



**UNITED NATIONS**

**WORLD CONFERENCES ON WOMEN**

**First World Conference - 1975**

**MEXICO CITY**  
June 19 to July 2

World Plan of Action set goals for 8 years. They were:

- Marked increase in literacy and education;
- Equal access to opportunities;
- Increased employment;
- Elimination of discrimination;
- More women in policy-making positions;
- Increased provision for welfare services;
- Parity in civil, social and political rights;
- Recognize the economic value of women's work;
- Promote women's organization within institutions;
- Develop rural technology and support services.

**Second World Conference - 1980**

**COPENHAGEN**  
July 14 to 31

The national level Programmes of Action included:

- Establishment of qualitative and quantitative targets for second half of the Decade.
- Machinery (women's bureaus and commissions) should be established with effective linkages with national women's organizations.
- Legislation guaranteeing equal participation of women in politics and decision-making.
- Studying ways in which mass media treat women's issues, implementing corrective measures.
- Cooperation between governments and NGOs. Full and equal opportunities for employment and career equal remuneration;
- Mainline of citizens in good physical and mental health for overall socio-economic development;
- Equal access to education and training at all levels.

**Third World Conference - 1985**

**NAIROBI**  
July 15 to 26

Reports from 134 governments indicated that the Decade's objectives were only partially attained.

The absence of equality of women in most countries is a severe social problem.

The delegates drew up the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000.

All documents adopted during the Decade remain valid and are the basis of the Forward Looking Strategies.

**Fourth World Conference - 1990**

**BEIJING**  
September 4 to 15

The delegates will review achievement of the Forward Looking Strategies

- To equip women to meet the demands of the 21st century for scientific, technological, economic and political development.
- To empower women for effective participation.
- To put forth a global policy of gender equality, development and peace.
- Draw up a Platform for Action

# Steps toward Enlightenment of Men

by S.H. Khan

*It is a long road to male enlightenment, but better late than never. Men and women, all of us have to be motivated and it has to be done soon, for it is already too late for many.*

AGAINST the backdrop of such a momentous event, the suicide of Noorjahan in Sylhet, and the murder of yet another Noorjahan in Faridpur occurred in rapid succession. Both were victims of social and religious prejudice, discrimination and violence. The shocks were not over when news of other such similar and barbaric stories from all over the country begin to filter into the news. Bangladesh is part of this world, in happiness and in sorrow; mostly the latter, as events tend to prove. Stop this violence against women, some had cried. It was past time something was done. But what was going to be done about it? Maybe not much, some argued, but it was a good start.

Organizations dealing with women rallied together and decided that not only were these atrocities to be prevented from happening again but that there should be a strong reflection of the Geneva convention throughout Bangladesh: from the capital city to the grass roots level, men and women from all walks of life were to be made aware of this worldwide movement, they were to be made aware that there were laws. It was time people realized that women were not going to be the victims anymore. Accordingly programmes were taken up collectively and individually. Some of the decisions taken were to hold rallies, wear badges and distribute leaflets protesting violence against women in different parts of Bangladesh. In Dhaka these events were held at different corners of the city, such as the round about at the SAARC fountain, Farmgate, in front of the Press Club etc.

So, on a clear beautiful morning our team went where the SAARC fountain was and stood there with banners protesting violence against women. We had two large banners. Badges and leaflets were distributed and explained to the interested pedestrians. While we were doing this I suddenly noticed the police sergeant walking up to us. I thought here goes my solidarity for women — he was going to evict us, maybe even forcefully. I was so flabbergasted that it took a minute to realize that he was only interested in wanting to know how long we were planning on staying there. Here was a police officer smiling at us and wonder of wonders, offering help! The gentleman suggested that in case we got tired of holding the banner we should stick it in the ground. When I declined his offer of help he just smiled and walked off. When I explained the encounter to my colleague she laughed and said that maybe it was because I looked so fragile and he probably thought I would faint away! So many countless women aren't allowed even that little compassion for human frailties.

There were some such signs of solidarity from the other half of the population i.e. the men, and it all came from the younger generation. Some smiled at the slogan non-gratuitously and, very rarely, they even gave the victory signal. These handful of incidents stand out in one's mind, because one would like to believe that even if men are not going to do anything actively, such as taking action against the perpetrators of violence, they can participate passively. It is the least that they should do; after all, they do claim to be human beings. It appears to be such a small, inconsequential, simple and easy step, but oh, so impossible to actually do. An impenetrable barrier.

After we got used to the staring we noticed that men

their husbands or sons or brothers, their supposed love ones. Weren't they? Then why is it so? Because whether at home or at work women have too many obstacles, hurdles to cross. Women suffer everyday, in every action, every moment — from the simple act of eating to sleeping.

