged to provide positive Quranic proof—not interpretations—for their objections (L. Dupree 1959 and 1980a:249). None were forthcoming, and the evolutionary processes toward emancipation began. But very few women spoke out publicly on the subject. The egalitarian ideology was still provided by men, who continued to dominate the reform movement.

Women were automatically enfranchised, without a suffragette movement, by the 1964 constitution, which stated that all Afghans "without discrimination or preference, have equal rights and obligations before the law." Among other things this constitution guaranteed women "dignity, compulsory education, and freedom to work."

Over the years increasing numbers of educated women emerged to work in government and business as secretaries and judges, hairdressers and diplomats, entertainers and parliamentarians. They were employed in some factories, including ceramics, fruit packaging, pharmaceuticals, and housing construction. At no time, however, were women expected to engage in public manual labor. Women in Afghanistan have never carried bricks and buckets of cement on their heads at construction sites, nor performed menial tasks in the streets. The direction of change was positive and steady, but because of the government's insistence on voluntary acceptance, the numbers of women who made changes were small in terms of the total female population and largely confined to the middle and upper strata of urban communities. Nonetheless, the society as a whole became gradually reconciled to women's participation in the totality of the society.

Undercurrents of dissent existed. In 1968 conservative members of parliament proposed to enact a law prohibiting Afghan girls from studying abroad. Hundreds of demonstrating girls vociferously brought their constitutional guarantee of equal rights to the attention of the parliamentarians. In 1970 two conservative mullahs (Muslim religious leaders) protested such public evidence of female liberation as miniskirts, women teachers, and schoolgirls by shooting
at the legs of women in Western dress and splashing \textit{zem} \textit{vand} acid. In protest five thousand girls, fearful that the legal \textit{system} (dominated by males, often conservatives) would prove too lenient to the \textit{ululahs}, spontaneously took to the streets of Kabul. These \textit{first} demonstrations by women were early indications that a women's consciousness was developing—an initial statement that women should be considered a viable force with potential leadership.

Progress continued without further strident \textit{demonstrations}, but at the same time age-old beliefs and customs prevailed ever among the enlightened. The government of the Republic of Afghanistan, founded by Daoud on 17 July 1973, attempted to \textit{address} specific problems through a Penal Code (1976) and a Civil Law (1971), both of which followed the constitutional injunction that “There can be no law repugnant to the basic principles of the sacred \textit{reign} of Islam.” The Penal Code and Civil Law included the familiar articles against child marriage, forced marriage, and abandonment. They protected inheritance and expressly declared the mahr to be “\textit{property of the wife}” (Civil Law: 110). Yet numbers of \textit{ex-discrepant}ing social customs favorable to male dominance in matters such as divorce, child custody, adultery, and the defense of honor were perpetuated by their entrenchment in these legal statutes.

Many attitudes reflected in the laws, both \textit{positive} and \textit{negative}, had been the subject of argument between Muslim \textit{traditionalists} and modernists for centuries. Contradictions became most destructive in families which encouraged partial emancipation while insisting on patriarchal control as an ideal. For example, to encourage a girl to seek education and then deny her the right to exercise her choice to work outside the home and select her marriage partner fostered incipient rebellion.

The insistence on patriarchal control arose in part from the fact that in Afghanistan women symbolize honor—of the family and of the family. Any deviation on the part of women from honorable behavior as it is defined by any given family or group is seen to besmirch the honor of those in authority and cannot therefore be tolerated. It is this attitude which has perpetuated overprotective institutions and customs such as the veil and seclusion. At the same time, if women are placed on an exalted symbolic \textit{panacea} it behooves men to respect those who behave with honor. Idee respect for women is a genuine personality trait in Afghan males and basic
element in traditional male-female relationships. Observers from sophisticated Islamic cities such as Tehran have remarked with wonder that attractive, young, unaccompanied females were able to walk through the streets of Kabul without being subjected to abusive stares, vulgar remarks, and jostling.

Few Afghan women wished to destroy their respected status, but many began to ask for a more precise definition, in modern terms, of what constituted honorable behavior on their part. After all, women had been asked to contribute to national development and enhance the image of a progressive Afghanistan. They had responded with distinction, functioning with poise and dignity, with no loss of honor to themselves or to their families, and with much credit to the nation. They had proved the correctness of the modernist contention that there is nothing inconsistent with Islam, or modesty, and full participation. But as they became increasingly aware of the importance of their roles, women began to examine their opportunities as individuals rather than stereotypes or national symbols. They longed to be released from the strictures of family consensus and given the right to determine life-crisis decisions as individuals. They began to articulate goals which conflicted with male-oriented ideals.

The government was still unable—and unwilling—to insist on breaking restrictions imposed by the family, which continued to be the single most important institution in Afghan society. Family attitudes, not government guarantees, decided the future of girls. Furthermore, laws favoring women were indifferently enforced, and as more and more women entered the work force, competition caused indifference and resentment to surface. Positions of responsibility and power were occasionally offered to women, but disproportionately to the female work force. Criticisms of sex discrimination and tokenism were raised. Yet women were unwilling to take a militant attitude toward sexism, and they lacked the cohesive leadership necessary to permit them to function as a distinct group with power to force the guarantees pledged to them in legal statutes. By the end of the 1970s skepticism and cynicism were pervasive, and the emancipation movement was labeled by many as a purely cosmetic sham which the power elite espoused for its own aggrandizement and perpetuation.

In truth stagnation had set in and changes were needed. Although
all but a few deplored the violence which accompanied the Saur (April) Revolution and the establishment of the leftist Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) on 27 April 1978 (L. Dupree 1979d), many looked forward with anticipation to new programs unshackled by precedent.

**MOBILIZING AFGHAN WOMEN AFTER THE SAUR REVOLUTION: APRIL-JULY 1978**

On the women's front a sense of unease set in early regarding the new government. Within twelve days the Revolutionary Council under Prime Minister Nur Muhammad Taraki had presented the "Basic Lines of the Revolutionary Duties of the Government of the DRA" and broadcast it over Radio Afghanistan (Afghanistan, MIC, *DRA Annual* 1979:67-70). Article 12 ensured "equality of rights of women and men in all social, economic, political, cultural, and civil aspects." The abrogated constitutions of 1964 and 1977 had made identical blanket assurances.

Government leaders offered little concrete in the way of articulating expectations or specifying action-oriented programs to implement Article 12, however. Dr. Anahita Ratibzad, member of the Revolutionary Council and Minister of Social Affairs, was among the ablest, most dynamic members of the new leadership. On 10 May she made a major address to her staff and Kabul's teachers, in which she pledged to translate Article 12 into action. She described the "duties of women and mothers, who shape the future of the country ... to bring up sons and daughters who are sincere and patriotic" and told women to "take steps to consolidate your revolutionary regime as bravely as the heroic and brave men of this country" (*Kabul Times*, 5/11/78).

It was not surprising to find that women were being called to participate in political action, but it was disappointing to note that women were still being assigned primarily culture-bound, stereotyped roles as mothers duty-bound to fulfill supportive roles for family and nation. Afghan history and folklore are replete with idealized accounts and legends of heroic women who provided guidance and inspiration to their menfolk in times of crisis. If the ideal personality type for Afghan men is the warrior-poet, a lauded personality type for Afghan women is the poet-heroine. Many of the Afghan heroines were mothers...
whose sagacity had inspired their famous sons and whose striking poems had furthered nationalistic causes—for example, Nazo, mother of Mir Wais Hotak (1709-15), who had removed the yoke of the Persian Safawids, and Zarghunah, mother of Ahmad Shah Durrani (1747-72), who had founded an empire. Women who had defied the customs which proscribed education for women in the harems were also extolled. Zaynab, daughter of Mir Wais Hotak, was a scholar in both Pashto and Dari. She wrote, taught, and acted as political adviser and stood with her brothers at the bastion of Kandahar when the city was besieged in 1738 by Persia's Nadir Afshar. Spina Herawi, Aisha Durrani, Amana Fidawi, and Mastura Ghori were among the accomplished poetesses illuminating the courts and harems of the past. Rabia Balkhi (tenth century), who wrote a poem on her prison wall in her own blood to condemn the injustice of being denied the right to marry the man of her choice, is particularly beloved. Heroines of the battlefield inspired armies both with daring acts and stirring couplets. Malalay, the most often quoted of these fighting heroines, rallied Afghan troops in the battle against the British at Maywand (near Kandahar) in 1880, and Ghazi Adi rescued the flag of a dying mujahidin (freedom fighter) opposing the British in Kabul during the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80). These types of poet-heroines have been revered through history for their individuality, patriotism, duty, and courage in transcending the controls imposed upon them.

