

Women on the Move

Soap, Handkerchief and Credit for Norplant!

by Farida Akhter

She told them, that this method has many side-effects. So she did not want her daughter to take this method. The Family Planning workers became very angry. At one stage, they threatened her that she would be put in jail because she was opposing Norplant.

of the side-effects of Norplant. They have been sharing information among themselves about the harmful effects of this method, which was given to some women in the adjacent thana, Kalitali.

In the village Nurunda, the two male Family Planning workers went to a family called "Boro Bari" and contacted the young educated girl. They asked her to organize a meeting in the evening for a slide show on how Norplant will help to keep good health and to keep good relations between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. They also assured that the participants will be given soap and biscuits.

In the evening there were over 100 people to see the slide show. They were given the soap and biscuits. Next day, the Family Planning workers came to the village and targeted a woman for Norplant insertion. The girl from the Boro Bari was asked to take her to the clinic. No car came to pick her up, Boro Bari girl was given the transport cost for taking the woman to the clinic. But at the clinic, Boro Bari girl asked whether they would do medical check ups. It was found that the woman had high blood pressure. The Boro Bari girl did not allow

the Family Planning workers to give Norplant to this woman although the Family Planning workers insisted that it would be alright.

In the meantime, Family Planning workers in Nallara village convinced a woman for Norplant insertion. But next day, when she was supposed to go to take Norplant, her mother who is a village midwife, visited her. After hearing that her daughter will be taken for Norplant insertion she waited till the FP workers came. She told them, that this method has many side-effects. So she did not want her daughter to take this method. The Family Planning workers became very angry. At one stage, they threatened her that she would be put in jail because she was opposing Norplant.

In the month of October, a meeting was called where mothers-in-law were asked to be present. The old women were quite thrilled about the meeting, where they were told that they would be given soap and biscuits. They brought their grand children with them. In the meeting, they were told that the reason the daughters-in-law behave badly with their mothers-in-laws is because they have more children. If they had only one or



Let her make her own decisions, don't coerce her.

NEWS BRIEFS

Violence Against Women

12.12.95 *The Daily Star*
A housewife Rina Akhter Mala was allegedly set on fire by her husband Rafiqul Islam on December 4th at Babu Bazar area under Kotwali thana. Mala died at the DMCH on 11.12.95.

Relatives said that Mala's husband reportedly demanded Tk 20,000 from her as dowry a few days before the incident. At one stage Islam set her on fire during a heated argument.

In her statement at the hospital given before her death, she said that her husband always pressed her for

dowry and her mother-in law supported her husband.

Mala, who got married to Rafiqul Islam three years ago, has a one and a half year old daughter Disha.

A murder case has been filed with the Kotwali thana against Rafiqul Islam and his mother. No arrests have been made yet. Rafiqul Islam is still absconding.

The Daily Ittefaq 14.11.95. A housewife named Krishna Nanni got mugged near the BNP office in Naya Paltan yesterday. The muggers stopped the rickshaw she was in to snatch a gold chain from her neck and reportedly fled away by an auto-rickshaw (Dhaka Metro Tha-02-4244) soon after.

A case has been filed at the Motijheel police station.

Sangbad 17.11.95. On 16th November a woman trafficker of Kandupatti brotrol along with three of his accomplices were sentenced to 14 years imprisonment at the Katiyadi Thana under a violence against women case. The sentence was carried out under

No: 5 of the special tribunal's judge Muhammad Shameul Huq.

In 1992 the accused lured a young woman named Parveen to Kandupatti promising her employment.

They forced Parveen to work for a brothel there. Later a complaint was made against the accused where upon the police carried out an investigation and brought out charge sheets against 4 persons. Three of them were sentenced to vigorous imprisonment and one was released.

In most developing countries, the birth of a daughter is one of the least desired events in a family. For reasons ranging from anything to everything, the birth of a son is anticipated eagerly by all and if the child turns out to be a girl, the mother is blamed for it and very often, advised to have another baby. In a country as ours, where the bringing up of a daughter is considered extremely expensive, for they will not be able to support their parents at old age as is commonly believed, a female child is not welcome.

If modern technological facilities as a announces was more freely and cheaply available then the number of "female foetus" abortions would shoot up alarmingly.

Luckily this is not the case.

In illiterate and some so

called "educated" families,

the mother is still blamed for

the birth of a daughter, and

the pressure is on her to

produce a male offspring.

The fact that the father may

have some contribution to

towards the gender of the child

is something many are ignorant about.

One often hears it being said that "it's God's

wish whether the baby is a

boy or girl". God's wish is

certainly is but God has pro-

vided us all with all the relevant factors, so why not try and understand so simple a process?

The gender of a human

being is determined by the "sex chromosomes" he acquires or gets at birth. These are the special set of chromosomes which determines a person's sex. There are two types of sex chromosomes in human beings. These are the "X" chromosome and the "Y" chromosome.

A human being always gets a set of these chromosomes and a combination of "XX" renders a female gender and "XY" renders a male gender.

When a zygote is formed, all of its chromosomes are obtained from the parents' cells.

