

# LIVING

## Can the Single Mother Make it?

**T**ODAY in our capital city, and in places like Comilla and Rajshahi, single mothers of middle class families, who are either widows or divorcees, are making ends meet by taking up jobs, while running the home at the same time. Their husbands are sometimes remarried, sometimes visit the children occasionally with gifts, but are often simply not there when family and financial crisis arise.

Shabnam Khan with her four children, has seen her husband only from time to time. He took to card playing before his marriage, unknown to the wife, and lived in Dhaka, while the poor lady tried her best to keep the children fed, clothed and educated in Rajshahi. All through problems like typhoid, jaundice, appendicitis operations, rheumatic fever not to mention — measles and mumps — the father was not on hand even to buy the necessary medicines or the powdered milk. He failed to leave money for clothes or food on any occasion and the lady simply performed her conjugal duties on the said visits, as she was advised to do so by her family.

Shabnam had only completed her matriculation examination when she was married. She went through college and a secretarial course, living with her brother while her children were being brought up at home by the grandparents. When the children were a little older she brought them to stay with her, with the youngest in a makeshift cradle, as Shabnam worked for some NGO. As the children grew older she shifted to Dhaka working 9 to 7, coming home to cook and clean and bring up her brood.

It was not that Shabnam did not have proposals of marriage, people knowing that she was separated from her husband. There were her colleagues, relatives, friends of her brothers. Yet she rejected them all as she feared that if the children were brought up by the grandparents, they might not be able to grow up and adjust to normal healthy life. Shabnam calculated, by the time she was forty the children would all be independent and she would be able to lead a life of her own with a man of her choice.

Today she is forty-five and still living with her children, with her grandchildren added to the list of her care for admission to school, tutoring, and baby

sitting. Shabnam is well-groomed, soft-spoken, well-read and a reliable office worker. Yet she feels that all her married life she has been a "hostel superintendent" and little more. With regular hours to keep at office and the large family to supervise, not to speak of nieces and nephews who come for her advice and help regularly, she has been a matriarch, with no love life to speak of.

Nasreen Kabir, at 30, is a mother of a boy and a girl whom she is supporting herself, like Shabnam, with her work as a teacher of Biology and, with

her children with her aging and ailing mother.

Like Shabnam, Nasreen has hardly enjoyed the pleasures of married life and although she knew her husband since her university days, she found life miserable, as he cheated on her. There were repeated quarrels for the four years that they lived together, while Shabnam had no outings, while her husband resented even her women friends. While Imran, her husband, spent money on smoking, drinking and evenings at the club or cinema house, she was like some prisoner in the home

finding it an easy task to play both father and mother.

It is not only the middle class woman who finds it difficult to run a home on her own in the east. Parul works as a garment factory worker and certainly earns more than the average "aya". Yet all the money she earns goes into paying for the tiny room she has rented near Jhikata for herself and her three young children. She pays the baby-sitter, an old neighbour of hers, with many grand-children of her own to mind. She sends her elder boy and daughter to a free school. Yet for a good feed Parul goes to her mother's house, where the mother works as a cook and spends the night at her mother's servant quarters. She is sometimes given old clothes for herself and her children by her mother's "begum-sahib" and that keeps her in seeing the days through.

One naturally asks, where is Parul's husband and what does he do? Anwar, the man in question has taken a second wife and his job as a rickshaw-puller had never been a reliable one. He would have the cheek to come for meals at the place where his mother-in-law was employed and collected his "baksheesh" when he did the odd gardening job. He would often bring along his second wife until the master of the house put a stop to it. Today Parul no longer has her husband coming to borrow money. Yet rearing her children and making her own ends meet is a constant daily battle for her.

The cases mentioned does not mean that all husbands are uncaring. There are men who regularly supervise their children's homework and 9 o'clock dinner, while the wife is away on official tour or even beauty exercise, tennis or swimming. Husbands have been known to do the main cooking during Eid, birthday and anniversary occasions. They have known even to shampoo their wife's hair and paint their toe-nails for them. Most marriages in Bangladesh are much happier than the ones, say in the west. Yet the fate of the single mother remains a lamentable one with no social benefits and often little help from the in-laws. She has to struggle incessantly to make ends meet, to educate, protect and feed her children, and have some sort of social life for herself.

