the telescope on the goblins of

Bill Clinton, Monica Lewinsky

and Kenneth Starr stalking the

sordid scandal-ridden political

scene in the United States. And

even as the full House of Repre-

sentatives were debating the

move to initiate proceedings of

formal impeachment inquiry

(published by The Daily Star

some days later on 15 October).

one had made a foolhardy

bravado prognostication about

the results of the forthcoming

November 3 elections that went

against the mainstream

thinking of House Speaker

Newt Gingrich. House Judiciary

Committee Chairman Henry

Hyde, all Republican and some

Democratic Congressmen, and

the political pundits of the U.S.

and international media. And

still more foolhardily it bucked

the historical trend of mid-

term elections' results since

resort to some armchair sooth-

saying averring that the Repub-

licans by their present venture

into the uncharted waters of

impeachment of the Presidency

are shooting themselves in the

legs politically, as they have

been adept at lately, and are

likely to suffer setbacks in the

The politicians and the po-

coming elections.

One had written: "One shall

1822 as well as since 1934.

# \_\_\_\_\_FOCUS\_\_\_\_

LAVAYS look at life Athrough the wrong end of the telescope: things appear in much sharper focus and you always see the forest instead of the trees, but like Portia in The Merchant of Venice it is easier to teach one's readers on what were good to be done than be one of the many to follow one's own teaching.

As Minister/Charge d'Affaires a.i. of Bangladesh in Moscow in 1978 one had looked at the Soviet Union through the wrong end of the telescope during the high noon of the Leonid Brezhnev era, discovered the serious cancer in the economy of the socialist system, and reported back that the Politburo was fully aware of their dysfunctional socialist statecraft but with the Kremlin being the Mecca of socialist orthodoxy they could admit no such blasphemy as in the event things would fall apart and the centre couldn't hold.

Post-diluvian Soviet history is all too well-known: after Brezhnev came Kosygin and Andropov, both felled in quick succession by real-life cancer. then along came Gorbachev and his glasnost and perestroika. and the metastasis accelerated and made short shrift of the superpower and its socialist bloc in a few years. All in all it took a baker's dozen years from the time of one's crystal ball gazing.

From one's ivory tower beside Gulshan lake one had once again focused the wrong end of

## Wrong End of the Telescope View of the US Mid-term Elections

by Khurshid Hamid

"One shall resort to some armchair soothsaying averring that the Republicans by their present venture into the uncharted waters of impeachment of the Presidency are shooting themselves in the legs politically, as they have been adept at lately, and are likely to suffer setbacks in the coming elections."

litical pundits had predicted that just as the Democratic landslide in 1974 after Watergate and the last Republican landslide in 1994 after Whitewater, both instances of discontent with the White House translating into routs in the Congress, and just as since 1822 the party of a Democratic President in his sixth year in office and since 1934 the party of an incumbent President has always shed seats in the House of Representatives, history would repeat itself in the present midterm elections with the Republicans bolstering their thin margins in the Senate and the House, and the Democrats being slaughtered.

Towards this end the Republicans had even mounted a US\$ 10 million monster TV ad campaign during the election week to publicize Monica Lewinsky's trysts with President Clintonas if the American public had not had enough of it. The Republicans and the pundits, if all else failed, placed their bets on

the turnout to be as usual abysmally low, at around 30-35%, which always translates better for the Republicans since religious conservatives are the most motivated to vote The Republicans' game plan was to go in for the Presidential jugular with an impeachment bolstered by a popular mandate.

The November 3 elections,

where the Americans elected

the House of Representatives, a third of the Senate, and a clutch of State Governors, have come and gone. The Republicans had proposed; the American public has wisely disposed. They voted contrarian to politicians and pundits. The Democrats, particularly the blacks, were more motivated to vote in unexpected droves to stick by their man than the not-so-revolted runof-the-mill Republicans, although the voter turnout remained only slightly higher at 37%. Democratic victories (surprise, surprise! screamed the pundits) held the Republicans to their 55-45 Senate ma-

jority, but won five extra seats in the House to cut the Republican majority down from 22 to 11 votes.

Democrats also captured the governorship of the most populous state California, rolled back the Republican tide in the South by toppling their governors in Alabama and South Carolina, and won the governorship of lowa for the first time in three decades. All this was warm comfort for President Clinton. And one's modest effort at playing Nostradamus and prediction mongering hit the jackpot.

