



Homeless Women in Safe Custody

by Salma Ali

YOUNG girls find themselves in safe custody prisons for various reasons. In prisons they are exposed to criminal ideas and can be overwhelmed by elder and seasoned convicts as all are confined under the same roof. In a poor country such as ours it is impractical to demand of the Government to construct separate accommodation for the women in safe custody within the jail compound. Still, society has a moral obligation towards them and should do something to help.

Welfare. The statutory guardian may make such arrangements as he sees fit for the care and welfare of the child. The Children Act, 1974 (Act No XXXIX of 1974) regulates the law relating to the custody, protection and treatment of children and trial and punishment of youthful offenders. Part V of the Act deals with care and protection of destitute and neglected children. Under Section 32 of the Act, a probation officer not below the rank of Sub-Inspector of Police or any authorised person, may produce before a

established for all safe custody cases irrespective of age. There are many reasons why young women find themselves in safe custody. Naturally, the socio-economic and personal background along with the social environment

Mental dispositions or attitudes in girls such as unwillingness to marry a man selected by the elders, hatred for marital life, strong dislike for day after day monotonous life and love of adventure, desire to assist financially family members and also reasons for young women to leave home. Girls are less educated and less worldly-wise frequently fall under the trap of a ill intentioned lover who either abandons or sell them for prostitution. Frequent re-marriage, especially of father or husband, result in abandoning of women with children. These women are left with no choice but to venture out of homes in search of a livelihood. Second, third and even more marriages are common in our country. Social causes such as conviction of parents or husband or relatives, introduced by parents or husband or relatives, bad influence, feeling of betrayal, employers' ill-treatment can also cause girls to escape. Introducing of girls into offensive acts by their parents or husbands instigate and misguide the girls towards acts of deviance. Girls' intimate friends may also be bad influence in causing them to ultimately become homeless. Constant threats by family members and fear of parents that some grievous injury may be made on their person force the girls out of home. False allegations of theft by the employer — a common feature in our homes — puts fear of reprisals on the girls. Neglect by family members, infidelity of the husband, desertion by husband, unhappy family relations and unhappy marriage are very important contributing factors. Neglect by family members may be caused by bad influence or financial difficulties. Women may be deserted by husbands under bad influence and financial difficulties. Unhappy family relations are those relations which result from constant irritation of a woman by her husband or other relatives and which results in stresses and strains in a woman's mind which force her to escape. Unhappy marriage means that the woman could not find happiness with her husband in her married life. This group includes women who were married against their wishes and who could not get along with their husbands for various reasons.

Merely releasing them from safe custody prisons through process of law is not enough. In fact, rehabilitation is as important as release from prison to safeguard the future of the girls and to turn them into useful citizens.

