

World's women wage uphill fight for their rights

Continued from first Perspective page

subservient to fathers and brothers and, when they marry, to their husbands.

In the more traditional families, women are kept veiled and are allowed to speak freely only to other women and to male relatives.

In some Third World countries, women played a major role in the fight against colonialism, only to find their rights restricted once their countries gained independence.

A prime example of this is Algeria, where women fought alongside men in the Front for National Liberation and smuggled explosives and weapons in baby carriages.

Algerian women are now glaringly underrepresented in the Algerian National Assembly, the party, and the government. Polygamy is still permitted, and in 1970 the old Moslem practice of allowing a man to divorce his wife by saying "I divorce you" three times in the presence of witnesses was reinstated.

IF RELIGION is a barrier to women's rights under Islam, some feminist leaders think the same is true in Western countries.

"The doctrine of most religions is very unequal toward men and women," said Karen DeCrow, a Syracuse attorney who is past president of the National Organization of Women (NOW).

This is true, she said, of Roman Catholicism, Protestant churches, and Orthodox Judaism. But in the West, women tend to rebel against the role assigned to them by religion, more than Moslem women do, she said.

Mrs. Koryne Horbal of Minneapolis, the U.S. member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, sees parallels between attempts to curtail women's rights in Iran and "the religious backlash against women's rights" in the United States.

She said religious sentiment is manifested in this country primarily in opposition to family-planning legislation.

In Africa, tribal traditions and female illiteracy are major problems for women in securing their rights.

Generally, African women cannot own land independent of their husbands and parents. Their marriages are often arranged by their parents. Those women who migrate from rural to urban areas frequently are unable to find work and are forced into prostitution to survive.

Many African women work as domestics and put in a seven-day week with no annual vacation.

In Somalia, the Sudan, and other Moslem countries of Africa, female circumcision is widely practiced. The clitoris in young girls is removed in the belief that this will remove sexual desire and help to keep them chaste as women.

Throughout much of Asia, Buddhist custom dictates that women stand and serve while men eat. If there is anything left after the men are finished, the women eat.

Women in some areas also are subject to superstitions that certain types of food, such as chicken, eggs, and milk, are not good for women. The result is that women and girls often are undernourished.

COMMUNIST COUNTRIES boast that they lead the world in



the emancipation of women. But the claim proves somewhat hollow upon close examination.

Women do have wide access to higher education and to the professions in communist countries. But few of them ever rise to positions of leadership in the professions, in the factories, or in political life.

Furthermore, men in the Soviet Union and other communist countries are not accustomed to sharing in household tasks. So a widespread complaint among women from these countries is that they bear a double load — working at their paid jobs during the day, then coming home to a full job of house-keeping.

Mrs. Horbal, the U.S. commissioner at the UN, said Soviet women delegates "complain openly" about this problem, even while maintaining there is no discrimination against women in their country.

Membership in communist parties is the key to upward mobility in communist societies, but few women are allowed to be party members. Even though women outnumber men by 60 per cent in the Soviet Union, only 23 per cent of the Soviet party membership is female.

In China, women account for little more than 13 per cent of party membership.

There are no women ministers in the Soviet government, and only one woman in history has ever served on the ruling Politburo. Women hold 35 per cent of the seats in the Supreme Soviet, the parliament — an impressive statistic on the face of it.

But the Supreme Soviet is a rubber-stamp body with no real legislative power.

WOMEN HAVE made some of their most significant advances in the Scandinavian countries, particularly in terms of political participation.

Five of Sweden's 20 cabinet ministers are women, including the foreign minister. In Denmark women hold 3 of 19 cabinet posts and in Norway 4 of 15.

By contrast, only 3 of the 18 Latin American countries have any women cabinet ministers.

In Scandinavia, although women are increasingly entering the professions and working at jobs traditionally reserved for men, their level of education remains lower than that of men.

The percentage of university degrees that go to women

stand at 40 per cent in Sweden, 25 per cent in Denmark, and 10 per cent in Norway.

A common complaint of women in both industrialized and developing nations is lack of access to the most prestigious and best-paying jobs.

In many developing countries, the bulk of female participation in the labor force is in agriculture. In some Western countries, women find it difficult to break out of such traditional job categories as teaching, nursing, retailing, hairdressing, and the like.

The level of labor force participation of Latin American women, averaging 20 per cent or less, is among the lowest in the world. Few women are to be found in the higher ranks of the civil service of most Latin American countries.

More women work in France than in any West European country. But mostly they are in low-paying, dead-end occupations, and many earn less than men for comparable work.

West Germany and Italy have considerable salary differentials between men and women, although membership in the European Common Market theoretically requires that women and men receive equal pay for equal work.

MRS. HORBAL said that women are coming into their own in some countries in employment simply because there is a shortage of skilled male workers. She said Jordan was a prime example of this.

"That's the major hope for women in all the Islamic countries," she said.

But not all such countries have labor shortages. And, in an event, Mrs. Mallica Vajrajhon of Thailand, a women's rights expert on the staff of the United Nations in New York, does not believe that economic development necessarily benefits women in poor countries.

"At present, these countries are just training women to be more efficient slaves in the factory instead of in the home," she said. "They don't even become foremen, much less factory managers."

"Industrialization often puts the woman in a worse position. She doesn't have to cope with just one man in her life who dominates her. She has to cope with a whole board of a industry, and the union leadership in her factory as well.