



# Be 'Sex Positive' to be HIV-Negative

By Wilhelmina S Orozco

**The sexual health risks for immigrant women in the US are greater because of language and cultural barriers**

ASIANS in New York City are getting their share of "use condom" reminders to prevent their being infected with the AIDS-causing human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The reminders come in the form of condoms packaged innocuously — for example, in bright candy wrappers for Filipinos, as small ribboned gifts for Thais and in origami wrapping for Japanese and Koreans.

With neon pink brochures on AIDS, these are left on counters and tabletops in beauty salons, video shops and laundromats, even in an overseas shipping company frequented by sailors.

Seeing how fast the condoms disappear, outreach workers like Ludy Resurrection replenish the supply almost daily.

Ludy, a Filipina, is with the New York-based Asia and Pacific Islanders Coalition on HIV and AIDS (APICHA).

In the United States the discussion on sexuality now centres on making it a sex-positive topic, says Ludy. To be sex positive is to have a healthy attitude. This means you do not practise (sex) until you are responsible," she explains.

A former college professor in the Philippines and co-founder of the Women's Resource and Research Centre of

the Maryknoll College (now Miriam College), Ludy talks passionately about the lopsided rearing of children which contributes to grave social problems. She said when society permits sons to grow up without respect for women, and daughters to think they cannot live without men, the result can be confusion and an abnormal sexual appetite which can lead to irresponsible sex.

The Filipino community in New York is priority group for sex education as it members experience sexual repression due to traditional religious views about sex, says Ludy who was in the Philippines recently to spend Christmas with her family.

Ludy, whose places of assignment include the Thai Beauty Salon which is frequented not only by Thais but by Vietnamese, Filipino, south Indian, Cambodian and Irish clients, was resisted at first. She earned their trust after six months of just making herself visible and chatting with them as an immigrant like them-

selves.

The sexual health risks for immigrant women, Ludy notes, are greater because of language and cultural barriers. "A lot of immigrant women have no access to health care and the traditional focus (of HIV infection prevention) are gay men and women," Ludy quoted colleague Sau Fong Au, coordinator of the coalition's Women's Project.

Ludy thinks that informed and responsible sex can reduce the risk of being infected with HIV. This could only come about, she says, if society roots out the sexual repression which conservative forces in the Roman Catholic Church would like perpetuated.

Aside from direct client services likely teaching the proper use of condoms, APICHA extends technical help and conducts education and advocacy on HIV and AIDS-related concerns for immigrants for Asia and the Pacific.

Statistics gathered by APICHA show that in the US, Thais followed by Indians and Filipinos top the list of HIV-in-

fecting immigrants from Asia and the Pacific.

In New York City, Filipinos have the highest number of AIDS cases among all ethnic groups, composing more than 21 per cent of New York City's more than 300 AIDS cases reported through May 1993 to the NYC Department of Health. About 80 per cent of the reported cases are immigrants.

Overall, Asians still count the least number of AIDS cases among ethnic groups while non-hispanic blacks have the highest. However, the situation for Asians is becoming graver. Thus Ludy uses unconventional advocacy methods such as leaving condoms in a laundromat patronized by women in saris and veils, chatting up the Thai beauty shop clientele, visiting a Filipino video rental store and frequenting the Cambodian market in Brooklyn's Crown Heights.

Starting out as an all volunteer group in 1989, APICHA was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1993. Its first president of the board, Glenn Tadashi Izutsu, died in

developed the menus pointed to "the need to respect indigenous perspectives on health and diet."

The coalition has tieups with other groups. Its Client Services links up with groups that support caregivers of PWAs especially women, as well as with groups that help these people overcome substance abuse and those assisting AIDS victims on legal matters such as immigration problems.

APICHA is now collaborating with the Philippine American Communities Executive Council (APCEC) for what they call the Tulay (bridge) Project, which among other things, educates the Filipino American community on AIDS and mobilizes community resources for Filipino clients.

Another joint project is the pimberrera (a tiered food container) service which provides hot meals to Filipinos with AIDS who can no longer look after themselves, and who have been shunned or abandoned by relatives and friends.