Today she tends to lose her temper with her children when they are misbehaved, and rarely has any time for her appearance trying to run her career and her household. She is certainly not



A mother with her child. Courtesy:Alpana

tutions she gives in addition. To pay the house rent, salary for the servants, fees for the children's school, and to buy the rice, meat, vegetables and other necessities of life, she has very little savings to show. Bringing up her children without a father, who has married again and taken up a job abroad, is no trifling matter. She barely finds the time to relax or socialise. For her it is all work, work and more work. Her husband does not send any child support allowance, and one wonders how Nasreen will pass her days in future. It is difficult she says to find a husband in Dhaka, who will accept her two children along with her. She hates the idea of leaving

at the beck and call of her in-laws and her sour tempered husband. She did not see any point in continuing with her life with her husband as he only came home about midnight to quarrel and find faults. Friends advised that he should see a psychiatrist but that did not improve matters. Shabnam took to tranquilizers and cigarettes but she came to the conclusion that she would lead a more organised life, and an existence with less tension if she lived on her own.

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## Cards for a Noble Cause

by Lavina Ambreen Ahmed

**I**t is winter again. The season which represents so many things: such as chilly breeze in the early hours of dawn, foggy morning, dew drops on the grounds, the delightful aroma of yummy home-made 'pithas' coming from the kitchen, picnics, parties and holidays, plus, the pleasure of sending and receiving New Year cards.

Not a year passes, without the exchange of season's greetings cards between family members, friends, colleagues and well-wishers. After all it is time to say goodbye to the current year and welcome the new year with open arms. A new year full of new promises, hopes and resolutions and what better way is there to express one's feelings if not by a card?

People are already rushing to the stores to get the best cards available. Are you one of them? Then, wait a minute and stop yourself from buying the usual funny or serious New Year cards this year. For a change try being different and do a good deed — buy Unicef cards.

Unicef, or the United Nations Children's Fund, is the only organisation within the UN system dedicated exclusively to the welfare of children. Unicef's concern is for the millions of deprived children throughout the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, whose basic rights to adequate nutrition, health care and education remain unfulfilled.

In other countries Unicef has many ways of raising funds i.e. staging concerts, exhibitions, matches or whatever, but in our country the only way of fund raising till now is by selling cards, stationery, ensembles, calendars to the general public. Though, in the future there are plans of trying out some new methods in our country too.

The Unicef greeting card operation began in 1949 when a seven-year-old Czechoslovakian girl named Jitka Samkova, gave a painting to Unicef in thanks for the help it had given her war-damaged village during the World War-II. Her drawing composed on the theme "Happiness in a country at peace" became the first Unicef



A sample of a UNICEF card

card. From then on, Unicef greeting cards came into being and gained fast popularity worldwide within a short span of time.

Later on, designs were contributed by famous artists and museums from all over the world. There is an International Art Committee which reviews several hundred art works annually and selects the designs most appropriate for card reproduction. At present, the developed world is giving a great deal of importance to the environment. Keeping this in mind the Unicef is using recycled paper for the envelopes, card boxes, mailing cartons and

some other items. Card designs too are often printed on recycled paper whenever the art work is adaptable to this process. Card messages are usually printed in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Arabic — which are the six official working languages of the United Nations.

In addition to holiday cards and calendars, Unicef also offers a year round collection, which includes cards of four sizes, practical stationery items, pocket diary, desk calendar, colourful mugs, several jigsaw puzzles, an interesting memory game called Tandem, etc. But of course, the cards are the best

selling items. Unicef helps the governments at their request to establish multifaceted projects of long-range benefit, i.e., providing basic services for women and children — maternal and child health care, clean water supply, improved nutrition, education and social services.

In the last few years this organisation with the help of mass media has drawn world wide attention to the fact that four relatively simple and inexpensive methods, if applied, could bring about a revolution in child health and survival and could make possible for the parents themselves to halve the rate of child deaths and save the lives of up to 20,000 children each day. These methods are: growth monitoring, oral rehydration, breast feeding and immunization.