All chromosomes in human beings divide before fertilisation occurs (chromosomes always occur in sets of two so that their number is halved). When fertilisation takes place, one chromosome each is contributed from the male and female parents and the resulting zygote gets a complete set of chromosomes.

The ovum mother cell divides into two ova, each containing one "X" chromosome.

The sperm mother cell (here the mother cell means the originating cell) also divides into two sperms, each containing one chromosome from the mother cell. Since the sex chromosomes of a male are "XY", the sperm cells get one "X" chromosome and the other a "Y" chromosome.

A zygote is formed when a sperm contributed by the male fertilises an egg contributed by the female. As the egg contains an X chromosome each, and therefore it is the type of sperm, father containing an X or a Y chromosome which determines whether the resulting zygote is an XY and hence a male or XX type, a female.

The chances are 50-50 i.e. equally split for there will always be an equal number of X sperms and Y sperms meeting an ovum. Therefore equal chances of a boy or girl baby.

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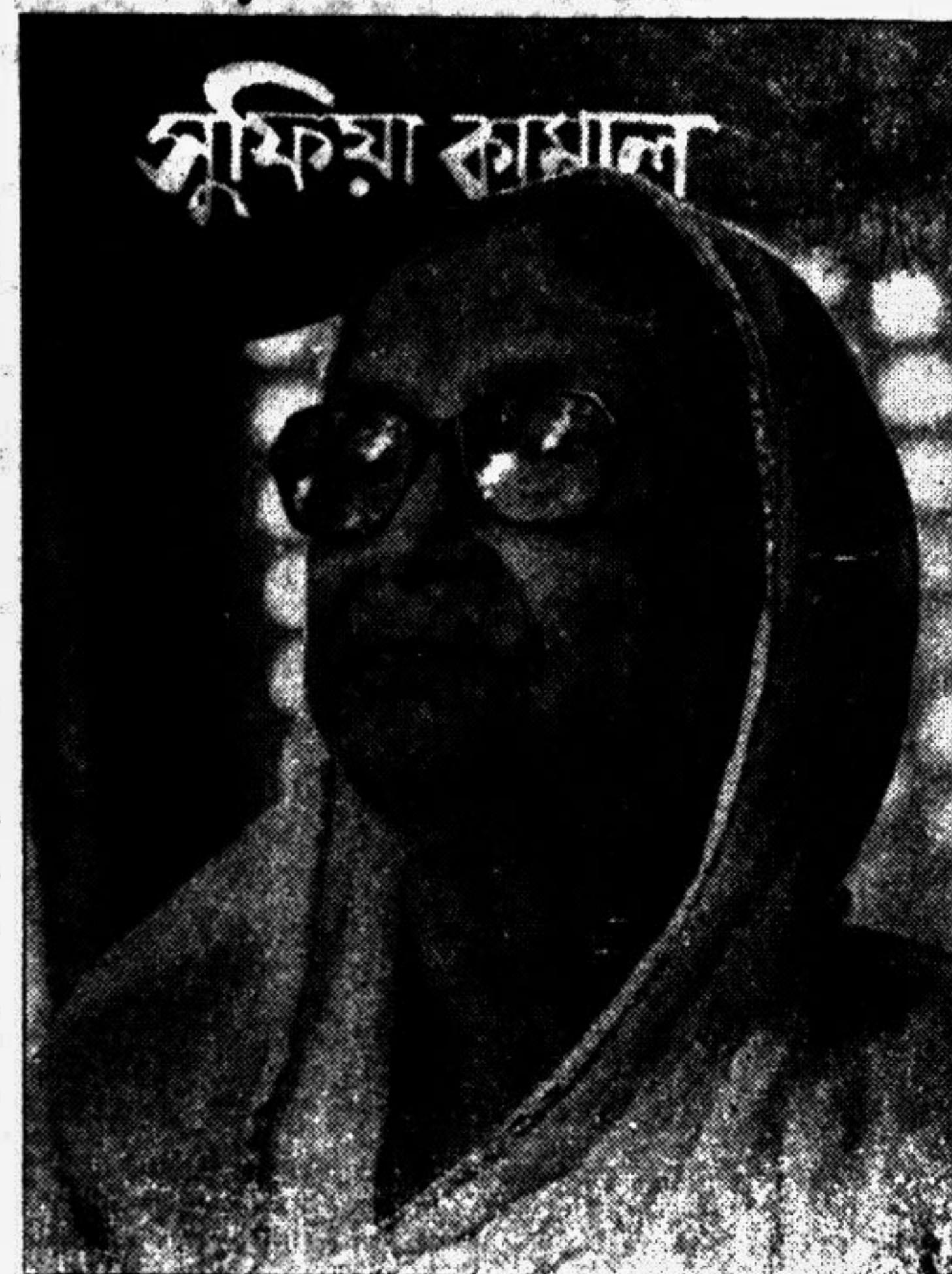
higher than the mortality rate for baby girls and women!

The "sex" of the offspring is therefore clearly seen to be a complete biological process oriented one.

