

| HUMAN RIGHTS |

A SHAMEFUL TRADITION

ANIKA HOSSAIN

The tradition of giving and receiving dowry is unfortunately still alive and kicking in our country. Despite the increase in literacy rate, awareness, and provision of laws against dowry over time, one would think the practice has been significantly curbed. Unfortunately, the opposite has happened. The practice has now spread to the poorest classes of society and is considered nothing less than a curse.

2015 hasn't even begun properly, and already dowry related deaths are being splashed across the newspapers. Reshma Khatun from Benapole, Mollika Das from Jessore, Jesmin Khatun from Sirajganj, Sharmin Akhtar from Monirampur, Simi Akhter from Joypurhat and Chand Banu from Sharsha were all young women in their early twenties, who were tortured and murdered brutally by their husbands and in-laws— all because their families failed to meet the demands of dowry, and these are just a few of the reported cases. There are countless women whose deaths and suffering go unreported due to fear of repercussion and the lack of awareness about, and faith in our justice system.

"The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 deals with demanding and giving dowry and deems both punishable (at least 5 years in prison), even if there is no violence," says Shahnaz Huda, Professor of Law and former Chair of the Law Department of Dhaka University. "Also, section 11 of the Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Damon Ain (2000), deals with death grievous hurt and simple hurt related to dowry," she informs. However, in many cases, this law is considered problematic. "It talks about a mandatory death penalty for dowry related death. In some cases the judge is hesitant to give the perpetrator the death penalty, if there is some small doubt or extenuating circumstances," she explains. "As there is no other alternative, such as life imprisonment, they have no option but to set the perpetrator free. The law commission has suggested giving the judge the option of life imprisonment as

