

ROLE OF WOMEN  
IN THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

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In any society it is difficult to generalize the role of women and still accurately portray it. This statement holds true in Yemen also, despite the country's under-developed character. Here there exist differences in the roles played by women from one region to another and, at times, even from one village to another. For example, in one fishing village in the Tihama the women move about freely, unveiled, working in close contact with the men. Yet, in another village only a short distance away women are confined to the compounds. All work outside the compound is done by boys or servants. If the women do leave, it is only to visit a female friend, and only when completely veiled. Despite these differences generalizations can and must be made, albeit carefully, in order to gain an understanding of the type of life Yemeni women lead.

The vast majority of Yemeni are involved with agriculture. Thus, one starting point for examining the role of women is in the rural agricultural sector. Women are responsible for the most boring and exhausting work and play a major role in the division of labor.

Though chores are basically a communal effort, several labor divisions can be discerned in the rural society. One is between men and women; another concerns the divisions among the women themselves. The first of these is easily explained. Both men and women work the fields in the mountain areas, helped by the children, few of whom attend schools. Males are responsible for the more specialized tasks--plowing, building, marketing, and supervising or managing the farms, while the women seed, weed, harvest, and

winnow the crops. When involved with these tasks the women are always accompanied by a man; they do not work alone in the fields. Men sometimes aid the women in these tasks.

Before examining divisions among women themselves it must be understood that a Yemeni family is not always a small nuclear one, but often an extended one including all relatives, even those not residing in Yemen. It is common practice to house and care for a relative who has no work, or is old, or has no other close relatives with whom to reside. Married children often reside with the husband's parents though they may also move to the wife's family if she owns more land or job opportunities are better. It is also common for migrated Yemeni to send money to the family, even after having been away for several years. Thus, when discussing divisions of labor in any sector this often involves divisions between a fairly large group of people.

When divisions among the rural women exist, they are made by age, at least in northern, mountainous Yemen (along the Sana - Hodeida road). The women of this area lead the hardest life of all Yemeni women. They have more physical, manual tasks from carrying water and wood, to harvesting and planting, to caring for the animals, than any other group of women in the country.

The oldest women have the easiest tasks. It is they who take the livestock to pasture, then sit and watch it during the day. The importance of this role is not to be underestimated. Livestock, though small in number, is a major part of the family's holdings, providing it with work animals, meat, eggs, milk, as well as added income from marketing. Of equal importance is the fact that women have an active ownership in much of the livestock,

especially goats, sheep and poultry. It is they who rear, tend, sell and trade the livestock. There are two interesting points to be made concerning livestock. The first is that the women do all the milking of the animals with the exception of the camels. They are milked by the men. The second point is that the women have total control of the poultry; the men play no part in this. In fact, it seems that poultry is the only aspect of their lives which women do have control of. Poultry will be discussed in greater detail further on in the paper.

Middle-aged women are responsible for childbearing and household tasks. Those with the youngest children cook. They are concerned very little with ongoing planting and harvesting. While household tasks are not numerous (Yemeni houses have very few furnishings) the women are burdened with childbearing and care. Married at 12 or 14, frequently to a first cousin, the women are constantly pregnant. They often have between six and ten children, only about half of which, due to the high mortality rate, survive.

The youngest women, newly married or unmarried, are responsible for the difficult physical tasks. The heaviest of these is collecting water. Villages lie in the mountains; water is in the Wadi (river valleys), and every day it must be carried back up the mountains on the heads of the women. Average time necessary for completion of this is five hours, but may take anywhere from four to eight hours, especially in the dry season. During the dry season livestock is often herded to the water and back with the women, thus eliminating the need to carry extra water. It does cause other problems though. With the animals in the Wadis, either to get water themselves or to help carry it back, there are few or no work animals to help with the work in the fields. This cuts down on production and aggravates the already serious labor problem in Yemen.

Wood, too, must be collected, again by the young and some of the middle-aged women, while at least one woman remains at home to take care of tasks there. Where wood is not available, old roots and dung are used for fuel. Occasionally, young boys also help collect wood.

These tasks are not completely inflexible; allowances are made. For instance, if a woman is not feeling well she will be helped out by the others. An ill young woman would be allowed to handle tasks of the middle-aged, while someone else replaced her until she was back to normal, and so on. Basically, women handle those chores for which they are physically capable.