In an attempt to mobilize Afghan women, the DRA held up these poet-heroines as models, pointing out that “Women have always been prominent in politics and social struggles, like Rabia, Malalay, Zarghunah, and Aisha” (Kabul Times, 7/3/78). The rhetoric stressed the obligation of women to identify with these heroines, but the rights due women remained amorphous even though almost daily functions hailing the Saur Revolution were held in girls’ schools throughout Kabul.

Lengthy DRA speeches rang with scathing condemnations against the tyranny, injustice, corruption, torture, and lack of attention that had been the “hallmarks of the defunct regime” under which “thousands upon thousands of women had lived in dark homes and humid caves, with no ear to hear their cries of anguish, no heart to beat for them,” as Dr. Anahita phrased it (Kabul Times, 5/11/78). The defunct regimes, said Sultana Umayd, Director of Kabul Girls' Schools, “had championed women's rights for purely
demagogic reasons, flouting the prestige of Afghan women and weakening their creativity through deprivation and oppression” (6/25/78). “Now,” said Suraya, President of the Democratic Organization of Afghan Women (DOAW—see below), “all injustices and slavery have been eliminated, and Afghan mothers can rear heroes and heroines like Maimalay.” “Now,” said Ruhafza Kamyar, Principal of the DOAW’s Vocational High School, “society belongs to us and we belong to society, and it is up to us to make efforts to our last breath for the realization of the aspirations of the people” (6/5/78). The speakers did not say how the aspirations could be realized. The meetings ended with the chanting of slogans calling “death to the bloody hangmen” (5/22/78).

All revolutionaries must downgrade their predecessors in order to justify their actions. From the beginning, however, the totally negative harangues of the DRA sounded slightly hollow in light of the fact that it was the very women who heaped vituperation on past leaders who had benefited most from the movement those leaders had initiated. The most prominent women speakers during the early months after the Saur Revolution had been active in education and medicine for many years, as principals and administrators with positions of responsibility. The career of Dr. Anahita exemplifies the development of these women. She was born in October 1931, the daughter of Ahmad Ratib, a dissident journalist who opted for exile after he had incurred the disfavor of the authorities. (He died of tuberculosis in Tehran about 1935.) Anahita’s mother, a half-sister of Mahmud Beg Tarzi but outside the elitist society, became a nursemaid in the home of Shah Mahmud, brother of King Nadir. Anahita—whose birth name was Nahidah—was educated at and graduated from the eighth grade at Malalay Girls’ School in Kabul in 1945. The next year she entered nursing school. In 1950 she studied nursing in the United States, and on returning to Kabul, she was appointed in 1953 as Director of Nursing at Kabul’s Women’s Hospital, where she also taught nursing. Joining the newly established Faculty for Women at Kabul University, she went on to enter the Medical College at the university in 1957 and became a member of its teaching staff upon graduation in 1963. Along with three other women, in 1965 Anahita stood for and won election to the Wulusi Jirgah (Lower House of Parliament) as a candidate from Kabul City for the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). These elections marked the
beginning of an experiment in constitutional monarchy when numbers of liberal and leftist newcomers appeared in the political arena. Anahita marched in the vanguard.

Dr. Anahita joined the leftist PDPA when it was founded by Taraki on 1 January 1965. During a period of relatively free press (1965-73) she wrote for the weekly Parcham (first published on 14 March 1968) until it was banned in July 1969. Her major assignment within the PDPA, however, was the formation in 1965 of the DOAW to counter the establishment’s Women’s Welfare Association (established in 1946), a nonpolitical organization offering education and employment opportunities to women (among other supportive activities). The PDPA accused the Welfare Association of being run by aristocratic women for their personal satisfaction without concern for the real issues facing women.*

Dr. Anahita was rewarded for her loyal party work in 1976, when she was elected to the Central Committee of the PDPA; she was reelected in 1977. After the Saur Revolution she was elected to the Revolutionary Council of the DRA and appointed Minister of Social Affairs.

On the one hand, Dr. Anahita symbolizes the success women could achieve after Daoud’s emancipation movement was initiated in 1959. On the other hand, one can understand her rancor toward the elitists, for she too had been a victim of the shabby treatment meted out to women by the old society. Because her widowed mother had been taken into the home of the royal family, Anahita had grown up as the plaything of princes, but when it came to marriage, she was married off to the family doctor—some say to pay his bills. Therefore, she also represents those women experiencing the frustrating

The Welfare Association was called the Afghan Women’s Institute during Daoud’s Republic of Afghanistan. The DRA claimed that Daoud had been “scared stiff of the growth of the democratic movement of women, using every means to prevent it. The so-called Women’s Association, set up by well-known court appointees, tried to deflect women from genuine class struggle” (Kabul Times, 3/10/79). The international leftist press, especially in the United States, persists in parroting the DRA contention that no attention was paid to the women’s movement prior to the establishment of the DRA and crediting the DRA with the initiation of the emancipation movement. For example, Bechtel states the following: “For long centuries most [women] were treated like slaves... sold into marriage and denied the right to participate in social and economic life.... Equality for women was proclaimed immediately after the April Revolution” (1981:11). For a counter statement, see N. Dupree 1980:22.
contradictions inherent in an emancipation stymied by family structures and entrenched social customs.

It is hard to deny Anahita’s charm, ability, and enthusiastic energy. From the day of her appointment as Minister of Social Affairs, she was indefatigable, visiting welfare centers, schools, kindergartens, and medical facilities. She received women’s delegations from the provinces, and to one and all she articulated the party’s concern to eradicate the discriminations of the past.

By the end of May 1978 a few hints as to the direction that women’s programs might take began to surface through the DRA rhetoric. The expansion of kindergartens was given first place, and the “democratization of social life” through a restoration of the rights and privileges of women was hailed as a major task:

Privileges which women, by right, must have are equal education, job security, health services, and free time to rear a healthy generation for building the future of this country.... Educating and enlightening women is now the subject of close government attention (Editorial, Kabul Times, 5/28/78).

The National Agency for the Campaign Against Illiteracy, accused of ineffectiveness since its establishment in 1969, was slated for reorganization “to teach people the aims of the Revolution and how to meet these goals (Kabul Times, 6/26/78). Week-long seminars were held to familiarize teachers with the new literacy and the techniques of “enlightening the masses” (7/9/78). In July 1978 it was reported that 19,672 Afghans were registered in literacy programs, 1,616 of whom were women.

Those who knew Dr. Anahita in the early days of the DRA had confidence in her leadership and great hopes that the Ministry of Social Affairs would provide the necessary means to implement positive programs. However, internal power struggles between two factions within the PDPA, Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner), ended these hopes. Parcham lost the struggles, and on 12 July 1978, only three months after she had come to power, Dr. Anahita left Kabul to become Ambassador to Yugoslavia. Her lover, Babrak Karmal (then Deputy Prime Minister), and other members of the Parcham leadership were similarly dispatched. When they later refused to return home, they were purged from the PDPA and branded as counterrevolutionary conspirators plotting to pervert the
Saur Revolution. Taraki and his First Minister Hafizullah Amin then set out to consolidate Khalq power (L. Dupree 1980e and forthcoming).