In what to him is the elections' fulsome wake. Henry Hyde has sent a set of 81 written question to Clinton, which focus on the perjury and obstruction of justice aspects of the case and not on his sexual dalliance with Lewinsky (thus chopping off the hydra-head of sexual McCarthyism one had underlined earlier), and this would avoid the embarrass-

ment of the President testifying

in person. Hyde has said that he wanted to wrap up the Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings by the year's end. Hyde further said he would invite only Kenneth Starr to testify and that there were no plans to call other figures involved in

the scandal.

All these are obviously an ef fort by the Republicans to scale back the impeachment inquiry and put it behind them as early as possible, in the fear of suffering further political singeing. House Speaker Gingrich's puffed-up head has rolled - he has resigned from the Speakership and will retire from the House after twenty long years for so disastrously misreading the political straws in the wind As a parenthetical aside, 400 U.S. historians last week jointly declared that President Clinton's behaviour did not amount to an impeachable of-

The United States' democracy as a practicing statecraft has been saved from being

tainted by its practitioners. The U.S. Constitution and its eternal principles have been preserved from being frivolled by the politicians and pundits. These were the tenor of one's trepidation in the earlier article one had written on the subject. Politicians, far away and nearer at home, all feel that they should shape the way their respective people think, but they do not realize that they are fighting a losing battle in this. The ordinary people are excep-tionally well informed through the rise of television, the Internet and lobbies in the developed world, and the non-governmental organizations and the tea stalls in the developing coun-

Ideological issues have become an endangered species. and multi-issue party manifestos and sloganeering are definitely on the wane in public attention. Elections today are not about bringing in the pork and parochial matters, but are invariably national referendums on more universal issues of demonstrated competence in governance and the handling of the economy, of democratic and decent behaviour, of caring for the less fortunate, and of broader honesty and morality (sexual peccadifloes and minor



infringements in campaign financing and business deals do not count). The United States' mid-term elections have proved this. Politicians in our country should take heed.

The author is the former Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Switzerland.a

#### LETTER FROM EUROPE

### Double Consciousness and Quest for Identity in Chicano Poetry

by Chaklader Mahboob-ul Alam

While the Eurocentric hegemonic culture of Anglo mainstream America, uses a self-serving oppositional binary system to divide America into "us" (the dominant group) and the "other" (the dominated group), the Chicano literature, ( or at least significant part of it) on the other hand, in its quest for self-identity and struggle against this imposed sense of "otherness", provides literary paradigms which advocate a more positive open identity.

NE evening, when I got home rather early. Carmen said, " Darling, I am afraid, you may have to change your plans about playing tennis with your friends this Saturday because we are thinking of going to Toledo." Toledo, the old imperial city of Spain is approximately fifty miles from Madrid. It represents the fusion of three cultures—the Christian, the Islamic and the Jewish. I must confess that I like its ancient walls, narrow winding streets, souvenir shops, synagogues, churches, mosques and of course, its museums. Although Carmen and I have visited the place several times, yet we like going back to it again and again. But to go on a Satur-day would mean sacrificing my long established habit of playing tennis with my friends on that day and that prospect did not please me in the least. So I asked, "Who are these "we"? I thought the children had something else to do." Carmen replied, " Oh , no. I was not thinking of the children. An American poet and novelist called Rudolfo Anaya is here on a lecture tour. Both he and his wife Patricia would very much like to see Toledo. So I have told them that we will be delighted to show them around. Besides, I thought you would like to meet with Rudy. He is one of America's top Chicano writers." Carmen, in her capacity as the Coordinator for North American Studies Center at the University of Alcala invites writers, educators and professors from U.S.A. and Canada quite regularly and following the American tradition invites them home for lunch or dinner. And I must admit that I enjoy meeting with them. Because of my own personal background I am especially interested in ethnic

Since I had not so far met a Chicano poet, I agreed with Carmen that I would indeed be happy to spend the day with Rudolfo Anaya and his

