

What Do the Working Mothers Do With Their Children?

by Sabah Chowdhury

"WHEN I go to work, where do I leave the children?" was one of the many banners displayed by various women's organisations on the International Women's Day. This was a reminder of the common problem shared by all women workers, at one time of their career or another.

Even given the slow pace of industrialisation in our country, there is a growing demand for workers, especially cheap workers. Economy alone does not call for such labourers but Society also needs dual work force of both men and women.

But although there is a twin pull for women workers, the society or the economic structure does not look after the special need of mothers and, by extension, the child.

Just as a woman has the right to work she also has the right to motherhood. She is not only a care-taker of children, providing food and nourishment, but a giver of love and emotional support. And nobody has the right to deny her this.

The question then arises, is the government providing this? There does exist a Labour Law, in our country, which has a number of clauses protecting the rights of women labourers. Besides, enjoying the common rights of a factory worker, such as, a proper toilet, canteen, rest-room etc. under the Factory Act, she also has certain rights meant exclusively for her and by extension the well-being of her child.

The Factory Act provides that in a factory where there are more than 50 female workers, there should be 'creche' facilities. Children below six years of age will get the benefit of this facility. They shall also have separate toilet facility. If required, the gov-

ernment can even ask the owner of private concerns to supply nourishing food as well as milk to the children of the mothers working under them.

The law also says that, women should not work more than 9 hours in a day. They should be given a break of half an hour, after every 5 hours.

However, it is sad to note that these laws have remained in paper only. Not to speak of

extended families, mothers tend to get the help and support of either their own mothers or their mother-in-laws to baby-sit for them in their absence, single nucleus families are the worst victims. Here also it is the women of the lowest income group who are the worst sufferers. They cannot afford a maid nor can they leave the children to the care of the neighbours, as they too are all working women.

State facilities to help

The Factory Act provides that in a factory where there are more than 50 female workers, there should be 'creche' facilities. But in Bangladesh such facilities till remain unheard of.

the private factories, these laws have not been implemented in any of the government factories.

Different classes of women suffer in different ways. The woman suffers as a garment employee, as a person breaking bricks on the roadside, as well as an office employee.

Women belonging to the lowest class are the worst victims. For instance garment workers often hide the fact of their motherhood to continue employment.

Employees generally do not want to employ women with small children, as her input as a worker might suffer. She might also turn out to be irregular.

Another side of this problem is that, although in case of

women solve this problem is non-existent. Private facility, in the form of 'Baby-Care' or 'Day Care Centres' do exist but they are very few in number and their charges are far beyond the affordability of a middle class working family.

These days we all are aware of the fact that breastfeeding is the best nutrition for a baby in the first four to six months of its life. Not only does it protect the baby from various illness, it provides a strong emotional support. It creates a wonderful bond between the mother and the baby. But then, how does a working mother provide her baby with this emotional bond particularly when no offices or place of work has any creche facility, nor is she allowed to leave the place of work within a specified time? These and



Do I stay with them or leave them behind?

many other questions remain unanswered till now.

There is, as a matter of fact, no easy answer to this prob-

lem. The undertaking is such that, either the government supported by the private sector should show initiative and

come forward, or this country runs the danger of raising seriously physically and mentally malnourished children.

Women in the Eyes of the Law

by Rahat Fahmida

The legal rights of women in Bangladesh are often subject of great controversy. There are several statutory laws to reflect the legal status of Bangladesh women. Traditional Muslim Law, Indian Succession Act of 1925, the Married Women's Property Act of 1874 and Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961 including the constitution of the country itself guarantee and protect the rights and interests of the women regarding fundamental rights, marriage, divorce, succession and inheritance of property, guardianship of children, etc. However, in the absence of proper enforcement of the legal provisions, the deprivation of women tend to persist. Their implementation also cannot be perfect if there is lack of social consciousness as to the intent and importance of law.

The legally and religiously appeared discriminations are based on the idea that women are inferior and incapable of taking decisions or independent thinking or living or independent wage earners. However, one cannot deny that the legal rights of women at marriage, dissolution of marriage, guardianship of children and inheritance of property are very significant aspects in a woman's life. In Bangladesh also these legal rights are not assured or protected, specially in the villages. The inequality is based, often, on the traditional concept of men being head of the family and being more knowledgeable he has the ultimate responsibility of protecting and maintaining women. Lack of positive practice of women's legal rights, whatever they may be, is not only adversely affecting their legal status in the families but at the national level as well.

