

Diva

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women



On Children

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TITLE: Children

COVER: *Yermiah Khan Durrani*

The Good,

- Diva has been accepted by the Board of Directors of the Canadian Periodicals Publishers Association (CPPA) for Canada-wide distribution;
- is also accepted by Inland for distribution in the United States;
- has been assigned an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN 0842-4330) by the National Library of Canada, Ottawa;

The Bad,

- typos got out of hand in the 4th Issue of Diva,
- our two contributors from Copenhagen, Denmark; F. Schwarz & H. Juhler, felt angered by the intro. given to the article called "Are Foreigners Criminal?", they also took it to be an intro given to it by the two authors (E.T. Peterson & R. Mehdi) who gave a critique of their view on immigrants and criminality in Scandinavian countries.

PLEAS NOTE:

It is (almost always) Diva who provides introductions to the material published. The Editorial Committee emphasizes Diva's anti-racist policy and completely owns what it said regarding the said article! (In other words, we do not mind calling a spade, a spade).

If the authors feel the comments to be unjustified, we open pages of FORUM for them to defend their position in any of the coming issues of Diva.

And

Bhooma Bhayana, a valued member of the Diva Editorial Committee, and a regular contributor (Female Physician's Perspective) is leaving Toronto for London, Ontario. Bhooma: good luck and we look forward to your writings and representation from London.

The Ugly

Sylvia Hale, one of our most valued contributors from Fredericton, New Brunswick is hurt by Diva where her research article titled "Using the Oppressor's Language" was mistakenly published under the name of Hull, instead of Hale. Diva Editorial Committee apologizes to Sylvia Hale and the readers for this gross discrepancy while taking full responsibility for it.

CHILDREN AT WORK

by

Meera Dewan

Meera Dewan, a documentary film-maker, found eleven-year-old Ashok when she went to Firozabad to make a film on child labour. Ashok had no work for a while as the factory was closed, and so had the time to talk about himself and his work with his own father, and to Meera. Ashok is a brave boy. One of the 'survivors'.

Inside the glass factories of Firozabad it is hot, dark and dangerous. Ghost-like children drift between roaring furnaces and glass-blowers, carrying blobs of molten glass on rods much taller than they are. Ashok is one of them.

Air is always stifling and the floor is hot to the feet. Hour after hour the work goes on - boring, unhealthy, dangerous. Children are always getting burnt, sometimes seriously. Cut feet and hands are so common that no one takes the wounds seriously - but they hurt and often get infected. Into this hell come children whose parents desperately need their wages to help support their families. Factory owners prefer to employ children because they can pay them so little, and children cannot complain. Some children come from villages outside

Firozabad, and live in factories with no one to look after or care for them, except, perhaps an older 'brother' who takes pity on the little ones, protects them, and 'helps to make them strong'. When children are seventeen or eighteen most of them are thrown out of the factories - they are 'too old' to work. Other, smaller ones, are employed instead. From these factories come sparkling wine-glasses, jugs, tumblers, ash-trays and electric bulbs - light Made in Hell.

Dad: (Touching Ashok's hand) You got burnt here, how did you get burnt?

Ashok: Is it my fault? Another boy in the factory was carrying the hot glass ball and the ball burnt me.

Dad: And I told you not to work. I told you to study and you quietly, secretly went to work.

Ashok: The other boys told me, "Come with us and learn to work," and I went with them. It was my own wish.

Dad: Couldn't you first have studied with your own wish, too?

Ashok: No.

Dad: Why not?

Ashok: (Looks at Dad quietly) How long will you stay hungry (quickly corrects 'stay hungry' to 'earn alone') We have to arrange sister's marriage, so I thought, 'How long will Papaji work alone?'

Dad: But, how did you learn the work?

Ashok: I was going to school and my friend Bhura said to me, "Leave your bag in school and come with me". He took me to the factory and there the bosses made me stand near the furnace. You have to fan the man who works near the furnace. I kept watching what the others were doing, and that's how I learnt the work. For eight hours work we get Rs. 2. That's how I started. Then one day when I reached work my friend said, "Stand closer to the furnace and pass these iron rods to the glass blower". So I started watching how the others were doing it and started following them. That's how I learnt so I could now earn Rs. 11 for eight hours work, instead of Rs. 2.

Dad: (looks sad). And at this young age you work so hard. What do you think?

Ashok: There is only you earning in our family. And so many of us have to eat and be looked after. That's why I thought, 'How will we manage in Rs. 11? I must learn more difficult work, which bring more money...like Rs.30. That's how I feel.

(Actually Ashok's Dad is unemployed - but Ashok is too polite to hurt his father by saying so in front of a TV camera and outsiders like us, so he pretends his Dad works. Ashok is the only person who works in his whole family)

Dad: It's a good thing that you are beginning to understand your circumstances. That's why I wake up at four in the morning and make tea for you and send you to work... You have now begun to understand your responsibilities, that staying with our family we all owe each other something. I appreciate your taking responsibilities and that's why I want to help you, by making tea, by sending you to work and bringing your lunch to the factory. When I bring your lunch how do you eat it?

Ashok: Running!

Dad: How can you eat running?

Ashok: I pass on one of the hot iron rods with the melted glass on it to the blower, come back for a bite, and then go and give the next one.

Dad: Don't you get even two minutes lunch break?

Ashok: Oh no!

Dad: Now you're working hard, helping to pay your older brother's school fees. When you go to work in the factory, with what feelings do you leave home - sometimes you have to go from factory to factory looking for work. You know there are some boys who pretend to go to work but they run off to play, how about you?

Ashok: Well, you know I leave the house at four in the morning, after having some breakfast. Then it takes an hour to reach the factory site. I go from one to another, to find out where they need a person to carry the hot iron rods. Sometimes, I sit in one factory waiting for the work. If I get it, that's fine. If not I have to go home without the work and money.

Meera: *Tell me about your first day.*

Ashok: I went to find the other worker, but there was already another boy doing that. So I stayed on in the factory, watching how other people work. I wanted to learn their work. The supervisor said OK, go try it. I kept on working, and by now it was the third shift. I was so tired, I didn't do the work correctly, I made a mistake. This man next to me, he gave me a slap... it was such a hard slap that I couldn't ever forget the work now! Then there were just two hours of work left, and Papaji came to see me. He started doing my work and I went out of the factory gate and sucked two limes, which made me feel cool, and I went back to work again. I sent Papaji home and came home with the money later.

Meera: *And Papaji-how did you feel when you saw Ashok working for the first time?*

Dad: I was waiting all afternoon for him to come home from school. When he didn't come I started looking all over for him - then I went to a nearby factory and saw him working there. It was summer and Ashok was sweating a lot near the furnace. Seeing him like this made me so angry, and I thought, 'No one has forced him and yet he is working so hard on his own.' I said "Ashok, come on home right away!" But he replied, "Papa, it's only one hour more for the shift to be over. If I leave, I won't get any money. Please let me work for one hour more. Then I'll come home, Papaji". But I couldn't bear to see him this way, so I sent him out of the factory and took the iron rod myself. But I had never done this before, so I burnt my hand immediately. Ashok actually knew the work better than me. Another young worker said, "Uncle let your son do the work... you'll just hurt yourself!" Then Ashok came back after sucking some limes and said, "Dad, please leave this work to me. If you burn yourself or do something wrong, these supervisors use bad words. I can't hear them scream at you".

Meera: *Ashok, what work do you plan to do in the future?*

Ashok: I have to do this glass factory work always. When that's all I've done from my childhood, that's where I'll have to keep working. But in the factory, I'll learn a more difficult job which brings more money. I'll learn the work another worker next to me does. He makes designs with coloured glass. You can keep sitting in one place so no one yells at you.

Meera: *Do people get hurt or burnt in the glass factory? Have you ever got burnt?*

Ashok: Yes, we all get burnt. Once I was working at night, and I was going towards the

furnace with my iron rod and another boy was coming from the furnace. The melted glass at the end of his rod hurt me here (touches his forehead). It was Diwali that day. I kept trying to work, but that boy said, "You take two or three hours off and sleep here in the corner of this factory, while I do your work". So I went and slept on the floor. I didn't get annoyed with him when the accident happened, but the Manager beat him. I couldn't go to work for 10 to 15 days.

Meera: *When children like you get burned or hurt while working what do your bosses do?*

Ashok: They have medicines. If some boy is burnt or cut with a glass, the bosses keep bandages for him. One day I was working and Baba's foot was cut from heel to toe. His chappal was full of blood. I took a rag and wiped the blood, got a bandage from the gateman and tied it. I tried to comfort Baba. I worked in his place while he rested. I let my work suffer, but I didn't want his to lose his wage.

Meera: *If you didn't have to work, what would you like to do. Have you thought about it?*

Ashok: Sure, I've thought about it, but I have to work. What can I plan? I have to work, that's it.

Meera: *Do you get time to play with friends?*

Ashok: Yes. When we don't get work we go to play football. We make two teams and have a match. Mostly our team wins. Just like rich kids play games and matches, we play too, but only on days we don't get work.

Meera: *How do you feel when you don't get work?*

Ashok: We keep looking for work and thinking about work. Once we meet other children starting to play, then we forget. Sometimes, when I'm playing a friend comes and says "Ashok, you can work here". Work... we have to do it. We can play any day.

Meera: *What are you doing these days now that you can't find work in the factories?*

Dad: He's at home.

Ashok: But we keep doing some work, even at home. We join bangles. By watching others, I have slowly learnt this work. Now I know the work in the factory and the work at home, so if I don't get one, I can do the other one.

[Meera Dewan has worked with CINEWOMEN in Delhi, India as well as an independent film maker. Films to her name include: "Gift of Love" (on dowry), "Whose Children?" (child labour), and "In the Dust of Development" (Tribal people, bypassed by modern developmental goals). Meera is presently working on a film on Immigrant women with the Women's Studio at the National Film Board of Canada].

Project Children in Crisis

"Project Children in Crisis" is an effort to initiate research at an international level focusing on torture against children.

Wars, ethnic confrontations, political violence and suppression of people under dictatorships are some of the major conflicts in which children suffer both physically and psychologically. Children comprise a large portion of the population and they are caught in these conflicts without their consent.

The interest to study the effects of wars and other such conflicts on children increased after the second world war. Thus D. W. Winnicott in his article "Children in the War" published in 1940, wrote: "To understand the effect of war on children it is first necessary to know what capacity children have for the understanding of war and of the causes of war, and of the reasons by which we justify our fighting". Later on in 1943, Dorothy Burlingham and Anna Freud published "Young Children in War-Time". In this book the authors made a survey of psychological reactions of the children to the war. Gradually with the increase of information, more knowledge was accumulated and effect of torture on children inflicted during these conflicts was also demonstrated.

Children can become victims of war, violence and torture directly or indirectly. They can have a direct experience of war, arrest and torture or they can be indirectly traumatised by arrest and torture of their parent etc.

The Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (RCT) in Copenhagen has been offering treatment to the children of torture victims since 1983. The review of work done at RCT in 1988 showed, among other things, that children are used as an instrument in the torture of their parents. One of the worst threats to a prisoner is the threat to harm the prisoner's family. A very effective physical form of torture is molestation of their child before the parents' eyes. Arresting of children is used as a means against the person whom the regime or the torturer wants to harm.

Many children are born in prison. Many young children have experienced imprisonment along with their parents. Many children have experienced acts of molestation and violence which they could not understand because they took place while one or both of their parents were watching without intervening. The children regard this as a betrayal or breach of trust.

After such an experience, can the child's feeling of trust be restored? Can the damage done be repaired?

Examination of children who have been tortured directly or indirectly show signs of physical and psychosomatic maladjustment. Symptoms similar to those of adult torture victims. Fear, headache, stomach ache, nightmares, gloom, depression, isolation and the like. Half of the children show problems with dealing with school and friends.

