

AFGHAN WOMEN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN AND IRAN

Refugee Transformation

Nelofer Pazira

A thesis in the

Special Individualized Program (SIP)

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts (Sociology & Anthropology and Religion)

at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2003

© Nelofer Pazira

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitons et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

ISBN: 0-612-83964-8

Our file *Notre référence*

ISBN: 0-612-83964-8

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

Canada

ABSTRACT

AFGHAN WOMEN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN AND IRAN: Refugee Transformation

Nelofer Pazira

This is an exploratory case study, which documents social change in the pattern of everyday life of Afghan women refugees in Iran and Pakistan. The central question of the thesis asks: Do significant changes affecting self-perception take place in a refugee woman's life as result of migration? And, supposing that such changes do occur how might the UN, non-governmental organizations, and the international aid agencies take them into account when designing their policies?

I have adopted a comparative approach in reviewing the literature of trends and patterns of various refugee experiences, including my own. I undertook field research (February – June 2000) that comprises a comparative study of refugee women's life in Iran and Pakistan and in the two locations of city and camp.

It became evident that migration does indeed produce significant socio-cultural changes in a refugee woman's life, and that these affect her view of herself. Specifically, living in exile enabled a majority of women refugees to connect the economic well-being of the family with female education and the ability to find employment. (This phenomenon, though it may seem obvious in the west, is a revolutionary notion for women from rural sector backgrounds long defined by a tribal, semi-feudal structure). Such a development in turn challenges the traditional view of gender relations, in which the man is inevitably seen as head of the family, provider and protector.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been completed without the help and support of my main supervisor Dr. Lynda Clarke, whose endless coordinating efforts and intellectual guidance enabled me to see this through.

Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan, who have been the source of inspiration for this research, opened their homes and hearts to me. I am grateful to their generosity and kindness.

Faouzia Hariri, coordinator of the Afghan NGO in Tehran, and the UNHCR staff in Iran – especially Shabnam Beshurat – assisted with my research. UNHCR and UNDP Pakistan provided access to the refugee camps. ACBAR Resource and Information Centre in Pakistan helped with data and information. My friends in Iran and Pakistan -- in particular, Mrs. Sorour Bani-Hashemi, Nabila Ibrahemi, Siddiq Barmak and H. Abdolrahman offered help throughout my visits to both countries.

Dr. Sheila McDnough, Dr. Marie-Nathalie LeBlanc, Dr. Sajida Alvi gave much of their time for a thorough and serious examination of the thesis.

I am indebted to Robert Fisk for his help and advice; to Dr. Mahmud Ayoub for his assistance; to Zia Abdali for sharing information about Afghan history; to Mariam Kakkar for her suggestions in preparation for my research; to my friends in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto – Afra Jalabi, Andaleeb Qayyum, Emran Qureshi, Kim Elliott, Nader Hashemi and Rafi Khan– for their encouragement.

I am grateful to my brother Hassibullah Pazira for reminding me of the reasons for hard work, to my best friend Mejgan Pazira – who also happens to be my sister – for being a pillar of support, and to my parents whose patience and prayers have offered much comfort and inspiration throughout my life.

My heartfelt thanks to all of them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	Chapter One: Introduction				
	1.1	General Introduction			
	1.2	Statement of the Problem			
	1.3	Literature Review			
		1.3.1.	Introduction		
		1.3.2.	Anthropological Literature and Migration		
	1.4	Highlighting Key Concepts			
	1.5	Afghan Refugees: Historical Background			
	1.6	Methodology			
		1.6.1	Research: Phase I		
		1.6.2	Research: Phase II		
			1.6.2.1	Pakistan	
				1.6.2.1.1	City
				1.6.2.1.2	Camp
			1.6.2.2	Iran	
				1.6.2.2.1	City
				1.6.2.2.2	Camp
		1.6.3	People		
		1.6.4	Location		
		1.6.5	Problems encountered during the research		
II	Chapter Two: Afghanistan: An Overview				
	2.1	Introduction			
	2.2	Ethnic/linguistic Divisions			
	2.3	Islam Afghan Style			
III	Chapter Three: Women's Status in Afghanistan				
	3.1	Introduction			
	3.2	Historical Background			
		3.2.1	Women's Socioeconomic and Political Roles		
	3.3	Women and the Culture of Reform			
		3.3.1	Education		
	3.4	Women and Formal Legal Reforms			
		3.4.1	Marriage		
	3.5	Changing Environment			
		3.5.1	Women and Work		
		3.5.2	Health		

- IV Chapter Four: Change and Resistance to Change
 - 4.1 Refugee camp in Iran
 - 4.1.1 Introduction
 - 4.2 Khotoon's Wedding
 - 4.3 Afghan Refugees and the Islamic Republic's Policies
 - 4.3.1 Education
 - 4.3.2 Health
 - 4.4 Analysis
 - 4.5 Conclusion

- V Chapter Five: Accepting Change
 - 5.1 Refugees in the City – Iran
 - 5.1.1 Introduction
 - 5.2 Masoudeya Suburb
 - 5.2.1 Women and Work
 - 5.2.2 At the Training Course: *Trick or Treat*
 - 5.2.3 Health
 - 5.2.4 Marriage
 - 5.2.5 Education
 - 5.2.5.1 Refugees, Education and the Islamic Republic's Policy
 - 5.3 Analysis
 - 5.4 Conclusion

- VI Chapter Six: Varied Responses
 - 6.1 Refugees in the City – Pakistan
 - 6.1.1 Introduction
 - 6.2 *Atwar bazar* (Sunday market)
 - 6.3 Afghan Refugees in Pakistan
 - 6.3.1 Life in Exile
 - 6.4 Afghan Refugees and Education
 - 6.5 A Step Back, A Move Forward
 - 6.5.1 Marriage
 - 6.5.2 Health
 - 6.6 Analysis
 - 6.7 Conclusion

VII Chapter Seven: From Reaction to Action

- 7.1 Refugees in the Camp – Pakistan
 - 7.1.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Ra'meena's Dream
- 7.3 The Camp School
 - 7.3.1 Health
- 7.4 Refugee Camps in Pakistan
 - 7.4.1 Refugees and their host
- 7.5 Women, Marriage and Work
- 7.6 Analysis
- 7.7 Conclusion

VIII Chapter Eight: Remarks and Conclusion

- 8.1 Observing Change
- 8.2 Analysing Change
- 8.3 Looking Ahead

VX REFERENCES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Introduction

It is an odd thing to become a refugee -- odd not in the sense of deranged, frantic or insane, but in terms of being cast off, misplaced, or out of place. The refugee's very individuality and identity are 'misplaced' as she is reduced to a common category, defined by a generic word, refugee. Simply by crossing a line called a 'border,' the refugee finds her reality inverted. She is now the unknown, and undesired. The lines, moreover, between the imagined and the real past are blurred. The personal stock that is each person's tangible knowledge of a national history has been effaced. In the mind of the refugee, her native land is reduced to a mere image, accessible only in the words "back home."

I could have begun this introduction with a more statistically-centred, scientific description of the refugee condition, or more precisely, the situation of Afghan refugees in the two host countries of Iran and Pakistan. I might have begun with an academic justification of the need for such a study. It was, however, the experience of becoming a refugee that inspired this study; my work is first and foremost a distillation of that experience. Thus I embarked on a journey, returning to Pakistan where I lived as an Afghan refugee for a year and two months (1989-1990).

It was on the afternoon of a hot day in July 1989 that we first arrived in Islamabad. Refugees from the capital city of Kabul, we thought settling in Islamabad would meet our 'urban', 'modern' expectations. Islamabad certainly was a modern city, but the economic limitations of our refugee life dictated everything, including the place

of our residence. With the help of a relative, we found an apartment in a newly developed suburb. The compound, still under construction, was a two-storey building, which housed a set of shops on the ground floor, and seven one-bedroom flats on the upper level. At first the idea of sharing two small rooms and a bathroom between the five of us (my parents, a brother and sister and I) seemed appalling, but we had no choice. "You'll get used to it," said a family friend who had been living as a refugee in Islamabad for some time. We were among the first tenants of the compound. Within a month, six other Afghan families moved in.

Other Afghan refugee families in the building, like my family, had fled for survival. When there was a power cut -- common in the summer -- we left our sweltering, tiny rooms in search of a mild breeze and a little shade in the stairways leading to the rooftop. There, we met and talked. But too often, we shared more than just the experience of becoming refugees. Each family had managed to bring something of the old life with them -- few objects, but lots of memories. Lack of various things, some more noticeable than others, made itself felt in each household. Basic household supplies -- cooking pots, plates, bowls, utensils and iron -- were the most needed. These scarce objects travelled back and forth between our rooms several times a day. In a short while, lending and borrowing became a common practice in the compound, just as gathering on the rooftop -- during power cuts and in the evenings -- also became a tradition, mostly among women. Through our shared experiences and common concerns, a sense of community began to develop. But it was not free of gossip, self-consciousness or competition.

Across from the compound was a set of newly-built large white and black marble homes. Unlike our few insignificant clothes and even fewer household objects, the owners of these houses arrived with truck loads of furniture and supplies. They were Pakistanis. Watching them unload their belongings from the bare rooftop of our flat evoked memories of the life that we, too, once had -- a material life that we could no longer afford. But it also reminded us of our status -- that of the 'refugee'.

Our Pakistani neighbours sympathized with our condition. In the middle of the summer, most Pakistani cities suffer from a shortage of water. The wealthy can buy water tankers. As refugees we neither knew, nor could afford such an expedition. The Pakistani families extended their help by providing us with clean drinking water. Soon, it too became a tradition to knock at a Pakistani neighbour's door to fetch water. We carried enough buckets and pots to last us a day, and repeated the exercise at each sunset during the waterless weeks of July and August. We appreciated their goodwill and generosity. However, the interactions -- though always friendly -- became an indication that we were in a different country, living among a different group of people.

It was there that I first became aware of the fact that being an *Afghan* had a particular meaning. It defined us in relation to Pakistanis. We were refugees from another land. Though members of the same faith -- Islam -- we still differed in our way of life, language and culture. It was in Pakistan that I became aware of my national identity in a sense I had not thought of before. It was there I began to unravel the construction of this national identity that seemed so natural to me until I crossed the border; to question what being an Afghan meant. The trouble with being an Afghan was being a 'refugee'. It suggested an unequal social and economic status. In addition, it had nothing concrete or

fixed to hold on to except for a collection of memories. I had just turned sixteen. It was too painful to think of myself as a 'refugee'. Hence, in a battle against the self, I decided that being a 'citizen of the world' conveyed positive feelings of belonging rather than being a 'refugee', which indicated lack of belonging and a vague negative identity.

At the time I was not aware that there was a political trend of thought advocating this idea of 'citizens of the world'. It was not until later -- in fact, as part of my university studies in Canada -- that I discovered there was even a term describing proponents of such a view as "internationalists" (Rourke 1997: 218). Stranded in the hardship of a refugee life, for me it was a momentary relief to think like that, a sort of sought-after solution to avoid the confusion over my situation as a refugee.

Obviously, I had to do away with my national identity in order to become a 'citizen of the world'. I argued that, after all, national identity was mapped upon us, as an historical coincidence. We have no choice as to where we are born, into which part of the world and into which kind of culture and family. In addition, there are certain universal values, attitudes and habits that form the basis of our existence -- crucial to the knowledge of ourselves. Therefore I thought it possible to discard my national identity, casting off its shadow-like ability to follow me into the unforeseen future.

It was in Iran, where I travelled for the first time in 1996, that I became aware of the importance of 'nationality' -- ironically when I was there as a Canadian journalist rather than a citizen of neighbouring Afghanistan. I discovered that regardless of my own desire to dismiss national identity as a factor in my life, it mattered very much to everyone else. It was there that the shadow of the past materialized, as Iranians and Afghans constantly questioned my background and national identity. There was a general

rule, which defined a person, based on one's nationality. Once again, being an 'Afghan' automatically pointed in the direction of a 'troubled' category -- the 'refugee'. There, like a misty, half-broken mirror, my past was held against my present and I could not, at last, escape its reality.

It was against such a backdrop and a whole set of irreconcilable questions that I set out to discover how displacement, affecting the day-to-day life of a refugee, reconstructed gender identity and self-perception among Afghan women refugees. I wanted to know, in addition to the obvious -- change of country and status -- what else was changing for a refugee woman; to what extent exposure to a new living environment in the two different Muslim societies of Pakistan and Iran contributed to changes in Afghan women's self-perception. How did these changes challenge the traditional view of women and their status?

I found out that refugee life, however monotonous, undergoes development and change. A refugee society is, like other societies, dynamic. Indeed, it may be argued that adaptability is an imperative for a refugee, stranded in an uncertain, inhospitable environment. By adaptability is meant accepting the imposed living conditions, adapting to it out of necessity rather than desire. The necessity of exile has forced many to accept changes to their lifestyles. This change may be gradual, but it is nevertheless apparent in day-to-day life. I found that for the Afghan women living in Iran and Pakistan, becoming refugees -- though immensely sad -- was inevitable. Changes in the pattern of everyday life as a result of migration and exposure to a new environment challenged not only their traditional view of the world and ideas regarding female education, but also aspects of the power structure within the family itself. These changes are observable in Afghan refugee

women's self-awareness, and their attitude towards health, marriage and the education of female members of the household.

The refugee women themselves did not intentionally initiate change. They realized that change was a necessity of life in exile. In most cases, refugees would only identify what was happening to their lives in exile as change after being questioned about it -- as if the transformation was invisible. Change was the result of certain living conditions imposed by exile. They were not always the same, nor were the alterations to their lives organized. In fact, some of the changes in attitude and ways of thinking had begun as a set of informal strategies adopted for the sake of survival, which subsequently became part of the normal pattern of everyday life. New living conditions did not always bring about positive change. One of the negative aspects of living in exile for women, aside from poor living conditions, was restriction on their relative freedom of movement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In an attempt to study the socio-cultural changes that take place in a refugee woman's life, I have looked at the pattern of her everyday life in relation to her environment in exile. I believe that the study of the ordinary and the everyday yields valuable information about social/cultural change. The question of 'change', its kind and degree, has been studied in the context of geographical location, societal structure and the socio-economic and religious backgrounds of the individual refugee. I do not propose to offer conclusive answers to the plight of Afghan refugee women. Rather I am attempting to offer an insight into a refugee woman's life under very particular circumstances: in camp and city, and in the two very different countries of Iran and Pakistan. By reflecting

upon my own experience of becoming a refugee, I hope to provide a personalised account of change in a refugee woman's life, rather than a detached and abstract study.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Introduction

The literature review deals with the two categories of transnational movements -- immigrants and refugees. The purpose is to provide a brief and general overview of anthropological literature dealing with various aspects of migration and to situate the present study in the context of an ongoing debates regarding refugees in a changing world and an ever-changing discipline.

1.3.2 Anthropological Literature and Migration

Immigrants and refugees make up the lower strata of the new global world order. (The higher strata being multinational corporations, mass communication networks, scholars, tourists, etc.). "Immigrants and refugees", like the rest of transnationals, move in large numbers across fixed geographical boundaries known as 'nation-states' as well as social, psychological and conceptual borders. In fact, Kearney points out that according to an International Labour Organization report in 1992, "there were an "unprecedented" 100 million people living outside their national countries, people who for the most part are scattered as a result of wars, unemployment and poverty" (Kearney 1995: 557). In "Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things" (1995), Liisa Malkki remarks that accelerating "spatial and social displacement" of people

around the globe “includes enormous numbers of people who are legally classified as refugees” (Malkki 1995: 496).

Anthropology, like other social sciences such as psychology, sociology and political science has been concerned with various aspects of migration. Migration has emerged as a field of anthropological study particularly since World War II, and above all in recent decades, which have seen a greater degree of displacement or at least more awareness of displacements across the globe. Research on migration has sparked debate on such issues as the situation of urban migrants, adaptability and survival, and the legality and illegality of migrants. As far the issue of adaptability, Nancy and Theodore D. Graves note that during the post-World War II period, there has been an enormous growth in “rural-to-urban” migration, matched by an increase in “anthropological interest in this phenomenon” (Graves & Graves 1974: 117). This focus has made available a very large amount of material on migrants’ adaptive strategies from around the globe.

Graves and Graves argue that there is a growing consensus among anthropologists that “the nature of man” is interactive, as opposed to totally active or passive as was previously imagined. The term “adaptability”, meaning the effort and ability to overcome problems imposed by the physical and social environments, “nicely captures” this anthropological consensus (Graves and Graves 1974: 117). It is true that recent debates on the concepts ‘urban’, ‘rural’, and ‘adaptability’ within anthropology and other related disciplines show that these categories are highly contested in the light of emerging new theories. Nonetheless, the focus on rural-urban migration and mechanisms of adaptability continues. This focus also relates in practice, to a reality that still continues to exist in some parts of the world -- as I will explain later in my research. Moreover, ‘urban’ and

‘rural’ as well as issues of survival and ‘adaptability’ are still part of the vocabulary of the international aid workers whom I have encountered during my fieldwork, as well as part of the language of some of the refugees I have spoken to. Both groups view and treat these ‘problematic’ theoretical categories as tangible entities. For these reasons, I employ these terms in my study.

Graves and Graves describe the strategies adopted for survival by migrants in a new environment as being of three different but overlapping categories. First are the individualistic versus group-oriented strategies. In an individualistic approach, a migrant “relies essentially on his own resources or his own initiative for a solution” (Graves & Graves 1974:128), whereas in a group-oriented strategy, a migrant turns to other people for help. These two strategies are applied to concerns such as housing, transportation, employment, and social interaction. A second category is formal versus informal strategies, representing a choice between the use of “formal channels of organizations or informal social networks” (Graves & Graves 1974: 132). These strategies are aimed at securing financial aid, medical care, and conflict resolution. A third category of survival strategies adopted by migrant is “generalized” versus “specialized”. In a generalized strategy, a migrant is forced to accept relatively unskilled jobs in return for access to a wide range of employment opportunities, whereas in a specialized strategy, a migrant may specialize in certain occupations and is “willing to wait to find a suitable opening” or takes advantage of the opportunities present for his “participation in a certain economic niche” (Graves & Graves 1974:135).

Graves and Graves point out that “lack of training, capital or even language skills” (Graves & Graves 1974: 139) all pose a challenge to a migrant’s adjustment to a

new environment. Also, migrants may face prejudice and discrimination due to “racial and cultural distinctiveness and minority political status” (Graves & Graves 1974:139). Those remarks, with the problems they raise for adaptation, certainly apply to the refugees discussed in this study.

The legal rights of migrants as well as the problem of their ‘illegality’ is yet another topic that has been researched and debated by anthropologists. This area of study relates to law, since it is the law which categorizes migrants as ‘legal or illegal’. Recent anthropological scholarship has reflected the growing reality of “migrant illegality”.

Nicholas P. De Genova in “Migrant Illegality and Deportability in Everyday Life” (2002) provides an overview of the discussion and debates affecting issues of migrant illegality, whom he refers to as “undocumented migrants”. De Genova argues that the increase in transnational migration “has involved the global emergence of a variety of socio-historically distinct undocumented migration”, accompanied by a “variety of socio-historically particular configurations of migrant “illegality” (De Genova 2002:424). Thus, the issue of “migrant illegality” as a “problem” has entered the domain of policy debates, as well as practical strategies of border policing.

De Genova’s research on “undocumented migrants” identifies two sorts of shortcomings in this field of study:

- 1 There is a vast scholarship on the subject, but little of it deploys “ethnographic methods or other qualitative research techniques to elicit the perspectives and experiences of undocumented migrants themselves” (De Genova 2002:421).
- 2 Most of the scholarship has concentrated on offering solutions to the “problem” of “migrant illegality” or using various canons of “social

scientific objectivities” in order to evaluate the supposed “successes” or “failures” of “legislative, administrative and enforcement tactics” (De Genova 2002: 421).

De Genova argues that “legal reality” is superimposed on the daily life of an undocumented migrant who otherwise may be “engaged in social relations with ‘legal’ migrants as well as citizens” (De Genova 2002: 422). De Genova further suggests that migration law has produced the category of “illegality” not in terms of how law “constructs, differentiates, and ranks” certain categories, but in the sense that “the history of deliberate interventions that have revised and reformulated the law has entailed an active process of inclusion through illegatimisation” (De Genova 2002: 439). De Genova consequently calls for reexamination of the origin of the status “illegal” (De Genova 2002: 440). He argues for a critical anthropological approach that might serve as a “critique of nation-states and their immigration policies, as well as of the broader politics of nationalism, nativism, and citizenship” (De Genova 200: 423).

De Genova calls for criticism and reinterpretation of migration law, pointing out that historically, anthropology has contributed to the legal field, in particular to debates on human rights. Ellen Messer makes a similar case, arguing that anthropology has traditionally contributed to human rights debates and developments by “providing cross-cultural research on questions of what are rights, ... by monitoring compliance with human rights standards, and by criticizing human rights violations or abuses” (Messer 1993: 221).

Anthropologists have also now recognized more varieties of migration. George Gmelch, for instance, suggests that previously, migration was seen largely as a one-way

movement -- based on the category of those who left the Old World (Europe) for North America. He argues that “massive urbanization occurring in most parts of the world led to a “rural-urban” analytical framework” (Gmelch 1980: 135). However in the past two decades, anthropology has treated “migration as a system, examining both stream and counter streams” (Gmelch 1980: 136).

Gmelch highlights “return migration”, that is return to the refugee’s place of origin, as an aspect of migration that has become a significant area of anthropological research. According to Gmelch, return migration has been the “most difficult aspect of the migration cycle to quantify” (Gmelch 1980: 135). Since traditional anthropological fieldwork had limited research period and space, it was led to a “view of migration as a static event” (Gmelch 1980: 135). A growing literature on return migration now attempts to correct this deficiency by providing “typologies of return migrants” (Gmelch 1980: 136), as well as examination of reasons for return, readjustment processes, and the impact of returnees.

Although there is more research needed, Gmelch argues that there are enough data to allow some generalizations. According to this data, most return migrants leave “rural areas and small towns in developing regions” (Gmelch 1980: 137) in order to obtain “unskilled jobs which nevertheless paid for more than they could have earned at home” (Gmelch 1980: 137). Such migrants are motivated, in other words, by economic necessity. Most migrants also follow a “chain migration” pattern -- i.e. migrating to places where family or friends are established. Gmelch divides return migrants into two groups: temporary and permanent. He argues that the first group returns after accomplishing a “specific” objective -- most often, accumulating a sum of capital.

However, permanent migrants -- those “able to create a better life abroad” (Gmelch 1980: 137) -- return for two kinds of reasons. The first kind is external, for instance family circumstances or “faltering economic conditions in the host country” (Gmelch 1980: 137). The second is internal, for example failure to adapt to the way of life in the host country (Gmelch 1980: 137).

Gmelch further argues that, regardless of the reasons for return, many migrants fail to realize “how much they or their communities have changed during their absence” (Gmelch 1980: 143). Moreover, while migrants bring back “valuable industrial work experience and skills” (Gmelch 1980: 153) and perhaps some capital, there is “no evidence,” he concludes, that return migration causes any significant change in the social structure of home communities” (Gmelch 1980:153).

A few dominant themes emerge from these debates concerning refugees. It is evident, to begin, that changing anthropological approaches dealing with the subject reflect the changing realities surrounding migration. This dynamism is certainly welcome. There is nevertheless an evident need for more diverse and qualitative research as well as cross-disciplinary studies linking the psychological and sociological dimensions of migration. Generalizations should be avoided in favour of case-specific analysis.

In addition, in theoretical studies, the categories of migrant and refugee have tended to be treated together. It cannot, however, be assumed that research on migration automatically relates to the debate on refugees. While it may be true that in some generalized, indirect way, some of the same survival strategies or issues such as, for instance, “migrant illegality” can be extended to discussion of refugees, refugee studies is

a field in its own right, with its own particularities and need-for distinctive critical approaches.

Third, the diversity in refugee populations should be recognised. Some researchers assume that since people have always sought refuge and sanctuary, the concept of refugee is a continuation of that same category. This approach is often part of an attempt to analyze or “solve” the refugee “problem” or to devise what Stine calls a “professional refugee assistance system” (Stine 1981: 320). In “The Refugee Experience: parameters of a Field of study” (1981), Stine argues that studies on refugees must focus not just on “specific policy questions” or “most recent arrivals,” but on “looking at refugees everywhere from a broad historical perspective” (Stine 1981: 321).

Refugees, in his view, are a “recurring phenomenon with identifiable and often identical patterns of behaviour and sets of causalities” (Stine 1981: 321). Stine then goes on to suggest that there is a general phenomenon that can be called ‘the refugee experience’ and that the task of anthropology must investigate what he calls “all stages of the refugee experience” (Stine 1981: 321).

Liisa Malkki, however, argues that “forced population movements have extraordinarily diverse historical and political causes and involve people who while all displaced, find themselves in qualitatively different situations and predicaments” (Malkki 1995:496). She argues that the problem with propositions such as Stine’s -- which she refers to as an “intellectual project” -- is that they posit “a single, essential, transhistorical refugee condition” (Malkki 1995:511). As a result, instead of being viewed as a “mixed category of people sharing a certain legal status” (Malkki 1995:511), refugees become a “culture” an “identity” or a “community”.

Looking back at the long list of material now available on refugees -- a sample of which was presented in the literature review -- it is clear that there is wide interest in the field of 'immigrant and refugee' studies. Where, in the context of this literature, is the present study situated?

First, while there may be a great selection of information available about various aspects of refugees' life, there is still need for research that reflects the individual realities of refugees' life. There is a need, in other words, for qualitative research. This has been a principle aim of my work, the realization of which has been aided I believe, by the fact that I am a refugee myself. I fear that the realities of a refugee life -- packed with trauma, conflicting aspirations, changes and hopes -- might be lost in the theoretical battle over the soul of academic discourse on the subject. This is not to dismiss the importance of theory, but simply to point out that there has to be a balance. This study will remind the reader that refugees are more than just a subject of study and debate.

This study also takes seriously the particularity of refugees, as opposed to migrants. The particular trauma, instability and isolation of the refugee condition comes out clearly, I hope, in the chapters that follow. The reader should be able to gain close appreciation not only of the social, but also very personal and psychological difficulties faced by refugees.

Third, as I have pointed out, though the terms 'urban', 'rural', and 'adaptability' are (as I have also stated) currently the subject of debates, I continue to apply them in the ordinary sense. Since they adequately describe a reality recognised by aid workers (to whom this study is partially directed) as well as refugees themselves.

Fourth, although Afghan refugees, including, of course, women, struggle with the reality or threat of illegality, this study follows De Genova's suggestion that the daily life and interactions of real migrants be brought to the fore, so that they are not masked by "legal reality." The struggles and effective adaptation of refugees constitute in themselves, I believe, a critique of the imposed category of "illegal" and the politics that construct it.

As far the issue of "survival strategies", I have found that the Afghan refugee women on whom I focus resort most often to group-oriented strategies, no matter what their concerns. This may reflect not only the communitarian, rather than individualistic nature of Afghan society, but also a tendency of females to share and cooperate in overcoming difficulties. Women tend initially to adapt, moreover, with the aid of informal social networks rather than formal channels; though they may also avail themselves of "formal" assistance offered by aid organizations, where this exists. The distinction between "generalized" and "specialized" strategies for obtaining employment is not so relevant to poorer women refugees, since they arrive with no specialized skills, and do not much increase their employment opportunities by willingness to accept unskilled work. One might say, in fact, that the categories of survival strategies defined by Graves and Graves are much less relevant to men than to women. Here again the importance of particularities emerges; a more important adaptation issue in the case of Afghan women might be (as seen in the chapters that follow) adjustment to new gender expectations, or negotiation between gender patterns of the refugee and host societies.

Last and most important, my study addresses two significant gaps between the literature on refugees. The first is appreciation of change in the perceptions and ambitions of this population. The physical situation of refugees has, obviously, changed. Is it not

reasonable to test the hypothesis that the outlook and psychology of these human beings has also been altered? This proposition, I believe, is dramatically differed in the chapters that follow -- along with the argument for particularity since change is different and actually proceeds in different directions in various settings (for instance, urban, vs. rural settings). Gmelch asserts, to cite a phrase already quoted, that “there is no evidence that return migration causes any significant change in the social structure of home communities” (Gmelch 198:153). It may be that, if the anthropology of refugees were to shift to a focus on the individual, including his or her psychology, this evaluation would be different. Changes in self-perception and worldview takes some time to manifest themselves in the “real world,” and the causal connection is difficult to trace. These are however, prime movers of society and history, and one might expect them to have some impact on the future of home societies when migrants and refugees return -- as we can already sense (see conclusion) in the case of Afghanistan.

The second, somewhat startling gap in the literature this study aims to address is lack of studies of Afghan women refugees themselves. There is a dearth of literature, both in English and “local” languages with which I am familiar. It is hoped that this thesis will provide a preliminary picture of this much-pitied, but apparently under-studied population.

1.4 Highlighting Key Concepts

A number of terms such as culture, tradition, modern, social change, urban, rural, nationalism and ethnicity are employed in this thesis. I am aware that they are all contested categories within academic discourse. However, they may appear as neutral

territories in this study. The reason, as I pointed out earlier, is that most of these words point to tangible realities for both the aid workers whom I have spoken to, and some more articulate Afghan refugees as well. It makes sense, I think, to describe reality as the refugees and aid workers see it.

Each term has a particular meaning in the context of place, how it is used, and who uses it. Meaning, in other words, depends on specific context. For instance, the word 'modern' for an anthropologist or sociologist signifies "temporality of rapture", "against tradition", "reason and progress" and so on. An Afghan refugee's use of the term 'modern' may, however, be different. Thus, instead of trying to bring these notions from my Canadian university studies into the lives of refugees, I have chosen to use them according to the time and place of my study, and in the manner of their use by the refugees and aid workers.

This usage is partly an attempt to discard the implicit hierarchy that exists between the researcher and those who are part of the research project. Hierarchy is unfortunately a reality of the discipline that needs to be acknowledged, and, as suggested by Abu-Lughod, one has to make an effort to find ways around it. One way for me, personally, is to respect the language in which the refugees speak -- even words such as '*pasmonda*' (backward), '*besawad*' (uneducated) [in Dari] which are discomfiting and problematic in academic discourse.

Moreover, such concepts have multiple meanings in Afghan context. The concept of 'modern' in Afghanistan and among the Afghan refugees has more than one meaning. For some it is tied to the concept of urbanization, while for others it is associated with Westernization. For example, a refugee family stranded in the inhospitable environment

of refugee camp views those Afghan refugees living outside the camp as being 'modern'. The world outside the refugee camp is the 'urban' center where there may be more access and economic or social possibilities for the refugee. Thus, for all refugees I spoke to living in the camp it is desirable to move outside the camp. Most of these refugees have come from what could be termed 'rural' Afghanistan. But in comparison to village life, the refugee camp is seen, by the refugees themselves, as 'a backward' place that is confined and limiting.

Moreover, refugees who live in the cities or suburbs in Pakistan and Iran do view life in the Western countries as 'modern'. Since they find the limitations of their refugee life difficult to take, they all desire -- all of those I spoke to -- to leave for a Western destination. In their imagination, living in the West is the ultimate modern existence. The West is associated with economic comfort, personal freedom and access to a better life. Thus, within one community of Afghan refugees -- less than 200 kilometers apart -- the concept of 'modern' takes relative meanings.

Among some of Afghan professional elite (whom I have come to know over the course of years of involvement with Afghan affairs) the concept of 'modern' also had a strong association with Westernization. This is not to say that all Afghans or Afghan refugees think the same but simply to point out that for the individuals I spoke to and certainly through my own experience of conversations in which the term 'modern' was mentioned, there was a clear indication that it denoted certain material associations with the West.

The concepts of urban (*shahar* or *khur* in Dari and Pushtu) and rural (*dahe* or *qarya* in Dari and Pushtu) have their own particular meanings in Afghan context. Unlike

in the West -- where we associate 'urbanization' with industrialization, etc. -- in the context of Afghanistan, anything outside village life is seen as 'urban'. This includes small local centers that hardly fit into our definition of urban, but are not at the same time our typical 'villages'. These lie somewhere between the 'urban' and the 'rural' in the sense of the problematic categories that we have come to debate in academia. Moreover, in the context of Afghanistan, rural and urban are not defined, fixed boundaries. They mix and mingle in such a way that it is hard to decide where one ends and the other begins. Nonetheless, the term urban is used in reference to those who went to school -- i.e. acquired formal education -- and dressed in 'Western-style' clothes -- however, modest.

Finally, I use the concepts 'change' and 'socio-cultural change' not as homogenous categories denoting linear, uni-directional and 'progressive' movement from the 'traditional' towards the 'modern' and 'Western'. I have attempted, in fact, to demonstrate the opposite, that is to say that change is diverse and takes different shapes and courses in different contexts and times. Like the concept of 'modern', change, too, has multiple definitions. I realized during the course of my fieldwork that Afghan refugee women differentiated change based on their own individual experiences. Therefore, I have also relied on the refugee women and their indication of what 'change' means for them, rather than relying on an understanding rooted in a Western academic tradition coloured by feminism.

I have considered change in four different areas of a refugee woman's life. These categories are: *marriage*, *health*, *education* and *work*. None of these categories were

present in my mind when I started the fieldwork. They emerged in the course of fieldwork and interviews as references made by refugee women themselves.

1. 5 Afghan refugees: Historical Background

The Afghan government coup of April 27, 1978, brought into the open the historical conflict between the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’ in Afghanistan. It also set in motion the unravelling of a century-long socio-political repression that was especially felt among the masses, but went unaddressed by the political elite. A coalition of two Communist parties, Kalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner), made up of a group of urban intellectuals was responsible for the coup. The first three months of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan gave rise to some hopes. However, when the new leadership imposed reforms on a predominantly ‘rural’ population that had traditionally resisted interference from central government, the base of support declined. This set of radical social and agrarian reforms threatened the existing cultural and socioeconomic framework of the country without offering any viable alternatives.

