TES, that is the only way

cried for justice for her

daughter Yasmeen. Standing

on the stage before a crowd

of 10,000 Sharifa Begum

aroused an anguish in us all,

and heart rending are the

circumstances under which

Yasmeen lost her young life.

But this does not only arouse

anguish but also anger, frus-

tration, humiliation and a re-

solve that we will seek and

play of unity and solidarity

thousands of women gath-

ered outside the Engineers'

Institute on 30 October at

the Dhaka Rally to demand

In an unprecedented dis-

attain justice for Yasmeen.

to describe Sharifa Be-

gum's lament as she

Women on the Move

Dhaka Rally by Sammilito Nari Samaj The Cry of Anguish

by Shaheen Anam

the anguish felt by one society as well as to the auhuman for another at the loss of a loved one. More poignant

It was not only women who gathered to protest. Hundreds of men came along, standing shoulder to shoulder with their female compatriots to protest at the rising tide of violence against women that seems to be presently sweeping the society. What was so special about the Dhaka Rally was that people from all walks of life participated. There were the well-known activists, comjustice for Yasmeen, to mitted, vocal and strong, protest police brutality on along with young activists women and also to show that who were shaking the earth women are not the vulnera- with their militant slogans. ble, weak, defenseless com- Thousands of women from munity they are perceived to urban slums and adjoining be. In a tremendous show of areas of Dhaka came in to strength, the Sammilito Nari stand beside groups of very Samaj succeeded in demon- urban elite women who selstrating that women and dom take part in street women's organizations de- demonstrations but could not spite differences, can stand stay away from this one. The unitedly on a common plat- determined look on people's form on a particular issue. faces was obvious, they had The impact of such a display gathered as one, to say "NO

WOMEN". Is this then the beginning of a women's movement that is determined to succeed? Perhaps it is the issue which has pushed women to a point beyond endurance. Perhaps women are finally fighting with their backs to the wall. A fight for survival. For too long we have remained silent on issues of violence, be it domestic, public or custodial. For too long women have been made to feel guilty for crimes they have not committed. There comes a time in every nation, community or people's lives when they say "SO MUCH AND NO MORE". Is this then such a time? I wonder and hope.

The time has perhaps come to personalize every violence, every rape, every assault as if it has been perpetrated on me, you or on a loved one. Yasmeen's rape and murder should move every parent who has a fourteen-year-old daughter to act and protest. The young bride

dren than what kind of society are we talking about. Freedom of mobility, of access and choice is a fundamental right that we are being denied and there is no enough dowry is no one else reason to tolerate this any of 16 who is forced to take but your sister, niece or poison for not bringing