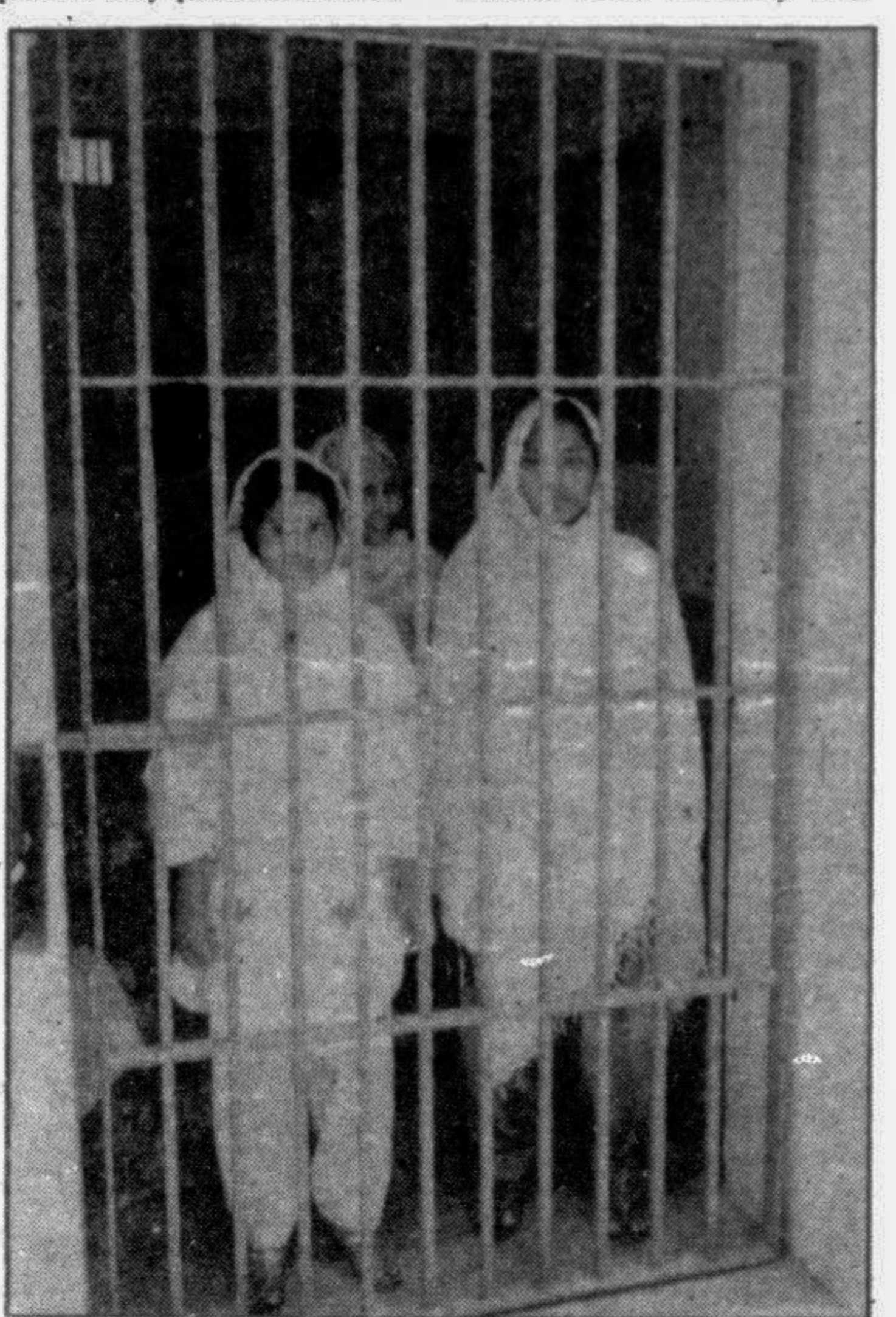
Merely releasing them from safe custody prisons through process of law is not enough. In fact, rehabilitation is as important as release from prison to safeguard the future of the girls and to turn them into useful citizens. Alternate safe custody homes should be set up for providing these girls with a separate home on a temporary basis, this will segregate them from real convicts and pave the way for their rehabilitation. A healthy atmosphere should prevail in these homes for fostering moral development and giving medical aid, legal counselling, basic education and self-employment training. Above all, the homes must provide complete safety and protection. How long a particular girl will reside in the home will depend on the court which decides her duration of stay in safe custody. On expiry of that period the girl will be returned to the court which will finally release her.

Whatever time the girls spend in the safe custody home should be properly used with certain objectives as in all probability many such girls have never had the opportunity to visit homes devoted exclusively for their welfare. The safe custody homes whether established by the Government or by private organisations/associations should provide certain services. First of all, they should provide absolute safety and protection from direct or indirect influence of undesirable elements or criminals. Secondly, they have should be able to arrange legal assistance for those in need, e.g., in cases of kidnapping, eloping, etc.

Thirdly it should provide medical aid, psychological treatment and vocational training for these women. These homes can only be established with the co-operation of relevant governmental authorities and the judiciary. The Ministry of Women's Affairs can play a helping and supervisory role as the guardianship of every abandoned child stands vested in the Director of Social Welfare, who is the statutory guardian provided by the Bangladesh Abandoned Children (Special Provisions Order 1972 (P.O. No. 124 of 1972). The government may appoint as statutory guardian any other person or authority in addition to or in place of the Director of Social

ment of children and trial and punishment of youthful offenders. Part V of the Act deals with care and protection of destitute and neglected children. Under Section 32 of the Act, a probation officer not below the rank of Sub-Inspector of Police or any authorised person, may produce before a

are highly relevant. Girls find themselves in extreme difficulty with the death of either parent and the re-marriage of one. Neglect and cruel behaviour of the step parent are common causes for girls to leave home. Acute financial difficulties is another factor that may force