It will take a lot of education to educate the mostly illiterate masses of our country before they start understanding such a concept. We are educated masses who refuse to understand a and still openly blame a woman for the sex of their children, will however require different methods. Our general "close-minded" approach to life, the tendency to blindly accept things running in the way they already are and the refusal to try and understand the actual process is the longest barrier of all. We can only hope (and hope there always is, even if there is nothing else) that in the very near future, we will have a whole generation of people, all understanding and appreciating so natural and simple a process of life.

Begum Sufia Kamal: Breaking Barriers, Clearing the Way for Others

by Raffat Binte Rashid



DRESSED like her brothers, in pyjama, achkan, and a topi, Begum Sufia, a mere child, went to Pyarilal's school to learn Bangla.

A zealous woman born with a burning passion for knowledge, Begum Sufia Kamal was the daughter of Syed Abdul Bari (BA, BL), a pundit who knew nine languages. By profession he was an advocate practicing in Comilla and Balurh. Her mother, Syeda Sabera Khatun, was the youngest daughter of Nawab Syed Mozammel Hossain of Shaistaband.

Begum Sufia was born at her grandparent's house in Shaistaband on the 10th of Ashar, 1318 (June 20, 1911). When she was just seven months old her father left his family in search of a spiritual life. Thus her mother came back to her father's house with her two living children: a three and half year old son and seven month old Sufia.

In Sufia's grandparent's house her maternal uncles maintained an aristocratic, highly cultured status.

Even though all her uncles were well educated and had their own career, they were extremely conservative about their women folk. Her eldest maternal uncle, who was also a pundit in many languages and had a big, well equipped library at his own house, never actually gave much thought about women's education. He was strongly against it, as it was considered very demeaning to their status.

Yet defying all these age old conservative thoughts, Sufia expressed her desire to study Bangla. During those times people from respectable families only spoke in Urdu, women folk only learned Arabic and Persian at home. Young Sufia along with her brothers made her the subscriber of the famous *Sandesh* magazine. Her brother with his own scholarship money sent her the first *Sandesh* by post.

It was a grand occasion for her but at the same time she was extremely tense, and wanted the matter to be a secret. A girl from the Nawab family receiving Bangla books by post was considered an impudent act. However the post master being her teacher Pyarilal, kept it under cover and secretly continued to encourage her.

When she was only seven years old she first met Begum Rokeya. This left a deep mark in her life. Begum Rokeya impressed Sufia and wanted her as her student but due to

lands. Moreover on religious occasions she would be fascinated by hymns and loved to hear ballads sung by the workers. These small opportunities to acquire knowledge made young Sufia even more

According to her family tradition she was married to her maternal cousin Syed Nehal Hossain, a law student, in the year 1923, when she was a girl of 12. She came to live in Barisal at that time was extremely progressive and Nehal was acquainted with the editor of weekly *Tarun*. He first gave him his wife's writing to be printed.

Her first publication, where she wrote as Sufia N. Hossain, was appreciated widely except of course by her uncle, who called them back to his residence. There she was under surveillance while her husband was abused for such an 'insane' act. While she was in Barisal she also started doing some social work as well.

She came to Calcutta with her husband and there she had the opportunity to meet Kazi Nazrul Islam, Saugat's editor Md Nasiruddin, poet Rabindranath Tagore, Sharat Chandra, Subash Basu, Lila Ray, Shamsunnahar Mahmud etc.

Inspired totally by her husband she became the first Bangalee Muslim woman to

The Gender Factor: Blame it on the chromosomes

by Muneera Parbeen

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Needed: Mechanisms to Enable Mothers to Breastfeed

BREASTFEEDING empowers women. It gives women greater control over their bodies. It makes them less dependent on the business interests that promote bottlefeeding, and on doctors and other medical professionals.

Not only does breastfeeding have a contraceptive effect which helps couples to space their children. It also reduces the risk of anaemia for the child and helps protect the mother against ovarian and breast cancer, osteoporosis and multiple sclerosis.

Recognising women's right to breastfeed, more

over, is acknowledging that reproductive activity is equally valuable as productive work, and that a way has to be found to integrate the two types of activities.

Not the least, breastfeeding challenges the view that the breast is primarily a sex object.

Advocates of the practice reiterated these points anew in discussions on women's reproductive rights at the global gathering of women held in Beijing last year.

Endorsed at the NGO Forum, which took place in Beijing's Huairou county from August 31 to September 8, 1995, was the resolution that

"breastfeeding is a women's issue."

Mechanisms to promote breastfeeding and the welfare of the mother and the child include maternity and paternity leave, child care facilities, flexible work hours and a private place where women can express and store breastmilk.

The Alliance, which is based in Penang, Malaysia, asked individual consumers and women's groups to actively oppose misleading marketing practices of baby food companies, to boycott products whose advertisements use women's breasts.

CORRIGENDUM
The by line of the article "Essence of People's Participation in Development Programme" printed in this page yesterday should be read as "by M Sufia Binte Rashid" which was inadvertently printed as "by Someswar Singh".

James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK



by Jim Davis

MY UNCLE ED WAS BIG ON ETIQUETTE



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GARFIELD