

WOMEN ON THE MOVE



Empowerment : For Breaking the Chains

by Zaheda Ahmed

Special on WOMEN IN 1994

December 29, 1994

Are women better or worse off in 1994? The picture is mixed: enrollment in primary schools has increased. On the otherhand in terms of human rights women suffered greatly.

The Daily Star brings out this special feature at the end of 1994 covering major issues that impede or expedite women's emancipation.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Where are We at the End of 1994?

by Shaheen Anam

How else does one explain the public flogging of Hajera the murder of countless young brides for dowry and the nameless thousands who have not been lucky enough to have their cases reported in the Press.

her body against her will even as a child in order to survive. This is a fact that we can no longer deny. The horror of it all is made even more acute when society does not allow a woman to lead a normal life once she is 'spoilt'.

To add to all kinds of violence against women is the phenomenon of the illegal salish or fatwabaz. The cases of Noorjahan Feroza etc. are well known by now. God knows how many Noorjahans and Feroza's are regularly getting flogged and caned without our knowledge. Unless someone, usually some women's organization takes a mission like interest in a case, it usually goes unreported or unnoticed. The case of Hajera of Kujirgram who was raped last September is one such case. When she became pregnant her guardians asked for justice. The justice was the salish pro-

In Bangladesh women have made great strides over the past few years. The necessity of involving women in the development process as full partners is now understood and supported by both government and the civil society. The growth in female labour is testimony that women can work and work successfully in most fields. The brilliant examination results of young girls is gradually removing stereotyped images of what women are capable of. The phenomenal success of Grameen bank borrowers and the mobilization work of many NGOs prove that women do play a critical role and contribute positively to the family, community and society. There

is no doubt that wherever and whenever women have been targeted for some programme, be it income generation, education, awareness raising, the outcome has been nothing less than miraculous.

To rid the society of an ill requires the commitment and will of the civil society. Why is it that all the protests against the illegal activities of the fatwabaz have been from the women community. Except for some valiant journalist and columnists the civil society has been noticeably silent over the whole salish issue. The society is also suspiciously silent over reported cases of domestic violence.

Since the first few months hardly a day has passed when we have not read or seen reports of death or serious assault of a young woman by her so called relatives. It is usually the husband, the person who once vowed to love and protect her who deals her the fatal blow. The reasons are routinely for dowry and sometimes because the wife has protested her husband taking on another wife. Sadly enough, all our political parties are conspicuously quiet over the issue.

Domestic violence is not the only kind of violence that is reported. We also read of rape, mutilation, trafficking of women and forced prostitution. Women in general become victims whenever there is an increase in lawlessness in the society. Nothing highlights the abuse, indignity and worthlessness of women than the fact that she has to sell

I have often wondered why is it that we are not being able to stem the tide of violence against women in our society? If such a miracle has been achieved in fields such as immunization, control of diarrhoea disease, credit for women tree plantation etc. then why cannot society take a stand against this killer that takes away the dignity and self worth of another individual.

T first glance, it appears Asia — particularly South

Asia — may be the forerunner in pushing women at the top of politics and power. Indira Gandhi led India as prime minister for nearly 20 years up to 1984. Similarly in Sri Lanka, Srimavo Bandaranaike was premier from 1960 to 1965 and from 1970 to 1977, and now her daughter Chandrika is doing so.

In Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia came to power after the fall of Ershad, a military ruler while Sheikh Hasina is leading the Opposition. Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, second time in office had had the distinction of becoming the first woman prime minister of the Muslim world.

A recent book, *Women & Politics* published by the Women for Women, argues that though their ascendancy in a male centred and male-dominated sphere of politics in a patriarchal society is certainly unique, "it can not be ostensibly generalized that women and women's rights have both achieved due recognition in Bangladeshi politics."

Rashed Khan Menon, MP is ex-

plained that the political parties have not been able to formulate and shape the issue of women and politics is indispensable to the question of discriminations that women face in every sphere of

politics.

She says that the programmes envisaged by these parties are piecemeal in nature and lacking in an underlying analysis of the women's situation in Bangladesh.



Voices Unheard in Parliament

by Hameeda Hossain

As women's groups joined the struggle against military rule in Bangladesh in the eighties, they also began to articulate their own concerns about violence, about inequity in laws, about state policies which strengthened discriminatory social practices. Although there were no wide eyed illusions that the revival of an elected parliament would bring about a total change in gender relations, it was not unrealistic to expect more respect for the rule of law and increased representation for women's concerns.

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