These chores are begun at the age of six or seven, by both boys and girls. The boys are given fewer chores, most of which concern the livestock and assisting their fathers, collecting firewood and some care of the children. After a short period of time these tasks, excluding those of assisting their fathers, are given over to the girls in order that the boys may do other things such as go to schools, often a couple of hours away. Rarely may a girl go to school. Instead, girls are kept at home, caring for the younger children and helping with household tasks. When they approach marrying age they are very restricted in movement, especially outside the home. Boys, on the other hand, are given much spare time and freedom to do as they wish.

Rural life is very isolated for the women. It is seldom that they get away, while the men, quite regularly, travel back and forth to the city marketing, etc., and thereby gaining new information. Occasionally a more wealthy woman will be able to travel also, however, only with the permission of her husband. No woman may travel without the approval of her

husband or that of another male providing for her. Consequently, the women are isolated and have as their main source of information that which their husbands relate, radio programs, and the daily tea parties, to be discussed shortly.

City life is in no way as difficult as rural. Most houses are equipped with electricity and water is readily available. Divisions of labor are not found by age, instead all the women are involved in the same chores, those of childbearing and raising, and household tasks.

The women in the poorer families, i.e. the majority of the people, generally get up at sunrise and make the fire in the kitchen before going to fetch water. After getting the water they wash the babies by splashing cold water on them, then begin to prepare lunch. The preparation of this takes about one and a half hours. It consists of bread, rice, and helbah (whipped, ground fenugreek and seasonings, including garlic and lemon). The kitchen in which this is cooked is so smoke-filled due to poor ventilation that anyone not accustomed to it cannot remain inside for more than a couple of minutes. Yet the women, having worked in it since childhood, spend several hours a day there. In the wealthier homes running water is available, though often only during certain hours making it necessary to collect it in a large barrel for use during the day. Kitchens are usually well ventilated and gas stoves available.

Though much of the woman's time is spent in cooking food for the family, baking bread and making butter, other tasks requiring attendance are washing and taking care of the house or compound. In the cities washing is done outdoors by hand in large basins, and frequently on stones in a river in the rural areas. Depending on the home, clothes are dried either by hanging them

from sticks and lines or laying them upon stones on the ground in the sun.

Homes are fairly easy to take care of. Many are constructed of mud with mud floors; some are made of stone with tile floors. Furniture consists basically of rugs and cushions. Cleaning simply means sweeping the floor and mopping it when made of tile. Because these tasks are readily completed by about 3 p.m., much time is left for socializing, a popular event in Yemeni life. So popular is it that the average work day is only four to five hours long in order to allow for the social gatherings.

Afternoons after lunch are spent at tea parties in one home or another, discussing local events, drinking tea, chewing qat and smoking the water pipe. Both sexes enjoy socializing, but it is interesting to note that they do not socialize together. By custom, men gather in one area, the women in another. This can mean different rooms or different buildings. Neither sex may interrupt the other gathering.

Discussions in the women's groups usually are concerned with their families and those of their friends, gossip, and, when the women work, their work. Frequently part of the afternoon is spent dancing to Yemeni music. The majority of the women are excellent belly dancers. However, they only dance for their female friends. Great care is taken that the men do not see them, often to the degree that the door to the room is locked so that no man may enter unexpectedly.

During the parties the women are eager to learn new things. If a foreigner is present and the language barrier is not too great many questions will be asked. It is one of the few times the women are able to gain new information.

Occasionally a mixed group can be found; the men will include their wives, but generally not, due to fear of reprisal by the other males. This is true even of men who have lived in foreign countries and have socialized with their wives and other females in that country. Only with relatives, when foreigners are present, when the group is very small, and/or when the woman has traveled abroad, is it possible to find a mixed group. If a larger group is present or there are no foreigners the customs of the country are respected. This is true for all parts of the country. Propagation of this custom lies not only with the men; women, too, are afraid to socialize in mixed company. Both sexes completely ignore the opposite sex during the socializing hours, especially when two parties are meeting in the same house.