**MANIPULATING AFGHAN WOMEN IN THE NAME OF REFORM: JULY 1978-DECEMBER 1979**

Dr. Anahita's expulsion was a loss. Her Ministry of Social Affairs was dissolved "since the Social Affairs Ministry was not needed right now," according to Taraki (Kabul Times, 10/18/78). Women's affairs were relegated to the Ministry of Education. Women prominent in the DOAW no longer made public appearances. No woman was appointed to subsequent cabinets or to any other substantive positions. Mrs. Taraki and Mrs. Amin only rarely appeared at functions. Neither functioned in the forefront of the political scene, and both primarily fulfilled ceremonial roles. Following the patterns set by past regimes, they graciously received flowers and opened exhibitions of needlework.

The Khalq government did not ignore women. Taraki held that "without the participation of the toiling women no great movement relating to the toiling classes has achieved victory, because women form half of the society" (Kabul Times, 8/23/78). Furthermore, when speaking to Polish journalists in September 1978, Taraki stated the following: "The people's state not only protects the women's movement but will also carry on intensive and effective struggles to equalize the rights of women with those of men. Afghan women from now on are free in the real sense of the word and have equal rights with men" (9/26/78). Admirable sentiments—but Taraki did not elaborate on how the lot of women had improved since the Saur Revolution, nor did he speculate about the creation or extension of specific programs. However, one avowed PDPA objective—"to awaken the political consciousness of women"—was vigorously promoted. With its promotion begins the purposeful manipulation of the women's movement as an appendage to national politics by a leadership attempting to establish legitimacy and consolidate its power. Public demonstrations were ordered to build up popular support and morale.

The DOAW was renamed the Khalq Organization of Afghan Women (KOAW) with Dilara Mahak, formerly principal of Amana
Fidawi School, as president. Functioning in close association with the Khalq Organization of Afghan Youth (KOAY), the KOAW actively rounded up women to attend “grand functions” or gather in the streets to participate in “grand marches,” shouting “Hurrah, hurrah,” and slogans condemning “the reactionary plotters,” and supporting the “Glorious Saur Revolution” while they waved huge posters of “our Great Leader,” Taraki. Frequently these grand marches ended in “volunteer clean-up” sessions, and the people of Kabul were treated for the first time to the sight of girls wielding brooms, sweeping the streets in public in the company of men (Kabul Times, 10/29/78). So much time was consumed in meeting, marching, and “volunteering” that little constructive planning was possible.

Women were extremely visible in the press, receiving promotion awards or certificates following short refresher courses in traditionally accepted women’s fields such as education and health. Glowing reports of KOAW successes in carrying out its directive to revitalize and organize new women’s groups in all parts of the country were frequently published. The announced goal was to absorb 12,000 women, and the KOAW was reported to “now have complete influence among toiling women” (Kabul Times, 3/8/79).

After the PDPA had been created, each of its factions, Khalq and Parcham, organized small clandestine cells in government departments, educational institutions, and youth groups and directed members to spread discontent by constantly harping on discriminatory practices and the disregard evidenced by the power elite toward women. The women who joined these cells came from various backgrounds. Ages ranged between 18 and 30; many were schoolgirls, particularly from Kabul University. The majority were unmarried, but wives of officials and housewives also participated. The Khalq faction tended to draw members into its cells from the middle class and minority groups, predominately in urban provincial centers. They were educated and employed, but not often in high-level positions. Parcham members were from more liberal, elitist families and mainly from Kabul, although some landed gentry from the provinces were also represented. Most were more highly educated, and numbers had travelled abroad because they were affluent. Many held important positions in government because their higher social status provided them with better contacts inside the establishment.

The members’ reasons for joining either PDPA faction were as
varied as their backgrounds. In pre-DRA days, when legislation permitting political parties was held in abeyance there was only the establishment and the left. Moderate liberals were not organized. The frustrated and the activist opposed to the establishment had only the left to turn to, and there individuals were more important than ideology. Women gathered around charismatic personalities, like Dr. Anahita. Male party members were influential in recruiting female members. One of Taraki's most often quoted statements regarding women was that men and women are like "the two wings of a bird" (Kabul Times, 3/8/79); in order to fly both wings must move, and no great movement can achieve victory without the participation of women because they form half of the society (8/23/79). It was incumbent upon male party members, therefore, to enlist the cooperation of the women in their families.

Some women were persuaded to join by their friends. Others joined because of general dissatisfaction, usually concerning male-female relationships at home. The young were particularly attracted by promises of loosening parental control. Most had no ideological reasons for joining. They joined for the sheer excitement of doing something different, of defying their elders. At first it was daring to associate clandestinely with PDPA members. Moreover, party meetings provided an alternative to cloistered, family-chaperoned outings. Party gatherings were mixed, and it was considered perfectly acceptable for boys to invite girls—and even for girls to invite boys—to them. In addition, Parcham meetings presided over by Dr. Anahita and Babrak Karmal were famous for ending in lively disco parties.

Disco parties were particularly attractive in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a plethora of night clubs and discotheques flourished in Kabul. These public clubs were expensive and patronized mainly by the social elite. The middle class youth could not afford them, nor did their families consider them suitable places for their children.* The PDPA meetings provided these youth with an alternative and the psychological satisfaction of being "mod" and "with it."

*The number of night spots in Kabul in 1972 comes as a surprise to many. Being off limits to most middle class youth, they became symbols of elitist alienation, pushing the middle class toward the left. For a descriptive list, see N. Dupree 1972:159-61.
In both PDPA factions much attention was paid to organization. Each institution, including the DOAW/KOAW had committees responsible for the indoctrination of specific sections inside government ministries and city wards. Close links were maintained with the PDPA central hierarchy, which issued the directives. The members were instructed to establish control over their sections and play up latent female frustrations in order to increase membership.

After the PDPA gained power, it became fashionable to join it—and for less palatable reasons. Prospective members were lured by promises of good positions in the government and promotion. Conversely, those who hesitated were threatened with demotion or dismissal, or even denouncement and arrest.* Daughters whose parents objected to their going out unchaperoned threatened to turn in their elders for hindering the revolution by keeping them from party meetings. Small girls were told that if they joined the youth groups, they would be cleansed of the stigma of having parents who had associated with past regimes. As members of the party, they could grow up with pride as true daughters of the revolution dedicated to the service of the motherland.

None of these reasons, coercive or otherwise, had much to do with ideology or the practical furtherance of the emancipation movement. There was little perception that women should be given the opportunity to develop into a distinct group capable of defining problems specifically related to women, and that they should possess socioeconomic and political power to solve these problems. The ideology was still being provided by men, and the women's movement was obligated to share common political goals.

KHALQ STEPS TOWARD EMANCIPATION

A principal task assigned to the KOAW by the Khalq leadership was the eradication of illiteracy in Kabul and provincial centers. “The roots of rotten customs and traditions are nurtured in ignorance,” the Khalq preached (Kabul Times, 10/18/78). Khalq spokesmen adapted Lenin’s dogma that “An illiterate person stands outside

*All such incidents discussed in the text are from personal communications with Afghan refugees and mujahidin. Names have been purposely omitted to protect the interviewees.
R. REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC AND AFGHAN WOMEN

politics; he must first learn his ABC's. Without that there can be no politics”;* they “Afghanized” it by claiming that “An illiterate woman cannot carry on the struggle, cannot handle properly the family affairs, and cannot rear properly sound and healthy children.” A jihad (holy war) against illiteracy was called (3/8/79). By September the remarkable—and improbable—figure of 926,141 men and women enrolled in literacy courses was announced (9/8/79).

In sum the KOAW was primarily enlisted to continue women's traditional, sex-oriented occupations as teachers “to extend civic and political education to women, to enable women to understand their rights and responsibilities, to equip them with epoch-making ideology of the working class” (Kabul Times, 3/10/79). While these were worthy objectives, in practice the literacy classes were merely political meetings in disguise. Instead of beginning with A, B, or C, Lesson No. 1 began with jim, dal, kha, and alif for Jamhuriyat-i Demokratik-i Khalqi Afghanistan—the Dari (Afghan Persian) equivalent of PDPA. Marxist ideology dominated the curriculum. Practical, nonformal, functional teaching materials which had been developed a few years previously were shelved.†

The KOAW cadres used heavy-handed tactics to harass illiterate women—a politically vulnerable group—and the tactics stiffened the opposition. Taraki told a group of journalists that “[We] have in no case enrolled women [in the literacy courses] by force. Not even a single one” (Kabul Times, 5/3/79), but countless refugees pouring into Pakistan during the summer of 1979 listed the forceful implementation of the literacy program among women as a major reason for their departure. In the recalcitrant city of Kandahar three KOAW workers were killed as symbols of the unwanted revolution.