As government reform policies met with dissent, the Kabul administration reacted with harsh, repressive measures. A large number of members of the political, religious and intellectual elite were jailed or executed. Countless members of the rural population were killed in ground attacks and aerial bombings, which destroyed villages. Thousands of Afghans were forced to abandon towns and villages for neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. By the end of 1979, when Russian troops invaded Afghanistan in support of the Communist regime in Kabul, about 1000 refugees were crossing into Pakistan everyday. There were already an estimated 400,000 Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and 200,000 in

Iran by the end of 1979. As the war in Afghanistan developed into the last and worst of the Cold War proxy battlefields, the number of refugees from 1985 to 1990 reached a staggering 6.2 million in Iran and Pakistan alone (Dupree 1992:1-2).

In the summer of 1989, my family decided to join the three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. We left Kabul at dawn on a midsummer day. We carried a bag containing two light blankets, two candles, matches, a small bag of dry fruit, and a silver pot. After a ten-day-journey by foot, we finally crossed the Afghan/Pakistan border. We travelled by an illegal route, climbing rough mountains, passing trenches and valleys, making our way with the help of an 18-year-old female guide in and out of the villages, military checkpoints, strongholds and abandoned cafés. When we arrived at the Parachener border, the Pakistani police welcomed us and a car journey of six hours took us to Peshawar. That, however, was not the end of our journey. It was only the beginning.

Hanging from a black thread around my neck, I carried a small rolled-up paper -- equal to the size of my small finger -- wrapped in a cotton brownish-green cover. That was a note in Dari (Persian spoken in Afghanistan) indicating that we had given a sum of several million Afghanis (the unit of currency) to a person in Kabul, and that we were thus entitled to collect its equivalent in Pakistani rupees in Peshawar at a given address. My family was among the 20 per cent of educated Afghans. They were part of an 'urbanised' elite who could afford to obtain such a rolled-up note. Thousands of other Afghan refugees did not have that luxury. In Pakistan, as in other parts of the world, the economic background of refugees determined their status. All Afghan refugees, then, faced two possibilities: to live in designated refugee camps under restrictive Mujahidin rule and receive some form of relief from the UNHCR; or to live outside the camps, on

their own. It was, however, the economic status of the refugee family that for the most part determined whether they could live outside a refugee camp. Those without the means to support themselves had no choice but to live in the camp. Whether living in or outside the camps, being a refugee was not easy.

As if in a perpetual state of 'refugeeness', using legal or illegal means, Afghans like my family then left Pakistan for Western countries. For Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, popular destinations were Germany, the United States and Australia. No Afghan refugee that I know, however, would have missed the chance to migrate to *any* Western country that offered asylum. Many who did not succeed in going to the West moved back and forth between Pakistan and Iran in the hope of a better life.

The Geneva Accords, which called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, brought about the departure of the last Russian soldier on the 25th of February 1989. The Afghan Communist regime, however, remained in power. There was little hope of a return to Afghanistan. My family was among the fortunate few whose political asylum application was approved by the Canadian embassy. After a year and two months of living in Pakistan, we finally left Islamabad in the autumn of 1990 for Moncton, a town in the province of New Brunswick on the Atlantic coast of Canada.

In April of 1992, the Communist government in Kabul finally collapsed and the interim Mujahidin government (a coalition of 15 different Islamic, anti-Communist parties in Pakistan and Iran) was established inside the country. I remember my father's readiness to leave Moncton for Kabul as soon as he heard the news. Having left an entire life behind, returning to a peaceful Afghanistan was for him an ideal. My father lived with the dream of returning home. Some 1.6 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan

and Iran did, in fact, go home. By the end of 1994, they were joined by another 1.3 million. However, the failure of the Mujahidin government to bring about a viable and just peace resulted in a total breakdown of order. The result was a cruel civil war between the various ethno-linguistic and religious factions. All this happened just two months after the Mujahidin victory. The civil war of 1992-1996 caused a majority of the population to flee once again and provoked a massive internal displacement.

Nevertheless, despite civil war, repatriation policies adapted by Iran and Pakistan soon after the Mujahidin victory forced Afghan refugees to return. By the end of 1994, the number of refugees in Iran and Pakistan had been reduced from the 6.2 million of 1990 to 2.7 million (UNHCR Report 1997: 4-5). Then, the fall of Kabul -- September 1996 -- to Taliban forces added another twist to the already complicated political situation of Afghanistan. It slowed down the repatriation program in Iran (although the program never completely stopped). Meanwhile in Pakistan, some Afghans who shared similar ethnic/linguistic and religious backgrounds with the Taliban also left for Afghanistan. As the war between the forces of the ousted Mujahidin government and the Taliban continued, internal migration created more disorder inside the country.

A group of former Mujahidin groups formed a coalition known as the Northern Alliance to fight the Taliban. (The Northern Alliance proved to be useful for the United States and its supporters when they launched an attack on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda after September 11, 2001 in their 'war on terror'). Repressive Taliban policies which were intended to impose their own particular brand of Islam on a diverse population made peace in Afghanistan an even more distant prospect. Flocks of refugees poured once

again into Pakistan and Iran. The number of refugees crossing the Afghan-Iran/Pakistan border fluctuated, depending on various factors.

According to UNHCR estimates, there are about 1.3 million refugees in Iran and 1.2 million in Pakistan. In addition, about six million Afghans are scattered around the globe (UN Information Paper 1999: 3, and Personal communications, Pakistan; March 2000). The situation of refugees and their numbers began to change after the fall of the Taliban government in December, 2001. However, for the purpose of this study, I will refer to the estimates and figures up to date of the collection of data, February to August 2000.

1. 6 Methodology

My primary method of collecting and understanding data has been through participant observation. I observed women as they engaged in daily chores and participated with them in, for example, shopping at the local market, cleaning, cooking, going to the park, walking their children to school, etc. This gave me a chance to be directly involved in the daily activities of the women whose lives I was trying to understand. I spoke with both female and male members of the family at an informal level. Having the freedom to follow a refugee woman as she went about her daily chores provided me with an insight into her life, her dilemmas and aspirations. Once I was in the company of women -- particularly those from rural Afghanistan -- I realised the limitation of my own thinking and approach. Different people define 'change' differently. As a result, it became a primary objective of my work to understand how Afghan refugee

women defined change, before analyzing how those changes had come about and affected women's self-perception.

Once I developed a better understanding of the condition of Afghan refugee communities in Iran and Pakistan, I devised a detailed and specific questionnaire to enhance the results of my research. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: general information about the status and condition of refugees' life, including personal information: age, education, employment, income, ethnic/religious background, etc. The second part of the questionnaire enquired changes in the refugee's life since migration: her attitude towards female education, employment, marriage, health, public participation and family life. The questions were open-ended.

The interviews were conducted in Dari and Pushtu languages. Since I am fluent in both languages, I did not need a translator. However, I used English and Dari interchangeably when I took notes. I audio taped those interviews where the presence of a tape-recorder did not interfere with the comfort of the interviewee. I also asked the permission of the interviewee for recording the conversation. Coming from a journalism background, I already had the skills required to manage and direct a well-focused interview; I was able to keep the main objective of the interview in mind while letting the interviewee express her thoughts. (Since I am not comfortable with the term 'informants', I will be referring to the people whom I interviewed for this research, whether in a formal or informal setting, as interviewees).

1.6.1 Research: Phase I

The primary phase of this research began in May 1996, when I lived with an Afghan refugee family in Iran. It was my first visit to Iran, where I was shooting a documentary film about the socio-economic conditions of post-Khomeini Iran. A meeting with an Afghan family, quite by chance, provided an opportunity for me to gain some insight into the living condition of Afghan refugees in Iran.

The family of six shared a first-floor room in a three-storey house in the south of Tehran. I shared the same room with the refugee family for five weeks. A curtain divided the room into two unequal sections at night when we laid the blankets for bed and pulled them half over for cover. The grandmother, a woman of 66, the three children (two boys aged 11 and 9, and a girl aged 4), and I slept in the larger half, while the husband (age 41) and his wife (age 34) took the other half. Every morning around seven o'clock, the curtain went up and the spreading of a tablecloth on the floor was a prelude to breakfast. There was a tiny bathroom and a kitchen in the small backyard across from the main entrance to the house. Another curtain, separating the portion of the yard near the room from the staircase to the upper levels, secured the privacy of the refugee family and two other Iranian families who were residing on the second and third floors.

The young couple had left Afghanistan in 1985, escaping war and conscription. All three children were born in Iran. The father of the family was granted permanent refugee status, which entitled his children to attend Iranian schools in their neighbourhood. The wife, who had finished two years of university education (Biology Department) at Kabul University, stayed at home. The husband, an accountant from Kabul, was working at home as a tailor. The family had a small income, which barely

paid for the sixteen thousand toman (about \$ 20 US) monthly rent -- in addition to \$1,000 US that the family had given as a deposit – a long with electricity, gas and water. There was no telephone. I paid a small rent, participated in the housework with the wife, and helped her two children with their English lessons.

I also accompanied the wife to the market and Friday evening gatherings in the park. Several Afghan families -- from the same social group, i.e. from the city of Kabul and with formal education -- met for an early evening walk and tea. The tea sessions were particularly interesting. Each family carried identical baskets, which contained a few cups, a thermos of tea and a jar of candies. As the children played and the men discussed politics, the women poured tea. A common topic of discussion in which both men and women participated was the hardship of refugee life. Endless stories about the refinements of ‘back home’, its sense of belonging and feeling of comfort were related at these tea meetings. The future of the children was another topic that was discussed at length. Uncertainty about the future was a matter of great concern for all these families.

I visited these families again in June 1998. I stayed two weeks with the same family. On the first Friday at the tea session, I saw all the families I had met in 1996. They all wanted to inform me about the changes in their lives. The daughter of one family was engaged. The son of the other had a new baby. In a short time, I had heard about the illness of family members, the victory of the children in school races, etc. The families felt frustrated at political unrest inside Afghanistan. Their comments echoed a sense of disappointment about their desire to return home. They continued to talk about the life they had ‘back home’ with a sense of nostalgia that the ‘good old days’ were over. They were becoming more realistic about life in exile.

I kept a record of the meetings and conversations as well as the name, life stories and details of each family during both visits. Later, I added my impressions of the encounters using a different colour pen. I also noted the questions that were raised in my mind as a result of these meetings, hoping to return in a short time to conduct more research.

In February 1998, I visited several Afghan families in Islamabad – Pakistan. The two-week visit allowed me to gather some basic information about the Afghan refugee community in Pakistan. I lived with one Afghan family for a week and made notes of my observations. The family of nine (two couples, with three and two children) lived in the second floor of a two-storey building in west Islamabad. Each family had one medium-size room, linked together with a narrow corridor. They shared the bathroom and kitchen and a balcony. The couples were related and both women (in their mid 30s) held degrees from the University of Kabul in education and mathematics. Both stayed home. Their husbands (in late 30s), with high school education, worked as shopkeepers (sharing a small shop) in the nearby market. All five children (between ages of 6 and 11) attended an Afghan-run private school in return for a small monthly fee of \$1.00 US per person.

The family paid a monthly rent of \$ 100.00 US. They paid hydro, water and gas on a bi-monthly basis. The income from the shop was sufficient for the “cost of a refugee life,” according to one of the ladies in the house. Each family had a single bed in which the children slept. The underneath of the bed was used as storage room for family clothes. The adults used a cotton-made narrow futon and a blanket for bed. I stayed with the family who had two children. Women of the house barely went out except for grocery shopping. Men left early in the morning and returned home in the evening. The children

were gone for half a day -- morning or afternoon -- depending on their grades. It was in this family's home that I met several other Afghan families, their neighbours and friends.

These visits were unsupervised. They were not limited to a set of questions or series of events. The first two days, both families in Iran and Pakistan seemed a little reserved, but my presence was soon forgotten and I could observe everything. The women in the house felt comfortable enough to share details of their lives with me. The men, too, let me hear their stories. On several occasions both the husband and wife asked my advice about a disagreement or treatment of the children especially how to encourage their children to take studying seriously.

These visits gave me better insight into the living conditions of refugees in Iran and Pakistan. They were also a good introduction to the policies of the host countries towards Afghan refugees. I learned about the ethnic relations of Afghans with the people of Iran and Pakistan, the difference in attitude towards and treatment of refugees by local people in the two countries, and the refugees' reaction. These visits set the framework for phase II of my research, which was directed at the main question of this thesis.

1.6.2 Research: Phase II

1.6.2.1 Pakistan

I spent six weeks (February 24-April 6) in Pakistan, where I interviewed 50 women (25 in an Islamabad suburb and 25 in a refugee camp near Peshawar). I used a prepared questionnaire for all these interviews. Although I also had casual conversations with male members of the family, I did not use the same criteria or questionnaire while

talking to the male members of the family; however, I made note of our conversations, marking their comments and points in short form.

In order to conduct interviews in the Islamabad suburb, I used my contacts within the community whom I met in 1998. For the camp interviews, however, I needed the assistance of UNHCR. UNHCR and the Pakistani government authorities provided me with a permit, and after a first-day formal introduction through their officials, I was left on my own to conduct interviews in the designated camp. I chose the camp based on factors relevant to my research, which I will discuss later. I will use the words ‘camp’, and ‘city’ for the two locations where interviews were conducted.

I used a snowball technique to collect the number of interviews I wanted. In Pakistan, all refugees I talked to were more than willing to share their stories and experiences. They were always welcoming and talkative. The women in the camp were even less reserved. While talking about women’s health, I was searching for ways of bringing about the subject of female sexuality, often considered a taboo subject. But I discovered, however, that these women were very much more at ease with discussing issues related to sexuality, pregnancy, and birth than I anticipated. No male member of the family was present during the course of the interviews. However, I did speak to the men before or sometimes after the interviews. As mentioned earlier, I did not interview them based on the same questionnaire, but I simply asked about their experiences of becoming refugees, their opinion about children's education -- specifically female education -- a woman’s role in the family, and some basic personal information such as age, background, and occupation.

1.6.2.1.1 City

I lived with an Afghan refugee family in the Peshawermore district in Islamabad. There were three families who shared the 2nd floor of a four-bedroom house. A Pakistani family lived on the first floor. Each family lived in one bedroom that had an attached small bathroom. I stayed in the fourth bedroom that did not have a bathroom. I was given access to all three bathrooms. There was a medium-size kitchen that all three families shared. All families had access to the rooftop, where they often spread their washed clothes to dry. Family # 1 consisted of a grandmother (70), her single daughter (31) and a grandson (14). Family # 2 was a couple (in their 40s) with an 11-year-old daughter. Family # 3 was also made up of a grandmother (68) with a single daughter (35) and son (15) and grandson (5). The upper floor was rented for 4,000 Rupees per month (equal to \$ 90.00 US dollars). The three families shared the rent as well as the gas, electricity and water costs. There was no telephone line.

All three families received a small amount of money from abroad to pay the rent. The grandsons of both families worked in a glass-making factory. Their small income paid for the rest of their living costs. The husband of family # 2 ran a small shop near the house to help his family survive. The young girl of family # 2 attended an Afghan private school. She became my contact for several teachers whom I interviewed. It was also through this family that I met several families living close to them. These interviews were conducted at the houses of the interviewees. Part of the interview was done casually, as the women carried on their daily chores; the more specific questions were left to the last when we would sit and enjoy a cup of green tea.

1.6.2.1.2 Camp

I went to the Nasir Bagh camp with the assistance of UNHCR-Peshawar. The camp was about 40 minutes drive from the city of Peshawar. The climate of the camp -- mainly security -- did not permit me to live there. I made a daily journey from the city of Peshawar to the camp. On the first day, a UNHCR advisor introduced me to a female teacher. She became my contact in the camp and introduced me to other families there. (I also had the assistance of a male friend who travelled with me from Islamabad since it is impossible for a single woman to travel by herself). Although he accompanied me in walks from house to house (mainly for security purposes), he was not present during the interviews. While all families welcomed him inside the house, women of the house usually went into hiding behind a curtain or another room. Therefore, I decided that it would be best for him to wait in the courtyard or outside the door while I spoke to the women.

1.6.2.2 Iran

I spent six weeks (April 20 – June 1) in Iran. I interviewed Afghan women in a camp and in a Tehran suburb. I interviewed 25 women in each location. As in Pakistan, I used my contacts within the community to interview women in the Tehran suburb. For the refugee camp, however, I obtained permission from the Interior Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the help of the UNHCR-Tehran.

1.6.2.2.1 City

I lived with an Afghan refugee family in the Tehran suburb of Mosh'ariah. The women in the family became the link to other women I met and interviewed in the neighbourhood. The family of 8 lived in a small two-bedroom ground floor apartment. The father of the family (52) worked as a brick maker. The mother (47) managed the house. The elder daughter of the family (20) helped her 15-year-old brother with sewing for a clothing store that had employed him illegally. The family's elder son had gone missing. His wife (in her late 20s) and one daughter (10) lived with the in-laws. They helped the mother of the family in the daily chores around the house. Except for a picture on the wall, there was little talk of the missing son. The family's other members were the 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son who attended 2nd 'Rahnuma'i' (equivalent of grade 10) and primary grade 5 schools respectively.

The family had migrated to Iran 14 years ago. After many years of hardship and financial difficulties, now the two small incomes paid for the 15, 000 toman (about \$23.00 US) monthly rent, utilities and other expenses. Women of the house used one room as their bedroom. The other, kept somewhat cleaner, with embroidered pillowcases and curtains to cover the clothes hanging on the wall, was used by the father and the two sons. It was also considered a guest room, where visitors were served tea and homemade cookies. I stayed in the women's room. It was the same tradition of spreading blankets under and over oneself for bed and folding them every morning in a neat pile at the corner of the room. There was a small kitchen and a tiny bathroom -- we had to cover the toilet with a wooden board in order to be able to stand under the shower, which was right above the toilet. I paid a small rent for the duration of the time I stayed with the family.

1.6.2.2.2 Camp

I also visited Saveh refugee camp, near the city of Saveh, about 130 Km Southwest of the capital Tehran. An arrangement between the Interior Ministry and the authorities in the camp allowed me to enter the guarded camp. For various reasons -- security and official permission -- I could not stay in the camp. Instead, I spent full working days there. A camp supervisor introduced me to a family the first day I arrived in the camp. The family became a good contact. I interviewed women inside the houses, where they spent most of their time. After very brief introduction to the first family, the camp authorities -- otherwise quite restricted -- granted me full freedom to move around. All the interviews were done without supervision. Since the security situation was much better in the camp, I did not need any male or female to walk me from house to house. My freedom of movement enabled me to learn the geography of the camp very well. I got a better feel of the place, the mix of people that lived there and the kind of facilities they were offered.

The immediate problem I faced in this camp was the unwillingness of refugee women to talk. A camp supervisor introduced me to one family as a Canadian researcher. As soon as it was discovered that I was not representing any relief agency nor had I anything material to distribute among the refugees, the family lost interest. However, the moment I spoke Pushtu (as the household was Pushtun by ethnic origin), they warmed up. There was at least another hour of hesitation as they wanted to know if I was reporting to the Iranian authorities. But after I managed to explain the purpose of my presence, and my research, they opened up.

1.6.3 People

I interviewed 100 women and some 30 men (though I did not use the same questionnaire for men). Most of the people I interviewed had been refugees for more than a decade. The people whom I interviewed in the two camps were from rural areas of Afghanistan. The refugees in the suburb were from semi-urban towns near Kabul or other major cities. The ages of women interviewed ranged from 16-45. I had intended to interview women across different generations with the hope of finding out how young and old assessed change.

Table I shows the over-all age group of the women interviewed. It also shows the over-all age group of the male members of the household -- the husbands of the women whom I interviewed. I spoke with half these men -- those under 45 -- separately about their views on migration, women's status and rights. Chart 'A' shows the age group of women interviewed from the four different locations.

Table I Age distribution:

Age Group	Female	Male
16-20	20	0
21-25	26	2
26-30	23	8
31-35	14	14
36-40	10	19
41-45	7	9
45 above	0	9

All	100	61

Chart A:

Age group Pakistan: Camp

Age group	Female	Male
16-20	7	0
21-25	5	0
26-30	8	2
31-35	4	5
36-40	1	6
41-45	0	2
45 Above	0	1

All	25	16

Age group Pakistan: City

Age group	Female	Male
16-20	3	0
21-25	3	1
26-30	6	0
31-35	2	2
36-40	7	3
41-45	4	5
45 Above	0	3

All	25	14

Age group Iran: Camp

Age group	Female	Male
16-20	4	0
21-25	8	1
26-30	5	3
31-35	4	4
36-40	2	6
41-45	2	2
45 Above	0	3

All	25	19

Age group Iran: City

Age group	Female	Male
16-20	6	0
21-25	10	0
26-30	4	3
31-35	4	3
36-40	0	4
41-45	1	0
45 Above	0	2

All	25	12

Table II shows the educational level of the women interviewed. It also provides the educational level of the husbands of women interviewed. Out of the 100 women interviewed, 29 were single, 61 married, and 10 widowed.

Table II Educational level of women interviewed and in contrast to their husbands

Level of Education	Female	Male
Illiterate	45	25
Partially literate (grades 1-3)	7	1
Primary school (grades 4-7)	12	6
Above primary (grades 8-11)	16	8
High School (completed)	15	14
Above high school	3	3
University (completed)	2	4

All	100	61

1.6.4 Location

There are no accurate statistics on the number of refugees in Pakistan or Iran. One reason is a flux in the refugee population. Depending on the political climate in Afghanistan and the weather in Pakistan, which refugees from the Afghan northern plains and central regions find intolerable, refugees move back and forth across the boarder. Refugees return home as soon as they feel there is a glimpse of hope in the political

situation, but then find themselves forced out once again by war, starvation and lack of security. Some have fled, two, three or four times. At times, both the Iranian and Pakistani governments have tried to restrict refugees' movement -- but to no avail.

Notwithstanding, according to the best of official estimates, there are currently some 1.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and 1.3 million in Iran (UN Information Paper 1999: 3, and Personal communications, Pakistan; March 2000). A large number of refugees live in designated areas known as camps, or often referred to in Pakistan as 'refugee villages'; thousands others are scattered in various parts of the host countries.

Refugees outside the camps usually live in concentrated numbers in districts where housing costs are not too high, i.e. poor residential areas that are already overpopulated. An entire family, or more in some cases, lives in a single apartment on the first or second floor of a house. Usually several families share a small living space.

These refugees are not, however, isolated. They do mix with the local population and are therefore, to some extent, in touch with what is going on in the city or town where they live. They are often aware not only of local events, but also of political, social and economic developments.

In contrast to town-refugee life, refugee camps are remote places. Refugees living in the camps have little chance of integration into the larger society. They are confined to a fixed area (particularly women). Town refugees live in houses already built, and thus must know the basic geography of at least their immediate surroundings if they are to survive. They are forced to learn the nuances of a different culture and system of life. Camp refugees, by contrast, build their own homes. The result is a home based on the

style of what they had back home, though perhaps smaller in size. They also often maintain the lifestyle and frame of mind of their previous lives.

I chose the town locations because there was a concentrated refugee population in those areas. The refugee population had migrated at least a decade ago. There are eight Afghan refugee concentrations in Iran. They are Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd, Kerman, Zahedan, Zabol and Mashad (UNHCR Information Paper 1999: Annex I). I chose to investigate the population in a Tehran suburb because I was familiar with the area, had made contacts in my previous visits, felt that a location close to the Iranian capital would have exposed the population more directly to social and political developments in the host country. In Pakistan, refugees live mostly in the North West Frontier Province, the cities of Islamabad, Karachi, Multan, and Lahore.

As of February 20, 2000, there were 48 administered refugee camps in Pakistan and 7 in Iran (Commissioner Report on Refugees 2000: 6 and UNHCR Information Paper 1999: 2). Pakistan has had a larger flow of refugees than Iran; the organization of refugees into camps has been a long-standing tradition in Pakistan. There have been international aid groups attending to the needs of refugees based in Pakistan since the beginning of the Afghan war (Commissioner Report on Refugees 2000: 6 and UNHCR Information Paper 1999: 2).

Although the actual job of organizing Afghans into refugee camps was done by various Mujahidin groups -- with the help of the Pakistani commissioner for Afghan refugees -- the international community was also involved in the process. Only organized refugee camps are entitled to receive rations provided by organizations like the UN. Other NGOs also concentrated and sometimes limited their efforts to the refugee camps.

In the 1980s, Mujahidin groups played a significant role in facilitating distribution of aid to the refugees. (There are horror stories among the refugee camps about the Mujahidin leadership and their handling of aid -- using it as a tool to enlist support for their particular group. A Mujahidin leader or commander would become a self-appointed camp supervisor who acted on behalf of the refugees in a particular camp). At the time there were seven Mujahidin groups based in Pakistan. There were eight Mujahidin groups based in Iran, but they were never given the same kind of authority as their counterparts had in Pakistan. (General Zia al-Haq of Pakistan admired and encouraged Mujahidin groups in their war against the Russians, for self-interest reasons that cannot be discussed within the scope of this paper). As will be explained later, the international aid community had only a small presence in Iran, compared to the staggering numbers into which they mushroomed in Pakistan.

In Iran, earlier refugees were left to survive on their own since there were by far fewer camps established near the Iran-Pakistan and Iran-Afghan borders. In the early 90s, when the Iranian government policies on refugees began to change -- due to what was represented as 'domestic economic pressures' -- more refugee camps were established to facilitate the repatriation process. According to a UNHCR monthly report dated April 6, 2000, of around 1.3 million Afghan refugees in Iran, about 5 per cent were living in the camps.

In Pakistan, there seem to have been constant organizing and reorganizing of camps. According to a report of the Pakistani commissioner for Afghan refugees, a number of camps have been abandoned, other merged and some new ones have been established to accommodate new arrivals. In Iran, on the other hand, the majority of

camps -- though they might have been restructured -- remained of the same number. In Pakistan, refugees might have had the possibility of choosing a camp; in Iran, the government authorities chose it for them.

I chose the two camps for the purpose of this research in Iran and Pakistan based on the following criteria:

- They were approximately the same distance from a main city. Nasir Bagh was 40 minutes drive from the city of Peshawar; Savah was 35 minutes drive from the city of Saveh.
- Both camps had been in place for more than a decade.
- Both camps had a mixed population of tribal groups.
- Both camps had an estimated 500 + families (each with an average of nine members per family).
- The refugees in both camps were registered and were known as legal refugees. (UNHCR handles the process of selection and documentation in both countries). As will be discussed in chapter four, not all Afghans who live in Iran and Pakistan are registered. Various rules apply to different categories of refugees, depending on the time of their arrival, the location of their residence, etc.
- Refugees in both camps were receiving some form of relief from the UNHCR and other outside donors.
- Both camps had basic facilities such as schools and health clinics (though they did not operate all the time).

1.6.5 Problems encountered during the research

As I began the interviews, with my prepared questionnaire, particularly in the camp in Pakistan, I realized that a few of the questions needed some adjustments. One concerned religion. From every woman to whom I posed the question, I received the defensive response of “Thank God, I’m a Muslim.” The question had to be phrased so as not to make them feel I was questioning their piety. It was about developing a ‘comfort-meter’. It became obvious that it was almost impossible to take an objective approach to religion -- to regard it, for example, as a sociological phenomenon -- because faith was passed on to the women by an elder member of the family as a dogma.

I also discovered that there were some differences between my notion and understanding of change -- based on my social-scientific university education and socialization in a Western society -- and refugee women’s understanding of the concept. For instance, I never assumed that women would not welcome change that eliminated the practices of bride price or extravagant wedding ceremonies. But in the course of my contacts I discovered that many women were disappointed that their daughters could not have a ‘big’ wedding or the family could not collect a bride price. I, therefore, decided to abandon my own ideas of positive and negative change and instead use the term through the understanding of the refugee women themselves.

At the very personal level, it was draining to listen to so many tales of human misfortunes. I could not help but realize that if it had not been for my family’s good fortune to leave Pakistan, I would have been in a similar predicament. I was constantly conscious of the possibilities denied to those women who might in other circumstances have been doing what I was doing.

CHAPTER TWO

Afghanistan: An Overview

2.1 Introduction

History is a prerequisite for studying and analyzing sociopolitical and cultural changes in a country and its people. Prior to an anthropological discussion of the changes occurring in the society of Afghan refugees, one must, at least, have a brief knowledge of their past: the refugees' cultural, social and political backgrounds. The current condition of Afghan women refugees' life can be better understood in the context of the history of the country and its culture. To that end, in the next two chapters I provide a brief historical overview of the country and women's status in the context of Afghan culture.

2.2 Ethnic/linguistic Divisions

Like most of the countries of the region, Afghanistan contains a variety of ethnic groups, speaking some 20 different languages and dialects. Because of the invasions, foreign rule and tribal movements across borders, no single ethnic group stands out as Afghanistan's 'authentic', original population.

Various tribes and ethnic groups currently share different parts of the land. The four major ethnic communities are Pushtun, Tajik, Hazara and Uzbeks. Given the differences and discrepancies cited by various sources, it is difficult to determine the exact size of the Afghan population, which seems to vary between 15 to 20 million. Since no accurate census has ever been undertaken in Afghanistan, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of even these figures. However, the majority of sources describe Pushtuns as the largest ethnic group making up about 40 per cent of the total population. Tribally

organised, Pushtuns are predominantly Sunni Muslims. However the tribal code of conduct known as “Pushtunwali” has been given priority.

Pushtunwali (customary law), held in high regard by the majority Pushtuns, emphasizes hospitality and defence of property and Honour. Revenge, “punishing all adulterers with death”, fighting to death to protect a person or property entrusted to a tribe or a person, pardon of offence -- other than murder -- on the intercession of a woman of the offender’s lineage or a Sayyid (descendant of the Prophet Mohammad) or a *mullah* (religious leader) are among its values. Pushtunwali also forbids the killing of a woman (as well as a Hindu, and a boy not yet circumcised). Women play a central role in Pushtunwali, from being ‘peace makers’ to providing reasons for vengeance, from being forced to marry the brother of a deceased husband for *her protection and for the honour of the family* to being the subject of monetary negotiations over her price as a bride (Dupree 1980:127). Pushtuns speak an Iranian variant of the Indo-European language family called Pushtu (Smith et al 1973: 64).

Tajiks, a combination of four predominantly Sunni Muslim ethnic communities, make up 30 per cent of the population. They share in common the name Tajik, a language (Persian spoken in different dialects) and sedentary living habits.

Numbering around two million, the Hazaras are a distinct ethnic group that speaks a Persian dialect called Hazaragi and belongs to the Shiite sect of Islam. Their physical appearances are Mongolian or Turko-Mongolian and their ancestral background is largely traced to the armies of Genghis Khan who invaded the region in the 13thc. They are divided into a number of tribes that are “differentiated from one another by locality,

variations in Persian dialect and slight cultural changes” (Smith et al 1973: 77). Uzbeks, mostly Sunni Muslims, make up a million of the population and speak Uzbeki.

Smaller groups include Turkomans, numbering about 400,000; they have maintained their Turkic language and tribal nomad lifestyle. Three small groups, who speak different languages and dialects, include Wakhnis, Sughnis and Munjanis; other small ethnic groups include Chahar Aimaks (four tribes), Kizilbash, Nuristanis, Pashaies, and Boluches, who speak either Pushtu or Persian and are from various mixed ethnic backgrounds. With the exception of the Kizilbash, who are predominantly Shiite, the rest belong to the Sunni sect (Smith et al 1973: 77-79).

These ethnic/linguistic backgrounds affected the pattern of Afghan migration. Generally, Pushtuns went to neighbouring Pakistan, particularly to the North West Frontier -- with which they shared ethnic/linguistic ties. Hazaras on the other hand fled to Iran, where they thought they would feel at home among the majority Iranian Shiite population. (Though Hazaragi is particular to Hazaras, nonetheless it is a variant of the Persian language, the official language in Iran). As will be discussed in the following chapters, the first round of refugees were largely from rural Afghanistan. Often, people from villages that became the focus of conflict escaped to the nearest point of safety regardless of any ethnic/linguistic considerations. Those majority Pushtun inhabitants who lived in close proxy to Iran ran to an Iranian town for survival. However, those who had the chance to plan their escape did to a certain extent consider their options.

The majority of the urban population -- particularly from the city of Kabul -- wanted to go to India. It was safer and had better appeal. While people drove in pick-up trucks, rode horses and mules or walked long distances to get to Iran or Pakistan, one

could -- with enough money -- board a plane and land in New Delhi three hours latter, providing one could manage to trick the government into providing a passport and then paying Indian embassy staff a sufficient bribe to obtain a visa. In return for permission to leave the country, an Afghan also had to leave property, money or family members as a deposit to guarantee his or her return to Afghanistan. Men of conscription age (18-40) were not allowed to leave. Later, doctors, engineers and professors were also added to the list of those who were not permitted to leave the country. Medical certificates were the best way of getting a passport. Soon, forging medical documents, birth certificates and other IDs became a common practice.

India was seen as a modern secular country, compared to Pakistan and the newly-established Islamic Republic of Iran. By Afghan urban standards, Pakistan and the new 'Islamic' Iran were seen as restrictive Islamic societies. According to Afghans, India had a better refugee program. Once in India one could directly register in a UN office as a refugee. Without having to live in a refugee camp, an Afghan was entitled to a sum of money -- a sort of per diem. It was left to the refugee to decide how to spend it. No food ration was involved. Refugees were treated with more respect. "There is a sense of integrity maintained, even when you're a refugee in India," wrote us a relative from India (Personal communications, Canada; July 1991).

Each family has had its own particular reason for departure and choice of a destination. But choices were limited and the majority end up fleeing to Iran and Pakistan. My family decided to go to Pakistan because like India, Pakistan also had better relations with the West. The aim and aspiration was to leave India and Pakistan for Western destinations. Iran was on the West's blacklist and it was next to impossible for

Afghan refugees to gain Western sponsorship through Iran. The majority of international aid organizations, including the UN, operated in Pakistan and India.

2.3 Islam Afghan Style

Ninety-eight per cent of Afghans are Muslim. In the past two decades -- especially since the 1979 Russian invasion -- there has been a strong resurgence of Islamic identity in Afghanistan. Islam Afghan style is a combination of religious and political identity. Although a conservative Islamic outlook seems to have been present throughout the history of the country, a politicized Islamic identity is a somewhat new phenomenon -- embodied in the Mujahidin (holy warrior) forces that emerged in the 1980s as a resistance movement against the Russian occupation and the puppet Communist regime.