Also networking with APICHA is the Coalition for the Advancement of Filipino Women, Inc. (CAFWI), mainly a consciousness raising group for which Ludy Resurrection is the coordinator. — Depthnews Asia

## From Plenty to Penury, to Possession and Pride!

**Zugal Bala of Bassudebpur Landless Women's Group (ASA). Manikgonj, narrates her story of fall and rise.**

WHEN Anil was in class three and Babu in class four it was the time of our happy days. Then we lived in our own furnished house at Horina with seven children and we had a sprawling orchard to depend on. But the happy days did not last long. Within a few days Anil had to carry basketful of cigarettes (for peddling) instead of bagful of books (to school). And Babu had to become a carpenter.

Anil's father was a school teacher. One day, due to a sudden stroke he became paralyzed and after suffering for eight months he expired. To give him a standard medical treatment the whole orchard had to be mortgaged. Within two months all the family savings was finished. Experiencing the pinch of starvation, my children began to leave home in search of work. My eldest son went to Dinazpur with a neighbour to work as a carpenter. The second son engaged himself in selling cigarettes. I had to sell two bigas of land for survival of the family. A period of long five years passed in that way. But all on a sudden I had to face a severe shock for the second time. My last daughter Rita fell into the river and drowned. That year the inflating Padma swallowed everything except only the homestead.

Facing such a miserable condition my husband's elder brother sold out that house for sixteen thousand taka. From a relative he bought nine decimals of land for us at Paddarpura on condition that we could pay only 16 thousand taka at that time and the rest Tk 20,000/- be paid within ten years, otherwise the total land with the paid amount would be forfeited.

For a long time Anil and Babu were working in Dhaka. The family was dependent on them. By that time, my two daughters were grown up. To manage bridegroom for them was beyond the range of our capacity, because there was also the question of dowry, besides expenses. Considering all these facts Babu got married by taking Tk 7,000/- as dowry himself to enable me to overcome my two daughters' wedding costs. But few days later, Babu set up his family across the border and virtually cut off the communications with us. It was not possible for Anil alone to maintain the family and hence we had to starve almost regularly.

I became more afraid and upset due to the fact that five years had already passed but only six thousand taka was paid against the house Tk 14,000/- should be paid within the following five years. By this time Swapan, my fifth son had passed SSC examination obtaining 1st division with two letters. He should get himself admitted into a college. And that would also entail expenses. We were afraid perhaps we

would have to lose the domestic land for good. I shared my 'ins' and 'outs' with Shilamoni — a neighbour and worker with ASA (Association for Social Advancement). Observing the hapless condition she listed my name in ASA-Bassudebpur Landless Women's Group to help me by giving some cash taka to sustain with.

After three months of entry, the Samity gave me Tk 1,000/- as the first credit. I bought some firewood with Tk 700/- and hens with Tk 200/-.

Swapan was admitted to Manikgonj college with the rest amount. The instalments were repaid jointly, sometimes from poultry income and sometimes from April. Seven to eight months later the firewood was sold at Tk 1,650/- and six hens at Tk 300/-.

With the help of these amounts, Tk 2,000/- was paid against the house.

In the second year I received Tk 2,000/- from the group. Three goats were bought with that. And instalments were repaid from poultry income. At the end of the year we sold two goats and got Tk 3,600/-, from which Tk 3,000/- was paid against the homestead land. By that time Swapan had passed HSC examination. He cherished to make himself a doctor. But it was impossible for me to bear the expenses and hence he got himself admitted to B. Sc class.

In the mean time, the Samity gave me Tk 3,000/- as the third term credit. The total amount was used for the previous loan repayment purpose. The instalments were almost repaid from poultry income. Swapan was one of the good students at the college, though he got little support from the family. Then, my daughter Shikha was in class eight and Swapan often found telling something about me to his sister. Sometimes a question arose in my mind, "I am a member of landless women's group and is that a matter of hesitation for them?" But one day I got to know Swapan was only inspiring his sister!

Swapan expressed himself, "You became a member only to keep our life moving, to stand against poverty. Tk 8,000/- has already been repaid (against the house) within three years. We also can repay another Tk 5,000/- within a few months which also would come from the group. It is easy to collect a few hundred taka but to manage thousands is very difficult; but for the group. You also have a regular savings and profitable poultry rearing. You could continue our study only involving yourself in the samity at the right time. And step by step we have also become the owner of the house. I can't understand why the question of shame would arise at all. How it is prestigious to move from door to door like a refugee! It's our pride that you could gain the power to sustain."

