



Our Families: Conflicting Values

by Shaheen Anam

THE UN is observing 1994 as the International Year of the Family. They have also coined a very appropriate slogan for it, which goes: Building the smallest democracy in the heart of society. This refers to integration and equality within the family.

The concept of family cohesion is very strong in traditional societies such as ours. Most of our values, norms and tradition is centered around the family which is considered to be the most powerful vehicle of communicating norms and traditions from one generation to the other. The devotion of sons towards their parents even in the most difficult times is a part of our folklore. Even today, inspite of abject poverty we often hear of how

the maid servant saves money and sends back to her parents, or the 10 year old boy working in hard labour to provide income to the family. We say with a lot of pride that unlike the decadent West, we still have our family values intact.

But is this the reality? Are our families really the bastion of stability and strength that we so proudly profess? Are our families in a collective sense living up to the responsibility that society has given them? Is the traditional definition of family which is defined as a group of people living together, who care, give and receive nurturance, protection, security and affection still true for us?

A careful review of the current situation of families in our societies will reveal that all is

not well. Here we must remember that by families we should not mean the few thousands middle class families living in cities. The majority of our families live in the rural areas where the concept of the family as providing security, affection and stability is slowly becoming a myth. Our families are disintegrating faster than we would like to admit. The reason given is of course poverty. While that is true to a large extent, sometimes we are a little too quick in jumping to that conclusion. In the midst of breakdown of families and support system guess who are the victims? The women of course, they are the ones who bear the greatest burden of family disintegration.

The biggest example of our disintegrating families is the rising spectre of Female Headed Households. According to latest estimates, the national average is 8 per cent and in certain places goes up to 16 per cent. The reason for the rise in women headed household is mainly due to abandonment of women by their husbands, although rural to urban migration of male members and widowhood are also factors.

Let us than examine the case of abandonment as a factor of family disintegration. In a traditional family system like ours, how is it that women can be cast away from the family so easily? What about the support system that once provided women atleast some semblance of security. What about the village elders, salish or family courts. How come no one is being able to come to the rescue of abandoned women. Men are, on a regular basis taking and leaving wives without bothering to pay the mandatory "mehr" however insignificant the sum may be. Children are also abandoned with the mother unless the man thinks the child will be of some use to him. Most of the women beggars we see in the streets are victims of this want of abandonment. Left with no options these women are driven to begging, maid's work if they are very lucky, while many are forced into prostitution. Security, love and affection that it is suppose to be.

Celebrating the Year of the Family is indeed a noble effort towards family cohesion but sounds hollow in the backdrop of the prevailing situation. Unless the wife or the women in the family are accorded the respect that they deserve, unless their contribution is appreciated by the family, cannot function as the abode of security, stability, love and affection that it is suppose to be.

Justice Rachid Achieves the Unthinkable

Tariq Butt writes from Islamabad



Court judge at the same time. Says Rachid: "The timing of my appointment was just a coincidence. My promotion was due because I was No 3 in the seniority list."

In addition, she points out, my passion for hard work to go high brought prompt promotions.

She feels she deserved her progress. This profession, she notes, "does not belong to men alone, and women must take the initiative. I am confident that women can outmatch men."

She might not have got her new job had not a religious-minded citizen petitioned the Federal Shariat Court a few years ago for a ban on the appointment of women judges. The court dismissed the plea.

She recalls that after the judgement her colleagues were sure she would become a High Court judge. They were right. Would she like to go one step higher and become a Supreme Court judge? "Who wouldn't?" she replies.

Rachid, who is 43, is from a well-off, liberal family in NWFP. She was educated in prestigious co-educational institutions: "This gave me immense confidence with the result that I experience no problem in working with men."

While graduating in law and political science she was an active sportswoman, and was captain of the volleyball team.

"I still love sports but have little time left for them now," she says, though she joins in with her three school-age children, a daughter and two sons, whenever possible.

She did not meet her economist husband before their arranged marriage in Canada, where he had lived for

23 years. "He is a nice, cooperative and accommodating fellow," she says. "He never interferes in my sensitive professional duties."