The word 'Mujahid' struck a chord with millions of Afghans, for Afghanistan is a conservative patriarchal society where Islam has for the most part been equated with custom. Particularly in rural Afghanistan, knowledge of Islam was limited to a few rituals and folktales. Aside from an intuitive belief in *Allah* (God) and in Mohammad as the Messenger of *Allah*, most beliefs related to localized pre-Islamic customs. As noted by Dupree, "the Islam practiced in Afghan villages, nomad camps and most urban areas would be almost unrecognizable to a sophisticated Muslim scholar" (Dupree 1980:104).

According to Oliver Roy, Islam challenged many of the pre-Islamic tribal traditions of the Arabs by introducing reforms that raised the social and legal status of women. But it also left some aspects of the prevailing tribal culture untouched. In Afghanistan, argues Valentine Moghaddam, Islam "was superimposed on a patriarchal

society but did not radically change many of its institutions” (Moghadam 1993: 210). Thus, Afghan Islam combines elements of belief and rituals from different teachings, traditions, knowledge and religions -- often contradictory and quite conservative in nature. Saints and shrines, magic, and shamanism, and tribal codes of honour were given an Islamic edge and colouring.

To make matters even more complicated, Pushtuns in the tribal areas adhered to their traditional code of Pushtunwali. Some of the ideals prescribed by this tribal code run counter to literate Islamic principles. For example, *badal* (blood vengeance) even on fellow Muslims, is one of the tenets of the tribal code. It contradicts the Quranic saying: “It is not for a believer to kill a believer unless it be by mistake” (Sura 4:92-93: Pickthall, 1954, 88). The Islamic dower, *mahr*, called *walwar* in Pushtu, have been abused in tribal Afghanistan. The *mahr*, a payment due from groom to bride, is an essential part of the Islamic marriage contract. In the Quran, *mahr* is a nominal fee. In many Muslim countries such as Iran, Egypt, and also in urban Afghanistan, its purpose is to provide a kind of insurance for the wife in the event of divorce or widowhood. But in rural Afghanistan, *walwar* is understood to be compensation to the bride’s father for the loss of his daughter’s labour. It is part of the groom’s ownership claim over his wife. It is the price of the bride.

Adultery (*zina*) according to Islamic law requires four witnesses, whereas in Pushtunwali, hearsay (*peghor*) is sufficient. More than morality, it is honour of -- men, community and tribe -- that matters most. The Quran allows women the right to inherit property, but women in tribal areas of Afghanistan are not allowed to do so. Patrilineality is the basis of the tribal system, and allowing women to own property

contradicts that principle. Usurpation of land belonging to a rival, forced marriage, and remarrying of a widow to the brother of her deceased husband are other examples of the predominance of Pushtunwali over normative Islam.

As will be seen in the next chapter, these elements of tribal practices have had a great impact on the lives of women in Afghanistan. Various governments and leaders have tried in different ways to limit their use through the establishment of a legal system. Others tried to create a legal system by organizing a loose form of co-existence between the two. For the most part however, the tribal code remained unchallenged.

This brief background is relevant in understanding the lives of refugees both in Iran and Pakistan for they are largely a people without formal religious education other than rote-learning of the Quran, relying on a combination of customary laws and ethics, tribal codes, rituals and traditions. Refugees arriving at the Iranian or Pakistani borders were actually shocked at the differences between their own religious practices, and those of their hosts, since it was generally understood that Islam was common to all these countries (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 2000, Iran; June 2000). Thus the religious ideas, including gender ideals and practices, the refugees encountered in Pakistan and Iran were actually somewhat novel.

CHAPTER THREE

Women's Status in Afghanistan

3.1 Introduction

Afghan women play a major albeit subordinate role in the context of their country. Not unlike other patriarchal societies, Afghan women are viewed as the torchbearers of morality and symbol of both the tribe and male honour. Women have been placed under immense pressure by the norms of tribal feudal society. This has to some extent restricted their freedom of movement and other basic rights. Despite cultural restrictions, however, Afghan women have been able to contribute to the socioeconomic life of the country. This contribution has been different depending on their ethnic, tribal and regional backgrounds.

As noted in Chapter One, the main categories of education, marriage, health and work that emerged from the data will be used as a measure of change among the female refugee population. This chapter sets out to provide a brief background on all these areas. Since it is impossible to discuss any of the above outside the political developments in the country, I have included information on the background to some of the social and legal changes affecting women's lives.

3.2 Historical Background

Historically, women's status has been tied to property. This is true of not only Afghanistan, but also other countries with a tribal social structure and feudal or semi-feudal economy. In such a society, property often includes livestock and land. Women and children tend to be assimilated into the concept of property belonging to a male

(Moghadam 1992: 36-37). Thus tribal codes such as Pushtunwali forbid a woman from inheriting or owning property, for she is someone else's property. With the development of what is considered 'a modern urban culture' -- however limited -- in various parts of the country this traditional pattern began to change, even while in villages the old system and structure remained as the basis of social interactions and belief.

Tribal and even conservative urban cultural norms put enormous pressure on women, for they are seen as a reflection of the honour of the community and of the men. Hazaras, for example, do not adhere to any particular tribal code such as Pushtunwali. But they do also place a high value on women's honour as part of men's dignity -- even more than the value of land. When Hazara civilian women were being raped by Pushtun militias in 1995, an educated Afghan Hazara friend in Canada remarked: "If a house is destroyed, it can be rebuilt, but if a woman's honour is lost, it can never be repaired." For him, and for the majority of Afghan men, women's honour remains one of the most important issues in life, as it is tied to the honor of men. "It is our [male] dignity and honour that is at stake when a woman has been disrespected, touched or raped," he concluded.

Thus women are seen to be in need of protection. Since the family's honour is invested in its women, women's activities are closely guarded. However, degrees of conservatism differs from family to family, community to community and region to region. For example, in the modern capital of Kabul, where I grew up, it was considered inappropriate for a young woman to return home after dark (i.e. sunset 8pm summer time and 6pm winter), unless accompanied by a man. Educated women saw this as a function of society and accepted it as normal.

To protect women from danger and strangers, gender segregation and female seclusion was practiced widely in non-urban centers. In the cities, however, tribal restrictions faded as a class structure began to emerge. Certain jobs were regarded as appropriate for women. For example, women were discouraged from working in mixed environments. Teaching remained one of the most respected jobs for women. By the 1990s, according to Oxfam, 70 per cent of all teachers in Kabul were women.

However, none of these views and practices has stopped women from playing an important role in society. Although women were forced to stay at home during Taliban rule, they have at other times been able to participate within the bounds of culture, in the economy as well as the social and political life of the country. Afghan culture, after all, is not a uniform set of norms. As Valentine Moghadam notes, even rules of segregation vary “by ethnic group, region, mode of subsistence, social class and family” (Moghadam 1993: 210). The only exception is the category of elderly women, who are highly respected all across Afghanistan; they often exercise a considerable influence over family as well as community life.

3.2.1 Women’s Socioeconomic and Political Roles

Given the diversity of cultures, practices and traditions, the status of women and their rights in Afghanistan have differed between communities. While in the cities women from some socio-economic and ethnic/linguistic backgrounds worked as doctors, nurses, secretaries and teachers, others who came from more restricted backgrounds were not even allowed to leave their homes.

In non-urban sectors, close community ties and family farming provided a network of support for women, who usually participated in the labour market -- either by working on the farms and helping gather the harvest or by their work in the home. Generally, women participated in the household economy, though their activities differed widely. The degree and type of their socio-economic participation has been subject to communal/tribal structures, ethnic background and geographical location.

For example, in the northern part of Afghanistan inhabited by Uzbek and Turkomans, where carpet weaving had traditionally been a major industry and a source of income, skilled women were counted on to secure part of the household income. Girls were usually given into marriage at an early age; the bride-price of a well-trained female weaver was usually high. The parents of a skilled daughter therefore relied not only on the income her weaving brought in, but on the considerable bride-price her marriage would accrue as well. Women were expected to contribute to their husband's household economy after marriage. It was not uncommon for well-to-do men to have multiple wives, as the number of skilled women in the household increased family income. In this northern region of Afghanistan women did not participate in farming activities; in fact, women rarely left their homes except to participate in weddings and other family gatherings, which were almost always segregated (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 2000).

In rural areas of western Afghanistan, where Persian-speakers and Pushtuns share the land, women were in charge of market gardening, the products of which were used at home and sold in the market. However, women's main occupation in these areas, in addition to childbearing and child-rearing, was the breeding of silkworms. From the silk,

they produced handicrafts such as handkerchiefs and turbans, which were also sold in the market. In central Afghanistan where the Hazaras live, women's principal work was animal husbandry. During the four months of summer, women and young children took their cattle and sheep to the high pastures, where they stayed for the entire season. Men remained at home near their farms. In the pastures, women worked to prepare the wool they collected from the sheep and to produce woollen carpets known as *namad*. They also prepared various dairy products, which were used by their families in winter and also sold in the neighbouring markets. Back at home, women gathered bush and wood in preparation for central Afghanistan's harsh winters.

In the south and southeastern parts of the country, occupied mainly by various Pushtun tribes, women are renowned for the role they have played in tribal and national conflicts. During the war of independence (1919), Pushtun women took food to military strongholds and transported ammunition and knives to their soldiers. In the case of tribal disputes, women were -- and still are in some tribes -- used as a means of preventing acts of revenge. The tribe at fault would give one of its most beautiful women in marriage to a well-known member of the enemy's tribe. The practice is known as *bad* or *bady dadan*. A woman given into '*bady*' would pave the way for reconciliation and prevent further fighting or revenge. While some view *bad* or *bady* as a positive practice, others consider it both primitive and degrading. Educated Afghans argue that giving a woman into marriage against her wishes is barbaric. Others conclude that within the particular cultural context, *bady* gave women an essential role in the community as peacemakers (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 2000 and Canada; July 1999).

Within these regions women generally took part in family farming as well as contributing to the household income with handicrafts, embroidery and other needle work; while in some communities women were restricted to their homes, in most mountainous areas women carried water to the house from nearby rivers and streams (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 2000). Afghan folk songs depict the theme in a romantic manner with constant reference to the beautiful figures of young girls collecting water.

A considerable number of Pushtun tribes are nomads -- known as '*kuchis*'-- who moved freely within the region and across borders. An attempt was made by the Communist government to prevent nomads from crossing the border. When forced to settle, *kuchis* did not return to Afghanistan and moved to the Pakistani side of the frontier and along the Afghan-Pakistan border where the Communist government had no control. Nomad women were fully involved in the socio-economic activities of their community. They travelled with men, set up tents, gathered firewood, carried water and collected greenery for the animals.

As early as 1900, a small group of women in urban areas began to enjoy limited statutory rights. Historically these centres of trade, commerce and administration were at the intersection of major trade routes, and both men and women were exposed to degrees of outside influence. In some of these towns -- depending on ethnicity, geography and social background -- women's roles as mothers and wives were recognized and valued, and in some urban centers women played an active role in society outside their homes. Queen Bibi Halima, the wife of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, not only played an active political role during her husband's rule from 1880-1902; she also had 200 women trained

as soldiers (Kakar 1979: 17-18). However, in general, the public sphere remained out of bounds to all but the most well-to-do and educated women; these included female members of the royal family who by 1921 were given a monthly salary of 300 Rupees by the central government. Male members received 400 Rupees monthly (Mujadidi 1997: 5).

3.3 Women and the Culture of Reform

3.3.1 Education

Education too has been subject to ethnic and social diversity. However, one striking factor has remained consistent across all cultural boundaries: by 1978, out of the 15 per cent of the population who were literate, “only 2 per cent were women” (Johnson 1998: 70). There are various reasons for such a low rate of education among Afghan women. Educational opportunities in Afghanistan have been very limited, particularly for women -- though hard data on literacy among women is not available, as there are no records. Not all of the female population residing even in the cities attended schools. Only families with a less conservative stance allowed their daughters to go to school. These were often families that had travelled abroad or were aware of changes taking place in other parts of the Muslim world, particularly in Ottoman Turkey and Egypt at the dawn of the twentieth century. Most young girls were sent to school until puberty, after which they were required to stay home, help their mothers in household activities or preferably get married. There were hardly enough schools in the rural areas for anyone, let alone for women who usually did not venture outside their home villages -- unless for marriage or household chores.

Prior to the establishment of public schools in the first part of the twentieth century, education was in the hands of the religious clergy (Wilber 1962: 67-69). Mosque schools -- established by the community under the supervision of a religious leader or *mullah* -- taught young boys for half a day, six days a week. Only in major cities, such as Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad, were some girls also sent to mosque schools. The main purpose was to learn Quranic passages in Arabic -- often without a translation into Persian or Pushtu -- and memorizing the Quran for prayers and recitation. The other basic text was the Panj Ganj (Five Treasures), comprising sections devoted to moral lessons, to religious precepts and laws, and to mildly didactic poetry from renowned Persian or Pushtu writers (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 1998). Mosque schooling relied on oral education and involved little writing.

Among what may be regarded as the conservative sectors of Afghan society -- those who resisted the reforms such as implementation of education, particularly female education -- education beyond Quranic recitation and the lofty thought and metaphysics of great poets and teachers of the Muslim world was not encouraged (Wilber 1962: 73). Conservatives often regarded any other schooling as a threat to Islam.

There were several efforts, from the beginning of the 20th century onward, to justify and establish women's education. But each of these successive efforts reached only a tiny, elite part of the population, and finally foundered on conservative opposition. For example, in the late 50s, several girls' schools were established under the leadership of Daoud Khan, then the Prime Minister in Zahar Shah's constitutional monarchy. A small group of women, mostly from the royal families benefited from secondary and higher education. However, the political turmoil in the country jeopardized women's

education altogether, beginning with the conservative members of parliament's law in 1968 to ban Afghan girls from education abroad.

With the coming to power of the Communist party -- supported by direct Russian military and economic aid -- a universal literacy program for women was established. With its goal to "teach people the aims of the Revolution" (Dupree 1984: 316), the government began programs to rapidly transform society -- by force. Schools and teaching centres were established throughout the country, and urban and rural women alike were required to register for literacy classes. Those who refused to attend were physically brought in or else branded as 'anti-progressive' by the government. Perhaps a gradual, situation-specific literacy campaign would have proved more effective. In any case, the associated Democratic Organization of Afghan Women remained on the periphery, effectively reaching only a small group of intellectuals (Dupree 1984: 321).

At the same time, conservative views found new momentum with the right-wing ideology of Pakistani religio-political theorist, Abu Ala Maududi, a proponent of veiling and gender segregation. Influenced by Maududi's views, religious leaders in Afghanistan argued that the "expansion of non-traditional education was eroding the morals of the young and undermining social traditional values" (Marsden 1998: 94). Maududi's theories supported centuries-old patriarchal notions of women representing the honour of the family, tribe and nation. Any deviation from "honourable behaviour" was considered to "besmirch the honour of those in authority" (Dupree 1984: 310) and would not be tolerated.

Compulsory female education soon failed because many saw the classes as a platform to promote the government's political program, and refused to attend. In rural

areas, compulsory female education was met with fierce opposition from religious leaders, who were instrumental in the emergence of the resistance movement, which eventually confronted the People's Democratic Party (Marsden 1998: 95). Books and papers were purposely lost, delayed or damaged. Teachers, fearful of their superiors at the Ministry of Education, turned in false reports of attendance and progress. Terrified that their daughters would be taught on the basis of an alien value system, families fled to neighbouring countries (Dupree 1984: 334).

In 1992, the Communist government was overthrown by a coalition of religious parties (Mujahidin) that had fought the Russians. Their failure to establish a just system of governance resulted in a bloody civil war, which consumed the last of what was left of educational institutions and opportunity for both sexes. By 1994, Taliban forces begun to gain control of major cities and banned all girls' schools. Nevertheless, a limited sort of basic education for girls has been available in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. This will be discussed in the next chapter. In post-Taliban Afghanistan, education has become a primary item on the list of both Afghan and non-Afghan organizations wishing to make up for the losses of the last two decades.

3.4 Women and Formal Legal Reforms

3.4.1 Marriage

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901) started the first formal legal reforms for women when he divided the legal system into Islamic law (*shari'a*), common law (state) and customary (existing) laws. As part of this new system, he abolished a long-standing customary law which, he claimed, violated Islamic law; this customary law, widely

practiced among the tribes, "bound a wife not only to her husband but his entire family as well" (Gregorian 1969: 138). According to this custom, widows were given into marriage to their husband's next of kin, often against their will. The Amir announced, that "the moment a husband died his wife was to be set free" (Gregorian 1969: 138).

He also required all marriages to be registered and modified a law dealing with child marriage, introducing instead an Islamic legal norm by "permitting a girl who had been given in marriage before she had reached the age of puberty to refuse or accept her marriage, when she attained full age" (Gregorian 1969: 139). Women were given into marriage by their menfolk at the age of 8 or 9, while the age of puberty in Afghanistan was generally between 13 or 15. Still another Islamically-inspired reform allowed women to sue their husbands for alimony or divorce in cases involving cruelty.

Amanullah Khan, Rahman Khan's grandson, subsequently introduced a Family Code (1921) regulating marriage, and outlawing child marriage and intermarriage between close kin. It reiterated Abdur Rahman's ruling that a "widow was to be free of the domination of her husband's family" (Gregorian 1969: 243), thus allowing her to choose her own husband. The new Code also placed restrictions on wedding expenses and "granted wives the right to appeal to the courts if their husband did not adhere to Quranic tenets regarding marriage" (Gregorian 1969: 244). While polygyny was not fully abolished, government workers were forbidden from taking more than one wife. In 1924, women were officially given the right to choose their husbands (Gregorian 1969: 244).

After a long setback during the Bacha-I-Saqaw (also known as Habibullah Ghazi) rule and that of his successor Nadir Khan, legal reforms were reintroduced in late 1959

during the reign of Daoud Khan. The 1964 constitution enfranchised women without the help of any suffragist movement. Modernizing-nationalist men remained the primary advocates of women's rights; the number of women involved in women's rights advocacy was small relative to the total female population, and was largely comprised of middle and upper class urban women (Dupree 1984: 309).

In 1973, while Mohammad Zahir was on a state trip to Europe, Daoud staged a coup. For the first time, Afghanistan became a republic, with Daoud as its first, self-proclaimed President. Initially Daoud Khan showed leftist tendencies, but soon realised the success of his government relied on the support of conservatives. In concessions to maintain the support of the tribal chiefs and religious leaders, he agreed to redress specific problems through a Penal Code (1976) and a Civil Law (1977). The Penal Code and Civil Law both followed the constitutional injunction that "there can be no law repugnant to the basic principles of the sacred religion of Islam" (Dupree 1984: 310). Thus while the Civil Law abolished child marriage and set the marriage age at 16 for girls, limiting the right of parents and guardians to wed a girl at the onset of puberty, it also legally entrenched men's right to divorce, child custody and defence of honour (Moghadam 1993: 220). The latter was a concession to conservative elements that wanted to combine religious tenets and tribal codes under the banner of Islam. The decree did not sanction honour killing. It did, however, allow a man to take measures against a disobedient wife, including verbal insults and physical abuse, justified in the name of 'defence of a man's honour' and on the basis that even Islam encouraged men to punish disobedient women.

Ultimately, Daoud's attempts to suppress the opposition, particularly the leftists, led to the overthrow of his government and his death in April 1978, when the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) staged a coup d'etat -- often referred to as the "Saur Revolution"¹ (Gupta 1986: 29). In the first three months of its rule, the PDPA split into two branches, Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Banner). Khalq remained a predominantly Pushtu party drawing members from the middle class; Parcham had a considerable number of Tajiks and some Pushtun members; its membership was drawn mainly from "more liberal, elitist families and mainly from Kabul" (Dupree 1984: 318).

On the legal front, the most important contribution of the Communist government was the introduction of decree No. 7, entitled "Dowry and Marriage Expenses" (Dupree 1984: 322). Similar to earlier modernizing decrees during the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan, his son and his grandson, the six-item document, aimed at eliminating the practices of bride-price, forced marriage and expensive wedding ceremonies. The minimum marriage age was set once again at 16 for females and 18 for males. But in a country where the rule of the central government had always been limited to few urban centers, and in which the tribes followed their own customary codes and traditions, such reforms seemed almost irrelevant.

Moreover, in a place like Afghanistan where a majority of women -- in rural areas, almost all women -- did not have any form of identity cards, it was not easy to know the exact age of the bride. Sometimes, parents or grandparents marked the birth of a child in the back page of a family copy of the Quran -- according to their own system of calculation -- often using seasons as opposed to monthly lunar or solar calendars. As late

¹ 'Saur' is the second month of the lunar calendar followed in Afghanistan.

as December 2000, in Niatak, an Afghan refugee village along the Iran-Afghan border, the majority of refugees did not know their age. One man told me that the *Mullah* in the village had marked his birthday in their family's copy of the Quran. However, since the Russian invasion and subsequent war left the *mullah* dead and the rest of the villagers scattered, he had no idea how old he was.

In that village, younger women and men often looked perplexed when I asked their age. One woman, with a look of some confusion mixed with sadness, guessed her age to be 20 or 30. Another man said he thought he was 34 or 35. I could hear the frustration in their voices as they struggled to come up with a number. Reactions of others suggested that it was not that important to their lives to know their age. This may have been true in their former homes in Afghanistan, but it obviously created problems once they crossed the border. Lack of information on individual refugees -- often factual data such as date of birth, date of marriage, age of spouse or children -- complicated the work of organizations that wanted to create a proper and accurate registry of all refugees.

Given such a background, attempts by the Communist government to raise the marriage age and punish families harshly when they did not comply with the new rules, were a failure from the start. In addition, the decrees issued by the newly-established Communist government were not an appeal to Islamic laws. They were instead inspired by socialist ideals and aimed at eliminating rural, feudal-tribal practices. In additions, existing problems with a more immediate effect on the lives of women in urban centers such as women's equal right to divorce, child custody, inheritance and employment were not addressed in the decree at all. Modeling itself after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution,

transforming the countryside into a modern Communist -- Russian-style -- state was the main objective of the government.

There was fierce universal resistance to the new marriage regulations which were coupled with compulsory education for girls. The government resorted to force to implement its policies. In the summer of 1978, even before the war, refugees began to pour into Pakistan, giving the forced and at times violent implementation of government programs as their main reason for leaving (Dupree 1992: 2).

3.5 Changing Environment

3.5.1 Women and Work

Women have always been part of the social and economic fabric in Afghanistan. Traditionally, their work has been concentrated inside the household -- from management to production and children's upbringing. Women have also worked outside the household, depending on their cultural, social and economic conditions. For the most part, however, agricultural activities were seen as a man's domain. Women in Afghanistan, like many women throughout the world, perceived the household work as part of their natural duties and did not attach any value to it. A woman's work was seen as her obligation towards her husband, children and family, whereas men's activities were almost always viewed as work.

Women's entry into the organized work force has been an urban phenomenon. Though Afghanistan has never had an industrial revolution, the development of institutions in the cities necessitated an organized working sector regulated by the state authorities. In its early stages, this work force did not include women, at least not in

large numbers. It was generally regarded as against a man's honour to let his wife, mother or sisters work. Whether because of tribal honour in rural areas or a result of class-consciousness in urban settings, women are placed on a pedestal of honour and dignity, fragility and elegance. It should also be acknowledged that women themselves often preferred not to work, particularly in blue-collar jobs. In fact, some saw working at certain jobs below the status of their family.

For many rural women, formal employment was not even an option. Some could not even contemplate it, since it was always seen as part of a man's world. This became obvious during my encounters in the refugee camps with middle-aged and elderly women. Though economic necessity and education had forced some changes towards female work remained largely negative. Since men are traditionally seen as the protectors and providers of the family, it reflected negatively on a man when a female member of his household worked for an income. Fear of losing control over women also prompted some men to forbid employment.

Similar to the case of education, new ideas about work affected only a handful of members of the upper class. A few elite women entered the work force when the first Dari-language women's weekly magazine, called *Irshad-i-Niswan* (Guide for Women), was established in 1921. Gradually women began to accept teaching jobs and work as secretaries and nurses, work seen as both morally safe and appropriate for women. But work in the sense of formal employment remained limited to major cities. By the 1960s, the first group of trained women doctors and engineers were graduating from Kabul University.

According to data from a UNICEF/UNIFEM workshop (August 1989) and another SIDA workshop (April 1993), Afghanistan in 1979 had a female population of 6.3 million, of whom 313, 000 were considered economically active (involved in the formal workforce). Eighty-five per cent of the 313, 000 were production-related workers, employed mainly in textiles (clothing and carpets). The other major category of employed women was “professional, technical, and related workers”, 1,300 women, or 4 per cent of the economically active female population. These women were mostly teachers, nurses, and government employees, secretaries, hairdressers, entertainers, and two or three parliamentarians -- members, in other words, of the small salaried middle class.

The Communist government established in 1978, paid little attention to the issue of women’s employment in particular, although a universal literacy program aimed at modernizing women was instituted. The Democratic Organization of Afghan Women was put in charge of women’s affairs. The organization, which lacked experience in dealing with real issues concerning women both in the city and outside it, concentrated on propagating the Communist government’s agenda. Much attention and energy were focused on women's participation in public rallies and gatherings organized in support of the government. State-controlled media continued to display women as successful agents of social change; interviews with women members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and women who had participated in promoting the revolutionary cause were regularly broadcast (Dupree 1984: 331).

These stage-managed, pro-government activities served only to widen the gap between modern and conservative elements. When women appeared on television as

dancers, actresses and singers, this only encouraged the belief among conservatives that women's education led to sexual anarchy. Anger was provoked even among moderate families, most of whom banned their daughters from attending school altogether (Personal communications Pakistan; February 1998).

Communist rule did, however, result to an increase in the female labor force in an indirect way. With a majority of men between the ages of 16 and 40 conscripted into the army and a considerable number joining the Mujahidin, women were forced to fill their place, simply to provide for their families. Ordinary women with little or no formal education began working in factories, hospitals, schools, hotels, restaurants, publishing houses and various government institutions as secretaries, maids, cooks, labourers and security guards. For the first time, many Afghan women recognized new abilities and a wider range of possibilities as their world expanded outside the private sphere (Moghadam 1993: 232-233; Personal communications, Pakistan; February 1998).

In the meantime, some of the Mujahidin forces themselves recruited women, particularly those from cities, by hiring them in their health clinics and schools in Pakistan as headmasters and teachers. In Pakistan, foreign NGOs hired Afghan women in various projects to help them with the implementation of their programs, especially those aimed at women. These instances, however, were exceptional. The conservative stance of some of the Mujahidin toward women's employment basically forced them to restrict their activities to household work. The difficulties of a refugee life, where qualified men can barely find proper jobs, left women with little opportunity to work.

Between 1992 and 1996, the city of Kabul was turned into a battlefield in which Tajiks, Pushtuns and Hazaras fought each other. The war had a catastrophic effect on the

women of Afghanistan. The new Mujahidin government made *hijab* -- head cover -- compulsory for women. While women could continue to work, the situation deteriorated as the ethnically-motivated war persisted: for the first time, women were used as weapons of war. Many Hazara women were tortured and used as sex-slaves by the Pushtun fighters; in revenge, Hazara fighters raped a defenceless group of Pushtun women, cutting off their breasts to outrage the enemy (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 1998). Tajiks -- members of the ruling Jamiat party -- were accused by both sides of watching the rape and torture of women, if not directly taking part.

Up to this point, respect for women, however superficial, had prevailed. Most Afghans will argue that because the honour of their country is symbolized by the honour of women, Afghan culture has a high regard for women. These incidents of ethnic conflict -- in which women were the most unfortunate, if not the only, victims -- set a new precedent. Whereas in the past women had been exchanged in marriage between tribes to prevent fighting, they had now become objects of violence -- weapons and victims of a bloody war.

As part of a backlash against the aggressive reforms of the Communist government and subsequent failure of the Mujahidin administration to restore peace and security, the Taliban sought to, in effect, restore moral order. Women, the torchbearers of national honour, were once again placed in a most disadvantageous and vulnerable position. Whether through genuine patriarchal concern or deliberate political manipulation, Taliban policies deprived women of what little they had gained.

Women's 'integrity' became the Taliban's main obsession. Women were ordered to stay home and banned from going to school or to work, attending public bathhouses or

seeking medical care in hospitals. They were to be covered from head to toe by a *burqa* or *chadori* -- an all-encompassing cloth with a small mesh for the eyes -- and accompanied by a male relative if they ventured outdoors (Dupree 1998: 152). All these Taliban decrees were allegedly in compliance with traditional norms.

The Taliban's laws were harshly enforced; violators were brutally punished. The Taliban "morality" campaign affected the urban centres most heavily; the women of Kabul -- many of them not accustomed to *chadori* -- were slow to follow the Taliban's instructions and many were assaulted and beaten in public by the Taliban's morality police. All this was done, ironically, for the sake of their 'integrity', their security and the nation's honour (Burns 1997: A6).

In October 2001, the United States and its allies' campaign against Al-Qaeda -- the organizers of the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania (September 11, 2001) -- brought an end to Taliban rule inside Afghanistan. Since the departure of the Taliban, women have been able to leave their homes, to go to work and school. However, lack of security has remained a major threat to the life and freedom of women in Afghanistan.

In June 2002, I observed that women who left their homes continued to wear the burqa. Some wore Pakistani style clothes with a long head cover. With refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran in large numbers -- the majority women and children -- the economic situation in the country remains chaotic. In the June 2002 *loya jerga* -- a traditional meeting of heads of tribes -- Afghan women, mostly from abroad, had a small but significant representation. Two women, Sema Samar and Sema Wali, were appointed

to the new cabinet; several others also took administrative positions. Though symbolic, this could have a positive effect on women's situation in the country.

3.5. 2 Health

Afghanistan has generally been categorized as one of the poorest countries in the world, with low life expectancy, high infant mortality, and malnutrition. Medical facilities have been available only in the capital and a number of other cities. But medical facilities as we know them in the West -- doctors, nurses, hospitals and other healthcare units -- do not have a long history in Afghanistan. People in Afghanistan have relied on natural, herbal and at times spiritual remedies, as well as local men or women. Sometimes, *mullahs* performed a sort of shamanism to rid patients of 'bad spirits' and cure certain diseases.

Given the conservative nature of traditional Afghanistan, women did not have much access to health services. First of all, there were not many facilities at their disposal, especially in faraway villages. Secondly, even when they were a short distance from a local clinic or hospital, women could not simply leave their homes for a visit to the hospital. They had to be brought in by their menfolk. Well-to-do families might be able to send for a doctor.

Despite its conservatism, rural Afghanistan showed little resistance to doctors. In fact, the only time a tribal man made an exception for his wife, mother or daughter to be examined by a stranger, man or woman, was with a doctor, albeit with the wife's face covered. My father, a medical doctor, witnessed many such occasions in the days of his work in various Pushtun, Hazara and Turkoman tribes. Women themselves were shy and

preferred female doctors. However, there were not enough doctors in general, let alone female doctors. This complicated the situation for women who suffered from gynecological problems, but were not able to communicate this to male doctors.

In the villages as well as in parts of the cities, an elderly woman often acted as midwife. Mothers and grandmothers were regarded as possessing the wisdom to help a young woman get pregnant, give birth and raise a child. Even when doctors and hospitals were available, traditional families preferred to deliver at home. As complications developed, those with access to hospitals rushed to see a doctor. Others relied on homemade remedies. Consecutive pregnancies, hard labour during childbirth and the responsibility of raising a large family left many young women exhausted and in fragile health.

Some health programs were developed to address problems of women's health. In the late 1970s, with the help of the World Health Organization, the government established a number of Child-Mother Health Protection clinics. The function of these clinics was to offer general health facilities to all, particularly to women and children. The clinics offered a monthly ration of wheat, powdered milk and baby food for registered mothers and children, as well as birth control. Traditionally, however, the majority of the population preferred large families and sons were favoured over daughters.

However, according to Dr. Azizullah Saidali, vice president of the Indira Gandhi Children's hospital in Kabul in 1989, mothers and children continued to suffer from simple problems such as malnutrition: "Babies typically have low birth weight, generally a function of the poor health of the mothers, who often suffer from anemia... 60 per cent

of children under-five suffered from malnutrition” (Moghadam 1993:238). The UNDP’s Human Development Report suggests that by 1990, only 29 per cent of the total Afghan population (15 million) had access to health services, and 80 per cent of those were from urban areas. Thus a majority of the rural population who made up the first wave of refugees to Iran and Pakistan in the 1980s was unlikely to have seen a doctor or hospital or to have much knowledge about basic healthcare and hygiene. The issue of women’s health in the refugee camps has been a challenge both for the women themselves and aid organizations in the host countries.

CHAPTER FOUR

Change and Resistance to Change

4.1 A Refugee Camp in Iran

4.1.1 Introduction

Within the Saveh camp, refugees live in isolation. Ethnic/linguistic differences prevent Afghan refugees of different groups from having much personal contact, though they live in close proximity to one another. Afghans and Iranians rarely mingle because of the physical isolation of the camp. A supervisory group of six Iranians arrives each day from a nearby city to run the camp. Up to six armed security guards keep watch over the activities of the camp from their shabby hut at the entrance. Occasionally, Afghan men come to chat with them. Women generally stay at home.

Despite the lack of any contact, the environment of the host country does affect the daily life of refugee women. In this chapter, I discuss the pattern of change in refugee women's life. Marriage, health and education are the hallmark of change, however limited and largely unseen. Given that change, for the most part, is the outcome of an undesirable refugee life, there is some resistance to it. But as it will be illustrated, the refugee women have resigned themselves to adapting to the new living environment. I also examine Iranian government policies on Afghan refugees and the living conditions and status of refugees in the Saveh refugee camp, about 130 kilometers southwest of the Iranian capital, Tehran.

4.2 Khotoon's Wedding

Khotoon was only two years old (February 2001) when I attended her wedding in the Saveh refugee camp. Held in her mother's arms, she was crying profusely. Khotoon was not aware of what was happening in her life. Her mother, Norbebi, 21, was rocking the child-bride in her arms to stop her crying. Khotoon was being given into marriage to her 8-year-old cousin.

I found the young groom outside, playing with a few other boys his age in the dust and mud of the refugee camp. It is your wedding day, right? I asked. He shied away and let another boy -- slightly older and taller -- speak for him. "Yes, it is." Does it make you happy? I addressed the question to the groom. Again, he shied away. Other boys around him laughed. One told him he should say 'yes'. I asked the groom again, do you like to be married? He nodded and blushed. Walking backwards -- step by step -- he wanted to leave me and play with his companions.

