



ONE wonders, how much more violence against women is needed before society to finally react. Perhaps like most other issues such as poverty, infant mortality, diarrhoea etc. we have become desensitized towards violence also.

# Stop, Please Stop This Violence

by Shaheen Anam

**Believe it or not but we have the unique distinction of being the only country in the world where maternal mortality is decreasing but another killer is showing an upward trend and that is Death of Women due to Unnatural Causes. The statement is not a fiction of anyone's imagination. This is a documented fact. The figure might vary slightly but at present there are about 52 deaths per thousand due to pregnancy related causes and 67 per thousand due to unnatural causes. The Home Minister disclosed in Parliament on 22 November that of the 21, 622 reported suicides since Jan 1992, women totalled 12,470. In this respect Jessore tops the list with 1,788 person committing suicide out of which 1,081 were women. We all know what these so called "suicides" mean. Most of these are cases of dowry deaths domestic violence etc. whereby women are murdered in a planned way and their husbands or relatives report that they have committed suicide. In other cases their lives are made so unbearable that they are forced to commit suicide which is tantamount to murder also.**

Violence against women is on the rise. We read about it in the news papers every day. We also know that for every reported case there are thousands others which are not reported. The statistics compiled on death of women in a certain age group due to unnatural causes are so horrifying that no civilized society can remain indifferent to it any longer. But somehow it seems that violence against women is not considered a threat to civilized society.

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the way it reports violence against women? Newspapers usually reports the statement given by the policemen connected with the case. We all know how fair and gender sensitive our police force is. Moreover, we hardly ever find

out what happens after the crime. There is very little follow up on the cases. The general public need to know whether the guilty person has been punished or not. This gives a message to the society in general and to potential offenders

who will know whether they can or cannot perpetuate violence on women. The other fault with the media is sensationalizing violence. Because of this only the more sensational ones gets prominent coverage the rest are ignored after a certain point

Therefore, although it is the responsibility of the media to inform the public, there is a great need for the media itself to become sensitive to the whole issue of violence against women.

national television, the fate of a young girl whose life has been completely destroyed by her kidnapper/husband. This was shown in a programme called "Drishtikon". This young girl who is just about 19 now was kidnapped 3 years ago and forced to marry her kidnapper.

and certain NGO's are doing a valiant job of helping them but the problems are so great and resources so constraints that a vast majority remains un-served. The Social Welfare Ministry also has programmes to rehabilitate victims of violence but falls far short of an effective programme which would protect them on a long term basis.

What then is the answer? Who is responsible for the dangerous upward trend of violence against women? What can we do, you and I. The first and primary thing to remember is that this is not only a women's issue. Therefore information and awareness about violence on women should be directed towards men and women both.

The second is, this cannot be treated any longer as stray or isolated cases. The numbers are far too high to define it as an outcome of domestic violence only. The deaths, and all other outcome of violence is a sickness of our society whereby one half feels superior to the other half and gets religious and social sanctions.

There is a need to network among us. All like minded organizations and individuals should pool in their resources and work in a concerted effort to eradicate this curse which results in the ultimate deaths of women. Our whole judiciary system will have to be sensitized to the issue. The existing laws that protect women should be strictly enforced and if need be there should be a movement to change some of them. There should be a public outcry, expressed by our civil society against such outrage. These issues can no longer be shrouded in secrecy or discussed in small groups and private meetings. It is now time to take a proactive and militant attitude by us all and give a clear message:

Where then does a victim of violence go to seek redress? The various women's organizations

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.**

Until very recently, death of women at the reproductive age, say between 18 and 35 was primarily pregnancy related.

The story of Noorjahan Begum from village Chatakchara, Peroza of Kalipur and another Noorjahan from Modhukahil all of whom have been victims of illegal village salish are by now familiar stories.



*There has been protest meetings, discussions and appeals to stop the unlawful activities of village salish. The Amnesty International has also documented these gross violations of Human Rights. Unfortunately, the reaction from our law enforcing authorities or from the judicial system has been muted at best and total indifference at worse. Although some of the offenders were taken into custody they are out on bail now. Court cases are going on against them but this will be a long process. Moreover we can never be sure show these trails will be conducted. In a society where witnesses are bought and sold with impunity one can only imagine the outcome of the trails.*



Not being able to bear the physical and mental abuse that was inflicted on her regularly she attempted suicide 3 times. About 6 months ago she escaped to her parents house. The torture that was inflicted upon her by her husband and her friend after she was caught was open for all of us to witness. She now carries 125 stitches all over her body as a result of the brutality. As if that was not enough for her tormentors, she and her family are under threat of death for daring to report the matter to the police.