They don't have the energy to look, at some banner! This is society's contribution to women. The entire attitude constitutes this trend of violence against women.

Yet there was a lot of encouragement too. A microbus full of women became actively excited when they saw us. It was wonderful to be part of the exchange of the hand signals. Another woman looked at the banner and us very happily; in fact her car had gone past us but she looked back for as long as she could and went on smiling at us. So I gave her a thumbs up, which she immediately returned. This happened quite a few times.

When our morning activities were over we went to our respective offices. We were to find out that not only were ninety-nine per cent of our male acquaintances reluctant to wear the badge protesting violence against women but they kept coming up with incredibly ludicrous excuses for not wearing it, the most predominant one was the fear of being laughed at! Some would not wear the badge saying that it did not apply to them because they weren't married. Didn't they have sisters, mothers, aunts, cousins? Only a few, and you could count them on one hand, agreed that something needed to be done and it had to be done soon. They agreed that for the movement to be a success in reality, men had to participate too. One person's acquiescence was because of two cases of abuse against the women in his family. Some participated because it would "please the wife."

It is a long road to male enlightenment, but better late than never. Men and women, all of us have to be motivated and it has to be done soon, for it is already too late for many. Too many Noorjahans have paid too high a price too many times. It has been almost a year since the aforementioned events took place. The Geneva resolution was adopted. A new era has begun, but let us not stop at adopting new laws only. The verdict against the culprits of the Noorjahan case in Sylhet was given seven years imprisonment. Finally some justice has been done. Hopefully this will be a long continuing process, because this is not an end but a beginning. The message is clear that women are no longer going to pay the ultimate price for the blind prejudices of society, and if any boy thinks that their crime is going to go unpunished, they should think twice, because events indicate otherwise.

# Journalism as a Profession for Women in India

by Afifa Raihana

A South Asian Press Club conference was held in Dhaka recently. Journalist, came to Dhaka as a member of the Indian delegation. Unlike our country India has a lot of active women journalists. According to Sajeda, "More and more women are taking journalism as a profession in the developed parts of India and the number of women in journalism has sharply increased in the past decades."

Sajeda studied in England. She did her bachelors in Economics and then MSC in International Relations. After completing her studies in England she came back to India and pursued the career of a banker. "After a year I became bored because banking is a very monotonous job," says Sajeda. Then she started her career in journalism as a special correspondent of "The Telegraph". As a special correspondent Sajeda did political, economic, environmental, spot news, feature and all other sorts of reporting except sports.

When Sajeda started her career, she was a fresher in this line. She had no academic background of journalism and as she was living in India for the first time, the culture, language, surroundings — everything was new to her. When asked how she adapted herself to the situation, Sajeda said, "I catch things very easily and I like to learn new things. These two things have helped me to handle the difficult situation." She also added, "I like my life in India better than my life in England."

At present Sajeda is the Delhi bureau chief of "The Asian Age". The Asian Age is the only 24-page daily that has been launched a month ago. "I've been with this paper from its birth," says Sajeda. Altogether 25 people work under her and among them 80 per cent are women. Sajeda says, "women are more sincere and devoted to their work." In The Asian Age her political and crime reporters are women.

When asked whether she faced any difficulties being a woman journalist, Sajeda said, "When it comes to work or collecting news, I never faced any difficulty. In fact being a woman has been advantageous at times because I had easier access to some places in comparison with men. So when it came to collecting news, being a woman was no problem, but in the journalist community some men found it very hard to accept the fact that a woman is a better journalist than some of them. They can accept a woman reporting on environmental issues or child labour, but they can't accept the fact that women are doing political reporting."

Sajeda is not associated with any feminist activities in India. To the question whether she supports the feminists' view Sajeda answered, "Feminists sometimes go overboard but I support some of their views."

About the South Asian Press Club Conference Sajeda said, "This conference can be an absolute success, if the governments of the SAARC countries help adopt the resolutions taken in the meeting."

When asked what Sajeda thought about Dhaka she said, "Dhaka is a very clean city compared to some Indian cities and I'd very much like to visit Dhaka again." Sajeda works for 12 to 14 hours a day. She loves to travel, listen to music and socialise.



The perpetuation of a cycle of 'more burden, less care' for females starts as early as the birth of a child.

# The World Honours a Vocal Voice of Dissent

by Daya Kishan Thussu

INDIAN environmental activist Vandana Shiva has won admirers the world over and earned many powerful enemies.

Among rural workers, ecologists and officials she has emerged as one of the most articulate voices of concern for mother earth. Her trenchant criticism of the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has angered business leaders.

