



War, Violence and Disintegration of Family

by Najma Siddiqi

FAMILY is the basic unit of a society. It bonds the society culturally and economically. Family is a social institution which everyone belongs to at some state of his/her life. It plays the most important roles to mould the life of an individual. It transmits traditions, values, etc from older to younger generations and performs many functions without which human life becomes unworthy and intolerable. A family provides emotional as well as economic needs to its members. In providing these needs women as members of the family play the most important roles. In addition to bearing and rearing children, historically women have been responsible for most domestic works. Through their roles they keep the family integrated. In fact, in the absence of appropriate and adequate roles of women, a family tends to disintegrate. To ensure sustained welfare of the society there is a need to keep families integrated so that they can play their appropriate roles. Fortunately, this need has been recognized by the world community.

the concentration camps, but also outside the camps. During the same war, the Japanese raped the Korean women indiscriminately; in both cases women were the worst victims.

2. The case of Bangladesh also demonstrates the havoc of war. Thirty million people were killed by the occupation army during our liberation war in 1971. Obviously, hundreds and thousands of families, particularly women and children were adversely affected. The brutal occupation army looted and burned houses, tortured and killed men, women and children indiscriminately; they violated many women including very old women and under-aged girls. Many of the women raped were killed by the violators after barbarian assault; many of the victims could not go back to their family because of the social stigma the rape carried. Perhaps a sizable number of them opted for suicide. Reportedly, many took up

pared by International Human Rights Law Group, USA, "No Justice, No Peace". It is stated "Raped was being used (in Bosnia) as a weapon of war in massive scale". To provide some more detail, let me quote from Newsweek dated January 11, 1993, pp 30-34. "On the top of documented cases of systematic torture and murder in Bosnia, comes the charge of a new Serb atrocity: mass rape. No one knows how many victims there are though estimates range from 90,000 to 50,000 women most of them Muslim. They tell of repeated rapes of girls as young as 6 and 7; gang rapes were so brutal that their victims die... Rapes were committed explicitly to impregnate Muslim women and held them captive until they gave birth unwanted Serbian babies... A 21 year old (soldier) from Sarajevo admits to raping seven women and to killing two of his victims in addition to the 18 murders to which he has already confessed. He asserted, "we were

of inhuman sufferings, displacement and disintegration of numerous families. Genocide, violence, tension, and total disregard of human rights during wars, specially towards women create situations which disintegrate family. Wars and civil strifes cause millions of families flee their homeland and take shelter in refugee camps. The members of the refugee families most of which disintegrated move from camp to camp as refugees. According to an UN study there are 20 million refugees in the world today and 20 million displaced within the borders of their own countries. Many of these refugees are the victims of wars and civil strifes. About 80 per cent of these uprooted people are women and children. (Susan F Martin, "Refugee Women" Zed Books Ltd, London, 1991, p-1) Family and community structures are profoundly affected by displacement caused by wars, civil strifes, violence etc. Once in a camp, the refu-

crushing their babies' skulls between knees." Another report published in a local daily, described how the Afghan male refugees forcefully abused the young refugee girls/women in the same camps located in Delhi areas in India. This implies that the impact of war is worse on women, even when both men and women live under the same refugee status.

2. During war many family units are destroyed completely. For example, boys from southern Sudan are in fear of attack by one side in the civil war on conscription by the other. For years they have been fleeing en masse, by 1988 four out of five of 180,000 inhabitants of the Itang camp in Ethiopia were unaccompanied young males. The fathers of many of them have been killed, and sisters and mother had been raped and abducted. (UNICEF, March, 1994)

3. The Sudanese refugees include a percentage of unaccompanied young male, and families flee Somalia and Ethiopia have suffered tremendous dislocations. Large numbers of men have been killed or been separated from their families.

4. During the wars between Arab and Israel, thousand of Palestinians were refugees. Many families have disintegrated. The broken families are scattered in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, West Bank, Gaza, and many other places in the Middle East. For Palestinians, as for Arab culture in general, the family is at centre of life. Their family lives were disintegrated because of death, imprisonment of the male members.

5. Civil war launched in 1989 in Liberia ignited brutal tribal conflicts. It is estimated that nearly half of Liberia's population of 2.5 million has been displaced, making for the largest percentage of refugees and internally displaced people of any nation.