"Project Children in Crisis" is an effort to initiate international research with the cooperation of organizations in six countries namely Argentina, Denmark, France, Pakistan, Philippines and South Africa. The Project aims to: 1. identify the specific nature of the problems child victims of torture suffer from. 2. research children's experience of trauma of both exiled children and those living in their original country of origin, (the difference being, those in exile have put some distance to the origin of their experience). 3. identify the symptoms and problems children outwardly show so that child victims may be identified in the future.

The research also aims at possibly developing a standardized research method and a uniform treatment strategy which could be used globally and transculturally.

Children who are direct and / or indirect survivors of human rights violations resulting from political conflict will be the main focus of the study. But parents / guardians and other significant adults will be part of the study as well, because they play a crucial role in the life of the child. Boys and girls ranging from 3-15 years of age, suffering due to the above mentioned traumatic conditions will be asked through their parents to participate in the study.

A comprehensive report and formal discussion of the results will follow, complimented by simple statistical evaluations. Attempts will be made to compare and contrast the findings from the six participating groups. The effects of treatment and rehabilitation of the various approaches employed by the concerned groups will also be elaborated.

"Project Children in Crisis" expects to complete its research within three years. Upon completion, the research findings will be presented in an international conference.

[Information regarding this project was provided to Diva by Voice Against Torture, an interdisciplinary research forum against all forms of torture; and for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of torture. The forum was established in Pakistan in 1987-88].

CHILDREN: A Female Physician's Perspective

by

Bhooma Bhayana

Children are the most precious gifts that providence has bestowed upon us. They are our legacy, it is true, but it would be unfair to think that our value for them was solely tied into our own desire for self-aggrandizement.

The newborn is an undifferentiated tabula rosa and, in its innocence we can find our own rejuvenation; a wistful casting away of layers of "tainted" experience.

Every privilege implies a responsibility, however, and the price we must pay for being privileged to behold this wondrous presence is to undertake the task of protecting its delicacy while allowing it to grow. Whether we are environmentalists and assume total responsibility or nativists and absolve ourselves of it we cannot deny our roles as nurturers nor can we deny that experience makes impressions.

Cognitive Development

The innocent protoplasmic blob of a newborn would be astonished to open a psychology text and find out the enormity of the developmental tasks that lay ahead. He/she would also have to choose between a host of theories of cognitive development to determine which context to develop in.

In most studies the most important variable is **age**. There is much emphasis on biological maturation. Intelligence, however, is to a great extent the internalization of tools provided by a given culture. Variables such as urbanization, schooling, powerlessness of a social group, and economic disparity affect cognitive expectations and ability. Cultures in which members are encouraged to develop a self conscious, individualist orientation may see a different pattern of development than those where collective identity is more important than self. Children also internalize the level of self-esteem in the collective consciousness of a group. Being born to a powerless group makes us feel powerless as individuals long before we develop "political awareness". The extent of application of the U.N. Charter of Rights for children also varies in different groups. This is evidenced often by children I see in the office. It is not uncommon for some parents to speak for their adolescent children even when questions are directed at the children. In other families very young children may come to the office unaccompanied by parents.

Ownership of health and body are very much related to one's sense of personal

empowerment. Many South Asian children, especially girls, relate a sense of being disempowered. It is uncertain whether this has to do with their sense of place in the family or in society.

It would be presumptuous to make conclusions about development or family pathology without considering cultural context. Moreover the effect of *migration* itself must be considered. In anticipation of migration to a "developed" nation, I remember that my parents versed me in reciting multiplication tables. On arriving in Canadian kindergarten I found that there was no use for all those stored tables and I had, instead, to deal with the entirely unfamiliar task of stacking coloured blocks!

South Asian children also complain consistently that migration gives their parents a "minority mentality" in that they feel they must prove their worth to the mainstream by excelling academically. This places undue stress on the children who must then take on the responsibility for community pride in addition to their own developmental tasks.

Psychosocial Development

Certain developmental tasks that face people at different stages have to do with establishing a homeostasis with their societal context. Erik Erikson described "eight stages of man" where, in the cycle from infancy to old age, people are faced with conflicts that come into focus. The resolution of the conflict becomes the task of that age;

1. **Trust vs. Mistrust** (0-1 year) wherein children learn to trust their caretakers and environments based on the quality of care they receive.
2. **Autonomy vs. Doubt** (2-3 years) wherein children's healthy exploration of their environment leads to autonomy.
3. **Initiative vs. Guilt** (4-5 years) wherein children make attempts at self-initiated activities.
4. **Industry vs. Inferiority** (6-11 years) wherein children become preoccupied with the operational aspects of the world.
5. **Identity vs. Role Confusion** (12-18 years) wherein adolescents attempt to integrate their own sense of identity on various levels.
6. **Intimacy vs. Isolation** wherein the young adult explores interpersonal relations.
7. **Generativity vs. Self Absorption** wherein the middle aged person looks beyond individual concerns to family and society.
8. **Integrity vs. Despair** wherein the aged individual attempts to accept impending death.

Vedic tradition gives us a similar "four stages of Man" where developmental tasks are determined by societal context:

1. **Brahmcarya** (0-25 years) The primary task of this age is student life; to develop intellectually and spiritually
2. **Grahast** (25-50) The tasks at this age are to generate and to set-up one's nuclear family within the context of an extended family and society.
3. **Sanyasi** The tasks of this age are to withdraw from society and serve God as an ascetic.

What happens then when children migrate across cultures and the task that they are expected to fulfill in the societal context differ markedly between the mainstream and their own native culture? The effects of migration and the expectations and fears of parents as "ambassadors" of the "old culture" add another texture to the simple juxtaposition of two cultures.

The Adolescent

At no age do these issues become more acute than in Erikson's model. This is the age where the individual is faced with resolving conflict between an evolving identity and role confusion. Identity refers to all levels of being; physical, psychosocial, cultural, sexual and spiritual identity.

Psychosocial and sexual identity take greatest precedence in adolescence. Psychosocial identity is achieved through social comparison followed by social approval. Not all comparison information is equally useful. The best information is derived from peers; those experiencing the same situation. When peer experience is diametrically apposed to parental expectation adolescents experience role confusion. They may feel that they are "freaks" within the mainstream or they may reject parental expectations. They may choose to live an unhealthy "dual existence" choosing their mode of behaviour to fill the expectations of the moment. John Morley once said "The young tremble even more than the old at the penalties of nonconformity"

Psychosocial identity is validated by the sense of freedom of action; the sense that one owns one's chosen role, all people are motivated to maintain their freedom of action. When it is threatened they are strongly motivated to restore it. Rigidity of parental expectation, especially when juxtaposed with diametrically apposed peer expectation, can lead to a form of reactance. The individual may choose an option that might not otherwise be in accordance with their best judgement.

In family planning clinics I have met many young South Asian and South East Asian women who have denied themselves the right of the choice to be sexually active. Instead they have jumped in blindly without benefit of contraception, or the concept of "safe sex". Their (lack of) choice has been catalyzed by reaction against parental rigidity.

Similar scenarios exist with respect to choices regarding drug abuse and self destructive behaviour.

Solutions

Because children are a sacred trust it behooves parent to entrust them with rights and choices if that is what is in the interest of a healthy evolution of awareness. As a group it is important to rid ourselves of the "minority mentality" and evolve a sense of powerfulness so that approval by the group is as valid as peer approval. The balance then allows individuals to chose between or assimilate alternatives healthily.

Above all, because children are a sacred trust, we must be capable of loving them unconditionally. Although they are our legacy, as Lay Bruy'ere wrote, "Children have neither past nor future; they enjoy the present, few of us do".

[Bhooma gave birth to her second son Rajesh on July 15. Congratualations Bhooma, Dinesh & Vippen Bhayana].

broken past - fragmented future:

South Asian Children In Cultural Crisis

[Goyal, born in Canada, was brought back to the province of the Punjab in India where she stayed with her parents until she was three. She arrived in Canada speaking fluent Punjabi, her mother tongue, but lost it within a few months of her stay here. From then on, it was 'an up-hill battle' in terms of her being able to retain her culture, language and history. She was inducted in the Canadian school system from the beginning of her educational life. As she grew up, she couldn't read, write or speak any of her own languages. She had little knowledge of writers, artists or cultural heritage that she inherited. The isolation and loss of pride thus created was a painful experience. And reclaiming it was even worse.

Goyal brings to Diva the direct experience of a phenomena that is isolating young immigrants in Canadian society i.e. loss of culture and language. This article was a discussion of two members of the Editorial Committee as an attempt to understand and re-format what had caused the loss and how it came to be].

Speaking from my own experience, I cannot name five South Asian children under the age of 25 who are capable of speaking their mother tongue fluently, or who would have any knowledge of classical or contemporary writers of their mother tongue, or even basic history of their country of origin. While I cannot speak for the whole community, I feel that this is true for a very large majority of young South Asians. This is painful but we have to accept it as a fact, that the majority of first and second generation South Asian children have already lost the most essential identity and link to their culture - their language. What I cannot understand is this: how was a child in my position was even expected to retain her own cultural pride, language or history in this society?

Too strong a statement?

Can be defended.

Think so? Shall we try?

Various factors. These factors can be found in South Asian community as well as in the Canadian milieu around it. So, actually you have no where to go. You go to school, that's what you mostly do when you are little, you have a routine: you wake up in the morning into a household. That household can be a typical South Asian first-generation family whose mother tongue was neither English nor French. But their main problem, at that time, is not their mother tongue or the name of it. Their main concern is survival. Survival on an economic, as well as, social level. They need to be operative and effective on both levels. They almost do not have any other choice. And they got to do it in a hurry...

Yea, right. So, the little one wakes up in a typical South Asian first-generation family...

No. The little one CAN wake up in a typical South Asian family who was right in the middle of a survival-battle and that requires their mental and physical faculties somewhere else then any active concern for the little one's cultural heritage and language or the retention of it.

So, the little one goes to a school.

Yea, a public school. Overwhelming majority of children are racially and culturally different. But the child has to, very quickly, learn their language and, mannerism. Because she wants to play, wants to make friends, wants to laugh when every one else is, wants to be part of it, wants to relate most instinctively. So, at that time, her survival also is at stake, and retaining her own culture and language is also cannot be one of her active concerns. Because nothing in her surroundings is giving her the feeling that retaining her own culture is something that will help her survive here. What might help her survive here is English language and culture. "conform or perish" kind of a situation. System, on the other hand, is directly helpful in that. The school even arranges to pay their teachers to work after school to teach them English. That learning effort is later mentioned in report cards and helps the little one improve her grades and get a few playmates and laugh together.

The whole concept of even making a conscious effort to retain one's culture sounds slightly ridiculous. How can one retain something that does not exist beyond the doors of her house? Her own culture has a marginal status while North American pop culture on the other hand is an integral part of her daily routine. Besides, retention of culture cannot be turned into a conscious act for a child growing up. One can't say "honey I want you to retain your culture" - like you're asking the child to go clean up her/his room. Culture is a product of what is around us. What is available to us. And for a South Asian child growing up in Canada - the choices are few.

The little one went to school a while ago.

Yes, she felt the pressure. From peers, from teachers, from books, from small sheets of papers that were handed out to her, from the landscape around the school, from the names of the little games, from those tiny little fights and the terms of fights. She feels the pressure to conform. Absolutely, completely and hurriedly. She arrives home and watches T.V. No one to play with. Confined residential situation. No back or front yards to get busy in other things. Too cold outside anyway...

School is the battleground where a war for identity takes place but where one doesn't realize who the enemy is, how to fight the battle, or what has already been lost..... until much later. One practically bury's one's culture like some dead body, and leaves the remaining bits and pieces at home. A kind of duality of identity exists. One is into new wave and the other is participating in a *puja* ceremony for some festive holiday. The two rarely meet. School keeps telling you, "your country of origin has no value - practically worthless. If you want to really educate yourself read Elliot, Keats, Hawthorne - these are the writers worth respecting. One's own writers, forget it, they don't exist. Everything is moving very fast, and the curve balls that are coming towards you are way out of your league.