Back at the bride's house, the yard -- surrounded by clay walls -- was packed with young and old ladies, all dressed in brightly-coloured embroidered clothes and head covers that barely reached their foreheads. Their hands bore various designs of henna, their nails painted. A group of women, taking careful steps, were moving in a circle while playing a musical instrument called a 'dyera' (drum). They were singing a wedding song:

*"My dearest love, you are my apple and my plum.
You, my dear cousin, you are my happiness and joy.
I wish to see you next to me, my dearest love".*

Girls as young as 11 wore red and green make-up with small artificial silver sparkles on their cheeks and lips. Their thick black, wavy hair flowed over their thin

shoulders and swayed as they moved their heads left and right to the sound of the drum. They were all already married.

I asked Norbebi whether Khotoon wasn't too young to be married. She replied, "Oh, no -- she is not going to her husband's house now. Not to worry, we will only send her when she is nine." Then she went on to explain why they were holding the children's wedding now. "My husband's brother has only one son and we have one daughter. We wanted them to marry because my husband and his brother wanted to make sure our children's names are put together -- so when they grow they won't marry someone else." I asked her what would happen when Khotoon was nine. "Then the groom's family will organize a wedding party and they will come and take the bride," she said.

Among the Makozai tribe of Pushtun Afghans, marrying young and within close family -- particularly cousins -- is a common practice. Norbebi herself was married to her cousin when she was nine. They lived in a small village in the Afghan western province of Orezgan. Both families owned a patch of land. Norbebi's father suffered from poor health and had no sons from either of his marriages. Norbebi was given in marriage to her cousin to keep the family ties closer, and to give her father a helping hand. Norbebi's father had seven daughters; his brother, however, had four sons and five daughters.

Norbebi does not remember much about her wedding. But she remembers that there was always an exchange of gifts between the families of the bride and groom in her village. The groom's family also paid a considerable sum of money to the bride's family as a bride-price. On special occasions --at New Year and the two Eids -- the groom's family would send a new set of clothes to the bride's house and, depending on the

financial status of the family, a sheep or calf. Meanwhile, the bride's family would prepare an elaborate wardrobe for the bride, to be sent with her to her husband's house after the wedding.

In Norbebi's village, a woman only left her parents' home on the night of her wedding. The bride did not return to her family home for one year -- it would be considered shameful for her to do so. However, her family -- often her sisters and mother -- could visit the girl in her in-laws' house. After a year, the bride could visit her family and often took a newborn child for an extended visit that might last up to three months. However, Norbebi never took her first born to her parent's home. She was newly married when they fled to Iran. Her two first sons were born in Ghazween -- another Iranian town. Khotoon and her third son were born in Saveh.

The circumstances of Khotoon's marriage are going to be different. While in exile, neither family can afford to exchange expensive gifts, nor can they prepare a wardrobe for the bride to take next door to her in-laws. The economic restraints of a refugee life do not allow the groom's family to pay a bride-price. Such traditional practices have come to a halt not because of these refugees' willingness or desire, but rather as result of 'imposed difficulties' of life in exile, according to Norbebi. The refugee women in the camp sadly note these obvious changes. These particular ceremonial practices -- with substantial economic underpinning -- are seen as negative changes. Norbebi has a tear drying in the corner of her eye when she talks about them. They do not reflect positively on the economic status of her family, she says.

However, there is another aspect to the story Norbebi recounts, though almost without realizing what it really means. If they were in Afghanistan and could not afford

to exchange money in the form of bride-price, organize an elaborate wedding and send her daughter away with piles of gifts, it would have affected Khotoon's future. She might have been looked down upon by rival brides in the family and by her in-laws. But in a refugee camp in Iran, it is unlikely that she will ever be criticized or less respected. Because both families are affected by the same financial problems, they both know the limitations imposed on them by the reality of a refugee life. In fact, there is a strong sense of sympathy and gestures of kindness towards the baby bride. Her mother-in-law remarks that "the poor child will not have much to start her life with here." But she is adamant that her son will try to make her happy despite everything.

In that context, Khotoon's wedding represents a settled change that has taken place in the life of Makozai Pushtun women. It is not welcomed happily. But to the women's understanding, it has brought about an acceptance of the loss of certain centuries-old tribal practices that would not have been so readily discarded if life had gone as usual inside Afghanistan. Here, in a refugee camp, without any laws or decrees, the community has come to accept a change Afghan rulers and reformers had been unable to institute.

It could certainly be argued that the agony of life in exile and the losses these refugees have gone through can hardly make up for such miniscule gains. Nevertheless, they are part of their lives now, though they are not being celebrated as a wonderful experience. The question that remains unanswered is what will happen if and when the refugees return home. Could such changes survive the tendency to revert to old ways, particularly in the familiar environment of their villages?

There is, moreover, some resistance to these changes even while in exile. Parents fear losing control over their children's marriage and future life. According to Norbebi, while everyone has accepted that they cannot control the unfortunate economic situation, they do try to control other aspects of life such as choice of a spouse. Hence the families act, and act quickly. Norbebi's husband and brother-in-law were keen on this early wedding ceremony precisely because of the economic and social conditions of refugee life. Khotoon's father was worried that a total stranger might ask for Khotoon's hand. The groom's father had been worried that someone with more money might have offered a handsome bride-price for Khotoon and that his brother would have accepted it. "Hardly possible," says Khotoon's mother. "But a real enough fear," she says, that it "got our men thinking."

Within the village community, all families knew each other. There was trust and loyalty. There was also a harsh punishment for those who betrayed the tribal code. Here, however, in the open field of a refugee environment, the next door neighbour is a total stranger. He may be another Pushtun, possibly even from a good family, but "it is not the same," says Norbebi. In such a place, it could have been possible for Khotoon to end up marrying a total stranger. Or her cousin might not have wanted to marry her if he was a little older and could make his way to the nearby city to work. He would have been independent and could have refused to obey the family. In either case, "there would have been a break-up between the two families, an unmendable break," says Khotoon's new mother-in-law. Several stories were told and retold in the camp about a few young, single men, who had left home, never to return, and two young girls (11 and 12) who had refused to marry their cousins. They remained anonymous, despite my constant

questioning and desire to know more about them and their circumstances. Everyone blamed life in exile.

In Afghan villages, girls were given in marriage at 8 or 9 years of age, and boys at 14. The idea was for the boy to be old enough to live up to his responsibilities as a husband. In the refugee camp, however, the age of those given into marriage -- both boys and girls -- was much younger. Insecurity rather than tradition had prompted Khotoon's early engagement. The mothers, sharing their husband's fear, had agreed. "It is safer and better for everyone now," says Khotoon's mother-in-law. "The children will grow up with peace of mind and we will have ours as well." After putting their minds at ease, Norbebi says, both brothers have gone to the city of Saveh to work. They will not be back for a month. But Norbebi is hoping that they will come home with a little extra money so she can begin to prepare a small wardrobe for her daughter's real wedding.

In the Saveh camp, a wedding takes place every few days. The women usually gather in the yard of a house -- surrounded by clay walls, using hanging clothes to construct 'doors' with clothes and broken car windowshields as windows -- to celebrate these weddings. They go through this routine every few days as one after another member of the family is giving into marriage, often at a very young age. Since life in exile offers few amusement, women take advantage of weddings for social purposes. While the women celebrate, men go to work or gather in front of the main refugee supervisory office to talk and trim their beards under the sunshine, pondering other changes offered by life in exile.

4. 3 Afghan Refugees and the Islamic Republic's Policies

The Saveh refugee camp comprises around 500 households, each with between 6 and 13 members. The majority are Pushtuns from the Makozai, Norzahi and Bakhteyari tribes. There are about 10 Hazara households. Both ethnic groups are tribally organized. In Afghanistan, they lived in isolation from one another, often separated by mountain ranges. Here in the refugee camp, they are forced to share a stretch of flat land, but they have imitated the isolated lifestyle of their home villages. The communities do not mix, even occasionally. In spite of a common language -- Pushtu -- shared by all Pushtuns, tribal identity remains stronger than ethnicity. Most of these refugees identify themselves first as members of their tribe, and only then as members of an ethnic community. They define themselves as Afghans only in reference to their status as refugees.

Like the majority of Afghan refugees, residents of the Saveh refugee camp came to Iran during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. At that time, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran had both pragmatic and ideological reasons for welcoming them. The war with Iraq meant that there was a need for extra manpower in the country, and the Iranian government's foreign policy stressed the unity of Muslim brotherhood across national boundaries. At its peak -- at the end of the 1991 Gulf War -- the refugee population in Iran (including Iraqis) reached around 4 million. Afghans accounted for about three quarters of this figure.

During this period, Afghans settled independently in various parts of Iran. Having fled rural Afghanistan, most of the Saveh refugees settled originally in the Iranian city of Ghazween, north of Tehran. "They established their villages around the city," says Zabeullah, a resident from the nearby city of Saveh who began work as one of the

supervisors in this camp 12 years ago, when the camp was just established. In 1987, the Iranian authorities designated a part of the desert land around Saveh -- connected to the city via a treacherous 7-kilometer road -- as a refugee camp and moved the Afghans there. "Here, they continue to live as they lived in their villages in Afghanistan," says Zabeullah.

Iran's policies towards the refugees have had a profound effect on the creation and expansion of camps like Saveh. Between 1992 and 1994, the government began a sustained campaign to repatriate all refugees, particularly Afghans. The major repatriation took place in Khorassan province (bordering Herat province in Afghanistan). It is estimated that at that time over one million Afghans returned to their country. As part of preparation for further repatriation, the Iranian government began grouping Afghan refugees in designated areas. In addition to Saveh, I visited two other locations where refugees had been brought to live: Niatak, on the south-eastern Iran-Afghanistan border, and Gulshahar, about 40 kilometers from the city of Mashad, near the north-eastern frontier with Afghanistan.

The government department dealing with refugees is the Iranian Ministry of the Interior's Bureau for Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA). Almost all Afghans arriving before 1992 were given 'blue cards', which proved legal refugee status. Those who arrived between 1992 and 1994 were issued temporary cards at the end of 1994, which were renewed but finally expired in 1996. After this, very few of the new arrivals were granted documents.

Afghans in Iran who have documents or 'blue cards', have the right of residence and the right to use educational, health and other government services. They must register

in their district of residence and can travel only with a permit. Afghans without documents and holders of now expired temporary cards, (all referred to as 'undocumented' or 'illegal') are not allowed to use government social services or to work. In theory, they have not even been permitted to enter Iran. They are subject to deportation without appeal. There are no statistics for undocumented Afghans in Iran. All Afghans, even documented, are considered 'temporary guests' expected, ultimately, to return to Afghanistan. There is no question of Afghans being granted citizenship, even those with documents which show they have been in Iran for 20 or more years. Nor is there any question of their children, born and brought up in Iran, being recognized eventually as Iranian citizens (Squire 2000: 3).

The Iranian upper classes hire Afghans as security guards, doorkeepers, cleaners, office or house servants, and gardeners. They prefer Afghans since they cost less than the regular Iranian employees. In addition, Afghans are perceived to be hardworking and loyal. Afghans have also taken over the labour market at constructions sites. They provide cheap labour, with less responsibility on the part of the employer. There is no place that an Afghan refugee can go to complain about poor working conditions, mistreatment or even abuse -- particularly since the adoption of the repatriation program in the early 1990s.

Afghans who came to Iran during the 1980s found employment in various sectors of the economy. The majority worked in Iranian factories manufacturing leather goods, shoes, textiles, industrial products, iron and gas. Afghans from wealthier backgrounds opened their own small factories and shops, themselves providing employment for other

refugees. In the city of Mashad, an entire market -- known as the 'Afghan Passage' -- was home to more than 30 shops, which were all owned and operated by Afghans.

But when the new government policy was directed towards repatriation, Afghan businesses were forced to close down. Holders of the 'blue card' maintained the right to work in a limited number of sectors (mainly low-paid, hazardous or labouring jobs). Illegal refugees were not allowed to work at all. The new policies further displaced the refugee population within Iran, forcing some to return to Afghanistan and into the refugee camps.

At the time of this study (June 2000), there were 7 refugee camps in Iran. They include Shahid Naseri (near the city of Saveh), Ansar (Semnan), Dalaki (Bushehr), Rafsanjan (Rafsanjan), Bardsir (Bardsir), Niatak (Zabol) and Torbat-e-Jam (Torbat-e-Jam). However, according to a UNHCR monthly report on Refugees from the 1.3 million Afghan refugees only about 5 per cent live in the camps (UNHCR 1999: Annex 1).

In the Saveh camp, each family receives a monthly ration of 8 kilograms of flour, 3 kilograms of rice, 60 kilograms of oil and two packs of sugar. Refugees have to supplement their needs from the market in the city of Saveh. A one-way taxi ride costs 200 tomans (30 US cents), a pick-up car about half of this amount (15 US cents). Several families -- often close relatives -- share a pick-up car to bring their food supplies to the camp. There is sufficient water, but the refugees have to buy their own wood for cooking and heating. According to the refugees, the monthly ration is scarcely enough and the cost of living -- given their own financial situation -- is high. Men who wish to work as labourers outside the camp must obtain a temporary permit from the Iranian authorities;

but they must find employment for this period and must report back to the camp authorities upon their return.

4.3.1 Education

A school has existed in the Saveh refugee camp since 1991, offering classes from grade one to five and with a total of 106 students attending class. Next to the supervisor's offices are three interconnected rooms. Corrugated iron has been used to provide shade for the rooms, but the school is poorly equipped and attended. The Saveh camp school is run and funded by the Iranian Ministry of Education, with some support from UNHCR. The curriculum and exam system is exactly the same as that of other Iranian schools.

As in all Iranian schools, teaching in the camp schools is in Persian. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, all textbooks were completely revised. Children are expected to memorize a summary of each lesson; the schools generally rely on traditional techniques of repetition, rote learning and memorization. There is also a heavy reliance on parental involvement in homework. Given that the parents of most refugee children lack any formal education and that some are resistant to sending their children to school, parental support and involvement cannot be relied on. In fact, most families agree to send their children to school in order to keep them busy, particularly since there are no other activities in the camp such as sports, parks, and playgrounds. Some mothers support the idea of having young boys sent to school so they will keep out of trouble.

Subjects taught to children in primary schools consist of Persian Literature, Grammar, Maths, Science, religious studies and Quran in grades one and two, with the

addition of Iranian-centered social studies in grades three through five. There are no additional classes or textbooks relevant to Afghan students, either for Pushtu language study or the history and geography of Afghanistan, excepting rudimentary information such as the chief cities, climate, and so on.

The school in the Saveh camp is poorly attended especially by girls. To encourage families to allow their daughters to attend school, the camp offers them an extra kilo of rice, or an extra pot of cooking oil. “They will come and attend school for that particular month,” says Zabeullah, an Iranian working in the camp. “But when the month is over, the families don’t let them return to school. They use food or work permits as an incentive, but it does not last very long.

Zargul is from Samangan in central Afghanistan. Her father was a landowner who was responsible for a large extended family. Zargul grew up with her cousins. Boys in her family went to the mosque to learn how to recite the Quran. Girls worked at home, learning how to bake bread, sew and cook. They occasionally accompanied their mothers to visit relatives and attend weddings but never learned how to read or write.

Education in Zargul’s town was oral. Very few knew how to write. She recalled a young man who used to come to their home at least once a week to visit her father and help him with his accounts. Zargul and her sisters and cousins used to watch him arrive, and then leave as their father would always accompany him back to the thick wooden door.

Zargul was given into marriage when she was 14. Soon after the extravagant wedding party, Zargul, her husband and his family fled Afghanistan. They have been living in Iran for the past 19 years. All four of her children were born in Iran; the eldest

daughter is 14 and already married, having attended the Saveh camp school up to grade five. Zargul's son, who is 12, also completed grade five and is now helping his father as a labourer. The third daughter, age 10, only attended school up to grade two, and the younger one, 8, has never been to the school. "My husband asks what use the girls will make of their studies," recounts Zargul. "He says that they should stay home to help me." Zargul says that the hardships of refugee life mean that she has grown weaker over the years and now needs help in running the house. "It is good for the girls to learn how to run a home," explains Zargul. "Soon, the rest will be married."

Aysha, Zargul's eldest daughter -- married and about four months pregnant -- is pleased that she had a chance to attend school. Coming from an area of Afghanistan where there were few schools, and none for girls, it is an accomplishment for Aysha's generation even to be aware of education, let alone to read and write. Aysha has no say in her parents' decisions over her younger sisters' education, but she is certain she wants her own children to attend school. Aysha's way of thinking about female education reflects a change. Had she continued to live in their village in Afghanistan, she would have "not known much about education and certainly would have not thought much of it," she says. She believes one of the reasons her parents did not object to her education was that her brother accompanied her to school. Now that her brother works, however, the family is reluctant to allow the two other young girls to leave the house alone. Aysha thinks her mother has also come to realize that there is nothing wrong with female education, "but she cannot disagree" with their father, she sighs. She is certain that her father is worried about what other refugees are saying about the camp school and particularly female education.

There is much discussion among the camp community about the families who send their children, specifically their girls, to school and about the supposedly bad effects of girls' education. "They say that they [teachers] are brainwashing our children," explains Aysha with a little hesitation. "People say that the teaching in school is designed to change our language and religion." Aysha's mother interrupts to say that school education has never been a part of their culture and tradition. "No one dies from not studying," says Zargul. "Life in exile is hard and we already have enough problems to worry about. We cannot afford to create more worries for ourselves by inviting people to talk about us too."

As I soon discovered, lack of interest in the education of children was in part due to the fact that these refugees were from Pushtun ethnic group, and thus predominately Pushtu-speaking Sunnis. In the meantime, the school authorities -- including the teachers -- were Persian-speaking Shiite Iranians. Refugees feared that through an educational system, their children were going to lose their Afghan (Pushtun) identity. Mistrust dominated the refugees' mind, who claimed that the camp authorities knew little about their Pushtun culture, language or tradition, or mocked these as irrelevant and backwards. There was also a mutual disinterest. Both sides showed no interest in learning about the other. The Pushtun refugees felt they had learned enough Persian to communicate and get by while living in Iran and wished to be left alone by the authorities. The authorities, for their part, viewed themselves and their culture as superior and did not feel the need to know anything more about the refugees than factual information needed for paperwork.

Thus, generally, the camp supervisors looked down upon the refugees and their culture. Zabeullah admitted to me that he had such feelings about the refugees he was

supposed to supervise. He felt sorry for them, pitied them for their lack of education and disliked them for their 'uncleanliness'. "I feel bad for them, because they all have lost their homes and have suffered a great deal from the war," he says. "They [refugees] have large families, most men have two or three wives, their children play in the dirt and dust all day long under the sun, their wives {my apologies for saying this} don't wash." Since they are "all villagers", he concluded, they are very backward and unaware of modern life. Zabeullah admitted that he saw a big difference between the refugees and himself, and even between the refugees and poor Iranians who were nevertheless 'cleaner and smarter'. As I discussed the issue with other Iranians, I gathered that Zabeullah was not alone in his way of thinking.

For reasons mentioned earlier, there has been little change towards female education among the refugees in the Saveh camp. The main obstacle has been differences in language. In addition, the majority of refugees belong to the Sunni sect of Islam and fear that teaching and textbooks which highlight the history, tradition and practices of Shiites are a method of indoctrinating their children with Shiism. Nevertheless, it seemed that among some women there was an interest and willingness to see their daughters learn how to read and write, as long as they also helped their mothers with the housework. However, this view was kept secret from the men, who generally had a negative attitude towards female education. Male attitudes were in part influenced by their relations with the Iranian camp authorities.

It was, however, easy to observe a change in the attitude of a younger generation of women (aged approximately 14 to 25) towards education, particularly those who had a chance to be part of a classroom, even for a few months. This marks a change from the

previous generation of women (aged approximately 30 to 45) who not only knew little about education, but also saw it in the same light as most conservative men -- as a bad influence. Resistance from the older generation was inspired by fear that they would lose control over their children.

4.3.2 Health

There is a health clinic in the camp. It consists of one room, which is always locked. A doctor comes from outside the camp once a week to attend to the patients. Those requesting a visit must present themselves in the yard next to the supervisor's offices and wait for the doctor, who examines each patient and either gives them medication or a prescription. The refugees have to purchase these medicines from the city with their own money. In an emergency, refugees are given permission to take a patient to the hospital in a nearby city, although transportation is rare and expensive. The camp supervisors work from 8:30 in the morning until 2:00 pm. There is an Iranian guard present in the camp, and no one may enter or exit without a permit from the camp authorities or from the Interior Ministry.

The most frequent female medical problems are chronic arthritis and difficulties in childbirth. Refugee women blame their chronic pains on lack of activity as well as the nature of the clay/mud camp houses in which they live. Back in their villages, these women used to move around large compounds, which were often surrounded by walls. They used to bake, cook, wash clothes and clean up. Each activity was accorded a special location in the compound, between which the women would move several times a day. But here in the camp, they have only a small area for movement. Now the longest

distance they travel to is to the health clinic, about 40 feet from their homes. Today, they bake, cook, wash and clean in the same spot, in a tiny area of front yard. Refugees live in clay houses that are built without foundations directly on the soft ground. The humidity from the earth below can be felt even when one walks over the carpet -- and most refugees do not have proper covering for their floors. They have no furniture and sit and sleep on the floor. Nearly all the men and women to whom I spoke complained about arthritic pain.

The second largest problem, both for camp supervisors and refugee women, is childbirth. According to the supervisors, the average birthrate in the camp is 36 per month. Refugee women are not in the habit of using contraceptives and prefer to give birth at home. They often do not report their pregnancy to the camp doctor and supervisors usually do not hear about the child unless they constantly follow up and question refugees or when a complication has developed as a result of home birth. In the view of the supervisors, the refugee women, out of ignorance, neglect their reproductive health.

Refugee women offer a different view. Back home they never heard of contraceptives. They gave birth to their first child, fed it milk from the breast for two years, and then got pregnant with a second, third, fourth and fifth child, with a distance of at least two years between each pregnancy. Abortion was always viewed as a sin. Occasionally, when they lost a child, they would attribute this to "God's will". But they never prevented a pregnancy or a child's birth. When they are offered information on birth control at the camp, they are frightened. In fact, the majority distrusts the Iranian

camp supervisors and Iranian doctor, suspecting that they want to eliminate their race by controlling their fertility.

The Iranian government, on the other hand, has implemented an active, religiously-justified birth control program throughout Iran. This was developed as a response to the need of Iranians, particularly when in the years after the Islamic Revolution the population of the country nearly doubled. Refugees in the camp, who have little contact with the larger Iranian society, are not fully aware of this situation. It is partly for this reason that they conclude that birth control is designed to reduce their numbers. The sense of paranoia seems to be directed among the Pushtun refugee population both at education and birth control.

Most refugee women informed me that they do not mind talking about their pregnancy to the camp doctor or even listening to his advice. But they do not feel comfortable with a male doctor. "If there is a female doctor, we will talk to her, but not to a male doctor," says Bakhtyar. "It is unacceptable in our culture and tradition." Culturally, it is considered shameful for women to speak with men about these issues; they will not even talk to their own men inside the house about it. "When I had my youngest daughter, my own son and father-in-law did not know about it until she was born," brags Bakhtyar, adding that it is important for a woman to maintain her and her family's honour.

Back in Afghanistan, women had a traditional support network to aid them in pregnancy and childbirth. Each village or tribe had its own set of elders who acted as experts. There were those who helped women with the delivery of a baby, especially if it was a first child. A group of women -- often mothers, grandmothers and mother-in-laws

-- regularly offered help and advice to pregnant women in the family. Here, in exile, that base of support has been eliminated, and no viable alternative has filled the gap. In a refugee camp, pregnant women have to rely on whatever help they can get.

Akhtar is a mother of 8 children, all but the last of which was born in Afghanistan. But she has never been to a hospital or visited a doctor. Akhtar wanted to go to a hospital for her last child, but the medical authorities there asked for one million toman (\$ 1400.00 US) -- a sum no one in the refugee camp can afford.

A combination of various problems, including poor housing, insufficient diet, and lack of physical activity has resulted in health problems for these refugee women. These problems have been compounded by lack of a female doctor, lack of access to healthcare facilities, and the absence of the traditional system of support.

4.4. Analysis

A few small, but significant practical changes that are evident in the life of refugee women at Saveh. Afghan women refugees in this camp have had to accept changes imposed by their life in exile. Economic restraints of life in exile have discouraged the kind of extravagant weddings, elaborate gifts and bride-wardrobes that refugees used to enjoy in their villages in Afghanistan. The majority can no longer afford to pay any bride-price; thus a common traditional practice has been eliminated. Yet children are still given into marriage at a very young age. The insecurity of refugee life has prompted some parents to marry their children at an even younger age than they used to in their villages inside Afghanistan.

While education is not a priority for refugee families, they have been introduced to the idea of school outside the mosque. Some have taken advantage of the camp school and attended classes. Enrollment among female students has been low, but some have taken an interest in female education.

As far health, lack of physical activity has resulted in the development of chronic pains for most women. Multiple pregnancies and childbirth puts women at great risk, particularly in the absence of the traditional system of close community support to which they were accustomed in Afghanistan -- while at the same time, the limitations of camp life prevent them from considering other options.

Many refugees resist the changes happening in their life. There are many reasons for such resistance. The most obvious ones are linguistic and religious differences. The language of the majority of refugees at Saveh is Pushtu -- quite different from Persian, the common spoken language in Iran. Very few refugee women (and few men) speak and understand Persian and only use it when they converse with Iranians. The majority also belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, while 90 per cent of Iranians are Shiite Muslim.

Failure to take these differences into account and address the needs and concerns of refugees has resulted in skepticism and resistance towards change on the part of this particular group of refugees. This failure largely stems from lack of interest on the part of Iranian and UN authorities in designing their programs and policies for refugees in the camp. The Iranian authorities think that it is the UN's job to accommodate refugees' needs. The best they can do, in their view, is to provide them with basic living space and a few services. The UN, on the other hand, assumes it is the Iranian authorities that

should be held responsible -- particularly since the Iranian authorities regulate all UN relations with the refugees.

There is also another underlying assumption on the part of both the UN and the Iranian camp supervisors. From their point of view, it is sufficient to provide refugees with basic needs such as housing and food rations. While that attitude may be useful when there is a refugee crisis, it hardly serves a camp that has been in place for over a decade, with a refugee population that has lived over twenty years in Iran. In the meantime, the refugees find themselves caught in bureaucratic battles. They feel stranded in a world of physical hardship and psychological conflict with the environment and changes it imposes on them.

There are a hosts of other reasons that cause resistance to change, subtle reasons embedded in the culture and thus not readily understood by all male Iranian camp supervisors or UN foreign aid workers. For example, it is generally perceived that the refugees refuse to use contraceptives merely because they place value on larger families. That is quite true. But there are also other factors. These include fear, shame, and pride. These are very difficult and complex problems to overcome, especially for a refugee woman who lives in an inhospitable environment and faces pressure from camp authorities that pull her into one direction, while her culture and husband often expect absolute obedience on the other.

It would require a 'cultural translator' to help camp supervisors and aid workers understand these problems. However, based on my observation, no attempt was made to hire Afghan teachers or nurses -- though such resources were available in the cities. This would have helped reduce resistance to change.

Building trust is also important. It was quite evident in the Saveh refugee camp that neither side had began to work through this. The refugees were open in admitting that they did not trust their hosts. They feel themselves to be a threatened minority. At the same time, the Iranian camp authorities -- mostly urbanized, with some form of formal education -- acknowledged that they look down upon these "rural, uneducated" people.

One issue that demonstrated the mistrust between both sides was housing. Housing was at the heart of a dispute between the refugees and the camp authorities when I visited the camp for the first time in May 2000. When the refugees had first moved to the camp, they had built their homes in the style of their villages in Afghanistan. The houses were in some cases interconnected, so it was difficult for the camp authorities to know the exact number of residents in each household. They wanted the refugees to demolish these homes and build a set of new houses according to a map designed by the authorities. This would give the government greater control over the household as well as the activities of each family.

All the old and new houses were build from mud -- using soft soil -- which after a few rainfalls began to deteriorate. On the day of Khotoon's wedding, the houses were once more undergoing their usual repairs after three days of rain had demolished parts of the walls and most of the rooftops. In the yard where the ladies were singing and dancing, there was still rainwater and the roof was a shambles. I asked Khotoon's mother if it was really a good day for a wedding. "It always rains and the roofs come crumbling down on us," she said. "Our men are gone to the city and until they come back -- or some other relatives manage to come and fix our house -- there is nothing we can do

about it. My husband had agreed on today as Khotoon's wedding day and we didn't want to put it off because of the weather. It is always like this anyway." She spoke these last words with a sigh of fatigue and resignation.

Surrounded by the half-ruined clay walls, the colourful ceremony went on. Khotoon was fast asleep in the small, dry corner of the striped blanket that covered the floor of the room where three quarters of the roof had fallen through. Norbebi, sitting near her child, was lost in thought. Women's voices echoed in the empty, desolate air as I left the ruined refugee camp that looked like a half-destroyed village.

4.5 Conclusion

Life in refugee camp is very confined, with limited access to the outside world. Nonetheless, the environment has imposed some changes on the lives of the Afghan refugee women with whom this study deals. There is, however, also considerable resistance to change on the part of the refugees who must deal with a complex set of problems at the same time that they suffer from fear of losing their culture. This fear impacts particularly strongly on women, since they are the bearers of traditional values. However, as will be seen in the following chapter, not all Afghan refugees in Iran have had the same experiences, nor has the sort and degree of change been the same everywhere.

CHAPTER FIVE

Accepting Change

5.1 Refugees in the City -Iran

5.1.1 Introduction

Life in the city is different from life in the refugee camp for Afghan women. They have a better chance of being exposed to a new environment that in turn affects their view of life and of themselves. They have also arrived in a society where developments concerning women's life are taking place. These include birth control programs and an ongoing, lively debate about the rights of women. The presence of women in the streets, shops, on television screens and in other sectors of everyday life helps Afghan women compare their lives to their counterparts in Iran. The result is a questioning by Afghan women of practices and culture that used previously to seem acceptable and normal.

This chapter discusses the living conditions of Afghan refugees in a suburb of Tehran. The analytical framework concentrates on actual changes taking place in these women's life. In addition to general information about the refugees and their current condition, the host country's refugee policies are also briefly discussed. I go on to examine how exposure to a new urban environment and changes in the pattern of everyday life have enhanced women's self-awareness. I further discuss how women's growing self-awareness affects practical and tangible matters such as education, marriage and reproductive health. I also investigate how such awareness challenges existing views that were established by tradition and culture in the home country.

5.2 Masoudeya Suburb

The crowded town of Masoudeya stands in the far southeastern corner of the city of Tehran. A large community of Afghans, nearly all from the Hazara ethnic background, lives there. Most of these families fled the rural central Afghanistan plain about 20 years ago. The majority used to live in various suburbs of Tehran before moving to Masoudeya, which offered cheaper though poor quality housing. There are some employment possibilities in the area, and most refugee men work on construction sites. Others work as carpenters, tailors and weavers.

A life of exile has brought many changes for the women in this community. They used to get married at a very young age -- 9 to 13 -- and would raise a large family. They lived in a closed community in which education was not a subject worthy of much attention. The *mullah*, the religious leader of the community, advised the head of the tribe, while the rest of the people followed the instructions of both men in matters of life and death. Women were expected to learn the skills of their mothers and boys the jobs of their fathers. The rest -- marriage, divorce, buying and selling property -- was left to the community elders. In their towns and villages in Afghanistan, Hazara women did play an active socio-economic role, although they never realized the importance of their economic participation in the life of the family or community.

All this has now changed. The impact of refugee life has been manifold. Displacement has been an agonizing experience. But the changes the refugees were forced to accept as part of a new life in exile created greater self-awareness for women. Not only have they become aware of the importance of their economic role within the family; they have also learned how to expand it. In Iran, women can no longer take part

in animal husbandry as they did back home in Afghanistan. They do not possess cattle and sheep, or the pastures where they would once have prepared dairy products that helped to provide a family's livelihood. Instead, the men bring home sheep wool for cleaning, and it is the women who spend hours doing this tedious work. They also knit and embroider. They are not as physically active as they were in their towns and villages, but their economic role remains crucial for the survival of the family. While in the past they considered their participation in the household economy a natural responsibility -- like giving birth and raising the children -- in the city they have become aware of the value of their work.

While families still live in a semi-closed society, community leaders have lost much of their influence. They can no longer feed, clothe or provide for anyone in trouble. Every Afghan, including the community elders themselves, has to do his or her best to survive on their own. Women's views of the community leaders have changed. In their villages, they would respect the leader because of his economic power, as well as his knowledge. In exile, women no longer have to turn to one man for advice. There are many other sources of knowledge, from Iranian religious leaders to the local mosque, and even television programs. Hazaras are Shiites, like the majority of Iranians. This has helped enormously, since the refugees do not feel threatened -- like the majority Sunni Pushtuns of the Saveh refugee camp -- by the Iranian way of life, religious practices and culture. Hazaras also speak a variant of Persian, which enables them, almost effortlessly, to understand much that goes on in Iran. Women in particular favour Iranian television cooking lessons, evening drama series and other shows. The elder women in the

community like to watch programmes about life and the sayings of religious characters. All of these elements have helped women gain a broader perspective on their lives.

As in Afghanistan, there have always been conservative forces in Iran. But many reasons have prevented them from succeeding completely in implementing their agendas. First of all, Iranians did not have the same kind of tribal code of conduct as the Afghans. They have been more influenced by national politics, which is not as regimented as a tribal code. Both countries have also had different experiences of Islam. The fact that Iran is the only Shiite state in the world has given the country a distinct identity. An individual's understanding of Islam in Iran is closer to the normative (Shiite) religion.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, while the establishment of the theocratic state handed much power to the conservative forces, opposition remained active. One reason for this was that by the time of the Islamic Revolution, Iran was already a modern society, largely Westernized and economically strong. Another reason is that, due to a deeper understanding and knowledge of religion, many have been able to challenge the religious authorities -- and continue to do so -- not as agents of secularism but as advocates of Islamic rights. This is particularly true when it comes to women's rights in Iran. The struggle between the two forces has resulted in the creation of a dynamic, vibrant society, with an aware, politicized population.

