

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women

Divva



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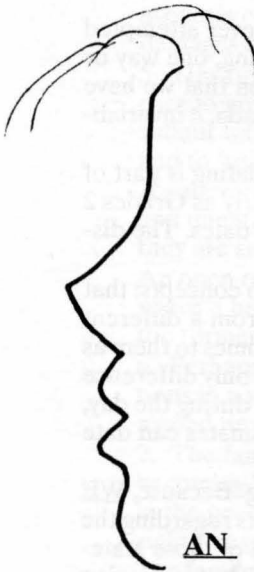
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CONTENTS

1.	Dating: The South Asian Experience	3
	Divya Editorial Committee	
2.	Why do Men Rape Women?	12
	Annalise Kongstad	
3.	Sexual Normality? Abnormality?	16
	Bhooma Bhayana	
4.	Fact Sheet on Women's Fight Against Media	20
	Holly A. Handspiker	
5.	Prostitution: Reality of a Profession	25
	Amita Dhillon	
6.	Obituary: The Late General Zia of Pakistan	30
	Kris	
7.	Collectibles: 1	34
8.	Son Preference in India	35
	Brenda Cranney	
9.	Memory of An Unpaid Debt	47
	Fauzia Rafiq	
10.	Poems	53
	Suniti Namjoshi and Gill Hanscombe	

Forum
Toronto, Canada



AN
EXPLORATORY
ANALYSIS



Dating:

THE SOUTH ASIAN EXPERIENCE



prepared by

DIVA EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

It is observed that numerous issues relating to women, especially relating to sexuality of women, are tabooed by the South Asian community in Canada. Most serious implication of tabooing those comes out in a stubborn attitude that refuses to accept the existence of those issues barring all discussion on them. This stubbornness makes it impos-

sible for the community to begin to resolve them, resulting in a prolonged torment for families and young women.

One of the basic reasons for the publication of a journal like *Diva*, was to bring those issues out in the open and to begin to discuss them enabling women and the community to work towards a positive resolution.

INTRODUCTION

'Dating' is one of the tabooed issues that the South Asian community never attempted to discuss, understand or resolve in any constructive way. The fact that dating, one way or another, effects every young woman growing up in Canada is an assumption that we have small reason to doubt. And if it effects every young woman growing up in Canada, it invariably effects a large majority of South Asian families.

South Asian girls are inducted into the Canadian school system where dating is part of mainstream culture. Girls and boys become conscious of this tradition as early as Grades 2 or 3. By the time they enter Grade 8, some of their classmates are going on dates. The discussion about 'going out' with 'so-and-so' starts even earlier than that.

South Asian girls, from their early teens usually become conscious of two concepts: that dating is a normal practice for young girls and boys, and that, they being from a different value system are not to participate in this activity. This parallel realization comes to them as clearly and definitively as the moon and the night or the sun and the day. The only difference is, they might, by then, know exactly why the moon rises at night and the sun during the day, but they have little or no opportunity to understand why most of their classmates can date and why they themselves can't.

The answer to "why I can't" usually followed by a simple and intimidating "Because, WE DON'T". This small sentence is then followed by a few judgmental statements regarding the 'badness' of Western values and the 'goodness' of our own culture. Either of those statements might not have been made in order to give any insight into the two cultures, leaving an inquisitive, intelligent and impressionable teenager to grapple with the question with no tools for a positive understanding or resolution of an issue that she would have to face most of her youth. She has to face it, she has no other choice. She cannot, even if she wanted to, taboo the issue and try to forget about it: a route her family and her community has expressly taken.

Her situation becomes acutely painful:

1. She has been negated at two levels; she cannot go on dates, and she has given no viable or solid reason for why she cannot go on dates.
2. She already faces the stigma of being what is condescendingly called 'the visible minority', and not being able to do what the majority of her classmates feel entitled to, is doubtless adding to the stigma.
3. The projected standards of beauty and attractiveness of women as divulged by advertisements, television serials, soap operas, art films, commercial films, teen novels and other story books are diametrically opposed to what her own physical appearance is. She was conscious of this way before the question of dating became a practical problem to deal with. She was given the feeling that she was definitely not pretty and sometimes not even attractive. Not only can she not do what most "popular" girls in

out. These realities confirm for her the fatal feeling she had all along; she is ugly and unbecoming. The psychologists or social workers who work with youth know how destructive this feeling and its confirmation possibly can be for a young person already grappling with her growing body and mind. This feeling has been known to have produced suicidal tendencies in the youth -- boys or girls.

4. Her isolation again is twofold; on one hand, she cannot confide with her family as to how she feels about her appearance, sexuality, dating; and on the other hand, she cannot discuss this question with her classmates because, more often than not, this aspect is considered by them as "weird" and "oh-so-backward". The fact that it further damages her self-esteem is not something that happens just occasionally.

5. Her oppression as a young woman and as a member of a community that doesn't care to give any viable reasons for its values, can force her into doing three things: to submit totally to the unexplained value system of her community; to rebel against it; and to "safely" rebel against it.

A safe rebellion is probably the worst kind of rebellion because it calls for distorted and unnatural measures like lying and sneaking. It is true that no one feels good when they are sneaking or lying.

An open rebellion in a South Asian family might take too much in emotional energy to prove a healthier alternative to the safe rebellion. A total submission might become too tormenting producing morbidity and introversion.

6. Perhaps the only gain that is made in this routine is rifts within a family and distortions in a young girl who had to work so hard to go on a date that she can rarely have a good time or is unable to evolve a healthy relationship with her date.

7. The family, on the other hand, is living through the worst fears. Of their daughter becoming "loose" and unfit for an arranged marriage since she might lose her virginity in the process. Conflicting emotions due to religious concepts that negate a woman's right to express her sexuality in any healthier manner.

The family attempts to "protect" her by repressive measures; making her feel sinful and guilty, isolating her from her friends, withdrawing certain privileges, abusing her physically, forcibly marrying her off, etc.

This state of affairs, obviously, is not taking anyone anywhere. We call for an open discussion on it with the view that it might create some basis for understanding the issue thus leading to a resolution that is liberating for both women and families hopefully resulting in a change in the attitude of the community towards women.

CULTURAL FACTORS

In Canada, girls generally start to date, with their parents' consent, on a one to one basis at approximately fourteen years of age. There are exceptions to this related to religious and cultural backgrounds but it would be fair to say that fourteen is the mean age of onset of dating. Diva editorial committee felt that it was important to explore with South Asian women how they fit into the 'dating game' in Canada.

In South Asia, any liaison between young men and women leading to marriage is not needed or desired because marriage partners are chosen by the families and not individuals

themselves. It is important for us to understand the tradition of arranged marriages. This tradition is a derivative of two major factors:

1. South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal) despite some industrial development and urbanization still depend heavily on agriculture in their economies. It might not be unrealistic to say that 75 to 80% of their economic structure is entwined in feudal relations of production. Feudal relations of production give the patriarchal family-formation an absolute right to own their offspring the way they would own landed property, farm animals and the labour of their children and women.
2. Dominant religions (Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism) provide ideological basis for these ownership rights giving them sanctity and mystical value.
3. This combination provides patriarchal system with an absolute control over their children, especially female children. This absolute control is instituted by role-fixation of boys and girls at an early age; determining their career plans; making alliances with other family/clans through arranging marriages; protection or acquisition of property or privilege through these alliances.
4. Children are conceived as an asset to be traded. This asset, if a woman, cannot be traded well if she is not a virgin because, the biggest value this asset has, is her virginity.
5. The value system of propertied classes, it has been made desirable for those as well who don't have property or privilege.

When families arrive in a country where a system has historically gone past taking their children as part of their property, where liaison between women and men is permissible prior to marriage, where women have, over decades, fought and gained some rights to their persons and bodies doubtless poses a major threat for families and a tormenting conflict for young women.

QUESTIONNAIRE

To test this hypothesis we developed an extensive questionnaire that was used as basis of personal interviews. Originally, we had developed two questionnaires, one to be used with young women the other to be used with parents/families. But due to financial constraints we were unable to do both so we chose to begin with young women.

The women that we interviewed originated from India and Pakistan and ranged from twelve to thirty five years of age. The length of residence in Canada varied from one year to twenty four years. Women interviewed came from various religious backgrounds including: Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Jain. And represented various communities: Punjab in the north and Kerala in the south.

As discussed in an article in this issue 'Son Preference in India' there is quite a discrepancy in belief systems in these areas even among people of the same religious group. With the number of variables that have been cited above it would seem that to come to any consensus about 'how South Asian women view dating' would be impossible. This was not the case, in fact, some questions elicited the same answer from all respondents suggesting that feelings of sexist oppression cross barriers of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

The questionnaire consisted of thirty-one questions that were devised to elicit in-depth personal responses. The respondents were reassured of the confidentiality of the material as they were concerned about their families finding out about their views on sexuality as it might relate to dating.

RESPONSES

The first question asked was, "Did you ever go on a 'date'?" All except two, had gone on a date.

The next question asked **whether or not dating was an accepted practice in their family**. The women almost unanimously responded 'NO' with the one exception stating "Yes, because it was forced on them (the parents)".

Response to another question "if your parents were supportive of dating?" was again quite negative:

"My parents have no knowledge of my 'dating practices'",

"No, because it was not an accepted practice in their culture",

"Because I go to university my parents are unaware of my social life".

The responses to these three questions clearly demonstrate the dichotomy that South Asian women face. The familial expectation was that women do not date yet in spite of this most women do date .

Women's decision to go against their father's wishes was not made lightly . Many of the women talked about the inward struggles that tormented them. They were aware of the cultural attitudes within their own race but could not accept them. The following comments were made when asked **why their fathers did not allow dating**:

"Fear on my behalf".

"Divorce rate higher here".

"Patriarchal protective attitude".

"Fear of (me) not having a stable married life".

" (fear of me losing my) virginity".

"Hope that I would get arranged marriage (instead of choosing my own partner through dating)".

" (My) studies would be neglected".

" Girl's respectability - girl is like a white sheet, anything can spot it" (various respondents).

Resistance on the part of the family took the form of:

"imposing curfews right after school".

"checking up, spying".

"calling police when half an hour late".

"isolating from friends".

"not allowed to go out of house".

"not talking to me".

"pressure on mother".
"emotional blackmail".
"physical threats".

Women resisted by playing "hide and seek, lying and sneaking out". They felt that they could not live within the patriarchal confines that suppressed them as women.

As well as being in conflict with their own families and culture, South Asian women were also placed in conflictual positions with their peers and with Canadian society in general. A number of questions were asked that addressed how South Asian women interacted with their Canadian born peers. The responses were fraught with anger and despair. The responses to the question **'How did you feel at school with girls of your age group who went on dates as part of their culture?'** were painful to hear. These included:

"immature".
"(felt like children not women/girls) much younger".
"jealous (of girls)"
"missing out on fun"
"was considered (by them as) non-human in terms of dating"
"left out".