The trip to Toledo . besides being pleasant was very educational for me. Rudolf Anaya was born on 30th October 1937 in Pastura, a village in eastern New Mexico, U.S.A. He earned an MA. in English from the University of New Mexico in 1968 and started his career as a public school teacher in Albuquerque. In 1970 he was appointed as the director of counselling at the University of Albuquerque. He joined the English department of the University of New Mexico in 1974. In 1966 he married Patricia Lawless. His first novel Bless Me, Ultima, (1972) has established him as one of the major contemporary Mexican-American (Chicano) writers. Then came in quick succession Heart of Aztlán (1976); Tortuga (1979); The Silence of the Llano: Short stories (1982); Isis in the Heart: A love poem, etc. In 1971 Bless Me, Ultima won the Premio Quinto Sol, the most coveted Chicano literary award. Later Anaya went on to win the New Mexico governor's Award for excellence and the President's Salute to American Poets and Writers. Rudolfo talked of multiculturalism, bilingualism, Jungian ideas on intuition and feeling and Chicano quest for identity. He also talked about his childhood in the village, his back injury as a youth, his move to the city etc. in such simple, unpretentious manner that I was impressed. By the time we got back to Madrid from Toledo. I had become an ardent member of Rudolfo's fan club. The day with Anava also increased my interest in contemporary Chicano poetry and its role in the Chicano quest for

In this context, it is now ap-

propriate to ask, who or what is a Chicano or a Chicana? In the thirties, the European-Americans started using this term in a derogatory manner while referring to the American citizens of Mexican origin. No one exactly knows the exact origin of the term. According to one version, it is merely an abbreviation of "Mexicano". According to others, it is a meld of the "Chi" of Chihuahua (a Mexican border province) and the "cano" of Mexicano. Having long suffered racial discrimination from mainstream America, the militant activists of this ethnic group have now adopted it "as a positive term of self-identification" in their struggle for social justice.

In the words of the Chicano poet Pat Mora a Chicano or Bilingual, Bicultural,

Able to slip from "How's life?" To "Me'stan volviendo loca," Able to sit in a paneled office Drafting memos in smooth

Able to order in fluent Spanish At a Mexican restaurant, American but hyphenated Viewed by Anglos as perhaps perhaps inferior, definitely

viewed by Mexicans as alien, ( their eyes say, you may speak Spanish but you're not like

Actually for a better under-

standing of the Chicano situa-

tion we have to go back to the year 1521 when the Spaniard Hernán Cortés destroyed the Aztec Empire in Mexico by capturing Tenochtitlan (Mexico City). Since the European invaders were accompanied by few women, they married or started living with Indian women. This phenomenon was responsible for the birth of a new mixed (in Spanish Mestizo) race and a new nation called Mexico. After consolidating their hold over Mexico. the Spanish invaders moved north in the first half of the eighteenth century conquering Texas, New Mexico or Aztlan the original home of the Aztecs), Arizona and California. The entire area was named as New Spain and ruled by viceroys on behalf of Spanish monarchs. After more than a decade of armed struggle, Mexico became independent from Spain in 1821. Mexico's northern provinces were sparsely populated. The newly independent Mexican government had neither the means nor the energy to consolidate its hold over this vast territory. In hindsight, it is now clear that the Mexican government was also not conscious of the Anglo-American peril from the north. By the time the Mexicans became aware of the danger, it was too late. In 1836 the Anglo-American settlers in Texas were successful in gaining independence from Mexico and in 1846 Texas became a part of the United States. Further annexations took place soon. In an undeclared war against Mexico. President James K. Polk (1844-1848) conquered the entire Spanish-speaking area north of Rio Grande ( which subsequently came to be known as the American Southwest), thus converting the Spanish-speaking people ( the Chicanos) of this area into second-class citi-

zens in their own land The colonizers of only a hundred years ago, themselves became a colonized people. English was imposed as the only official language at schools and offices. Although a treaty (the Treaty of Guadulupe Hidalgo. 1848) was signed to guarantee the existing property rights. slowly but inexorably most of the land was confiscated by hook or by crook and came un-

der the control of the Anglo-

American settlers. Thus the Anglos became the owners of the land, dominated the economy and political life. The Mexican-Americans became unskilled labourers, who worked on the land which was no longer theirs and started suffering racial discrimination from the dominant group The Mexican-American ( the Chicano) also felt the overwhelming presence of a foreign culture (English). He was torn between two cultures and suffered from a crisis of identity. What was he? Was he a Hispanic-Mexi can, or a Mexican-American or simply an American? Should he learn only Spanish or English or both?