They returned to Pakistan after three years of marriage. He now works in Peshawar with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

After returning to Pakistan in 1986, she was appointed solicitor to the NWFP government before becoming a district and sessions judge in the city of Kohat and then a special judge for banking, customs and anti-corruption.

She advocate greater participation of women in all spheres of life: "Women must be comprehensively involved as they work more devotedly and honestly."

"Nothing is impossible for women to achieve if they show audacity and dedication," she says. "In my view, a woman has more courage and stamina than a man in many respects. If she is a working woman, she raises children, looks after them and cares for her husband beside doing her job."

Gemini News
The writer is chief reporter on The News in Islamabad.

responsible for the failure to accord protection to women and children in crisis situations.

We Call on our Governments

To ensure that the cultural, religious and ideological diversity of all communities is given expression in media and education in ways that do not include or violate the rights of women and minority communities.

While we advocate multiculturalism, all cultural and religious practices, which deviate from universally accepted human rights including women's rights must not be tolerated.

Culture and religion have been used systematically to violate women's fundamental human rights and their access to power and equality. Women's rights are increasingly threatened and violated by militant assertions of religious and ethnic identity, in normal and in crisis situations.

We reiterate human rights and freedoms particularly of women, which are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Declaration on Violence Against Women and other international human rights instruments.

We wish to emphasise that universal rights standards are rooted in many cultures and religions of our people. However, we wish to draw a distinction between institutionalised religion, perpetrated by the state, religious

institutions and religion in people's movements. Religious movements to be empowering must adhere to principles of non-violation of human rights.

We hold our governments

responsible for the failure to accord protection to women and children in crisis situations.

Innovations in Quality Education for Girls' and Women

by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

The main reason is that although there have been plenty of innovations, they have all been dropped in various buckets. What is needed is wide knowledge of these innovations so that they may be copied and used by others in their areas, according to their contexts.

tional problems in a country's context, so that national capabilities for development are improved and potentials and visions expanded. (UNESCO-PROAP)

Literacy camps have been set up in India, where newly literate rural women get together at regular intervals to read and talk about issues that they have had to face in their lives. Through these as well as through literacy materials that among other things are sensitive to their gender and relevant to their lives, they learn to take their lives in their own hands. All these have been possible in a project called *Mahila Samakhya*, non-governmental but sanctioned and helped by the Indian government. There are projects part

of literate men and women if indeed these NGOs are so effective?

The main reason is that although there have been plenty of innovations, they have all been dropped in various buckets. What is needed is wide knowledge of these innovations so that they may be copied and used by others in their areas, according to their contexts. In fact, what is needed is that all the drops in all the buckets around the region be solidified in one bucket. Of course, government is essential to this process. Without government, undeniably the most important bodies in our Third World countries,

they can sustain their literacy skills. Depending on whether they have graduated from their literacy classes or are now in the midst of learning to read and write, the women meet daily, and are given loans in groups.

The women of Saptagram are eager to learn, thirsty for knowledge. An Indian participant, representing the PROPEL project from the south of the country was moved, when an old lady at least 60 years old told her story. "When I first started learning, they laughed at me, asking me what I could possibly be, but by learning to read and write I have been able to push my daughter and grand children to attend school and these classes, now I know a little more about my identity that I am somebody in this village, among my family, I will take my literacy with me when I go to God."

The government participants all agreed that NGOs and governments should all work



PROPEL — A new window on living and learning

of the Indian government's direct initiatives such as one where there is empowerment of the teachers and another, *Shishu Karmi*, where teachers need little qualifications to begin with and are trained on the job to teach primary age children of their rural communities.

In Bangladesh, the NGO Gono Shahajo Sangstha (GSS), works with primary class students and adolescents, teaching classes based on government curriculum. But the teaching methods are child centered. The children are taught Mathematics, Bengali, English and Social Science subjects at their own paces and looked at individually or in small groups of two or three, somewhat similar to the tutorial system in Oxford or Cambridge. The children make their own play time. They study and then wander off to the playground for a game of pass the ball or jump rope and then come back and finish their work, assigned by the teachers, each day. Homework is a no-no in these GSS schools. The belief is that all the learning needed can be done in school.