As dissension continued to mount, the PDPA initiated steps to create an aura of solidarity. Girls continued to be exploited in a very public manner in street demonstrations and volunteer projects—activities which would have been considered unacceptable for girls in the past. Now they were not only acceptable, but patriotic as well. One immediate result of such deviations from traditional behavior

*Quoted by Dr. Anahita 1980.
†Daoud’s republic had placed great stress on the initiation of “functional” literacy courses, in which the “main objective was to improve vocational skills . . . on the basis of the choice of the participants” (Kabul Times, 3/28/76).
patterns was an increase in aggressiveness, a basic personality trait among Afghan women. In the past, however, women displayed assertiveness with quiet propriety. Shouting slogans in the streets now gave decorum a new dimension, and the girls exploited this first opportunity to express themselves in public by flaunting their sexuality. This was most noticeable at Kabul University, where the Khalq girls were notorious for their un-Afghan forward, unladylike behavior.

Even the most liberal male proponents of emancipation were embarrassed by the Khalq women's brashness. The traditionalists watched with horror and became even more convinced of their contention that if women were educated and allowed to move freely in the society, sexual anarchy would be the result. By their unorthodox behavior the Khalq girls strengthened the traditionalists and dealt a blow to centrist-conservatives and modernists alike.

The DRA abrogated the 1977 constitution when it came to power and periodically issued decrees to address specific situations. On 17 October 1978 Decree No. 7 was issued. Entitled "Dowry (Mahr) and Marriage Expenses," its stated purpose was to ensure "equal rights of women with men and in the field of civil law and for removing the unjust patriarchal feudalistic relations between husband and wife for consolidation of further sincere family ties." Considering the lofty goals, Decree No. 7 was a very sketchy document of only six articles—the shortest decree issued by the DRA. It was inadequate and simplistic, leading observers to suspect it had been hastily compiled with little reflection. Moreover, as the following discussion details, the six articles benefited the male rather than the female, in contradiction to the rhetoric.

Article 1. "No one shall engage a girl or give her in marriage in exchange for cash or commodities." It was well to decree that an unscrupulous father should no longer be allowed to give his daughter to the highest bidder or for payment of debts without considering her emotional preferences. But in most normal circumstances the exchange is not a "sale" or "wife buying." It compensates for the loss of an economically functioning member of a household and defrays wedding expenses as well as the cost of the goods a bride is expected to bring with her. In most instances the payment equals, or covers barely more than, the expenses. To be equitable the article should have mentioned some limitation on the expectations of the groom's family; these can be exorbitant.
Until attitudes and attendant practices such as arranged marriages change, the issue of prestige cannot be discounted when considering the well-being of brides. A bride's status and treatment in her new home often depend, rightly or wrongly, on the price she has commanded and the goods she brings with her. Honor too is involved. If a father accepts too small an amount, it may appear that he does not value his daughter. If she arrives in her husband's home without the clothes and necessities that allow her to move in with pride, her position suffers further.

Article 1 was of dubious value for girls. However, since the necessity of marriage payments had often delayed marriage for less affluent men until unfairly late in life, the total elimination of the payments was highly advantageous for men.

Article 2. "No one shall compel the bridegroom or his guardians to give holiday presents to the girl or her family." Avaricious mothers of brides-to-be inflict unjust hardships on less than affluent prospective bridegrooms by taking advantage of a custom according to which a fiancée is considered part of the groom's family and therefore entitled to receive gifts on four major religious holidays during each year of the engagement. Like Article 1, Article 2 makes a shortsighted attempt to right this wrong while ignoring the frequent situations in which a bride is less than wealthy and dependent upon holiday gifts—usually sets of clothing—to complete a suitably prestigious trousseau. Therefore, like Article 1, Article 2 caters to men.

Article 3. "The girl or her guardian shall not take cash or commodities in the name of dowry [mahr] in excess of ten dirham [Arabic coinage] according to Shari'at [Islamic law], which is not more than 300 afs. [about U.S. $10] on the basis of the bank rate of silver." According to Islamic law, the mahr is the exclusive property of the woman, but in practice fathers demand exorbitant sums and appropriate much of them, and husbands frequently neglect to pay them on demand. A predominate number of court cases involving women concern the mahr. While the writers of Decree No. 7 attempted to protect men from grasping, demanding women, they considered only half the problem and once again discriminated against women. Without accompanying protective legislation, Article 3 deprives women of the principal buffer in cases of separation, divorce, or abandonment, for there is no alimony in Islam.
Article 4. "Engagements and marriages shall take place with the full consent of the parties involved: (a) No one shall force marriage; (b) No one shall prevent the free marriage of a widow or force her into marriage because of family relationships [the leverite] or patriarchal ties; (c) No one shall prevent legal marriages on the pretext of engagement, forced engagement expenses, or by using force." Article 4 is a catchall listing age-old unjust practices without presenting guarantees for enforcement. The problems are identified, but such simplified legislation cannot eliminate the practices. Only evolving attitudinal changes can do so.

Article 5. "Engagement and marriages for women under sixteen and men under eighteen are not permissible."

Article 6. "(1) Violators shall be liable to imprisonment from six months to three years; (2) Cash or commodities accepted in violation of the provisions of this decree shall be confiscated."

Principles crucial to true emancipation, such as the equal right of women to demand divorce, work opportunities, and inheritance—all guaranteed by Daoud's Civil Law—were not considered. Hopes that the DRA would affect a meaningful direction for the women's rights program were dimmed by the lack of guarantees in Decree No. 7. Like earlier pronouncements against child marriages, forced marriages, the leverite, and exorbitant brideprices made since the days of 'Abdur Rahman, Decree No. 7 by itself was doomed to be ineffective. A government such as the DRA, which professed to have "sprung from the toiling masses," "practiced dialogue with the masses," and "learned from the masses," should have realized that trifling half-heartedly with deep-seated socio-religious customs was courting disaster. The unjust discriminatory practices toward women which had persisted for centuries were too deeply rooted in the culture to be uprooted by mere pronouncements. They had proved to be immune to mere legislative reforms, and they would remain so without attendant attitudinal changes and legal guarantees.

The DRA "welcomed" Decree No. 7 with great fanfare, however. A special stamp was issued to commemorate the decree. For months government ministries and organizations, schools and factories, workers and peasants in the capital and in the provinces staged grand functions, sometimes lasting from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
(Kabul Times, 10/28/78), ending in marches with “hundreds of thousands” carrying “thousands of photos of our Great Leader” (5/8/79). The speakers, predominately male, most often touted Decree No. 7 as a harbinger of cataclysmic change and a “deadly blow to feudalism” which had with a single stroke “delivered women from the tyrannical patriarchal relations of the past” and “gained for women and mothers ... full independence and released them from the shameful customs of the medieval ages.” It “ensured rights of men and women in a real sense” and “for the first time in history ended the practice of selling girls.” It was a “chain-breaking” decree which “eliminated feudalistic patriarchal relations” and “delivered millions from outmoded mores and customs.” As Professor Mrs. R.S. Siddiqi phrased it, “No more will a girl be plucked from the garden of innocence ... and thrown into the clutches of a blood-thirsty beast and never have the opportunity to develop” (11/16/78). There were few such sparks of originality in the rhetoric. The same phrases appeared over and over in speeches delivered at myriad grand functions in Kabul and in the provinces. The PDPA propaganda machine in Kabul was in full swing, and the catechized KOAW cadres dutifully mouthed their lessons.

Tragically, the promoters of the campaign to sell Decree No. 7 neglected to even infer that all the principles contained in the decree conformed to Islamic injunctions. The omission was one more example of how the DRA totally disregarded any attempt to identify its reform programs with Afghan culture—i.e., with the people of Afghanistan. The rhetoric served instead to inflame conservative listeners.