#### Male-Female Relationships

Male/female relationships in general are interesting. Friendships do not exist as in a Western culture, in large part a result of cultural inhibitions. For example, up until the time chores are assigned the sexes are fairly equal, but after ages six or seven divisions appear. Girls are given more tasks and less free time than the boys, as mentioned earlier, and by the time they are 12, i.e. puberty, veils are worn and associations between males and females are virtually nonexistent. In small villages, it is possible that youth will continue to speak to one another on the streets after sexual separation, but in larger cities any male/female relationships are unlikely before marriage. Usually conversations with the opposite sex are only with relatives. The effects of this are reflected in marriages.

Marriages are results of contracts between families. If a man decides he wants to marry a particular woman he approaches the father to see if he is agreeable. If he is, a contract is drawn up. These contracts are determined by such factors as family origin, financial position, occupational status of the prospective husband and the family's reputation for piety and rectitude.

Among agreements made under contract is that of establishing a bride-price. This is paid by the prospective bridegroom or his family. Part of this goes to the bride's family to be used for the marriage ceremony; the other part is given to the wife in the form of jewelry and a new dress, which the groom buys himself at the market. The bride-price varies from a few hundred rials to 10,000 rials. The average price in Sana is 5,000 to 6,000 rials.

In at least one instance, the total bride-price is not paid. It is as follows: If the son from family A marries the daughter from family B and the son from family B marries the daughter from family A, the bride-price may be waived if the families are good friends and agree. However, after the marriage has been consummated an amount agreed upon prior to consummation must be paid to the father of each bride by the husband. Thus, the bride-price itself encompasses not only the price of the wedding ceremony and clothes, but also rights to the woman.

According to Islamic law no marriage can be forced; the consent of both man and woman must be had. However, given the social customs of sexual segregation from the time of puberty, it is difficult for either one to form an opinion of the other, let alone become acquainted. A rule exists

stipulating that the bride and bridegroom not meet before the wedding. In small villages this is unlikely. There everyone knows everyone else, conversations with the opposite sex are not completely terminated at puberty, as already shown, and personal choice may enter into the picture.

Most Yemeni are not in love with their partner at the time of marriage; it is expected that the couple will fall in love within a few weeks or get divorced. Thus, marriage relationships are frequently purely sexual. It is seldom that a sense of fondness between couples is found. If found, it is usually in older couples or ones who have emigrated to countries where mixed socializing is more common. Another interesting point is that the woman retains her maiden name after marriage in Arab countries.

Legal rights are involved in marriage. These include the bride-price, already discussed, support, obedience and inheritance. According to law the husband must support his wife by providing food, clothing and shelter in a manner appropriate to his economic and social status. If he cannot provide for her, or if he refuses, these are grounds for divorce. In return for this, the husband has the right to demand obedience. The wife is supposed to move into his domicile, live with him, accept his authority and obey his decisions.

Another example concerns property. Usually both husband and wife own some land. This ownership carries over into the marriage. By law, neither can make a claim on the property of the other; each has the freedom to manage his or her own land. This is particularly interesting in view of the role of women. She is allowed to manage her property (girls inherit from their families one-half the amount boys do) as she wishes, with the exception that she may not give away more than one-third of it. If the wife

should die first, the husband has the right to her property provided her father is already deceased. If the latter outlives her, her land stays in the hands of her family. If the husband dies first, one-half of the land is divided among the male offspring. The wife then received three-fourths of what remains. The last bit of land is given to the daughters. In cases where there is no son, the wife is given three-fourths of the property, brothers and fathers of the deceased inherit the remainder.

Monogamy is not the only male/female relationship permissible; polygamy is also allowed by law. In Yemen, a man may have up to four wives though this is not commonly practiced due to financial constraints. It is possible to find a few families with two wives to a husband. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to discover anything concerning the relationship between the wives. I could only find that they must be provided with separate living compartments and treated equally in every way.

A question which can be raised here is how much influence does the wife have with the husband. It appears that the men and women cooperate in the course of daily life decisions, though the actual amount of influence a wife has on her husband undoubtedly varies with individuals. Technically, no woman may make a major decision herself, and, if her husband is out of the country she may have to wait a long time for someone to make it. For instance, if a child becomes ill, she cannot decide to take it to a clinic or hospital; that must be decided by a male, be it her husband or some other male relative. This also holds true for decisions concerning schools, investments in homes or agriculture, etc. However, in Taiz and probably in some other areas also, this is often not what happens. These women can be found

taking ill children to the hospital, going to the schools to question and/or complain; they take an active part in decision making.