So in school a kid gets zero culture or formal education on one's country of origin. It teaches you nothing about your history, your country's literature or the fact that it even exists on the face of the earth except maybe in a passing remark, on how yea yea the British kind of 'used' it for certain economic purposes. Besides school and peers, what's left? The media.

She has no choice but to watch T.V. and take that as an interesting enough activity...

It is an interesting enough activity when you have all those cartoons and movies and funny programs. It also, though you might not appreciate it this way, is helping you in your struggle for survival. It is providing valuable insights to your understanding of language, manners and body language that you are so desperate to learn to survive. While it teaches you to

survive in one respect, it also leaves you defenseless in another.

So, the little one watches T.V,

Yes, and none of the heroines look like her, or speak her language, or know her mannerism. She watches historical movies which are not based on the history of her country of origin. She watches people sing and dance, none of it has the steps or sounds that she knew as her own. She watches news, its about some other people. She communicates with her parents, they speak English. Their concern is for her and them to learn this language quickly. They know. They don't want her to continue to live with her language disability. They want to help her out. They speak English with her.

She grows up in surroundings that do not encourage her to retain her own culture and language.

Yea, nothing encourages her towards it. Everything pushes her away from it. She might want to or at least tried to interact with it if she was given the feeling that it will have some value. But as far as this society is concerned, they only recognize European culture as worth something and WASP culture at that. Sure we have multiculturalism and Caravan. But what do such events and attitudes towards non-mainstream culture tell us? They objectify us and our culture like it was some caged animal in a zoo. "Oh look at the way they dance Honey, isn't that sweet!" This is the big concession the government and mainstream culture make to us non-whites living in their homeland. As far as the're concerned, we are supposed to be grateful for this liberal attitude of "See, we can tolerate living with non-whites and the culture they represent and we don't mind if they do their own thing - as long as its not more than once a year in some stuffy school auditorium". With this kind of attitude, it is not surprising that South Asian children become so alienated from their culture. They receive no positive reinforcement of it from the people around them, from their school, peers or media.

Alienation is so complete that mostly one does not even realize that a loss has occurred. You lose something from so deep within you but you are not even conscious of it.

So, after a few years, the little one is proudly declaring 'Oh, but I was born here. I am Canadian.' But she has to keep on saying it because people keep on forgetting, keep on overlooking the fact that she is Canadian. She has to say it so many times and people are so forgetful and unbelieving that she is forced to face the fact that she is not, so to speak, Canadian. That learning the language, slang, mannerism or history has not made her Canadian. Because the word 'Canadian' brings someone else in mind. Someone who is fair, blue-eyed, blond and suites all outfits that are advertised in media. On the other hand, she is dark, brown-eyed, black-haired... She can never be a true Canadian, her colour will never allow it.

sure, sure. Let's not be obvious...

Yea, right. 'Canadian' is never obvious. I mean, not all the time, so you have, unknowingly, bargained for acceptability that was conditional. And some of those conditions were beyond you. No matter how hard you worked you could not fulfil some of those conditions. You made a terrible bargain. You were forced to give up your self to become someone who did not look like you at all. It was so obvious and you did not know. One might think, "well other immigrants came to Canada where English was not their mother tongue yet they have managed okay, so why can't we South Asians? While many Polish, Ukrainian, German Hungarian etc. speaking people have also gone through a cultural loss in the process of living here for a few generations, their situation is quite different. They were accepted from the beginning because one they were white and two because they were from the same

continent (it's all in the family sort to speak). Us uncultured Asians on the other hand have no direct link with European culture and will always be viewed as 'foreigners' no matter how many generations of settlement we have to our name.

So, what does the little one do now?

She has two choices. Yet again, only two choices. By the way, she is a big one now. So, the two choices: one is to remain oblivious and continue to insist on her Canadianness, or, to revert back to find out by what name should she call herself that does not seem so impossible to believe. With this, a slow and painful journey commences. It is nerve shattering at various levels. For one, the previously innocent practices like making the curriculum for school system, casting for T.V., choice of news flashes, favorite subjects to make documentaries, historical bases of different bestsellers and story-lines of movies, all start to appear to be stemming from a heinous scheme well thought-out that it could easily rob the little one of her soul.

So, one begins to become aware of the mechanism of society.

One does not have to say it so impersonally. It happens to human beings, you know. The other option is to try to connect with your own people, culture and history. To reclaim it all. Or enough to be able to go by it. It again becomes a struggle for survival. You have to reclaim it and reclaim it in a hurry. But it is different this time. This time, the society surrounding you is not helping at all. And South Asian community is actively projecting a commercialised culture of South Asia that is the typical version of an immigrant's view point of a culture and society which is unreal and over-idealised or in some cases even inferior. The last one is what is presented to you by this society i.e. your culture is inferior. It is being said to us for hundreds of years...

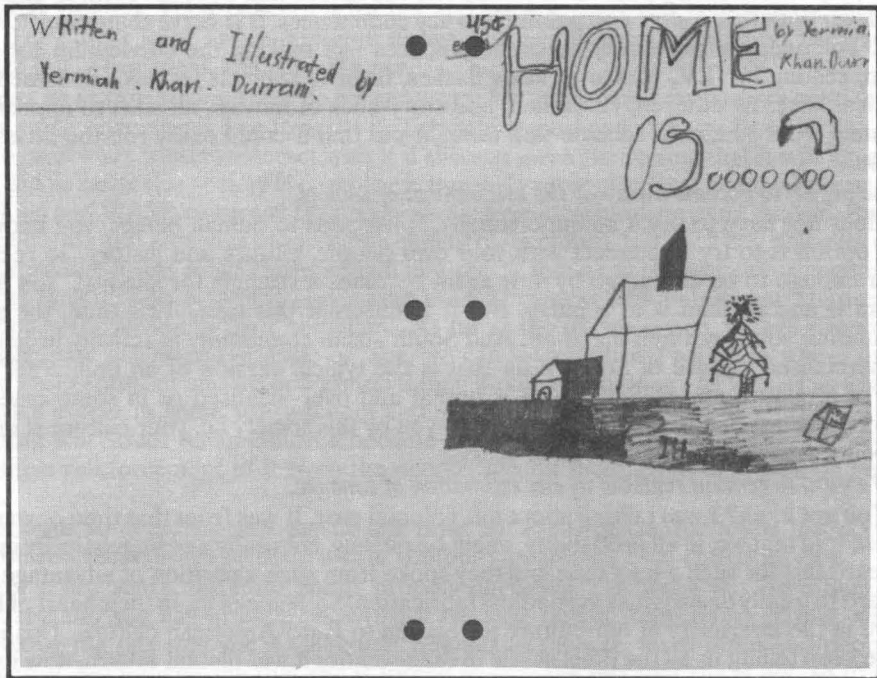
We want to remain realistic in our estimation of time etc.

You got it, eh? I was talking about our colonial past. It was from that time onward that we were told that we, in all probability, might be racially, culturally and linguistically inferior. We heard this for such a long time and they spoke from such a position of advantage that it was hard to totally dismiss it as groundless fabrication. So, some of us, in their heart of hearts, believe in the inferiority of our culture in relation to Euro-American culture. This is what people keep telling us all the time. While in the seventies it was blatant racism, now its more discreet. Sure we have rights on paper but we know what they really think, 'ethnic' is still considered a dirty word. If one is ethnic one is hanging out with the wrong crowd.

But the fact remains we can never become one of 'them' - let's accept this as a given. So what do we have left. Our roots, our place of origin. If the situation wasn't so hostile we could fit into this culture, like in the Caribbean; South Asians there were accepted on a much more human level as equals and it was for this reason they can call themselves "from the Caribbean" because they were able to integrate at all political and social levels. They were accepted and they were given the opportunity to really fit in. But here it's a different story. So if we are not 'Canadian' what are we? - those who were brought up here, know this country (almost) as if it were their own. In some ways it is their country. We can't dismiss this culture as having played no role or having no rights on those who have been brought up here. But that does not mean one sheds the past like an unfashionable piece of clothing.

Our identity as individuals comes from where we can draw strength from. If we negate what our heritage and origins are, we are negating what we inherited from our forefathers. We can either feel ashamed or feel proud of it, and feel part of it at some level, knowing that our ancestry, language, and culture belong to us, and is part of our person.

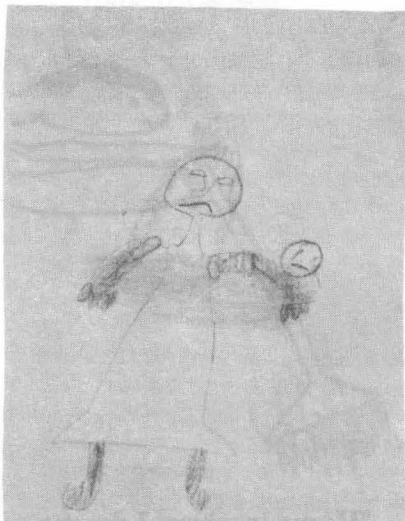
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Toronto, Canada



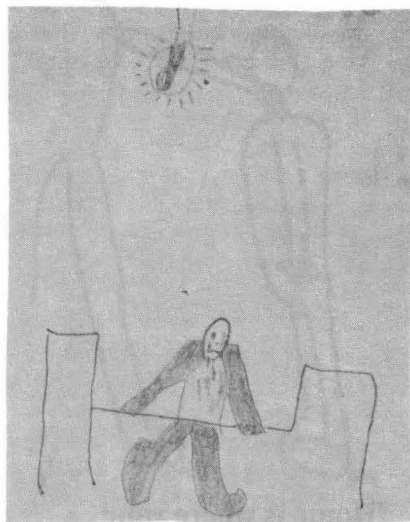
by

Yermiah Khan Durrani

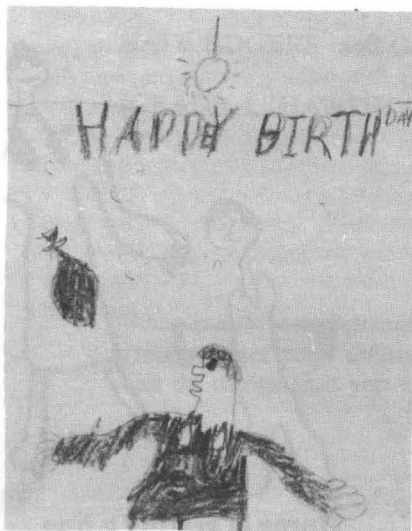
[Age 9, Grade 3, Ellesmere-Statton P.S.]



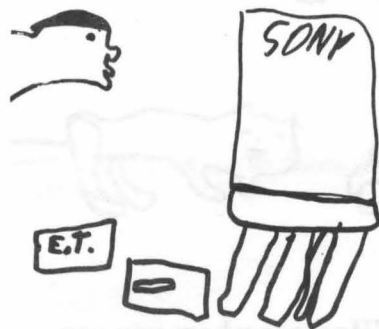
"Home is where you have to babysit for no money".



"Home is where you can sit down and cry".



"Home is where I have a birthday".



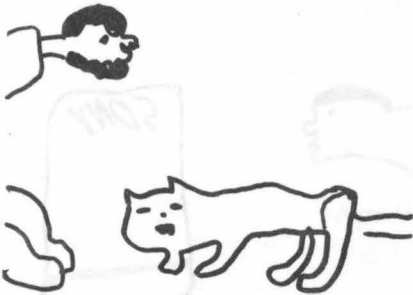
"Home is where you can watch hockey matches without paying".