— ASA case study

## A Sobering Role for Women

by Bharat Dogra



**A grassroots women's movement against alcohol is taking rural India by storm, and has attained political centre-stage.**

RAMPAL Singh did not take his first swig of arrack until he was 25. But two years later he was hopelessly hooked. Instead of providing for his family, Rampal was drinking away his meagre earnings as a farmhand.

He beat his wife Shanti whenever she demanded money for running the home and looking after their two children in their little village on the outskirts of this north Indian town.

But Shanti was not about to just weep in one corner while her husband turned into an alcoholic. Two years ago, as Rampal staggered home from a drinking binge, Rampal got a shock when he opened the door to his hut to find himself among almost all the village women — including Shanti. They wanted help in getting the local liquor shop shut down.

Intrigued, he followed the women to the liquor-kiosk where the wives raised slogans and sang songs against alcohol. They continued unfazed even when the liquor contractor's men threatened to beat them up.

Rampal was impressed by their valour and enthusiasm. He began quietly accompanying them to their protest meetings and soon became an active participant.

"The movement helped me give up the bottle and save my life from ruin," says Rampal, who has not touched a drop of liquor for more than a year now.

A grassroots anti-liquor movement, usually led by women, has taken rural India by storm over the past two decades.

In the central state of Andhra Pradesh, a women-led grassroots anti-alcohol campaign snowballed last year into a political movement and became such a hot issue in state elections that the government that came to power outlawed alcohol altogether.

Some say such drastic measures may actually create problems of moonshine and strengthen the alcohol mafia, but it does indicate the power of women in grassroots activism.

The movement started in 1992 in the town of Dubakunta in Andhra Pradesh, where a local woman was inspired by a story she read in her adult literacy class.

When three drunk men from the village drowned one night, the women got together to hold protest meeting and demonstrations outside the local liquor store.

Then they formed squads to stop trucks carrying liquor and launched a vigorous campaign to get their men to kick the habit. Their success prompted women in neighbouring villages to take up the struggle and it soon spilled over to other districts of the state.

Soon, the anti-liquor movement in Andhra Pradesh had become strong enough to stop the auctions of liquor stores in important regional centres of the state.

Realising the political potential of the mass upsurge, the

regional Telugu Desam party made prohibition a major plank of their state election campaign last year.

The party swept the polls, decimating Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's Congress party. One of the first decisions the Telugu Desam ministry took after being sworn in was the imposition of prohibition in the state.

In the tiny northern state of Haryana, the movement appears to have reached a flash-point. Separate anti-liquor movements in the state's villages, again led chiefly by women, are now coalescing to produce a mass upsurge.

Noted social activist Swami Agnivesh, who has organised a number of anti-liquor marches, is trying to form a political party called the Arya Sabha, centred around the issue.

"Anti-liquor feelings have spread so rapidly that several opposition parties have been forced to honour these feelings and they have accepted the prohibition demand to a greater or lesser extent," he says.

"This is a classic case of popular sentiment pushing a grassroots concern onto the nation's political agenda," says a social activist.

But one of the leaders of the movement in Haryana, activist Virendra Dahiya, warns, against overconfidence and complacency. Says Dahiya: "Any slackness in our efforts at this stage could lead to the loss of all the gains we have made through two decades of sustained efforts."

Perhaps the most successful of these movements began in the mining town of Dalli-Rajhara in the tribal regions of the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in the late seventies.

A workers' union of iron-ore miners, known by its Hindi acronym CMSS, had won significant economic gains for badly exploited miners. But the union leaders were apprehensive that the higher wages would be squandered on liquor in an area where addiction was rampant.

The CMSS launched a strong educational campaign against liquor addiction followed by a fast by one of its most popular labour leaders to check the sale and purchase of liquor.

The CMSS was able to create a climate where the workers felt resorting to increase liquor consumption would be a betrayal of the union which had fought for their rights. Initially more than 4,000 workers took a pledge never to drink alcohol again.

Since then, as the reach of the union increased, more and more workers have been taking up the pledge in the region. Says Sonaribai, a tribal woman from Dalli-Rajhara: "If previously our people used to consume one rupee (about three US cents) worth of liquor, now they consume liquor worth only a quarter of that amount."