Therefore by the time Afghan refugees arrived in their host country, Iran was an advanced urban society. The Islamic Revolution imposed a dress code for women, but did not discourage them from being active members of the society. Quite the contrary; women were regarded as an important constituency, and religious and political leaders capitalized on this. Women's involvement in politics as well as social and legal change

was even more organized and better articulated after the Islamic Revolution than before, since their legal and social rights were being tampered with and curtailed through the new policies (Personal communications, Iran; July 1996). Women from different walks of life in Iran joined forces to fight. Hazara women refugees were influenced by these developments.

An Afghan refugee woman, from the central plain of Bomyan -- where a majority of Hazaras live in Afghanistan -- would have seen Iranian women moving in public, occupying various social sectors, working at different jobs. She would have observed that birth control was being favoured by both the liberal and conservative (secular and religious) women in the community, since the Islamic Republic eventually had to adapt an ambitious and active family planning policy. She would have seen women presenters on television. The fact that all women were dressed in Islamic attire -- which is conservative and very modest -- was even more appealing to Afghan refugee women. They might have had a hard time identifying with a secular woman; but they could easily relate and trust the modestly covered Iranian woman.

As result of such exposure, these particular Afghan refugee women no longer believed in very early marriage. Having a large number of children is now seen as a burden rather than a privilege. The majority considers birth control a good alternative to consecutive pregnancies. Some actually do use contraceptives. For most Afghan women, education has become a near-necessity, although not all refugee children in the city can afford to have an education. Women believe education will help make young girls better mothers and wives as well as more productive individuals in the family. Though not all Afghan refugee families agree about birth control or female education, the majority are

aware of the changes that it can bring to their lives. They have increasingly come to accept it.

A brief mention of relations between Iranians and Afghans is essential to this chapter, since it relates to an aspect of change in the life of Afghan women. Urbanized Iranians often view the refugees as “village people”, with no formal education and thus not up to the standards of their modern city lifestyle. This attitude has had two effects on the life of Afghan refugees. One is that of anger and hatred, and rejection of everything Iranian as negative. This is rare and often temporary. The other reaction is defensive; an Afghan refugee is forced to prove that she can and will match her Iranian counterpart in lifestyle, education and achievement. Unfortunately, there are not many resources at the refugees’ disposal, but the desire to show the Iranians that they are not ‘backward’ or ‘unworthy of respect’ is strong among the majority refugee families.

It is an interesting situation. On the one hand, Afghan women have allowed themselves to be influenced by their hosts; on the other hand, they find themselves the object of disdain. The tension is quite noticeable. Each time they speak about it, the refugee women first point out the racism and arrogance of their Iranian hosts -- then launch into a series of defensive stories about how they are as good and well-informed or as well-dressed as the Iranians. No one, for example, dare wear traditional Afghan clothes in a city like Tehran, because it will single them out as members of a rural population. Aside from social ostracism, wearing Afghan clothes could attract the police and lead to arrest, forcible return to a refugee camp, or even deportation.

5.2.1 Women and Work

Afghan society, like all patriarchal structures, views men as the ultimate owner. Land, livestock, women and children are part of his property. In that context, women's work in the field or in the household is viewed as her natural duty in the service of the owner. While she is recognized as the most valued of all men's property, her economic contribution is never valued as work. The economic structure of a tribal society, which operates on the basis of communal farming and labour, does not leave much room for recognition of an individual's work, either man or woman. Nonetheless, man is still the master, and his work has an added value because he is responsible for providing for the family, clan and tribe. Women's role as a caregiver and subordinate partner is respected and sometimes praised, but almost never valued in terms of its importance for the financial survival of the community.

This is not exclusive to Afghanistan. In her book "Women, Work and Islamism" (1999) Maryam Poya illustrates the case of Iranian women -- to some extent similar to the developments in other parts of the world, including the West -- as they struggle for the gradual right of women to work, for recognition of her contribution as 'work'. In the case of Afghanistan, the struggle is in its very primary stages. As mentioned in chapter two, women began to infiltrate the work force during the years of war mostly for their and their family's survival, when there was a lack of manpower. That experience, in part, enabled women to realize their capabilities and eventually take pride in their work.

Life in exile has had a similar effect, however, in a very different context. As refugees, men have carried on the tradition of providing for their families. They have

also continued to resist and oppose the idea of women being the breadwinners for the family while they are still around. But as the hardship of life in exile poses more and more difficulties, there is pressure for change. Men have been forced to realize their lack of ability in providing for the family. They end up working at jobs that provide little money. The employment situation is not secure and income not stable. This has left the majority somewhat embittered, as they feel powerless in the face of a harsh reality. But life in exile demands flexibility, and both men and women have been forced to accept some of these changes. Some men have welcomed the contribution of their wives, mothers or sisters towards the financial needs of the family.

For women, however, this is a new discovery. They have begun to question their economic role. They have come to realize that what they do on a regular basis has a value. They also see themselves equally responsible for the survival of the family. While back in Afghanistan, it was a common belief that men had to look after their families, life in exile has forced women to rethink that convention. Afghan women refugees have been able to closely watch Iranian women and learn about the important economic role they play in Iran. This observation has enabled them to compare themselves with Iranian women. As opportunities occurred, Afghan women began to experiment with their abilities. The result has brought a greater sense of confidence and the belief that they can work, that their labour has value and that they deserve respect for it. During the course of my research it became evident that while there was much resistance towards women's work, change was creeping in, gradually and subtly. And women were fully aware of the challenges and obstacles. The following is an illustration of the new reality in the lives of Hazara women in Tehran's suburbs.

5.2.2 At the Training Course: *Trick or Treat*

Refugee families share rented homes. It is normal for a family of five or six to share one mid-size room. Soraya Paksema's 13 member family all live in two rooms; they all use the same bathroom. Soraya is 21, one of eight children in her family. They fled Afghanistan about 19 years ago. First they settled in the eastern Iranian city of Mashad where her eldest brother, who was 28, worked in a shoe factory. Six years ago, fearing deportation through Iran's repatriation program, the family moved to Tehran. Soraya was in grade 7 in one of Mashad's public schools. She has not been able to continue her education. In Tehran, her brother works at home as a tailor. His 22 year-old wife and two-year-old son live in the same house as the rest of the family. Soraya's younger brother, who is 18, works on a construction site. The two incomes barely cover the cost of the family's living.

They pay a monthly rent of 8,000 toman (about \$ 12.00 US dollars). However, to obtain such a good rate for their double room and bathroom, they had to pay an advance of one million toman (\$ 1400.00 US dollars). In addition, they pay utility (gas, water and electricity) charges each month. If either tenant or owner decides that the contract is over, the family can take its one million toman advance money and leave.

Soraya's sister, Kubra, lives on the first floor of the same building. Her family of six shares a room. Kubra is 25. Her 34-year-old husband sells things on the street. In Iran this is called 'dastforoshi' (peddling), a kind of self-employment. "It keeps him busy," says Kubra, "but it does not give us a stable income." Her husband makes between 10 and 15, 000 toman (roughly about \$ 18.00 US dollars) per month. Five thousand

tomans goes on rent, 1500 on utility costs. “There is not much left to live on by the end of the day,” says Kubra, who was 15 when she got married. At the time she was in 5th grade, but couldn’t continue her education because she got pregnant soon after her wedding. Her son, age 10, is in 3rd grade and cannot help his father. Kubra’s mother-in-law, a 44-year-old brother-in-law and his 17-year-old daughter live with them. Her brother-in-law works as a tailor, but the income is poor. “There are months when he has nothing to do,” says Kubra’s mother-in-law. “And then he makes no money.”

To help the family financially, both sisters are registered in a training program. It does not pay directly, but gives them sewing skills, which will enable them to work as tailors. The family considers it a dishonour for women to go out to work, especially if they have to share a work environment with men. But if they can help Kubra’s brother and brother-in-law in their tailoring work at home, the women can improve the family’s income. In addition, Kubra believes that she can make things that her husband can sell on the street.

At 8:00 in the morning, both sisters put on their ‘*monteau*’ and ‘*maqn’ae*h’ (the Iranian dress code -- a knee-long coat and head cover) and leave for their sewing class, about 35 minutes’ walk from their home. Across from the Afsarya main bus station is a line of shops. The sewing class is held on the first floor of one of these three-storey buildings, between a barber and a taxi/car rental company. The entrance is narrow and dark. The first small room, which has a desk and a chair, is used as an administration office. The next room is large and spacious and contains about 28 sewing machines, two large cutting tables and a blackboard.

As soon as Soraya and Kubra enter their class, they -- like the rest of the women - take off their coats and head cover. A teacher, also an Afghan refugee, begins the class with some theoretical instruction, followed by practical examples. The students are left to practice their lesson for the rest of the day. Each begins to cut and sew. They take shifts the limited equipment and machines. In between, they can take a break, ask the teacher for help or chat with one another about anything from Iranian TV dramas to life in exile and family problems.

The women's sewing training program is operated by the UNHCR office in Tehran. Iran has hosted millions of refugees over the past two decades. During the 1980s, it received little help from the UN and other international agencies for at least two political reasons:

- 1 The Islamic Revolution of 1979 ended Iran's close political and economic ties to the West. While Iran remained a member of the United Nations, it was blacklisted in America and other Western countries as a "fundamentalist" regime. The West felt betrayed as the Islamic Republic rejected its way of life, economic interests and political system. This view of Iran as a hostile place for Westerners affected the presence of Westerners in the country. Many countries in the West, including the United States, issued warnings to its citizens against traveling to Iran. Aid workers as well as international organizations were reluctant to go to Iran, set up offices or work there.
- 2 Given the political climate of the early years after the Islamic Revolution, Iranian authorities regarded any foreign agency or workers as spies; it was often dangerous for foreign agencies and workers to live in Iran. Besides, Iran

discouraged the majority of foreign humanitarian agencies from sharing the costs and responsibility for the millions of refugees who had fled to Iran. Even in 1996, when I first visited Iran as a Canadian citizen, I was interviewed by Iranian intelligence through the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In the hours of interview, I was repeatedly asked why I had planned to visit Iran. Who paid for my trip? Did any organization, government or agencies hire me to visit Iran? I was traveling as a tourist, with a tourist visa issued by the Iranian embassy in Canada, and had letters from my university indicating that I was a student. In the course of this trip, I met two UN workers in the UNHCR office in Mashad who told me several stories about colleagues and acquaintances who had exactly the same experience. They also mentioned that the situation was much better than the earlier days.

A brief look at the history of UNHCR's involvement shows much cautious behaviour. Five years after hundreds of thousands of refugees crossed the Iran-Afghan border, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) began its modest assistance to Afghan refugees in Iran. In 1983, they signed a first cooperation agreement with the Iranian government; it was two years after the signing of this treaty that the first UNHCR office was established in Tehran. By 1992, UNHCR was expanding its presence and the scope of activities. At the time of this research, UNHCR had a central office in Tehran, three sub-offices in Mashad, Orumieh and Ahwaz, two field-officers in Kermanshah and Zaheda and border field posts in Khorasan and Sistan-Baluchistan providences (UNHCR Information Paper May 1999).

In 1999, the number of UNHCR employees was 96, including 14 international and 82 locally-recruited staff. During the last sixteen years of its activity in Iran, UNHCR has spent an average of some US \$20 million a year for programs benefiting both Afghan and Iraqi refugees. As mentioned earlier, with the moderate political changes in Iran in the 1990s, it became easier for the UN to operate some of its programs. However, the UN is still required to obtain government approval for its projects, whether entering a refugee camp, organizing a training workshop or providing allowances for refugee children's education. By the mid 1990s, Iran had introduced a repatriation program for all refugees. The plan called for 'voluntary' repatriation and all UN projects had to comply with this policy. The women's sewing workshop in Afsaria is no exception (UNHCR Information paper; May 1999).

The sewing course is designed to help Afghan refugee women learn a skill which they can use on their return to Afghanistan. Their training is designed to encourage refugee women to return to their country of origin at the end of the three-month period of classes. Technically, sewing students who complete three quarters of their program are entitled to a certificate of accomplishment. However, the agreement between the students and the operating bodies -- the Iranian authorities and the UN -- indicates that the students can only obtain a certificate at the border, on their way to Afghanistan. The UN has accepted this arrangement in return for Iran's permission to allow its refugee projects to go ahead.

Inside the sewing class, where the noise of traffic disturbs the clicking of scissors, the rhythmic grind of the sewing machine and the concentration of the Afghan women, it is a different story. These women have been given an opportunity to leave their homes,

to meet, to share their griefs, frustrations, wishes and dreams. The everyday journey to and from the course has given them an exposure to city life. And they have been given a skill that can help them play a more effective role in the household economy. They have come to know the value of their work.

In rural Afghanistan women did not have to deal with money. It was a man's job to buy food. Women did not concern themselves with income or spending. They had no interest in prices. It was the responsibility of men to make sure their family was provided for. Even when their own dairy products were sold at market, women were not involved in the transaction. It was all considered a part of the man's income. "In Iran, men are busy trying to find work," says Amena, who used to live in the same village as Soraya and Kubra's family. "At first, we had to send my younger brother grocery shopping. Then when he found a job, I had to go with my other sister."

In Afghanistan, Amena's mother used to milk the cow and make cheese. Amena used to watch her as a child. "We had lots of cheese in the house," says Amena. "The first time I went to buy cheese in the market in Iran, I couldn't believe how much it cost." One day, Amena, her sister and mother decided to calculate how much money they could have made from the cheese she used to prepare in Afghanistan. "My father would take the cheese to sell it in the market," says Amena. "No one ever bothered to ask him the price. We only used to hear him complain when he was not offered a good deal. Those were the words -- 'a good deal'. We never thought of it in terms of money."

Amena thinks that people should be paid for work, whether it is performed in the home or outside. "I helped my brother pair the slippers he was going to sell on the street. He told me that he would pay me one toman per pair. Then he forgot what he had

promised. I told him Hazrat Ali (the fourth caliph) once said that ‘a worker should be paid before the sweat has dried up from the work’. My brother realized immediately and paid me.” According to Amena, it is important for women to know the value of their work and to make sure they are paid for it. Amena’s mother wishes that she had asked her husband how the money made out of her work in Afghanistan was spent. But she also wishes she was selling a portion of the cheese she made back home here in the Iranian market. “At least my mother knows how much she would be making,” says Amena.

All the students wish to receive their sewing course certificate, but no one is in a hurry to return home. They would prefer to stay in Iran, at least until there is real peace and stability in Afghanistan. As the clock strikes 12:00, they obey their dress code, put on their chadors and leave the building. As they say good-bye, the second -- afternoon -- shift begins. Another 30 Afghan women enter the sewing room to prepare for the day’s lesson and work. Soraya and Kubra walk back home with a pride that they find “hard to explain.” “I feel happy that I learned something new today,” says Soraya. “I think I’m now more appreciated by my own family and relatives.” Kubra is certain that she can help her husband by putting her new sewing skills to work. “At first it was hard for him to accept it,” says Kubra. “But once I showed him that I can make things that he can sell, he was happy.” These women expect to continue to play an economic role within the family. In the camp, of course, the Pushtun community regard it as a dishonour if women are expected to earn an income from any economic activity. It implies that the man cannot support his family by himself, and has to “sell his honour” instead.

5.2.3 Health

Zenab's family have been living in the Masoudya district of Tehran for the past nine years. They lived in the city of Qom for 10 years and in Baarabad for one before going to Tehran. Zenab's father has two wives with 9 and 7 children respectively by each. The eldest brother is 42 and the youngest in the family is 15. Zenab is 21, the sixth of the 9 children. In Afghanistan, they used to have a farm and a big house. They shared the huge compound with two of their uncles and their families.

Here in Iran, they are forced to share a three-bedroom apartment with one bathroom and a kitchen. Space has become an important issue in their daily life. Managing a large family away from their original home -- which provided stability and comfort -- has been a great challenge. But their difficulties have taught the children a practical lesson. They all want to avoid two mistakes made by their parents: having two wives and having a large family. For the problems of two households and a large family have been compounded by their conditions of exile.

In their earlier, more comfortable home, they were better off and there was a large living space; children grew up together. In Iran, the women have discovered for the first time that raising a child is a major responsibility. There is insufficient room because Iranians don't rent their homes to large families. Even to rent the house they are residing in now, they had to hide three members of their family from the landlord. For fear of neighbours' complaints, they would explain that three sons were guests who were merely visiting from another city. Even now, the three sons have to sneak in and out of the building.

The other problem is that they can't allow their children to leave their home to play outside. Here in the suburbs, this can lead to trouble. If they become involved in a fight with other children -- particularly Iranians -- they could face deportation. Given the anti-refugee sentiment in Tehran, their refugee cards could be confiscated and they could be forced to leave the country. "Some Iranians don't like us," says Zenab, "so when the children get in trouble, it means trouble for the whole family. It is easy to lose patience when you have a difficult life. Refugee life is not easy. It is better to have fewer children so one can have the patience to raise them and look after them properly."

In addition to the cost of bringing up a large family, health and childbirth are a huge economic burden. Refugees living in the city have access to Iranian hospitals and health clinics. But health care is not free, even for Iranians. (The only difference is that Iranians can get medical insurance through their work, whereas Afghan refugees do not). Acquiring a job, which provides medical insurance, is out of the question for the refugees, who have a hard time finding employment in the first place. Each child's birth costs up to a million toman (about \$ 1400.00 US dollars), and if they do not visit a health clinic or hospital, complications during a birth result in even greater expense. Women with consecutive pregnancies suffer health problems. For a poor refugee family, regular visits to a doctor and the purchase of medicine is a luxury that cannot be afforded. So most women have learned that fewer pregnancies and fewer children are both more economic and more healthy.

In those families where the women have understood this, the husbands have come to agree. According to several women, their husbands were at first unwilling to acknowledge this as a shared problem. They used to say that pregnancy and childbirth

were women's problem which they did not wish to discuss. "You know how men are," says Roqiya, 31 and a mother of two, "men usually don't care how horrible a pain we women go through with childbirth. One of the reasons is that there always been other women in the family to take care of their wives, so they never had to deal with the problems of pregnancy and childbirth directly. But here, most men have to pay attention because the other women are not there, or they don't know how to help."

As a result, some men have come to realize the high price of their indifference. A few have accepted their wives' use of contraceptive pills. But most women began taking the pill, for a month or so, without telling their husbands. Gradually, they have been able to let the husband know. Few men, however, readily have agreed to the use of oral contraceptives. Certainly, none has agreed to consider a vasectomy. They will not even discuss it with their wives. "My husband accepted that I should take the pill, but I can't even talk to him about what he can do to help. It seems that pregnancy is still seen as my problem, but at least he is fine with what I want to do to stop getting pregnant," says Roqiya. The few men who responded to my questions about their role in pregnancy and childbirth and the use of contraceptives commented that they were nervous about undergoing vasectomy. They regarded surgery as a 'humiliation', as 'belittling their manhood', as a challenge to their 'male honour'. However, they all agreed to women's use of contraceptives.

The changing environment of exile has brought a new ideological approach to contraception and consecutive pregnancies for Afghan women. By the mid-1990s, the Islamic Republic introduced a population control campaign which included advertisements on television and radio. Hospitals and health clinics handed out

brochures. However, the greatest influence on Afghan refugees were the religious authorities, who were in favour of the contraception campaign. Afghan refugee families, mostly Hazaras, are religious and have always looked to Iranian theological authorities as role models. They share a common religion and language with Iranians and see themselves as a minority within Afghanistan. Thus they listened to the voice of the Iranian clerics and followed their teachings and decrees.

Indeed, among majority Shiite Afghans, there is almost a fascination with the entire hierarchy of Iranian religious authority. When local *mullahs* spoke about population control -- linking the importance of having a good, manageable, healthy family to the teachings of Islam, pointing out that the creation of such an ideal family was a Muslim responsibility -- the Afghan refugees felt constrained to follow this example. Most of them have therefore now come to believe that the best model of a good Muslim family is one that is small, educated and well-trained.

Younger generations have learned much about this at school. Nearly everyone I interviewed between the ages of 16-and 22 repeated the Iranian population control slogan of "One Child is Good -- Two is Enough". Marzia, 16, was born and raised in Iran; her family left Afghanistan 20 years ago. She is engaged to be married to her cousin, but wants to have no more than two children. "It is better to have fewer children because then one can do a proper job of raising them," says Marzia. "It is no use having so many that you cannot look after them properly." Marzia's mother had to raise eight children. According to Marzia, her mother has grown weaker and frail because of "too many pregnancies" and the exhaustion of raising and managing a family. "It was different for my mother. In her time, women had to have many children, especially when their

families had large farms and big houses. But I know that having many children, especially without enough time between pregnancies, is detrimental to women's health. It is not good, either for the family or for the children.”

5.2.4 Marriage

For most Afghan parents in the Masoudeya district, the marriage of their children remains a constant preoccupation. Women more than men fear that their daughters will remain unmarried, passing the ‘marriage age’. Given the age at which they themselves were married, their daughters have in fact already passed the ‘right’ age. Most of the older women in the community hardly remember their wedding day, but recall that they were afraid of their husbands. They were 10 or 11 when they were given into marriage. In their memory, the wedding night was a nightmare that they had to live through because “women are born with inadequacies.”

According to a traditional belief in the community, women are born to suffer. “Our ancestors, our great grandmothers and their mothers have all gone through the same thing,” says one of the woman in Masoudeya. “All women have accepted their destiny, which is to go through certain calamities in life.” Getting married and giving birth are on their list of ‘certain calamities’. While they acknowledge that 10 or 11 is too early for marriage, older women still wish their daughters to follow their example, one way or another.

The younger and middle-aged women in the community do not share this view. Almost all suggest that age 16 to 19 is the best age for marriage. They argue that a woman's age makes a big difference in the success of a marriage and the ability to raise a

‘good’ family. “When a person is older, she knows better,” says Najeeba. “You know what you’re doing in life. You are fully aware of the responsibility of becoming a wife and a mother. If you know better, you can help both your husband and your children and can actually look after yourself and your family.”

Najeeba fled Afghanistan with her parents, two sister and four brothers 20 years ago. She was 12 and the eldest of the three sisters. The family had to first worry about surviving. Her father found a job in a shoemaking factory in Mashad. One of his relatives immediately asked for Najeeba’s hand in marriage. Najeeba’s mother insisted they should wait until both families felt more secure, at least financially. The family of Najeeba’s would-be husband continued to press for the marriage. Finally, when she was 15, her family agreed to the engagement. Her fiancé was then 18. After two years of engagement, they got married and have been together for the past 20 years. They have four children.

For both her mother and Najeeba’s generation, it is a social transformation for women to marry in their later teens. It is an even bigger change for women to decide the age at which they should be married and the choice of a husband. Najeeba’s youngest sister, Khadija, 29, married when she was 19. She told her mother that the Iranian girls in her class wanted to get married when they were at least 19 or 20. Khadija had a chance to attend nine grades in one of the schools in Mashad. She also refused to marry her cousin and her sister’s brother-in-law. Sakena, 33, was given into marriage to her cousin at 17. Her brother-in-law wanted to marry Khadija and the family had no objection. “I told my mother that if they make me marry this man, I will run away,” says Khadija. “I

was not going to run away, but I had seen on Iranian television the story of a girl who threatened to do this -- and it worked.”

At first her mother did not take her seriously, but later realized it was not right to force her into marriage. “It was a different time when we were forced to get married,” says Khadija’s mother Fatema. “We had no education, we didn’t know anything. But these girls -- they know everything. They are smart. So I convinced my husband, and we said no.” The rejection cost the family a lot of ill-feeling from their relatives. Sakena’s in-laws treated her badly for failing to persuade her sister to marry their son. Sakena and her husband broke away from the family and came to live with Sakena’s parents. Several years later, they all regretted the past, and began to visit each other again. Sakena says that even though she knew the situation would result in bitterness among the families, she still supported her sister’s decision. “I didn’t want to take my in-laws sides -- not because Khadija is my sister, but because I knew she was right. She did not like my brother-in-law. She didn’t have to marry him.”

Khadeja, who is a mother of two, is certain that if she still lived in her village, it would have been almost impossible for her to marry as late as 19 -- let alone refuse to marry her cousin. “In our village, they used to say that marriage to cousins was ‘written in destiny’,” says Khadija’s mother. Khadija believes that even if she had refused to marry her cousin back home, it would not have made much difference. “The head of our community used to decide who was going to marry who and there was no way anyone -- man or woman -- could reject the decision of the elders,” says Khadija’s mother. Khadija says she wanted to marry at 19 because “you are old enough to make decisions for yourself, you are wiser and you enjoy life more.”

5.2.5 Education

Refugees in the Masoudya district value education. Most families want their children, both boys and girls, to be educated. They have come to see education as a necessity of life and a key for a better future. Younger women in the community showed much enthusiasm towards learning and education. Most of those to whom I spoke had some basic education. Interest in education was provoked by a new awareness on the part of refugees, directly associated with migration. Refugee women characterize the change as something positive. They offer the following reasons for such realizations:

The environment where they have come to live had a direct influence. People in and around them attended school. They saw how living standards were higher among families with better education. As a minority, they felt deprived of their rights -- one of the reasons being their own lack of education. Out of a desire to make up for past failures, they had began to search for ways in which they could play a more active role in changing their socio-political status in Afghanistan. They blame successive governments in Afghanistan for depriving them of education. They realized that while in exile, they had no more excuse.

5.2.5.1 Refugees, Education and the Islamic Republic's Policy

The main obstacles to education for refugees in Iran can be easily listed. There has been no resistance from the refugees to education within the Afghan community, save for economic restraints. As pointed earlier, refugees whose mother tongue is Persian have little fear enrolling their children in Iranian schools. Majority of Afghan refugees --

especially in towns and cities -- are Hazaras who are also Shiite Muslims. They do not share the same fears as their Pushtun counterparts over the loss of culture, language or religion. In fact, the Persian-speaking Shiite refugees argue that Afghanistan has a common history, heritage and culture with Iran.

But there are difficulties for Afghans who wish to go to school. If they move from one area of Iran to another, they cannot enroll again. Schooling is expensive and many families cannot afford to pay. Because of Iran's repatriation policy, they feel they have no future. The Iranian government discourages education because it regards it as an incentive for refugees to stay. I found only one case where the family thought it was sufficient for women merely to read and write; she should spend her time preparing for marriage. But the majority of Afghan Hazara refugees in Tehran's suburb have come to the conclusion that an educated woman can make a better mother and wife.

5.3 Analysis

Change is more evident in the life of Afghan women refugees in a Tehran suburb than in the refugee camp. There seems to be acceptance of female education, work, marriage, and health issues, including the use of contraceptives to prevent consecutive pregnancies -- which is seen as a reason for the poor health of young women. The majority agree that 18 to 25 is a better age for marriage. Even those who were married younger said the same. Most women said they would marry within their family, but only if they liked the man. They argue that marrying within the family was better because families knew each other; this made it easier to establish trust between a couple. An

overwhelming majority of women agreed that female education was a necessity and that the best family was a small family with a maximum of four children.

One underlying reason for this dramatic change is exposure. Living in a suburb has given refugee women the ability to observe a new environment. They have been able to make direct comparisons between their lifestyle, way of thinking and beliefs and those of Iranian women. This has enabled many women to question some of the commonly accepted conventional views on marriage, parenthood and education that existed in their villages in Afghanistan.

Two other important reasons have been the existence of a common religious belief -- both Hazaras and the majority of Iranians are Shiite -- and a common language since Hazaras speak a variant of Persian and can easily understand Iranians. Because of these commonalities, there has for Afghans always been a sense of fascination toward Iranians, with whom Hazaras like to think they share a common culture. Therefore it has been easier for the Hazaras to trust their hosts, particularly on issues of religion. That is in sharp contrast to the situation of the Pushtun refugees in the camp. While like the Pushtuns, Hazara refugees complain about Iranians' negative attitude towards them, they are still much more at ease in the new living environment than Pushtuns.

The younger generation seems to have higher aspirations than their predecessors. Not only do they compare their standards with that of Iranian women, but also to their mother and grandmothers, often concluding that they are aware of issues that earlier generations were not. That in itself has become an empowering tool for women, who still feel plenty of social and cultural pressures. It would be useful for the UN and aid organizations to note this already well-developed awareness among women. Considering

it when designing their programs, they can further help these refugees, whether in Iran -- or when and if they return to their villages in Afghanistan.

5.4 Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, the result has been a far greater acceptance of change. Women favour smaller families, are willing to use birth control, consider education an essential ingredient of life and have realized the value of their work. Despite the difficulties imposed by economic hardship, refugee status and the feeling of bitterness towards their hosts as they continue to look down upon them, Afghan women have gained much self-confidence. A change of attitude and behaviour is underway and women themselves are fully aware of it and in some cases, the driving force behind it. Change is a welcome phenomenon for this particular group of Afghan refugees in Iran. However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, other Afghan women do not view change in the same way. Their understanding, experience, and acceptance of change differs sharply.

CHAPTER SIX

Varied Responses

6.1 Refugees in the City -- Pakistan

6.1.1 Introduction

Afghan women from urban centres experienced a different kind of exile from their counterparts who arrived from rural Afghanistan. This chapter discusses the experiences of Afghan urban women in a Pakistani district of Islamabad. It will be noticed, for instance, that while some women have found the refugee experience curiously empowering, others with the same ethnic, linguistic and religious background have come to regard the restrictions imposed by their new environment as detrimental to their social development.

This chapter shows that change does happen in the life of a refugee woman. But, even in a similar setting, this transition takes place in different ways. Whether conditions of exile help women accomplish more or force her to give up some of her pre-refugee life achievements is unpredictable -- or can only be speculated on and appreciated with knowledge of each very particular set of circumstances. The two categories of change, as experienced by refugee women, are termed 'progressive' and 'regressive'. The definition depends on her socio-cultural background and the manner in which she views change. In the urbanized community of Afghan refugees, however, 'progressive change is generally understood as a transformation which enables a refugee woman to explore new boundaries, discover new ideas and aspire to accomplish new tasks; all of which in turn affects her self-awareness. 'Regressive' suggests the opposite -- instead of new opportunities, the change results in restrictions and limitations not previously present or

so pronouncedly present in her life -- forcing her to compromise or give up some of her previous achievements. Based on my observations, the two categories are not mutually exclusive. Regressive change could be affecting one aspect of a woman's life, while progressive change is at work in other areas.

Afghan refugee women describe the effect of progressive change as 'positive' and the impact of regressive change as 'negative'. According to Afghan urban women in Pakistan, living in exile has had few positive, but many negative results. Some have managed to turn these rather negative experiences into something meaningful for themselves and their community, while others have simply accepted the norms and conditions of their 'changed life'. However, regardless of their involvement in women-related activities, the majority of Afghan women from city backgrounds have come to value their social role more than ever, particularly after the takeover of power by the Taliban and their overt anti-women policies.

6.2 *Atwar bazar* (Sunday market)

Over a square mile of soft brown-grey earth is stirred up by the feet of thousands of street sellers and shoppers every Sunday in the G9/4 district of the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. At dawn, vendors set up their temporary shops in the open space. Depending on their income, they use wooden boards, cardboard, plastic, and canvas sheeting or paper to protect themselves from the rain or sun. At sunrise, huge crowd flock into the market. Their purple, turquoise, black, red, gold and silver clothes dissolve into one another, like the back of a peacock, as one moves between stalls. The roar of traffic, of taxis and buses and bicycle bells in the neighbouring streets mix with the shouts of money changers and vendors, touting in Urdu “take it away with you -- the best quality for the best price,” or “one bunch for three Rupees, two bunches for five.” They sell groceries, electronics, cloth, jewelry, makeup, books and magazines, used clothes and shoes. Most of the vendors and shoppers in *Atwar bazar* are refugees from Afghanistan.

Next to the Sunday market is the *Hadda* (bus station), where taxis, rickshaws, buses, minibuses and vans pick up passengers. The *Hadda* is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. All the workers in the *Hadda* are Afghan refugees; a few own minibuses and taxis, others work as drivers, conductors or mechanics on Pakistani-owned vehicles. All the vendors as well as the workers in the *Hadda* are men. A large number of young boys, mostly of school age, sell tea, water, plastic bags -- “one Rupee for one bag,” they keep shouting. Teenagers work as conductors in the bus station. “We’ve room for two more passengers, come aboard, one Rupee to Pindi,” they scream, while banging the side of their vehicle. There is a kind of harmony and rhythm to all this,

despite the overwhelming din. Compared to Afghanistan at war, this -- for Afghans -- is life as usual.

Across from the *Hada* is Peshawar more, a long paved road with side narrow streets and housing on each side, known to both Afghans and Pakistanis as 'Little Kabul'. It is in Little Kabul that refugees meet each other, where Kabuli restaurants are popular for their kebabs, where the sound of Afghan music fills the street. Pictures of Afghan singers hang on the doors of Afghan tailor shops, while on the sidewalks young Afghan men sell freshly-cooked French fries, watered-down juice and old Afghan jewelry. Uniformed Pakistani guards protect several Afghan gold and jewelry shops. White wedding dresses are displayed next to pink and pale blue engagement clothes in shop windows that huddle in claustrophobic proximity to bridal flower-sellers, make-up artists, Afghan clinics, spice stalls, video stores and Afghan schools.

Every engagement, wedding, death, departure, break-up -- even the arrival of every newcomer -- is known in the street. All news travels fast in this community where the Afghan refugees are from a combination of Pushtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek and other ethnic backgrounds. But they have two things in common: they are Kabulis [coming from Kabul] and they are city folk. This brings them together and keeps them together -- their memories of Kabul and their desire to recreate those memories, their need to make everything look and feel as they once did at home.

6.3 Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

By the end of 1979 -- the year of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan -- about 1,000 Afghan refugees were crossing the Pakistan-Afghan border every day. At the peak

period of this refugee exodus, in 1990, about 3.7 million Afghans were living in Pakistan. In 1992, after the fall of Dr. Najibullah's communist regime in Afghanistan, about a million refugees returned home. Their repatriation was organized by the UNHCR. Each family was given 3,000 Pakistani rupees (about \$ 60.00 US), a bag full of wheat and a small plastic tent. But it was not long before some of these refugees were returning to Pakistan, this time fleeing the Mujahidin inter-factional fighting (1992-1996) that was laying waste to Kabul and other cities. Those who migrated to Pakistan after 1992 were called "new arrivals". And further 'new arrivals' were to arrive in Pakistan -- especially from Kabul -- during the subsequent Taliban rule (Dupree 1992: 1; Pakistan Commissioner for Refugees Report 2000: 7-9).