Equality, development and status are interrelated. Women's legal status should not only be viewed as an issue in social development but should be seen as an essential component in every dimension of development. So far as legal rights of women in Bangladesh are concerned, women have rights both under law and under constitution. But, it should be kept in mind that our legal system along with customs and culture plays a vital role in patterning the status and role of women in the family, in the society and the overall development process. The legal system directs the progress of a society as well as retards it.

The main obstacle to the realisation of equality is the pervasiveness of social attitudes, deep-rooted in tradition and history. While under general law, women are entitled to equal status and educational rights to those of men, in practice, a large number of women especially, in the rural areas, still cannot enjoy equal educational opportunities. Socio economic reasons, attitudes including traditionally defined sex roles and customary practices and misinterpretation of religion continue to impede rural women's access to equal opportunity and implementation of legal rights. As a result of this, in spite of many protective laws, there are still cases of murder or attempt to murder for dowry and cases of rape, grievous hurt, or death caused by acid.

The desired result cannot be achieved unless poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, economic dependency of women, misinterpretation of religious principles and traditional attitude of the society towards women are removed.

THE TASTY NUT THAT COULD RESCUE AN ECONOMY

For centuries the ngali nut tree has played an important traditional role in the South Pacific. Now the nut has been earmarked as the environmentally-friendly cash crop of the future. It may take on a vital economic role for Solomon Island smallholders and their cash-struck government.

The Solomons is a necklace of small islands, atolls and cays scattered across 800,000

only for dogs if the ngali nut pudding is forgotten.

Now the nut could provide a cash injection for the Solomons if islanders can exploit a consumer market niche among green, healthfood shoppers reassured that buying it helps sustain the world's tropical forests.

Within two years a ngali nut project here seems to be taking off and attracting the interest of environmental groups

Marketing Authority (CEMA), offers cash for ngali nuts at buying points around the Solomons' seven provinces. CEMA manager Pitakia Peloma says: "Ngali nuts grow all over the bush. Usually everybody in a village can claim they have at least one nut tree on their land. People just have to clear the bottom of the trunk and collect the nuts. They don't have to plant, or work hard, like you do with copra or co-

coa." The people of the Solomons will have to pool more nuts to be able to have a marketable surplus. To encourage them to sell in bulk, advertisements are being run on the national radio station, Radio Happy Isles. At the moment the nuts are slow to come in.

Barry Evans, who works at Dodo Creek Agricultural Research Station, a government-funded centre that monitors new crops, thinks people are up to seeing the ngali nut having a traditional custom value, not a commercial value.

He says: "Things do not work in the Solomons until people see results with their own eyes. If a neighbour dries nuts and then sells them for dollars, they'll want to do this too."

Wearing a kernel coloured T-shirt emblazoned with the homegrown slogan "in search of the ultimate nut," Evans said: "The beauty of the ngali nut is that people do not have to be taught how to plant, grow, look after or dry it."

A locally-owned community project from Yasbel province is not daunted by shelling or marketing the tonnes of whole nuts CEMA hopes to buy during the main harvest. Already it is selling nuts in kilo bags, billed as fresh from the rainforest. "We are working on packaging for overseas, but haven't pushed that market yet," company manager Gilbert Leamana said.

Agriculturalists like Evans are determined that promoting new cash crops, like spices and coffee but chiefly the ngali nut, will give people in the Solomon Islands trade options. The major benefit of the ngali nut as a cash crop is that it does not effect traditional land use.

The government sees the benefit of the nut too. No longer will it have to rely solely on earnings from copra and cocoa, cash crops susceptible to price drops on a flooded world market.

"It's the cash crop for the future," said Sir Baddeley Devesi, Deputy Prime Minister, fresh from an overseas promotion of Solomon Islands products. "The Australians are crazy for ngali nuts." — GEMINI NEWS

Solomon Islands

Area: 28,000 sq km
Pop: 283,000
GNP per head: \$530
Life expectancy: 58

square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean. It is a young country where 20th Century western values meet age-old custom and traditions.

Just 10 per cent of the 315,000 people live in towns. The rest are in the villages of their ancestors, eking out a subsistence living from their bush gardens and the sea.

Land is a major issue. Without it, islanders have nowhere to grow food for themselves or their large families. Land is passed from generation to generation and the ngali nut tree has become a boundary marker, a signpost of land ownership in the dense tropical bush.