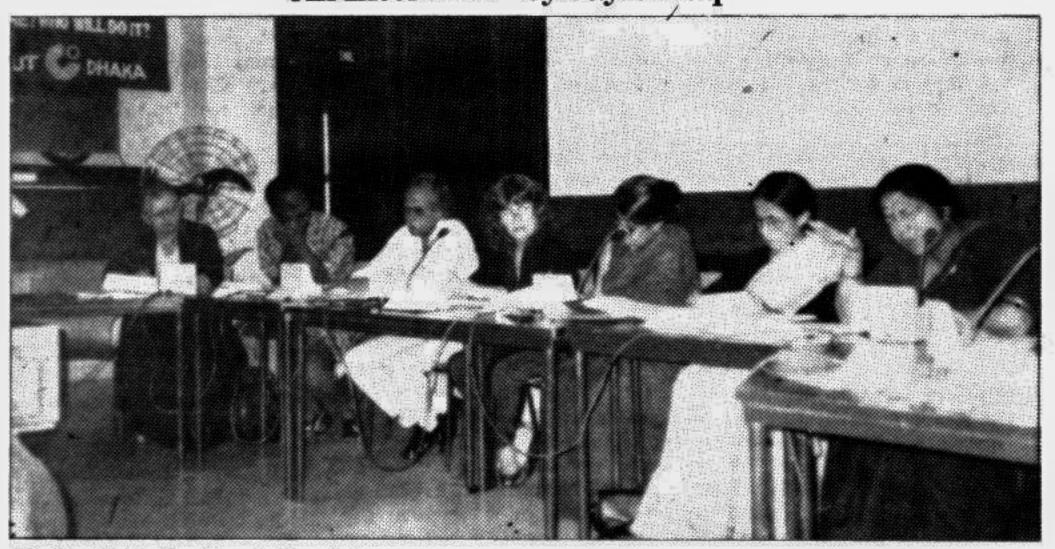


Participants in the rally on October 30: A protest loud and clear

Clamour for Women's Claims

An Interview by Fayza Haq

of unity is tremendous to the to VIOLENCE AGAINST



Dr Ursula Muller, fourth from left

R. Ursula Muller, who are Touching on the aspects "human rights" for women at Muller adds." I am not sure the Goethe Institut asked that it was a good idea to why there should be a have the conference in China separate human rights as it was a hindrance for discussion for women, ex- some women, specially the plains, "We need to interpret NGOs, as they are working the existing legislations. hard for the liberation of Some women do feel that they are not included in some of the laws of the charditional formulations. For instance, there is the paragraph that says that parents have the right to give their children good education. This ignores the fact that education can be sexist and hostile to women and there may not be an understanding between parents about their child's future.

Asked about how she felt about the recent Beijing Conference, Dr. Muller confides." I have not been these but I learnt a lot from the newspaper reports. There are fundamentalists both on the Christian side and the Muslim side. It was surprising that both sides could compromise. In the ICPD in Cairo in '94 it was difficult to have an autonomous women's view. It is important that human rights should not be put aside for cultural rea sons.

was here recently to of the Beijing Conference chair a workshop on that appealed to her. Dr. women.

"In these international level conferences women ter of human rights. Women's meet counterparts as they needs and claims require ad- never meet before which give, a push to women's movements in the respective countries. The success of these movements depends very much on the strength of women's movements and the political background of the countries." Is she satisfied with the

> achievements of the Beijing Conference? "It was good that all sides could come into a resolution of women's rights. In comparison, the conference in Cairo had been a disappointment. The difficulties sometimes arise due to religious traits, which are themselves traits of something else - deep rooted interest in maintaining the deep-seated hierarchical structure in society which control women's reproductive capacity and sexuality

> What were the aspects of the conference that appeal to her? For the German case.

it was disappointing. Papers of the working group that help the government and NGOs were not included in the government paper as an appendix. If this had been done it would have shown a variety of discussions. Even in France the women's movement was very angry as the government took very conservative names for relationships between men and women. There are various forms of living together which should have the same right to exist. "Did she think that the recommendations of the Beijing Conference will be implemented in the future? To this Dr. Muller replies," This depends on the strength of the respective women's movements in the countries. The early EEC regulations have provided important incentives to the German women.

"As regards enjoying liber ated policies of women's rights Scandinavia and Canada are the leading countries. The US had a pilot discussion for equal rights as there is a conservative majority in the US Congress which wants to abolish the equal rights amendment of women and ethnic minority groups. There has also been a scandal about sexual harassment around Clarence Thomas, a judge of the constitutional court."

Dwelling on steps taken against women's harassment in Germany she says, "Sexual harassment may not be regarded as a problem in the eastern countries but the amount of sexual harassment in the west is astonishing. Now experiences from US, Britain and other EEC countries and Australia may be able to solve the problem a bit. Legislations have been passed but they have not been effective."

Talking about women's rights in Bangladesh, Dr. Muller says, "I have read some articles about women's rights in Bangladesh. On the formal level the situation is rather progressive as they have the same rights of equal pay and the right to vote. What I found very impressive in Bangladesh is that there are lots of groups who are concerned about spreading the knowledge of equal rights even among the illiterate." Dwelling on the situation

in Germany she comments. "On the formal level German women enjoy equal rights. As soon as you go into details

you find that many things are not equal. It is only since '77 that a woman may take up gainful employment without asking her husband. It is only a few years that a woman may marry without losing her original name. I left school in '67 and among the rare ones in a class of 30 who have kept my original surname. The lack of child care for the whole day makes it impossible to have a job and a family too. Thus there are

"None of the parties can deny the women's rights except the reactionary neo-Nazi ones. Christian Democrats remain conservative. Women, specially the young find the parties hostile to human rights for women."

highly qualified women sit-

ting at home for years.