6. Refugee women face particular hardships. A particular problem for a refugee woman is her own physical protection and that of her family.

7. Quarter of a million people were murdered in Rwanda this year. In all these cases, millions of families were disintegrated and women had to bear the worst of the brunt.

Conclusion

All these confirm that wars and civil strifes cause widespread genocide and severe violence. They hurt innocent men, women and children. Rape is no longer an accidental atrocity of wars, rather it is used as a weapon of wars. Therefore, women suffer most. Wars and civil strifes destroy the peace of a country, region and in fact the entire world. If we want development and progress, we must unite to stop the on-going wars and prevent future wars.

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War violates many human rights. It creates havoc, confusion, disillusion among people. Wars are usually the result of political, economic, commercial and religious or ideological conflicts between nations. In most cases it is the strong who tries to exploit the weak. War causes brutal widespread genocide, and is obviously full of violence which affect adversely all walks of human life. The genocide and violence caused by wars adversely affect all people, in general, but women and family in particular, much more severely. During and after wars women become the worst victim. Due to their physical and biological vulnerability, women suffer more than their male counterparts in wars and civil strifes. As a result, families disintegrate.

Violence against women is almost a universal phenomenon. In almost every country of the world women share at least one element in common i.e. a frighteningly high proportion of violence that strike them. Violence generated during wars take many forms. One form is rape. Another form is disintegration of family.

Wars and Violence

Although rape has been frequently treated as an incidental atrocity of war, it is also used in a planned way as a political and military weapon to terrorise the opponents in wars. History is full of these examples. To make our point, we present; below on a few selected examples.

1. The world community can not forge the widespread genocide and atrocities of the Second World War. The well-documented cases of the Nazi Atrocities in Europe and those inflicted upon the Korean by the Japanese are well known. During the WWII, the Nazis tortured, systematically raped and killed thousands of Jewish and other women not only in

prostitution as a profession to earn their livelihood. Obviously many of the rape victims became pregnant but did not have knowledge of or access to available abortion services.

Eventually, they became mothers of unwanted children. As a result they avoided their relatives, friends and acquaintances. The children born to them also became a social burden in our conservative culture and poverty ridden economy. A large number of these "illegitimate" babies were sent to out side Bangladesh for adoption. In the process, the original family disintegrated. This was a highly undesirable impact of war on women and family which we experienced in our life time.

3. More recently, mass rape of women in Bosnia perhaps surpassed the Nazi or Japanese atrocities during the WWII in Germany and Korea respectively. In a Report pre-

ordered to rape so that our morale would be higher... we were told we would fight better if we raped the women... The soldiers were ordered to rape and murder for the amusement of their commander.

4. Undoubtedly, there are many other cases in the history which prove that during wars parties involved do not hesitate to use rape in a planned way as a tool of terrorizing their opponents. One report emerged that rape was being used as a weapon of war on massive scale in Bosnia.

Available evidence suggests that rape has been used to humiliate women as direct targets and to humiliate their communities, thereby inducing members of the local non-Serb population to leave their homes.

Wars and Disintegration of Family

1. Wars have been the cause

gees often find themselves living with strangers. In this situation young women become target of additional violence. Many of them are raped even by the guards, not to speak of strangers living in the camps as refugees. The frustration experienced by both men and women, particularly women, result in increased family tension and potential violence.

While in camps, the refugees tend to develop psychological problems afflicted by depression, suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism, crime etc. According to a report recently published in UNDP circular, the Secretary General of All Africa Council of Churches, remembers stories from 1970s told by Burundi mothers. Their families were "pursued by soldiers from burning villages into tall grass, where, to prevent the discovery of the entire group, they had to silence crying infants for ever, by



War creates havoc, confusion, disillusion among people.

One-woman band Strikes up a New Political Tune

Lindsay Mackoon writes from Port of Spain

THE Movement for Unity and Progress has only one Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago. But her ambition is to become Prime Minister.

And unlike former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, 38-year-old Hulsie Bhaggan intends to take other women with her.

There are only five other women in the Caribbean nation's 36-member Parliament, but she says that half her party's candidates in the next election, due in December 1996, will be female.

Her ambition seems a distant dream, considering that she entered Parliament only three years ago and her party is no more than a breakaway faction from the main opposition United National Congress (UNC) and was launched only in December.