Despite the rhetoric, little positive transpired because Decree No. 7 set ablaze the already smoldering dissent. Revolts in the countryside escalated and fractious disputes among the Khalq leadership paved the way for the rise of Amin (Prime Minister after March 1979), who eliminated Taraki in September 1979. Less and less was said about Decree No. 7, and the women’s movement was kept in low profile, for it became a sensitive point of contention between the DRA and its tradition-bound opponents. The Marriage Registration Office in Kabul, which normally took in thousands of afs. a month, reported an average take of 160 afs. a month as the end of 1979 approached. Marriages were taking place in local mosques, but without civil registration and without benefit of Decree No. 7 (personal communication).
On 1 October 1979 a fifty-eight-member Constitution Drafting Committee was appointed. It contained a token four women: Fawjiyah Shahsawari (Vice President of KOAW) on the Subcommittee for Regulating the Political System of the Society; Dr. Aziza (DRA Director of Nursing; she replaced Dilara Mahak as president of KOAW after Taraki was eliminated) and Shirin Afzal (President of the Reformatory Schools), both on the Subcommittee for Regulations between the State and Individuals; and Alamat Tolqun (President of Kindergartens) on the Subcommittee for Regulating Foreign Policy and International Affairs. The Working Subcommittee, the Subcommittee for Regulating Administrative Affairs, and the Subcommittee for Ensuring Judicial Justice had no female representatives—a deplorable situation since the need to effectively guarantee women’s legal rights by eradicating legal injustices and implementing Decree No. 7 should have been a primary goal of the DRA’s legislation.

In any case the efforts toward emancipation proved purely cosmetic. The government overresponded to increasing successes of the resistance movement with severe repression, which brought about a breakdown of many fine Afghan traditions (L. Dupree 1980f). One of the traditions to suffer most was respect for women. Women seeking the whereabouts of their menfolk from the Ministry of Interior were screamed at in abusive language and curtly turned away with such insults as “Go! Find yourself another man.” Women and children were imprisoned.* There were no trials and no proofs of guilt.

The country slid rapidly into chaos. In a desperate attempt to establish solidarity, Amin opened the Plenary Session of the National Organization for the Defense of the Revolution (NODR) on 5 December 1979. The delegates—a total of 580, including members of KOAW—had been selected for their “profound loyalty to the aspirations of the Saur Revolution; their irreconcilability to domestic and foreign enemies; political and social piety [sic], and popularity.” It was at this time that reportedly “20,000 crusading compatriots were armed” (Kabul Times, 12/11/79).

* Including Suraya (former president of the DOAW and a cousin of Babrak’s) and Jamilah Nahid, daughter of Dr. Anahita (see New World Review, July-August 1980:6).
REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC AND AFGHAN WOMEN

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AFTER THE SOVIET INVASION: 27 DECEMBER 1979-

Less than a month after the NODR was established, the Soviets invaded. On the night of 24 December 1979, they airlifted many thousands of troops into Afghanistan. On 27 December Amin was killed; the airlifts recommenced, accompanied by a massive land invasion from Soviet Central Asia. Babrak Karmal was brought back as puppet Prime Minister, General Secretary of the PDPA, and President of the Revolutionary Council. Dr. Anahita was appointed a Basic Member of the Politburo of the PDPA Central Committee (PDPA/CC), a member of the Revolutionary Council of the DRA (RC/DRA), and Minister of Education. Two other women were appointed to the RC/DRA with Dr. Anahita: Suraya, reappointed President of the DOAW, which regained its pre-Khalq name; and Jamilah Palwashah from the Ministry of Education, a prominent leader in the DOAW who was also an alternate member of the PDPA/CC. The leading women under the Taraki-Amin Khalq regimes disappeared from public view.

Once again women were soon called upon to support the nation and the "Glorious 27 December Uprising," as the second wave of the Soviet invasion was billed. On 1 January 1980 a "Message to Oppressed Women and Mothers of the Homeland" alluded to heroic women of the past and concluded as follows: "It is the duty of the revolutionary government of Afghanistan to guarantee the rights and freedom of women in all social, political, cultural, and other spheres of life. Women of Afghanistan!, defend the dignity and honor of your homelands!" The PDPA Revolutionary Council's "Greetings to the Heroes of Freedom" spoke even more forcefully to women:

We believe that the vanguards and standardbearers of the people of Afghanistan derive their strength from serving . . . the mothers of the country who have given birth to and fed them. So long as they belong to their mothers . . . no enemy or devil can defeat them (Kabul New Times, 1/1/80).

Verbal attacks on Amin's excessive repressions were even more venomous than those previously directed against the defunct "feudals." All the attacks were vehement, but the most vitriolic denouncements came from Dr. Anahita, who upheld the tradition
that Afghan women are implacable when crossed. She characterized Amin as a “cruel and criminal murderer with a fraudulent devil’s soul,” “a savage despot with ruthless fascistic manners,” “a beastly lunatic [guilty of] savage acts of looting, killing, and outraging the honor of the suffering and noble people of Afghanistan in order to keep his throne”—and much, much more (Kabul New Times, 1/2/80). Her phrases were less elegant than those of past poet-heroines, but they were certainly rousing.

The party newspaper Haqiqat-i Inqilabi Saur (Truth of the April Revolution) published a long diatribe on the tyranny of Amin’s “sanguinary” followers, “those dolls who had no will of their own . . . stupid, empty-headed, brainless yes-men . . . who massacred patriots and plundered their properties”; it characterized Amin as “a version of Hitlerites, Mussolinis, and Genghis Khans . . . more murderous and cruel than all the hangmen and murderers of history. His reign of terror will form the most bloody pages in our history. . . . He was not a cultured man. He repeatedly insulted and humiliated women who sought their husbands from him” (Kabul New Times, 1/5/80). Released prisoners likened Amin to Zuhak, a legendary despot possessed by the devil who feasted on human brains (Kabul New Times, 1/10/80).

The daily newspapers carried pictures and accounts of the countless women who had been jailed and subjected to attacks “violating human dignity.” An eighteen-year-old boy reported witnessing scenes of sexual molestation while he was being interrogated at the Ministry of Interior. Worse yet, he had been threatened with being forced to witness the sexual molestation of his fiancée and other female members of his family unless he confessed to anti-Khalq activities (Kabul New Times, 1/3/80). A “Message to Mothers,” published on 15 January 1980, appealed to raw emotions. It called on women

who know that those who have been martyred in the glorious struggle against the bloody, beast-like, fascist, and dark-hearted murderer have spiritual links with the sisters and mothers of this land. Come!, and take part in the mourning ceremonies of this day, the day of martyrs and the day of renewal of pact and oath for revolutionary struggles and lament over the martyred heroes!”
The DRA had declared Mothers' Day, previously celebrated on 14 June, as "null and void" in June 1978. It held that in the past the Women's Association had observed Mothers' Day "in a deceitful manner, unmindful of the conditions of millions of toiling women." Instead, International Women's Solidarity Day (IWSD), initiated by the International Conference of Women Socialists in 1910 in Copenhagen, would be observed on 8 March each year because it marked "the solidarity of women in their struggle against tyranny and imperialism, discrimination and racism, and highlighted freedom and equality" (Kabul Times, 6/17/78).*

Gala functions were held to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of IWSD on 8 March 1980. Using the motto "Awaken the political consciousness of Afghan women!," the celebrations mirrored those held to welcome Decree No. 7, now conspicuously unmentioned. The grandest function, held at the Polytechnic Gymnasium and graced by one of Mrs. Babrak Karmal's rare ceremonial appearances, passed a resolution condemning the "adventurous and irresponsible policy of the American reactionaries, China, Pakistan, Egypt, and Israel... against the Afghan revolution and disinterested assistance of the Soviet Union to Afghanistan" (Kabul New Times, 3/9/80). The use of the DOAW for disseminating political propaganda continued to be prominent, but the DRA stressed the following:

One important criterion of a progressive regime is the efforts it makes to ensure equality between males and females... It was not religion that stood against women's progress... for Islam made learning incumbent upon both men and women... but men used women as second-rate citizens and did not allow them to acquire knowledge and therefore women are not aware of their rights (Editorial, Kabul New Times, 3/16/80).†

*From its inception the DRA attempted to identify the Afghan women's movement with the world-wide women's socialist movement. Afghan delegations attended numbers of international conferences, beginning with the International Democratic Federation of Women meetings (which opened in Moscow on 15 May 1978), at which Afghanistan became a member. Delegations of women from Communist countries periodically visited Afghanistan.