Every year, many volunteers all over the world help raising funds during the greeting card sales campaigns, specially, in the Eid or New Year season. The voluntary contributions derived from government, organisations, groups and individuals really benefit the underprivileged children of the developing nations.

Sad but true, that people are often reluctant about buying these cards, they seem to be more concerned about the designs — the cards not portraying our tradition, culture being quite a common complaint among the customers. This kind of feeling fogs their minds from thinking about the noble cause behind each card, a single card can help save the life of a child.

Children are the future of a nation. If we can't ensure them their basic needs, everything else would be meaningless. In the beginning of a new year, let's all take an oath of trying to be humane citizens in the true sense, by helping the disadvantaged children anyway we can — in this case just by buying cards.

Next time when you ask yourself, "Why should I buy Unicef cards?" remember the Unicef logo — "There are millions of reasons and all of them are children."

## Audrey Hepburn's Final Performance on Star Plus

**A**UDREY Hepburn, one of the most honoured and respected women in the world, can be seen in her last performance as host of the critically acclaimed series, *Gardens of the World* with Audrey Hepburn, on STAR Plus beginning Friday, January 7th at 2 PM (BST), says a press release.

*Gardens of the World* presents diverse garden themes in a breathtaking series of six programmes, featuring over fifty of the world's most beautiful gardens — Italian Renaissance gardens, 17th Century French gardens and 20th Century English gardens among them. Exploring each of the gardens from an historical, cultural and aesthetic perspective, Miss Hepburn is enchanting and informative and shares the narration with distinguished British actor Michael York.

Miss Hepburn's performance was recognised with an Emmy Award from the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for Outstanding Individual Achievement in an Informational Series.

"Audrey refused dozens of



feature film roles in the 80s and 90s. Almost nothing could lure her from the pleasures she found in her home and family life, and her responsibilities to UNICEF," noted Robert

Wolders. Miss Hepburn's companion and lifemate, "But as host of *Gardens of the World*, Audrey saw a rare opportunity to bring forth beauty in a poetic and meaningful way. She

became passionately involved with *Gardens* — from conception to completion."

Miss Hepburn filmed the six-part documentary series on location in the US, Europe, the Caribbean and the Far East. The fifty world-class gardens featured were selected by a team of accomplished garden experts in collaboration with Hepburn herself. Her experience in, and love of, the garden were only two of the crucial ingredients which made her contribution to the project extraordinary.

The lushly photographed series explores a full range of garden styles, from formal gardens to country gardens; from flower gardens to public gardens and trees; and whole episodes to the two most popular residents of the garden, roses and tulips.

"We all have within us a need to create beauty. And we all can in a garden however small. It is this need which has written the history of gardens. By looking at our world through its gardens, we reaffirm the simple human capacity to create beauty on this earth." — Audrey Hepburn.

## Allergies and How to Cope with Them

by Sylvia Saleem

**W**HAT is an allergy? It is a sensitivity any one of us may have (or develop) to any substance or thing which in the ordinary way is absolutely harmless.

Practically anything may cause an allergic reaction in someone. The ingredient that is an irritant to you personally may be completely harmless to others. It may be in the food you eat, in the clothing fibres you are wearing, in the pollen of flowers carried on the wind, in the fur of your favourite domestic pet. It may be in the deodorant you are using, or the deplatory, or in any one of your hair preparations. It may be in the perfume or cologne you like best. It may be in the colouring of your lipstick, rouge or eye make-up. It may be in your face-powder.

There is no accounting for it, nor is there as yet any specific "cure".

When the word is used in connection with cosmetics, it

means, simply that one woman in a thousand (or in many thousands) reacts to some ingredient in a cosmetic which others use with joy and without ill-effect of any kind.

The reaction usually takes the form of a skin eruption or rash which breaks out after contact with some specific preparation. Generally the symptoms are merely redness, swelling or itching in a small skin area, although sometimes they resemble the effects of a common cold or hay fever.