When asked **how their classmates responded to them**, were they pitied, isolated, made fun of or looked down upon: painful recollections were shared.

"It was distasteful, not making fun of but (thinking I was) weird and yukky".
"Arranged marriage was primitive".
"Yes, excluded".
"(it is) part of much bigger thing. One stigma among so many". "One of the things for which I was looked down upon. Felt suicidal".
"Looked down upon because (they conceived me) of backward culture".
"Sometimes I feel bad, but I do look on the positive side. I would think, somebody would like me and I would be allowed to go on dates and then they will know they were wrong".

In developing the questionnaire the committee felt that **differing approaches to dating in the South Asian community from that of the mainstream culture would be one factor that would elicit racial discrimination** and therefore asked the respondents if this was their experience.

The women were equally divided in their response to this question, half saying it had no bearing the other half feeling strongly that it led to discrimination. One woman commented that "teenagers in the 70's were into 'Paki-bashing'. If you weren't at dances and parties it makes you out of it."

Others commented that you were discriminated against because of your cultural attitudes and colour.

Intensity of racism that some experienced indicates that racism in this regard is obviously a problem and that this question should be explored further. Experiencing racism leads to feelings of alienation and isolation as well as anger towards a society in general that is rejecting you.

South Asian women also faced an inner conflict separate from cultural, familial, and peer conflict; a conflict that raised questions about their own self worth. Many acknowledged having feelings of self-pity as well as feeling confused, angry and frustrated. One woman comments,

"I felt anger distributed between classmates, parents, new culture and cultural background".

Women interviewed had been exposed to conflict in all areas of their life. When asked if they had resolved conflicts between cultures only two responded in the affirmative. The most common response was that they were still resolving the problem.

"I rationalized - each culture has certain considerations which prove practical if one has to live in that culture. There is a lot of stress in respecting one's parents as well".

The dilemma that women found themselves in elicited much hostility towards parents. All women felt that they should have had the opportunity to date with their parent's permission instead of sneaking around.

"I didn't like the deception - full of guilt".

"No hope in parent\daughter relationship".

"Everyone should be able to do what they want, feel free".

"not always have to fight oppression".

The women interviewed were unanimous in their agreement that they would allow their daughters to date.

Although all of the women felt that dating was an important part of growing up, concerns were raised about the entire concept of dating. The 'dating game' was seen as hypocritical in that it was oppressive for women. A double standard is still apparent with males wielding the power. Women continue to struggle with society's reluctance to address women's sexuality. Sexual activity in dating is usually initiated by the male with little understanding of what it means to the woman. The feelings that the South Asian women raised concerning this were similar to those raised by the conscious section of white Canadian women.

When the respondents were asked the question "how do you feel about the concept 'dating'?" they were quite verbal on this issue.

1. "It has to be understood in the (Canadian) cultural context. Dating seems to fulfill a function. It would probably lead to exercising more choice (for women) than being channeled into arranged marriages against their will".

2. "If you teach your sons and daughters social and moral responsibility there still will be a double standard. Boys don't get pregnant and do not worry about contraceptives (but we have to)".
3. "There is a basic lack of identifying and dealing with and/or a lack of recognition of a woman's sexuality and this is common to both cultures. This leaves a woman helpless in the dating situation. It is a difficult thing in a woman's life (dating/relationships) throughout. It's still difficult for me but one tries. Sometimes I don't, because of the kind of men one can meet. I feel it has to come from men too for any kind of a positive relationship to develop from dating".
4. "I feel it should be a person's choice to date or not date though the issues of 'dating' and healthy gender attitudes should be defined. If we are to eliminate the oppression of women we should start young and not have differential sex-roles and there by a differential power dynamic between men and women - oppressive to women eventually".
5. "Hypocritical. (Dating) contains its own oppression. This oppression manifests itself on various levels".
6. "A lot of pressure to be heterosexual. Different system but it (also) is geared toward getting (the woman) married and all that".
7. "Getting women to fulfill the role that they always fulfilled".

The question "what would you recommend the attitude of the South Asian community should be towards 'dating'?" also elicited strong opinions. They were:

1. "(should be) Liberal. More liberal".
2. "Should be a bit broadminded".
3. "It's natural for a young girl to want to go dating. Parents should be more open with children and should have communication with children".
4. "One should talk about it openly (within community) and create a safe attitude regarding this issue".
5. "I think it should be allowed. Women should be treated as independent individuals who have choices".
6. "Women should be allowed to go dating - to make their own decisions. *It is important because the community by opposing it so much makes it (dating) seem as if it was a great opportunity for freedom which it actually is not.* So if we were allowed to know that we could move on from there".
7. "First, to recognize it as an issue, to try and eliminate the fear of sexuality of women. They (the community) have to openly talk to the young women in their families".

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the responses presented throughout this article that young South Asian women are in a 'Catch-22' situation. They are struggling with restrictions placed on them by their culture and with the expectations placed on them by their Canadian peers. The Canadian dating scene that they are trying to enter has its own restrictions as women have pointed out. Our patriarchal ideology continues to inform dating practices in Canadian society. 'Women's Lib' was touted as causing a sexual revolution whereby it was permissible

Canadian dating scene that they are trying to enter has its own restrictions as women have pointed out. Our patriarchal ideology continues to inform dating practices in Canadian society. 'Women's Lib' was touted as causing a sexual revolution whereby it was permissible for girls to do the 'asking'. In discussions with young Canadian girls it seems that the boys still retain the power in dating relationships, asking for dates, initiating sexual activity and proposing marriage.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

This article was an exploratory analysis intended to highlight concerns facing South Asian women regarding dating practices. It is an area that needs much more indepth research and open forums of discussion between the parents and women on one hand and between South Asian women and their Canadian peers on the other. These open discussions are to be organised with a view to create lines of communication and understanding between the two groups that the young South Asian women are feeling oppression from. This oppression persists because of the elicited opposing groups but stemming from the same root; the conflicting concepts regarding sexuality of women in South Asian context in Canada.

We welcome any response or reaction to the opinions expressed, (deadline for sending material Dec. 15/88).

Why do men rape women?

by

ANNALISE KONGSTAD.



"It appears that need for sexual release is not the primary motive of a sexual aggressor..... A primary goal of the sexual aggressor, it is clear, is the conquest and degradation of his victim". (Davis, cit. Schwendinger and Schwendinger).

"..... and the intent is not merely to "take" but to humiliate and degrade". (Brownmiller).

Most contemporary literature from Western countries argues that the act of rape is a manifestation of men's intent to degrade and conquer women. This explanation has its root in the American womens movement. No doubt the author who has had the greatest influence on the spreading of this explanation in the debate concerning rape is Susan Brownmiller. Her book "Against Our Will. Men, Women and rape" was translated and published in most Western countries in the middle of the 70's. Brownmiller said that her purpose was to give rape a history, taking rape in war as her paradigmatic case. Her worthwhile historical examination of was rape and her demonstration that rape has always been part of the conqueror's suppression of his enemy is an important contribution to the understanding of rape.

On war rape Susan Brownmiller says:

"War provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women. The very maleness of the military - the brute power of weaponry exclusive to their hands, the spiritual bonding of men at arms, the manly discipline of orders given and

orders obeyed, the simple logic of the hierarchical command - confirms for men what they long suspect, that women are peripheral, irrelevant to the world that counts, passive spectators to the action in the centre ring.

Men who rape in war are ordinary Joes, made unordinary by entry into the most exclusive male-only club in the world. Victory in arms brings group power undreamed of in civilian life. Power for men alone. The unreal situation of a world without women becomes the prime reality. To take a life looms more significant than to make a life, and the gun in the hand is power. The sickness of warfare feeds on itself. A certain number of soldiers must prove their newly won superiority - prove it to a woman, to themselves, to other men. In the name of victory and the power of the gun, provides men with a tacit licence to rape. In the act and in the excuse, rape in war reveals the male psyche in its boldest form, without the veneer of 'chivalry' or civilization".

Over a number of years I - together with three women - have been working with different aspects of the complex problems of rape, and I have become more and more convinced that this explanation of men's motives for raping women is an oversimplification.

To explain the act of rape I think one must depart from that particular manifestation of rape which is most common in a given society at a given time. Accordingly, I think that Brownmiller makes a mistake when she generalizes from war rape to rape in general. As I see it, war rape must be understood in its specific context. Raping the female members of a population is part of the general destruction of the enemy. Soldiers kill men, burn houses, and rape women. War rape tells more about the advancing army and its relation to the enemy than about men's relation to women. The fact that the women are raped shows the nature of women's oppression inherent in rape. This in itself is essential.

The first quotation in this paper has been used to support the explanation that rape serves to degrade and humiliate the victim. The quotation is taken from a paper by Davis on men sexually assaulting men in an American prison. As in the case of war rape, this type of rape must be understood in relation to its special context. Prison society forms a hierarchical system which prison rape serves to support.

Thus, while I agree that neither prison rape nor war rape are primarily sexually motivated but serve to degrade and conquer the victims, I do not agree that the motives behind men's rape in prison and in war can be directly transferred to the situations in which men rape women in general. The motives for rape must be sought in the general conditions that characterize the context for the particular situation.

In Western countries today the most common form of rape is contact rape (i.e. the victim already had contact with the rapist prior to the rape). In the Nordic countries the amount of reported attack rape equals the amount of reported contact rape. On the other hand, from Rape Crisis Centers and research on non-reported rape inform us that most non-reported rape is contact rape. This requires us to focus our attention particularly on contact rape.

Looking at this type of rape, I find that two factors must be accorded particular attention in the explanation of men's motives for raping women. One is the pattern of social contact between men and women - the dating game or gender game. In this game, the active part is primarily played by the man - the man is the one who takes most of the initiatives, while the woman's role is primarily to react positively or negatively to the initiative of the

man. Although the female role of present Western societies gives opportunity for initiative to some women to some extent, it is still a deep-rooted pattern for men to play the active part and for women to exhibit passivity. A great deal of the gender game is non-verbal, consisting of glances, smiles and incidental touches. When it is played verbally it is often in some sort of code, where the latent meanings differ from spoken words. In the gender game there are communication patterns that are identical to those in non-sexual relationships. This creates a basis for misunderstandings of the situation. As the man has the most active part, his interpretation and definition of the situation will be determining.

When the gender game has this character of men trying to make a conquest of women it is because the gender game has as its object the satisfaction of male sexual lust, which in the Western society is seen as a force of nature, while female sexual lust is seen as dormant and therefore to be awakened. The fact that part of the female is to be a sex object, combined with male power to define the meaning of the situation, can have consequences for situations that do not seem to involve any sexual aspects. Because of his lust alone, a man may define a situation as sexual although it is entirely lacking in manifest sexual content.