Influence of older members of the family is quite evident and important. Of particular interest is that of mothers and mothers-in-law. They have much influence in the family. No son can marry without the approval of his mother. After he is married and living at home with his wife, the mother still has the right to govern his decisions, such as work and treatment of the wife. She actually has much greater influence on his actions than does the wife. In addition to governing her son, the mother also has the right to treat the daughter-in-law as she wishes. She can assign chores, delegate tasks and do anything else she wishes. In many cases the result of this influence can be a difficult relationship within the extended family.

Divorce practices are a fascinating aspect of Yemeni lives. A large number of women are divorced two or three years after marriage, a reflection of the fact that many have been married to a man much older than they, or one who did not treat them as well as their families had originally expected, or that so few Yemeni are in love at the time of marriage. The process of divorce is very simple for a man; it is quite complex for a woman. In fact, it is impossible for a woman to divorce her husband herself if permission is not written into the marriage contract. Some areas of Yemen do not permit it at all.

At the time of the marriage contract a clause is written concerning divorce. In the Taiz area this clause stipulates a sum of money which the husband will pay the wife's family if he divorces her. In addition he must by law provide child support up until the time that he takes the children.

This occurs when the children reach the age of 7, no matter what the sex of the child. He gains rights to them at an earlier age if the mother remarries. In Sana the man does not pay the wife's family any extra sum. He is responsible for child support, however, and it seems that he may keep the children himself from the time they are completely weaned, about age two.

Laws concerning divorce are those of the Islamic religion. The man need not go before a judge; he need only say "I divorce you" before two witnesses and the act is done. The number of times he repeats this is very important. If he makes the statement only once, the divorce is completed. However, he may ask for the return of his wife if he changes his mind. In essence, the statement said once is a warning for the wife to obey his commands. If the man is very orthodox in his religion it seems he may divorce his wife through such a statement even without witnesses being present.

A man may also state "I divorce you" two times. This means he is more serious about the divorce, and his wife must return to her family or nearest male relative as with the single statement. Also, as with only one statement, he may request that his wife return to him. This takes place, as above, through a bargaining process with the wife's father. It often becomes quite complex with all the male relatives becoming involved in some aspect of the process, be it deciding during a qat party what the compromise should be, or carrying messages between the families. The request for her return must be made within two months of the original statement, otherwise she cannot be claimed as his wife; she is divorced from him.

If the statement is made three times, the divorce is final. No bargaining is permissible.

Thus, for the man divorce is a simple process which he may undertake whenever he wishes to the degree of finality he wishes. Comparing the process by which the woman "divorces" her husband, one sees quite clearly the lack of rights under which the woman lives.

As stated before, a clause is written into the marriage contract concerning divorce. Unless included in this is an agreement that the wife may divorce her husband, she has no recourse whatsoever if the marriage does not work out. If such a clause is included, she may divorce her husband. However, no woman may decide to divorce her husband without male permission, the most important of which is the permission of her husband.

If a woman is unhappy with her husband she may at any time run away from him. She would return to her father or nearest male relative at such a time. While there she can complain to her father or male relative about the marriage at which time he and the other male relatives decide, while chewing qat, whether the husband is guilty. Grounds of guilt would include evidence of mistreatment by the husband, failure to support the wife or children, and/or a permanent defect in the husband, such as insanity or certain long-standing illness. If he is found guilty, a bargaining process takes place between the male relatives and the husband. It may be decided that the husband must pay a sum of money to the family before the wife will be returned, or, if the case is serious enough, they may ask the husband to divorce her. If he does not agree, the woman remains married to him whether or not she is living with him or her relatives, and cannot remarry until after his death. He, on the other hand, may take another wife, up to the

number of four, at any time.

Appeal for a divorce can also be made to a gadi (a religious judge). However, this must be made by the father or another male relative who has already decided on the guilt of the husband. Only in very rare instances may the wife appeal to the gadi. Still, even if the decision of the gadi is in favor of the woman, the husband must agree to the divorce before it can be finalized.