She now lives the life of a fugitive because her tormentor along with his friends are around and boast of killing her entire family. These people are masts of the area against whom even our police force is helpless. This young girl begged for life, on National Television. What answer does society have for her?

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## How Prostitute Rosa Found a New Life

ROSA became a prostitute at the age of 17. By the time she was 20, she was living off the earnings of other prostitutes in Colombia's emerald-mining region of Boyaca. At 24, she owned a bar with 15 prostitutes and was contracting business in Ecuador.

Patricia Iriarte writes from Bogota. Hundreds of prostitutes have found their way to a new life, thanks to a centre run by nuns in the Colombian capital, Bogota. One such is Rosa, who by the age of 24 was running a bar with 15 prostitutes. Today she is a seamstress, helping others to escape a life of misery. Gemini News Service reports on the work of a centre called on to give advice by 1,000 people every day.

refused to accept her as an honest woman. And she endured economic hardships while looking for a job. Yet Marina succeeded. Her rehabilitation was the result of methods of the Sisters of Worship that are based on values, self-esteem, respect and training. She was able to regain dignity and educate her children.

The Sisters of Worship know that much remains to be done. An evaluation in 1990, sponsored by UN Children Fund, highlighted shortcomings that are being remedied. A reception office opened recently in the city's red-light district, a home for teenage mothers has begun operating, and a cooperative is being organised to provide home loans and credit for small enterprises. Funds are needed to renovate machinery and equipment at the Centre's workshops, and the staff need training in health and psychology.

on average 1,000 people a day. The Centre has a kindergarten for 200 youngsters, mostly the children of women being trained or employed at its workshops. The women learn to sew, knit, embroider, make toys or become qualified beauticians.

Marina is another girl who has benefited from the Centre's rehabilitation and training programme. She had been jailed for stealing a watch from a customer who refused to pay and met a nun who visits the jail to counsel inmates.

Prostitution is still a problem. Along 13th Avenue and many other streets of Bogota, as well as any other Colombian city, women routinely sell their bodies to survive, enduring a life of exploitation, violence and contempt. For the lucky ones, the Maria Micaela Centre offers hope for a better future.



**WEAVING A FUTURE FOR STREET WOMEN**  
A nun at Bogota's Maria Micaela Centre teaches a former prostitute how to use a weaving machine

Rosa is one of hundreds of Colombian prostitutes starting new lives with the help of the Sisters of Worship through an integrated programme for personal advancement.

Her story is not unusual. Like that of many other prostitutes, it is rooted in poverty, ignorance, and exploitation. Lacking an education, she could not find a job and slipped into prostitution.

Every day, on an average, Parul has to entertain at least 15 clients, from 6 am to 10 pm, even when she is sick. This 'service' is in exchange for residence, protection and food. She must share the major portion of her earnings with her sardarnis (pimp or madam), apart from the occasional tips of Tk 5 to Tk 20.

## Preparing for Beijing '95

OVER 700 women from Asia and the Pacific representing diverse cultures, communities and political systems met in Manila last week in preparation for the Fourth World Conference of Women to be held in Beijing in 1995, says a message, received here yesterday. The UN sponsored conference is expected to identify strategies for a Plan of Action for women's development. The discussions at Manila focussed on a critique of development strategies relating to the economy, health, agriculture, labour, education and culture, science and technology, violence, family, political development and human rights. In drawing upon their experiences the women clearly rejected the dominant model of development, by providing evidence of the negative impact of structural adjustment programmes, restrictive trade agreements. In fact the new economic policies were shown to be based on a utilisation of women's labour on exploitative terms. In pursuit of such policies, the state and become more coercive. Systemic attempts were being made to homogenise plural and mutually tolerant societies resulting in a marked departure from human rights standards by both state and non-state forces. As a result of these policies not only was the principle of gender equity systematically ignored, but there was an increasing evidence of violence against women, within the family, the community and the state. The women from the South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) addressed their concern over the threat to peace in their region from the competitive increase in military budgets, the encouragement given to obscurantist, communal forces. Both tendencies contributed to a growth in the levels of poverty and to violence. The women demanded that their concerns be recognised by the member governments at the Ministerial meeting to be held in Djakarta in March 1994. The women of South Asia further articulated their alternatives for a UN Plan of Action for Women's Development to be undertaken by member governments, NGOs and women's organisations-alternatives leading towards the ideals of social justice and gender equality in the region.