According to UNHCR, there are 1.2 million Afghans in Pakistan (at the date of this study -- February 2000). Afghan refugees are concentrated in the three provinces of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Baluchistan and the Punjab. Small pockets of Afghans are scattered throughout other parts of Pakistan. The NWFP has the largest number -- over a million -- followed by Baluchistan with around 300,000; about 100,000 Afghans live in the Punjab. "Women and children make up 76 per cent of the registered refugee population and a good 48 per cent of the children are under age 15" (Dupree 1992: 3).

From early days, those Afghans who arrived from rural areas largely settled in designated refugee camps, while the majority of urban refugees found homes in Pakistan's cities. Most of the refugees from Kabul were fortunate enough to have a reasonable economic status -- those with families abroad or with a desire to emigrate -- travelled to Islamabad. As in Iran, those Afghans living outside the refugee camps were

left on their own to survive. But unlike Iran, the refugees in Pakistan have always been allowed to work and study. In fact, Afghans have taken over certain industries in Pakistan. As the late dissident Pakistani intellectual Eqbal Ahmad told me in February 1998, Afghans practically run Pakistan's transportation industry. "If they returned home tomorrow, the Pakistan transport industry will collapse," Ahmad said.

During the Cold War, when General Zia al-Haq's military government was ruling Pakistan, Afghan Mujahidin forces -- comprising around seven different parties, many of them rivals -- maintained control over all Afghan refugees, in and outside the camps. While several of these parties organized a civil society -- by running medical clinics, schools and educational courses -- they also restricted the refugees' personal freedom, watched their movement on the streets, and dictated dress codes. Fear of the Mujahidin was real. In Peshawar, for example, music had to be kept low, few Afghan men risked wearing blue jeans, and no Afghan woman left her home without a Pakistani-style long, thick head cover, or dared to wear make up.

Those who failed to abide by the Mujahidin's rules, which prefigured later Taliban restrictions in Afghanistan, were invariably punished. When I was living in Islamabad as a refugee in 1989, I remember watching a young woman -- probably my age at the time, 17 -- being forced to have her face washed in the street, in front of the incredulous eyes of Afghan and Pakistani shopkeepers, because she was wearing makeup. The man in charge of this punishment was a young Afghan who was a member of one of the Mujahidin groups. Such acts of chauvinism -- often motivated by male rivalry, personal vendettas or insecurity more than any ideology -- were justified in the name of Islam.

I was told at the time that we were lucky General Zia al-Haq had been killed in an air crash -- because with him disappeared the extraordinary judicial powers over the public which the Afghan Mujahidin had acquired for themselves in Pakistan. Nonetheless, young men still showed up from time to time, carrying rifles and other weapons and using the language of *jihad* and its accompanying rhetoric, to police people's behaviour. Refugees, especially women, had no recourse for complaint.

Although Afghan refugees in Pakistan were largely left alone after the establishment of the Mujahidin government inside Afghanistan in April, 1992, a common culture of conservatism -- one of the Mujahidin's legacies -- had been established in the refugee community as a social norm. In February 2000, when I was carrying out this research, Afghan women in Pakistan were still wearing Pakistani-style clothes and head covers, even though the Mujahidin were no longer present to impose their codes of dress. Most forward-thinking women with whom I spoke thought it appropriate to "look like the rest" as a way of "fitting into the community". But almost all of them complained, lamenting that their way of dressing was a sign of 'cultural degradation'.

They argued that they had been deprived of their modern Kabul culture in favour of a "backward" as well as unfashionable Pakistani manner of dressing. While no-one would risk leaving their homes without the Pakistani clothes or head covers, many women cleverly coordinated the colours of their dresses and shaped their head covers to make them "interesting". Some allowed the covers fall over their shoulders. In every possible way, they tried to add a personal touch to something they believed to be "strange" or "dull" for their own modern taste and style.

With the departure of the Mujahidin from Pakistan went their schools and clinics. For over a decade these institutions had provided employment and services to both men and women in Islamabad. Although their work and educational environment was hostile, it had provided women with an opportunity to leave their homes -- "with a sense of purpose," as one refugee woman put it. They learned to sew and embroider, to weave carpets, to learn English and quote from the Quran. The schools had made it possible for women to continue some education, at least to read and write. Professional women -- mostly those affiliated with the party, directly or through a family member -- ran the courses and schools. However, a male representative of the party always oversaw these activities, checking the curriculum and other school affairs. Female nurses and doctors worked in the clinics, often supervised by a male colleague.

At the end of the Cold War, donor-fatigue plagued the NGO community in Pakistan, and they too abandoned the Afghan refugees. Traditionally, most NGOs worked in Peshawar, but there were several NGOs which had extended their activities to Islamabad. By 1992, about 80 agencies and institutions were involved in women's projects in Pakistan. Save the Children and other organizations continued to work in Islamabad, providing training and employment for women. Some restarted their work once the Taliban came to power. But most saw the relative security provided by the Taliban as an opportunity to work inside Afghanistan, and thus began to negotiate deals with the country's new rulers. In February 2000, when I was conducting this research, several independent agencies were funding English and computer training courses for women (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 2000).

For the most part, instead of integrating with Pakistani society, Afghan refugees have managed to set up their own lifestyle. Up to now, Afghan refugees have been able to continue their ownership of shops, stores and restaurants. They have always been allowed to buy property, but few can afford it. The majority of the refugees in Peshawar more share rented apartment and houses. Although the Pakistani government wants the Afghan refugees to return home, they have never -- unlike the Iranian authorities -- banned refugees from work or study.

The ethnic relation of Afghans and Pakistanis has been quite different from the relation of Afghans to Iranians. In some cases, it has been almost the reverse of the Iranian situation. There is a double standard and a psychological complex at work. Afghans think themselves superior to Pakistanis and they make no excuse for saying so. Afghans like to place themselves on the same footing as Iranians, but often appear on the defensive and assume an inferior position. There are many reasons for this.

Afghans have always viewed Iran as a modern country and respected or admired it because of its long history. Given that both Iran and Afghanistan were once part of the same powerful empire, the two nations share a common heritage. Hence, at least for reasons of self-interest, if not otherwise, Afghans like to believe that they are culturally similar to Iranians. Pakistan, relatively speaking, is a new country. It was annexed from India in 1947 as a Muslim state. Caught between its Islamic aspirations and its secular past as part of India under British rule, Pakistan lacks the same sort of nationalistic fervour that gives Iran its confidence. Therefore, in the Afghan view, Pakistan has a short history and in comparison to Iran, is not seen as culturally advanced.

Iranians and Pakistanis views of themselves feed into the Afghan stereotypical perception of them. The majority of Iranians see themselves as superior to Arabs, Turks and Afghans. They claim that their past -- as one of the world's oldest empires -- sets them apart from the rest of the people in the region. They do not hold Afghans in high regard, especially since they have had over two million Afghan refugees living in their country, sometimes in appalling conditions. Their view of Afghans reflects their lack of knowledge about Afghanistan and their failure to recognise the diversity of the Afghan population. Being partially exposed to a few incidents involving refugees from rural Afghanistan, the majority concluded that this represents all of Afghanistan.

I recall conversations with well-educated and Westernized Iranians who refused to accept that I was an Afghan. They kept saying that I did not look like 'Afghans', that I was educated and modern. Therefore, I did not fit into their category of being 'Afghan'. The most amusing part came when one Iranian would try to offer an explanation to other Iranians saying that I looked, sounded and acted differently from the rest of Afghan refugees in Iran because I lived in the West -- i.e. the West had civilized me. I often refuted such an Orientalist attitude, but for the most part I would fail to convince them of the reality next door -- the reality that Afghans were not all the same and, in this respect, were much like Iranians. But the Iranian friends who treated me with much respect, mostly because of my Western affiliation, were little interested in hearing about Afghans. There were, however, few exceptions.

Iranians living in exile, however, seem to have much sympathy for Afghans, particularly Afghan refugees in Iran. This is not because they have been inoculated with a dose of civilization in the West, but because they have gone through similar

experiences as immigrants and refugees. Some are appalled at the treatment of Afghan refugees by their country and its people (Personal communications, Iran; November 1999).

Pakistanis, on the other hand, have more respect for Afghans. They consider Afghans from urban centers to be educated and modern. Our Pakistani neighbours used to visit us in our small flat, admiring our taste in everything from fashion, jewelry and clothing to food. They used to say that they knew that Afghanistan was a modern country with what they called “a long and rich history”. They used to ask us to teach them Persian words. I also discovered many ordinary Pakistanis -- from shopkeeper to taxi drivers -- who held similar views.

Both views and attitudes -- Afghans and their hosts -- are wrong, since they are based on superficial and discriminatory perceptions. They ignore realities and the basic principles of equality. Unfortunately, these very problematic cultural precepts define and to some extent determine the relationship between the refugee population and the two host countries of Iran and Pakistan. It has in some ways determined the way Afghan women refugees view their counterparts in Pakistan.

Women in Pakistan have been struggling for their rights. They have been active members of their society. But given this negative view of Pakistani society, Afghan women have scarcely tried to learn from some of the Pakistani women’s experience and achievements. The majority of Afghan women from urban centers consider Pakistani women ‘unfashionable’ and ‘backward’ because of their traditional Pakistani dress. For the refugees from rural Afghanistan, this is not an issue, since they are not exposed to the

wider Pakistani society and have little contact with the world outside of the refugee camp. In addition, they are traditional and find Pakistani dress quite appropriate.

6.3.1 Life in Exile

Hamida, 36, was a third-year biology student at the University of Kabul before she migrated to Pakistan. Her husband was a fourth-year medical student at the same university. As cousins, they grew up in the same neighbourhood in the west of Kabul. Hamida married Wali when she was 22. She had her first son -- Rameen, now 12, -- when she was 24 and Wali was 26. Ten years ago, the couple left Kabul and their university, fleeing the war and the Communist government's forced conscription. Her second son -- Bejaan, 9 -- was born in Pakistan. "It was very difficult at the time," says Hamida. "My mother came to stay with us when I was giving birth. Then she returned to Kabul. But a few months after that, both our families [Wali's and Hamida's families] decided to join us in Pakistan." They all live in Peshawar in close proximity to each other.

For the first three years after Bejaan's birth, Hamida stayed home. Wali found a job in a shoe store, cleaning and maintaining the shop and later also acting as a translator for the owner and his Afghan customers. Then he tried to buy used shoes, to repair and clean and then to sell in *Atwar bazar* and other open markets in Islamabad. But his income hardly allowed the family to survive. To raise more money, Hamida started to work from home -- bringing back sewing and embroidery work from Save the Children, which offered low-income projects for women. Wali then found a job with a glass decor and design company. It requires travelling. "Sometimes Wali is gone for a good six to

seven weeks,” says Hamida. “But it is a better job and the income is reasonable.” Wali thinks he is lucky to have found such work. “The owner is a kind person,” Wali says with a satisfied smile. “He is quite sensitive to our problems. Knowing that I have a family, for example, he tries not to send me away for a long time.”

With Wali away so often and for such extended periods, Hamida had to manage on her own, with some help from her own and Wali’s family. “It is wonderful to have our families so close, but when it comes to everyday life, it is my responsibility to do things like grocery shopping and arranging for the repair of the water pumps in the building, which seem to break down all the time, and to take the children to the doctor”, says Hamida. With her extra responsibilities, Hamida has had to get to know the city, the market place, the clinics and shops, in addition to learning a new language, Urdu.

“Despite all our attempts to pretend that our surroundings look like Kabul, the environment and climate here are alien to us,” says Hamida. “We have to speak Urdu, wear Pakistani-style clothes, and survive with the little freedom and possibilities we have.” The weather is often hot and humid in Pakistan, sometimes reaching 49 or 50 centigrade. Afghan refugees, used to the cool nights and fair days of Kabul, find the weather unbearable. Women do go out to shop, study or work; but they are harassed by men. “When we first arrived in Islamabad, it was the Mujahidin groups who used to stop and lecture us about how we should behave,” Hamida says. “Since they have gone, Pakistani men treat us as if we are prostitutes.”

Some Pakistani men regard Afghan women as easy targets to tease or chase, according to Fereshta, Hamida’s younger sister. “If we say anything about this at home, the men -- our fathers, brothers or husbands -- find it an insult to their honour, so they go

out and fight,” complains Fereshta. No Afghan woman wishes to be held responsible for getting their men into trouble. “Who wants to be blamed for an argument or a fight which ends up at the *tona* -- the police station -- where the corrupt policemen beat Afghan men, make them grind chili paper, squeeze them for money and refuse to release them until one of us -- a woman from the family -- goes to them and cries and begs for the man to be released? So you can see how we have to remain silent.” The attitude of Pakistani men has forced even liberal-minded Afghans to become more conservative. “Wali, who never used to mind what I wore, now watches carefully how I leave home,” says Hamida. “Once, when I was wearing a bright colour, he told me that it would attract more attention. He asked me if I wanted Pakistani men to stare at me.”

The Pakistani police force is largely corrupt. The real problem is the crisis of governance and state in Pakistan. Institutions like the military and police force are powerful entities. General Zia al-Haq’s government was a military government. So is the current government of Pervez Musharraf. Ordinary Pakistanis feel helpless in the face of powerful military generals and their governments. Few in positions of power care more about the country and its people than their own interests. Those Pakistanis desiring a democratic government, accountable institutions, and an efficient social system are marginalized. Crooks and thieves, groups that thrive on disorder, carry on their agendas. A combination of indifference and incompetence results in a lack of security that affects both Pakistanis and Afghans.

For example, understanding and dealing with the police force in Pakistan involves many nuances. Afghan refugees and Pakistanis from low-income classes often find themselves the undeserved target of police harassment. They are both vulnerable groups

that easily become victims of police intimidation. A police officer, who is supposed to maintain order and security, becomes the instigator of disorder and crime -- in many cases because his government has failed to meet his basic living needs. An average police officer is paid 1200 Rupees per month (about \$ 25 US). The money is hardly enough for a single person's living, yet from this tiny sum the police officer is expected to cover the cost of his rent and utilities, feed himself and his family, and pay a bribe to his boss to keep his job. This creates a necessity for the officer -- however decent he may be otherwise -- to harass people for money.

The other form of police money-making is through random, but frequent street assaults. In these situations, often the police officer and the driver, peddler, shopkeeper or even a passerby negotiates the amount of the bribe. On several occasions, I have been in a taxi when a police officer has stopped us for no obvious reason. I have had to sit through long minutes of negotiations between the driver and the police officer. Once I tried to interfere by questioning the officer about the driver's offence. The taxi driver was displeased. He put it bluntly: I was going to return to my 'good life' in Canada while he and the police officers were still going to be there. "Thank you for your help," he told me, "I've got to deal with the police officers here. I can't afford to refuse paying him. Otherwise, my life would be made hell".

The police officers usually do not leave without money and if forced to do so, they drag the so-called 'offender' to the police station where the 'crime' doubles -- without any proof -- and the cost of the victim's freedom becomes even higher. There is no place to complain since corruption runs to the top of the hierarchy. Afghan refugees have grown so used to this system that they no longer bother to argue with the police as

to whether their refugee documents are real or false, or whether they're carrying narcotics or not. They openly ask how much they should pay, negotiate a price and get on with their work. The consequences of this chronic problem are severe for refugee women. It adds an extra restriction on their movements. It compromises their safety. All the women I spoke to complained about being nervous and lacking peace of mind when going out themselves or when their menfolk leave home. Both men and women dread running into the police.

Security has become a serious issue for most refugee women. A motorist attacked Fereshta, Hamida's sister, two months ago. She recounts the event, which had a cruel psychological effect on her: "It was daylight and I was going home from the market. A motorist passed by very close. I pulled to the side. Then he turned and came fast towards me. Before I knew it, he had grabbed the golden chain from my neck and pulled it. I was hurt and screamed. He pushed me away, took the golden necklace and raced off fast on his motorbike. I got up and a couple of passers-by came to help. But I was terrified. I brushed the dust off my clothes and walked home, trembling." Since the incident, Fereshta has been fearful of leaving home alone. "I am afraid to wear any jewelry ever again," says Fereshta.

Incidents of this kind -- a male motorcyclist was also driving around and grabbing at women's breasts -- were common. In fact, the first advice offered to me by women in Islamabad was to stay away from roads at night, to take great care during the day and, if possible, cover myself fully and avoid wearing jewelry. "Threats have so affected some families that they won't let their children -- especially their daughters -- leave home," says Hamida. "Before all this, I used to let my sons walk home, but I have to admit that

now I make them wait until I am finished in school so we can come home together. I don't know if it is more for their security or mine, but the fear haunts us all the time.”

Three years ago, Hamida volunteered to work in an independent school organized by Faouzia, a former teacher from Kabul. Hamida heard about a group of women starting a school for Afghan refugees and wanted her son Rameen to go there. The school he used to attend had been closed down and Hamida had been trying to teach him at home. Her second son, Bejaan, was also approaching school age. “Once I went to the school, I realized I could teach other children, like I had tried to do at home for my children,” says Hamida. “They had just started the school and didn't have money to pay, so I volunteered.” It also provided an opportunity for Hamida to do something with her time. Now she is employed by the same school and receives a small monthly income. “It is very useful,” she says with self-assurance. “I always find it hard to ask my husband for money. He brings his income home, but still... Now, if I want, I feel free to buy things for the children or myself. It is not much, but it is money that I make, so it has a great value for me.”

The Taliban rule and their policy towards female education prompted Faouzia and three like-minded teachers to reflect on the dire needs of the refugee community. “We realized that the majority of families who arrived in Islamabad -- particularly after the Taliban take-over of Kabul -- wanted their children to have some form of education,” says Faouzia. “Most of the schools offering basic education during the 1980s were closed down and there were few other alternatives available to refugee children.” The establishment by women of independent schools for refugee children is something quite new.

Over the years, the concept of female education was chiefly promoted in Afghanistan by male-dominated governments -- developing female self-esteem was scarcely taken into account. As a result of the oppression imposed by the Taliban, former teachers from Kabul became more determined than ever to resist the Taliban mentality. "We didn't have any money, so we decided to turn my house into a school," recounts Faouzia. "My husband, who was the headmaster of Habiba High School -- one of the boy's high schools in Kabul -- supported the idea. So we used the kitchen, the three rooms and the hallway as classrooms."

The community of refugees welcomed the idea. Soon, the mixed classes filled up with children of all ages. Each student is required to pay a monthly fee of 50 Rupees -- about one US dollar. In return, they receive half a day of classes in various subjects. "Once we had a little income, we expanded to three different schools in order to accommodate the needs of the students," Faouzia says. "Now we have classes from grades one to twelve. All three schools are co-educational. We have both male and female teachers." The monthly fee paid by the students pays for the rent of the building and a small income for the teachers. Teachers are paid 500 Rupees (about \$ 10.00 US dollars) per month.

However, the schools lack many resources, including textbooks and other teaching material. Teachers, though most of them have some previous experience, rely on old methods of teaching. Memorizing and rote learning are basic methods of learning. The pre-war school books -- particularly science texts -- are outdated and irrelevant. "Our female students and teachers are harassed by Pakistani men," Faouzia says. "Our male teachers are afraid of the Pakistani police who constantly demand money from

them. But despite all this, they are motivated and resolved to work. Of course, part of it is economic interest, but there is a lot of goodwill.”

6.4 Afghan Refugees and Education

In the initial days of their exodus, Afghan refugees were concerned only with the basics of survival. Education was not on their list of priorities. A general hope that they would soon be returning home also prevented Afghan refugees from considering their future outside Afghanistan. For refugees, the first and most difficult moment of their new lives is the necessity of looking forward -- of thinking of a future outside their original homeland, outside their native country. Some of the urbanized Afghan population saw Pakistan as a passage into a better world -- the West.

Those from rural areas, which comprised most of the refugee population in the early days, were not much interested in education -- not least because most of the early refugees left their villages in protest at the Communist government's imposed reform programs which included compulsory education for men and women. In such an atmosphere, the mere mention of education for girls was anathema (Marsden 1998: 95). This was a setback from the progress made in Afghanistan since the establishment of the first girls' school -- Malali -- in Kabul in 1921.

As the number of refugees increased, the Pakistani government and UN administrators established primary schools for Afghan boys as early as 1979. The situation of refugees began to change as the Mujahidin forces organized and as the success of their *jihad* against the Soviets gave Afghan refugees self-confidence. A 1986 UN survey shows that 41 per cent of the children in a sample refugee camp were between

the ages of 5 and 17. Out of those aged 5-11, 50.6 per cent of the boys and 4 per cent of the girls claimed to be at school. But the figures change drastically among those aged 12 to 17. The percentage of boys attending school rises to 52.8, while that of girls drops to 1.4. Puberty appears to mark the end of schooling for most girls. The sampled population was from rural areas, where only 15.7 per cent of men and 0.6 per cent of women were literate. The rate drops to 0.1 per cent among women in Paktya and Zabul, two provinces well-represented among the sampled refugees. By 1992, an estimated 30 per cent of refugees had received some form of schooling or training (Dupree 1992: 8).

Some of the educational institutions for refugees was provided by the Pakistani government and UNHCR, while other schools were affiliated to political parties -- often funded by European, US, Arab or Pakistani voluntary agencies. Few private schools are run by Afghans in the cities, and some urban families send their children to Pakistani schools.

Inside Afghanistan, indifference towards education in rural areas has been partly caused by the failure of the education system to meet their needs. For village children, meaningful education took place in the fields, where sons learned from their fathers -- and at home, where girls learned from their mothers. Furthermore, there was always a conventional wisdom that the only knowledge a girl needed to fulfill her primary roles as wife and mother was to be found at home, not in secular schools where she might learn to question the primacy of male authority. Those who attended school, on the other hand, rapidly lost these skills and incentives; there was nothing relevant to read once the child left the schoolhouse (Dupree 1992: 9). But (as discussed in the next chapter) once in

Pakistan, this traditional pattern of life could not continue; thus both attitude and thinking began to change.

A gradual change of attitude towards education emerged even within the conservative refugee population. This could be attributed to the changes of a life in exile and exposure to a different environment. The need for employment increased when refugees were outside their traditional work places. Foreign agencies employed Afghan refugees according to their degree and level of education. Those working for foreign agencies received comparatively better pay. In addition, religious studies were maintained as part of the everyday curriculum. Emphasis on religious studies prevented traditional and conservative families from arguing -- as they might have done in the past -- that education was a corrupting phenomenon. By 1992, out of the total teaching time, an average of 44 per cent -- up to 52 per cent in some schools -- was devoted to Islamic studies during the first three years of schooling. This decreased slightly during the final three years of schooling to accommodate classes in history, geography, science and other subjects (Dupree 1992: 9).

At a time when Mujahidin forces were claiming that the rest of the educated classes had been brainwashed by the Communist regime, the idea that religion should be the primary focus of education became the actual aim of many schools. It brought more students to the classroom, gained the support of conservative elements in the refugee community, prompted Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia to fund schools, and resulted in successful work -- which in turn meant more funding from outside. In 1989, for example, almost all schools and even skill-oriented courses like sewing taught Quranic

studies for the first hour of class. It was almost impossible for any school or course to survive without paying lip service to this curriculum.

Most of the western countries which funded projects during the Cold War era out of self-interest ignored or forgot this aspect of the Afghan problem. Furthermore, in order to maintain the support and obtain the permission of the Pakistani government to establish some of these schools, it was regarded as imperative to emphasise that religious studies were part of the school's purpose. Religious studies involved learning to read the Quran in Arabic and memorizing some verses -- few verses were translated into Persian. Religion as a subject was never discussed.

A series of textbooks came into existence as the direct result of the years of *jihad*. The contents of these books are dense and abstract, with little relevance to the lives of the students. They are all ideologically oriented toward the *jihad*, celebrating the bravery of Afghan 'holy warriors'. The teaching of history and literature -- rather than natural science -- propagated the idea of holy war through heroic stories and poems. Most poems talk about resistance values, bravery, and 'Afghan honour'. Several lyrics dehumanize Communist party members and Russians. All nationalistic poems refer to the April 1978 coup -- often called "Saur revolution" -- as a 'black day in the history of the country.' For nearly two decades, these texts formed the basis of Afghan schooling.

Deconstruction of these texts and their impact is an imperative part of any rehabilitation/reconstruction work in Afghanistan. Independent schools such as the ones Faouzia and her colleagues run have stopped using them. "The only alternative is going to the old Afghan textbooks," says Fouzia. "Of course, the ideal would be to go through all the texts and publish a new one based on current needs of the students and the

community.” So far, it has been difficult for people like Fouzia to find funding for such projects, although she was offered money to publish three books of drawings and essays about war and peace by young Afghans. “With the support of UNICEF, we managed to publish these,” says Fouzia, showing me the books. “It’s a small but important work.” Since Afghans have never been able to deal with their experience of war and its traumas - - not even those living abroad, including the West -- this is an impressive and much needed work.

6.5 A Step Back, A Move Forward

6.5.1 Marriage

The celebration hall in the Islamabad Hotel is a place of too many mirrors -- on both walls and ceiling -- of plastic flowers in every corner, of massive carpets, grotesque chandeliers and a stage for bride and groom heavy with coloured hearts. There is order in everything, in the purple and green napkins on the white table clothes, and the purple candles on each table, the purple and green curtains wrapped around the six white pillars which support the ceiling. The band is playing loudly. The dance floor is packed with men and women -- all dressed in modern clothes, long fancy sleeveless dresses, suites and ties, silver and golden jewelry. It is a display of wealth and fashion. “It’s the good taste of the bride and groom and their families,” says one of the guests. More than 200 people are at the wedding party. All are Afghan refugees from Islamabad -- from the area of Peshawar more.

The bride arrives in a cloak of green -- a long green dress with a see-through green net over her face and head, green and white flowers hanging from her left hand.

The groom, too, is dressed in a modest shade of green with a white shirt and darker green tie. They are followed by their parents and family members. Yalda, the bride, is 17 and Masoud, the groom, is 26. Masoud was 12 when his family -- originally from Kabul -- migrated to Australia. Masoud, the eldest of three sons, grew up in Australia. Yalda, on the other hand has spent the last 12 years of her life in Pakistan. Their families are related. Masoud's mother wanted her son to marry an Afghan. She was worried that their Afghan cultural values wouldn't be preserved if Masoud were to marry someone else. In her search for the perfect bride, she watched videotapes of other Afghan weddings, phoned her sister-in-law in Islamabad to keep her eye out for a young Afghan girl -- obedient, good-looking, fashionable by Afghan standards, educated and from a respected Kabuli family. The requirements -- especially of education and fashion -- are symbols of class, since they are urbanized Afghans.

Masoud's mother saw Yalda in a videotape and contacted her family in Islamabad. Yalda is in grade 10, keeps her head down when passing crowded Afghan areas, and displays a modestly cute smile. Yalda's family was thrilled to hear about the marriage proposal. "She will have a good future," says her mother, Aniess. "What would she have done in Pakistan? Afghans have no future here. School would have been over in the next two years and then what?" Yalda thought the same. Once the engagement was confirmed, Masoud travelled to Pakistan with his parents for the wedding party. The final month was spent preparing for the elaborate wedding. It was also a chance for Yalda and Masoud to get to know each other a little. "They look great together," says Yalda's mother.

Countries like Pakistan, India and Iran -- where there is a concentrated Afghan refugee population -- have become popular places for bride shopping. Afghan men living abroad are ideal knights on white horses for socially and economically deprived Afghan refugee women in the developing world. Marriage has become a ticket to a better life, a lottery for a 'good future'-- as it is propagated by the families on both sides of the border, mostly out of fear that their children might marry non-Afghans. The conditions of life in exile and the desire to go abroad forces girls to get married younger. The average age of marriage seems to be 17-18 within the Peshawar more Afghan refugee community. While for a majority of women in pre-war Kabul it was customary to marry between the ages of 20 and 25, some women were marrying as late as 30.

There seemed to be an understanding that the mid-twenties was a better age for marriage. Life in Pakistan, however, has had the opposite effect. It will be oversimplification to argue that young women are in total control of the marriage situation. Although, they decide who they marry -- based on a group of potential grooms presented to them by the family in the form of still pictures -- there are various pressures, both familial and social, that dictate their choice. However, the parents, at least from what I have been able to gather, do not actually force their daughters into marrying someone abroad at a certain age, though they might encourage it. It is often the young girls who agree to marry at a younger age, arguing that life in Pakistan does not offer them any viable future. "These days, very few young girls think about marrying without also thinking of going abroad," says Rona, a former doctor from Kabul and a guest at the wedding. "A good husband nowadays is a dream -- an Afghan with a passport from an

attractive world of comfort and ease. It is always a bonus -- but not essential -- if he happens to be educated, handsome and a person of good character.”

According to Rona, many Afghan men also prefer to marry Afghan women from Pakistan or Iran. “It is economical. It is less expensive to have an ostentatious wedding in Islamabad than in Germany, Australia or the States,” she says. Conservative families assume that Afghan women living in the East are likely to be more obedient. This may not be true -- in which case the family, in Rona’s view, is in for an unpleasant surprise. Experience within the Afghan community in Canada suggests that it has become fashionable to travel to one of these countries and return with a ring -- to wait for the bride to arrive. It usually takes between 12 months and two years for the visa and paper work to be completed before the bride can join the groom. Among Afghan refugees in Peshawar, there are favoured destinations. “It takes less than a year to go to Australia, if the groom has a stable job,” says Aniess, the bride’s mother. “Germany is worse, because there is no way one can go legally -- so a couple always have to take the risk of going through illegal routes.”

In recent years, some Afghan women living in the West have married Afghan men in Pakistan and Iran. But by comparison, the number is much lower. Young Afghan women in Pakistan or Iran are seen as more Afghan than their counterparts who live in the West. The refugee community in Pakistan and Iran views Afghan girls from the West as more independent and Westernized, though some families are willing to have them marry their sons, in order to send the sons abroad. It provides a ticket to the West -- even for conservative parents who were once unwilling to see their sons marrying a Westernized woman.

Apart from marrying at a younger age, getting married in Pakistan has another negative aspect. Given the circumstances of life in exile and of the prospective groom living in a Western country, there are more arranged marriages. At least in the city of Kabul, women have had some freedom in choosing their husbands. Although not everyone enjoyed the same degree of freedom, it was becoming more acceptable for families to consider their daughters' choice. In Pakistan, families continue to consult their daughters, but they initially have little choice. Since combined economic and social pressures persuade girls to marry someone abroad, they have no access to the groom other than seeing a photograph. It is not until the engagement has been confirmed that the groom arrives. On many occasions, they do not even come in person to collect their bride. Few grooms can stay more than a couple of weeks in Pakistan. Within those weeks, the groom must visit all his bride's relatives at economically back-breaking dinners and lunches, get to know his fiancée, then get married and prepare all the legal documents so that his newly-wedded wife can join him later.

Organizing huge weddings and elaborate parties are about economic competition. These events have more to do with ostentation -- marriage with a family abroad is part of the calculation of 'haves and have-nots' -- than an individual's choice and freedom. Many young girls feel they must live up to this new life-in-exile where the material world is of extra importance. In competition for finding the 'right' -- meaning financially better off -- family as opposed to the 'right guy', hasty decisions are made.

There have been several cases when the family or the young woman has realized after the wedding night that the 'ideal husband' has not been as perfect as he claimed, when it is discovered that he has had a wife in the West -- often a non-Afghan -- or

children. Or when it turns out he does not have the financial backing to help her leave Pakistan. These discoveries, known as 'his lies', often become a sort of dark wall from which the young woman sees herself hanged for life; because once the marriage has been consummated, divorce -- even for liberal families -- is inconceivable.

Fear of divorce is inspired above all by socioeconomic consequences. The prospect of life for a divorced woman is not promising, particularly in a society where female virginity is the most important mark of moral, religious and ethical purity. Virginity in woman is admired in the same way as bravery in a man. While lack of courage in a man may be shameful, a woman's failure to be a virgin can produce catastrophic results in her life. Women are therefore often forced to endure the hardship of a failed marriage in order to avoid divorce.

Afghan men arriving in Pakistan in suits and ties, with credit cards and glossy photos of themselves in front of new and colourful cars are fully aware of their superior status. This does not mean that all men marrying in Pakistan, Iran or India exploit the situation or are about to lie or cheat. There is often a genuine interest in the part of the bridegrooms in marrying an Afghan woman. But the circumstances encourage deceit. Often the expectations of women and their families put much pressure on the groom. The burden on the groom and his family is financial, whereas the pressure on the woman is social and cultural.

In the hope of avoiding such mistakes, families force their children into marrying close kin. This, they argue, is one way of avoiding future problems. Marrying within the family was common in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas. For most young men and women, it was about access. The chances of a young men growing up in a village

knowing many women from outside his village -- or vice versa for women -- was minimal. So marrying within the same village, within the same family, was almost a norm. In the cities, conservative families continued to encourage marriage within families for various reasons, including mistrust. Life in exile has compounded that fear. In addition, a few cases of proven mistrust involving grooms from abroad have brought this conservative stance to the fore. To protect their daughters from 'future problems' and themselves from embarrassment within the community, families often force close-kin marriages. This further limits the choices of a young girl who is already struggling with the idea of an early marriage, with little knowledge of the man she is marrying, and often dazzled by the speed and the superficial luxury of a wedding ceremony.

There are no statistics available about the number of marriages involving grooms or brides from the West. However, it appears that an increasing number of young Afghans marry in such a circumstances. One reason is the growing population of marriageable age among the immigrant communities in the West. Almost two decades after the war and the uprooting of the Afghan population, a majority of those who were young when fleeing Afghanistan are now in their twenties. Fear of losing their culture -- common among the first generation of immigrants -- is also another incentive, particularly on the part of families. I have not heard of any cases of such marriage involving love. The practicality of refugee life seems to have dictated the idea of 'get married first, love will come later'.