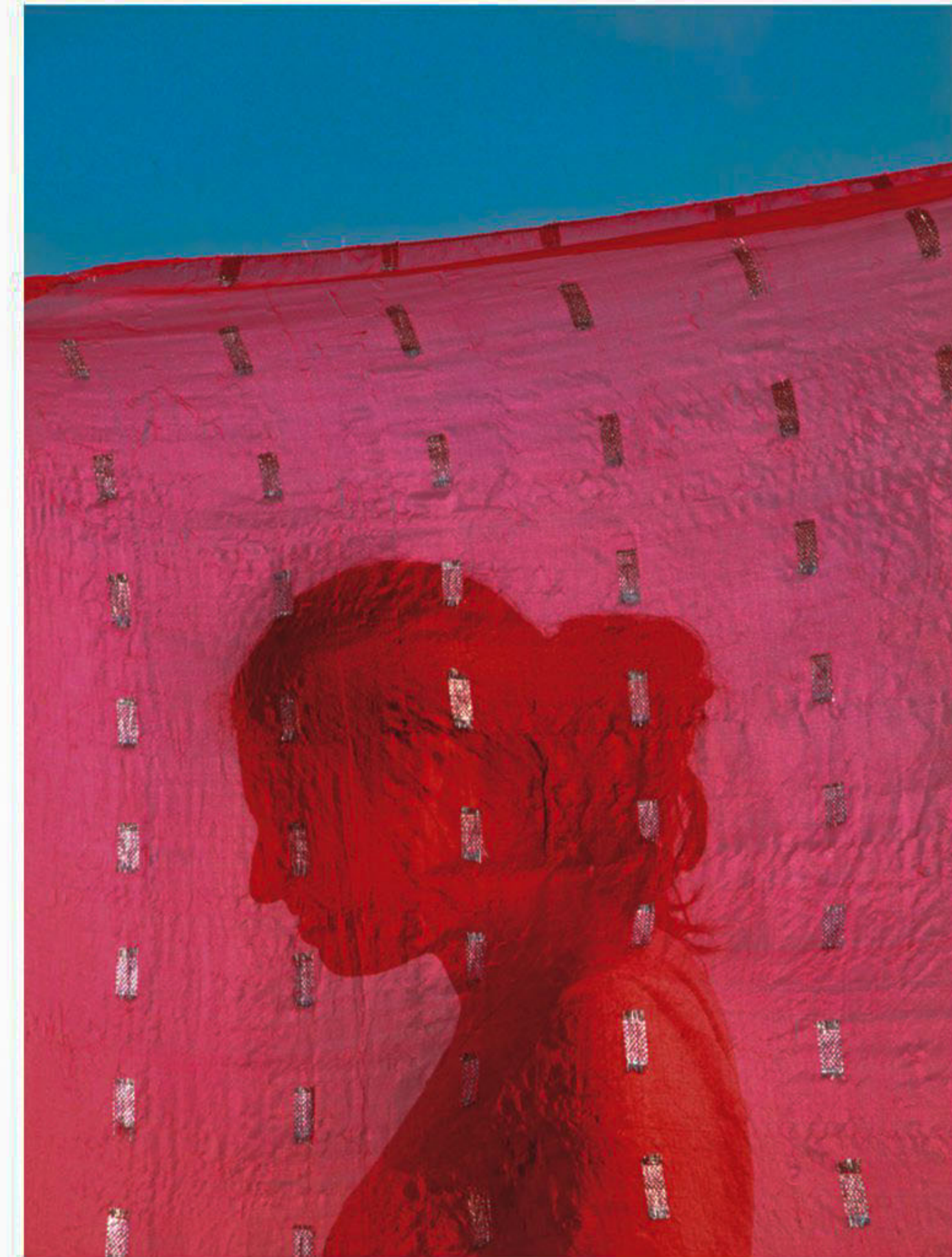


PHOTO: KAZI TAH SIN AGAZ APURBO

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ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

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they believe this will increase the rate of convictions." Another issue that arises is that the Nari O' Shishu Act, falls under a special tribunal dealing with violence against women and children, therefore the punishments issued are stricter than those under other laws. "So, many people seeking justice for domestic-violence related deaths want to file their cases under this act and therefore list dowry as

a cause of violence. If the allegations are found to be false, these cases tend to fall through the cracks," says Huda. Amendments to these important laws, is therefore crucial to ensuring justice in these cases. Proper enforcement of dowry related laws, support and counsel for the victims' families, and most importantly, education and awareness are all important factors that will help reduce the rate of these crimes in the future.



"Women hold up half the sky."
— Mao Zedong

Indigenous women work twice as hard as men. In fact, in Bangladesh, women from all walks of life have learnt to balance between taking care of a family and earning a living.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

SNAPSHOT

YOUR SAY

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The Story of the Star

It is really heartbreaking to even think that from the next Friday I will not get the Star Magazine in its renowned shape. It has always been a good friend on the weekend. It seems to me that this sudden makeover of the magazine is going to change my lifestyle as well. Thanks to Aasha Mehreen Amin for telling us the rich past of the Star. I would like to congratulate its new editor and the team. I believe the venture will surely give us more resourceful weekends from its first issue.

Shaoli Tasneem
Banani, Dhaka

It Ends Here

Reading the last issue of the Star was an amazing experience. I am taken aback to read that the Star will not be published as a magazine anymore. The article titled "It Ends Here" has nicely depicted the experiences of the brains behind the magazine. It was also nice to see the faces together in the publication.

Tarana Khan
Gulshan, Dhaka

An Incredible Experience with the Star

You must have your inbox filled with messages from readers all over the world. So I will keep this short. I just went through the Star's final edition. It has been an incredible experience, though one of mixed feelings.

Aasha Mehreen Amin's reminiscence of the early days at the Daily Star and the magazine was a nice touch. Just so you know, a lot of familiar names if not faces, will be missed every Friday.

Please convey the gratitude of an avid reader to all the writers, cartoonists, photographers and illustrators of the Star. Let them know how much they are appreciated.