Yet despite all these complexities many Yemeni women are divorced. It would be interesting to determine what percentage were initiated by the husband and what percentage are initiated by the woman's family.

After a divorce the woman usually returns to her family or closest male relative who will support her. She usually remarries. There are few single people of marriageable age in Yemen. The bride-price for a previously married woman is one-half that of the first marriage.

As already stated, a major role of women concerns childbearing and raising. Yemen has several social practices concerned with this.

During pregnancy no changes are made in the work pattern for the woman, except during the last few weeks when she is relieved of the heaviest tasks. For delivery of the child the woman generally returns home to her mother where in the presence of her mother, another female relative, and a midwife she gives birth. No man may be present. Occasionally a woman will deliver alone if she can find no midwife whom she trusts.

In some villages, after the child is born the mother and child remain in bed, or at least inside the compound, for 40 days. In other villages the period is only 5 days. This practice is strictly observed, except when there is no one to help the mother with chores. During this time period,

in some villages and if the food is available, the mother is given a special diet of chicken, butter fat, honey, fresh vegetables and fruit, especially dates, to "strengthen" the blood, while other villages believe she should eat only wheat products. It is the only time special attention is paid to her diet. But it is not practiced everywhere. Some villages allow no change in the diet. Yemeni recognize little relationship between the nutrition of the mother and health of the fetus. There is also little recognized relationship between the diet of the mother and lactation. Thus, following the rest period she returns to the normal Yemeni diet, consisting basically of sorghum and low nutrition foods.

There does exist a relationship between the mother's milk and the baby. Breast milk is considered a part of the woman's body, capable of transmitting both temporary and permanent conditions and characteristics to the suckling. According to Yemeni beliefs lactating women must avoid anger or fear as it may be transmitted to the baby. Occasionally Yemeni fathers have objected to wives breast feeding the babies, believing a woman's milk to be harmful to the child.

Very often wet nurses are used. One reason for this would be if the mother became pregnant again. Milk from a pregnant woman is considered harmful to the child. The wet nurse must avoid anger and fear just as the real mother must.

Interestingly, the wet nurse also acquires the same legal rights to the child. Because the milk is considered part of the woman's body, the child becomes part of her body through nursing and, therefore, legally hers. It becomes a legal child to the wet nurse's husband also, due to his role in her pregnancy, which, in turn, provided the milk. Thus, a child can

legally have several sets of parents.

Yemeni women often breast feed a child for two years. When weaning finally does take place it does so in one of several ways. The child may be sent from home, thus preventing nursing, or the woman may apply the bitter juice of a cactus to her nipples in order to repulse the baby.

Artificial feeding, i.e. baby bottles, has been introduced in health training centers by organizations such as the UN. However, their use has not been very successful for several reasons. One is that the women attend classroom training sessions with such irregularity that, although they have learned the convenience of baby bottles, they have not learned or understood the necessity of sterilizing the bottles between uses for good health. Another problem is old milk in the bottles. The women frequently make enough milk to last the day, leaving it unrefrigerated with the child while they are off working. It spoils, the child becomes ill, but the mother does not understand why. Over-diluted milk powder, resulting in malnutrition of the child, is still a third problem.

The Swedish clinic in Taiz, dissatisfied with these problems, has introduced the idea of using cups and spoons to feed the babies. This has been more successful than the baby bottles. The women rinse them more often and any milk left in the cups dries out since the top is open, lessening the problems. Still in the area of health care and nutrition, the women need much training.

Methods used in child raising are interesting. During childhood the children, at least in Sana, roam the streets freely. Discipline is a communal effort rather than just in the family. If a child is in the wrong

it is expected that he/she will be reprimanded by the person who caught the act. Only at puberty does the family take over the authority of discipline. At this point, as in all areas of the country, the sexes are segregated, trained in the social customs, as discussed earlier, and rejoined only in marriage.

### Marketing

In addition to agricultural work, household tasks and raising children, women play a role in marketing which varies depending on the area in which they live and their economic status.