6. 5.2 Health

Women from urban centers in Afghanistan were used to visiting hospitals and clinics. They were largely accustomed to supervised pregnancies and childbirth in hospital. This was in sharp contrast to women from rural areas who were not allowed even to visit a health clinic or go to a doctor. Life in exile has affected women's access to health facilities. Due to a dire shortage of doctors, women in the cities did have access to doctors and nurses, especially when it came to delivery. Elders in the family, however, did continue to provide some advice, and the participation of trained nurses and midwives was becoming more common. In Pakistan, women are struggling with ways to make up for the loss of even this minimum health security enjoyed 'back home'. In many cases, they have had to revert to the old, traditional ways to deliver.

Health clinics in Peshawar are private and quite costly. Afghan refugees have access to Pakistani public hospitals -- where some basic services are free of charge - - but these hospitals are often far away and inaccessible to the refugee population. Instead, Afghan refugees in Peshawar rely on their own clinics and doctors. Once, the Mujahidin forces funded the majority of these clinics, offering free services and medication to Afghans. But now individual doctors and nurses have themselves set up in small clinics -- often sharing space with Pakistani private practitioners -- to serve the Afghan community. For each visit, they charge a fee of 60 to 80 Rupees (\$2 to \$3 US dollars).

Some nurses visit pregnant women at home in return for a fee. Since it is very expensive to give birth in Pakistani private clinics, most Afghan women give birth at home under the supervision of an Afghan nurse, or in her absence, under the watchful

eyes of a female relative or friend. Though this is better than the situation in the refugee camps, there are problems. Not all of these self-appointed midwives or former nurses are experienced or well-trained. They do not have access to proper resources. If a complication develops during childbirth, they do not have sufficient contact with hospitals to transfer their patients. Many often delay sending their patients to a hospital for fear of damaging their own reputation. Those patients who do end up in a hospital do not receive immediate attention since they have no previous registration records.

The cost of living in exile, the difficulty of childbirth and the hardship of pregnancies -- in addition to their own increasing sense of self-awareness -- have thus compelled a majority of women in Peshawar to use contraceptives in order to prevent consecutive pregnancies. Most women I spoke to suggested that they preferred two or three children only. This is a change from the attitude of earlier generations of urban women who considered five or six children a normal average family size. The majority of women welcome this imposed change as a positive step in their lives, towards better health and happier families.

Shema, 28, has two daughters. She teaches in one of the schools established by Faouzia and her colleagues. Her first daughter, Shireen, was born when she was 24 and the second, Nigeen, three years later. "I went through hell both times," says Shema. "After Nigeen, I promised myself to have no more children and told my husband as well that 'this is it'. I don't want to have any more children." Shema's husband, a taxi driver in Islamabad, agrees. "It is better to have a smaller family, so you can look after them properly," says Nabi. The couple have decided not to have any more children, despite the wishes of both Nabi's and Shema's mothers, who think they should have a son. "I don't

care anymore about the gender of my child,” says Shema. “I know everyone wants us to have a son, but I am happy with my daughters. I don’t think I can or want to go through another pregnancy and childbirth in Pakistan or anywhere else” (Personal communications, Pakistan; February 1998 & March 2000).

Relating the issue of smaller families to having a better or happier life began through the work of Mother Child Health clinics in Afghanistan. Now for the first time, many young couples are coming to this conclusion by themselves. But arriving at such a realisation does not always translate into small families. Many women do not have access to birth control methods, either because they are costly or, in the absence of proper hospitals, they fear for their health. Several couples I spoke to relied on tradition methods, and thus many end up becoming pregnant despite their desire to have no more children. Nonetheless, a majority of women consider acceptance of smaller families a positive change in their lives.

6. 6 Analysis

During the course of my conversations with these women, I observed that although women from urban sectors used to play some form of social role in the society where they came from, it was in exile that they began to understand the importance of that role. A strong sense of self-awareness was prompting them to take initiatives and get more directly involved both at home and in the community. They wanted to be in charge and considered their options. We saw this in the case of those women who had established schools or who offered to teach for little pay.

Physically, however, urban women have been more restricted. Their hopes of social participation and an active life were greater than the limitations of their new environment, which has affected their freedom of movement. The majority continued to challenge visible borders, discriminatory attitudes and imposed restrictions. They were pushing the traditional boundaries. Nonetheless, economic difficulties, security and other social problems remained obstacles to their goals. Defiance on the part of some women, their dedication to public education and to the creation of room for women in society -- however limited -- was a great sign of hope amid the gloomy nature of life in exile.

In the case of health, family planning and childbirth, women have had to accept the limitations of life in exile in the areas of access to health facilities, contraceptives, doctors and well-trained health practitioners. But changes in this area have enabled women to gain a better perspective in life, realizing that having smaller families can improve their health and life.

In the case of marriage, however, refugee life has had a negative affect. The desire to leave the unfavourable life of Pakistan for the West has forced women to marry at a younger age than they would have wanted. Lavish marriage ceremonies have added to the economic burden of refugee life. Material competition between families has left women often obliged to marry a family member or a total stranger who has just arrived from abroad -- often with a suitcase full of gifts for the family and an idea of a future life that may not ultimately make her happy.

In education, women have had to accept the limitations of their refugee life. They take advantage of whatever schooling is possible. But the majority of young women leave school after grades nine or 10 to marry, in the hope of going abroad. The majority

also concentrate on courses in household décor, sewing, embroidery and some language to facilitate their transition to a Western country and their new, married life. For some young women, Islamabad serves as a preparation for the life yet to come in the West. They therefore accept the limitation of their life in Pakistan as a passing phase.

Despite the circumstances of their lives in exile, many women have continued to maintain their freedom of movement. Others, however, have accepted these changes as part of experience of refugee life and have resigned themselves to 'making the best of it'.

6.7 Conclusion

As illustrated in this chapter, transitions in the lives of refugee women from an urban background has taken different forms at different times. The impact of change has not been uniform and does not always result in empowering. Furthermore, it is apparent that change has been unpredictable. As it will be seen in the next chapter, other Afghan women in Pakistan -- those living inside a refugee camp -- have also welcomed some aspects of change. However, their acceptance and understanding is rooted in the particular context of their present environment, as well as their somewhat different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

CHAPTER SEVEN

From Reaction to Action

7.1 Refugees in the Camp – Pakistan

7.1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the living conditions of Afghan refugees in a Pakistani camp. Afghan women who have had no formal education have come to connect education to their economic well-being. Most of these women try to persuade their menfolk to let their young daughters attend the camp school. However, the limitations of the refugee lifestyle, lack of educational resources, and problems of security prevent young women from pursuing their education further. Very few manage to continue their studies beyond grade eight.

The economic situation has forced some families to accept women's employment in and outside the camp. This, for the first time, has allowed women from rural Afghanistan to realize the value of their work. There is a change of attitude towards the age of marriage and the choice of husband. However, all believe in large families. There has been resistance to the use of contraceptives and other forms of birth control -- despite attempts by the UNHCR to introduce various population control methods. The Pakistani Commissioner on Afghan Refugees remains hopeful that refugees will soon return home, since they have become an economic burden for Pakistan.

7.2 Ra'meena's Dream

“Why do you want your daughter to go to school and be educated?”

“Because I want her to have the opportunities that you had.”

Ra'meena, who has never been to school herself nor had any formal education, utters these words about her 13-year-old daughter with a hopeful smile. As if waking from a dream about her daughter's future, Ra'meena talks softly about how her daughter has grown up and how she likes school, her classes and teachers. Aged 28 -- though she looks closer to 40 -- Ra'meena is already a mother of seven children, six girls and a boy. Nearly 20 years ago, the family left their native province of Kunar for Pakistan. Like most residents of Kunar in southeastern Afghanistan, Ra'meena belongs to the Pushtun ethnic group. Upon their arrival in Pakistan, Ra'meena's family settled in the Nasir Bagh refugee camp -- about 45 minutes drive from the city of Peshawar, in the North West Frontier Province.

Ra'meena married a close relative while in the refugee camp. She had her first child when she was 15. Her husband was 22 or 23 at the time -- Ra'meena is not sure. Both her family and her husband's were farmers back in Kunar. But in Pakistan, they have no land to farm. Instead Ra'meena's husband now has a small shop near the refugee camp's school. She shares a small mud-house (three rooms, a small bathroom and a yard) with her mother-in-law, brother-in-law, his wife and 5 children. She has a small room, where we sit and talk. The floor of the room is bare, except for a one-person-size 'namad' -- the special Afghan rug made of wool -- placed at the centre. A curtain separates the room. “Children sleep in one half,” Ra'meena tells me. “ Their father

[meaning her husband], the youngest daughter and I use this half.” Her eldest daughter is 13 and the youngest is 1.

Ra’meena only thought about the idea of girls going to school after she came to Pakistan. In their Afghan village, there were no schools. There was one school in the nearest city, but girls were never allowed to travel that far from home. Her father would never have let her go to school, but she has argued many times with her husband over the education of her daughter. “The biggest problem for us here is money. If we had studied, we could work and make more money. The teachers in my daughter’s school are paid well because they have studied. We didn’t study and now we can’t work and we are poor.” The family barely survives on the tiny income provided by their shop.

“I wish I could go and study,” Ra’meena says. “If their father” -- referring to her husband -- “let me, I would like to work and study now. But I know he won’t. So instead of talking about something I know to be impossible, I argue for what is possible: the education of my children.” Ra’meena, like several other Afghan refugee women with whom I spoke, has made a connection between education and the economic well-being of her family. “If the father of my children had studied, he could have had a better job,” says Ra’meena. “Would he have worked in the small shop?” she asks with a smirk. “Of course not.”

Laul Mena [a Pushtu compound word meaning red/hot love], Ra’meena’s sister-in-law, pulls her pink head cover over her face in shyness when asked about her life. When she appears at the door, she fills the tiny wooden doorframe. Like Ra’meena, she is dressed in traditional Afghan clothes -- a long baggy dress, decorated with needle and mirror work in the front, baggy pants and a long, colourful head cover. Her dark, straight

black hair, parted on the top, is arranged with narrow colourful hair clips on both sides of the face. The two sisters-in-law talk for a few seconds amongst themselves:

“It is OK to talk to her,” says Ra’meena. “She is an Afghan, like us,” pointing in my direction with a big smile. Lail Mena walks into the room. “You talk to her,” Ra’meena says in haste, as she rushes to lift the overflowing aluminum kettle from the wooden stove just outside the room. She picks up an old, half-burned cloth from the ground and lifts the handle, placing the kettle hurriedly on the ground. Two unclean-looking glasses are produced from near the stove. The kettle, which has been blackened by smoke, is brought into the room. Lail Mena watches her sister-in-law carefully as she rinses the glasses and pours tea.

Lail Mena, 25 and mother of five -- three sons and two daughters -- was eight years old when her family left Afghanistan. They came to Nasir Bagh camp, assuming that they would soon return home. She saw the destruction of her village in Logar before fleeing. She remembers how it happened.

“It was almost sunset when the Russian planes circled above the village. We thought it was like the other times when they used to take a look and leave. But a couple of days before, two Russian soldiers were killed near our village. My father rushed to the farm to cover the pile of hay, praying to God to help us. He knew something was wrong. He was killed by a Russian bomb near the pile of hay he was going to cover.” Lail Mena wipes a tear from the corner of her eyes. “When the Russians bombed the village, they didn’t spare anything. Our pregnant cow was screaming. She had freed herself to run away from the sound of the planes and bombs. Later, we found the cow dead in the nearby field. The calf was dead too. When the bombardment stopped the next day, people

buried the dead. I watched my elder brother as he covered the dead cow with soil and dust. We -- our family and most of the villagers -- left that night for Pakistan.”

Laul Mena’s two brothers managed to bring the family to the other side of the border. The two men went back later to collect some of their belongings -- only to discover that the village had been totally destroyed. Both took up arms to fight the Russians. “They came to visit us in Pakistan, sometimes bringing money for my mother” says Laul Mena. “They came to my wedding, and they visited again when I had my first son.” Ra’meena interrupts to say that about eleven years ago, one of Laul Mena’s brothers married Ra’meena’s elder sister. “They live on the other side of the camp,” says Ra’meena looking into the distance. The other brother was killed during the first years of the Mujahidin infighting (1992-1996). “We heard the news, but never saw the body,” says Laul Mena with a long sigh. He left a widow with two children. All three now live with the family of the elder brother. None of the women say it openly, but there is an understanding that the widow was then given in marriage to the elder brother -- Ra’meena’s brother-in-law.

In some parts of Afghanistan, a widow becomes the responsibility of the brother of the deceased. Whether married or not, he is required to marry and provide for the widow of his brother. It appears that Ra’meena does not like the arrangement. I ask if it is only because of her sister -- since her sister is his first wife. Ra’meena and Laul Mena exchange a meaningful glance. “In our culture, it is considered a shame, a dishonour to the family, to leave a widow alone,” replies Ra’meena. She disapproves of the practice, but is reluctant to express it openly. She does not want to “offend anyone”. She knows her boundaries. “I can talk and say things about my children’s education because I know

it matters, but there is nothing I can do about this. So, I mind my own business.” According to Ra’meena, her sister and Laul Mena should have refused the marriage. “But they took pity on that poor widowed woman and her two children, so they didn’t say anything.”

Laul Mena never went to school. Her entire family worked the farm together. Education was not on the list of priorities. Both her brothers were sent to a Quranic school for a short time, just to learn how to recite certain verses. “Only boys went to the Quranic school in the mosque; girls never did,” says Laul Mena. Now, two of her children go to the camp school. She wants to send the younger ones too, when they are older. Her husband, who works at the shop with his brother, has raised no objection to the children's education. Like Ra’meena, Laul Mena is adamant about her children's education. She insists that education means prosperity and leads to an economically improved and more ‘respectable’ life.

The mother-in-law -- who is simply called ‘anna’ [the elder] -- joins us in the conversation. She, too, had lost two of her sons to war. “I have too many bad memories,” she says “I like it here better.” Both Ra’meena and Laul Mena tease their mother-in-law, who seems an authoritative but kind character. “She likes it here, because she doesn’t have to work in the farm, milk the cow, collect firewood and host big family events,” says Ra’meena. “No, the two of you would have had to do all that work,” says anna, laughing. “At my age, I couldn’t have.” She does not deny that it was a hard life in the village. “It would have been better here if we had a little money -- a better income,” says Laul Mena.

A dog barks in the empty dust yard. A slender, old, bearded man walks into the yard. He is the father of the family. Both Ra'meena and Laul Mena reach for their head covers. It is a sign of respect. The father of the family helps his two sons in their small shop, and keeps an eye on the children as they go in and out of school. He takes the place of his sons in the shop when they have to go to the market to buy supplies or groceries for the family.

When I ask him what he thinks of female education, he shakes his head. After a pause, he says that there is nothing else for the children to do. The school keeps them out of trouble, keeps them busy. "In the village, they could have helped with the farm, taken the animals to pasture, helped in the house. But here, they only get into arguments, too much of a bother," says the old man, keeping an eye on the dog. "Do not be afraid of him," says Anna, referring to the dog. "We keep him for security. There are lots of thefts and robbery in this camp."

Shortly after midday, the children are back from school. Ra'meena's daughter -- Gulali -- and Laul Mena's daughter -- Parigul -- are called into the room. The boys are playing in the yard. Gulali and Parigul do not look like their mothers. They are dressed in a Pakistani style shalwar-kamis (fitted suit) -- sky blue kamis (dress) and pure white shalwar (pants) with a small sheer white head cover. Ra'meena and Laul Mena only speak their native tongue -- Pushtu. The girls speak both Dari and Pushtu.

Gulali is not at all shy about talking to me. She tells me that she is in grade six and likes her geography and literature classes most. She can count numbers in English and speaks a few words of greeting in the same language. Ra'meena, proud of her daughter, encourages her to speak to me in Dari. She tells Gulali in Pushtu that she

wishes her to become like me. Gulali takes a longer look at me, smiles with approval and wants to know more about what I am doing in their home. Still a child -- if a mature child -- Gulali holds her baby sister much like an adult, a little woman, while sitting on the ground next to her school satchel from which a washed-off notebook and a pen protrude.

The attitude of women towards female education in Nasir Bagh stands in sharp contrast to the Pushtun refugees in Saveh refugee camp in Iran. Though both communities share much in common, in terms of their cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as well as in the case of hard living conditions in exile, each has adapted a different approach to change. Only the younger Pushtun women in Saveh camp considered education a positive influence in their lives. Here, the older generation, even some of the men, have come to see it as a tool to improve their economic lives.

Like Hazara refugees in Iran, these Pushtun women from rural Afghanistan have come to realize the significant role of education in relation to their economic life. The Hazara refugees, however, were living in a Tehran suburbs and were exposed to an urban, advanced culture. Under the direct influence of the host country's culture, they had developed many progressive ideas on female education, or at least they regarded the progressive thinking of the host country as a desirable ideal. What is interesting about the Pushtun women in Nasir Bagh is that they have come to exactly the same realization in the confined, remote area of a refugee camp and without any direct influence from Pakistani society (which is itself, in the North West Frontier Province, very conservative).

It is apparent that it was the particular experience of migration that compelled these women to rethink their traditional views on education. Finding themselves in deplorable poverty in a refugee camp, they began to think about the ways in which they could improve their economic life. They noticed that the NGO and UN workers were economically better off and successful. Thus the immediate and available sources of comparison for them were other Afghans who work with the UN and aid agencies. For a majority of women in the camp, Afghan teachers -- often arriving from the nearby city -- have become role models. Knowing that these women are all Afghan and even, in the case of some, from the same Pushtun background, has helped women in the camp realize that there are other Afghan women who live economically better and more active lives.

The presence of Afghan teachers has made it easy for families, even men, to accept the education of their children, particularly daughters. There is little fear that anyone would rob them of their original Pushtun culture and tradition. The headmaster of the school is a Pushtun, and so are most of the teachers. The non-Pushtun teachers also speak Pushtu. This has provided families with enough confidence to allow their children to learn other languages like Dari and even English. In fact, those with a little English have a higher chance of landing jobs with the NGOs and UN. Aspiration for a better life seems to have been the crucial factor in a significant change in attitude towards education.

7.3 The Camp School

Across from Ra'meena's shabby hut is the refugee camp's school. Its dingy painted walls distinguish it from the rest of the one-storey mud houses in the area. Inside, there is a large, carpeted room with an outside desk at one end and wooden chairs around the room. The headmaster, a middle-aged Afghan man from Jalalabad, leans on the desk. All his seven teachers are female. They use tents for classes. Students sit on the floor over a plastic ground sheet, holding their books in their hands, resting their notebooks and pencils on their laps. Each class has a blackboard standing in one corner. It is one of 20 co-educational refugee schools in Pakistan, boys sitting on one side of the class, girls on the other, with a little walking space between them. When the students move, a haze of dust rises into the air. A ray of sunshine breaks through the small opening and holes in the tent. Younger children wear brighter coloured clothes. As the age of the students increases, so the colours of their outfits become duller. Boys are often dressed in their traditional clothes, girls in Pakistani style shalwar-kamis. Few dress in Western style trousers and shirt.

Grades 1-3 learn a few Quranic verses (in Arabic), how to read and write in Pushtu and Dari, in addition to an hour of drawing and recreational activity once a week. Grades 4-8 take classes that include Quranic studies, Dari and Pushtu literature, mathematics, basic science subjects, history, geography, basic English (as a second language), arts and recreational activities. All lessons take place inside the same tent. The textbooks used in the school belong to the new wave of publications produced in Pakistan by various Mujahidin groups. Learning is based on the old method of memorization. The school lacks many resources. But it does provide the basic ability to

read and write for both girls and boys. The school is operated by UNHCR, but is run by Afghans. The majority of the teachers have only high school education themselves, and only one has any previous teaching experience.

Most teachers, aged between 20 and 35, travel to the refugee camp every day from the nearby city of Peshawar. Teaching at the camp is a source of income. “It is impossible to have a job in the city of Peshawar,” says Najeeba Harith, who comes from Hyatabad-Peshawar to teach. Originally from Kabul, she finds it hard to travel long distances. “But this is better than nothing. My family practically survives on my small monthly income.” The school only goes up to eighth grade. Those wishing to continue must travel outside the camp.

There is a university for Afghan women in Peshawar. It was closed down for three years under pressure from the Taliban. The Peshawar Women’s University re-opened while I was carrying out my research, but the medical and law faculties stayed shut -- medicine and law supposedly being ‘unfit’ studies for a woman. The majority of teachers in the camp school welcomed the partial re-opening of the university as a necessary compromise. One teacher, Razeea, 20, was a first year student at the University before it closed down. She was hoping to resume her studies in science. But Harith is skeptical about the re-opening. “The Talibani types would like to close down this school too, and maybe re-open it with all male teachers and students,” says Harith. “The only protection we have is that the school is run by UNHCR, so the Taliban don’t have much leverage here.”

7.3.1 Health

As well as being a teacher at the camp school, Najeeba Harith is in charge of a health educational centre for women. The centre, also operated by the UNHCR, has its headquarters in the school, a small room with several charts, posters and a few medical supplies. Harith explains how she tries to help women in the camp. "Every third house in this area is considered a health centre -- meaning that we use one in every three houses to gather women to teach them about health matters."

The women receive basic advice about personal hygiene, and information about childbirth and pregnancies. The major aim of the campaign is to teach women contraceptive methods to reduce the number of childbirths in the camp. But according to Harith, the program was almost totally unsuccessful. "Almost all the women showed interest in personal hygiene and some liked the information about childbirth, but none would even contemplate the idea of birth control, let alone discuss different methods of contraception," says Harith.

I visit one of these homes designated as a health center with Harith. Malika, aged 34 and a mother of seven, welcomes us. We sit on the bare ground, Malika breast-feeds her six-month old boy with a big smile on her face. "God has been kind to us and given me this boy," says Malika, stroking her son's fine black hair. "I have six daughters." In Afghanistan, as in most patriarchal cultures, a son is more important than a daughter.

There is an old Afghan proverb which says that 'a daughter is someone else's property -- a boy becomes the walking stick for parents' old age'. Malika looks thin and weak. She squeezes her sagging breast for milk. Yet she does not mind having more

children. "God gives us the children and the ground bears their weight," she says. "Why make such a big fuss about having them."

There is no hospital in the camp and it is difficult for refugee families to gain access to medical supplies. The UN annual report on refugees and other NGO informal papers suggest that between a quarter and a third of the female deaths during reproductive years -- between the ages of 15 and 45 -- can be attributed to childbirth. According to Dupree, an estimated 80 to 85 per cent of these deaths could be avoided by preventative measures or the provision of health care. The current refugee population in Pakistan has the highest Afghan fertility rate ever recorded at 13.6 live births per 1000, compared to 9.3 prior to 1978 (Dupree 1992: 6). Over half of refugee women have had six or more pregnancies; some have had as many as 12. A third have experienced miscarriages and half have lost at least one child. The school health centre teaches a few preventative methods in their program for women. But it is hardly enough for the needs of the community. The majority of the women in Nasir Bagh camp rely on their elders for help in childbirth and other female health problems.

A UN statistic shows that 85 per cent of the women living in the refugee camps continue traditional birthing practices at home without the benefit of trained assistants. Those who have elders to help them are considered lucky. But there are many young, inexperienced women who lack that base of support. "It is easier to talk to them since they feel much in need," Harith tells me. "But even they show resistance to the use of contraceptives." According to several UN research documents, child mortality rate remains strikingly high. Dupree puts the number at an average 185 and 329 per 1000 live births respectively (Dupree 1992: 6-7).

It is difficult to understand how some women could realize the importance of education and its connection to their economic life, but fail to see the direct relation between large families and economic problems. Most women I spoke to seemed to make a distinction between what is divine and what is man-made. Pregnancy is seen as divine intervention. Therefore, it is wrong to interfere with what God has intended to create. But education, finding a better job and making a decent living are viewed as worldly matters.

It is possible to plan and control children, says Ra'meena who has seven children. "But when Allah intends to create a being, it is not up to us to decide to have it or not. As servants of God, we must obey creation." Though not all women in the camp articulate their faith as eloquently as Ra'meena, such belief may be the cause of their resistance to the use of contraceptives and family planning. Unlike Iran, the Pakistani government does not advocate population control projects. Some hospitals and clinics in the cities propagate the idea, but they do not have the same kind of religious support as they do in Iran.

7. 4 Refugee Camps in Pakistan

7. 4.1 Refugees and their host

Colonel Hafeez sits behind an impressive old wooden desk in his rather shabby office in the city of Peshawar. He is in charge of Afghan refugee affairs in the North West Frontier Province. Three old chairs, a giant wooden shelf and an unattractive cream-beige filing cabinet complement his presence. Behind him hangs an ostentatiously authoritative portrait of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the first Prime Minister and founder of

Pakistan. To the left is a map of Pakistan -- with camps and refugee concentrations marked in vivid colours.

After shuffling among massive piles of papers and documents, Colonel Hafeez finds a report about Afghan refugees. Leaning on the dusty surface of the table, he shows me a page which says that “at the date of this research (February 20, 2000), there are 48 administered Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan.” Then there are several maps and more figures with the caption: “There are about 500,000 Afghan refugees in the Peshawar area -- about 75 per cent of the total Afghan refugees in Pakistan” (Commissioner Report 2000).

Colonel Hafeez goes on to tell me about the refugee camps in Pakistan and how they came to exist. “When Afghans crossed the border in the 1980s, local Pakistani people were sympathetic towards them. There was this spirit of brotherly relations. Pakistanis considered Afghans their Muslim brothers and many, voluntarily, allowed the refugees to settle on their land. Some even let them use their agricultural land,” says Hafeez. “But of course, it was all done in the hope that the Afghans would soon return to their country.” However, the continuation of the war inside Afghanistan not only forced the Afghans to remain in Pakistan; it added a further massive refugee population over the following decade. “Nowadays, no local person is prepared to give land for the new camps. The government has little land to give away, so the refugees are forced to live in the already densely populated camps,” says Hafeez with a sense of fatigue and frustration.

A representative of the Pakistani authorities, Hafeez is critical of previous Pakistani governments’ policies in relation to Afghanistan: “The big blunder of General

Zia was allowing too many Mujahidin parties to come into existence. We should have kept them united.” Involved with Afghan affairs since 1976, Hafeez believes that helping the Afghan *jihad* against the Russians was politically important for Pakistan’s existence. “Americans have their own interests. On the face of it, it might appear that we were acting on behalf of the United States, but actually it was beneficial for Pakistan to stop the Russians who had the ambition of reaching warm waters. Russians were not friendly to Pakistan. They have always been friendly to India, which is a perpetual enemy of Pakistan.”

Hafeez stops short of criticizing the Taliban. “Of course the gender problem is there. We all know that they are conservative and rigid, but there is no denying the fact that the Taliban have brought peace and security to Afghanistan.” Hafeez hopes that with security restored in Afghanistan under the Taliban, Afghan refugees will eventually return home.

According to Hafeez, the continuous presence of Afghan refugees has become an economic burden for various sectors of Pakistani society. “They have captured all the market and small businesses, where the poor Pakistani people used to work. So the poor in Pakistan have been badly affected by their presence.” Refugees do not pay taxes. They sell produce at cheaper prices and no local Pakistani businesses, according to the Colonel, can compete. Local businessmen suffer. “Afghans are hard-working people. The Afghan refugee works for 40 Rupees (about 80 cents US) a day. So they are often employed instead of local labourers. This has hurt Pakistani labourers,” says Hafeez.

Afghans in the Nasir Bagh camp argue that they have been willing to work hard for their survival. The ration they receive from the UN is insignificant in relation to the

number of people in each family. Most refugee families number between 9 and 14. “A few kilograms of wheat or flour, a pack of sugar and some cooking oil is hardly enough to feed a small family, let alone a big one,” says Benazeer, a teacher from the refugee camp. A native of Jalalabad, Benazeer and her family of 11 have been living in Nasir Bagh for over a decade. “It is the refugees who endure the hardship and pressure,” she says. “The living conditions in the camp are poor. There is no security. There is plenty of poverty.”

However, Colonel Hafeez boasts that Nasir Bagh is one of the better refugee camps. “Many dignitaries have been to that camp,” he says. “In 1984, Mr. Jimmy Carter himself visited it.” A man opens the door of his office to tell him that the people from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, are here to see him. It is Eid al-Adha (the feast of sacrifice). “Someone had thought of sending some of the extra meat from the sacrifice for the Afghan refugees,” says Hafeez. After a moment lost in thought, he continues with a grain of compassion: “It will be good for the poor families to have a serving of meat.” As I leave his office, the colonel and his colleagues are discussing how to deal with the meat and its distribution to the refugee camps. It may be a real feast for some refugees after all.

7.5 Women, Marriage and Work

It looks surreal. The bright yellow, orange and green colours of the clothes of Menah, Sa’heeda, and Shafiqah against the barren, dusty yard and the small wood fire that burns in the stove at the far end, next to the mud wall. A smoke-stained pot is simmering over the fire. A dog lies in the shade near the door. The three sisters are home alone. Menah is 14, with a mischievous smile. Sa’heeda is 16, the most talkative of the three.

Shafiqah is 18 and carries a look of responsible maturity about her. They are dressed up, waiting for their brother-in-law to come and take them to the city of Peshawar. It is the feast of Eid, a day of celebration for Muslims across the world.

For Menah, Sa'heeda and Shafiqah, it is a chance to leave the refugee camp, to venture into the world outside which is normally concealed from their view. To be part of that world is exciting; the car journey, the roads, shops, and the crowds. For a couple of days, Menah, Sa'heeda and Shafiqah will stay with their two sisters, who are married and share the first floor of a house in the Karkhona area of Peshawar. Then, they will have to return to the confines of their refugee camp's mud home, to the long empty days and this barren yard. "We like it in the city better," says Sa'heeda in Dari (Persian) with a touch of a Pushtu accent. "But my sisters don't have much space and their landlord would get upset if we stayed too long."

Menah, Sa'heeda, and Shafiqah belong to the Affridi Pushtun tribe. The family owned land and a farm in Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Twelve years ago, a family dispute cost their father's life, a fight over the land which led to a long feud. "My uncle and other cousins were involved in the death of my father," says Sa'heeda. The older sister, Shafiqah, is reluctant to talk or let her sisters say anything more about the matter. "We had to move to Pakistan," says Shafiqah. "It was not safe for us to stay in Jalalabad."

The family of seven -- five sisters, a brother and their mother -- came to Kachari refugee camp in Pakistan. Six years ago, when their two older sisters were given into marriage, the family moved from Kachari to Nasir Bagh refugee camp. It is closer to the city of Peshawar and easier for their brother and mother to visit the married sisters. "When my sisters are pregnant or having a baby, if they are not feeling well or there is a

death in their family, my mother and brother visit them frequently,” says Menah. “But we -- the three sisters -- only go at the New Year and Eid to visit.”

It is Shafiqa’s turn to talk. “When we moved to Pakistan, my brother was very young. So my mother had to work. In Jalalabad, she never did anything like that. My father would never have let her leave the house.” The mother now works as a cleaner in Pakistani homes. Her income is hardly enough for the family. “She has gone to work now,” says Menah. In her absence, the three sisters run the house. Shafiqa is in charge of cooking, Sa’heeda does the washing and Menah cleans the house. Shafiqa and Sa’heeda attended the school at the refugee camp up to grade eight. Menah is in grade six. Their brother studied only up to grade four and then, to help the family survive, began work as a brick-maker. He works near the refugee camp and keeps an eye on the sisters when their mother has gone to work.

“I liked school and wanted to continue,” says Shafiqa. “But the school only has up to grade eight and we have already finished that.” Sa’heeda shakes her head in agreement. “It would have been good to continue our studies; but to study beyond grade eight, we have to go to the city. My mother won’t let us go to the city alone. Besides, there is no regular transport and it is expensive to go to the city. We cannot afford it.” They point out that at least they have completed some studies. Their mother and two older sisters never went to school. It appears from the girls’ attitude and tone that ‘being in school’ has given them a sense of superiority -- they have been part of something that past female generations of their community could never have conceived of.

Education has become a new marker, a kind of sophistication, like a precious stone or an antique jewel worn over colourful dresses. But the girls are all sad that they

cannot work. If they do, it is possible that they will lose respect in the eyes of the rigid society in which they live and perhaps their chance to marry into a 'respectable family'. At least, that is the view of their mother and brother. "My mother says that she works out of necessity -- but she is also older," says Shafiqah. According to the sisters, their mother is constantly tormented by the shadows of the past, the family feud that took her husband away. "She says that we have enemies, so we have to be very careful," says Shafiqah. But they know other married refugee women who are working. Marriage is a stamp of maturity. Some families have allowed married women to work to help make ends meet. But the sisters have not reached this stage yet.

The three sisters giggle when they talk about love, marriage and family. Six months ago, Shafiqah got engaged to an Afghan living in Saudi Arabia. "He is a relative of my older sister," says Sa'heeda looking at her sister. "From the same tribe as us, Affridies." She has never seen him, not even his picture. She was told by his family that he is 23 years old and a kind person. Shafiqah had agreed to the marriage on the basis that there was nothing else she could do. She couldn't study or work. "My mother said that if she could have avoided it, she would not have given me into marriage. But we have enemies, and she is afraid. So I agreed to the engagement," says Shafiqah. But Sa'heeda and Menah think it exciting that their sister will go abroad to Saudi Arabia.

All three sisters agree that 20 or above is the best age for marriage. "But women don't have many choices," says Shafiqah somberly. Menah is adamant that it would not be disrespectful to her family if she requested to see the man she would marry. "My mother and brother have the right to choose someone for me -- but I have to see him before saying 'yes'," says Menah. "My mother used to say that when her father wanted

to marry her off, she peeked through the wall to see my father before saying 'yes'. So she is not going to object to me doing the same.”

Would Shafiqa’s husband let her work? “No,” says Shafiqa, disappointed. “His family already told my mother that I would not be going to school or work.” Sa’heeda interrupts: “They even told her not to go to the city anymore to visit my sisters.” But Shafiqa had protested. “I told my mother that not until I’m living in his house does he have the right to tell me where to go and not to go. But once we are married, then it is a different matter,” says Shafiqa, “but after marriage I will talk to him. It is different now. He does not know me and everyone is afraid of others talking about them.” Shafiqa is sure that she will have some influence on her husband, who seems to be very conservative in his views. “I may not be able to work, but I have to learn something about the country where he is. He will come to understand,” says Shafiqa.