If you suspect you have an allergy to any one of the various cosmetic preparations you use, the first thing to do is to try to find out which one of your beauty aids is the offender.

### Consult Your Doctor

It is always wise to consult your doctor, but it will help him to help you, if, in the early

stages, you try this simple but effective preliminary test. Rub a little of the cream, lotion, lipstick or other preparation which you suspect may be unsuitable for you in to a small area just below and slightly behind one ear (in the place hair stylists normally use to test your reaction to any permanent hair colouring before they go ahead with the first application). Do not wash this part of the skin for at least twenty-four hours unless you feel some reaction such as burning or itching. Immediately there is any sign of reaction, sponge the skin with warm water and baby-mild soap — there is no need to wait longer, for you have established your case and pinned down at least one likely culprit.

If you feel nothing after three days, and if there is no sign of pinkness, redness or rash, then the particular cosmetic you

have put to the test is innocent and you must experiment further with others, one by one.

### Non-Allergic Preparations

If you have an allergy to cosmetics... do not despair! There are many who suffer in the same way. We are living in an age of allergies, and each year sees an increase in the number of allergic reactions reported. Advances in cosmetic science have resulted in more chemically treated and formulated compounds, as well as in a vastly increased number of preparations used in the pursuit of beauty.

To be allergic to the use of any favourite cosmetic is, in itself, heart-breaking to the individual concerned. Recognising this fact, some cosmetic manufacturers now produce specially created ranges of non-irritant preparations.



"A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" on "Star Plus"



"Heart of Christmas" on "Star Plus"

### Milk Toffee I

1 bottle milk  
2 lb sugar  
flavouring

Boil the milk until it is quite thick. Add the sugar and stir over the fire until the sugar has all melted. Then add the flavouring and continue to stir until the mixture thickens. Remove from the fire and pour out on a flat dish which has been rinsed out with cold water. When partly set mark across in small diamond-shaped pieces or squares, and cut in pieces when cold.

### Milk Toffee II

1 tin condensed milk  
1 1/2 lb sugar  
1 teacup water  
almond or vanilla flavouring

Put the sugar and water in a preserving pan and stir over the fire until the sugar is dissolved. Lower the heat and add the milk, stirring it continuously as it burns easily. When very thick, remove from the fire,

add the flavouring, and pour it on to a flat dish which has been rinsed out with cold water. When set mark in small squares, and when nearly cold cut into pieces.

### Nut & Fruit Toffee

2 lb sugar  
1 tin condensed milk  
1 dessertspoonful butter  
1 teacup water  
1 dessertspoon vanilla essence  
50 cashewnuts  
1 lb sultana raisins  
2 dessertspoonfuls cocoa

Skin the cashewnuts, chop them somewhat roughly and toast them in the oven for a few minutes. Wash and pick the sultanas and dry them. Put the sugar and water into a preserving pan, and stir over the fire until the sugar is dissolved. Then add the butter, milk and cocoa which must be dissolved

in a little boiling water. Stir constantly until the mixture thickens and hardens when a little is tested in cold water. Remove the pan from the fire, stir in the cashewnuts and sultanas and add the flavouring. Stir well together and pour into a buttered dish or tin. Mark it in squares and cut in pieces when cold.

### Golden Toffee

1 lb soft sugar  
2 tablespoons water  
2 oz butter  
2 tablespoons golden syrup  
1 tin condensed milk  
vanilla flavouring

Melt the butter in a preserving pan, add the sugar and water and then the syrup. Boil for a few minutes and add the milk. Now stir constantly and boil for a quarter of an hour longer or until the mixture thickens and

### Walnut Toffee

1 lb sugar  
3 oz shelled walnuts  
2 oz butter  
a pinch of cream of tartar  
1 teacup water

Toast the walnuts a few minutes in the oven and then spread them out on a buttered dish. Put the butter into a saucepan and melt it over the fire, add the sugar, water and cream of tartar and bring to the boil. Boil without stirring until the toffee breaks brittle when tested in cold water. Pour over the nuts and leave to set. Before it is quite cold cut it in strips.