

- A considerable contrast between the few women of wealth and the rest of the women population.

THE PAKISTANI WOMEN

As one travels through the crowded bazaars and congested city streets of Pakistan, fifth most populous country in the world and the most influential Islamic country, he sees only men except for an occasional beggar woman or a spook-like figure shrouded in a loose garment from head to toe. Since there are nearly a hundred million people in this Muslim country, approximately half of them must be women. In the Islamic religion, however, the female is regarded as inferior and relegated to a subordinate role in life. She is secluded behind the walls of her father's home until an arranged marriage releases her only to live out her life behind the walls of her husband's home.

Not all women fare alike, however. Those of the wealthy and influential class, while small in number, move about freely and lead pampered lives. Not many

of the elite still practice purdah. Since servants are plentiful in this land of massive unemployment, the ladies of this class devote their time to entertaining themselves and their husbands and, of course, to child-bearing. They have been educated in private schools, sometimes speak several languages, are often excellent at bridge and other games, and are fond of traveling.

This privileged minority is a minute fraction of the female population. The vast majority live in villages where news of events in the outside world seldom reaches them and where even a bamboo hut has a bamboo wall around it. By any standards the masses of Pakistan are a depressed people. City dwellers and villagers alike suffer from grinding poverty and ignorance. They are orthodox Muslims.

If a woman of this group

appears on the streets, she wears a *burqua*, a two-piece garment consisting of a full skirt and a cloak with a hood. The hood has small peepholes for the eyes, but vision is partially obstructed so that often the wife is led by her husband.

A third group should also be mentioned. Beggar women appear on the streets clad in tattered saris, often clutching emaciated babies. Occasionally an insane woman, stark naked, may be seen but these are indeed the unfortunates.

Substantial improvement is being made in the lives of Pakistan's women, however. President Ayub Khan, in power since the army took over in 1958, has been responsible for establishing certain family laws which provide for and protect the rights of women. Although he came to power as the result of a military coup, he has established a program of "Basic Democracies" designed to carry self-government into the villages. Ironically, when the Assembly was reconvened in 1962, one of the first bills provided for the repeal of the law

which prohibited polygamy. The fact that women demonstrated in protest in front of the Assembly showed that they were ready to fight for their rights. The bill did not pass. Indeed a few seats in the Assembly are occupied by women.

The key which is opening new frontiers for women is education, whether the frontier be the other side of the home walls or the campus of a university on the other side of the globe. Pakistan is now in its second five-year plan for education.

Many women students are attending Pakistan's universities and the colleges and universities of the United States and other countries. Who has not seen their colorful saris fluttering on the campuses? There are women professors in the universities of Pakistan and women in the medical and legal professions. A few women have established fabric and dress shops. The mass of Pakistan's women, however, are in the villages. Their traditional way of life will become modern in direct proportion to the effort the

central government puts into education.

A concern for the underprivileged is developing among the previously mentioned elite as evidenced by the work of such organizations as the All-Pakistan Women's Association and The Women's Voluntary Association of East Pakistan. A delegate to a world conference of women's club in Japan returned to Dacca and made the following comment in her report to her local club, "I asked a Japanese woman why her country is so prosperous while ours is so poor. She replied, 'Here we all work. How can you expect to move ahead with

half your population, your women, asleep.'"

While education is the key to progress in Pakistan, overpopulation is the deterrent. Economic and educational gains have been offset by the increase in population; thus, Pakistan can increase the gross national product, but the standard of living changes little.

Nature's cruel methods of population control — flood, famine, and disease — must be replaced by education and birth control. Women have the most to gain in this struggle. The inertia of centuries may be overcome if there is a realization that a better way of life is possible. — *From Delta K. G. Bulletin.*