After 1910, the racial and cultural tensions were further aggravated by successive waves of fresh immigration from Mexico who had their roots in what is now Mexico and not in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona or California which had become part of the United States over fifty years ago. " The new immigrants brought new blood into the Mexican-American community and also reinforced the Mexican heritage." From being a small minority, the Mexican-Americans ( the old and the new) became a sizeable community (approximately 6% of the total US. population) of some significance in the American Southwest because of their participation as cheap labour in the expansion of American industry and agriculture. The Spanish- speaking population of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California were already American citizens by law. The children of the new-comers, who were born in the United States were legally American citizens. But the problem was that the Anglo community and the American establishment kept on considering them as foreigners, as "Mexicans". In spite of their contribution to the economic boom of the American Southwest, in spite of their heroic participation ( more than five hundred thousand men and women) and human sacrifice in the Second World War, any excuse was good enough to accuse them of anti-Americanism. This rejection created confusion, frustration and anger among the Chicanos. The Chicano poet Rodolfo Gonzales gave voice to this feeling in his poem "I am Joaquin". As any Chicano man or woman

**Lost in** a world of confusion, Caught up in a whirl of a Gringo society. Confused by the rules. Scorned by attitudes, Suppressed by manipulations, And destroyed by modern

Joaquin is:

Since, except the native-Americans (the American Indians), all Americans came from somewhere else, the doubleness or double-consciousness ( the term first used by the great African-American thinker W.E.B.Du Bois) lies at the heart of American experience. Yet, as Pat Mora in her poem Legal Alien puts it, there is something very special about the Chicanos:

an American to Mexicans a Mexican to Americans a handy token sliding back and forth between the fringes of both worlds by smiling by masking the discomfort of being pre-judged Bi laterally.

This anguish, this sense of rejection is even better expressed by Gloria Anzaldua:

Neither hispana, India, negra, espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed

caught in the cross-fire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back

not knowing which side to turn to, run from.

The history of the Mexican-Americans is the history of this strife. Because of their ethnic background, their multi-culturalism, their bi-lingualism and the discriminatory belief system of the dominant group. "the Chicanos see their own being as inadequately represented by a single facet of reality". They are treated as the eternal "others". " He (the Chicano) feels alienated from both the cultural modes—the Mexican and the American. Hence the quest for his own cultural niche, his own space, his own identity".(Rebolledo and Rivero) At times there is a sense of despair in this long quest Lorna Dee Cervantes writes:

I feel I am a captive aboard the refugee ship The ship will never dock El barco nunca atraca.

militant stand:

But in their struggle against this imposed "otherness" and in their search for self-consciousness, self-realization. self-respect and self identity the Chicana poet Gloria Anzaldua takes up a more defiant and

I am possessed by a vision that we Chicanas and Chicanos have taken back or uncovered our true faces, our dignity

and self-respect. It is a Validation vision Seeing the Chicana in light of her history,

I seek an exoneration, a seeing through the fictions of white supremacy, a seeing

of ourselves in our true guises and not as the false racial personality that has been given to us and we have

given to ourselves. And Lorna Dee Cervantes reaffirms her rights to this land as an American: I am a poet

who yearns to dance on rooftops. to whisper delicate lines about joy

and the blessings of human understanding. I try. I go to my land, my tower of words and

bolt the door, but the typewriter doesn't fade out the sounds of blasting and muffled outrage. My own days bring me slaps

on the face. Every day I am deluged with reminders That this is not

and this is my land.

my land

While the Eurocentric hegemonic culture of Anglo mainstream America, uses a self-serving oppositional binary system to divide America into "us" (the dominant group) and the "other" (the dominated group), the Chicano literature, or at least significant part of it) on the other hand, in its quest for self-identity and struggle against this imposed sense of "otherness", provides literary paradigms which advocate a more positive open identity According to the poet Gloria Anzaldua, "it is no longer a duel between the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a search for a new consciousness". While not forgetting his Mexican heritage, the Chicano is capable o changing the culture and "breeding a new language, a new lifestyle, new values, new images and rhythms, new dreams and conflicts into that heritage". He is in a position to transform his background of

multiple cultures and multiple

languages ......into something

powerfully positive".

## Taiwan Tiptoes towards Independence

Sophia Yow writes from Hong Kong

The fraught relationship between Taiwan and its massive neighbour, China, seems to be heading towards a less confrontational footing. Both continue to insist they want to reunite, but as Gemini News Service reports, their varying definitions of how that might be done are leading to a very different conclusion.

HOUGH the most recent China-Taiwan talks are ■ being played as a breakthrough in the international media, they only mark the end of open hostilities across the Taiwan Strait. As elections approach for

the National Assembly, Taiwan's parliament, as well as for other political bodies, half a century of protestations that reunification is the only policy available has still left the territory inching ever closer towards the goal of independence.

Taiwan's President, Lee Teng-hui, has stressed many times the importance of democracy in the People's Republic of China on the mainland as a condition of unification.