In the northern rural areas women carry the goods from the villages to the roads, while the men go from there to the cities, or the middlemen, to do the buying and selling. As mentioned earlier, the women are pretty much restricted to the villages. They must depend upon the husband to sell the family's produce as well as buy any necessary food, household goods, clothes, etc., for them.

Women in Sana have an advantage over the rural women. Due to their proximity to the markets, they can and do buy personal goods, but it is the men who do all the selling. Men are also the ones who buy the food. Only in cases of poverty or when no men are around, do the women buy the food. If they have anything to sell, such as bread, a child is sent to sell it; the women do not.

In Tihama the situation is quite different. Migrants populate this area, working as harvesters during harvesting season and begging in the cities during the off seasons. Here women are often found buying or begging

goods. In most of the Tihama and the southern mountain regions women actually take part in the selling process. The south, much more lenient towards women than other areas, is the only section where women commonly sell products, though basically those products are bread and woven goods. Other home industries, such as pottery, remain in the domain of the men.

The comparative freeness of the southern women as seen in marketing is also reflected in their style of dress. Very often the women wear mid-riffs and other more relaxed clothes than their veiled sisters to the north. Part of the reason for the differences is temperature. It is much hotter in the Tihama and southern areas. Part of the reason is also economic. Many times these women belong to the poorest segment of the society and are often held in much lower esteem by the other women sitting at home with children, purdahs and household tasks. Thus, the "freeness" of these women may only be superficial.

An interesting group of women in regards to marketing is the mountain women. This group is a unique one. Paid for very highly as brides, their husbands expect them to do virtually all the work for them. They are basically slaves to their husbands. These women, in colorful and highly trimmed dresses, very different from all other costumes worn by women, are found buying and selling everything.

#### Education

At the present time it is possible for Yemeni women to gain some formal education, particularly in the cities. Schools are set up for them, as is at least one woman's association, which also provides educational opportunities. There is virtually no co-education until the university level.

Girls are taught in girls' schools by mostly female teachers; boys in boys' schools by men.

The number of girls in primary schools has greatly increased over the past few years. In 1974, there were 20,770 girls in primary schools, i.e. the first six years, compared with 8,263 four years earlier, and 2,864 ten years earlier. This number, however, steadily decreases with further schooling. For instance, at teacher training institutes there were only 1,123 girls in 1974. The number is still smaller at the university though both have increased tremendously in the past few years.

Most of the girls attending schools come from the more educated families, many of whom have come to the country from Aden and are working in embassies, at the UN, etc. Many of these girls, upon finishing school, become involved in teaching, basically because it is about the only avenue open to women. The women are generally about 18 years old when they finish teacher training school, old maids by Yemeni standards. They are obligated to teach as a contribution to the government for their education. However, initially the question of wages and advancement does not arise. It is assumed that they will marry within a short period of time and terminate their work, and the great majority do.

Some women are able to obtain scholarships to the American University at Beirut. With the specialist English language program available in Sana, they are qualified to take courses in English while there. Others attend the University at Sana. At both schools they are well accepted by both fellow students and professors. However, the families have a more difficult time. They are usually strongly criticized by the townspeople, most of whom feel a woman's place is in the home, and when the women return, they generally

do lead a life in the home. Very seldom does an educated woman's life differ from that of an illiterate one. If it does differ it is probably due more to economic status than education, since only the wealthier families send their daughters to school in the first place.

One school in Taiz, the Mohamed Ali Othman School, has introduced a revolutionary concept; it provides co-educational classes taught by both male and female teachers and does not allow the girls attending to wear veils. Instead they must wear a uniform consisting of white trousers, a white blouse and gray overalls. As it is the best school in the area, parents wishing their daughters to have a good education must choose between the veil and studies. Even the most conservative have been choosing the studies, realizing that their daughters will never wear veils in their lifetime and that they will be growing up with boys.

The school provides programs for women also. A two month long health training program is offered at regular intervals, taught by the teachers and volunteers, some of whom are nurses. Films are provided to aid the courses and a woman's center is being planned for the near future.

Many women in Taiz are well traveled. They have come from Aden or have lived in other countries. They desire more than qat and parties; they want to participate wherever possible. Some speak English and/or have been educated. They want to use their education, and they are. These women are baking and bringing cakes to parties at the school in order to participate. It is usually the women who come to complain or question events at school concerning their children, not the men. They are not hesitant or passive in doing any of this; they are strong-minded women. As a result, their role is changing; they are beginning to break

away from the constraints of the society and become a more visible group.