For her work she has been honoured with the 1993 Right Livelihood Award, sharing the \$20,000 with four other women's groups.

The award was introduced in 1980 to honour and support work which challenged world problems such as the arms race, poverty, environmental destruction and social justice. Since then 50 people and projects have received it.

Presented annually in the Swedish parliament in Stockholm on the day before the Nobel Prize, it has become known as the Alternative Nobel Prize.

Shiva was born in 1952 and studied to become a nuclear physicist. When her doctor sister pointed out how the nuclear industry endangered health she had a change of heart and moved into theoretical physics, completing her PhD in the Philosophy of Science in 1978.

After four years at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, she set up a research foundation in Dehradun in northern India, an informal network of researchers working with rural activists.

These have included the Chipko movement to stop deforestation in the Himalayan foothills. The movement's name arises from the women's tactic of hugging trees to protect them from the axe.

The Chipko movement was an inspiration for Shiva's work, together with the hills and forests where she grew up. She has learnt more from uneducated farmers, she says, than city-based intellectuals who are "not rooted" in the environment.

Her first book, *Staying Alive — Women, Ecology and Development*, published four years ago, established her as a serious critic of the development model adopted by the Third World.

She was critical of the so-called Green Revolution in the 1960s and its effect on the environment and women. A major concern for her now is the impact of the "second" Green Revolution using biotechnology and genetic engineering in agriculture.

By 1990 Shiva's work had become so well-known she was featured as one of India's top ten women in a leading weekly magazine.

The following year she co-chaired the World Congress on Women and Environment. She has also coordinated a network of environmental activists from South Asia for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and is advising a South Asian citizens' group on environment issues. She is also ecology adviser to the Third World Network and the Asia Pacific People's Environment Network.

Coinciding with news of her award, she was in London to promote her new book, *Ecofeminism*, co-authored with German sociologist Maria Mies.

The concept of Ecofeminism, "a new term for an ancient wisdom," grew out of women's, ecological and peace movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Ecofeminism rejects, according to the authors, the "capitalist patriarchal world system" which is based on the "colonisation of women, of 'foreign' peoples and their lands; and of nature, which it is gradually destroying."

This criticism covers the whole basis of Western forms of knowledge, especially science which has a distorted view of nature, used to justify capitalism and colonialism. Shiva claims that for Francis Bacon, the father of modern science, nature was "no longer Mother Nature, but a female nature to be conquered by an aggressive masculine mind."

She says there have been three phases of colonialism, all of which have been justified as the superior white man's burden: first the mission was to "civilise," then to "develop" and now to "protect" the Third World environment. All have in practice meant depriving non-white people of their rights and resources.

The World Bank's Tropical Action Plan, the Climate Convention, the Montreal Protocol and the Earth Summit are all seen by the Third World as new ways of dispossessing the poor to "save" the forests, atmosphere and shared natural resources, not for their own people but for exploitation by the powerful North.

Shiva points out that there is a close connection between women and the environment. Most small and subsistence farmers in the Third World are women. For thousands of years they have lived in harmony with their environment, sowing seed and harvesting food. Now this is under threat by the global institutions like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that are seeking to have a "free trade" in agriculture.

Shiva claims that this freedom is for transnational corporations (TNCs) "to invest, produce and trade in agricultural commodities without restriction, regulation or responsibility."

Along with this is the threat to biodiversity, the attempt by GATT to allow agribusiness to patent seeds for farming. Seed corporations deliberately breed hybrid plants that cannot give rise to future generations so that farmers are forced to buy new seed every year.

Shiva claims that this is "a form of piracy," robbing the shared heritage of Third World farmers who have saved and used seed over millennia.

This is happening at a time when under the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes, poor countries are being forced to open up their economies to TNCs.

She calls the World Bank a "Janus-faced" creature which



Picture: Zed Books

claims to promote development but at the same time is making it easy for transnational companies to take control of the developing world.

Unlike Third World leaders, who have to be worried about the "bullet or ballot" if they go too far, the World Bank is accountable to no one.

The global lenders have done their best to erode the sovereignty of Third World states through the demands of structural adjustment. She argues that the state has become a provider and protector not of its people but of the TNCs.

The now fashionable concept of sustainable development is not compatible, she says, with the aping of Northern lifestyles by the South.

Despite the alarm about losing control to the TNCs, Shiva says the Third World has a good deal of creative energy which needs to be tapped. She is optimistic about the future, with ever-growing grassroots groups.

With increasing education, especially among women, she says, things will look up and GATT/World Bank/IMF hegemony will end. Already, she says, signs of economic and moral decline in the West, which controls these institutions, are there for all to see.