But Taiwanese public opinion differs sharply. A recent survey by the Taiwan Mainland Affairs Council showed that only 17 percent wished to unite with China, while 73 percent were opposed to the "one country, two systems" formula proposed by Beijing

The fact is that, perhaps unsurprisingly, neither of the two basic groups in Taiwanese society trust the Beijing govern-

The "Outsiders" - the soldiers and their families, members of the Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek, who were defeated by China's communists and fled to Taiwan in 1949 have no reason to trust the communist regime.

Then there are the "local" Taiwanese, those who trace their family history back to at least 1895 when the island was ceded to Japan by the Qing government. They felt betrayed then, and later suffered under the harsh rule of the Kuomintang. Locals, therefore, have a strong sense of Taiwanese identity and traditionally find "mainlanders" — both KMT and communist — untrustworthy.

With Taiwan's increasing democratisation, all political factions on the island have had to take these positions into account. The two major parties, the Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party, thus find themselves advocating similar platforms with respect to the island's international position.

Taiwan's President, Lee Teng-hui, began as early as 1988 to appoint more Taiwanborn KMT members to government positions in an attempt to localise the party's appeal.

He has to walk tightrope between affirming the essential unity of "one sovereign China" the official KMT position ever since 1949 - and insisting that Taiwan has a different government from the mainland, that Taiwan and China are "two poTaiwan Fujian Hunan Taipei Jiangxi Hsinchu 5Changhua Taiwan Tainan • Guangdong Kaohsiung 200km / 124mls 1550 1975 1987 Chinese territory Chiang Kai-shek Cabinet approves lifting of martial law 1550 - 1949 Replaced by son and recognition of Dutch, Manchu Chiang Ching-kuo new parties and Japanese 1996 1978 occupations Taiwan holds "first Limited election 1949 election to choose allowed Chiang Kai-shek Chinese leader sets up in 5,000 years". anti-communist Elections held. Mainland responds "true China" New party formed with military exercises Jordi Bou

litical entities. On many occasions he has called for China to face the real ity, to respect the Taiwan government as a political entity with the same importance as the Beijing government. Taiwan belongs to a cultural and historical China, he says, not to

Unification, he maintains, can only happen under a free and democratic system. Communist rule has "proved to be a failure"; the sovereignty of the Republic of China (the formal name for Taiwan) is independent of the PRC."

Lee also claims that the problem "is not a domestic issue but an international one". He reasons that if it were a domestic issue the Beijing government would have a reason to attack. As an international issue, he argues. Beijing is constrained by the possibility of international condemnation. Still. though, independence is a step too far as long as Beijing treats force as a viable option.

While the positive spin surrounding the most recent talks across the Taiwan Strait has

given new life to the idea of a meeting between Lee and China's President Jiang Zemin next year. Lee's determination, to visit China as the President of Taiwan precludes such a pos-

The KMT's biggest opposition, the Democratic Progressive Party, holds a slightly different view. Its support comes mainly from local Taiwanese who have been advocating Taiwan independence since the

During the years of martial law, they avoided mentioning words such as "sovereignty" and "independence" but simply said Taiwanese should be able to decide their own future. After the lifting of martial law in the late 80s, they argued that Taiwan should declare independence and anything leading to the change of the island's status should be decided by all Tai-

wan's people. However, in 1995 the then chairman of DPP, Shih Mingteh, said that if the DPP became the ruling party, it would not and need not declare independence. "Need not" because Tai-

wan was already a sovereign country. "Would not" because it would arouse attention and reaction from the international community.

In 1996, party chairman Hsu Hsin-liang called for a westbound policy. He suggested that Taiwan should open more direct links with China, that there should be more economic. cultural and sociological exchanges. However, these should be carried out in the same way that two countries interact. In other words. Hsu was saying that Taiwan should open a diplomatic relationship with

Taiwan and China should negotiate. Hsu agreed, but he insisted that sovereignty should not be the target of negotiations. That way, a failure of agreement on that would not bring negotiations on other topics down with it.