Safe neither inside nor out side. Photo: The Flesh Trade Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, 1993, 1993 Report

Juvenile Court (which was established by this Act) a child who has no home. On being presented before the Juvenile Court, the Court after taking such evidence as it thinks fit, may order the child to be sent to a certified institution or approved home, or to the care of a relative. It will therefore be seen that the law provides for private safe custody homes in Bangladesh so far as it relates to children and youthful offenders. But with co-operation of relevant government authorities, homes could be

girls to flee home to seek employment and also force guardians to desert the girls. Girls leaving home with dreams of life of luxury or free from want often fall victim to human trafficking. Ill-treatment by the father or mother or husband or lover and others can also cause girls to run away. Incessant assault on girls can be made for various reasons and such violent behaviour of the family members results in misery for the girls and ultimately leads them to flee.

The various forms of sexism at school

The school is by no means an institution cut off from society; rather, it forms an integral part of it, having the power to instil in children the social values and norms of the period and the society in which they live. Consequently, even when governments have subscribed to the principle of sexual equality, schools continue to convey sexist stereotypes and practise discrimination against women. This contradiction appears particularly striking when we examine the images of men and women in textbooks. For example, despite the humanist ideals of equality held by the Zambian government, Tembo points out that Zambian textbooks nevertheless contain: 'stereotypes, false images, content slurs and so on'. He feels that 'Part of the picture drawn in these books is seen by us to be more or less a correct reflection of the values and attitudes the society holds towards boys and girls'. Parents, for example, continue to give their sons' education priority over that of their daughters. Furthermore, as the Peruvian report points out, improving school curricula is only a partial solution to the problem. Thus, in all societies, discrepancies are found between the ideals set out in national constitutions and the everyday practice of discrimination within the education system. Sexism in the structure of the education system Children learn sexism not only from literature and school textbooks, but also from the school hierarchy. They have only to look around them to

Sexist Stereotypes at School and in School Textbooks

by Andree Michel

see how professional roles are unequally distributed between men and women in their own school. As observed by the Commission of European Communities, children in primary schools see that, while most teachers are women, administrative posts such as those of head teacher and deputy head are generally held by men. This pattern is extremely prevalent, and should not be dismissed lightly, as it teaches boys that when they grow up they will occupy high posts in education, government, the world of work and society, and that women tend to defer to men in the decision-making process. At the same time, it places a subliminal 'ceiling' on girls' ambitions. Statistics quoted by the Commission of European Communities show that in 1976, in France, 67.7 per cent of primary-school teachers were women, while only 41 per cent of primary-school principals were women. For Italy, these figures were 68 and 31 per cent respectively; in the United Kingdom 76.5 and 42.9 per cent, and in Ireland 71.8 and 52 per cent (heads and deputy heads included). This sexist hierarchy is reproduced in the secondary-school system, particularly as, in the interest of co-education, boys' and girls' schools have been integrated, so that there is now an even smaller proportion of women

in secondary-school headships. In addition, the majority of school inspectors are men. This is bound to build up the stereotype of the man in control, as seemingly women are capable of occupying only subordinate positions, both in the education system and in society. Bisaria points out that sexist stereotypes in Indian formal education should be weeded out from the structure and the implementation of the curriculum: in other words, from the planning stage to the classroom. Moreover, close scrutiny of Indian culture soon reveals obstacles which either keep girls from attending school in the first place or induce them, sooner or later, to drop out; for example, the distance between home and school, whether the teacher is a man or a woman, the timetable, the curriculum, or an early marriage. In India, sexist stereotypes concern first and foremost the curriculum, which 'implies all that happens in the educational system at the formal level, from early childhood education to university and higher education. Curriculum includes classroom programme(s) as well as out-of-class activities from playgrounds to assemblies, from project work to university and college extension pro-