†An American leftist correspondent reporting on an October 1980 interview with Suraya makes no reference to Decree No. 7, however, listing only the familiar youth-indoctrination programs, promotion of nurseries and kindergartens, and literacy as the "special practical measures" being taken to provide equality for women (Bechtel 1981).
A new directive outlining the "Fundamental Principles of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan" was issued by the Babrak government on 20 April 1980. Unlike Article 12 of the "Basic Lines" issued under Taraki, the new set of guidelines made no reference to women. Presumably this followed the logic advanced by the framers of the 1964 constitution, who held that specific mention of women would in itself be a type of discrimination.

Chapter 2 of the new "Fundamental Principles," entitled "Fundamental Rights and Obligations of Citizens," states that "Citizenship of the DRA is shared equally by all the peoples of Afghanistan." In its eight articles all citizens are assured of the following rights (among others): "equality before the law irrespective of their racial, national, tribal and linguistic affiliations or sex, domicile, religion, education, parentage, assets and social status . . . in all economic, political, social and cultural fields"; security; full freedom of practice of Islam or other faiths; work; health protection; education; expression; individual or collective complaint before state organs; and to be considered innocent until proven guilty. At the same time, citizens are "obliged to respect and observe the laws and standards of social conduct, human manners and morals." This requirement will remain amorphous until legislation suggests an alignment of the contradictory "laws and standards" inherent in custom, religion, and reform. Finally, "Defense of the motherland and the gains of the Saur Revolution, loyalty to its objectives and aspirations and service to the people comprise the lofty sacred obligation of each citizen" (Asia Society 1980:51-52).

Literacy continued to be hailed as imperative for the socialization of the populace. On 28 May 1980 the DRA announced its goal to eliminate illiteracy completely in the cities in seven years and in the provinces in ten years. The DOAW and KOAY—renamed the Democratic Organization of Afghan Youth (DOAY)—were assigned decisive roles in the project. In an interview with Soviet Woman in February, Dr. Anahita had deplored some errors, in particular the compulsory education of women. The reactionary elements immediately made use of these mistakes to spread discontent among the population. In this connection the former leadership of the Ministry of Education slowed down to some extent the solution of the problem of eliminating illiteracy (1980:3).
However, in May 1980 Dr. Anahita quoted some remarkable statistics: “At present, 500,000 have completed literacy training in 27,000 courses throughout the country. Further, 12,500 literacy courses have been set up in the army where about 200,000 soldiers have achieved literacy” (Kabul New Times, 5/29/80). As we have indicated, Afghan statistics are dubious. At its strongest, the Afghan army never consisted of more than 100,000 men, and by May 1980 desertions had considerably depleted its ranks. In contrast to her detailed quotation of such achievements, it is significant to note that when Dr. Anahita mentioned that the government’s goal was to educate all males in Afghanistan between the ages of ten and fifty, she omitted any reference to women. Literacy for women remained a politically volatile subject.

The media contributed some constructive and practical education for women on radio and television, such as programs on the activities and services of the Family Guidance Association (established in 1968). Magazines and newspapers in Dari and Pashto carried feature articles especially for women. The Kabul New Times published a weekly page for women. Many of the feature articles were inane, but interviews with Afghan women—from housewives to factory workers—discussing successes in employment situations as well as frustrations and maltreatment, arranged and forced marriages, problems with mothers-in-law and nagging, and extravagant husbands were full of substance. Articles on women’s achievements in other countries continued Mahmud Beg Tarzi’s vision seven decades earlier concerning a more equitable role for women in Afghan society.

Most heartening to women was that a special reporter from the Kabul New Times was assigned to the Special Court for Family Affairs. The court, an inspiration of the late Justice Ghulam Ali Karimi in 1975 and one of the more positive accomplishments of the Afghan women’s movement, continued to function after the Saur Revolution. The court is customarily headed by a male religious judge and includes a male and female judge trained in secular law as well as Islamic jurisprudence. The newspapers carried case histories and interviews of women seeking divorce or redress from maltreatment by husbands and in-laws and the court’s attempts to affect reconciliation. (Significantly, it is generally the women who are asked to return to their husbands.) These articles were both positive and educational. No amount of rhetoric could accomplish what these straightforward interviews achieved.
In June 1980 a staff reporter for the women's page of the Kabul New Times made some refreshingly honest and pertinent remarks:

There is nothing more ridiculous than granting privileges on paper without pushing them through practically. . . . There must be an effective law-enforcing apparatus to put into effect each right granted . . . so that every man who does not believe in women's attitudes may be convinced that he is wrong. . . . If women are too passive, . . . no amount of legislation can help them. . . . In order to raise the status of women we must first raise the standards of their men (6/16/80).

Unfortunately, beginning in July 1980 the women's page was gradually preempted by a variety of topical features, such as the Moscow Olympics.

Despite the government's attempts to appear to be functioning normally and implementing progressive programs, the presence of foreign invaders occupying Afghan soil was anathema. The mujahidin extended their effective control over the countryside and disaffection mounted in the cities, rapidly eroding Parcham's political base—particularly among university and college students, who were originally its staunchest supporters. The very girls who had been most revolutionary and politically militant became decidedly unrevolutionary, reticent, and obstructive. They felt disillusioned by the empty rhetoric, shocked and betrayed by the Soviet invasion. Any euphoria that was left from April 1978 faded as Kharq and non-PDPA members were arrested in increasing numbers.

On 27 April 1980 the citizens of Kabul were called out to applaud a parade of Afghan, Soviet, and Soviet-bloc dignitaries celebrating the second anniversary of the Saur Revolution. As the cavalcade passed a large girls' school, a girl named Nahidah began calling out anti-government, anti-Soviet slogans. Others joined her spontaneously and the clamor increased. Bricks and stones flew toward the cavalcade; shots followed from die-hard party members and militiamen. When the riot was finally brought under control, some seventy people lay dead, Nahidah among them. She has now joined the ranks of Afghanistan's heroines as the new Malalay.

Having sparked the resistance movement in Kabul, girls capitalized on their recent experiences in the streets and almost
daily organized demonstrations and processions. Jeering at the police and soldiers sent to break up the demonstrations, the girls snatched off the caps of the men and threw them their chadars (head scarves), calling: “Here! Wear these. Go! Shut yourselves up in your houses. We girls will defend the motherland!” (personal communication; see also an article from New Delhi in *Pakistan Times*, 6/13/80:1). The girls had taken the lead, expressing their indignation over the Soviet occupation and their distaste at being forced to parrot pro-Soviet propaganda. The Parcham authorities put down the demonstrations (mainly of students) with brutality, swelling the ranks of the dissidents.

The demonstrations continued through May and June in defiance of government prohibitions, and hundreds of girls were carted off to jail. The unmanly, disrespectful treatment of girls, in addition to increasing incidents of abuse by Russian soldiers, fanned the emotions of Afghan men. The Afghans sent to subdue the girls were beset with conflicting emotions between duty and traditional respect for women. A taxi driver cried in shame as he watched girls fighting “like cats” as they were manhandled into a police van (personal communication). A policeman taking six girls in for questioning refused to hand them over to four Russian soldiers who demanded them; he shot the Russians and himself rather than allow the girls to be subjected to insult (personal communication).

The girls remained defiant in spite of the arrests and violence. In Mazar-i Sharif, the capital of Balkh province, women demonstrated in protest after Russian soldiers stomped through the women’s section of the sacred shrine of Hazrat-i Ali without removing their shoes. Assaults on female honor caused the Russians to be regarded with revulsion and fear. Women sent requests to the mujahidin for small pistols with silencers which they could carry under their veils. Bodies of Russians were found in the streets with increasing frequency. Some fathers with young daughters opted for exile, saying: “We have nothing left . . . but still we Afghans know how to save the honor of our women” (*Pakistan Times*, 6/13/80:1).