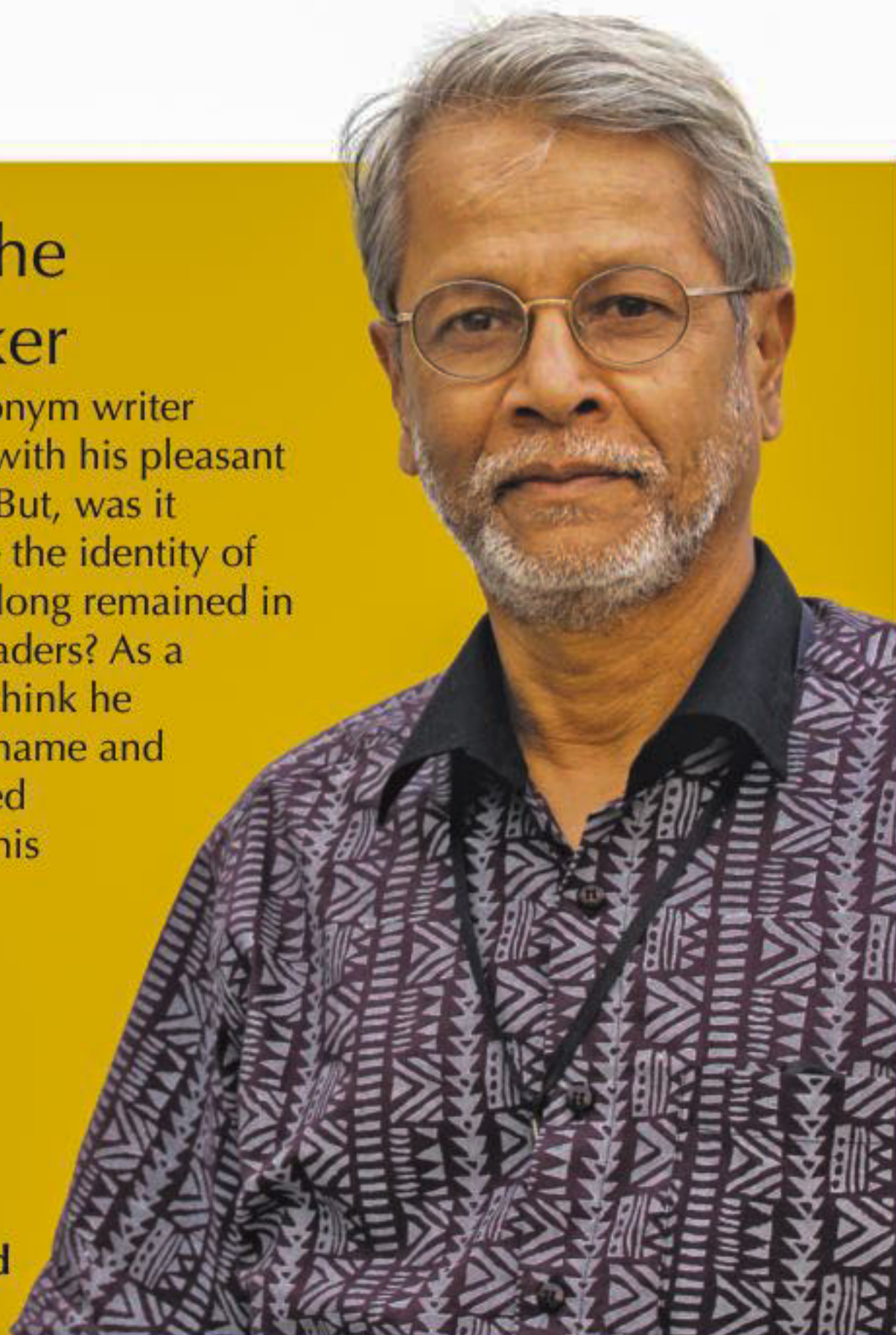
Looking forward to Aasha Mehreen Amin's next mission, I know it will be an even better one.

M A Saqif
Titumir Hall, BUET

Unveiling the Great Thinker

Chintito- the pseudonym writer always charmed us with his pleasant and witty columns. But, was it necessary to divulge the identity of Chintito who for so long remained in disguise from the readers? As a mysterious writer, I think he would find a better name and would have remained largely admired for his thoughts.

M Haque
Via Email



Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views held by the Star.

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