"It's hard work for women," says Dhaporam Roy, the Federation treasurer. Everyone agrees as they stand in Jabarhat Barrobari watching the women in their brightly coloured saris lifting baskets of earth out of a large square hole in the ground.

That is going to be a Federation fish pond, one day soon, when the rains come and the people fill it with hatchlings. It was a dream of all the members. How they would lease out the pond, make lots of money from the fish that they would harvest. But they are poor people. Where to find the money to excavate? And then the drought hit, and the Federation members were

hard pushed to survive, never mind find the funds for a fish pond.

The RDRS-ODA Drought Response Project intervened.

"We'll help you to survive, but only if you help yourselves. The Federation was told by the local Project Manager. The Federation agreed, and through its members found 575 women and men of the most needy families who were fit to work only 70 per cent being from group member households.

"The women can only dig 40 cu ft a day to begin with. Though by the time they've finished their part in excavating the fish pond, they can empty over 60 cu ft." The consensus

## Feminism

### A girl's point of view

Feminism is a word that is not very popular among the people in our country. Most of the time this word conjures up the image of either the controversial writer Taslima Nasrin or of a lady whose actions resemble those of a man rather than a woman.

These are the many misconceptions about feminism. To me a feminist is a woman who is proud to be a woman but who is also aware of the forces working to pull her down from her path of economic and social freedom. One does not have to be attired in skirts or trousers to express her feminist point of view, shalwar kameez can prove the point just as well.

To many people and even to girls, a feminist is a person who acts like a man and can carry herself pretty well doing that. I do not agree to this concept. A true feminist is a person who can work just as well if not better than a man without compromising her femininity. A feminist is not a man in disguise of a woman, but a woman who is self-reliant and who is proud to be a woman.

Girls of my age have the education and the opportunity to think about it. One does not have to be tough or financially independent to follow the ideals of feminism. Being aware of it will only equip one better to face the world; to gain economic and social independence and to reach one's goal by overcoming the impediment that a woman faces in this male dominated society.

Because feminism is a combination of a number of ideals, there is no definite rule and regulation that one has to follow. So it is quite easy to adjust the way one wants to follow it by interpreting it in her own socio-cultural context.

Personally I have divided feminism into two categories. First is Radical Feminism and the second is Practical Feminism. A radical feminist usually does not see situations in practical terms. Many of her views are usually very much one-sided and rigid. As a result, the path she follows rarely helps women because unless a plan is made and followed with a balanced and logical point of view, it can't be beneficial to the wider section of the fairer sex. I personally do not support this kind of belief. A practical feminist considers herself a humanist as well as a feminist. What ever she does to benefit women, she does not lose sight of the real issue that is, to do good for the whole mankind, be it male or female. As she sees things from a practical and logical point of view, it is much easier for her to take the right decisions.

By molding the ideals of feminism and other social values that we young women are taught, we can have a progressive mind that will not only help us to be good citizens of the country but also make us aware of the social injustice that is occurring everyday against the women of our society and will give us the strength to fight it and ensure our rightful position in society.

Deneb Zeenat Latif  
Class-XII, Sec-B-Science

**Get ready for the struggle for life. So that for a handful of rice, your don't have to depend on the "devil" — man! I will prepare you with the knowledge and education, accordingly.**

— Begum Rokeya

seems to be that the women aren't used to hard labour. You can almost hear the men thinking, "It's not natural for women to dig." The men boast that they can dig 100 cu ft a day, and do the hardest part at the bottom of the pond, where the earth is hardest to chop out. "So the women do the first part, we do the last."

It seems fair, and everyone is still paid 30 taka a day for their work, regardless of gender. It's a small sum, but it buys the family's food, maybe pay for a few poultry birds, and everyone is happy, the women, the Federation, the NGO and its donor.

But is it fair? One of those deemed suitable to work is Bilori Begum, the wife of the

Federation treasurer. He calls her over from where she is digging despite the heat of the winter sun. Her workmates come, too, from the 15-year old girl to the 55-year old grandmother.

Bilori agrees it is hard work, but she says she's happy to earn money herself. If only she had less housework to do in the evenings. Her husband insists he helps, doing the cooking and looking after the children during the day, but admits he finds it difficult.

"The hardest part is separating the rice from the boiling water." He is eager to dig his 100 cu ft a day. His wife asks only, "Isn't there another fishpond to dig next year?"