Though Taiz is the center of change, women in Sana are also reaching out. They, too, are beginning to develop their skills. For example, in Sana there exists a women's association which offers educational opportunities, mostly in traditional women's areas such as tailoring, housekeeping, needle work and embroidery. Interestingly though the most populated courses are those in literacy education.

The organization was begun three years ago by a small group of educated women. Today it has six teachers, 150 members and four utilized rooms. If more rooms were available, it would expand. At the present time the organization is requesting money from AID in order to buy more equipment such as sewing machines, a stove, seeds and gardening materials, and books to help the women of Sana learn new skills. These are badly needed skills which would help the women improve home conditions and improve their position in society.

Women's roles are changing, but not only in the ways mentioned above. The number of working women in Yemen is also increasing, in spite of all the restrictions placed on them. In addition to teaching, some women are entering the field of nursing. Their role will be an important one. As social mores and beliefs now stand a male doctor has great difficulty examining women patients. He simply is not allowed to undertake many necessary examinations. A female nurse has a much easier time; she is more accepted by the women and is able to examine them as well as talk with them as no man can.

A three year training course in nursing taught by the Health Manpower Institute was begun in 1972, available to all who had finished the intermediate level of schooling (10th grade). It is available in Sana, Taiz and Hodaida; however, only about 15 people have completed it. Very few qualified students are available for the program. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that upon completion of the program, the graduates are required to work for the government at rates far lower than they could receive in positions with much less training. Working for the government is not enforceable, however, and many do not.

Women can also be found employed at the Institute for Public Administration in Sana as secretaries and clerks. Six week training courses in secretarial skills are available and becoming quite popular, partially because women are able to earn good salaries upon completion. These salaries are three times as high as those paid by the government to graduates of the three year nursing program.

Another employer in Sana is the Chinese textile factory, where the employees are almost exclusively women. Textile work is better accepted by the males due to the fact that it is considered traditional women's work. This is over and beyond the fact that the Chinese refused to open the factory unless 40% of the employees were women. The women, even while working, wear their veils. Healthwise this may actually be beneficial as the veil prevents textile dust from entering the lungs.

An interesting point to be made here is that most women who are employed are either divorced or widowed. A few are employed before marriage, but only for a short time until they marry. After marriage most stop working

to care for husbands and family. If and when something happens to the marriage an increasing number turn to jobs.

The role of Yemeni women is changing, a result of one major occurrence -- migration. There are two types of migration concerned: one is inter-country, particularly from Yemen to Saudi Arabia; the other is intra-country, from the rural areas to the cities. The first of these has had the most profound effect on women.

Due to the incentive of higher wages, many men are leaving Yemen for periods of up to three years in order to work in the Saudi Arabian labor force. Frequently all the males between the ages of 15 and 40 will migrate from the village, leaving the women under the auspices of the young and old men. Seldom are the families taken along with them. As stated before, when the women do travel it is only by permission of their husbands. When the entire family migrates they tend to remain for a longer period of time, usually three to four years.

Change occurs in the villages from which the men have departed. Women carry still greater workloads as a result. In the past women used to only sow seeds in the fields; now they participate in nearly all tasks, including breaking up the dirt clods on drags behind the bullock. They still do not run the plows in most cases, however. The men are responsible for the more skilled labor.

Increasingly women are allowed to grow vegetables, thereby providing their families with new types of food. The importance of this is not to be under-estimated. Not only does it supplement the daily diet, but it also aids relationships between wives and returning husbands. The men, while abroad, have learned new eating habits and new foods, even though migration

usually is to an area similar to the homeland region. When they return, the women, using the vegetables, are able to satisfy some of their new tastes. Vegetables also serve as added income for the family when sold. Over and above this is the fact that women are reaching into new areas, are learning new techniques and habits, and are, thereby, changing their role and increasing their responsibilities within the family.

#### AID

As a result of migration, of profit incentives, and increased responsibilities, Yemeni women want to learn new methods and techniques. Presently, they do not know where to turn for aid. They need help from outside sources.