Asked to say a few words on the contradictions of the Church as regards women's rights, Dr. Muller says," There is the Protestant Church and the Catholic, Church. In the Protestant ones women become priests and there is the first female bishop. This is unthinkable in the Catholic Church which is

reactionary on women's questions."

daughter. If we cannot pro-

vide the minimum security

for ourselves and our chil-

Talking on how German women feel about abortion. she informs, "It is widely believed that abortion should be a woman's decision and is a private affair. Now this is not punishable in the first three months. In Bavaria an abortion maybe difficult. Since the '60s family planning is a common practice and now even the Catholics practise it. Now the issue is why contraceptives are not used effec-Professor Muller works in

the department of Sociology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, Dr. Muller's studies include segregation of labour markets by gender and the strategies that lead to it; the reactions of German men to the women's movement; sexual harassment in the workplaces; models of combining family and working life; women's discrimination in the labour market; men's vio-Tence towards women.

Dr. Muller, who grew up in Cologne, has two children - a son and a daughter - and lives in Dortmund.

Born for the Wreaths

A Sketch by Meher Akhter

ODAY I want to tell you my story. I don't want to leave this body without telling the cruelty this world has inflicted on me. My wounds are still fresh never to be healed, the excruciating pain tearing apart my existence. I have become a corpse ready to be buried and perished into oblivion.

My story begins with the sun rising, illuminating the whole world. The chirping of the birds woke me up. I heard the sound of footsteps fading away to the fields, the creaky sound of pumping tubewell was coming from outside and my mother was calling me to say my morning prayer. I prayed for my well being.

The white pieces of papers changed my world, the feeling of being loved is wonderful. I felt like the happiest person and the world seems to be revolving around me. Tall, handsome and being the blood of the very high clan, you were every girl's heart beat. I had never dreamt that the secret love I was nurturing for you, will become a reality. The long awaited days will soon be over now because today you asked me to meet you.

The darkness was creeping in, engulfing nature with its dusky gloomy feathers. Waiting in the wilderness, I saw four shadows materializing, my eyes rested on one of the figures. I stood petrified as I saw you, your eyes were glaring with an evil intent. A sudden chill ran down my spine and I saw so many vicious hands pouncing on me, ripping me apart. My world of dreams fell into pieces, my chastity was crushed again and again until my existence began to throb. Time came to a standstill and nature seemed to hide its face to escape the shameful state of humanity. I was left to die.

I regained my consciousness in an unknown world where I was a stranger. The agonizing pain was tormenting my whole body, blurring my sights and numbing my senses. Whenever I opened my eyes, I tried to look for my kins, I saw none. I found people clad in uniforms asking several questions, and when I tried to answer, my voice failed me and again I was drawn into obscurity. God knows how many days I was in that state fighting to

survive to go back home, into my mother's safe arms.

One day I found myself surrounded by unknown people, volley of questions were shot at me, flash of lights blinded my eyes, before knew what was happening. I became the talk of the nation and the whole world become sympathetic and was ready to

Standing in the court I

fight my battle.

took a cursory look around me, it was packed with people. I recognised the faces I longed to see were hidden in the crowd. I didn't miss the satanic figures sitting in the front, casting a mocking look at me. My heart started beating hard at the pounding of the gravel, the court proceedings were announced. The prosecutor started to cross me, a grip of nausca began to overcome me, it was like the same ominous night except the circumstances were different and the method of assault was new. In the face of onslaught, I was shocked out of my senses, I was torn apart between withdrawing or carry on. I opted for the later.

Today is the last day of my trial, my painful ordeal will soon be over now, my fight for justice will be realized and I will emerge a winner. Suddenly a silence enveloped the whole court room and I heard a voice saying "not having enough evidence against the charged persons the court is acquitting them."

It was my defeat indeed because it was only my fight, the people who were swarming around me had long disappeared. I was left alone in this cruel world to mourn on the grave of goodness that they have just buried.

I lost my virginity in the hands of insanity, I lost my integrity in the hands of justice. I lost my liberty in the hands of society. Everyone used me, abused me and later discarded me after their purpose was served.

In this rehabilitation centre where I am counting my last days, this recurring pain is killing me slowly and surely. Life has become an unbearable burden to carry on. When't see the flowers, I just wonder that there are flowers born for the ceremonies and there are flower born for the wreaths to be placed on the graves. I think I was born for the wreaths.

conference in Beijing," Yuan

both organisations try to

women have the legal right

for a 90-day maternity leave

and can get up to six-and-a-

half months of vacation after

ries which give the women

more, up to one year of

ally has comprehensive legis-

lation to protect women's

care it's implemented. So we

go out to inform the women

about their rights and we

explain the women's rights to

the leaders of the work units

so there can be no misunder-

This positive development

does have negative conse-

quences. Many Chinese

women complain they can no

longer get a job because po-

tential employers are afraid

they will get pregnant.

standing about this."