But the diminutive Bhaggan has shown she is a fighter and is widely regarded as honest, articulate and intelligent.

Says Diana Malabar Wyatt, an independent member of the Upper House of Parliament: "We must respect her for her views and strong determination."

That assessment is shared by her 73-year-old father, Neerajan. Hulsie is a selfless person and goes all out to seek justice. She does nothing half way. It is always 100 per cent."

A management graduate, Bhaggan shot into national prominence a year ago when she blocked traffic on a highway in protest against the government's failure to deal with floods in her constituency.

Defiantly she chose to spend a week in jail rather than pay a fine for illegal squatting. Her action won her thousands of supporters, though UNC leader Basdeo Panday accused her of "being a loose canon and undisciplined."

Early last year she again infuriated Panday by alleging that the police were reluctant to arrest black men who were raping Indian women.

The claim was dynamite in a country with two distinct ethnic groups: people of African descent and those of Indian origin, brought to the country, like Bhaggan's own Hindu grandparents, to work as indentured labourers on British-owned sugar estates.

Panday said her allegation was dividing society, though it helped push the government into appointing a Prime Commission. The rift widened, culminating in her expulsion from the party.

Her supporters claim Panday made the move because her growing popularity posed a threat to his position.

Her outspokenness is prove by her willingness to tackle head on the twin taboos of race and gender — last year she challenged a hallowed part of Trinidadian culture, calypso music, by introducing a parliamentary motion opposing the denigration of women in calypso songs.

"My main problem is that I have dared to challenge and seek entry into the men's

club' in politics," she says. "When a woman becomes involved in politics, she must be seen, not heard. If she is heard, it must be merely to express her gratitude to the men who gave her the opportunity to be there."

In the current situation, a woman is not supposed to express an independent and strong view. But I intend to disrupt the status quo contribute towards modernising politics in Trinidad and Tobago.

She is the driving force of the new party, leadership of which consists mainly of UNC politicians disenchanted with Panday and with her treatment. She says it will "introduce a new political culture and bridge the racial divide." She says the existing political culture discourages many decent and honest citizens from joining politics: "We intend to change that. Unless such people enter the political arena, there will always be corruption in government."



What does the Beijing Conference mean to Bangladeshi Women?

by Shaheen Anam

MOST International Conferences are greeted with a certain amount of skepticism. While this is also true of the forthcoming Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) scheduled for September 1995, in Bangladesh the interest and enthusiasm, especially among a section of women certainly outweighs the skepticism. There is a feeling that something substantial and concrete will after all come out of this conference and have a positive impact on the lives of women both globally and locally. The challenge now is to hold on to this enthusiasm, translate it into action and take it to Beijing and beyond. The challenge also is to spread the enthusiasm from a section of the community to the majority of the women in Bangladesh.

The government as we know has set up a National Coordination Preparatory Committee (NCCP) to coordinate their preparatory activities. Among other things the NCCP is responsible for preparing the Country Report which is now in the process of being finalized. The government has also prepared a Draft National Plan of Action based on the Jakarta Declaration is a set of excellent recommendations which if implemented will certainly help to remove some of the existing gender disparities. While drafting an Action Plan is a very positive step, let us hope that it will not just remain as a mere plan but will be implemented at the policy level.

The non-governmental community as we also know has organized under a broad-based coalition called The National Preparatory Committee towards Beijing, NGO Forum '95. It brings together women's groups, activists, NGO's, academics, cultural groups and a cross section of the civil society from all over Bangladesh to coordinate and consolidate the perspective of Bangladeshi women for the conference and beyond. There are 2000 members who represent scores of organizations and institutions. Most of the important NGO's, and women's organizations working for the emancipation and empowerment of women

from the workshops have been very positive. Women participants were encouraged and were able to articulate their needs and constraints in a forceful and effective manner. Most women said they needed credit, family support, education, training, access to market etc. Among the constraints they identified were social customs, stereotyped roles for women, lack of power and control, exclusion from most important decision making role. Their responses totally refute statements such as "poor women do not know what they want". In fact on the contrary, working with women constantly reinforces the belief that women are capable of taking control of their lives, they just need a little support, a helping hand.

The Beijing Conference is still a few months away and there are many hurdles to cross before the preparatory activities can truly be called the participatory process that we all intended it to be. The important point to remember is that Beijing is not an end by itself. It should be seen as a vehicle that can be used to bring attention to issues that affect the lives of women, internationally, regionally and locally. The conference is also an arena where national governments make commitments and can be held liable to honour those commitments.