The other fact I see as being of crucial importance is the difference between men and women in the use of and the reaction to violence and aggression. Contrary to men, women are socialized not to express aggression but to turn their aggressions inward and to avoid conflicts. This socialization influences the woman's reaction when she is exposed to sexual assaults. For one thing, violent and aggressive behaviour is very unusual in women themselves and, if shown, is seen as an expression of rage. This implies that women may perceive such behaviour as being more violent and aggressive in intent than it actually is. And women have neither been taught to fight nor to defend themselves. They have only learned to protect themselves by avoiding or trying to escape risky situations. Women, therefore, have difficulties in judging the danger inherent in a situation, and also they have difficulties in offering efficient resistance. Furthermore, they are confronted with an attacker who has not only learned to fight, but also learned that physical power can be used as an instrument to maintain one's right.

One of the arguments that supports the explanation of rape as having a degrading and conquest motive is that rape victims have often said that they experienced the rape primarily as a violent and humiliating act. I do not doubt that this is the primary experience of rape victims and I find it natural that this is so because of the above mentioned female reaction towards violent and aggressive behaviour. Rape victims often must experience that they are unable to resist the undesirable act that is forced on them.

The fact that one person has the power to force upon another person an act that this person has no useful instrumental behaviour to withstand - and an act of great intimacy which is embedded in strong moral conceptions - implies humiliation. But there is a reason why women have not been taught to resist rape. One of the paradoxes in the pattern of sex roles is that women are seen as responsible for not letting situations turn into a direction where there is a risk that they can be raped. In my opinion the motive for men to commit rape is sexual desire - not to be confused with sexual need.

Men are, when they commit rape, using a power that they have because they are men in a male society. They have power to define the content of a situation as being sexual, power to enforce their interpretation and definition and power to act on it. It is a power that is sup-

ported by an asymmetric sexuality between the two sexes, by making women into sex objects, by the gender game, and by the difference in readiness to action.

To a high extent there is general agreement among feminist researchers that the explanation of rape must be sought in the societal structure and the existing gender roles. They also agree about viewing the historical development of the rape prohibition as significant in understanding rape. Similarly, it is agreed that a historical lag influences our conception of men's and women's sexuality and the formation of the gender roles. Despite a relatively high degree of consensus as to the theoretical framework, we still reach different understandings when it comes to the general motive behind the act of rape. This disagreement is probable due to, among other things, the fact that the explanations of precisely this aspect of rape lack empirical documentation.

In their examinations, feminist researchers have foremost wanted to shed light on rape from the perspective of women and hereby they have ended up missing knowledge about the other part - the man. There exist studies of rapists, but systematically they exhibit the same fallacy: the research is based on men convicted of rape. As a result of the preceding filtering process, just a small number of all rape occurrences conclude in a man being convicted of rape. However, the selection is biased since most convictions concern rapes by attack or instances where the man has used grave means of violence. Thus, these cases neither cover a description of the actual amount of rape nor an analysis of other elements of the rape complex.

Characteristically men who are reported for (or accused of) rape either totally deny that the rape took place or state that the intercourse occurred voluntarily with the consent of the woman. The latter can be seen as a sign indicating they are lying but can also mean that they really believe this to have been the content of the situation. Some of the men who talk about a voluntary intercourse admit that they had to overcome some resistance on the part of the woman, but they further submit that they find it to be normal. This attitude is apparently shared by other men, according to surveys by men on the subject of the use of power in relation to obtain sex with a woman (see Bart and O'Brien: Stopping Rape, 1988).

Both interview with women who have been raped and police reports have shown us that some rapists try to set up dates in the future, send flowers, ask whether the woman enjoyed it or even suggest marriage.

The above illustrations can not prove that my overall explanation is correct but, in my opinion, supports the presented viewpoint.

In order to get individuals' own account of why they acted in a certain way, it is a prerequisite that they acknowledge having committed the act. In this connection, the words rape and rapist become problematic.

So far I have not mentioned the Law. It is not because I find laws to be unimportant but because irrespective of the content of laws - that differ markedly in different countries - the answer to the question: "Why do men rape women?" should be essentially the same in patriarchal societies if it has any explanatory value.

[A prominent Criminologist, Annalise Kongstad works at the Department of Criminology, Copenhagen University and is highly regarded as an authority on issues relating to rape.]

sexual normality



abnormality



a female physician's perspective



by

Bhooma Bhayana

"There is no greater nor keener pleasure than that of bodily love - and none which is more irrational".

PLATO, The Republic III - 403.

Malini sat at the edge of the decorated palang and waited. A canopy of fragrant jasmine strung on strands and hung around the bed surrounding her. For a moment she wished it were a fortress of bricks. Rose petals were strewn all over the sheets. If one

of a Moghul prince and princess in the Shish Mahal (palace of mirrors). Malini felt a bit like a princess in her burgundy silk brocade sari. Her mother had searched all over Old Delhi to find one with just the right paisley pattern of golden thread running through its border. It seemed funny to Malini sometimes that her mother, after twenty-one years of denying the existence or importance of "boys" was now so enthusiastic of delivering her into the hands of one. Malini's palms felt warm and clammy. She hoped that the intricate mehndi (henna painted on the palms of the bride) pattern would not blur or stain. She heard laughter outside the bedroom door. He would be coming in soon. Malini tried to rehearse in her mind what she would do when he entered. Her only education had been the whispers of the girls at the convent school and then the girls who did the whispering were the kind that got into trouble with Sister Chawla. One of them had told her that she could lose her hymen from participating in sports. Malini had quit the volleyball team the next day for she could certainly not put her parents through the shame of someday being returned to their home as a rejected "used" product. He knew enough to assume the stance of the bride in the films by the Bombay producers: she lowered her eyes reverently for she did not dare to look in his eyes. The films had also taught her (confirming her mother's theories) that there were two types of women - the kind that assumed this stance and the kind that were outcast for their "zalil" (brazen) ways. The doorknob turned. Keshav entered. The rest was all a blur to Malini and continued to remain a blur on every night that the doorknob of her bedroom door turned.

This scenario may seem a bit antiquated but, surprisingly, the approach to sex that our newlyweds, Malini and Keshav, have taken is not uncommon. Within a cultural context it might even be classified as "normal". Sex can basically be divided into "normal sex" and "abnormal sex". Even within the realm of "normal sex" there is much debate as to which positions, acts, players etc. make the event normal. It is sufficient to define normal as that which is acceptable and positive to the players. "Abnormal sex" can be further subdivided into Psychosexual dysfunction (inhibition of sexual desire and/or psychophysiological performance), paraphilia (sexual arousal to deviant stimuli) and gender identity disorders. Beyond normal and abnormal sex is sexual assault which has nothing to do with sex at all but rather with a most perverse form of violence. Even in the absence of pathology the issues in normal sex go beyond those of procreation and pleasure. The palang becomes at once the playground and battleground for all the issues in the relationship. In cultures where there exist stereotyped sex roles, dual standards of morality for men and women and inequity of power between the sexes these translate through ignorance into sexual dogmas and anxieties. Sex becomes, therefore, inextricable linked with the way that we give and receive not only love but also power.

One of the themes that I consistently see in South Asian marriages and other marriages where women are dis-empowered is that sex becomes a commodity used by the woman to barter with in exchange for a role in the decision making in the relationship or household. In a world where one has little else to offer THAT IS TRULY VALUED it becomes a mechanism of balancing the power see - saw. In a society where, on the other hand, sex is cheapened, it devalues the woman's view of herself to feel that she has little else to withhold or offer. The vicious cycle is a hard one to break.

The paraphilia and gender identity disorders are really the subject of a psychiatric treatment. I would only like to note one thing, for people who might need to be reminded, that homosexuality is a variation of sexual orientation or preference and thus not a disorder related to gender identity disorders.

The psychosexual dysfunctions are disorders of the various stages of sex. There are four stages of any sexual act. These are excitement, plateau, orgasm and resolution. Excitement is a process with physical and psychological components both of which are interdependent. In men the physical component involves erection along with a variety of responses such as increased heart rate, increased respiratory rate etc. In women the physical response involves vaginal lubrication, clitoral enlargement and the same variety of other responses. Such a response can only occur if someone has a sort of subconscious permission to allow it to happen. If a woman fears punitive divine intervention or being ostracized by society or simply that the ensuing act is not permissible for some nebulous inexplicable reason she will not allow herself to become excited nor will she allow for the physical response of vaginal lubrication. When the psychological preparation and the vaginal preparation are not there intercourse becomes unpleasant and even painful thus reinforcing the woman's preconception that the act is undesirable and even repulsive. Disorders of sexual excitement are known as frigidity in women and impotence in men.

The incidence of psychosexual dysfunction in women is difficult to ascertain because it is most often not brought to professional attention. In the few cases of frigidity that I have seen, the husband generally brings his wife into the office insisting that she needs "to be fixed".

I shall never forget the anguish of a young bride who could not allow penetration during intercourse because she felt that it would make her fulfill her parents' prophecy that she would somehow become a marked woman because she was brought up in North America. The fear of betraying them and becoming that horrid picture they had painted paralyzed her so completely that it did not seem to matter that she was now married and it was somehow "acceptable" by their definition. The fear interfered with her desire to express her love for her husband and expressed itself by interfering in the normal processes of vaginal lubrication and pelvic muscle relaxation. In the end the young couple was presented for infertility after two years of marriage because of the coaxing of hopeful grandparents.

Sexual assault has little to do with sex but needs to be addressed because of the misconception that it is a sexual act. Sexual assault is a violent crime. Culture may or not affect the incidence of sexual assault. It definitely does affect its coming to public, professional and judicial attention. It also most definitely affects the nature of the aftermath for the assaulted woman. Sexual assault can become a simple extension of the otherwise accepted victimization of women.

A previous article in DIVA studied the Huddood ordinances in their application to sexual assault. An assault is only considered such if it is witnessed by four pious Moslem men. In my work on the sexual assault care centre at the Scarborough Grace Hospital I've been able to construct an image of a rapist through the stories women have told me. None has been stupid enough to choose such a select audience!

We also have implanted in our minds images of Sita, after having been captured by Ravana, returning to her beloved Rama only to be ostracized until she can prove her purity by walking on fire unscathed. Had she been assaulted by Ravana would it not have behooved

Rama to have received her with a loving acceptance rather than to have continued the assault on her dignity?

Without continuing the sacrilege it suffices to say that we are not nearly as supportive of sexually assaulted women as we are of victims of other forms of assault for a variety of cultured - and unjust - preconceptions.