The protein-rich nuts are important too. A ngali nut can make or break the reputation of a chief or big man. At feasts, spreads of pork, chicken, taro and sweet potato make food fit

around the world. Neil Judd, a consultant ecologist from British-based David Bellamy Associates (DBA), which plans to initiate an economically viable rainforest conservation scheme in the Solomons, says: "The ngali nut project is a classic example of a sustainable forest product, used by the people forever but never before put on the export market."

"People want alternative sources of cash, they want to find other ways than selling timber products. The ngali nut is the answer."

The nut is billed as having a unique taste and already people are biting in a chain of Australian health food shops. A vast chocolate making empire is said to be interested in the high quality cooking oil produced from the nut.

The Commodities Export

NEPAL LOOKS FOR REVISED LAWS

by Mallika Wanigasundara

KATHMANDU: Parental property virtually never passes on to daughters, only to sons. Disaffection over this inequitable inheritance system is now being voiced by the small segment of Nepali women who are educated and enlightened.

The law on property should be changed, the women feel, in view of recent political developments notably the dethroning of the monarchial autocracy and the institution of constitutional democracy.

One who feels strongly about the law giving equal treatment to women and men, as well as to races, castes and religions, is Padma Sakya. Ms. Sakya teaches at the University of Tribhuvan and is Education Director at the Centre for Women and Development here.

Ms. Sakya notes that a woman gets a share of the parental property only if she does not get married by age 35. But should she marry later, she has to return the property to her brothers, who share it equally and who often hold it in common ownership. This has happened to a cousin of hers, says Ms. Sakya.

Moves are afoot to change the law, led by prominent women and their organisations. Among them are politicians like Sadhana Pradhan (an outstanding fighter in the pro-democracy movement and a Minister in the interim gov-

ernment), the popular Nepal Women's Association, university teachers, government officials, social workers and those active in non-governmental groups.

"We hope to organise a forum soon to agitate for property rights for women, advocate a more participatory role for women in development, education for women and so on," says Ms. Sakya.

Shisham Mishra, a university student and volunteer worker for the Forum on the Protection of Human Rights, is sharply critical of how the law works to the advantage of greedy male siblings. Even if parents want to give some property to their daughters, the sons often do not allow it, she says.

Ms. Mishra qualifies that her own brothers are "not like that." But the law as it is simply does not give women anything to fall back on.

The inequity becomes even more pronounced in the case of peasant and working class women, who make up the vast majority. They have no awareness of their rights, have no time to think of such after a long day of drudgery which is repeated for practically all their lives, says Ms. Sakya.

Nepal's literacy rate is around 34 per cent and her per capita income is US\$160. The country is classified as least developed, and 85 to 90

per cent of its people live in villages.

Nepali women are gripped by a glaring contradiction, says Ms. Sakya. "We worship a living goddess -- a girl-child who is picked at five years of age, lives in the Kumari temple until she is 12 and is worshipped by all Hindus and Buddhists."

This girl represents divine power, but has not been able to help the cause of women in Nepal, says Ms. Sakya.

the parental property, so she is presumed to be comfortably off.

To the women's counter argument that wives enjoy the income from the property but not its ownership, Mr. Upreti countered that the system in fact gives women an advantage in marriage.

Rather than bridegrooms going around in search of women with the largest dowries, it is the other way

Spurred by the spirit of the democratic movement, women in Nepal are gearing to agitate for the reform of law inimical to their gender

A silver lining in this tradition is that no prospective husband could demand a dowry, as they do in India. Thus no bride would have to suffer gruesome repercussions if her parents failed to deliver.

The rationale behind Nepal's property rights system was explained by Bharat Upreti, a lawyer who took a prominent part in the pro-democracy movement. The system of inheritance by sons is to prevent the property from passing into other hands.

At the same time, the daughter who marries gets a husband who already has his share of

around. "Husbands are in the market and they have to prove their worth and their ability to maintain a family," he says.

In the case of an unhappy marriage, the wife has the protection of the law to some extent. If she has been married for 15 years and is over 35 years of age, she can seek divorce and get half of her husband's property.

Mr. Upreti said that Nepal's new Constitution assures equal protection regardless of race, religious caste or gender. Any law which is discriminatory and goes against the spirit of the Constitution will lapse within one year and will have to be replaced with a new one,

he said.