Like three small pillars of power, the colourful sisters stand together, resolute and radiant against the discretion of their mother and fading dominance of their brother. They mirror the tiny changes Afghan refugee women have experienced despite the socio-cultural pressures and the inhospitable environment of the refugee camp. Unlike past generations in their community, they are educated and suspect they may be able to influence the circumstances of their living. Education in particular has brought them self-respect and self-confidence. The changes in their lives have been small, but significant from their perspective.

Further down the road, there is another story of change, involving another Afghan woman. Parween considers herself lucky to have a job. For the past four months she has been working with the UNHCR as a ‘local contact’ in the Nasir Bagh camp. Several

months ago, she joined a training program to help other women within the camp, providing basic information on health and other matters. A mother of six children -- five daughters and one son -- she studied up to grade nine in one of the schools in Jalalabad. Then she was married to the son of a next-door neighbour who was an army officer.

They were forced to migrate to Pakistan soon after their marriage. All her six children were born in Pakistan. For many years, her husband was employed at different labouring jobs. Two years ago, he developed severe arthritis which forced him out of work. Since his health deteriorated, he has been doing odd jobs; but with the children growing up and rising food prices, his small, occasional income can no longer look after the family.

The UNHCR was recruiting among the refugee women to implement a new teaching program. "I told my husband about it," says Parween. "At first he was a little reluctant, especially because I have a two-year-old daughter. But the economic pressure compelled both of us to consider the opportunity seriously. So I went to the training and our two daughters -- Palwasha, 16, and Sharmela, 15 -- looked after their baby sister and the house."

During training, Parween had to go to the UNHCR office in Peshawar twice a week. The 46-year-old former army commander, Noormohamad, has not only come to accept his wife's work, but has offered a helping hand. "I went with her myself to the UNHCR office when she had to do her training" says Noormohamad. "The two girls took turns watching the baby." Now Parween is only required to report to the office once a month. The rest of the time she is in the camp. "Once other women heard about her, they come to her for help," says Noormohamad.

If Parween has to visit any of the refugee women in their homes, Noormohamad accompanies her -- or she takes her 12-year-old son with her. "It is not that my husband doesn't trust me. It is because of security," says Parween. "I don't know most of the households in the camp. It is hard to trust people, so I prefer to have someone with me." Parween earns over two thousand Rupees (about 50 US dollars) a month. This is the first time in her life she has actually been paid for her work.

Parween has gained self-respect because women in the camp ask for her help. Her children, particularly Palwasha and Sharmela, who are in grade seven and six, look up to their mother. "My mother says that now she is working -- and if we can afford it -- she will send us to school outside the camp," says Palwasha in a hopeful voice. The two-year-old Kreshma is fast asleep. Parween talks about her work while Noormohamad, standing next to her, watches his wife proudly. Dust motes move in the sun's rays entering the room from the tiny window.

Given living conditions and traditional, conservative background, it may be a while before many women can join Parween; but she has effectively passed on her sense of self-esteem to other women. Exposure to new possibilities, to a different way of life is all these women need. For the three sisters, Parween is a good role model. They consider her lucky. They can relate to her, and the more respect Parween gains within the community, the more it will help other women to follow her example.

7.6 Analysis

Afghan women in the refugee camp in Pakistan have reacted to change differently from their counterparts in the refugee camp in Iran. The most important factor has been

the harsh reality of a refugee life, specifically the dire financial situation that prompted them to accept some changes. This is obvious in the case of education, refugees have come to see its importance for economic welfare. Thus, the need for survival and the aspiration for a better life has become an incentive for education.

This is in part encouraged by the favourable cultural situation of this particular refugee life. The living environment in which change has taken place has been culturally comfortable. The refugees have felt at home within the conservative, traditional lifestyle of the North West Frontier Province, which is similar to their original surroundings in Afghanistan. Secondly, they have had reason to trust the implementation of change, since they have not felt threatened by it. The agents of change are Afghan refugees themselves, often from the same ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. They are workers with UN or other aid agencies. They are teachers at the camp school. Women have been able to relate to them and to compare their lives and status with them. The result has been a greater interest in female education.

In some cases, women have gone a step further by taking an active role in the life of their children. They have tried to convince their husbands of the importance of female education. The United Nations and aid agencies can certainly take advantage of this awareness on the part of these women. In fact, the role of the UN has been very significant in maintaining change among the refugee community in Nasir Bagh refugee camp. Their programs to involve women from the camp as communicators between the refugees and the aid groups have helped women to find employment and gain respect within a community which was otherwise unwilling to accept women's work.

However, much more work is needed in the matter of culture to enable women to develop better family planning. Regarding childbirth, very few women have been willing to accept the use of contraceptives, or even realize the connection between their difficult economic situation and large families. As I discovered during the course of my conversation with women, religion remains a very sensitive topic; challenging women's views of childbirth and divine will is problematic. But any conversation about the economic situation of the family or of women themselves encourages a better response. Judging from the ability of women to realize and take many steps towards change, it may not be very long (speaking optimistically) before they will also discover the importance of paying attention to their health and the well-being of their families.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter illustrated acceptance and reaction to change in a refugee camp in Pakistan. The economic needs of the community have fostered a change of attitude towards female education and work. Several women have taken the initiative to enhance change. This chapter brings to a close the set of case studies that were to serve an illustration of the direction, degree and kind of change Afghan women refugees have been experiencing. Such change has been very different in different contexts. The following, concluding, chapter offers some further thoughts on how these changes could be interpreted so that their diversity and multiplicity may be taken into account in formulating social policy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Remarks and Conclusion

8.1 Observing Change

In 1989, Peshawar in Pakistan was a crowded, conservative, masculine city. There were scarcely any women to be seen on the streets. The few I saw were fully enveloped in shiny black coats and head covering. Even their faces were shrouded in black fabric, just thin enough for them to see through. There were no women drivers, no colourful shalwar-kamis (Pakistani style dress and pants), none of the white or cream loose head scarves that were so common in Islamabad, only three hours' drive south of Peshawar.

It was an all-male society. Afghan refugees were no exception. We used to hear in Islamabad about the fate of those Afghan women who failed to abide by the strict dress code. The list of 'disobedient' and 'unruly' also included Afghan female NGO (non-governmental organisation) workers for whom punishment included kidnapping and assassination. These crimes, though infrequent, were intended to be a warning for other women.

Neither the Pakistani police nor any Afghan Mujahidin groups ever enquired into these crimes. There was also little public outcry and few calls for an investigation. I travelled several times to Peshawar with my family to visit relatives. We -- the women -- walked in and out of the car to enter a house with our faces fully covered and heads bowed. It was an unspoken rule, ordained by fear. From what we understood, it was the Afghan Mujahidin groups who controlled Peshawar. They had unprecedented power, effectively granted to them by the late president of Pakistan, General Zia al-Haq.

Almost 11 years later, in February 2000, Peshawar had undergone a transformation. There were women on the streets, albeit begging. They were dressed in colourful Afghan traditional clothes. Some covered their faces -- "out of shame" as one of them told me. "I don't want people to recognize me," she said in distress. Women's clothes -- Western-style wedding and engagement dresses -- were displayed in shop windows. A few Pakistani women were even abandoning their traditional shalwar-kamis for new western fashions.

Given my memory of the place, I could not believe I was in the same Peshawar -- the same city in which, under our fully-covered bodies, our hearts used to beat faster for fear of being seen. The blue jeans of young girls peaked from under their knee-length skirts; their head covers only reached their back, no longer enveloping their whole body. Young Afghan men, dressed in suits and jeans, worked in women's clothing and accessory shops. The stores where these young men worked smelled of Calvin Klein's 'Obsession' and 'Contradiction', displayed Alfred Sung's 'Romance' along with a few Pakistani colognes and perfumes.

Sleekly dressed, these young men came from 'urban' Afghanistan, part of a generation that neither believed nor cared about '*jihad*', the holy war which once inspired so many Afghans. One of them showed me a building under construction. "That is going to be a fine wedding hall," he smiled. "These days many Afghans come from abroad to marry. So we are going to have our own [Afghan] hall for the ceremony and celebrations. There are only a couple of hotels in this city and they are often unavailable or too expensive."

It was a strange combination of 'modernity' and conservatism -- the new and old living in bizarre conjunction -- in a highly populated city. Just outside the city centre were the Taliban schools. There, the Peshawar I knew so well breathed more heavily -- masculine, rigid and somber. They, too, had access to technology, to computers and lap tops and fax machines; but they had no time for the presence of women. Young men -- all dressed in traditional clothes -- were undergoing a learning-by-rote system of order and discipline. Memorization was at the heart of their education. The reality of life in the city was interfering with their ideal society. But they were pleased that in Afghanistan, the Taliban had proved a successful venture.

"I will send you to Afghanistan," Sheikh Rohat Gul, head of one of the Taliban madrassas (religious school), told me. "As a single woman, you can travel there and no one will dare harm you." And what if someone does harm me, I asked? "His head would be chopped off immediately," said the Sheikh, moving his boney old hand across his wrinkled neck in the gesture of an executioner. Hardly a comforting thought for me; however, I realised he was proud of the imposed rule of law that had brought some security across the border in Afghanistan. "We want the same thing here. Before the British drew the (Durrand) border, we were one people," he said.

The Sheikh's loyal students, boys and young men, were all refugees from Afghanistan. Living for almost two decades in Pakistan, they had grown tired of watching their lives wither away while sitting under the smouldering sun in 40 + centigrade, breathing dust and the stench of sewerage in the over-populated refugee camps near and around Peshawar. They had joined the Taliban schools to take charge of their destiny, to shape their future and give meaning to their otherwise boring lives.

In addition to the semi-urbanized population of Peshawar and the conservative Taliban, the majority of international organizations were also present in Peshawar. In an air-conditioned UNHCR office, a meeting of “social animators” was taking place. It sounded like a phrase from theatre or drama school and referred to an ambiguous unidentifiable category which might have belonged on the Starship Enterprise, to an alien world. “Social animators” was UN-speak for those few selected refugees from various camps who were used as contacts and intermediaries for UN staff. Stripped of their techno-terminology, the “animators” were, in reality, a few educated women chosen by the UN to act as communication officers between the refugee camps where the women lived.

It was all part of an attempt to encourage the voluntary repatriation of refugees, a task the UNHCR had taken up at the request of the Pakistani government in the early 1990s. In the same UN compound, Ms. Iris Bloom, the local UN coordinator for refugee repatriation, was expressing her frustration with Afghans. Her comments echoed a growing negative attitude among UN staff towards the refugees. “There are too many Afghans here,” she said. “Afghans make up about 70 per cent of the city of Peshawar. They [Afghans] have too many children. We try to help, but they don’t want to change at all.”

Bloom's remarks about the refugees' unwillingness to change evolves from two relatively common problems. Firstly, there is a growing sense of fatigue and boredom among Ms. Bloom and her colleagues with the refugees whose plight, ultimately, kept them employed. NGO and UN workers would often begin their vocation with good intentions and much enthusiasm for helping the refugees in their care. But along the way

-- dealing with countless bureaucracies, mismanagement, tough living conditions and the pain of listening, over and over again, to identical stories of loss and devastation -- UN staff would become morally and physically tired. In some cases they would effectively grow immune to the refugees' problems, even cynical about their own role in helping the Afghans.

After all, most refugees complain. For a refugee, after being displaced from what he or she once considered a natural habitat -- home -- the world seems a bitter, cruel place. Feelings of nostalgia, the difficulties of life in exile, and the humiliation of being reduced to the category of 'refugee' are overwhelming. As fatigue-syndrome overcomes UN employees, their daily work takes priority over their compassion -- over the vocation they once regarded as their inspiration.

In that context, generalisations about "too many people," "too many children," and claims that "they don't want to change" become part of the daily routine. It only sounds alarming and degrading when heard by an outsider. Few refugees understand enough English to grasp the nuances of such comments. So, the language of separation -- the 'us' and 'them' -- continues to filter into the UN-refugee relationship, defining the attitude of those who are primarily supposed to help the needy.

The second problem is far more subtly embedded than the first. This is the widespread conviction that the refugee society is stagnant and unchangeable. Refugees are often perceived as a fixed category of people. Because they go through the common experience of displacement, they are viewed as all having identical needs, problems and attitudes. Unfortunately, the majority of the organizations, who work very hard to provide basic daily care for the refugees, ignore the psychological effect of displacement, the

refugee's experience of war and the changing dynamics within the refugee family's individual life during its temporary resettlement.

While they may to some extent sympathize with the refugees, the NGOs' well-qualified organizational skills are far from adequate for dealing with the psychological aspect of a refugee's life. Forced by their system of work to be highly pragmatic, they have little time or patience to analyze the nuances of each family's situation. Classifications like "refugee problem" and "refugee condition" reflect the belief that refugees are alike, an unfortunate group of people who resist change and thus remain the same. Given the difficulties imposed by the working environment and the situation of refugees, few of the aid workers "find the time or the energy" to take an interest in the diversity and dynamism of the community, a staff member with the Swedish Aid Group in Peshawar told me.

8.2 Analysing Change

A brief look at the available literature on migration and refugees indicates that there is a wide interest in the topic as well as a widening of perspectives and categories of study of refugees and migrants. With the transforming world, the discipline of anthropology is changing to form and reform the course of theoretical debates, as well as reflecting the diversity and needs of the world of reality. Within this context and against a backdrop of some misconceptions -- for example, considering refugee society to be stagnant and homogenous -- this paper has as its objective examination of change among Afghan refugee communities in Iran and Pakistan, in two different locations of city and camp.

Change happens at different levels. First, the new environment forces or/and fosters change. It thus becomes imperative for refugee women to adapt to their new living environment. For example, women from the city of Kabul who became refugees in Pakistan had to accept certain compromises in the relative freedom they used to enjoy in Afghanistan. In other cases, developments in the host countries have had their effect on the refugees who are exposed to them. For example, the proactive family planning that has been underway in Iran affected those refugee women who were exposed to this information in an intensive way, whether through schools or the mass media. In other circumstances, the economic pressures of refugee life have limited customs that were part of the refugee women's life prior to migration. In this instance, elaborate ceremonial practices such as weddings have been eliminated in favour of smaller, manageable or at least economically less burdensome celebrations.

The environment has had a direct impact on the sort of change that has taken place in a refugee woman's life. In the refugee camps, women are restricted to a confined environment. There is little chance of exposure to the host society and interaction with the world outside the boundaries of the camp. In the cities, however, though refugees live in concentrated areas, they have a greater opportunity to respond to the larger society. They have better access to educational and health facilities. Hence, changes within refugee camps are mostly those necessitated by the living environment. There are possibilities to discover new ways of thinking, of realising and approaching issues. But these are limited.

In the cities, refugees have to live with some of the changes that have been imposed by the conditions of life in exile. However, because the context of comparison,

sources of inspiration and goals of achievement are different, there is also more potential for diversity and multiplicity of change than in a refugee camp. For example, refugees with similar backgrounds -- non-urban, with a strong tribal patriarchal social structure -- have experienced change differently, according to their living environment. Refugees in the camps have had a chance to reflect upon female education for the purposes of finding better economic opportunities. But their counterparts living outside the camp consider female education a necessity -- not simply because of its economic viability, but also because it helps women achieve other goals in life, such as being an aware member of society, capable of making better choices in life. All findings, of course, are also relative and by no means conclusive for all other cases.

Change also happens at the personal level. Women are becoming aware of their social and economic role and are enhancing change by claiming their space within the family and community. As illustrated in the story of the sisters at the sewing workshop in the suburb of Tehran (Chapter Five), women's self-awareness is increasing among some refugee women who have been able to absorb the physical, psychological and emotional changes of their refugee life. Whether out of imposed conditions or desire, these women strive for better opportunities and are fully aware of their social and cultural limitations. They struggle in various ways to broaden the realm of their possibilities. For instance, several young mothers at the refugee camp in Pakistan (Chapter Seven) have begun to fight for their daughters' right to education. They directly associate education with an economically better life; they also aspire to see the next female generation -- specifically their daughters -- grow up differently from themselves, with more opportunities in life.

In the final analysis, a refugee's life does undergo transition. Refugee life is dynamic. Migration is itself a transformation in physical and social setting. It thus creates conditions for further potential change and reform. Experiencing a different environment also brings about changes in an individual's attitude to society. Exposure to a new environment or society, watching another community's way of life, provokes curiosity. These things enable a person to observe and learn new things, and to reflect upon their own traditions in relation to the new living social setting. Though such awareness and reflection may be limited and marginal, in the life of an individual it translates into a significant change.

My overall finding is that the highest degree of change has been in education, including female education. From the number of women interviewed, about 85 per cent favoured some form of education for themselves or their daughters. Most striking is the case of rural Pushtun women in a refugee camp in Pakistan who, prior to migration, did not have access to education. They had begun to understand the importance of education by connecting it to economic well-being and prosperity. They realised this by comparing the economic situation and status of other Afghan aid workers and teachers with their own poor economic condition. The result has been a unique dedication on the part of several mothers, who argue with their husbands in order to let their daughters attend the camp school. Given their conservative cultural background, this appears to be a *quiet revolution* with a great impact on the lives of women in that community.

The next highest degree of change was seen in marriage, especially marriage age. Seventy-five per cent of women interviewed agreed that on average 20 is a good age for marriage. Young women wanted to have more freedom in choosing their spouse and their

age for marriage. The more dramatic change was among the Hazara rural women living in an Iranian suburb. Exposure to a different lifestyle of Iran, along with their formal education in Iranian schools, had its influence. It has been relatively easier for Hazara women to adapt to these changes. They do not feel threatened by the culture of their host country since they share a language and religious sect in common with them. This advantageous condition has enabled refugee women to compare their lifestyle with that of Iranian women. The result has been 'positive' for refugee women.

The opposite side of the spectrum showed women from urban centers living in a Pakistani suburb, and Pushtun refugees in the camp in Iran marrying at a younger age than they used to. The urban women refugees in Pakistan accepted 20 and above as the 'right marriage age', but the majority failed to live up to this desired age for various reasons. Fear of insecurity in Pakistan and the aspiration of living in the West persuaded these women to accept marriage -- often to someone they had never met before -- at a very young age. They married at 16 and 17 in order to leave their unfavourable refugee life in Pakistan for a Western country.

Pushtun families in Iran, out of fear of losing control over the future of their children in what they considered to be an inhospitable environment, also married their daughters as young as 2 in order to avoid problems once their children grew older. Traditionally they used to marry young, but often the average age was nine or above. But the insecurity of life in exile has encouraged parents to 'tie the knot' when the bride and groom are still children.

As far work, about 70 per cent of women interviewed showed interest in employment. The majority have come to realize the importance of work as part of their

contribution to the family's financial income. The most negatively affected group has been that of urban refugee women in Pakistan. The majority of these women have had a job -- or were university or school students with the prospect of a job. But life in exile has forced them to stay home. Few have had the fortune of finding work with the NGO community, whose work is limited in Islamabad. Others have tried to establish schools where they could be employed. Nevertheless, the employment rate and opportunities remain very low. This has in some cases affected women's self-confidence.

The highest support for work came from Hazara women in Iran. For the first time they have paid attention to their economic role within the family. They have realised that what they do on a regular basis has a value. Men in this refugee community are still reluctant to value women's work as equal to their own. But the economic participation of women -- through sewing, handicraft, and other forms of assistance -- now plays a significant role in the economic life of the family. Most young women interviewed favoured professional jobs. However, given the circumstances, they were willing to continue smaller, non-professional employment to maintain their degree of involvement in the household economy.

Similarly, a majority of Pushtun women in the refugee camp in Pakistan had begun to value female employment. This was one way in which they could improve their living conditions. Since very few women from the camp were employed, it was difficult to gauge the degree of resistance to female work. Women employed by the UN as communicators between the aid community and refugees suggested a positive reception. And women from the camp looked up to the female teachers and aid workers as successful women.

In reproductive health, 60 per cent of women interviewed showed interest in contraceptives. The most noticeable change has been among the Hazara refugees in Iran. Coming from a very conservative 'traditional' background, often valuing large families, the majority of Hazara women had been deeply affected by the Islamic Republic's population control campaign, which has made use of religion in advocating smaller families. This has had a great appeal for refugee families who not only consider themselves 'religious', but also belong to the same Shiite sect of Islam.

The second largest group that had come to realize the importance of family planning by relating it to better and happier life is the urban refugee women living in Pakistan. In their case, the difficult circumstances of giving birth in Pakistan in the absence of proper health care facilities -- and limited access to Pakistani hospital and health clinics -- had affected women's approach to pregnancy and childbirth. Younger women especially have shown themselves anxious to avoid consecutive pregnancies. The favoured number of children among this group of women, like the Hazara women in Iran, is one or two children. While there still appeared to be a preference to have sons as opposed to daughters, many young women indicated that they no longer believed in such a double standard.

The least affected group were the Pushtun refugees in the Pakistani camp. Despite various programs introduced by the UN, and attempts made by Afghan female teachers, these women remained reluctant to accept any form of family planning. They resisted the use of contraceptives and continued to believe that motherhood, consecutive pregnancies and giving birth were part of their traditional, natural role in life. They appeared to regard birth as a divine matter and any interference intended to control

creation seemed to them a religious offence. Nonetheless, a majority of the women interviewed were aware of the importance of hygiene and pregnancy-related issues, though only a small number showed interest in making use of them. A few young girls showed a little more eagerness in the use of contraceptive and having smaller families.

In summary, one can conclude that overall, social change is neither uniform nor unified. It is experienced differently. As mentioned before, refugee women identified the four categories of *education, work, health* and *marriage* -- as areas where they mostly experienced change and transformation. Based on their indications, I used these categories for the analysis of my data. As result, a pattern emerged which shows the multiplicity as well as relativity of change among Afghan women refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

8.3 Looking Ahead

Since the fall of the Taliban (December 2001), an estimated two million Afghan refugees have already returned from Iran and Pakistan. Peace in Afghanistan is fragile and the economy is a shambles. But all returnees wish to head for their hometowns and villages, and the majority have done so. The tremendous challenge for women now is to resist the influence of traditional conservative society. It remains to be seen whether they revert to their pre-migration, pre-exile roles, or whether they can use the skills they have acquired through the hardship of exile to enhance their social role.

My own observation is that Afghan women have come a long way, though they may experience some setbacks, since their country is still in chaos after twenty-three year of war and destruction. Events and developments in neighbouring countries will continue

to have their effect. As became evident during the course of this research, an entire generation of young Afghan women in Iran have already internalized certain norms and values from Iran's flourishing society, its women's movement and their achievements. Even those women who sought refuge in Pakistan were exposed to a different environment. Those who have had a chance to see a different society are unwilling to go back to the old days.

Issues that continue to effect women's life negatively are poverty, Afghanistan's semi-tribal structure and the flourishing warlords--allies of the West -- who threaten the pseudo-peace and security in post-Taliban Afghanistan. But despite the uncertain socio-political climate of the country, women refugees who have returned home are at least better aware of their potential. It may turn out that for the first time in the history of women suffrage in Afghanistan -- to use the term loosely -- women could actually be in the forefront of change.

One change that has already been observed by Mr. Yoshiyuki Yamamoto working with UNHCR is the eagerness of returning refugees for education. Historically, only urbanized families expressed an interest in the education of their sons and daughters. Traditional families did not attach much value to education. In most parts of 'rural' Afghanistan, female education was seen as a sign of dishonour. However, according to Mr. Yamamoto, the returning refugees, regardless of their social backgrounds, place education on their list of first priorities: "First and foremost, the refugees want to return to their town and villages," he says. "The second question they often ask is if there will be a school for their children." This is a quite extraordinary change, part of the

development of a civil society. Out of the ashes of decades of war and displacement, which have scarred both the people and the country, has come a glimpse of hope.

However, these signs should not be exaggerated; nor should the desire among refugees to have access to education and a better standard of life be idealized. There are infinite possibilities of a backlash, particularly if the economic situation of the country fails to improve and if security -- which remains a primary problem for women in today's Afghanistan -- does not increase.

Like women themselves, the international community also has an enormous task ahead. It has to take into consideration the transformation women refugees have experienced while living abroad. How well can this community be reintegrated into yet another environment -- inside Afghanistan -- without allowing the momentum of change to be lost? The task requires not only good planning, but also communication.

The hope must be that learning from their two decades of experience with Afghans -- mostly with refugees -- the UN and NGOs will design their projects and programs with special consideration for Afghan women. Their programs could guarantee a certain degree of women's involvement in the work sector. Consciously creating employment opportunities for women will enable them to sustain their contribution to the household economy. Given the dire economic situation of life in today's Afghanistan, this will also encourage other women -- who may not hitherto have had a chance to think about work -- to see the social and economic role they might play in improving their own lives.

Creating educational possibilities is also essential. A majority of women would like to have access to some form of education. The resistance to education even among

conservative families seems to be reduced, compared to some pre-migration patterns. The aid community could make female education one of its aims. If the example of Hazara women in Iran shows that segregated schooling has been the greatest incentive for the increase in the number of female students, the aid agencies could take this factor into account when building and organising schools for Afghans -- mostly in 'rural' areas.

The aid agencies could also continue their projects of hygiene education and female health, including childbirth. Agencies can take advantage of the experiences of refugee women with family planning. Some might be employed as communicators, sharing their discoveries about consecutive pregnancies, labour and childbirth with women who remain unaware of these issues. Training programs for female nurses, doctors and health practitioners is yet another area through which women's reproductive health could be improved. Training of midwives to assist women who prefer to give birth at home could address some of women's needs.

There is also the conflict between the lifestyle and norms of those who return after years -- in some cases decades -- of life in exile, and those who never left Afghanistan. There may be a backlash against some of the changes experienced by women refugees. The UN and other agencies would do well to note the differences between these two communities. It is also important to understand the differences between various returning groups and the degree of change in their lives while in exile. This will enable the aid community to organize its projects to speak to the needs of individual groups, avoiding generalizations and stereotypes.

It remains to be seen how the UN, aid agencies and Afghan women come out of these trying times and how much they are willing or able to take into account the

changing dynamics within the family and communities where the majority of the returning women refugees resettle. The fear remains that they will acquire only enough resources to deal with emergency situations, with no long-term planning in place. That will be a devastating blow to the achievement of Afghan women, particularly those who may return from exile with high hopes and aspirations. However, as they say in Afghanistan, once the tide has turned to flow in a particular direction, it is hard to stop it. One only hopes it moves in the right direction of where Afghan women themselves desire to be.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing Against Culture". in R.G. Fox (ed), Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present. New Mexico: School of American Research Press.
- Adamec, Ludwig., Irwin, Frances., Grassmuck, George. 1969. Afghanistan: Some New Approaches. University of Michigan Press.
- Alonso, Ana Maria. 1994. "The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity". Annual Review of Anthropology, 23, 379-405.
- Amiri, Soudabeh. May 2000. "Afghan Gender Equity Programme". UNHCR, Teharn, Iran.
- Amnesty International Reports on Afghanistan. November 1996 and September 1997. France.
- Binava, Abdul Raouf. 1944. Pashtani Mermoni (Pushtun Women) [in Pushtu]. Kabul: Pouhana Rana.
- Buckley, Richard. 1996. "Migrants and Refugees: Millions of People on the Move". Understand Global Issues, 9. Buxton Press Ltd.
- Burns, John. September 1997. "Islamic Rule Weighs Heavily For Afghans". The New York Times.
- Christensen, Hanne., Haffenden, Fay. August 1989. "Planning and Afghan Women Report". UNICEF/UNIFEM Workshop.
- Cohen, Erik. 1977. "Recent Anthropological Studies of Middle Eastern Communities and Ethnic Groups". Annual Review of Anthropology, 6, 315-347.
- Colson, Elizabeth. 1989. "Overview". Annual Review of Anthropology, 18, 1-16.
- Commissioner Report on Afghan Refugees. April 2000. North West Frontier Province: Pakistan.
- Davidson, Anders., Hjukstrom, Peter. 1999. Afghanistan, Aid, and the Taliban: Challenges and Possibilities on the eve of the 21st century. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, Stockholm.
- De Genova, Nicholas P. 2002. "Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life. Annual Review of Anthropology, 31, 419-447.

- Dupree, Louis. 1980 edition. Afghanistan. New York: Princeton University Press.
- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. 1998. "Afghan women Under the Taliban" in Fundamentalism Reborn?: Afghanistan and the Taliban. London: Hurst & Company.
- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. July 1992. "The Present Role of Afghan Refugee Women and Children". ACBAR Relief Agency, Peshawar, Pakistan.
- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. 1984. "Revolutionary Rhetoric and Afghan Women" in Revolutions & Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives. Ed. Canfield, Robert., Shahrani, Nazif. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dupree, Nancy Hatch. 1988. "The Role of the VOLAGS". In The Tragedy of Afghanistan: The Social, Cultural and Political Impact of the Soviet Invasion. London: CROOM HELM Ltd.
- Eqbal, Ahmad. November 1999 "Jihad International Inc." Dossier 22. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, France.
- Esposito, John. 1982. Women in Muslim Family Law. Syracuse University Press.
- Fletcher, Arnold. 1965. Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest. Cornell University Press.
- Fraser-Tyler, W.K. 1967. Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia. Oxford University Press.
- Ghobar, Mir G. Mohammad. 1995. Afghanistan dar Maseer Tarekh (Afghanistan in the Course of History) [Dari] Tehran: Inteshorat-e Jamouree.
- Gmelch, George. 1980. "Return Migration". Annual Review of Anthropology, 9, 135-159.
- Goldschmidt, Arthur. 1991. A Concise History of the Middle East. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Graves, Nancy B. , Graves, Theodore D. 1974. "Adaptive Strategies in Urban Migration" Annual Review of Anthropology, 3, 117-151.
- Gregorian, Vartan. 1969. The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880 - 1946. Stanford University Press.
- Gupta, Bhabani Sen. 1986. Afghanistan: Politics, Economics and Society. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

- Hannerz, U. 1996. "The Local and the Global: Continuity and Change" in U. Hannerz, Transnational Connections. Routledge.
- Hapret's New Monthly Magazine. March 1879. "Afghanistan". No. 346-31 Vol. LVIII. Washington, USA.
- Harris, Olivia. 1996. "The Temporalities of Tradition: Reflecting on a Changing Anthropology" in Hubinger, V. (ed.), Grasping the Changing World: Anthropological Concepts in the Postmodern Era. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hefner, Robert W. 1998. "Multiple Maternities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age". Annual Review of Anthropology, 27, 83-104.
- Ibrahim, Saad Eddin. 1997. "From Taliban to Erbakan: The Case of Islam, Civil Society and Democracy". Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies.
- Ignatieff, Michael. 1998. The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience. Penguin Books.
- Johnson, Chris. 1998. "Afghanistan: A land in Shadow". Oxfam, London, UK.
- Kakar, Hasan Kawun. 1979. Government and Society in Afghanistan. University of Texas Press.
- Kearney, M. 1995. "The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism". Annual Review of Anthropology, 24, 547-565.
- Loyn, David. Oct. 1996. "Afghan victors put mercy to flight". Guardian Weekly.
- Magnus, Ralph H., Naby, Eden. 1998. Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid. Westview Press.
- Maley, William. 1998. Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban. London: Hurst & Company.
- Malkki, Liisa H. 1995. Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania. The University of Chicago Press.
- Malkki, Liisa. 1995. "Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things" Annual Review of Anthropology, 24, 495-523.
- Marsden, Peter. 1998. The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan. Zed Books.
- Mead, Margaret. 1973. "Changing styles of Anthropological Work" Annual Review of Anthropology, 2, 1-26.

- Messer, Ellen. 1993. "Anthropology and Human Rights". Annual Review of Anthropology, 22, 221-249.
- Moghadam, Valentine. 1994. Gender and National Identity. Oxford University Press.
- Moghadam, Valentine. 1993. Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East. Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Moghadam, Valentine. March 1992. "Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernising Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan". In The International Sociology Vol. 7. No. 1.
- Mujadidi, Fazel Ghani. 1997. Afghanistan dar Asre Amanullah Khan (Afghanistan in the reign of Amanuallah) [in Dari]. Fremont, California.
- Newell, Richard. 1972. The Politics of Afghanistan. Cornell University Press.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1996. "Anthropological Research on Hazards and Disasters". Annual Review of Anthropology, 25, 303-325.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1991. "The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity". Annual Review of Anthropology, 20, 279-309.
- Pasquinelli, C. 1996. "The Concept of Culture between Modernity and Postmodernity" in Hubinger, V. (ed.), Grasping the Changing World: Anthropological Concepts in the Postmodern Era. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pickthall, Mohammad Marmaduke. 1954. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran. New York.
- Poullada, Leon. 1973. Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919 - 1929. Cornell University Press.
- Poya, Maryam. 1999. Women, Work and Islamism. London: Zed Books.
- RAWA. 1999. "RAWA staged a protest rally on black day of April 28". (www.rawa.org).
- Rashid, Ahmed. 2000. Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia. I.B. Tauris.
- Rourke, John T. 1997. International Politics on the World Stage. Dushkin/McGraw. Hill.
- Roy, Olivier. 1985. Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan. Cambridge University Press.
- Said, Edward W. 1979. Orientalism. Vintage Books.

Schinasi, May. 1979. Afghanistan at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. NAPLES.

SIDA Workshop on Women in Muslim Societies. April 1993. Stockholm.

Shuhada. 1996. "Shuhada Organization Activities and Status Report".

Squire, Catherine. March 2000. "Case Study: Basic Education of Afghan Refugees in Iran". UNESCO; UNICEF; UNHCR, Tehran.

Smith, Harvey H., Bernier, Donald W., Bunge, Frederica M., Rintz, Frances Chadwick., Shinn, Rinn-Sup., Teleki, Suzanne. 1973. Area Handbook for Afghanistan. Washington: DA Pam 550-65.

Stine, BN. 1981. "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field of Study" International Migrant Review, 15, 320-330.

Tapper, Nancy. 1991. Bartered Brides: Politics, gender and marriage in an Afghan tribal society. Cambridge University Press.

Turner, Victor W. 1964. "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage". Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion. University of Washington Press.

Wilber, Donald. 1962. Afghanistan: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture. HRAF Press.

UNHCR No. 108. November 1997. "Focus Afghanistan: The Unending Crisis"

UNHCR Information Paper. "Operations in Islamic Republic of Iran" May 1999.