We not only victimize women who have been assaulted by questioning the validity of their stories but we further victimize them by making them bear the burden of the guilt for inviting the assault on themselves. This may be because we do not understand that men who are rapists do not rape for the purpose of fulfilling a sexual desire but because they are violent socio-paths who, for their own reasons, choose to rape as an expression of their own abnormal destructive energies. The instigation to sexual assault is inherent in the assailant and is independent of the way that a women dresses or lives.

By treating victims of sexual assault in an unbelieving and guilt engendering way we perpetuate the environment in which sexual assault is allowed to continue. Instead we need to empower women to "Take Back the Night" (also the title of a campaign against sexual assault).

I don't think that I could agree more with the quotation from Plato's Republic that opens this column. The very same act of intercourse that can be an a expression of warmth and enrichment in a mature relationship can, for some, be a source of grief and pain and, for others, become a violent nightmare.

First Time

by

S. V. Whittaker

The rutting ritual performed,
The sated man-beast turns his back and sleeps.
And she bruised and battered.
Innocence bleeding onto vestal white sheets cries
Is that all there is?
Where is the tenderness,
The afterglow of ecstasy's fulfillment?
What is this violation called love?

The
Projected
Image

FACT SHEET ON FIGHT AGAINST CANADIAN MEDIA

by

HOLLY A. HANDSPIKER

1973: Women for Political Action became the first Canadian women's group to speak out against the portrayal of women on television. They viewed Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) as of both under-representing and sex-role stereotyping women (Spring, 1987, p.5).

1979: The CBC's licence came up for renewal, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) intervened, claiming that the CBC's portrayal of women was "deplorable and unacceptable" (Spring, 1987 p.5).

1979: President of the CBC held a two-day seminar in Ottawa on The Portrayal of Women on the CBC. Representatives from women's organizations and experts on sexism in the media presented a strong case for the establishment of policies and guidelines designed to help the CBC offer a more accurate image of women (Spring, 1987, p.5).

As a result, the CBC developed policies intended to improve portrayal of women. They promised to educate and sensitize their staff as well to promote equal opportunity within the corporation (Spring, 1987, p.5).

Since Canadian airwaves are publicly owned and the Canadian Radio - Television and Telecommunications (CRTC) serves to regulate and represent the public's concerns to the electronic media, Canadian women started to pressurize the CRTC to create guidelines and regulations in an effort to help eliminate the offensive portrayal of women in the media (Spring, 1987, p.5).

1979: Following the government's development of a national action plan intended to promote the equality of women in Canadian society and eliminate the discrimination women had traditionally faced in Canada, Jeanne Sauve, then Minister of Communications, wrote to the CRTC, indicating that the Cabinet considered the CRTC to be the agency that could "most appropriately take steps to see that guidelines and standards to encourage the elimination of sex-role stereotyping from the media it regulates are formulated by 1980" (Public Notice, CRTC, 1986-351, p.1).

September 28, 1979: The CRTC announced the creation of a task force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media. The task force, comprised of feminists, broadcasters and bureaucrats provided national and official treatment of the issue of sexism on television (Spring, 1987, p.5).

The task force was chaired by Commissioner Marianne Barrie. Two representatives from the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women served on the task force as ex-officio members during their tenure as officers of the Council (Public Notice, CRTC, 1986-351, p.2).

The mandate of the task force was reiterated later by next Minister of Communications, David MacDonald, who cautioned that, "with nearly fifty per cent of all (Canadian) women now in the work force, the media have a duty to reflect the role of women accurately" (Public Notice, CRTC, 1986-351, p.1). MacDonald requested that the CRTC task force make the delineation of guidelines for a more positive (and realistic) portrayal of women in radio and television (both programming and commercials) and the creation of policy recommendations for consideration by the Commission and the broadcast industry its objectives (Public Notice, CRTC, 1986-351, p.1).

It took more than three years for the task force to arrive at a compromise solution. (Spring, 1987, p.5).

First year: consisted largely of attempts made to convince a skeptical group of advertisers and programmers that a problem with the portrayal of women actually existed.

Second year: was devoted, in part, to arguing over what needed to be done about a situation which, in the eyes of broadcasters, amounted to a "small" problem (Spring, 1987, p.6). The final compromise solution, reached in the second year of sittings, was to "create guidelines that the industry would voluntarily follow over a trial period of two years" (Spring, 1987, p.6).

Third year: was spent developing those guidelines and writing up the report which was published as Images of Women. Guidelines and recommendations contained in Images of Women were the result of a "difficult meeting of minds on as complex an issue as sex-role stereotyping" (Barrie, 1982, p.17). If followed, the guidelines would certainly improve the representation of women on Canadian electronic media but getting the broadcasters and advertisers to implement the recommendations, through voluntary self-regulatory mechanisms, proved to be less than successful (Spring, 1987, p.6).

An increase in public pressure, in addition to the guidelines set out by the task force on Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media, seemed to be the only way the industry would voluntarily conform (Spring, 1987, p.6).

In response to the need for more public pressure MediaWatch was created in 1981. As a sub-committee of NAC, its goals were to educate Canadian women and girls on issues of sexism in the media and suggest ways in which the public could make their voices heard by the broadcasting and advertising industries. Thus the MediaWatch complaint form was instituted and proved to be an effective and efficient way for people to communicate their criticisms and/or praise to the media (Public Notice, 1986, BC 92-34, p.79).

1984: as an independent national women's organization, MediaWatch conducted a national monitoring study of TV and radio in Canada (advertising and programming) in order to present a "scientifically valid" voice to the industry (Spring, 1987, p.6).

The two-year period of self-regulation, prior to 1984, had not shown any dramatic change in the portrayal of women on the Canadian media (Spring, 1987, p.6). The monitoring study, undertaken that year by MediaWatch served as both a scientifically valid voice and a method of determining just how "bad" the portrayal of women by Canadian broadcasters and advertisers really was in spite of self-regulation (Spring, 1987, p.6).

The MediaWatch study, by researcher Ana Wiggins, was the broadest comparative study ever conducted on the problem of sexism on Canadian media. The results of the study were not encouraging and did not bode well for industry self-regulation (Public Notice, CRTC, 1986, BC 92-34, p.79).

Thousands of Canadian women, from every province and territory contributed hours of their time to two separate sessions of media monitoring in 1984 - phase 1, winter/spring and phase 2, fall winter. Some of the more damning results appeared in the 1984 MediaWatch report as follows,

In TV drama and situation comedy, men were seen as managers, executives, physicians, law enforcement officers and business owners while women were seen as homemakers, clerical office workers and students. In television news, female experts were invisible. 91% (86%) of experts, 70% (69%) of people in the street, 84% (82%) of eyewitnesses were men.

[When Women Become Visible, They Are Like Giants: A Progress Report. Spring, 1987, p.6].

MediaWatch renewed its commitment to improving the portrayal of women and girls in the media following the 1984 report,

We see from its (report's) results that the problem of sex-role stereotyping in the media is far from remedied. A fresh, informed and committed reexamination needs to be made by all parties and a strong new direction taken towards remedying a problem that continues to insult and degrade majority of Canada's citizens.

(Sex-Role Stereotyping in the Broadcast Media: A report on industry self-regulation. CRTC, 1986, p.79).

1986: The CRTC held public hearings to review studies and examine reports from the industries and to hear public submissions before making a final decision on whether self-regulation had been effective in ridding Canadian airwaves of sexism (Spring, 1987, p.7).

Present at the hearings were concerned Canadian women as well as members of the broadcast industry. "Strangely, no radio or television station covered the hearings or reported on their significance". (Spring, 1987, p.7). The broadcast industry's commitment to covering women's issues or to taking the matter seriously would, in the wake of absolutely no press coverage, seemed dubious.

The hearings were well-attended by the public, many of whom addressed the issue of sexism in the broadcast media,

Women technicians spoke about how hard it was for them to work in a male-dominated industry. Actresses spoke of the humiliation of being cast only in very limited and often demeaning roles. Women film-makers spoke of the difficulties in getting their visions and voices heard, and parents talked about the debilitating effects of sexist programs and ads on the lives and futures of their children.

(When Women Become Visible, They Are Like Giants: A Progress Report, Spring, 1987, p.7)

The CBC talked a lot about improving the 'critical mass' of women in each sector of broadcasting and of its action in the production of women-centered dramas. The list of promises concerning the eradication of sexism on Canadian television, at least in the case of the CBC, would have been considerably more impressive had an ex-CBC, producer not made a submission reminding everyone that such promises had been made for a long time (Spring, 1987 p.7).

The need for women to be actively involved in key decision making and to occupy creative positions in the broadcast industry did not come as much of a surprise to the women who attended the CRTC hearings. But it was the first time that the CRTC admitted that such proposals might be instrumental in improving the portrayal of women in the broadcast media (Spring, 1987, p.7). Following this admission, the CRTC quickly pointed out that they, as commissioners, had no jurisdiction over the hiring practices and personnel of broadcasters (Spring, 1987, p.7).

While the CRTC was making its final decisions about what to do with the "recalcitrant broadcast industry, another federal task force was winding its way through Canada - the Caplan-Sauvagneau Task Force on Broadcast Policy" (Spring, 1987, p.7). Media-Watch submitted its reports on the portrayal of women in the media believing that women's issues would be thoroughly addressed by the task force. When the report (Caplan-Sauvagneau) was issued, many of MediaWatch's most critical concerns had been ignored or "sloughed over in legislatively meaningless generalities and wishy-washy 'humanist' type phrases (Spring, 1987, p.8).

Had the government followed the recommendations of the Caplan-Sauvagneau report, as it exists now, the portrayal of women in the media and equal opportunity employment in the Canadian broadcast industry would be in a state of regression. The Caplan-Sauvagneau report is notorious in some circles, yet famous in others, for not recom-

mending that sexually abusive programming be prohibited in Canada (Spring, 1987, p.8).

Spring of 1987: MediaWatch learned of the CRTC's intention to comply with guidelines, making them mandatory for every broadcaster and conditional to licence renewal in Canada (Spring, 1987, p.8). MediaWatch has finally achieved their original and principal mandate.... to get the CRTC to "regulate broadcasters on sex-role stereotyping (Spring, 1987, p.8).

Getting the CRTC to represent the voices of fifty two percent of the population to the forty eight per cent who control the broadcast media has proved a formidable task.

It has been fifteen years since Women For Political Action first spoke out against the portrayal of women on Canada's public airwaves. MediaWatch has been active on this issue for almost a decade and now has representatives in every province and territory in Canada. But the problem of sexism in the media persists.

1986: A report released by the CRTC stated that,

... though a significant effort has been made by both broadcasters and advertisers alike, as well as by members of the public, to make self-regulation work... it has been only partially successful and further action is necessary.