**"Home is where your
parents can help".**



**"Home is where I do my
chores".**



**"Home is where you can
keep a pet in your back-
yard".**



**Home is getting a hug
from your family".**

KIDS & DRUGS: an interview with a social worker

by

KATE ROGERS and GAUTAM MUKHERJEE

[GRADE 4, HAWTHORNE PUBLIC SCHOOL, TORONTO]

What are the consequences if you take drugs?

Drugs affect your ability to think, make decisions, and it makes you think you can do things that you can't, it also can hurt or kill you.

Why do kids take drugs?

Because they want to be part of a group. They don't want to be called a wimp. Some kids think drugs will make them happy.

At what age do some kids start drugs?

Usually between 10 and 12

Where can kids on drugs go for help?

The Addiction Research Foundation. Hospitals. School nurse. Emergency rooms (if they're overdosed).

Where would you find kids doing drugs?

Yonge St., Queen St., King St., Bloor St., Finch St., Dufferin Mall, concerts, C.N.E. grounds, parks and alley ways.

How can you tell if some one's on drugs?

They giggle a lot, and their eyes roll around. If they are addicted then they look sick and depressed when they don't have drugs.

What are the most common drugs?

Marijuana, cocaine, hashish and crack.

About how many kids have tried drugs?

The Addiction Research Foundation did a poll with kids between ages 12-18 about drugs. The poll was about how many kids take different drugs. 16% said they've tried marijuana. 3.8% said they've tried cocaine. 8% said they've tried Barbitures (barbitures is a pill that makes you think you feel good).

How long can you live with drugs?

It depends on the drug, how much you take, how often, if you use clean needles etc. and the purity of the drug.

How much money does someone spend on drugs a week?

Sometimes 100's of dollars a week.

How do kids get the money?

They sit on the street and beg and they turn to crime. Some kids who still live at home use their allowance.

On the Innocence of Racists

by

HARDARSHAN KAUR GILL

[Gill is an Indian journalist residing in Denmark where she works with Immigrant women. She also is a founding member of an organisation that publishes a magazine called SOLDUE (Sun Dove). Way to go, SOLDUE].

"Would you like a 'negro kiss'!" said a nice elderly woman to me.

A "negro kiss" is a foamy Danish sweet coated with chocolate. The woman - a long time volunteer working in a project for immigrant women in inner-city Copenhagen, where I also work - was a well meaning Danish woman, not having the slightest intention of provoking or annoying me.

This example is typical - just like a popular song book for children, which has been used for generations here, and which my own children like. One of the songs in that book is called "Nigger-land". It says, that in "nigger-land" bananas grow, there are palm trees, people there don't know how to read, they don't even know where Denmark is, and they have forgotten how to clean their noses - and so on.

A jolly merry-go-easy Danish version of crude racism of which no parent nor child has ever been conscious.

I have lived in Denmark since 1972 and have seen how this racism has existed as an undercurrent in Danish culture for a long time. In fact now, when racism is becoming more and more visible and is being talked about, this undercurrent is often ascribed to ignorance. "Innocent racism" in contrast to that of a small but noisy extreme right or KKK-graffiti-writing youths of suburban Copenhagen.

Innocent or not - it is in my eyes alarming enough to read that Denmark - according to a recent EEC Euro-Barometer survey - now is on the top when it comes to popular affiliation

with racist ideology and political parties with racist ideologies. Funny enough - when that survey was published - the response was the typical easy-going one: it cannot be true! Denmark cannot be compared to Britain and France (which according to the survey were rated below Denmark on the racism score).

The problem in Denmark is exactly this, racism is not being taken seriously. It may be innocent to let the kindergarten children sign about "nigger-land". And maybe the skin heads, green jackets or whatever youth gangs are called are only becoming violent because of their own social frustrations. And maybe the extreme right shall be allowed its freedom of expression, and so on. The fact remains, however, that racism is never seen in its totality and as a social and cultural problem which is growing steadily.

Denmark lacks the consciousness of the big colonial powers of Europe and of racially conscious UDA although Denmark was active in the slave trade and colonized Greenland (which till 1979 was a Danish colony, today it is a self-governing territory under Denmark).

Denmark has also experienced waves of immigration in its history. By Swedes, Poles, Oriental Jews, Hungarians - e.g. the Oscar awarded Danish film "Pelle the Conqueror" tells the story about Swedish immigrants to Denmark in the last century. But somehow this history has not become a conscious part of Danish culture.

So, when immigrants started to come to Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries in the late sixties, they came to a country totally unprepared and unaware of how to deal with cultural minorities. After the first wave of immigration by mainly men who took up manual jobs, came the families of these men including children. To the big surprise of the Danes these families did not automatically adopt the dominant cultural values, but retained their own strange habits, clothes, food etc. - and language etc.

So far no real policy of integration has been adopted in Denmark. And most of the debate about integration is dealing with language. And beware, the language in question is DANISH, not the mother tongue of the immigrant child, who grows up in Denmark. To say it briefly: the predominant approach in Denmark is that of assimilation, not integration. And the principal tool is the language: Danish!

If only immigrants would speak proper Danish and behave like the Danes, then there would be no problem!

This is another example of ignorance, because this type of integration is not only inhuman and narrow-minded, it is impractical.

There are simple reasons for that.

First of all, culture is more than language. Knowing Danish does not make you a Dane. This has been realized by a union in a big factory in Copenhagen, mainly employing women and among them a big proportion of immigrant women. Together with the management the union leaders have agreed that only Danish is allowed as means of conversation when a Danish person is present. The problem was, that women from Yugoslavia used to speak with each other in their own language, although they know Danish very well. (In fact the factory is a local branch of a multinational corporation with English as its working language on the managerial level - not Danish!).

It is true that language is very important in the process of integration - but not like the union sees it in this example. Apart from understanding and speaking Danish (which is a problem when the government is cutting down on Danish courses for foreigners), it is of vital importance, that immigrants of the first (and second) generation can keep their mother

tongue alive. The identity of an immigrant will be shattered without the mother tongue. And it becomes a key to the maintenance of those family ties, which specially people from cultures with extended family systems build on. For them the mother tongue is literally the mother's tongue and the second generation will need it as well as the first.

And the same can be said about culture in general. Nobody can expect an immigrant to shed his or her culture completely. Danes who have emigrated to USA or Canada or elsewhere will agree on that with me, I am sure.

But that is where, the Danish ignorance gains the upper hand, because there is simply no general acceptance of other cultural values in Denmark than those which are very close to the Danish.

But even if we imagined, that the impossible was possible, that people could change their culture, as you change your clothes - and if we immigrants adopted all Danish cultural values - the bad as well as the good ones. There would still remain one big problem: colour!

Already now we see the example of adoptive children of different skin colour, who are being shouted at. They have Danish names, Danish parents and know no other language than Danish, but "innocent" Danish racism tells them: "Go home!"

This brings me back to the racist children songs, the "negro kiss" as well as the European racism-survey. In the schools today immigrant children face comments by their schoolmates which build on cultural prejudices of contemporary Danish vocabulary: "Black pig", "Perker" (a derogative for Pakistani), "Wrong colours" etc.

Teachers adopt the easy-going "nigger-land" attitude and advise the humiliated immigrant child: "Don't take it so seriously, they don't really mean anything bad with it".

Rexdale Women's Centre

The Riverdale Women's Centre is offering English As A Second Language Classes to Punjabi speaking women with a bilingual instructor. These classes will focus on life skills and will assist women in participating and fully integrating into the Canadian community. Classes will be free and free child care will be also provided as well as TTC tickets.

For more information or to register, women are welcome to call the Rexdale Women's Centre at 745-0062.

Death Penalty and Medical Ethics

by

DR. MAHBOOB MEHDI

[This paper was presented at a seminar on death penalty held by Voice Against Torture on 30-31 March 1989, in Islamabad, Pakistan. Diva publishes it in recognition of people who are raising their voice against capital punishment in Pakistan and in support of health professionals who are refusing, at considerable risk to themselves, to participate in the process of death penalty].

If a person whom the authorities of the state want to kill by hanging, dies a natural death before the event, then the whole plan of state sponsored murder i.e. the death penalty, fails. This is why a doctor examines a convicted person before hanging. If the person is not under the influence of a drug or is not unconscious or is not having high grade fever then he is declared fit for hanging. To prepare this convicted person for hanging, the doctor employed by the state, weighs the person to determine the length of the rope which would kill the person when the noose is in the neck and drop occurs. After the execution has taken place the doctor examines the hanging body to determine whether the life is extinct or not.

The doctor who participates in killing a person on the instructions of his employers creates a breach in the domain of medical ethics. People, both good and bad, come to a doctor because of the trust they have that the doctor would not harm them at any cost. Doctors who have indulged in harming human lives are bound to lose the trust of people. Moreover they are prone to become dehumanized. On the instructions of their employers they can inflict harm on any individual.

Should the actions of a doctor be determined by the highest standards achieved by the medical ethics or by the requirements of his job conditions and the orders of his employers, is the big question of the day?

One may call it "cold blooded killing of a helpless captive" or justify it as "a legal execution", but there is no denying that the death penalty is the active taking of a human life and the extinction of a human personalty. Its use runs counter to physicians' striving to maintain all meaningful human life regardless of the circumstances. Medical tradition and ethics hold that every one coming in contact with the doctor is entitled to adequate medical care regardless of economic, social or legal status. A physician is dedicated to preserve the right of life of every member of the society.

Let us go through the different codes of medical ethics in relation to death penalty.

According to the Hippocratic Oath, the doctor can apply his knowledge and skill only for the benefit of a person and never for harming or killing any one even if he has asked for it. Similarly the Islamic Code of Medical Ethics adopted in the International Conference on Islamic Medicine says that the doctor should not permit any of his special knowledge to be used to harm, destroy or inflict damage on the body, mind and spirit. According to the Declaration of Geneva of World Medical Association (1983), members of medical profession will maintain utmost respect for human life and will not use their medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity. According to the International Code of Medical Ethics of World Medical Association (1983), a physician shall always bear in mind the obligation of preserving human life. The World Medical Association's resolution on physician's participation in capital punishment declares it unethical and asks the Medical Ethics Committee to keep this matter under active consideration.

The resolution concerning physician involvement in capital punishment adopted at the central meeting of the Nordic Medical Associations, on 16-19 June 1986, reads as follows:

From ancient times to the present, codes of medical ethics have recognised the basic premise that the purpose of medical knowledge and skill is to improve health and relieve human suffering.

For a physician to prepare, administer or monitor any procedure with a view to injuring a human being or to train others to do so would be a perversion and corruption of medical knowledge and skill and of the physician's responsibility to and role in society.

Thus, the medical associations of the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) in recognition of human integrity declare it indefensible for any physician to participate in any act connected to and necessary for the administration of capital punishment.

Amnesty International in its declaration on the participation of doctors in the death penalty has said that doctors can be called on to participate in execution by, inter alia,

- determining mental and physical fitness for execution,
- giving technical advice,
- prescribing, preparing, administering and supervising doses of poison in jurisdictions where this method is used,
- making medical examinations during executions, so that an execution can continue if the prisoner is not yet dead.

In all the above situations amnesty international has declared that the participation of doctors in executions is a violation of medical ethics and has called upon medical doctors not to participate in executions, and to adopt resolutions to these ends.