The above are all innovative projects showcased in the UNESCO workshop, "Across the Divide: Innovations in Quality Education for Girls' and Women", that took place in the BRAC centre in Rajendrapur last week. Educational innovations are important in solving the massive literacy problem. They are creative solutions to existing and anticipated educa-

where men and women, all dedicated to education. They exchange ideas and options and go home to their own to replicate and implement some ideas or practices they may have picked up from another country's project.

Education is essential, no matter where, no matter for whom. If today, Bangladesh remains in abject poverty and one of the least developed countries of the world it is due mainly to the fact that our literacy rate remains ridiculously low. Illiteracy is 77 per cent among females and 52.9 per cent among men. The rest of the countries in the region are not faring too well either. The gender gap in literacy in Pakistan is 45 per cent in India 48 per cent. In India 48 per cent. Sixty per cent of the world's illiterate adults are women, more than half of which remain in the Region of Asia.

A large number of NGOs are doing innovative work to solve illiteracy, especially centering on girls and women. The governments too are working to eradicate illiteracy. As in Bangladesh, countries are dedicating larger and larger amounts of the budget to education, especially girls' education. It is by now a common fact that the investment with the highest rate of return in this region is the investment in girls' and women's education. Yet our statistics are deplorable. What happens to all these innovative projects, that are so successful in their own right? Why isn't there more

ours being no exception, none of this can happen. Governments need to work together with NGOs in order for there to be wide encompassing effects to educational innovations like GSS's, or *Mahila Samakhya*'s or any others. This is where organizations such as UNESCO and seminars such as

the one they just conducted (co-sponsored by Save the Children, USA) come in.

The participants were representatives of governments and NGOs and all were in turn impressed and inspired with each other's work. Most impressive by far were the projects they were able to visit in Jessor and see for themselves.

Saptagram Nari Parishad Swarnirvar's rural women were literate, assertive and eager to share their experiences with visiting *bideshis*. When, in one learning village we were hurried to move onto the next, one woman said to me, "where do you think you are going, without giving us your *porichoi* (identity, introduction)?"

Thikhana (address, identity) and *odhikar* (rights) are essential elements to Saptagram's literacy classes, the first things they are taught. They know that knowing our *thikhana* was their *odhikar*.

The women all get together with their groups each day in the middle of the day, to discuss issues such as how they could make money by travelling to the north to buy cheaper rice and sell it in the city, and read materials so that