(Public Notice CRTC, 1986-31)

The work done by groups, by individual Canadian women and by the federal government to support the provision of equality for men and women and to eliminate sex-role stereotyping from the media in Canada is commendable but insufficient. Further action becomes blatantly necessary when one realizes that the CBC allows advertising which contradicts guidelines intended to eradicate sexism in the media.

There is much more to be done.

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[This essay/report was submitted to Barbara Roberts, professor of Women's Studies, Concordia University, Simone de Beauvoir Institute, June 1988.]



**Female
Prostitution:
THE
REALITY
OF
A
PROFESSION:**

by

Amita Dhillon

[Diva publishes this article with great respect for the author, who being from the South Asian community, was brave enough to dare enter the profession of prostitution and was strong enough to come out of it..]

Right from the start I had an acute feeling of humiliation. This profession is considered to be the most degrading and insulting to all that is sacred to humanity. We are the scum of the earth. A woman who practices prostitution, has no value. The biggest insult a "normal" man or woman can give to a woman is to call her a "whore". If I was murdered while working, no one will really feel that loss of a human life has occurred. (Investigations into the murders of prostitutes are not given the same attention as might be given to the murder of a "normal" woman).

We are regarded as not being capable of experiencing rape. How can a woman who sells her body be raped? Any man or woman who is physically or psychologically coerced into a sexual act against their will is accepted as a victim of rape. But because a prostitute has crossed moral boundaries by selling something which has always been considered a man's private property; trading it outside the "sanctity" of a home, she is no longer regarded as

private property; trading it outside the "sanctity" of a home, she is no longer regarded as something which can be further violated. Society is very particular in validating victims of rape and prostitutes fall outside of the category of those likely victims.

So one learns to live with the feeling that no one really considers prostitutes human, equal even to other women, let alone a man. I felt, I was a fringe group of a sub-human species which has no societal worth.

This societal attitude pushes the prostitute onto the very margins of existence. And since the work is not integrated with any other "normal" activity, the prostitute practically lives in a world unto herself.

When I joined the profession I had not given much thought as to what I would be getting into or what social and emotional implications it would involve. The underlying force which led me to prostitution was economic need.

I worked for about five months and then left the profession, realizing how damaging that work was to my own person. Even now although it has been a short while since that time, I feel as if the experience did not really occur. It seems like a few life times ago.....

I do remember warning myself of one possible danger. I remember saying to myself, woman, don't make it a central focus of your life; keep it separate as paid work in this system should be kept otherwise you'll be in trouble. Big trouble. Trouble beyond your wildest dreams! So this is a story of entrapments. How dark doors can close on you and how a battle to get back your soul & spirit - or what's left of it - can get started before its too late.

I began to feel quite alienated from the world around me once my involvement became intense. I saw how I had slowly slipped away from my previous frame of reference. As individuals we live in an environment to which we are a part of. We are "members" of this environment on a physical, social, psychological and economic level. My membership expired in a certain respect once I took on the profession. But it was later that I felt I had lost practically all links with society and I was now surviving within the profession itself and nothing more.

This point is crucial in understanding the process of entrapment women go through in the profession. Because it is at this juncture when the embryo cord linking a woman to its previous reference is being severed that one begins to realize the pain. I began to realize this within the end of probably the first week of practicing prostitution.

It then became an emotional struggle to regain not only my own sense of worth but also my identity as a member of a society. The fact that I was critical of this society didn't make the pain of this forced dispossession any less. I needed to change the society in order for me to have a better life. I didn't want to be forcibly cast out whereby losing all power to affect any change regards the socio-economic values. I had fallen into a deep well and I had to climb out if I was going to survive.

Although society deplors prostitution and is morally very set against its existence, the attitude of the society itself creates psychological barriers which actually reinforce its perpetuation by making it difficult for women to find a way out.

I slowly became convinced that I couldn't survive in this work and that it was imperative for me to leave the profession 'tout suite' if there was going to be anything left of my own person. The price was too great to bear. And one doesn't even realize what has taken place.

One day I felt fine, and before I realize what is happening my whole life has transformed. It gave me a blow of such an impact that I literally felt shattered at its force.

Being of South Asian origin only intensified the feeling of alienation because of the added stigma attached to the profession. In our community even a woman who is raped is considered a prostitute. So a prostitute would be regarded as something less than even a piece of trash and "respectable and God-fearing" men and women wouldn't even want to cast eyes on you for fear of being contaminated.

The other equally crucial factor enhancing isolation is, ofcourse, the fact that even in the community of prostitutes you remain a minority, in fact, to be more precise, you remain a colored minority.

All these factors worked well to create this feeling in me that probably I'm not capable of doing anything else in life. Although in the beginning I was sure of myself, three months down the line my self-confidence was wavering considerably. I had thought from the beginning that this work was a short-term affair and I would move on to more satisfying activities once I had gained some economic stability but I underestimated the power of subversion this profession had.

Its ability to destroy a human being is devastating. Its destructiveness rests within the dynamics of the profession involving various levels. We can probably break these down to those having to do with society and those relating to the work itself. I have spoken somewhat on the role society plays, overlapping with that, are the rules of the game that govern the behaviour and appearance of the woman working. I should note that the code which I refer to is that of the hotel circuit brand which is a little different from "working the streets".

One leads a reptilian sort of life. Working all night and sleeping throughout the day. I had to create a new personality while I worked. It is a mechanism of survival in the profession because being "your own person" is difficult and at the same time unacceptable even unsafe since it puts the woman at a greater risk of being taken advantage of.

To become a person other than what you are were, was very difficult because it was a negation of the self so complete and mandatory that I had not experienced before with regards to any other work or social code. At every level my person was negated, replaced, coerced into what can only be described as something that is not quite human. Mainly because men don't want human women, they want, how can I describe it - a sex machine that can perform with excellence all kinds of chores right from flashing a sexy smile to responding most favorably to "Tell me, did I please you?" How's that for professional qualifications! Under these circumstances, a simple act of communicating with someone on a human level while working, added to my night. Sometimes I would call up a friend and chat on the phone. It felt as if a thread of pleasure had been woven into the evening. The experience always left me slightly exhilarated as if I had caught the thread of "normalcy".

The humiliation is another story. Although the "tricks", as clients are referred to, do have a superficial code of respect for you, there is still the enslavement of becoming sexually intimate with a complete stranger, even if one is being paid.

They call it the sex-trade but in actuality it encompasses much more than just sex. One has to sacrifice every part of one's self while working. And what isn't given up for the sake of work itself is unjustly taken from us by society. Our dignity and status as human beings is stripped away so all one can do is stick with the profession and allow one's self to diminish

in the process. I saw women who had been broken by this work and I could feel it working on me.

The feeling was so scary that I decided to make a move before it had a chance to entrap me fully.

Since you are basically on your own, what you are left with is essentially your own desire and the amount of will power within you that can possibly help arrest the process of being broken. And an ability to see the transformation taking place before one becomes emotionally dependent on the profession. This emotional dependence comes from the complete alienation from the outside world that takes away the right of a working woman to remain a functioning member of society.

Once the woman has become isolated to a certain extent her attempts and even desire to leave the profession becomes weaker. Because neither the society nor the feminist movement is helping her in making her emotionally stronger increasing thereby her chances of surviving the profession.

Within the feminist movement there are two basic attitudes. One of which is completely un-supportive to prostitutes and finds prostitution as degrading to women and an indicator of how men use and exploit women's bodies. They are morally indignant about this issue and want to eradicate it. The second recognizes prostitution as a profession and regards it as a women's right to work in it. They show moral support to prostitutes and attempt to give dignity to the profession. They advocate rights of prostitutes on a political level and feel it should be a recognized profession like any other.

While the first correctly perceives this profession as degrading to women and an indicator of men's abuse to women, their insensitivity to 'working women' is condescending, unhelpful and further degrading to us. Feminists in the second category have made attempts to incorporate prostitutes as members of society and ease the pressure society puts on the profession, which I take as a positive step.

Unfortunately the only problem with this is that prostitution, even if by some miracle, becomes socially accepted, this profession can never be satisfying, productive or uplifting for women. The nature of the work is humiliating and nothing can change that. To sell one's body, one's sex, can never be productive to the advantage of the woman. The only positive aspect to it is a material one. A woman can make a substantial amount of money doing this kind of work but my experience has been that the cost to women outruns the financial aspect of it. Even when prostitutes who say that this work is not degrading and that only society makes it degrading, are deluding themselves. I remember telling myself the same, it was a mechanism that helped me survive. Otherwise it would be impossible for me to continue the work.

There are national and international conferences where sex-trade organizations meet to discuss political and social issues. The trade is well organized throughout the world and we can see how it has established itself by incorporating the thought that if we give dignity to the work then it will not be damaging to women. Unfortunately, the very nature of the work is humiliating and counter-productive, it cannot change the adverse effects it has on women. Prostitution is one profession within the sex-trade which is only benefitting one party - that of men. It is only because of their demand for this service that it exists. And it is their convenience that women are economically deprived so that they turn to this profession to earn

a living. Most "tricks" think women are in business because they enjoy the work. This signifies the extent of their perversity.

I realize now at what tremendous personal cost I worked as a prostitute although at the time I was quite unconscious of it. I was supposedly a "natural" at it but no human being can feel at ease with this work since it is not only humiliating but emotionally demanding to the extremity. There are undercurrents of marginalization and finally isolation which can render the woman psychologically devastated and helpless which in turn leads to a form of social and psychological entrapment as was my own experience.

I have a great amount of respect for women who work as prostitutes. This is a fact which I only came to understand and appreciate after I went through the horrendous experience myself.

Having experienced sexual intercourse with a variety of men for a variety of reasons, has led me to a better understanding of men's sexual attitudes towards women. Men view sexual pleasure as their right. They will use women to attain their objective, while some pay for it and others do not. Regardless of whether men are paying for it or not, the same attitude prevails. There are degrees of variations where some men are more subtle about it than others. It can even be masked in the rhetoric of 'love'. On the whole comparing those that paid and those who didn't, the attitude is universal. It cuts through any lines of division I once thought existed between customers and those men who I had intercourse with voluntarily and before entering the profession. Sexual satisfaction is their right and women are used as an object in getting that satisfaction.

I remember a man who I was deeply in love with. At the time I thought he respected and loved me but now when I think back I realize what a fool I was to have been so humiliated and used. I never recognized it at the time and it only dawned on me recently. I feel outraged as to how I could have been so unaware of his degrading treatment of me. It can be so subtle as to go almost unnoticed.

The reins of power are generally in the hands of men within a sexual relationship. It is at their discretion how that power is to be used. It is their choice whether or not they decide to fulfill the sexual desires of the woman. Usually the only objective they have is to fulfill their own sexual needs and with that accomplished, they may or may not, depending on their sensitivity towards the woman, might go through the motions to satisfy her sexual needs. Or they might simply assume that her needs have been fulfilled in the process of fulfillment of their own. This is the most frequent attitude I have witnessed.