In the very conservative city of Kandahar the protection of honor took more drastic forms. When rumors circulated that Soviet troops had entered the city, two men killed all the women in their families to prevent them from dishonor. These acts infected the entire city, prompting one girl to send a desperate call for protection
to her brother in Kabul. When he arrived, he found his two brothers stationed on the roof, armed with knives, watching for the first sign of a Russian, at which, they vowed, they would kill their women. The Kabul brother, known for his liberal views, was powerless. He sent for two of the most conservative members in the family, who argued successfully with the brothers on the roof, that although men were bound by Islam to protect their women to the death, it was incumbent upon the women to protect themselves should their male protectors die. To kill women in anticipation of dishonor, they said, was un-Islamic (personal communication).

Dissidence also appeared in less violent and public forms. Women in government offices began slowdowns, particularly in the Ministry of Education's literacy program. Books and papers were purposely delayed, misdirected, lost, and damaged. More than the usual time was spent in the office gossiping, knitting, and thumbing through magazines. False attendance reports were submitted (personal communication). These actions were as courageous as the public demonstrations, for informers were everywhere who were anxious to enhance their positions with the authorities by turning people in.

The mujahidin encouraged noncooperation by girls in the areas they controlled. On taking over the Nangarhar University in Jalalabad, the mujahidin asked girls to return to their homes in order to protest the Soviet occupation. They promised to reinstate education for girls when they succeeded in expelling the foreigners and chivalrously paid each girl transportation costs plus 200 afs. spending money (personal communication).

Conflicting views on the role of women—particularly their education—constitute one of the more divisive ideological controversies among the resistance groups. Among the refugees who have fled rule by “infidels and godless invaders,” fundamentalist attitudes prevail, and those professing liberal views on women risk being branded as traitors and collaborators. By bringing the most fanatic attitudes toward women to the surface, the revolution has seriously jeopardized women. It has so widely polarized conservatives and modernists that fundamentalist reaction threatens to destroy previous accomplishments of the women’s movement. This has given rise to the belief that the mujahidin leaders totally reject education for women. The most conservative groups call for women to return behind the veil, but also hold that women have “the right” to education and work...
opportunities—in separate institutions (Hizb-i Islami N.D.a.).* The more liberal manifestos pledge basic freedoms for individuals; free and universal suffrage; compulsory education of all Afghan school-age children; social and economic justice and political freedoms and opportunity for “all Afghans, men and women, to participate individually or collectively in the affairs related to the welfare of Afghanistan”; and “that every individual is entitled to a fair and impartial trial . . . with an opportunity to defend himself or herself and demand the process of law” (National Islamic Front of Afghanistan N.D.).

Legend and fact combine in the accounts of women in the resistance movement. For instance, Nuristani women were credited with destroying the first Afghan army patrol to be annihilated (end of 1978). The government blamed the Nuristani mujahidin, but in Kabul many believed the story that Nuristani women hidden in trees pretending to pick walnuts did the deed. The patrol was taken unawares (the story goes) because it would have been disrespectfully un-Afghan of the soldiers to glance up at the women. Fact or fiction, the story enhances the reputation of Afghan women for being fierce, indomitable foes.† In the 1 January 1980 “Message to Oppressed Women,” Babrak called upon this acknowledged quality in Afghan women to defend the honor and dignity of the nation. The women have responded, but not entirely as he intended.

The innate courage of Afghan women has been exemplified in many ways. Widows lament they have been denied the honor of becoming shahid (martyrs) and plead for guns to fill the empty hands of their infant sons to revenge the deaths of their fathers (personal communication). Many wives and mothers have encouraged their men

* One young member of Hizb-i Islami, a fundamentalist group, explained that the group’s insistence on separate institutions, especially in work situations, was largely economic: “You have seen it yourself, khanum [lady]. When there are girls in the office, the men do not pay attention to their work. Much time is lost. And time is money. We have so much to do. How can we develop when so much time is lost?” (personal communication).

† Rudyard Kipling expressed British dread of Afghan women on the warpath:

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains  
And the women come out to cut up what remains,  
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your brains  
An’ go to your Gawd like a soldier  
to flee arrest while they remain behind to sell property and wind up other affairs. Then alone they face the hazards of crossing the border illegally. In the Kandahar area a band of female smugglers actively assists such women.

The revolution has split many families in permanent ways. Women unable to countenance life under Soviet domination have left husbands who elected to cooperate with the puppet regime. They have gone into exile alone, where they necessarily function as individuals making their own decisions. One wife sent the wedding ring she had worn for fourteen years back to her husband with the following message: “Come with this ring—or forget me.” Meanwhile she struggles to make a new life for herself and her two young sons while she assists her fellow refugees. When congratulated on her courage, her eyes flashed as she said: “But I must be strong. For my sons and for my country. But I can make it! And so can Afghanistan!” (personal communication). Her resolve best sums up the spirit of the revolutionary Afghan woman.

While the women in the resistance movement consolidate their positions, the Babrak regime offers women only token representation. Although a hard core remains active in Kabul, women as a group are still largely excluded from positions of real power—with the exception, of course, of Dr. Anahita, member of the PDPA Central Committee Politburo, only female member of the Presidium of the Revolutionary Council, Minister of Education, President of the DRA Peace, Solidarity, and Friendship Organization, and President of the DOAW. She greets all foreign dignitaries, addresses major meetings, and makes frequent trips abroad.

The Babrak regime has made increasingly frantic attempts to enlist women in its desperate fight for survival, however. The Fourth Seminar of the DOAW, held in Kabul on 2 September 1980, was directed “to search for scientific ways to mobilize the enlightened women of Afghanistan.” The DOAW, the prime institution promoting women, was defined as “the voice calling upon women to struggle against the counterrevolution,” and women were admonished as follows:

As a mother, as a sister, and as a woman you should not leave your sons alone on the long path of struggle for safeguarding the gains of the revolution that for the first time in history . . . has declared in
the laws the equality of the rights of women with men ("DOAW's Call on Heroic Women"; Kabul New Times, 8/30/80).

On 20 November 1980, the First Conference of the City Council of Representatives of the Women of Kabul City was organized by the DOAW specifically "to organize the women of Afghanistan in defending the revolution." A major objective of this conference was "to further expand the closed ranks of militant women in the country." In addition, it elected representatives to a nationwide conference on Afghanistan's women.*

The nationwide conference, the first international seminar on women to be held in Afghanistan, was entitled "Unity and Solidarity of the Ranks of International Democratic Women and Their Role in Mobilizing the Progressive Forces of the World." It was opened with great fanfare by Babrak on 28 November 1980 in the Salam Khanah, 'Abdur Rahman's Durbar Hall now used as the headquarters of the DRA Revolutionary Council (Kabul New Times, 11/29/80). Dr. Anahita was the chair. Delegations from a number of foreign countries and international organizations attended, including Angola, Britain, Bulgaria, Chile, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Republic of Germany, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Kampuchea, Lebanon, Mexico, Mongolia, Palestinian Liberation Organization, Poland, Soviet Union, Vietnam, All-African Women's Organization, and International Democratic Women's Federation. Twelve Afghan women "represented various strata of Kabul" (11/30/80; 12/1/80).

In its message to the conference, the PDPA/CC pointed out that the conference was being held "under sensitive... conditions... when, with the victory of the glorious and liberating uprising of December 27, the new evolutionary phase of the Saur Revolution*

The nationwide women's conference was the first of a veritable bombardment of conferences called as the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion approached. Tribal groups and special interest groups were gathered in Kabul so that Babrak could make impassioned, personal appeals for support of his National Fatherland Front, launched at a "great historic conference" called on 27 December 1980. Among the conferences were the following: 5 December—buzkashi teams composed of Uzbek and Turkmen horsemen from the north—to whom Dr. Anahita was chosen to present winning trophies! (the sport of buzkashi is described on p. 198n. above); 6 December—Nuristanis; 8 December—Safi Pashtun; 11 December—First Congress of Agricultural Cooperatives; 15 December—Afridi and Shinwari Pashtun; 21 December—the people of Bamyan; 29 December—Jaghatu (Hazarah).
emerged.” After reiterating the party’s duty to implement the DRA’s Fundamental Principles, it continued: “Under the present circumstances the training of sacrificing and firm adherents to . . . the Saur Revolution . . . is the great duty . . . and prideful responsibility of every mother. The Party and State will never spare any help to mothers in this noble task.” The PDPA further pledged that along with developing the national economy, industry, and agriculture, it would set up “kindergartens, nurseries, schools, hospitals, and clubs” and attempt to attract women to take an active part in “social life and productive affairs” to build a new society.