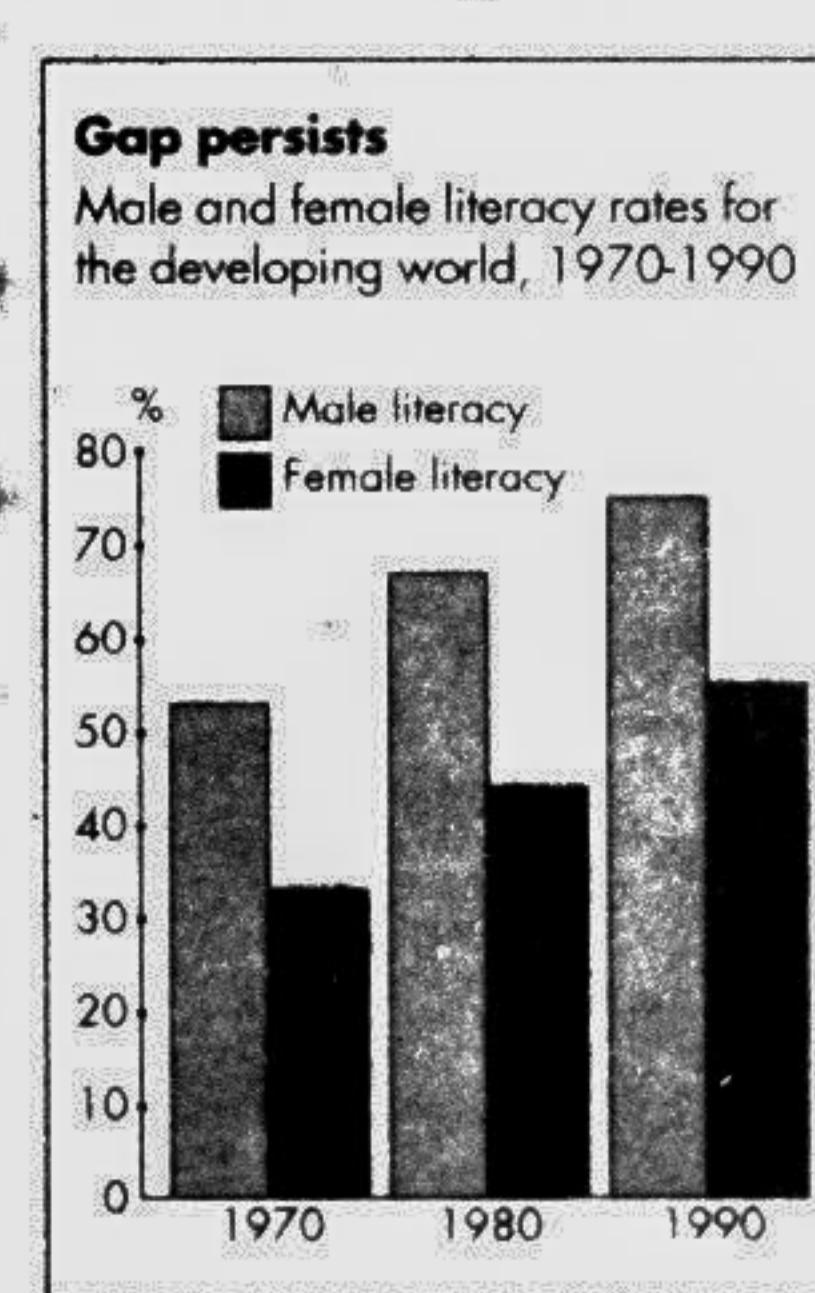
together, discussing women's education and girls' education separately and taking into account the empowerment factor in women's education. Also important is that quality education means sustainable education. For there to be Education for All, we must all work together, setting up various practices that others have used, that have indeed worked.

We must exchange and replicate and collaborate, only then can we be doing an all encompassing good with all encompassing results.

Rome wasn't built in a day, neither unfortunately, were these statistics or the various factors that keep literacy so low. We have time and we have the means. More and more we find through development initiatives that unity is one of the key ingredients in the recipe for development. This unity is what is needed among NGOs and governments and UN organizations to make innovations in quality education work and stick. The UNESCO workshop "Across the Divide:

Innovations in Quality Education for Girls' and Women" was simply a constructive step towards this unity. What is needed now is the facilitation of a dialogue between the groups. International organizations such as UNESCO can serve as facilitators of this exchange, they are after all, what member countries want them to be. The rest of what happens is up to the governments. Checkmate.

The literacy ladder



The big 10

Female literacy rates for the 10 most populous countries of the developing world (representing almost three quarters of its total population)

	% women literate 1970	% women literate 1990	% pt. rise
Saudi Arabia	2	48	46
Philippines	93	29	70
Mexico	85	19	59
Viet Nam	84	17	56
Brazil	81	22	61
Indonesia	75	13	50
China	68	34	71
Nigeria	40	11	46
India	34	18	51
Bangladesh	22	42	75
Pakistan	21	18	49
Iraq	20	51	31
Syria	20	51	31

Catching up

Twelve countries have lifted female literacy by 30 points in 20 years

	% women literate 1970	% women literate 1990	% pt. rise
UNESCO, Statistical yearbook, 1993. Population			
United Nations Population Division, World population prospects, the 1992 revision, 1993.			
SOURCE: UNESCO, Statistical yearbooks, 1993 and earlier years.			