Power relations are extremely unbalanced yet they are regarded as normal. Women need to recognize and assert their own sexual needs. Men will not be the ones to challenge the present balance since it protects their own self-interest.

Unless we recognize our sexual desires as being separate from men, we cannot effectively change the present sexual division of power, apparent in most relationships between men and women both within the "respectable" and accepted forms of love and marriage, and, in the degrading and unacceptable profession of prostitution.

OBITUARY

by

KRIS

[These excerpts are published here courtesy CK8LN radio. Obituary of the late General Ziaul Haq of Pakistan was written by a prominent Torontonion poet of Sri Lankan origin, who also hosts the radio programme 'Bourgeois News Bourgeois Blues'.]

Welcome to the seventeenth edition of Bourgeois News Bourgeois Blues
For the week ending August 20, 1988
I'm your no-name host.

2.

Well, August is normally winding down time.
It's a month before the leaves turn colour
Winter is holding its breath.
The ruling class is on vacation again

But it's been a great week.
Or rather it was a great Wednesday
Wasn't it?
The fascist dictator Zia Al Haq died
a tyrant is dead
Or should we say tyrants are dead
It isn't every day when seventeen generals fall from the sky
We normally don't celebrate death
But they were mass murderers
Not the kind of sensational mini-mass murderers
you regularly see on the front pages
of the Star, the Globe or the Sun
like Clifford Olsen, Jim Jones or some other one
with a stubble or a beard and thick glasses
who the papers say was unemployed or insane
and killed ten people
These mass murderers were the ruling kind

Who sold wholesale and murdered wholesale
And lived retail and ate and drank
in a day what people would eat in a year

These were not the mass-murderers or terrorists
of the National Enquirer's inquiry,
the Toronto Starry-eyes or the Hamilton Spectator's Sport
These were mass murderers
Who were elegantly dressed in suits and uniforms
Who were handsome men with their groomed short hair
Who had shining medals
tinkling like coins up and down
their puffed-up chests!
Who live off the minimum wages of their people
Who chase their people as immigrants and refugees
to slave on foreign shores!
Who use their armies to kill their own people
Who trade away their people's sovereignty
for military grants, defense contracts and hamburger franchises
Who gave over their land to foreign mercenaries
To wage war on neighboring countries

3.

I see the Globe & Mail wrote Zia an obituary
I see the TV news avoided mention of
the US Ambassador and the US generals who were also on that plane
These US Generals who lead the rapid deployment forces of
500,000 men in the Indian Ocean
So that they may attack anywhere in Asia or Africa
where the great wealth of the world also lies
Where most people of the world also live
Who see the Indian Ocean
as the swimming pool or lily pond
of multinational corporations
just like the Caribbean

5.

Well, I see our freely-traded Prime Minister
Mrian Bulronney
has sent his regrets about the death
of Pakistani dictator
General Zia.

We wonder what Bulroney regrets?
Does he regret he could not do what the fascist Zia did?
Is he jealous? Does Bulroney regret
he could not murder, like Zia did when he was but a colonel,
thousands of palestinians in Jordan in september, 1970.
Does Bulroney regret he hasn't hundreds of political prisoners in
the jails like Zia did?
We can't remember if the Canadian government
sent regret when Hitler died, or Mussolini died.
The people of the world don't regret.
The people of the world won't regret.
The people of the world won't forget.
Despite Bulroney's regrets

Despite Bulroney's regrets
Zia was a mass murderer
Who had sent 20,000 soldiers to guard
the false kings of Saudi Arabia and the Middle East
To make sure that easy oil was siphoned
into the tanks of multinational corporations

This Zia who's been promised \$4.2 billion dollars in US military money.
This Zia who had helped introduce the oh-so-ordinary and the nuclear
weaponry of mass destruction
into the Indian Ocean
This Zia who trained junior officers in Sri Lanka,
who murdered the Baluchis in the mountains of Baluchistan,
who sent Pakistani pilots to fly Iraqi jets
with chemical bombs over Iran
This is the man whom Bulroney regrets
This Zia who declared a woman is half a man?
This Zia who called himself the shadow of God
Who was really the shadow of death

6.
Bulroney's regrets fall like
so many drops of oil
in an ocean of blood

7.
Z-I-A or C-I-A
It doesn't matter how you spell his name

Zia so long
Zia, see ya later buddy.
We only wish things are always so easy

My only regret is that
I might not have mentioned everything the Fascist Zia did
History please excuse me

9.
Well, I can't remember feeling so good
since 1979

And no one else reminds of that great year
than this song by the Trinidadian Calypsonian The Mighty Sparrow and its dedicated to
the General Zias, the General Parks, General motors, General Foods, the Bothas and the
all those other
Fascist
in
General

10.
(DIVA, P.S.)
when I look back at it
it sounds vengeful
perhaps reactionary
but sad to say I enjoyed reading it much
I think it might be reactionary
because later that week
I read an article by the Financial Times of London
which said that capitalists were unhappy
with Zia
because the rate of profit had fallen
and Zia wasn't rectifying that fast enough.

Anyway I can't help ending it with this other short epigram

Zia Ul Haq
who said a woman was
half a man
Today he is not even
a leg or a hand!!!!

COLLECTIBLES: I



PAIN? She'll get used to it!

[a 5-year old in Himalayas].

Son Preference in India

by

BRENDA CRANNEY

One Day I cursed that mother-fucker God.
He just laughed shamelessly.
My neighbor - a born-to-pen Brahman - was shocked.
He looked at me with his castor-oil face and said,
'How can you say such things to the
Source of the Indescribable,
Qualityless, Formless Juggernaut?
Shame on you for trying to catch his dharma-hood
in a noose of words.'

I cursed another good hot curse.
The university buildings shuddered and sank waist-deep.
All at once, scholars began doing research
into what makes people angry.
They sat in their big rooms fragrant with incense,
their bellies full of food,
and debated.

On my birthday, I cursed God.
I cursed him, I cursed him again.
Whipping him with words, I said
'Bastard!'

'Would you chop a whole cart full of wood
for a single piece of bread?
Would you wipe the sweat from your bony body
with your mother's ragged sari?
Would you wear out your brothers and sisters
for your father's pipe?
Would you work as a pimp
to keep him in booze?
Oh Father, Oh God the Father!

You could never do such things.
First you would need a mother -
one no one honours
one who toils in the dirt
one who gives and gives of her love.'

One day I cursed that mother-fucking God.

Keshav Meshram, in Vidrohi Kavita (Poetry of Protest) (Pune:Continental Prakashan, 1979; trans. Jayant Karv and Eleanor Zelliott with Pam Espeland).

India is a patriarchal society where power relationships are based on gender domination. Rural women of India are repressed in all areas of their life including sexuality, employment, education, health and reproduction. In a country with a long history of 'sati', female infanticide and dowry deaths it is evident that there is a dominant ideology that is basically misogynist. Throughout this paper I will show how the politics of reproduction are based on power relationships with males controlling the reproductive rights of women.

In discussing biological reproduction I will look at the problem of overpopulation, the state imposed family planning programmes and preference for males evident in the high mortality rate of female infants. Considering the complexity of both these areas there are many variables that need to be explored to come to some understanding of the dilemmas. The articulation of politics, economics, religion, culture and ideology are important issues. The relationship between modes of production, property and the gender composition of the population need to be explored. Where possible I will compare these relationships in the North to those in the South of India.

India is a democratic union of 22 states and nine union territories. The Congress I (Indira) Party has been in power most often since India's independence from Britain. The parties in opposition are the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.), Communist Party of India Marxist (C.P.I.[M]) and the Janta Party. There are approximately twelve state parties. (Morgan: 1984:294)

The ethnic composition of India is Indo-Aryan 72%, Dravidian 25% and Mongolia 3%. Aryan tribes invaded the indigenous Dravidian civilization of India in 1500 B.C.E. and developed a racial/religious hierarchy that is preserved in the Hindu caste system today. Some aspects of the Dravidian culture are still evident in southern states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

The religious composition of India is 83% Hindu, 11% Muslim, 3% Christian and 3% other. The caste system stems from Hindu ideology. Although the Muslims do not adhere to caste, they too discriminate against the Harijan (untouchable).

The caste system plays an important role in the politics of biological reproduction. The caste system, which is based in patriarchal ideology, is divided into a theoretical framework of four Varnas:

Brahmin	- Priest, white (purity & goodness)
Kshatriya	- Warrior, red (blood)
Vaishya	- Merchant, yellow (trader's gold)
Sudra	- Cultivator, black (darkneww, evil)

A-Varna (without caste) Scheduled castes, Harijans (untouchables) -economically deprived, socially oppressed and politically voiceless.

(George: 1986:148)

Thousands of sub-castes are derived from tribal, racial, occupational, territorial and religious elements. The castes are based on opposition between pure and unpure. Although the colours associated with the Varnas are said to be unrelated to skin colour, the position of white and black coincides with the almost universal preference for white. For example, in India lighter skinned women are preferred.

In 1955 the Constitution of India abolished untouchability and the "Untouchability Act". Punishment for those convicted of discrimination in areas of access to public places were stiff. Prior to this 'untouchables' were not allowed to draw water from village wells or enter temples. (Nyrop 1985:203). One in seven families is categorized as belonging to the Harijans (untouchables). As many of these people live in rural areas they comprise a significant number of the population I will be discussing.

With the caste system people are made to feel inferior or superior by reference to criteria that has nothing to do with level of material possessions or earnings. You are who you are by nature of birth alone.

POPULATION

India takes up less than 2.5% of the earth's land mass yet accounts for more than 15% of the world's population. With a population in excess of 800 million India faces serious problems. As 80% of this population live in villages it is relevant that this paper focuses on how overpopulation affects rural women in terms of their own health and survival and that of their children, in particular female children.

For many years India has had a serious problem with over-population. The country has not been able to develop resources to maintain the population resulting in one of the lowest life expectancy rates in the world, 54 years for men and 52 years for women.

After thirty years of state-sponsored family planning programmes as well as extensive foreign aid in the 80's, India continues to have one of the most serious population problems in the world. The state-sponsored plans consistently failed to reach their goals. In 1981 the average woman (45-49 yrs) at the end of her childbearing years having spent all of her

reproductive years under government sponsored family planning programmes, had borne five live children. (Nyrop:1985:108)

Family planning is seen by many as an obsession of government and not a priority or need. Lower castes and Harijans do not have economic or educational reasons to limit family size.

