

World's women battle on

By Ray Moseley

IN TEHRAN recently, an aide to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was scolding a young woman employe of one of the American television networks because she refused to cover her head with a scarf during a press conference.

"This movement has nothing to do with women's lib; bear that in mind," he told her sternly.

Since then, the leaders of Iran's Islamic revolution have found to their dismay that some of their own women are equally reluctant to accept the narrowly circumscribed role that the male-led revolution has decreed for them.

Thousands of women have taken to the streets in Western attire to protest demands that they wear the chador, the traditional Moslem head-to-toe veil.

They also have demanded equal pay with men, a greater voice in government, and a retention of protections given to them in a family law enacted during the reign of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

THE IRANIAN protest movement represents a rare, startling example of female assertiveness in an Islamic society. Significantly, though women in Western countries have demonstrated in support of the Iranian women, there have been no such demonstrations so far in other Moslem countries.

But, if Western women appear more liberated than their Islamic sisters in many respects, a Tribune survey has found that women everywhere are still living in a man's world.

The women's struggle for equal rights has made progress in recent years — startling progress in light of the status of women during several thousand preceding years of human history.

But women impatient for revolution are still finding that progress comes more slowly than they would wish.

In no member nation of the United Nations, according to a UN report, do women receive equal pay with men. In no member nation is the legal status of women equal to that of men.

In the Third World, where there is often not enough food to go around, the UN found that the caloric intake of girls and women is much less than that of boys and men. Where there is starvation, the females starve first.

Ray Moseley is a Tribune reporter. He recently returned from a seven-week assignment reporting the Islamic revolution in Iran.

Women everywhere still live in a man's world. Those impatient for a revolution find that progress comes more slowly than they would wish.

In most societies, women lag behind men in level of educational attainment. Even in the most advanced countries, women who work still tend to be concentrated in low-paying, low-prestige jobs.

The unequal status of men and women is institutionalized throughout the world. Women play only a minor role at the decision-making levels of government. Few of them serve in national parliaments.

At the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, fewer than 10 per cent of the delegates were women. Fewer than 3 per cent of the permanent representatives to the UN are women.

YET ALL this must be measured against the status of women a relatively few years ago.

Until 1893, when women were enfranchised in New Zealand, women could not vote anywhere in the world. As recently as 1945, only 31 countries allowed women to vote; today they enjoy this right in more than 125 countries.

Nine states still exclude women from the political process: Liechtenstein, Bahrain, Kuwait, Nigeria (six northern states only), Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen).

Fifty years ago, only 43 Egyptian girls attended secondary schools. Today, more than a half million do so.

In France, women have had the right to run for public office only since 1945. And it was not until 1963 that married French women could open their own bank accounts without their husbands' authorization.

Until 1938, French women could not work or attend a university without their husbands' permission.

Most feminist leaders today agree that the greatest ad-

vances in women's rights have occurred in the United States and the Scandinavian countries. The biggest problems remain, they say, in the Islamic world and in other Third World countries.

Even Phyllis Schlafly, who plays a leading role in the fight against the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States, says: "I think ERA would probably be an improvement for women in many parts of the world."

For American women, she quickly adds, it would be a step down. "American women are the most fortunate class of humans who have ever lived on the face of the earth."

A SIGNIFICANT problem for women in securing more rights is that a staggering 40 per cent of them — a half billion women — are illiterate. Literacy rates among women stand at 85 per cent in the Arab states, 83 per cent in Africa, 57 per cent in Asia, and 27 per cent in Latin America.

In Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malawi, New Hebrides, and Upper Volta, barely one girl in 10 ever goes to school. In North Yemen, only one girl in 100 does so.

But major strides are being made in many countries in advancing the cause of women's education.

Even in conservative Saudi Arabia, higher education has been opened up to women since the 1960s. In the last 30 years, the female share of university enrollment has doubled in Japan, tripled in Nigeria, quadrupled in Pakistan, and quintupled in Thailand.

In most European countries, the number of female university students doubled or tripled in the 1960s and has continued to climb. In some African countries, female university enrollments multiplied seven to 16 times.

Women still account for only one-fourth to one-third of university students in most of the Third World.

But growing acceptance of the right of women to equal education has been the biggest factor in the improvement of their status in Moslem countries.

The fact that the shah sent thousands of Iranian women to the United States and other Western countries for higher education probably accounts in large measure for the strength of the women's protest movement in Tehran today.

Many devout Moslems maintain that Islam upgraded the status of women, and they frequently cite the Prophet Mohammed's saying that "Heaven is under mother's feet."

But Islam is male dominated and male oriented, and its dogma treats women as property. Women are expected to be