



TAHRUNESSA AHMED ABDULLAH

WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT

TAHRUNESSA AHMED ABDULLAH is a writer, activist and community leader who is known for her research on and contribution to the lives of women in rural Bangladesh. She was born on April 21, 1937 in Jessore district. Her father, Rafiuddin Ahmed, a lawyer at the High Court and son of a prominent Bengali Muslim family, and her mother, Anwari Ahmed, gave preference to their daughter's education. Tahrunessa received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Eden Girls' College, University of Dhaka, in 1958. In 1960, she received her Master of Arts degree from the College of Social Welfare and Research Centre.

Abdullah's first position after graduation was as Executive Officer of the East Pakistan Council for Child Welfare in Dhaka. During that year (1960-61), she organised the Crippled Children's Centre. It was then that she wrote the first of numerous articles on social problems, *School Social Work and Its Scope in East Pakistan*. From mid-1961 to 1963, she was District Health Education Officer for the Bureau of Health Education. With a US International Cooperation Administration Grant, she attended the American University in Beirut and received a Diploma, with Distinction, in Public Health in 1962. In 1963, Abdullah joined the Pakistan Academy for Rural Development in Comilla as Instructor and headed the Academy's Women's Education and Home Development Programme. Until the institution of the Women's Programme, all rural development schemes were geared towards men.

During her nine years at Comilla, she was responsible for the organisation of village level training programmes for women on adult literacy; health education, sanitation and nutrition; agricultural extension; and creation of cooperatives to

promote cottage crafts and other income generating activities. For two years she was also in charge of the publication section and for one year served as vice chairman of the Comilla Khadi Association.

A major task of the Comilla Women's Programme, as Tahrunessa wrote in her pioneering report which was published in Bengali in 1966, and later in English under the title *Village Women As I Saw Them*, was to gather information about "the customs and restrictions which direct and control the daily lives of women, and in some cases, stand in the way of the development of their talents."

Tahrunessa went to the United States to study at Michigan State University, where she received a Master of Science degree in Agriculture Extension Education in 1968.

In 1972 she became the Director (Training) of the National Board of the Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation and Welfare Foundation. She established the Women's Career Training Institute, the first institution in Bangladesh wholly devoted to career training for women. Intended for women war victims, it became the training model for the National Board.

Since 1974, she has served as Joint Director of the Women's Programme, Bangladesh's Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).

She has written more than 15 papers and articles, and co-authored one book, *Village Women of Bangladesh—Prospect for Change*, with Sondra Zeidenstein.

Tahrunessa Abdullah was the first Bangladeshi to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1978 in the Community Leadership category for "leading rural Bangladeshi Muslim women from the constraints of purdah toward more equal citizenship and fuller family responsibility".



VALERIE ANN TAYLOR

SOCIAL WORK

VALERIE ANN TAYLOR is a British born physiotherapist and philanthropist living in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She was born on February 8, 1944, in Bromley, Kent, UK. She is the founder of the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP). Though British by citizenship, she has spent most of her working life in Bangladesh, treating and rehabilitating poor Bangladeshis suffering from neurological disorders. She is also a fellow of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (FCSP).

Valerie first came to Bangladesh with the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in 1969 to work as a physiotherapist in the Christian Hospital, Chandraghona in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. She began to take an interest in caring for the paralysed in Bangladesh when she saw the negligence with which patients suffering from spinal injuries were treated. In 1971, during the Liberation War, Valerie was evacuated. Though she was only obligated to serve for 15 months, Bangladesh left an impression on her. She came back to the country two months before independence, having decided to devote herself to serving the paralysed in Bangladesh.

She was aware of the need for rehabilitation services for disabled people. This problem had become even more acute in the aftermath of the War of Independence. In 1973, Valerie returned to England to attempt to raise funds to establish a rehabilitation centre for the paralysed. She stayed in England for two years before returning in 1975. It took another four years before CRP was able to admit its first patients in 1979. During this time, Valerie worked in the Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital in Dhaka and it was in this hospital that CRP had its first premises consisting of two cement store rooms which were used to treat the first spinally injured patients. CRP founded a permanent home and moved

to Savar in mid 1990. Since then, CRP has grown to include a 100-bed hospital, in addition to providing other rehabilitation treatments. The centre provides recreational services including sports arenas and a swimming pool. The centre also provides vocational training for poorer patients so that they can acquire income-generating skills. Valerie Ann Taylor has devoted her entire life to serve some of the most neglected people in our society. She is also a legal guardian to two girls with disabilities, Joyti and Poppy.

In 1998 Valerie was awarded Bangladeshi citizenship by the then Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina. Despite officially taking a backseat at CRP some years ago, she remains the driving force behind the running and development of CRP.

Valerie Ann Taylor received the OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 1995 from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth; the Arthur Eyre Brook Gold Medal in 1996 and the Bangladesh Independence Award in 2004. She has also received the National Social Service Award (2000), Anannya Top Ten Awards (2000), Millennium Award (2000), Dr. MR Khan and Anwara Trust Gold Medal (2001), Hakkani Mission Bangladesh Award (2001), Rokeya Shining Personality Award (2005), Mahatma Gandhi Peace Award (2009), Lifetime Achievement Award (2009) by Hope Foundation for Women & Children of Bangladesh (USA), Nova Southeastern University Award (2009) and innumerable other awards.