— GEMINI NEWS

The writer is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service. He has a PhD in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and teaches a course on Third World Development at Britain's Open University. He is co-author of *Contra-Flow in Global News*.

# Protection for Victims of Violence

A rape victim who has had the courage to file a case against the accused, finds no easy way to justice. Sympathetic and efficient legal aid, addresses only part of the problem. Her attendance in court, required periodically, remains a daunting experience. Her exposure to violence has created deep anxieties of a renewal of violence, and a heightened sense of insecurity of rejection, of loneliness; this is often propelled by external suggestions of shame and guilt.

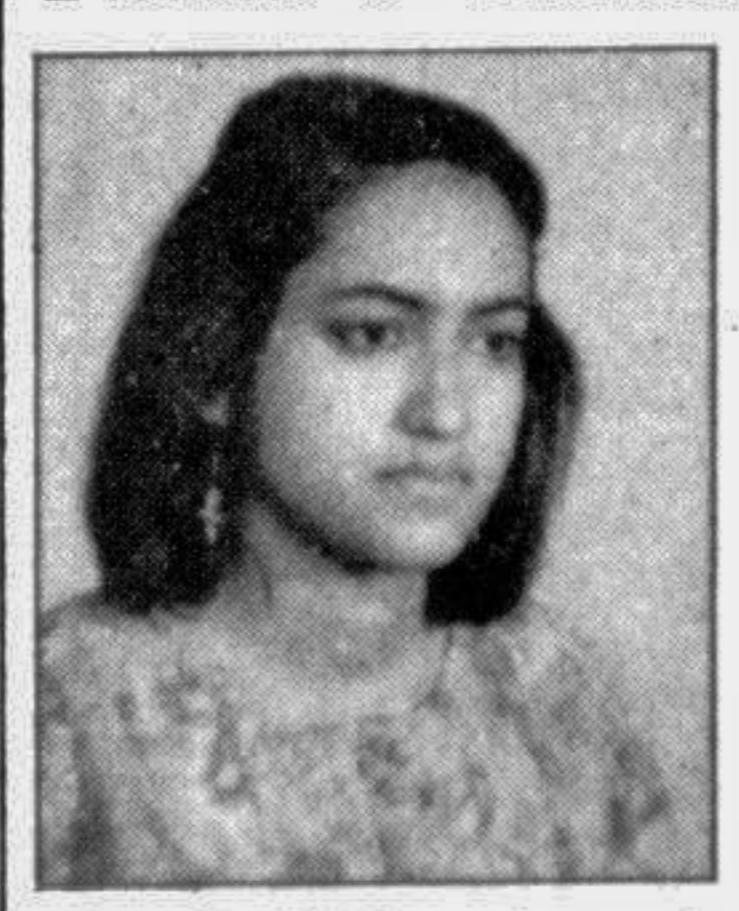
While the accused is generally left off on bail and appears to follow a fairly normal routine, the victim's life is totally disrupted. Because of her need for protection she is kept in a shelter, of which there are only a few and probably only in Dhaka.

Most of the shelters are run as temporary refuges, where the women are made to conform to strict routines. Usually run by volunteers, the main concern of the staff is to maintain discipline by curtailing non-conformist behaviour.

Yet victims of violence are obviously psychologically disturbed; this is evident in the way they erupt into insolence, fight with inmates of the shelter, or try to run away. Their special need for counselling is not taken into account. Strength through solidarity and understanding provided by able, trained and experienced staff, who can cope with the trauma of violence, is essential if the victim of violence is to emerge from her night of horror.

— Ain O Salish Kendra

# Tania's Exhibition in USA



received a bachelor of fine arts from the Institute of Fine Arts at Dhaka University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1986 and a master of fine arts from the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, Gujarat, India, in 1991.

Tabassum's first one-woman show appeared Jan 7-13 at Dhaka University's Institute of Fine Arts. Her work has appeared in several group exhibitions in Bangladesh and India, and she was commissioned to do 25 fabric paintings on the traditional Moghul theme for the Passage to India restaurant in Detroit, Mich. in 1986.

She also participated in a group painting project on a rural Bangladesh theme for the opening ceremony of the South Asian Federation Games, held in Dhaka in 1986.

Tabassum's works are based on landscape and some on psychological themes. The intense colors in her paintings don't celebrate visible beauty, but are rather instruments of exploration and discovery.

**TABASSUM** is Featured Artist: Tania Tabassum was the Brazos Valley Art League's featured artist of the months of January and February 1994 at the College Station Conference Center, according to a message received here in Dhaka.

The 27-year-old Tabassum went to College Station in April from Bangladesh with her husband, a student at Texas A & M University. She