This contrasts with the KMT's China policy which cautions Taiwanese businessmen not to invest heavily in China. The KMT also uses direct transport and other issues in exchange for recognition from

Last summer the DPP's secretary general Chiu I-yen and four other party members visited Xiamen to attend a seminar on relationships across the Strait. It was the first time a high-ranking DPP member had visited China. Though Chiu did not visit Shanghai and Beijing as he had wished, nor did he meet any high-ranking mainland officials, the visit was seen as an achievement for the DPP's

westbound policy. The closeness of the parties' positions means that sometimes the KMT even borrows ideas from the DPP. Lee's "unite under a democratic and free system" strategy is very similar to the "one country, one system" negotiation strategy suggested

by Hsu Hsin-liang. But the semantic differences have one real division built in. To the DPP, "China" means the PRC. To the KMT it is a cultural

and historical China. For the DPP, therefore, the "Republic of China" is Taiwan, and Taiwan does not belong to China, while the KMT believes that they are the Republic of China on Taiwan and that Taiwan belongs to a cultural and historical continuum.

The likelihood for both then, is a continuation of the status quo. No-one is in a hurry to declare independence. But unification is still no more than a slogan. Taiwan's uneasy balancing act looks set to stay for some time to come.

The writer is a freelance Hong Kong journalist who has recently returned from Taiwan.

#### Domestic Violence Needs Public Attention

Naunidhi Kaur writes from New Delhi

IVE-YEAR-OLD Sunanda, iving in the southern In-L dian state of Kerala, saw her mother being doused in kerosene by her drunken father. She heard her screams and two years later still wakes up sobbing inconsolably for her

University graduate Smita, 21, married to an Indian in New York is beaten by her husband daily. "If I do anything wrong he beats me. My mother in law curses me all day long. I cannot talk with my parents or my neighbours. Why did this happen to me?" she asks.

Activists are publicising the prevalence of gender-based violence in alarming proportions in India, saying that for too long it has been swept under the carpet even though incidents of wife bashing and dowry-related killings have been getting more frequent.

The regional office of United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in New Delhi has launched a global campaign for the "elimination of genderbased violence in the South Asia region" along with the Indian government's National Commission for Women.

Through street plays, posters and marches, women's rights activists have taken the cam-

paign which will conclude on Dec. 10 to the street. Starting with 100 police stations here in the capital, all the country's police will be sensitised about gender violence through workshops and posters. Most people do not realise

that wealth and social status are no immunity against private violence, activists say. "The victims have been maidservants who get bashed by their drunk husband to doctors who are strangulated to death,' explains media researcher Akhila Sivadas of the Centre For Advocacy and Research in

India's Crime Records Bureau places torture and molestation among the two most common heinous crimes inflicted on women. The last government survey in 1996 revealed that one in every four women faces one or other of these forms of violence.

The immediate provocation for the attack by their husbands can be anything from trivial reasons like the food not being tasty enough to arguments over money, alcohol, desire to work outside home - anything that threatens iron-clad patriarchal

Expatriate Indian women are equally powerless. Sakhi, a shelter for South Asian women in New York, has received 119 calls from battered women in the last six months with one reported case of a woman burnt for dowry in 1995. They feel immigrant women

are doubly vulnerable because they live far from their families, and are unfamiliar with the language and laws in their adopted country. "Many times the batterer threatens them with deportation if they tell anyone about the abuse," explains Sakhi volunteer Prema

A report on the status of women and girls in the Indian capital painted a chilling picture of abuse and neglect. According to women's accounts. "Cheap liquor and videos have ruined our lives. Blue-films are shown very cheaply by slum lords after which our drunken men harass us. They loose sight of who is wife and who is daughter. If we register a case with the police, they harass us. We are not safe anywhere."

'Saheli' or friend, a women's group who was the first to open a shelter for battered women in Delhi in the 1980s, says there is nothing private about domestic violence in the slums. "Half the neighbourhood is witness to the beatings," it says.

In the upper and middle classes, where privacy of both emotions and acts is maintained, family members quite conveniently feign ignorance of gender-based violence.

In most cases, wife torture is accompanied with economic and mental abuse. "The bashed woman is constantly put down as a stupid person by the batterer along with the fact that she is allowed no control even over the money she earns," explains Mullika Dutt who has worked with battered women.

Most times no one comes to their rescue even though their faces are black and blue or with cigarette butt marks. "Most people ... including neighbours, friends and even doctors do not come to the woman's rescue immediately and maintain their distance." says Amar Jesani, coordinator of the Bombay-based NGO, Cehat. The usual reaction is that it

is a "personal" problem. Consequently, when it becomes a daily problem, it is ignored. Even victims of abuse get

used to the daily altercation and start feeling it is normal. "When women who get bashed up daily get used to violence on a day-to-day level they fail to extricate themselves from it.

- Inter Press Service