She says Shanghai gener-

"But now we have to take

leave," says Yuan.

"But I know some facto-

solve is maternity leave.

that.

rights.

One of the main issues

In Shanghai, pregnant

Women's Equality: Myth and Reality

Critics were asking: how could China be host of the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women when it is often cited for not respecting the human rights of both women and men? Yet, the choice of venue had prompted a new focus on equality for Chinese women.

Fons Tuinstra writes from Shanghai

LTHOUGH on paper, the Chinese governmant stresses the equal rights of men and women. the reality is very different.

According to Zhang Bo Hua, chairperson of the Shanghai Municipal Women's Federation, a lot of women expect to get lesser-paid jobs and groups representing women tend to be moderate in their criticism of inequal-

"It is only since 1950 we started fighting for equal rights in China. Before that, we knew 5.000 years in which the inferiority of women was accepted," says Zhang.

"You cannot expect this attitude to change within one generation. My own mother gave up her job when she married my father. He was an engineer and didn't bother about the household.

"Only in my generation has this changed. I now share the household work with my husband. Real equality is only possible if we all give the same contribution to society. Now the double role of women, who have to work and to raise children is still a problem.

Employment of women was one of the main issues at the United Nations-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, from 4 to 15 Septem-

Zhang stresses that Shanghai women enjoy relatively high incomes, a good healthcare system and a high participation in the local economy when compared with women elsewhere in

In the economic life of Shanghai, 49.7 per cent of the jobs are occupied by women," says Zhang. "In industry it is 45 per cent, in the countryside 60 per cent And in Shanghai, all but three of a thousand girls go to school, a big problem in other areas. The majority of university students is female. although only 24 per cent of the post-graduates are female. But their participation

in this field is still growing. And 31 per cent of companies have a female general manager."

However, these rosy fig ures are not fully reflected in the political participation of women, admits Zhang and Yuan Jue Ying, head of the Shanghai Women's Committee of the Chinese Trade

The director of the Shanghai People's Congress is a woman, but only 16.8 per cent of its members are

Closing the wage gap

Women's non-agricultural wage as a % of men's



female.

And although almost 25 per cent of the governmental jobs in Shanghai are occupied by women, only 12 per cent of those are at higher levels. Women do play an active

role in political life, but there is no reason why we should be satisfied with our achievements now. The United Nations aim at a 30 per cent political participa tion of women. We are work ing very hard to achieve that goal. If you took at the participation of women at the political representation in the National People's Congress. China belongs to the middle range, in the 17th place. Every year the amount of female cadres in Shanghai grows by 1.5 per cent," Zhang states

Yuan says women still have a negative image of themselves which the women's committee of the trade unions is devoted to correct-

Many women, 40 years and older, are afraid they will lose their jobs now that statetribute greatly to our society.

come more profitable. "It is a problem of our whole society," says Yuan Especially in the textile industry, where about 60 per cent of the work was done by women. For them and younger women we organised gatherings called," Changing

owned companies have be-

Our Minds. "Women, like a lot of Chi nese employees, were used to quite high salaries, a fairly easy job and a working place close to their homes. We had to convince them in the future this would be over Most of them had a rather low ed ucation, so after the "Changing Our Minds' meetings we organised their education, taught them to work with a computer, accounting, hotel service, make-up and

so on, she says After that, we helped about 20,000 women to find a new job. Part of the money for their education came from the action Sisters Help Sisters," especially organised because of the UN women's

"By giving birth to the next generation, women con-

> The society has to bear the costs of this," says Yuan. Since the beginning of this year, the UN conference received a lot of publicity in the Chinese media.

The Trade Union's Women's Committee worked to raise awareness of women's issues and Zhang

says journalists interested in the topic also capitalised on conference. One of our papers started

column called Women's World. It is a way to fight for women's rights in China. It is an opportunity for us and all the other women to put some pressure on our governments not only to come with good plans, but also to implement them. We want to talk with our sisters about these issues Although we are coming from different parts of the world, we do have the same kind of problems.

- Gemini News

The writer is a Dutch journalist specialising in development issues















Jim Davis