AID is particularly important in connection with the adverse effects of immigration and emigration. As a result of the increased workload on women, there is a decrease in the quality of agricultural work and in care for the home and family. Infant care and feeding suffer the most, though the number of crops which can be planted and harvested is also diminished. Problems with infant care were pointed out in the discussion concerning milk bottles. Women are resorting to artificial feedings which in turn lead to health problems.

Change is also taking place in education and work. The fact that more women are attending schools, are learning new skills, and that some are even working before marriage is all new in Yemen. Of course, in order to do any of this, permission of the family, i.e. the father, must be obtained first, but women are playing larger roles than before.

Social inhibitions are holding women back from further development. They need to be informed, probably best by outside forces, as to what they

can participate in, what is available to them, such as schools and the women's association, and how they can become involved in such activities. Yemeni women need information concerning health and sanitation, crops, nutrition, and home economics. This list is by no means definitive.

One area in which AID can have an impact is poultry production. As stated earlier, poultry is the one area in which the women have total control. But poultry production in Yemen is plagued with problems. Little care is taken in choosing feed for the chickens; they are often simply thrown scraps from the household. Diseases affecting poultry prevail in the countryside which, combined with poor feed and little or no training in care for these animals, results in very small, often unhealthy, final products. Poultry is frequently no larger than a pigeon and expensive to buy. In Sana it often costs approximately \$2.00 per chicken.

Yemeni women desire training in order to improve poultry production. Such training can be provided by AID. A new poultry project has received funding. One way in which this could be implemented is by using a Western woman as a technician to train the Yemeni women. Given the social mores of the country a Western woman would have a much easier time encouraging new methods.

Because she is a foreigner she would not be restricted by mores as a Yemeni woman would be. She would have much more freedom of movement and expression. Also, because she is foreign she would be accepted to a greater degree by the men. This is of major importance.

As things now stand in Yemen a native woman can refuse no demand from a male. Thus, if a man decides she must raise the chickens one way and not

another, she has no recourse. A Western woman would have much more. Naturally, any new ideas she tries to implement will have to be cleared with the male head of the family since women can make no decisions, but a Western woman would be able to discuss the concept with the men; a Yemeni would not.

In addition, a woman would be advantageous over a male trainer for informal training sessions. Formal classroom teaching could be provided by either male or female, though a female would probably be better since women are accustomed to female teachers in their schools. However, informally a woman would be able to provide a tremendous amount of aid.

As mentioned earlier, the village women have as their main source of information the daily tea parties. A woman would be able to attend these and, in the course of conversation, teach new methods and ideas. This could help alleviate problems in training caused by irregular attendance at schools. Some of these were discussed concerning the use of baby bottles. Such problems will probably also arise in formal teaching concerning poultry production. They need not hinder development if informal teaching is also provided.

Another area in which AID can be useful, though the extent of usefulness is probably limited, is in health care training. A major focal point of AID in Yemen is water development. Wells are being dug, pipes laid and the Yemeni are being provided with potable water. However, the conditions under which water is obtained are not always the most sanitary. Often the water runs freely from a pipe; no faucet is provided. Livestock wander in the area, rubbing the mouth of the pipe, drinking from it, leaving excrement in the area. No water can remain potable under such conditions.

Since it is the women who raise the livestock and fetch the water, they must be taught sanitary measures. AID, while setting up pipelines and wells, could possibly supplement the work by teaching sanitary measures for care and use of the water.

### Conclusion

The role of women in Yemen, though fairly simple, is not inconsequential; women are of major importance. Looked down upon by their husbands as secondary citizens, it is the women who do most of the manual labor in Yemen, be it in the rural sectors of the country or in the cities. The women are the beasts of burden in the fields, the ones responsible for providing heirs for the property, for providing food, water and homes for the men and families, while the men wallow away the time chewing qat. In many ways, it is the women who make Yemen produce, yet they have been overlooked. Programs of development have been directed toward the men, the half of the society which performs only one-fourth of the work. In spite of this the women have retained their self-respect and are now, in small ways, beginning to express it. They need help. They need to be considered total citizens with programs directed toward their needs. AID, as an agency of economic development, must consider these when developing new projects in Yemen.