Lower caste and scheduled castes face a high infant mortality rate which is mainly related to poverty. They are unable to provide food, safe drinking water and medical care for their children. They continue to have large families to ensure that a few children live to adulthood. The hope is that their children will be able to earn money to contribute to the needs of the family.

Community participation in Family Planning Programmes is encouraged but community health guides chosen are male and upper or middle caste. (Bang:1986:1394) The male control of other areas of reproduction is seen in the high number of males in the medical profession. Very few rural areas have female doctors.

One of the major criticisms of the Family Planning Programmes is the total disregard shown for women which is reflected in the types of contraceptives offered and the attitude of the people dispensing contraception. In Uttar Pradesh a sterilization camp was set up to perform laparoscopies. Women were offered Rs 125 and this was certainly an incentive for poor rural women. States competed for the highest number of sterilizations in the shortest period of time. Many women were unaware of the irreversibility of the operation and obviously had not given 'informed' consent. (Ross:1986:15)

As part of the Family Planning Programme free abortions were offered to women, not out of concern for women's rights but for population control purposes. Although abortion was legalized in 1972 the number of illegal abortions has increased steadily from that time. The estimated number of abortions in India is between 2 and 9 million. Of this only 250,000 are performed in hospitals. (Savara:1980:24) Reasons given for this are that many Doctors do not tell women that abortion is offered free at the hospital but instead counsel women to keep the child. Not only is the treatment in the hospital very demeaning but coercive with Doctors threatening not to perform the abortion if the woman will not accept an I.U.D. or sterilization.

Rate of maternal deaths due to septic abortions has increased from 5.6% of all maternal deaths between 1961-65 to 9.0% between 1976-80. (Kabra:1986:25) Illegal abortions, even fatal ones, are not considered criminal and are not reported to the police. Fetex chemical paste is licensed and publicized as an abortifacient paste even though it has been used in 30% of the 747 septic abortion cases. (Kabra:1986:25) Two women are reported to have died from abortions caused by Fetex paste but it continues to be marketed. The following quote is a graphic example of the harmful effects of illegal abortions:

Prof. B. Kishore and his colleagues report from S.K. Medical College Hospital, Muzuffarpur, a case of illegal abortion conducted on a 19 yr. old unmarried girl by a village quack, which resulted in so large a perforation of the uterus that 15 feet of intestine were projecting from the vagina when she was brought to the hospital.

(Kabra:1986:25)

An injectable contraceptive NET-EN is being tried out on women in India under the direction of the Indian Council of Medical Research. It was first marketed in 1967 and research showed that there were many questions concerning safety that were left unanswered. It has been banned in most countries with the exception of India. It is being described to Indian women as a 'liberating' experience and also promoted as a drug that would give male babies. (Balasubrahmanyam:1985:35, 1986:1079, Sadasivam:1986:1886)

Questionable contraception, forced sterilizations, dangerous or illegal abortions clearly demonstrate the lack of regard for the health and safety of Indian women. The focus of the Family Planning Programme is to meet quotas regardless of the cost to women.

The failure of Family Planning Programmes is related to many complex issues. Some of these are the interplay between production and population, specifically gender composition. Marx refers to the relationship between the mode of production and the size of the population. He neglects to analyze the sexual profile which is an important factor.

INFANT- MORTALITY

Concepts of the capitalist theory of accumulation of property and wealth, inheritance rules that result in a patriarchal preference for a male heir and cultural attitudes are factors contributing to the population problem. It is interesting to compare an area in North India with an area in South India, Kerala which has been successful in decreasing the female mortality rate as well as the overall population.

India has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world and is also the only country that has a high sex differential that favours boys. In some areas of India female infant mortality is twice as high as that of boys. The usual pattern around the world is that more males are born than females. Biologically males are more vulnerable to disease and death in the first year and the sex ratio evens out. The standard ratio of females to males is 105/100.

India digresses from this pattern and female infants die in greater numbers than male infants in the first year. This pattern continues throughout their life. The sex ratio in India is 106.9/100 (males to females). (Miller:1980:42) This is a higher male sex ratio than other countries but what it hides is the regional variations, such as Punjab- 1157 males to 1000 females, Kerala - 979 males to 1000 females. I will show how the low female sex ratio is maintained using North/South comparisons.

There is a scarcity of females in Northwest India in what is known as the Hindu belt. This belt takes in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. This area has always had a history of low sex ratio of females to males. In the latest Census recorded in the Economic & Political Weekly, Vol. XXI, NO.12, March 22, 1986 there had been a positive increase although slight in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. What was distressing was that the state of Uttar Pradesh and east to Bihar and West Bengal there had been a marked deterioration in the sex ratio. Of 38 districts in the north-western area a reversal trend has taken place in 17 and a continuing decline in 19 has been noted. In two districts the sex ratio has remained the same.

This scarcity of females dates back to the early 1800's when infanticide was documented as a cause of infant mortality. The areas listed above that presently have a low female sex ratio, were also cited as the main areas where infanticide was practiced. Most studies show that systematic infanticide is directed primarily toward females. (Japan, China, England, France) (Miller:1980:43)

In India, two methods of destruction were used. Infants were drowned in vessels of milk or opium was administered. Infanticide was banned in 1901 and it was noted then that it was practiced by middle and upper level castes with Jats (Punjab) being one of the most suspected groups. In the late 1800's the sex ratio for Jats was 310 girls per 1000 boys. Today the Jats have the highest sex ratio, 1231/1000 males to females, coinciding with a high incidence of female infant mortality. (Mamdani:1973:142) The preference for males in this area is related to property and capital accumulation. There is a saying among Jats,

*A forest is not made of one tree
A Jat is not made of one son.*
(Mamdani:1973:85)

Although infanticide is clearly caste related, female neglect appears to be generally a more universal condition throughout India. Female infant mortality is directly related to female neglect. Dowry demands are cited explanations for female neglect in lower caste families as well as middle and upper level castes. In India there is a clear preference for sons which results in neglect of daughters.

Female infant mortality rate in the North is higher in diseases such as pneumonia, dysentery, influenza and bronchitis. In Kerala the statistics for these diseases are similar to those of other countries. (Miller:1980:83) These diseases are linked to environmental and cultural factors. Discrimination occurs in feeding practices, medical care and allocation of love. Boys are breast fed longer than girls and are given any extra food that is available. Medical treatment is given more often to male children. Hospital admissions in the north are two boys to every one girl, and in the south 1.2 boys to one girl. Boys are given more 'love' than girls. Their arrival is celebrated throughout the village whereas the arrival of girls is a disappointment.

Other variables that are linked to female infant mortality are level of education of mother and religion. There is a lower female infant mortality rate in areas where women have a higher literacy rate and education eg. Kerala. Therefore education of women is seen as a factor in decreasing female infant mortality. This is misleading as areas that have access to facilities for education also have medical centres in the village. If illiterate women lived in villages with medical centres surely they would also make use of them. It is unfair to say that illiterate women neglect their children more than literate women as there are no facilities to obtain medical assistance.

As 83% of the population of India is Hindu the ideology of this group would have the most impact on female sex ratios. Studies show that Hindus have a higher rate of female infant mortality than Muslims. (Miller:1980:63) The difference is only 5% which is not significant.

Percentage of deaths of children below age five to total deaths

STATE	MALES	FEMALES	DIFFERENTIAL
South			
Kerala	28.85	30.67	1.82
Tamil Nadu	39.88	41.33	1.45
Karnataka	41.23	40.13	-1.10
Andhra Pradesh	43.16	44.52	1.36
North			
Punjab	42.16	48.97	6.81
Rajasthan	51.45	56.60	5.15
Haryana	52.20	55.36	3.16
Gujarat	55.53	58.44	2.91
Himachal Pradesh	42.32	47.84	5.52
Utter Pradesh	52.95	60.69	7.74

(Premi:1982:77)

The statistics in the chart that I prepared show the percentage of deaths of children below age five to total deaths by sex (1976) in specific areas of North and South India.

The differential in Punjab is interesting as Infant Mortality rates are often associated with poverty and lack of basic necessities for children. Punjab has become one of the wealthier agricultural areas so the reason for high Female Infant Mortality rates is reflective of a more complex problem which will be discussed.

With the growth of agricultural wealth the accumulation of property increased. Both religion and culture dictate that property must be passed on to a male heir. In middle and upper level castes where property has been accumulated the farmers are able to hire help so females are no longer needed to work in the field. Females become a liability as they do not work outside the home and must be provided with a large dowry when they marry. When asked why they had a preference for sons the following reasons were given: 1. inheritance, 2. support in old age, 3. financial (Dowry), 4. ritual & religion (Miller:1980:160).

The lower castes also have a higher mortality rate for females than males but it is not as significant as that of the upper and middle level castes. The reasons for female neglect in lower castes are somewhat different than the other castes. As these castes are unpropertied they do not worry about inheritance. Financial support is one of the main factors. It is believed that sons will support their parents in old age. Daughters are liabilities as a small

dowry must be found. Culture plays an important part also, as a patriarchal, sexist society places more value on males.

The patriarchal preference for male offspring particularly in the northwest is clearly evident in the recent controversy over amniocentesis and subsequent female foeticide in Amritsar, Punjab. Between 1978 and 1983 approximately 78,000 female foetuses were aborted after sex-determination tests were done. (Mies:1986:151) This was justified as a means of population control.

It also applies the capitalist logic of supply and demand to the value of women in society. The cost of sex-determination tests ranged from Rs 80 to Rs 500. It was advertised as being better to spend the money now than to spend more later on dowry. The cost of amniocentesis makes it more readily available to middle and upper level castes but many are worried that its use as a population control device might be misused with lower caste women as abortion and sterilization was.

The impact of female foeticide in a country that has a history of female infanticide and an adverse sex ratio is frightening. This concern was also voiced in No Longer Silent. Technological advances, such as amniocentesis, should be assessed as to the socio-economic value. It would seem that there are far more serious threats to infant life than the ones that amnio would detect.

SON PREFERENCE

Overpopulation and high female infant mortality rates are problems for all of India. Son preference is valued for the following reasons: 1. transmission of family name, 2. economic support for the family when they grow old or are disabled, 3. performance of the ancestral rites for the father after his death (sradha), and 4. financial interests due to dowry payment. (Miller:1980:160)

These reasons for son preference are not as valid in different geographical areas or in particular strata of society. Inheritance is more of a factor in the North as more people own land than in the South. The North has approximately seven landowners to every four in the South. Daughters are often accepted in the South as heirs and may inherit land. Support in old age is particularly a problem in the North where married daughters live in village so are close to parents if they need support. Financial aspects are important in the North where large dowries are needed.

The interplay between production and gender composition within the population is relevant when comparing the North and South. In the North dry-field plough cultivation limits female participation in the labour market in propertied families. Female labour participation in the northern unpropertied families is high. In the South wet-rice cultivation provides employment for women from almost all social strata. In the chart below you can see how the modes of production relate to the gender composition of the population.