The message digressed to praise Babrak’s visit to the USSR (October 1980), the PDPA’s link with world revolutionary processes and consolidation of world peace, and Afghan support of “the untiring efforts of the Soviet Union . . . in [its] struggle for peace, detente, and complete and general disarmament.” Finally, it expressed the party’s appreciation for “the activities of the DOAW toward organizing the women of the country, consolidating solidarity with the women of the world, and their struggle for the prosperity and tranquility of peoples, limitation of the arms race, prevention of the threat of war, and ensuring freedom, democracy, and progress” (Kabul New Times, 11/30/80). Quite some tasks for the beleaguered women’s movement in Afghanistan! The first day ended with a concert and a fashion show of local costumes and modern dress.

The concluding session on 30 November was again attended by Babrak, but Dr. Anahita was the main speaker. Her long, long speech included fulsome thanks to Karmal and the PDPA/CC for their support of the women’s movement, gratitude for “the aid of the brotherly people of the Soviet Union,” and quotes from Brezhnev on the “victories gained” by Babrak’s visit to the USSR.* Emphasizing the role women had played in the historic struggle for national liberation, she exhorted “enlightened women” to go out “to raise the level of political and social consciousness and disclose the real nature of the reactionary, plundering circles of thieves, rebels and collaborators” (Kabul New Times, 12/1/80), described in the speeches by foreign delegates as “U.S. imperialists, Chinese chauvinists, and reactionary circles of the region and of the world” (11/30/80). With warmth and

*The speech was so long that it was reprinted in four parts in Kabul New Times: Part 1 (12/1/80); Part 2 (12/2/80); Part 3 (12/3/80); Part 4 (12/4/80).
fervor Dr. Anahita concluded: “Let the enemy die because we are undefeatable” (12/4/80).

The organizers of the conference issued a message to “the noble women, gallant mothers, and tortured sisters of the country” (Kabul New Times, 12/2/80) and presented the resolutions it had passed unanimously.* Dr. Anahita was unanimously elected president of the DOAW (12/1/80), with a forty-six-member Central Council, also elected unanimously. Representatives of DOAW central councils “in the provinces will be elected later,” it was announced (12/1/80).

The revolutionary rhetoric continues unabated, but the feminist movement in Afghanistan has become inextricably enmeshed with the political fortunes of individual leaders—and with foreign invaders well versed in directional indoctrination. The promised cataclysmic changes have not materialized. The psychological relationships between men and women have not been altered. By allowing themselves to be manipulated as tools of party politics, the militant activists subordinate the women’s movement to male domination, adding a sinister dimension to the traditional “patriarchal” attitudes their rhetoric condemns. Thus after a century of liberalizing effort, Afghan women still struggle to be recognized as individuals rather than stereotypes and symbols.

APPENDIX

RESOLUTIONS OF THE CONFERENCE ON UNITY AND SOLIDARITY

We have decided to:

1. Promote the role of Afghanistan’s women in defense of the gains of the Saur Revolution...

2. Be always decisive against the enemies of revolution...

3. Take part in actions for the gradual, stage-by-stage attraction of women to the process of social production, ensuring the right of women to work ... for economic independence of women, and their equality in family and society...

*The conference’s resolutions were reprinted in Kabul New Times, 12/1/80: 4. We reproduce them in summary in the appendix at the end of this chapter.
4. Actively take part in the campaign against illiteracy.

5. Pay attention to the promotion of the cultural level of women and see that they have access to education and acquire vocational know-how in factories and special centers, including villages and rural areas.

6. Take the initiative in advancing specific proposals to the state ... for the ... promotion of laws on women's work, payment of wages, work security, and child and mother care.

7. Take care of the health and education of children and help in the promotion of the material level of the life of families, take active and great part in state ... systems devised for child and mother care.

8. Strengthen our solidarity with the world women in the struggle for peace, relaxation of tension, and prevention of the horrible arms race and atomic conflict.

9. Expand our mutual friendship and cooperation with the women of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.
**GLOSSARY**

**AFGHAN TERMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afandi (afandī)</td>
<td>Honorific used in reference to some ruhani families; religious dignitary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agha (āghā)</td>
<td>Honorific used in reference to the descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhund (ākhund)</td>
<td>Learned Islamic religious leader or scholar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhundzadah (ākhundzādah)</td>
<td>Descendants of akhund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-amr bi-l-ma’ruf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar (al-amr bi-l-ma’ruf wa-l-nahy ‘an al-munkar)</td>
<td>Commanding what is good and forbidding what is abominable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaqadar (alāqadār)</td>
<td>Subdistrict commissioner/administrator (Dari term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaqadari (alāqadārī)</td>
<td>Subdistrict headquarters (Dari term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alif (alīf)</td>
<td>Letter of Dari alphabet; = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Alim (‘ālim)</td>
<td>Learned religious leader (singular of ‘ulamā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amir (amīr)</td>
<td>Prince, lord, or nobleman; former title of the ruler of Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqrāb (‘Aqrāb)</td>
<td>Eighth month of Islamic solar calendar covering 23 October–21 November; scorpion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqsaqal (āqsaqāl)</td>
<td>Village elders (Uzbek term)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabī (‘arabī)</td>
<td>Breed of sheep presumably from Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbab (arbāb)</td>
<td>Official village headman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arbabha-i rishwat khur (arbābhā-i rishwat khūr)</td>
<td>Bribe-eating arbabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariza (‘ārīza)</td>
<td>Petition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariza nawis (‘ārīza nawīs)</td>
<td>Petition writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkhasi namdar (ashkhāsi nāmdār)</td>
<td>Local magnates; famous people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashkhasi sarshinas (ashkhāsi sarshīnas)</td>
<td>Local magnates; people of repute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


Anahita, Dr. See Ratibzad, Anahita.


Anis (Kabul). After 1981 the official organ of the National Fatherland Front. In Dari and Pashto.


*BBC Summary of World Broadcasts.* BBC Monitoring Service, Caversham, Reading. Various issues.


Beck, Sam, and McArthur, Marilyn. Forthcoming. “Class and Ethnicity in Romanian Development.” In Lockwood, ed.


Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


Bibliography


________. N.D.f. A Brief Biography of Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Revolutionary Leader of Jamiat-i Islami Afghanistan. Peshawar: Political Committee of JIA.


JIA. See Jamiat-i Islami Afghanistan (JIA).


Bibliography


Bibliography


MERIP. *Middle East Research and Information Project*.

MIC. See Afghanistan, Ministry of Information and Culture.


Ministry of Information and Culture. See Afghanistan, Ministry of Information and Culture.


Bibliography


Bibliography


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. States and Social Revolutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


Bibliography


Bibliography


ADDENDUM: MUJAHIDIN PUBLICATIONS


Bisharat. Weekly newspaper published in Baghlan province by JIA.


Bibliography


*Sangar* and *Nida-i jihad*. Weekly newspapers published in Parwan province by JIA. In Persian and Pashto.


**NOTE:** Since early 1982, in accordance with the charter of the Islamic Unity of Afghan Mujahidin (IUAM), a coalition of seven Islamic revolutionary groups formed during the summer of 1981, all publications of its member organizations in Peshawar have been discontinued. In 1981 the IUAM launched a new series of publications expressing the collective views of the coalition. Thus far the following have come to the editors' attention:


The alliance of the three traditionalist resistance groups also has its own publications. Thus far the editors are aware of the following: