I had gone to the W.V.A. Residential Center to do a story on disabled child-

ren and ran into Rahima by

chance. In my protected co-cooned world, I'd never en-

countered victims like the

eighteen year old woman

whose left leg, right ear and

right arm were missing,

chopped off with a butcher's

knife. She sat in one of the

center's dorm rooms, quiet,

dry-eyed and reflective. Sto-

ries of women being burnt in

the kitchen, at the stake and

brutally murdered are in the

papers, everywhere, all the

time, especially in our part of

Women on the Move

I have started earning since I was 13. Sometimes

my income exceeded the income of my husband. I

have stopped earning since moving to the White

I wish I could have one or two more children, but

we were so happy with our daughter that we

thought of taking no more children. We are proud

of Chelsea." (Bangladesh Observer and Bhorer

House when my husband became the President.

Do you wish to have more children?

Apa. do you have cows?

Kagaz April 3, 1995)

This was the open discus-

sion between the US First

Lady Mrs Hillary Rodham

Clinton and a few village

women during her visit to

the village Maishahati of

Ihenidah in Bangladesh. The

members of Grameen Bank

asked these questions to the

first lady. Because the indica-

tors for the affirmative an-

swers were not met, I am not

sure whether they were satis-

fied with her answers. Hillary

does not have a cow and she

does not have her own in-

come. On the other hand, the

Grameen Bank members nar-

rated their condition to Mrs

Grameen Bank member I was

a pauper. Today I have a

house, a few heads of cattle

and poultry birds. I also send

my children to school...."

The enhancement of the

condition of the village

women is depicted by their

own income, cattle and poul-

try and by the fact that they

now send their children to

school. The First Lady of the

United Sates was found to be

short of two basic indicators

of enhancement of one's eco-

news which was published in

the daily newspapers after

the 5 hour visit to the village

Maishahati in Jhenidah 20

miles from Jessore. But it

does indicate a lot of things

to me. It is my experience

also, that village women ask

very straight forward intelli-

gent questions to visitors. They have some indicative

questions from which they

get to know outsiders.

Among the indicators, the

economic indicators are the

most important ones. I have

never heard the question,

"how much education do you

have" or "what is your educa-

tional level". It is immaterial

to them. They take it for

granted that these visitors

must be highly educated.

They do not care whether

I enjoyed this piece of

nomic condition.

"Before becoming a

Clinton as follows

Do you have your own income?

No I don't.

Hillary Has No Cow and

No Income of Her Own!

by Farida Akhter

the visitor's education is

graduate level or masters

level. But "do you have your

own income" and "do you

have a cow" are the most im-

portant questions to them.

There are very few visitors

who can satisfy the village

women with the answer to

the poor village women, "do

you have your own income"

and "do you have any deci-

sion-making power in your family". This has become a

theory in women's develop-

ment, that once poor

women have their own in-

come, they earn the decision

making power in family mat-

ters, especially with regard to the number of children to

have. There are thousands of

examples to prove this the-

ory. On this basis, many in-

come generating projects

years which have made cer-

grammes successful! Contra-

ceptive distribution pro-

grammes failed to ensure that

women have less children.

So, income earning has been,

in many cases, the best con-

traceptive. For the devel-

opment experts with a mo-

tive to reduce population,

these were important issues.

But for a village woman a

have developed over the

tain population control pro-

Similarly, the visitors ask

the second question.

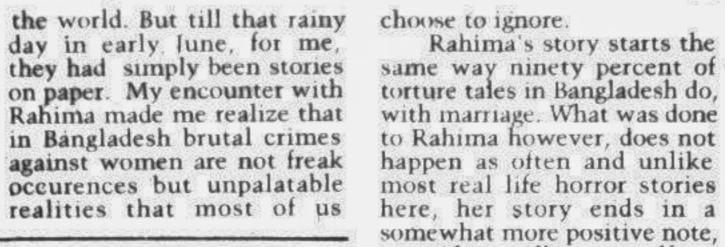
Living with Brutality by Schrezad Joya Monami Latif

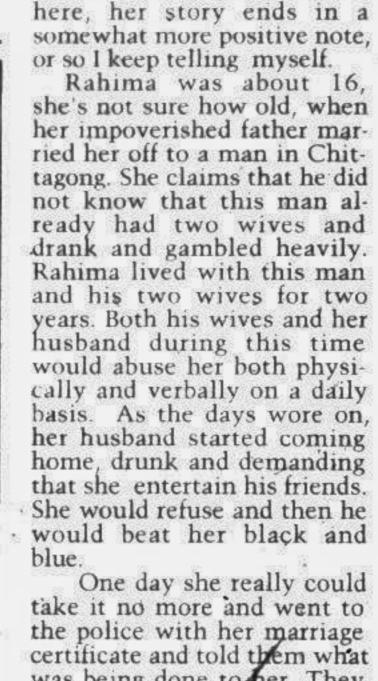
"My Husband Hacked off My Limbs"

Rahima's story starts the

day in early lune, for me, they had simply been stories on paper. My encounter with in Bangladesh brutal crimes against women are not freak

Courtesy Shehzad Noorani. DRIK





was being done to her. They assured her that they would see what they could do, and in the meantime she was not to return home. Rahima stayed at a neighbors home. After two days she went to collect her clothes and belongings. That one mistake will cost her the rest of her

Her husband's sister and his second wife were sitting outside on the patio when she got there. They told her to go inside and collect her things. Her husband and a friend

were sitting in the room when she entered. He asked her if she had been to see the police. Rahima denied everything but he was furious. His friend grabbed her two hands and held them down behind her. Her husband took a dao. (butchers knife) and cut off her ear and hit her a few times with it on her head, the scars of which have healed but left ugly, scarlet welts on her

Rahima does not remember anything that happened after that. Her face remained impassive as she told me in a monotone, "when I woke up I could not remember anything, not even my name. All I knew was that I was in tremendous pain and parts of my body had been hacked off." After slicing off her ear her arm, her entire leg and part of her other foot, her husband had left her next to the railway tracks to die. She was discovered and

taken to hospital where her case received much publicity. Rahima received treatment which included an artificial wooden leg. Her husband and his friend have been put in jail but that has no guarantee, whatsoever. Small punishment for a heinous crime. A female lawyer is actively fighting Rahima's case which has been dragging on for quite some time. In the meantime, the W.V.A. center has given her shelter and food. I did not want to ask

Rahima too many questions which would dredge up painful memories. She reassured me that it did not matter. "I'v e told this story so may times, you see, and to so many strangers".

And what about her future! W.V.A. is trying to re-habilitate her into one of their women's projects and Rahima herself is actually quite posi-tive about her life now. "I do not want to live off people's kindness forever." She is very grateful. "Apa, at least attention was brought to my case and I am being helped, I am not begging on the streets and I wasn't left to die on the railroad tracks."

True. She could have been one of the hundreds of casualties that occur each day but her life was saved. And yet...

I was consumed by rage that day, and went home to tell my grandfather about my day. It was lunchtime and all the household help were standing around the table. They listened to Rahima's story and tut tutted and the women got quite upset. But they all felt that I was getting. too worked up. "Apa, I can bring you a dozen of such cases just from the neighbourhood if you'd like to write about more of these," the cook told me, cases like this happen all the time, according to him. "why, the next door bua's sister's husband burned all her limbs with hot iron then hung her from the fan! That poor girl died and although her husband was caught and put into jail, he got out again, very shortly and now has a new wife." I was horrified with the cook's account and quickly got up to leave the table but my grandmother's old bua caught up with me at the front door. "Apa, there's no justice for poor people in this country, no justice at all. You come from abroad, see a few cases and you get all upset, but you don't have to live with this, you don't have to bear any of the pain. Are you going to write about this in your newspaper?How much good will that do?"

Her question will haunt

me, always.

General of the Women's Conference."

• The number of women who, like Mrs Mongella, reach the top is still very small. Britain's record, is particularly poor, with less than ten per cent of the seats in the House of Commons occupied by women. Baroness Shirley Williams, a former Minister and currently an advisor to the Beiring Women's Conference, believes that some kind of positive action is needed to help more women get into government.

She cites as examples countries like Sweden, Germany and India, who have introduced a quota system into their electoral process to ensure that there are sufficient women candidates.

In Britain, surveys show that among couples who both work full time, only a quarter share domestic tasks. In most families the woman does all the housework as well as her paid job.

In many countries the last ten years show an increase in violence against women, particularly in the home. Some people fear this alarming trend is the result of men feel ing threatened in their traditional role. Others point out that women now feel able to report incidents of violence, rape and abuse; this is a sign of progress.

All these subjects will be aired in Beijing, and no doubt, as at the last conference, splendid resolutions will be passed. How much this affects the lives of ordinary women throughout the world depends on how willing national governments are to implement those recommendations

From Nairobi to Beijing begins on BBC World Service radio on the following dates: South Asia from Saturday July 15 at 0015 repeated at 0540 and on Mondays

1430 and

Tuesdays at

state of stringency. When I was only 15 years

> Tota committed suicide. in my father's house at Dashara. But my father left us soon and the whole family became dependant on my elder brother. After two years, one of my neighbours helped me to get a job at sewing school of an NGO. At the beginning of the fourth year I got accidentally burnt and was hospitalized. After that it became very troublesome for me to continue

adding his own Tk 1,000/-. A new life tailoring was started from that day. Now-adays, I am known to all as 'Rahima Darzi'. In such a miserable condition, when I demanded a low rate for making dresses, maximum people of

simple question like do you have a cow cannot be answered in the affirmative by the most powerful women of the world. And then, what do the village women derive from this negative answer?

The question of having a cow in the family is very much linked to the nature of the economy one is in. Of course, if Hillary Clinton belonged to a US farm household, she would have thousands of cattle head. She could then perhaps satisfy



Star photo the village women. But this

was not the case. So a village woman with an agricultural base may need to understand other types of economies and their relation to people. If we blame the village women for

their narrow perception, then western women are equally guilty of having one particular perception about all the women in third world countries. They often fail to recognize the differences in the social and economic context of women in Bangladesh and ask generalized question with very preconceived ideas about the so-called backwardness of women in these countries. I simply want to raise this issue and connect it with Hillary Clinton's visit with the village women. Since Hillary did not have affirmative answers to quesctions asked by village women, the village women will not have a general sense of understanding about the empowerment of the first lady of the United States of

So, let's think in different ways and broaden our perspectives. Instead of making fun of the encounter between the village women and Hillary Clinton we can learn

a lot from it.

America.

The Rhythm of Sewing Machine is My Pulsation

Rahima Begum (31) of Manikgonj narrates her story of struggle



TES, like all others I also have some memories of time and trials of my own. We, three brothers and sisters, were living with our parents at Dashara of Manikgonj. My father Tufan Ali was a share-cropper. He had a negligible cultivable land. So, our days were passing on in a

old, a student of class three, my father settled my marriage with a neighbour named Tota Mian Within a few days, I went to my in-law's house. My father in law did not choose me, although he saw me before. He was pressing hard my husband either to collect dowry or get married for the second time. But Tota did not agree. Conflicting over that issue, only two years after the marriage.

From that day, I have been the job, because it was a ten

At that jobless situation I felt myself as an extra burden to the family. It became too hard to manage the family. Spending time and energy to do something was essential. But I had no capital to start something. Where from could I get that? From money lenders? If I failed to repay his interest! One of my neighbours suggested me to go to her ASA (Association for Social Advancement) group. She told me that if I maintained all the regularities, they would approve a loan in my favour and with that I could be able to continue a 'sewing business'.

Considering the fact, next day, I went to their office, and joined 'Dashara Akota Landless Women's Group'. Then regularly attended the group meetings and development education classes. Right after 3 months and 15 days the group provided me with a loan of Tk 1,000/- (one thousand). I had a savings of Tk 500/- (five hundred). My brother bought a sewing machine and some cloths from Manikgonj bazar

our locality come to me. In that way one year passed. I could repay my brother's loan and weekly instalments. To have a clear idea about my business I always maintained a daily note book. After income and expenditure of the first year, at the end I had a capital of Tk 1,538/-.

Gradually, my world began to change. Another hand was needed to deliver the order goods in time. I had to iron the clothes before delivering. For that also a considerable amount was spent. So, when, in the next year, I received Tk 2,000/- as the second term loan, I bought an iron with Tk 500/- and also a second hand machine with Tk 1,500/- I also employed an assistant to help me. After repaying the second term credit it was clear to me that the family was moving toward a solvency.

By that time, I already bought a ceiling fan with Tk 500/-. I also purchased a cow jointly with my brother. For that I had to spend Tk 5,000/-. Now we get four litres of milk

every day. The family also had been facilitated with a water sealed latrine and a tubewell. My capital was also increasing gradually and it became Tk 3.000/- then. At the end of the year, Tk

4.000/- came to me as the third term loan which I spent for buying cloths. The instalments were repaid in due course. The present capital in my business is nearly Tk 6,000/-.

Though I enjoy various facilities, but have no extraroom. I share the single room with my mother and it is very difficult to do the sewing work at night. We have attained remarkable changes in our every day life, but till today a large portion of my business is on 'overdue' and for that I have to face a loss of Tk 0.50 per yard by calculation. When the business will run fully with my own money, everything will become very easy for me. I am patiently waiting for those days. And, I hope the days are not very far. as the rhythms of my sewing

-An ASA case study

machines are pulsating fast.

FROM NAIROBI TO BEIJING Another Decade for Women Ten years ago the United Nations held a women's conference in Nairobi. This September another conference will be held in Beijing. Do these conferences make a difference? Have women's lives improved over the past ten years? ANNE THEROUX,

teners' correspondence programme, Write On, received (and broadcast) a letter complaining about female sports commentators. "Get back to your knitting, girls!" was the parting thrust Clearly some women's changing role. So are some women!

• ten years? Sometimes

The other day the BBC lis-

W HAT has changed for women in the past

it seems, not much.

sometimes envy my mother and grandmother, one woman admitted after describing how hard it was to run a home and a career. "Their lives were more lim-

ited, but at least they knew what was expected of them." And many other women I talked to agreed that trying to be Superwoman was exhaust-Because being a liberated - tions today about what kind

woman is tiring, it is tempting to romanticise "the good old days" when there was time to knit, bake and play with the children, while the man took responsibility for bringing home the money. However it was never quite like that. In many parts of the world "women's work" was hard, heavy agricultural labour. To this day women produce most of the food consumed in

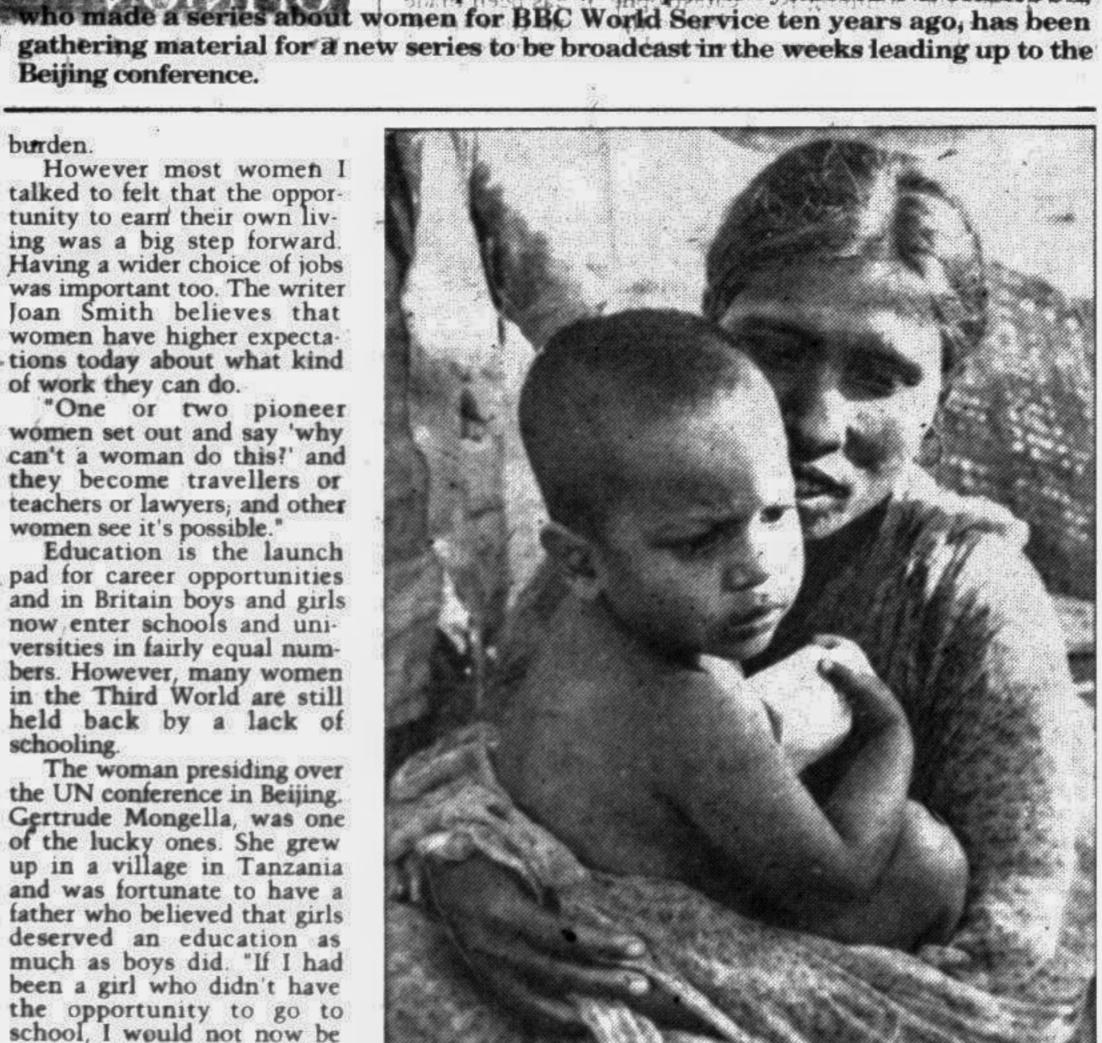
And there are growing numbers of women who support families without a male partner: at least a third of the world's households are female-headed. These women must earn money

Certainly in Britain one of the big changes over the past ten years has been the number of women taking up paid work, whether through economic necessity or because they want to. Over 60 per cent of women with children also have jobs outside the home. Is this progress? Not necessarily. Many of them have poorly paid part time jobs. The financial rewards hardly make up for the extra

not give women equal rights

to parental property. The

deal with.



How much will the Beijing Conference help them?-Star Photo

HE oppression of women in Bangladesh is often written about, perhaps because it is so blatant. This oppression takes many forms - it starts with all over the world, women in Bangladesh suffer because of discrimination against gir children within the household the standards of a society that and ends up with a legal sysjudges women by the way tem which, at the fag end of that they look. However, in the twentieth century, does

Secretary General of the

World Conference. The deci-

sion of my parents to take me

ties in my life. That's why I've

to school opened opportuni-

been a Minister, a high Com-

missioner and now Secretary

society constantly reinforce You would think that after the interior position of centuries of colonial rule, we women. would learn to take pride in The "big issues" like our own culture and heritage dowry, domestic violence, lower standards of nutrition rather than yearning after standards of beauty imposed and education for the girl by the conquerors. And anychild and so on are things that way, if white skin is so wonmost thinking people are derful, why do westerners aware of. What is less often spend their lives applying sunlooked at is how the opprestan oil and risking skin cancer sion of women takes place siin order to toast themselves multaneously at many differto a healthier shade of ent levels, and how all of that feeds into what women in our

society eventually have to Our own poets have sung paeans of praise which testify As in many other countries to the beauty of the Bengali

by Farah Ghuznavi woman (and a look around

you at any time should confirm the fact that beauty is alive and well in Bangladesh). Very seldom have those poems or love songs gone into details of how white the skin of the beloved is. Yet in Bangladesh today, the term "beautiful" (shundor) has become synonymous with "fair" farshal. We are arguable more racist in our condemnation of

When a girl baby is born, almost the first question is "What is her colour like?" Rongta kemon hoychhe? Why is it that one never hears this question being asked at the birth of a baby boy?It amazes me, that with rare exceptions, no matter how privileged, sophisticated or educated people in our society are, they can still come

out with statements like. "Oh. it's going to be hard to find a husband for so and so. She is so dark." Apart from the fact that I don't honestly see why brown skin should be considered ugly (presumably this is the way that the Almighty meant us to look, judging colour!, most people don't even bother to look beyond skin colour to consider a woman's features when they pass judgement on her looks!

selves buy into and actively it so ably ourselves! industry exploits these ridicu-

lous standards of ours with great ease, making huge profits from selling products which are guaranteed to make you fairer. You are urged to become "fair and lovely", to lighten your skin colour within weeks, to become devastatingly attractive for the small amount it costs to buy a few tubes of this product. All your problems will be solved if you use these creams and lotions, never mind the cost to your skin of applying such harsh chemicals and bleach! It would be interesting to know what the long-terms effects of such products would be on delicate facial skin. But who cares anyway, right? It's a small price to pay for "beauty".....

Who is the Fairest of Them All?

Bangladesh, this is hugely aggravated by the obsession that most people in this couninequalities which exist in our try have about skin colour.

darker skin as ugly, than many people in the west

from how many of us are this

As far as the vast majority of people are concerned, if a woman is dark-skinned, she is ugly, no matter how beautiful her eyes may be, how exquisite her bone structure, Similarly, if a woman is fair, she is beautiful, no matter how bland or boring her features. And then we complain about the racism we experience in the west! If we ourpropagate this myth, how can we complain if others use our skin colour to put us down? We don't need the west to make fools of us when we do Meanwhile, the cosmetics

hours duration.