grammes; from youth training programmes to social service camps.' Sexism in the teacher/pupil relationship For many years, research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom has revealed that there is a difference in teachers' behaviour towards boys and towards girls. The Peruvian study, carried out by the Peruvian National Commission for Unesco, is based on a teacher survey conducted in four schools located in different parts of the city of Lima. The aim of the study was to observe the various possible factors (socio-economic background, urban-coastal or Andean regions) which might influence teachers' behaviour towards their pupils, to examine children's reading habits and to study their concepts of male and female roles. While aware that the sexist stereotypes in textbooks did not in fact reflect real-life situations, the teachers felt that the problem was not serious, as they considered it to be the responsibility of the teacher to explain to his or her pupils that girls are just as capable as boys. I believe that this attitude underestimates the importance of textbooks, while at the same time overrating the role of the teacher in the battle against sexism. Moreover, it is clear that these teachers have an ambiguous attitude to-

Ladies Footwear Making

by Syeda Zakia Ahsan

A new project has been started titled 'Technologies for Rural Employment with Special Reference to Women.' It is being executed with the technical cooperation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and implemented by the Women's Affairs Department (WAD) of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. One of the prime objectives of the ILO/WAD project is to introduce appropriate technology for income generation and employment creation for underprivileged and disadvantaged rural poor women in selected villages of Bangladesh. Savar is one of the sites the project has introduced 'Ladies Footwear Making' for the women beneficiaries in that area. Originally, this profession had been controlled by men. Women's participation in this activity has opened a new area where women can be gainfully

employed to increase their family income. Social acceptance, however, is an important factor for sustainability of such an activity. Yet with time, when the women engaged in ladies footwear began to earn a living, heads of households and elderly-relatives agreed to allow women to take part and continue in this trade. Savar lies between the rural-urban belt in the outskirts of Dhaka city possessing a unique quality of urban life as well as the beauty of rural landscapes. Most families living in the Savar area are poor, and about 60% of the children in the vicinity go to schools. Most women in the Savar area are housewives, and only a fraction of the women populace are engaged in garment factories. Others break bricks or work as helpers in domestic households. Initially, only a group of fif-

teen women beneficiaries were provided 'on the job training' for six months by instructors deputed at the site. These women have completed and started production on a commercial scale. They work in cohesive groups of 5-8 women, concentrating on different aspects of footwear such as making the upper portion, weaving, sole-making and fitting for complete shoe manufacture. Footwear at the Training-cum-Production Centre are produced in different hues and designs for ladies and children. Usually the trainers and beneficiaries engage themselves in the market survey and design of shoes according to the specification of the buyers. With the help of the instructors the beneficiaries are involved in buying the raw materials needed to make the sandals. The sandals produced at the centre are sold at

the local market in Savar and Dhaka.

The women at the centre normally work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. However, during Ramadan, they work late into the darkness of night, to keep up the increased demand during the festive seasons. The trainers guide the women beneficiaries at the centre methodically in the areas of designing, colour combination, quality control, and timely delivery of products to the buyers.

Of late the women at the centre have acquired a sense of involvement in the footwear trade. Most women at the centre are now able to send their children to schools, and able to meet medical expenses of family members and save a little for rainy days. Due to their increase in their household income, tomorrow no longer seems to be a matter of worry and uncertainty like the past.

Twice to the Top of the World at 25

A J Singh writes from New Delhi

SANTOSH Yadav is pony-tailed, frail, delicate looking and 25. Until 1986, she had never seen snow or the Himalayas. Today she has created a record by scaling the world's highest peak, Mt. Everest, twice within a year. Yadav is an officer in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). Last year she stood on the peak as one of the 27-member team the police sent to Everest. This year she reached the top again as one of a 15-member Indo-Nepalese women's Everest expedition led by Bachindri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb the mountain in 1984. Apart from this record, last year's climb also made Yadav the second Indian woman, as well as the youngest woman in the world, to climb Everest. Yadav had not planned to become a mountaineer. She was born in Joniyawash, a nondescript village in the Rewari district of Haryana state. Her father wanted to marry her off early, but she refused and insisted on continuing her education. She recalls: 'I cried, fasted and tried every trick to make my parents change their minds.'