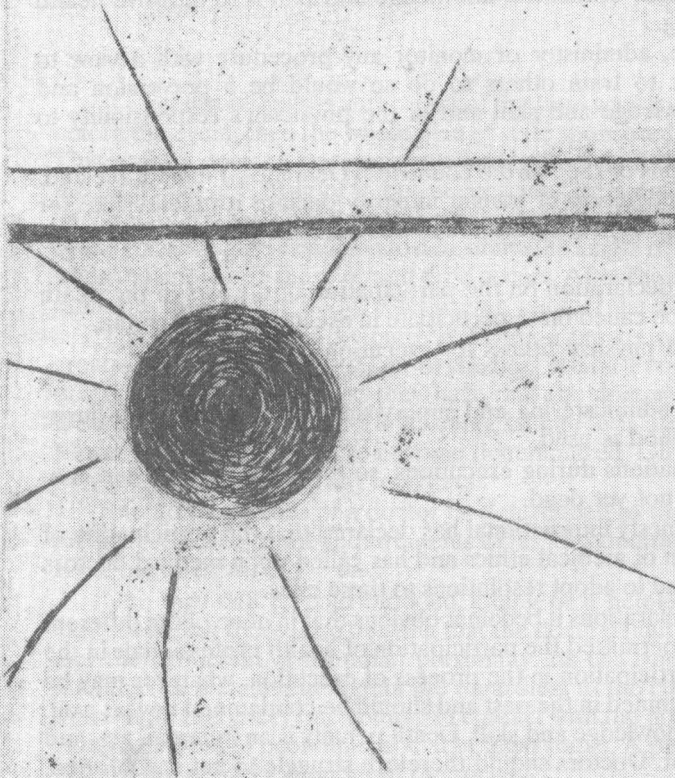
After considering all these declarations it becomes obvious that in none of the different periods of history, medical ethics permitted the participation of health professionals in the process of execution. Doctor's participation in the process of execution, whatever may be the circumstances, has been condemned in the past and should be condemned now as well. This is a gross abuse of medical knowledge and skill. Death penalty is an inhuman act and is contrary to medical temperament. Doctors should therefore struggle to get it abolished. And till the time it is not abolished, doctors should plainly refuse to take part in it.

Perception of Violence

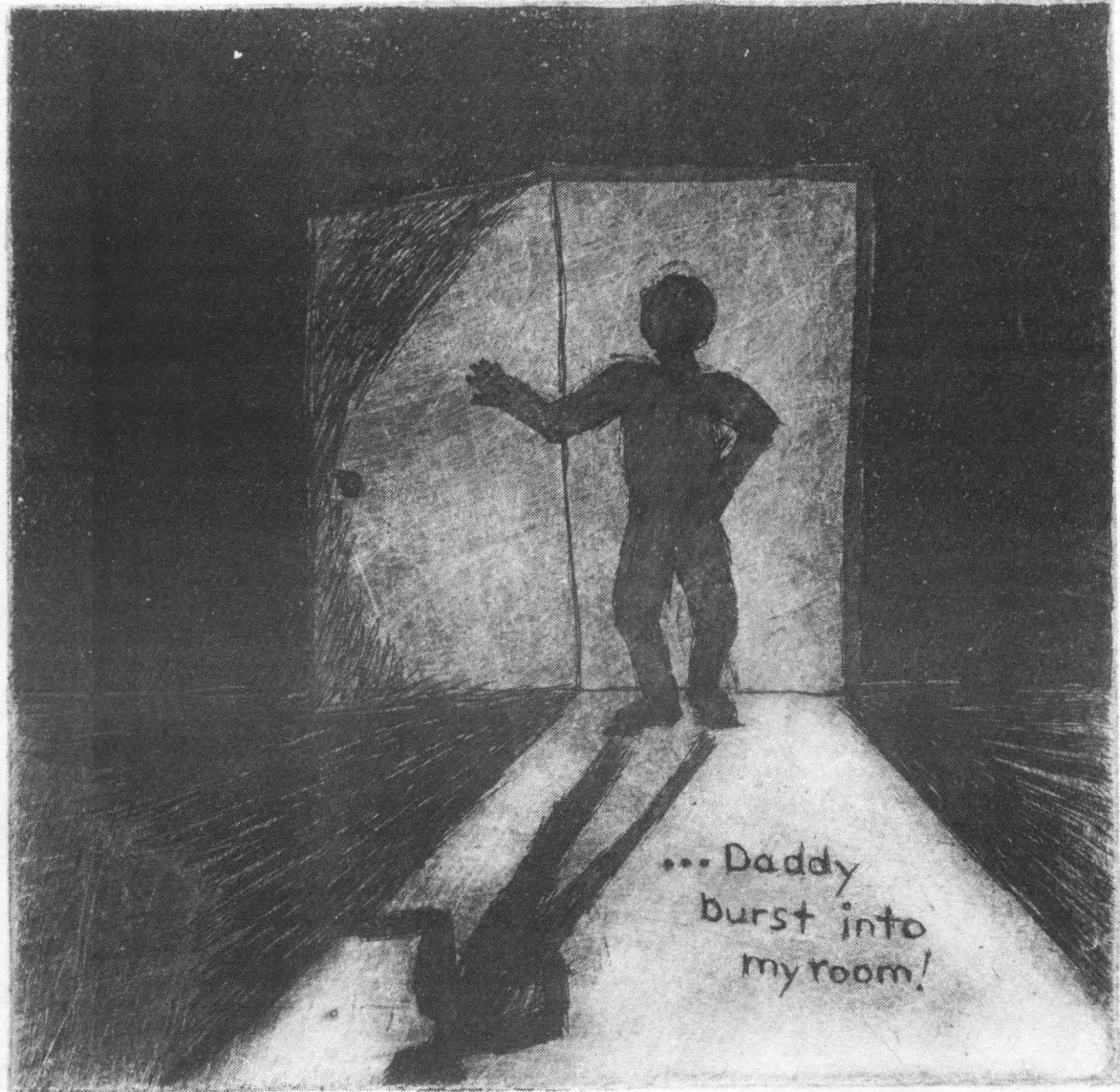
by

BRIGITTE WATSON

Just the other morning,
I was in my room colouring



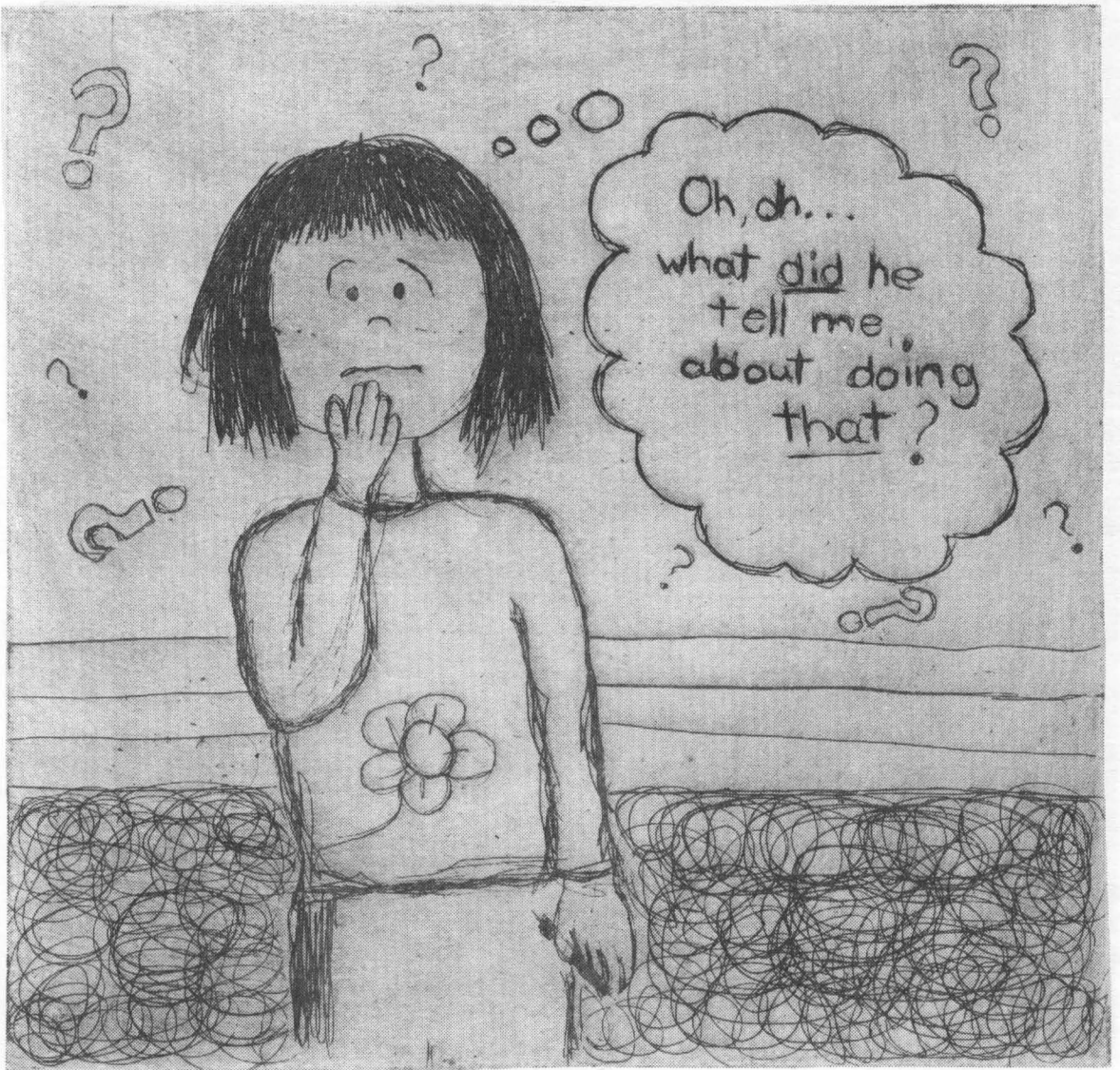


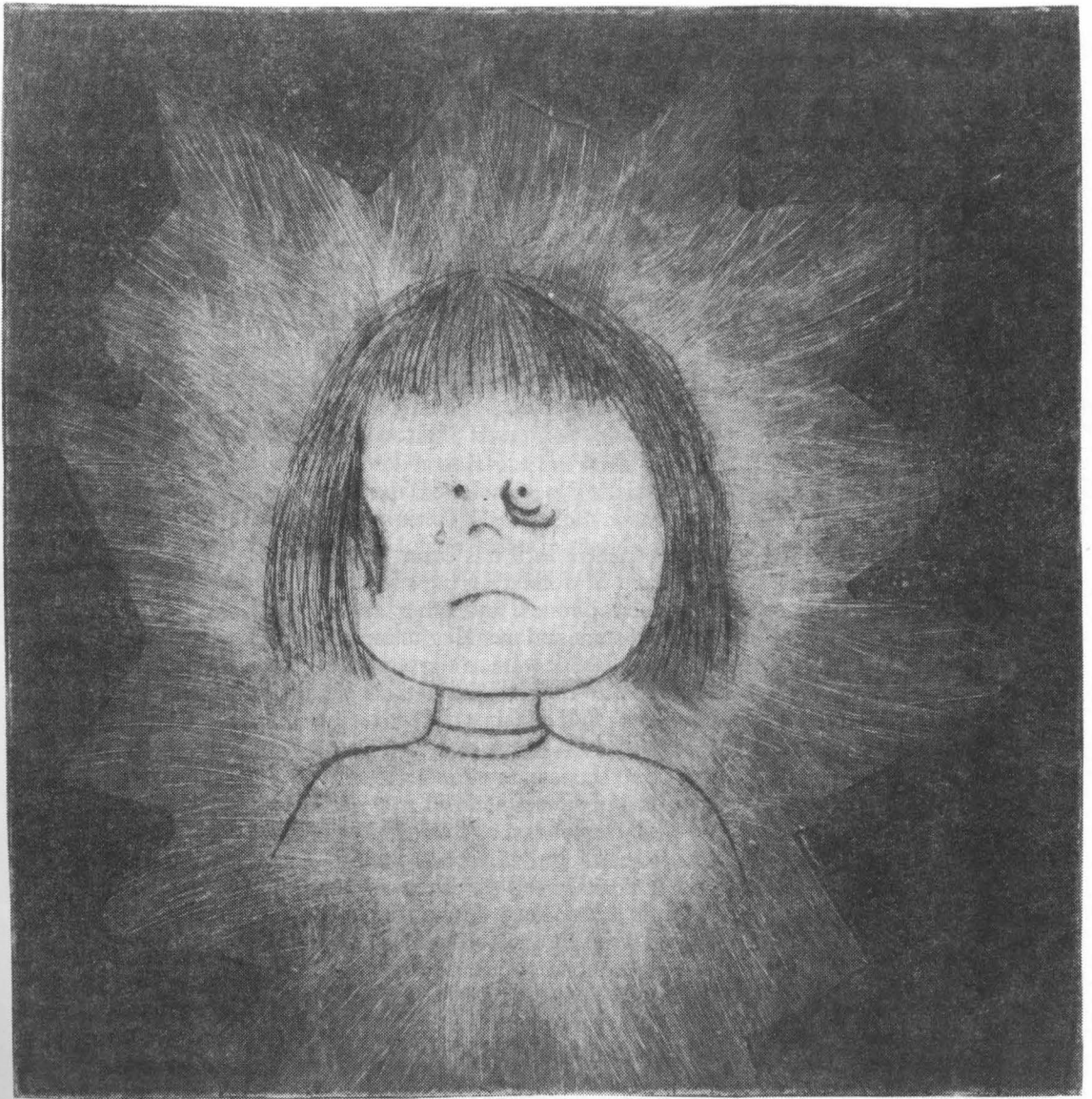


WHAT DID I
TELL



YOU
ABOUT
THINK
THAT





[Diva respects Brigitte Watson for her strength in sharing with us, through her art work, the pain she experienced as a child.]

Feminist Street Theatre in India

by

VIBHUTI PATEL

Alternative theatre, or street theatre as it has come to be known, has evolved as a dynamic and creative art form by and of women's groups in the last 15 years. Doing away with glittering stages, costumes, microphones, and other artificial devices, this form of theatre has been able to achieve an instant and meaningful rapport with those who come to watch it. And with this rapport established, women's groups have taken up such burning issues of the day as dowry, rape, and bride-burning, dramatizing them with scripts developed from real-life struggles for survival and individual or collective attempts to live in dignity.

The process of script-writing is also novel as it evolves from rigorous discussions and is open to improvisation. Dialogues and scenes are adapted to different situations. Culture-specific humour, folk art, folk music and dances and folk songs are liberally used to make a play comprehensible to women of all classes and cultural backgrounds.

Given the high level of illiteracy and limited social activities available to most Indian women, taking theatre to them is a positive and dynamic experience. It is a much needed form of protest against a male-dominated society. With its immediacy and powerful impact, street theatre came to be recognized during the cultural awakening of the late sixties as a vehicle of satirical comment on social concerns of the day. Alternative theatre by women has grown with the women's movement. One reason why this art form has become so popular at women's meetings or gatherings is that most women find it easier to express themselves through songs or skits rather than to speak formally at a gathering. Moreover, speeches rarely go over well with audiences who find them didactic.

One of the earliest alternative plays staged by the Stree Mukti Sanghatana in 1979 portrayed the problems of working-class women, e.g. wage discrimination, inhuman work conditions, job insecurity, and sexual harassment by employers. Real life experiences of women workers, maid servants, white-collar working women and students were acted out to depict the issues which concern them the most.

The range of issues taken up in plays staged in the alternative theatre is as varied as the people who perform the plays. Shramik Stree Mukti Sanghatana, an organization of tribal women in Dhulia, stages skits on alcoholism and wife-beating, witchcraft and rape. The *kalapathak* travels from one village to another. At the end of the play, the artist and the gathering get involved in heated debates over points arising from the play.

Street theatre took on an added dimension with the emergence of the anti-rape movement in India in 1980. The Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW) wrote two plays and two skits on the subject. One depicts the trauma of a middle-aged woman who has been raped by a policeman, and the antipathy of the neighborhood towards her. The woman's teenaged daughter helps her fight the rapist. This play was very well received and its script was published by a well-known women's weekly in India in their special issue on rape, in 1980.

The second play produced by the FAOW was written especially for consciousness-raising in the neighborhood of a teenaged construction worker who was gang-raped by three policemen and a bootlegger's son. Far from giving the girl support, her parents abused her and neighbors abused her. The girl's attempt at suicide failed.

This play takes up a number of issues but most importantly, it shatters the myth that women invite rape. It shows up the injustice of a society which ostracises the victim of rape instead of condemning the rapist. The play ends with a rape victim rebelling against this situation and saying, "I will no longer suffer in silence. Because I was weak and submissive, I lacked the confidence to raise my voice. But now I'll join the collective struggle of women against rape."

POLICE RAPE

The increasing atrocities by policemen on women made women's groups so indignant that the FAOW wrote a script for a small skit that could be shown at public places, in front of offices, factories and in women's meetings. The skit begins with a policemen's march:

Left Right, Left Right

Commit rape, Day and Night....

While marching, the policemen grab Mathura and Maya Tyagi, two helpless Dalit women who were victims of a criminal assault. When alone, these women had to suffer in silence, but when united they march forward chanting slogans:

One two three four

Tolerate oppression no more

Five six seven eight

To disarm the rapist, kick him straight,

Nine ten eleven twelve

Support each other and save ourselves.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE*

In 1979, women in Delhi produced a Hindi play, *Om Swaha*, which was well received because of its subtlety and audience participation. The play begins with a woman *madari* showing matrimonial advertisements to the audience and taunting the ads. She chants a *sloka*, "What is the meaning of marriage for an Indian women? Self-denial, self-effacement,

subjugation, humiliation, drudgery and victimization". When the play's protagonist, Hardeep, is married, she is taunted, beaten and harassed by her in-laws who ultimately murder her. The police registers a case of suicide. Hardeep's friend, Kancha, also shares the same fate.

At this point, there is an interval and the actors address the audience, who are seated in a circle. They ask: Should all women meet the same fate? Why should women tolerate such degradation? Can Kanchan's fate be different? This last question is then explored by means of a fantasy in which Kanchan now resists the haggling for dowry and the greedy demands of her husband and in-laws. She dreams of becoming independent, of studying and working, and leading a dignified life.

At this point, the *sutradhar* re-enters and says, "Look, Kanchan's struggle has made a difference in her life". The artists then invite the audience to express solidarity with Kanchan. After the play, discussion begins, a dialogue is established.

While the themes of these plays may be similar, the narratives differ to suit different situations. A play by Sachetana has a *madari* and two monkeys (played by women) in Madarikhel. The play ends with a male monkey refusing to set his wife on fire for bringing insufficient dowry, saying to the audience, "What do you think I am? I am a monkey, not a human being. Only they kill their wives like that". The monkey was similarly used recently by the Forum Against Sex Determination and Sex Determination and Sex Pre-selection in Bombay to say, "Are we human beings to indulge in female infanticide? We monkeys do not commit such crimes against the females in our community".

In 1986, Sahiar, a women's group in Baroda, responded to the increase in violence against women by using the Gujarati folk forms, Bhavai and Garba, to show how women are trapped in different situations. Their play established immediate rapport, boosted the morale of tribal women, middle-class women, and college students and opened up discussion of topics hitherto considered taboo by creating a space for the sharing of experiences.

Many of these plays are inspired by and have as their theme real-life events. When Manjushree Sarada was murdered by her husband and in-laws, Nari Samata Manch enacted many plays on the incident in Pune and in various rural areas in the Maharashtra. Anti-dowry plays by the Ahmedabad Women's Action Group, Chingari in Ahmedabad, Manushi in Kerala, Chhattisgarh Mahila Jagruti Sanghatana in Raipur and Nari Samata Manch in Pune have helped considerably to project an ideology that appeals to emotion and reason.

HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE

Apart from domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace has also been an important concern of women's groups. Rural Women's Liberation Organization in Tamil Nadu has written several skits and plays on the subject. When a woman in the income tax office in Bombay was sexually harassed by her employer and the union refused to take up her case, she approached the Nari Sangharsh Samiti which enacted a street play in front of the office in Nariman Point. The play was shown at other places as well. "One day in the life of a working woman in Bombay" was performed on 8 March, 1983 during a three-hour cultural program on the theme, Women and Work. Textile women workers who were on strike at that time related their experiences in another play which had a lot of songs based on Marathi folk forms.

HEALTH ISSUES

Health issues affecting women, such as anemia, amniocentesis, and myths about menstruation have also been given expression in skits and plays. The People's Science Movement in Maharashtra and Kerala, Chetana in Ahmedabad, and Arko Nari group have contributed to developing a scientific temper among the illiterate and semi-literate masses towards diarrhoea, epilepsy, and high fever, afflictions which otherwise were thought to be caused by witchcraft.

HOUSEWORK IS WORK

In Aurangabad and Rajasthan, the Stree Jagruti Kalapathak celebrated 8 March in 1982 by organizing a three hour cultural program, "We will smash this prison". A play by Shanta Gokhale on the restitution of conjugal rights, a skit on housework called Pyramid, and a music ballet on the life cycle of women were performed. The skit on housework shattered the myth that a housewife does no work by showing all the different and difficult tasks a woman does to run the household and keep the family together. Even though the woman is the core of the family, she is exploited and occupies the lowest rung in the family pyramid. The play makes the point that every day, a woman works, and yet she is given no leave, no bonus, no allowance, no medicine, no retirement, and no remuneration. The skit ends with the breaking of this pyramid and with men and women forming a circle which grows larger and larger, with the audience joining in. The play thus pleads for a recognition and appreciation of the work that women do at home and calls for the institution of financial and social benefits for them.

The dance ballet, Jagruti, was a product of collective research as it included folk songs, dances and folk forms of several Indian languages - Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Telegu and Sanskrit - to signify the universality of women's experiences and women's issues. It covered the lifespan of a woman, from pregnancy, the birth of a baby girl, girlhood, puberty, premarital dreams, the 'seeing ceremony' marriage, post-marital problems and attempts at murder by the in-laws. The ballet ended with a women's liberation song by Subramania Bharati.

The Stree Mukti Sanghatana, a collective of middle-class women in Bombay, goes beyond enacting plays. With the help of other women activists, it distributes booklets, printed scripts of plays, cassettes of songs, and posters, and holds exhibitions. Traveling exhibitions have been organized in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere in the country. One of the Sanghatana's plays, Mulgi Zali Ho (A Girl is Born), was a phenomenal success and was performed over 200 times between 1983 and 1987. During 1984, 1985, and 1986, the Sanghatana organized a women's carnival in various villages and towns of Maharashtra.

Anti-communalist theatre activity is also an important concern of women's groups. In March 1987, a street theatre festival was organized in Ahmedabad, at which women's groups enacted anti-communal plays in slums, at factory gates and in public squares.

The newly-formed cultural group, We Ourselves, made its debut with the play, We Twelve women from Twelve Homes, which shows how a woman, irrespective of her class,

caste or religion, is oppressed and discriminated against by society. For example, family violence is considered to be a personal affair between husband and wife by neighbors, the police and the law, who thereby abdicate their responsibility of helping the woman out of her situation. If the woman does try to free herself of the torment, society tries to make her feel guilty by branding her as 'individualistic' (as though individualism were a bad thing), 'selfish', 'an irresponsible mother' or a 'breaker of the family'. During the Shah Bano controversy, We Ourselves, produced its second play, We will Raise Our Voice. The play dealt with issues relating to marriage, divorce, child custody, and maintenance and property rights of Hindu, Muslim, Parsi and Christian women.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Street theatre faces two major problems. Its limited outreach does not allow for marshalling of support from people who are physically distanced from the movement. Some women's groups have suggested the use of video cassettes to circulate the plays, but others feel that televising such programs may not have the same impact. Watching programs sitting in front of the television would not help break the passivity of people. In contrast, street theatre is more involving and mobilizes women to become agents of change. Street theatre allows the artists, spectators and scripts a lot of autonomy and brings the creativity and participation of the audience to the fore.

The second problem facing street theatre is its use of crude rhetoric, which may alienate some of the people it is trying to reach. To be more effective, it needs to incorporate more subtle symbolism and use devices such as 'freezing' to make the effort more aesthetically appealing. To achieve this end, some theatre workshops have been organized. For example, Saheli of Delhi and Women's Centre of Bombay teamed up to organise a ten day cultural workshop in Delhi in May 1983. Similar workshops have been held in Hyderabad, Chhattisgarh, Madras and Palghat.

Alternative theatre activities have had an impact on mainstream theatre as well. During the last ten years, there has been an increase in the number of plays and television serials that have focused on women, although they usually deal with women's issues in a somewhat stereotyped manner.

Clearly, the most important aspect of alternative theatre by women's groups is to create an alternative, more positive image of women. Instead of merely showing women masochistically suffering as victims of oppression and victimization, this theatre shows them fighting these forces and emerging victorious. Street theatre emphasizes the need to meet obstacles through sisterhood and solidarity. The aim is to pose questions rather than provide blueprints of solutions, and to convey its message through the truth of experience rather than by rhetoric or propaganda.

Domestic/family violence is commonly used in South Asian in place of 'wife assault', a term that donates accurately what the writer means to express.

Prostitution and Equality:

LOOKING AT THE CUSTOMER

by

MARGARETHA JARVINEN

[Margaretha Jarvinen of the Institute of Criminal Science, University of Copenhagen was born in 1955. She is currently studying prostitution and social control in the metropolitan Helsinki area. Her licentiate dissertation "Police and prostitution in Helsinki", was published in 1987. She has previously worked for the Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research (NAD). She has published articles on women and alcohol and has edited reports on women's studies on alcohol and drugs, women's use of prescribed drugs and on women, alcohol and treatment].

We all know that prostitution has something to do with inequality - between men and women, social classes, rich and poor societies. We know that some women in poor countries turn to prostitution because they have few or no economic alternatives. We also know that prostitution is connected with the social-sexual objectification of women that permeates every patriarchal society in the world. Identifying women first as sexual beings who are responsible for the sexual services of men is the social base for gender-specific prostitution. We also know that "sex tours" arranged for Western males to Third World countries is a very lucrative business. In these "close encounters with the Third World" well-off males from rich countries buy themselves access to poor women from poor countries. In Third World countries, it has been said, Western males find the submissive females, they no longer find in their own part of the world. In rich welfare countries gender equality has partially eradicated "the know-how", the skills, the proper attitudes of "the world's oldest profession".

This article is not about prostitution in Third World countries. It is about prostitution and gender equality/inequality in Scandinavia: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, the home countries of some of the male "sex tourists". What kind of gender relationships do these men leave behind when they travel abroad; what kind of heterosexual prostitution do they find in their own countries?

The Nordic, Scandinavian countries are among the richest nations of the world, with welfare systems that should secure that nobody is forced into prostitution by destitution

alone. Gender equality in Scandinavia is, according to many studies, higher than in most other countries. In a publication by the Population Crises Committee (1988), equality between men and women is measured in five areas: health, marriage and children, education, employment and social equality. In all these areas Scandinavian women rank very high. For example, the educational level of women is extremely good in Nordic countries, women's share of paid employment is the world's highest, "social equality" (here legal, economic and family variables are included) is, in Finland and Sweden, greater than in any other of the 99 countries studied.

What about prostitution then, in our rich and comparatively equal, welfare countries?

Prostitution has, in the last decade, been studied intensively in Sweden, Norway and Finland. One common feature in this new Scandinavian research is that prostitution is expressly defined and analyzed as a mode of gender interaction. Traditionally, in research and public discussion, the interest has been directed towards the (usually female) prostitute, while the (male) customer in sexual commerce has remained invisible. Prostitution has been synonymous with "the whore" - sinful, evil and a natural object for contempt and moral punishment. Mass media, public opinion, welfare agencies have focussed on the prostitute, on her personal and social characteristics and shortcomings. In practice prostitution is decriminalized in all Nordic countries but this does not mean that prostitutes are socially accepted. Women in commercial sex are regarded as social and/or psychological delinquents. Male customers, if noticed at all, are described as blameless visitors, driven to the prostitution milieu by unmanageable sexual urge.

The customers - poor cripples or masculine heroes?

An important task in the new Scandinavian prostitution research then, has been to study the customers. Who are they, these invisible buyers of commercial sex, and what are their motives for entering the prostitution scene?

One common view is that prostitution is needed in our societies because it is used by men with physical, psychological or social handicaps, men without chances on the noncommercial sex market. These men then, too old, too ugly, too sick, too fat, too thin - however and by whoever they are described - should, according to this view, form the basis of the prostitution market. To deprive them of the prostitute's services would mean to push them into unbearable loneliness.

If you ask a prostitute "who are the men coming to you", you get a somewhat different picture of the clients. Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish prostitutes usually respond: "all kinds of men". They indicate that the customers do not belong to any special categories, that they do not deviate from the "normal", "average" man. According to the prostitutes there is nothing unusual in the men's appearance or behaviour. Some customers are married, some single, some are young, some middle aged or old, some are working class some middle class, and so on.

Here I shall refer to one of Scandinavian studies of customers: Sven-Axel Mansson and Ann-Ulla Linders' "Sexuality Without a Face" (1984). In this interview study 883 Swedish males were asked if they ever had had sexual contact with a prostitute; 20% (170) answered "yes". Interestingly enough the majority of these customers said that they had gotten their sexual commerce experiences abroad, typically, outside Europe; only one fifth of the 170 men said that they had visited a Swedish prostitute. What we see here is, in part, the effect of the sex-tours to "exotic" countries, especially Thailand and the Philippines. As a matter of fact some of the interviewees emphasized that they could never imagine going to a

prostitute in Sweden. Buying sex abroad however was seemingly an inevitable routine affair for many men - a reminiscence of the times when masculine colonizers thought they have the natural right to appropriate the colonies' women?

Mansson and Linders also try to map the men's motives for buying sex, abroad and in Sweden. Their analysis demonstrate three groups of motives.

Firstly: "curiosity and sexual variation". Curiosity motives often appear to have their origin in the extensive myth-building around prostitution which flourishes in pornographic magazines. The prostitute is supposed to be a "sexual animal", sexually aggressive and experienced, at the same time humble, willing to fulfill men's secret fantasies. For these men, "the whores" and the sex trade milieus are sources of erotic "forbidden" fantasies. Some of them say they have sexual desires which they cannot, or dare not, express in non-paid relationships. For example, it is quite common that the customers want to be sexually passive and submissive with a woman, something that the traditional masculine role "forbids". During a limited time and with well preserved anonymity they buy themselves the right to be weak!

Secondly, "contact problems and loneliness": the motives in this group all describe men's difficulties in approaching women. They felt they lacked the courage to make contact with women other than just prostitutes. The risk of being rejected by women was a constant threat to these men's self-confidence. Prostitutes are, according to the myths at least, women who "never say no". In the long run however, occasional meetings with paid women cannot fill the emotional vacuum the men experience.

Thirdly, "problems in marriage": the men in this group are married but describe their marriages as unsatisfactory, not only sexually. They continue to live in a couple-relationship, they share "children, house and car" - but apparently nothing else - with their wives. They rationalize: "we do not understand each other, there is no reason in trying any longer, I prefer going to a whore". They seek a female sex object and they, sometimes, find this in prostitution. But they also seek something else: a new partner, an unproblematic, lasting human relationship - in this respect the commercial sexual market usually has very little to offer.

Mansson and Linder's study gives a much more complicated picture of why men go to prostitutes, than I have summarized here. What I wanted to show, however, was that all the different motives have something to do with gender roles and the patriarchally-coloured sexuality in our societies. The customers interviewed were not physical or mental "cripples", they were not abnormal in any sense, neither were they "masculine heroes" boasting over their sexual conquests. They were normal Swedish men struggling with an ancient masculine role restricting them in their social and sexual lives. They were normal men seeking something - "sexual fulfillment", personal intimacy and closeness, a "perfect" companion - that prostitution could not give them.

The prostitutes - deviant sluts or successful courtesans?

Prostitutes have traditionally been described in either of two ways: (usually:) as highly deviant misfits with all kinds of psychological defects, or (more seldom:) as attractive, successful, even influential "kept women", courtesans. These views of the prostitutes have been scrutinized in many research reports.

In the Norwegian study "Backstreets" (1986) Cecilie Hoigard and Liv Finstad analyzes the prostitution market in Oslo. After many years of contacts with young street prostitutes, the authors describe the women in commercial sex, not as psychological misfits, but as socially deprived persons. The girls typically have a working class background, many of them come from one-parent families with social and economic problems, and a majority have, for

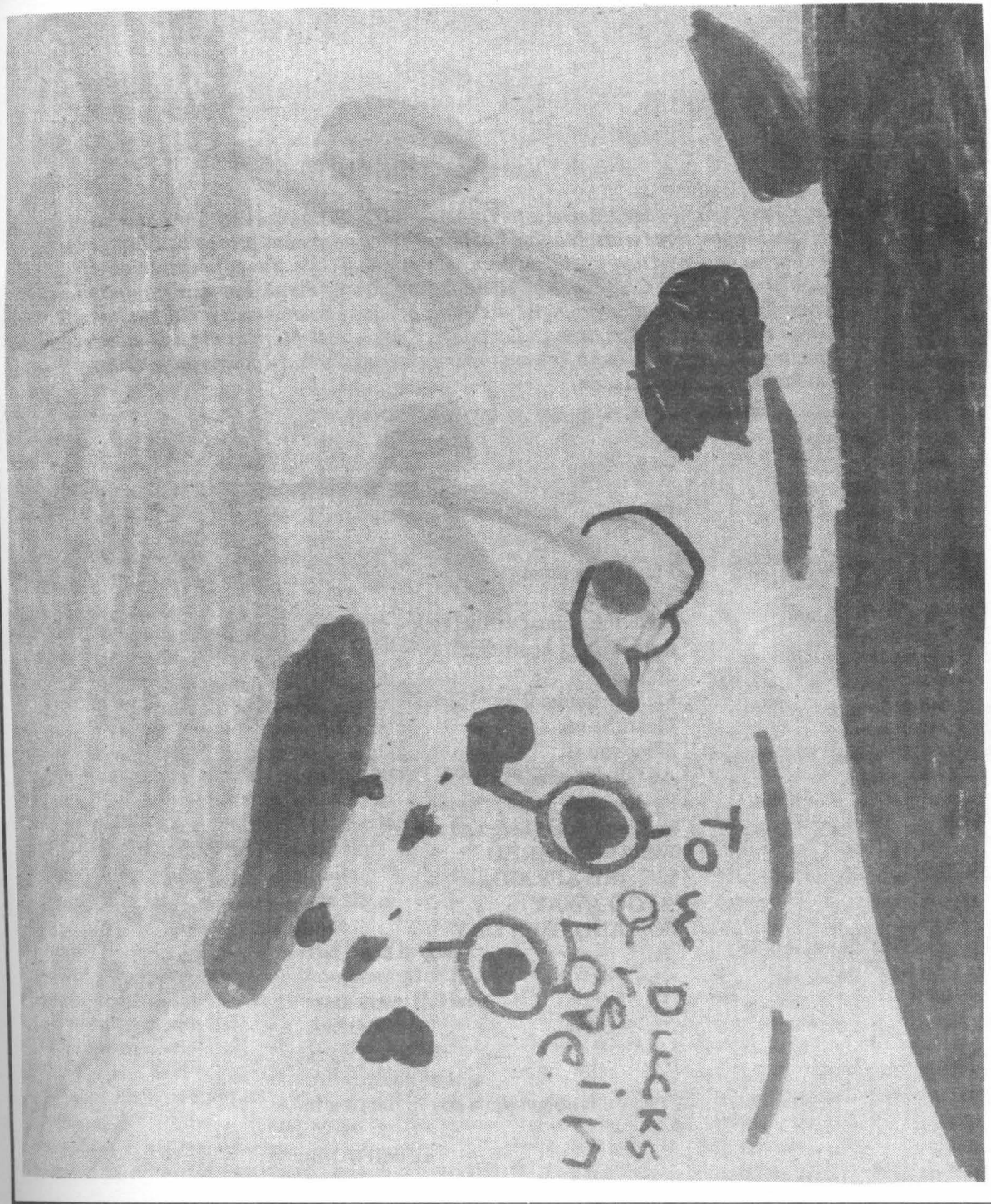
shorter or longer periods, lived in children's or young persons' institutions. Prostitution does not only represent "easy money" and a way out of relative poverty for these young girls, it also represents "belonging" to a new social network formed by prostitutes, pimps and other persons "in the life". The attraction of prostitution for today's young women partly lies in the prevailing sex inequality in the labour market. Women, and especially women with limited education, still have to face a comparative scarcity of well-paid employment. This, in combination with the conception that women's bodies are saleable commodities - perhaps the most important message of the whole sex industry - makes prostitution a thinkable, if not attractive alternative.

In my own study of Finnish prostitutes "Kept Women and Fallen Women" (1987) I found no signs of any "psychopathology" among the prostitutes. The study is based on a very large police material and personal interviews with 30 prostitutes, among them bar - and callgirls, representing the "Elite" in sexual commerce. The women I met were not, as far as I could see, "mentally deficient", "overtly narcissistic", "affectionless" or "workshy male-haters" - just to mention a few epithets traditionally attributed to prostitutes. Neither were the bar and callgirls I met influential courtesans, earning a fortune on men's sexual starvation. They were, in outlook and attitudes (towards work, men, children or whatever we discussed) very normal Finnish women, neither pitiable nor glamorous. Their motives for turning to prostitution were purely economic. They compared their earnings now with what they got earlier, in typical female low-pay, dead-end jobs and found that commercial sex, in spite of the problems connected with it, was what they preferred. Many interviewees were aware of the risk of self degradation in prostitution, they were afraid of violence, alcohol - and drug problems, social and economic exploitation connected with sexual commerce. They knew that women in prostitution function as sex objects, dependent on men, their money and their, sometimes bizarre desires. But, as some of the prostitutes said: "we are oppressed, yes, but are we more oppressed than other women in society?"

To conclude then: prostitution has not disappeared from our Nordic welfare countries. Scandinavian men do pay for sex tours to "exotic countries" but this is not because gender equality in their own societies has eradicated prostitution. The customers, and the prostitutes are typically not, as we have seen, abnormal individuals, a strange reminiscence of yesteryear, they are "normal" men and women, struggling with gender - and class - inequality. Prostitution is not a world apart from us, it is bound up with our everyday lives, a reflection of all male-female relationships.

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by **AMIL NIAZI** (Grade 1, Gledhill Public School, East York, Toronto)

Poems

Miriam Khan Durrani

[Miriam Khan Durrani (age 12) came to Toronto from Pakistan in 1986. She has been living here for the past three years. Mariam has been writing poetry and prose since the age of seven. Poems presented here are taken from her upcoming collection of poems titled "I Fear the Animal, fear the Cat" due to be published this year by Purple Poppy. Diva feels proud in publishing the creative writing of this young poetess who at such a young age has been able to capture our hearts through her poetry. Diva wishes Mariam the best in her future creative endeavors and looks forward to her upcoming book. All poems are courtesy of Purple Poppy, Toronto, Canada].

Fears

I fear the animal
fear the cat
I fear the animal will scratch
it stays in my heart that it will

I fear the animal
I fear the cat
I fear you all
All tall and small
So don't jump up in the air
and scratch me here and there
WE ARE SCARED
WE ARE AFRAID
SO GO AWAY
FOR ANOTHER DAY

Walking Down the Lane of Imagination

Hold the noise,
Close your eyes from the real world
Shut them
And walk...

All you can hear
is the sound of you stepping on the autumn leaves
Now
IMAGINE...

The scenery is
white,
the scenery is
green,
the scenery can shine
you're walking down
the path,
and the path is in the sky
IMAGINE...

you're bigger than the stars
the sky's
not the limit
the sky's
white
the sky is
blue
the sky is bright

walk down the lane
and the lane
is on the pond
All you can hear is
the sound of you stepping on the water
Now
IMAGINE...

Who's In the Cages

Am I?
inside the cages
Or... Are they?
inside the cages
the ones with beautiful hair
and faces so fair
Are we?
inside the cages
the ones who don't seem to have beautiful hair
and their faces aren't too fair
Are they?
outside the cages
Or... Are we?
outside the cages
the ones that aren't noticed
and the ones who are not appreciated
Maybe it's us
inside the cages
But so are they!...

As the Flowers Die

As the flowers die
I give out an endless sigh

As the flowers frown
I whisper goodbye

As the roses
wither
I know I will never
see them again

And now they are dead
standing still in the
red, shiny flower pot,
which shows no beauty,
like in the past

Now I put in, another pair,
of lovely red roses

In Your Heart

Take a look in your heart
and see what you've got
inside,
show it around
Don't you know
you're special enough
as every body else
You deserve attention
Show me what you have
in your heart
and I'll let you know
if you need to feel insecure
don't you know
you're special enough
you've got enough guts
believe me
to go out into the world
Well you're saying that's not enough?
- do you have personality
do you have a sense of humour
inside,
Are you yourself
A human Being
with a mind,
inside
do you feel?
Can you feel?

Can you fall in love?

Can't You See?

Can't you see
I can't be
what you want
what you please
I can't
wear a mask
I am me, Go away
or accept my way
do I have to raise my voice
to make you understand
I have no choice,
I am what I am...

Don't Pass Away
[Dedicated to AMI JAN]

Don't pass away
before my eyes
you don't know what it means
to me, to pay my regards

It isn't just my regards that matter,
It's that I didn't get to say farewell
and That's what matters

Don't close your eyes
behind my back
seeing your eyes closed before
I could kiss your forehead
makes me mad

It makes me cry
for an incredibly long time
This can't be
it's hard to believe
that I will no longer see your
alive smile
and your golden eyes, which
always have a shine!

It hits me in my heart
like a bullet, and I no longer
want to live either...

But that shall happen in my
own time
I think I'm feeling a little calm
but it's hard to believe
that you are gone
YOURS MARIAM

A Dream

by

RANI

He loves me
He calls my spirit
puts it in my body
my eyes open and I see
an angel leaning on me
with a smile on his face
and tears in his eyes
Oh! How innocent and
peaceful this face is

He was right
whatever
he did to me
I am the sinner
He had the right to punish me
I am the sinner,
I am the one who's guilty.

I open my arms
invite him for a hug
pain is gone, misery is gone
Everything becomes pretty
My eyes open again
It was a dream

But why?
Why do I have
this dream?
Do I want to have this dream?
again?
and again?
Or
Am I scared?
Scared to open my eyes?

Prayer On The Road To Harihar

by

SARA MATHAI STINUS

Her firstborn was the colour of wild honey
His laughter was like the tinkle of cowbells
The evening breeze ruffled his curly locks
As he strained to catch the golden light
Shimmering on her green glass bangle.
The magic of the child was irresistible
It quickened the father's steps at dusk
Put a lilting song in the mother's throat.
But seized by sudden fear of such happiness
She smeared his eyes with home-made kohl
So no evil eye would dare cast its spell,
She placated the family deity with marigold
But no antidote had she for the sickness
That gripped him in his fifteenth month.
Too late, all too late did the oxen trudge
The rough road to Harihar, the final hope.
The small hands were turning limp
The lustre was no longer in the eyes
The lids half closed, the throat clogged
The struggle was on, barely audible.
She held her dearest burden close
Shielding it from Yama, the God of death
While her silent lips repeated
An endless prayer to Krishna for pity
But Krishna was out playing the flute
Flirting with his favourite milkmaids
Spilt were the prayers on the road to Harihar.

Dreams

Trapped by dreams
we fly high
into daring skies
soaring above clouds
on wings of Pegasus
seeking, pursuing
the glittering trail
of our hopeful destiny
while the alert eyes of time
drives night and day
into the fold of exhausted years.

All too sudden
the stars cease to shine
cold and lonely
we begin to dream
of the once-dreams
now wingless
slipping earthward.
As we land bewildered
time gathers us gently
and carries us and our dreams
to the land of no-dreams

The Black Sea

Filling my horizon
you lie stretched out
draped in shimmering silk
whispering my name
as your eyes caress me.
Lithe of movement
your dancing hands with bejewelled fingers
tempt me with their white glitter
to seek your embrace.
Your heaving bosom
hides under the blue-green robe
the dark secret of your being
I have longed to taste.
Our sighs merge
as I take the plunge
and together we are eternal.
Reluctant but satiated
I rise and depart
salt in every pore
and pebbles in my hair
ready to meet the day.

The Call

Come all, tarry not
Hasten, it's late
And sharp the chill.
Come on and dally not
Bring your vitality
Bring your warmth
Let's breathe in unison
See, the hot vapours rise
Join hands, breathe deep
Watch how the ice melts away
Crystals of fire and heat
Drip drop by drop, a brook now.
Raise your voices, for sure
It's a babbling stream
Watering starved fields
Swelling hope, filling bowls.
Listen to the hum of wheels
Spinning the new rhythm
There's rejoicing in the air
As spades loosen earth
No longer forfeited.
Fetters of fear flinch
And take to flight,
Hostages no longer
We create the future
Our song is in the making.
Come sister, come brother
Our spirit is all it takes
To effect simple wonders.
Come all, tarry not
Hear the call of the earth
Let's inflate it with life.

My Black Sea

As the sun leans down
to plant a red-mouthed kiss
on the upturned face of the sea
birds fly out of my heart
to warmer shores of the south.
Bereft of its glory
the widowed sky mourns
and her loosened locks
cast an ash-gray veil
on the dazed waters
and the chant of sad winds
is heard tapping
on the window of my memories.
The stars come out
one by one into the night
but the dark sea eager
to hurry the dallying moon
rocks back and forth
and I fall captive
to its rhythmic restlessness
and am ferried across
to sleep's lonely cell.

Lullaby

Hush little one, fear not the darkness
it is but the covering under which
night receives the day, its beloved,
Watch child, how the day disappears
behind the screen of purple hills
into the open embrace of the night.
Now close your eyes dear, and sleep
only then will their love bear fruit
and Dawn their splendid offspring
with lucid eyes and golden locks
shall greet you with gentle breezes
and the twitters of a thousand birds.
Sleep my brown-eyed one, have no fear.

[Born and educated in India, Sara Mathai Stinus married a Danish writer. Both worked in Tanzania as Adult Education teachers and organizers with Danish volunteer services. Now in Copenhagen, Sara teaches at university, folk high schools and gives talks on Indian social conditions and women. Author of three books, she writes in Danish. These poems are from a few she wrote in English].

When I Was Twelve

by

CHRISTINE DONALD

When I was twelve, I used to go
to the joke shop and buy jokes I never played
on anyone.
I particularly favoured
imitation biscuits and chocolate
that yielded neither taste nor comfort.

A treacherous world I lived in, full of
things that looked
like other things that might
or might not explode

[Christine Donald is the author of The Fat Woman Measures Up (1986) and The Breaking Up Poems (1988), both available as book and audio-cassette from the Toronto Women's Bookstore and from Ragweed Press, Box 2023, Charlottetown PEI, C1A 7N7].



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