The success of the conference will depend on how well governments and the non-government community prepare for it so that at the end of the conference, women from all over the world will be able to say "yes, at last our voices have been heard". At the moment, we still have a long way to go before women can truly say that. There is work to be done in terms of disseminating information about the conference at the grassroots level at a much wider scale. The preparatory activities will have no meaning if the concerns of the majority of women are not reflected in the status report to be presented and the activities being planned for the conference. There is also the matter of getting commitment from government, political parties and civic society to work unitedly both men and women, so that the recommendations that come out of the conference are somehow implemented and impact positively on the lives of women in Bangladesh.

The meeting looked at five major issues affecting women in South Asia.

Economic and Environment Political Empowerment of Women

Violence Against Women Trafficking of Women Religious Fundamentalism and Ethnic Chauvinism

The Preparatory Workshop sub-group has been organizing workshops at grassroots level in various regions of Bangladesh. These workshops have for the first time taken the Beijing Conference to those women whose lives should be affected positively by the conference. Out of 6 planned workshops, five have already taken place generating a lot of issues, concerns and recommendations. These recommendations will be integrated in the status report being prepared by the Forum.

The feedbacks received

ONCE upon a time there was a poor farmer who lived on Dearinga Char in the Brahmaputra River in the far north of Bangladesh. This man, Kadim Seikh, struggled hard to provide for his eleven children but when he died, he left them very little, for he was as poor as he had always been. But his children had been left a rich legacy, for Kadim Seikh and taught them to care for each other, and when troubles came to two of his daughters, their brothers and sisters did not turn their backs.

Nurjahan was Kadim's third daughter, and his favourite. Like his neighbours, he had dreams that his all children would find both happiness and food in their lives when they left his home. For Nurjahan, Kadim arranged a marriage with the son of another char dweller, Md Ferdous Ali. Kadim lived long enough to see his grandson, Noor Jamal, bring joy to his daughter. He died before Ferdous Ali, dissatisfied with his wife's dowry, sent her away from his home with her son.

Poor Nurjahan, only 21 years of age, was now homeless. But her father's teachings had taken hold, and her brother, Md Ali Seikh, invited her into his family and his house, small though it was, on Madoner Char. Like his father, he too was a poor man, and Nurjahan had to earn a living. For two years she survived and fed her son by selling her labour to richer farmers.

A Story of Two Sisters

by Marion Garry

Then, in June 1992, she became a member of group with 15 other poor women from her village organised by NGO, RDRS. Calling themselves the Highland Mohila Dal, Madoner Char, they worked and saved together to give their children a better

life. At first, Nurjahan worked as a tree caretaker, earning 25 taka a day. After 18 months, she had saved enough money to buy two cattle that she is still rearing. Working with the group, she was involved in earthworks and the re-excavation of a fish pond that they

now cultivate very profitably. Through the training and support of her RDRS group, Nurjahan Begum has been able to lease land for share-cropping and to build a house for herself and her son. How happy she was on the day she saw the last CI sheet put on

the roof. But now it was her turn to help another of her father's children, her sister, Khodeza Khatun.

This next daughter of Kadim had been married at 17, just before her father died, to Md Ayub Ali, a man of 30 from Madoner Char. But Ayub was not the man her father thought he was, and soon after the marriage, he left the char after stealing a bicycle. While he was away, Khodeza went to stay with Nurjahan, helping her sister by looking after Nurjahan's growing vegetable garden, goats and poultry.

Then her husband returned, borrowed 500 taka from his mother to pay the fine for the bicycle, and Khodeza moved back to his house. Now 7 months pregnant, Khodeza Begum earns money by working at household chores for her neighbours while her husband is a day labourer. But they live hand-to-mouth, and life is hard for Khodeza. Sometimes, when there is no money for food, Ayub Ali tells her to ask her sister Nurjahan for money, or paddy, or even a cow. If not, he threatens to leave his wife and go away to Comilla or Dhaka for ever. If he does, Khodeza knows her sister will help her again. And now that she has become a member of an RDRS group, she too can plan to send her future child to school, as Nurjahan sends her Noor Jamal.

The writer associated with RDRS.