Santosh Yadav, a frail and delicate looking 25-year-old police officer, is the only woman in the world to have climbed Mt. Everest twice. She is also the youngest woman to reach the top of the world's highest mountain and the second Indian woman to get there. Success stories like these, in fields until recently exclusively male preserves, reports Gemini News Service, encourage Indian women to venture out of their stereotyped roles.



Santosh Yadav 'I believe in destiny'

Luck stepped in. A family friend in Jaipur offered to get her into college there and her parents relented. She graduated from Maharani College with honours in economics. Her romance with the mountains began in an unusual way. She was fond of painting and went on holiday to the Aravali hills in Rajasthan to capture their beauty on canvas. One day on a walk she saw youngsters learning rope climbing. Fascinated, she kept returning to watch them. An irresistible urge to become a mountaineer possessed

her. She joined a four-week basic course in mountaineering at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi in the Himalayas. There she met Hukam Singh, an inspector-general of police in ITBP and famed mountaineer. He spotted her talent and persuaded her to attend an advanced course at the institute. A breakthrough came when she was invited to join an international expedition to Nunkum peak in Kashmir, led by Singh.

Yadav climbed her first peak, Sanser Kangri, in 1989 with another expedition led by Singh. The same year she joined an expedition to Kanchenjunga, in Sikkim state. She joined the ITBP in 1990 as sub-inspector and rose to company commander. Her father, Ram Singh, is

now proud of his daughter, but he still wants her to get married and settle down. He never really wanted her to become a police officer — or a mountaineer. To reach the top of 8,848-metre Everest is the dream of every climber. Yet none made it until Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit on May 29, 1953. Since then 574 mountaineers have reached the top.

For Yadav her second climb on Everest was a hazardous experience. The weather turned bad as she came down and she was tossed like a rag-doll in a blizzard. Her eyes widen in fear as she recalls it: 'For a moment I thought I was going to die.'

She admits that more facilities exist now for climbers than in the days of Hillary and Tenzing. The climber still has to put up with the vagaries of nature, take weeks of exercise for acclimatisation, expend every ounce of energy to get to the top, and then endure the hazards of climbing down. Bruises on her cheeks caused by the gas-mask, black marks on her fingers and face all tell signs of her battles with nature. She confesses she tried to hide her hands on arrival at New Delhi airport from Kathmandu so that her mother would not get upset when they met.

Success stories like Yadav's in fields until recently exclusively male preserves embolden Indian women to venture out of their stereotyped roles. Bachindri Pal says: 'It's women like Santosh who go to prove that Indian women can rise to any height and prove their worth, should they be given the opportunity.'

Yadav herself is modest about her achievements. She attributes it all to her kismet (fate). 'I believe in destiny,' she says.

Rita Patel, the doctor with her on this year's Everest expedition, says: 'She is just like a snow leopard.' Santosh Yadav says she will never climb Everest again. Others are doubtful. Climber Parul Chandra says: 'If the mountain calls, she will go.'

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Poor Women Exploit Poultry's Potential

by Aloysius Milon Khan

RURAL women in Bangladesh still have few opportunities to earn a decent income. Heavily occupied with household chores and childcare, on one hand, and restricted by social barriers, on the other, their economic potential is severely restricted.

For these reasons, running small but commercial poultry projects are increasingly popular and acceptable ways for poor rural women to earn a reasonable living. 22-year old Regia Khatun of Bochaganj in Dinajpur district is one of many landless women throughout northern Bangla-

desh now exploiting the economic potential of poultry.

A visit to her crowded homestead reveals two sizeable and recently-built 'chicken-huts' which each house 200 young chicks. Regia has been running a poultry project for eight months after receiving a 6 day training from RDRS. She buys day-old chicks locally and knows how to take good care of them. Young chicks are very vulnerable to disease so take much care, requiring vaccination, eye treatment carefully balanced feed and sanitary huts. One woman from the next village is poultry vaccinator trained by RDRS so some of the simple veterinary care is available locally at low-cost. The risks can be high — most of the last batch died — but the rewards can be good. Regia claims to earn Tk 500-600 per month. Around the homestead there is evidence of improved living standards, new CI sheets, a new chicken-hut, and two recently-purchased cattle.

For Regia and thousands of other women with no land, poultry is an effective way of supporting her family.



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