He also cautioned against drastic change. Certain castes are very conservative and influential and they are very sensitive about property rights, he said.

Charu Chadda, who is waiting to enter a university, once worked as an anthropologist's assistant and has a somewhat different view about women's position in society.

"I worked in the villages and found that women do have a great say in family affairs, (contrary to) what is generally believed. People have a wrong perception about these rights and privileges. We should not try to impose them on women overnight within a modern framework," she says.

It should be a gradual process within traditional patterns, she adds.

Ms. Chadda has a different problem. Born of an Indian father and a Nepali mother, she has no nationality although she and her family live in Nepal.

She could obtain an Indian passport, but she does not want to do so. "I have lived all my life in Nepal, I am Nepali and want to remain one," she says.

She is in effect an Indian citizen and does not need a visa to live in Nepal. But, she points out, "It affects my chances of entry into the university, among other matters." Depthnews Women's.

How Vincent and Family Live off Their Cash Cow

A single cow is helping Vincent Kimuli, a 40-year-old Ugandan civil servant, to make ends meet. He has joined the promising 'zerograzing' milk cow scheme introduced by the regional diocese of the Roman Catholic Church of Uganda.

Kimuli is supporting a family of six with a quarter of an acre of land and one Friesian cross-breed milk cow. The cow brings a net monthly income of 27,000 Uganda shillings (\$48)—almost ten times Kimuli's government salary.

Bald-headed and stocky, the soft-spoken Kimuli is now the envy of his fellow civil servants in the area of Kitenga village, 80 miles southwest of Kampala—including those in higher salary brackets.

The huge cow, white with black spots on its thighs, was lent to Kimuli eight months ago under the programme of the Masaka Diocesan Development Organisation (MADDO).

The project, run under the theme of "a poor man's shortcut to self-reliance," was initiated in Masaka diocese two years ago with the help of West German Catholics who donated young Friesian bulls. The bulls are airlifted to Uganda to service local breeds to produce superior milking cows.

A West German charitable organisation, MISEROR, collects bulls from donors and flies them free to charge.

Kitenga was one of ten villages selected in the districts of Masaka and Rakai to try the project on an experimental basis before it is spread to the rest of the diocese. Kimuli was selected chairman of Kitenga's nine-man committee to administer the project.

Every village selects a committee of farmers who agree to accept other project members irrespective of their

religious affiliation or political beliefs.

To qualify, farmers must have a plot of land, fodder or grass for the animal and a cowshed. Members must pay for membership, a renovation fee and maintenance of the bull.

Dr Jaekson Mukasa, veterinarian in charge of the scheme at MADDO headquarters in Masaka town, explained that it was better to bring live bulls to Uganda than to import frozen semen for breeding.

He added: "For artificial insemination, you need sure re-

frigeration and exact timing to have the best results which is not necessary when you have a Friesian bull at hand."

The bulls are imported while still young so they can grow up in local conditions and get used to the climate.

Musaka said many local farmers could take advantage of the project to raise milk yields. The scheme aimed to introduce dairy farming on a small scale to families not before involved.

In such cases, MADDO gives a cross-breed cow to a mem-

9-person village committee
Selects member farmer to receive new cow

Farmer provides
Land
Cow shed

Cow on loan
Friesian breeding stock

Membership 1,000 Shs (\$1.76)
Dues 3,500 Shs (\$6.16)
Bull maintenance 500 Shs (\$1)

Cash income from milk 27,000 Shs (\$48) per month
Dung fertilizer

ber on loan and provides free medicine, treatment and training.

Mukasa said: "The snag is that we are faced with the problem of purchasing cross-breed milk animals. On the other hand, we do not want to rush."

"The imported bulls and the cross-breed cows delicate and expensive. We want people to learn gradually as the idea of the scheme is spread throughout the diocese. So far the project is promising in Kitenga village."

Some have not been as successful as Kimuli with their borrowed cows. One 60-year-old widow has been getting much less milk from her cow. Mukasa blamed poor production on mismanagement. The cow was not getting enough food because the woman's granddaughters refused to help, considering it beneath their dignity to carry grass and clean the cowshed.

For Kimuli, the arrival of the cash cow has been a boon. He gets four and a half litres of milk each day from the cow, which he feeds on maize and fodder.

With better feed the cow could produce up to 12 litres, he said. As it is, each litre produced brings Shs 2,000 (nearly \$4).