## Flesh Trade Arises Out of Crisis

PARUL, from Kutipara, Rangpur is only eleven years old. She used to live with her grandmother, a beggar, but hardship and poverty has drawn both of them to the romantic city Dhaka. Dhaka, seemingly the only answer to their prayer, has been a magnetic city for the needy and poor. Parul was offered work as a maid servant by a woman. Stricken by hunger, she grabbed it, as it was the best offer she had in two days.

by Raffat Bintu Rashid. These girls are rigid and self-centered, they become desperate in the face of extreme poverty. After receiving assurances for survival, from the pimps, they adopt prostitution as a profession. In many cases the parents bring their daughters in exchange for monthly financial assistance.

But what about the ones not licensed, the ones venturing in the streets of old Dhaka or in front of Ramna park? They sleep under the open sky on the footpaths and live only on bread and tea. They earn between Tk. 5 to Tk 20 which at least ensures their meals, according to them.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20 1989, said in Article 34: states parties undertake to protect the child from all form of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Unfortunately these laws only add pages to the books; in terms of implementation, initiatives are negligible. Rehabilitation of these girls are not of any standard. Sometimes they are given in marriage but later they return to their old profession after being tortured by their husbands.

Parul is just an example among the lakh and half of these unfortunate women. This is the unofficial number of prostitutes in the country and of them the majority are teen-

Their customers are school boys, students, service holders, police, BDR, army, old men and others. Some visit the brothel daily, some twice a week. None are allowed more

than half an hour. Anyone wanting to stay more is charged double. Sardarnis introduce them as daughters before police and law-enforcement authorities and the girls call them mothers.



The rescued teen-age girls from Kandupatty

Why is this inhuman trade being tolerated is beyond anyone's understanding. It is not merely tolerated but protected, licensed and regulated by law and constitutes a large source of public revenue. Dala lawyers (Broker lawyers) make arrangements for affidavit, a sort of license for the trade. Pimps prepare these documents and the girls put their thumb impression in presence of a notary public. Thus without understanding they make declarations as to why they choose to become prostitutes. Sardarnis threatened them saying "we have license, police can do nothing."

She says: "After three months, I was completely demoralised. I lost contact with my family for several years."

The opportunity for a new life came at a centre for venereal disease control in Bogota. There, she was given a pamphlet with information on the Maria Micaela Centre, headquarters for a social programme sponsored by the Sisters of Worship to aid prostitutes. The goal of the programme is to offer rehabilitation without incarceration.

For Rosa, as for the others who have used the Centre, such a profound life change was not easy. She says: "In the beginning, I had ups and downs. Since I was trying to train myself and find other ways to earn a living it took time to overcome my predicament. Now things are definitely different."

The true extent of prostitution in the Colombian capital has yet to be identified. Statistics provided by authorities show that anywhere between 45,000 and 200,000 women work in the sex trade. The doubt about number shows how little is known about the problem. Studies show that 82 per cent of the prostitutes are 15 to 40 year old, and eight per cent are nine to 14.

They get two hours instruction daily for three months on subjects that range from reading and writing to the creation of small enterprises. A factory employs 60 people and sponsors about 25 interns, primarily adolescents in need of special attention.

They talked about the possibilities of a new life. After release Marina worked in brothels, then went to the Centre. There she learned to operate a sewing machine and discovered a talent for embroidery. Marina gave up prostitution and began supporting her children with earnings from the Centre's clothing factory. She pulled together enough money to buy a sewing machine. Turning life around was a struggle. A lazy husband tried to take advantage of her. People

Help is available to those who find their way to the Maria Micaela Centre, which receives

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