Female labour participation rates and marriage costs have some bearing on the sex ratio of rural India but certainly do not explain it entirely with the exception of Northern propertied groups which is clear.

CATEGORY	Female Labour Participation	Marriage Costs	Juvenile Sex Ratio
Northern propertied	Low	High	High
Southern propertied	Low-med.-high	Low-med-high	Low
Northern unpropertied	High	Low	Mediam
Southern unpropertied	High	Low	Low-medium

Kerala has the lowest infant mortality rate in all of India at 47 per 1000 births compared to Uttar Pradesh in the north with 170 per 1000 births. (Jain:1985:412) Family planning Programmes have also proven successful in this area as compared to all other areas of India.

It is important to understand why Kerala has been successful. The success has often been attributed to the more advanced social development under the C.P.I.(M) Party. I find this a narrow explanation as states such as West Bengal are far wealthier and also are governed by the C.P.I. Party and have limited success with overpopulation and high infant mortality rates. Obviously the importance of social development in terms of education, health services and employment possibilities for women is a contributing factor to population control and a 'normal' sex ratio pattern which is found in Kerala. In looking at various studies of Kerala and discussing these with Rita Mathur, researcher for the film Women of Kerala, I agree with her interpretation that the most important contributing factor is culture. (Miller:1980:158)

Kerala has its roots in Dravidian culture and maintained a matrilineal form of family organization until the British imposed restrictions on this in the 19th Century.

The family organization in Kerala is in direct opposition to the patriarchal structure based in Brahmin culture found in Northern States such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat where men have control over women's sexuality and property is inherited through the male line.

In the Nayar family of Kerala, for example, property is owned in common by men and women. Women have control over their own sexuality. The separation of sexuality from subsistence is one of the main features of this culture. The people who women depend on for economic survival are not the same ones with whom they have sexual relationships. Therefore there was no basis for economic exploitation within the sexual relationship. Kerala did not practice sati, purdah or female infanticide.

The British saw sexual freedom of women as promiscuity so with the support of the Brahmins placed restrictions on women and land distribution. By the time of Independence the matrilineal system was undermined extensively. (Joshi/Liddle:1986:29) Kerala today has the highest sex ratio at 935 males per 1000 females (Jain:1985:72), the second highest age of marriage for women and the highest literacy rate in India.

The fact that Kerala has maintained these levels shows the drastic differences in Northern states. I think a major part of this can be attributed to the previous existence of the

matrilineal family which has a higher cultural regard and respect for women than patriarchal cultures. The quality of life for women improves as they become less oppressed by the patriarchal culture. Other contributing factors are the type of production (wet-rice cultivation, fishing, co-ops) which dictates female involvement in labour and the political affiliations of the state (CPI M). Tamil Nadu also has some history of early matriarchal development but not to the same extent. Unfortunately these two states comprise only a very small part of India and do not have much political clout. I do not believe that they can make much of an impact on the patriarchal sexist states in the Hindu belt of the North.

CONCLUSION

From the information presented above it is obvious that India has a serious problem that goes far beyond overpopulation. The Seventh Five-Year Plan (1986-90) has just started. Will it fail as the previous plans over the last forty years have done? The government attributes poverty to overpopulation. With the devastating lack of sanitation, shelter, food and water for much of the population it is apparent that India must tackle the population problem from another angle. The people have to be asked what they want from the government in respect to family planning and not have programmes imposed on them that do not meet their needs.

The main area of concern that developed for me as I compiled the above information is the position of women in Indian society, particularly rural women. In a caste and class based, feudal, sexist, patriarchal society women have no perceived rights. India has a violent history of control and domination of women through the practice of sati, dowry deaths, female infanticide, female infant and child neglect and rape. In most villages of India over one half of the women are anemic. India has a sex ratio that is unfavorable for women. The female infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the world.

Unethical population control programmes have successfully continued to oppress rural women of India. Technology has been able to control the reproductive process of women's bodies by the use of injectable contraceptives, sex-determination tests, hormonal contraceptives, laparoscopies, tubectomies, abortion and I.U.D.'s. Technology can control how many children a woman has, when she has them and what sex she has. All of this has been achieved with total disregard and lack of respect for women.

Technology, which has its roots in the existing political and caste ideologies, has failed to improve conditions for women in India. A better quality of life for women would be reflected in lower female infant mortality, a higher life expectancy for women, access to safe birth control and health care. Biological reproduction is controlled by the hegemony of political, cultural and religious ideologies. Where is the technology that can change these ideologies and ultimately improve the quality of life for women of India, in particular women and poor women?

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[This research paper was prepared for Department of Social Sciences, York University, Toronto, Canada].

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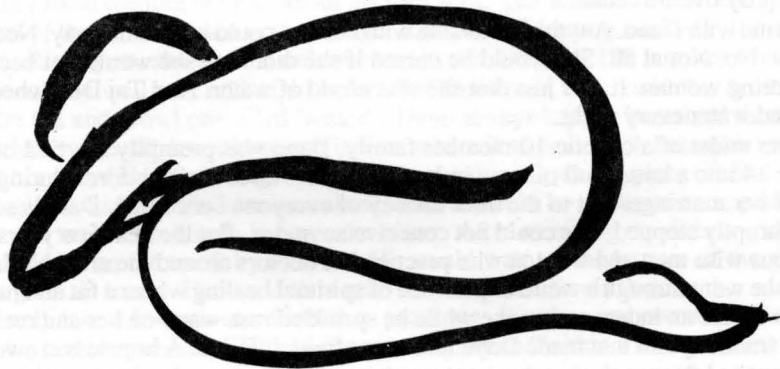
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Short Story
Toronto, Canada



THE MEMORY OF AN UNPAID DEBT

by

Fauzia Rafiq

Today was Dano's first day in her new home. She was 24 and had never been on her own before. The feeling was strange. Technically, Dano was not on her own even now. She was left under the care of her eldest son who had just turned 13. but he was her son, not her husband or her mother-in-law. She felt as if she was manageably alone especially because her son loved hanging around that newly installed tubewell at the other end of the township where women and girls went to fetch water and to do their laundry. It was a quiet afternoon. The heat of the sun was slowly giving way to a cool monsoon breeze. Dano was sitting cross -legged on a 'charpai' under a newly planted mango tree on her tiny terrace. It was her house and her terrace and her

tree and her toilet and her kitchen because Taj Din and his mother had left yesterday for Gujrat.

Taj Din had arrived from Saudi Arabia after two years. First thing he did was to select and buy this house. Two weeks ago they moved from their tiny village to this little township. His one-month leave of absence was to end in two more weeks.

So, after setting up the house according to his wishes he felt it appropriate to go visit his sisters in Gujrat and give them their presents. Also, it would give his sisters tremendous face in front of their in-laws if their 'rich' and 'foreign-returned' brother would make a short visit and bring foreign-made presents for them, their husbands and their in-laws. Taj Din, accompanied by his mother had left yesterday. He planned to go to Lahore from Gujrat, meet his old friends there, and then fly over to Jedda.

This was fine with Dano. Anything was fine with her that could keep him away. Not because she hated him. No. Not at all. She would be cursed if she did. And she would not because she was a god-fearing woman. It was just that she was afraid of water. And Taj Din, when he was around, wanted water every night.

Born in the midst of a chaotic 10-member family, Dano was promptly married off by her parents at age 14 into a house full of stern in-laws. She bore three male children during the first three years of her marriage. But to the utter dismay of everyone concerned, Dano's success at procreation abruptly stopped. She could not conceive anymore. For the next few years she was taken to various wise men and women who practiced as doctors around the area. Nothing happened. Then she went through a weird experience of spiritual healing where a fat and half naked man made her inhale an incensuous smoke while he sprinkled rose water on her and recited holy verses with a frantic rythm that made Danu feel very afraid. It failed. A hopeless crowd of relatives finally reached the conclusion that her 'womb has dried up', an absolutely unwanted diagnosis for any married woman.

After that Dano's in-laws dutifully reminded her every other day that it was out of goodness of her husband's heart as well the fact that she had already borne three male children for him, that Taj Din alias Taja continued to tolerate her as his wife. Thus, she should keep praying to God Almighty for His forgiveness and should try to thank Him by making her husband and in-laws happy for the rest of her life.

As far as Dano was concerned she needed no reminders. She was a good woman and knew how much she owed Taj Din, his relatives, and the God Almighty. So she spent her time vigilantly trying to please all three parties.

Among these three, Taj Din was the most difficult to please. Despite her best efforts, the situation continued to deteriorate. Taj Din, a strong and normal man, like all strong and normal men of the village, desired to relieve his sexual needs almost every night.

At that time, they lived in a small clay hut with a hay roof. A similar one-roomed hut was inhabited by Taj Din's mother and her five sons. Her three daughters were married off and lived in Gujrat and only came to visit once or twice a year. Taj Din was the oldest of the sons and led this manpower of five to work on someone else's land in the village. He also had a positive attitude towards life and took the burden of the future of his family seriously.

Utterly predictable in his behaviour, he would come home just after sunset, sit with his mother, brothers and sons in the kitchen and eat heartily while Dano kept up a supply of freshly made "chapatis" (big round pieces of bread cooked one after another in a flat pan). After-

wards, he would sit contentedly waiting for Dano to prepare his "hukah" (smoke-pipe). He would then have his hands washed by one of his sons, take his hukah and join the other men in the village.

After Taj Din left, Dano would eat her food; tend the children; wash pans, pots and dishes; put any leftovers safely away for the next day; prepare fresh flour for next morning; put out the fire; clean the two huts; look over the cows and chickens to make sure they were safe for the night; and prepare hot milk with a touch of tea leaves for her mother-in-law. They would drink tea together and share gossip of the day. Then Dano would bring a tattered book from the trunk and read out loud the famous story of the Prophet Joseph titled "Qissa Yousuf-Zuleikha", in which Zuleikha, the sinful and evil woman tried to malign the handsome prophet Yousaf. Dano especially liked reading the part about his torn shirt. Her mother-in-law liked listening to it as did most of the other women in the village. Dano loved reading out loud. It made her feel important. Rightly so, she was the only woman in the village of 150 families who could read.

It would be well past mid-night before Taj Din would return with his brothers. He would enter the hut and growl one word "water". Dano always kept an oversized tumbler of water in the kitchen space. She would snatch it from where it sat and reach him with speed. He would look at her and without moving his eyes away would indicate the place where he wanted her to put the glass. She knew where he wanted it but it would be wrong to anticipate his actions, so she always waited for him to indicate the place. After receiving the direction she would begin to put it down on the trunk by the bed. He would wait till the bottom of the glass was safely touching the tin trunk. He would then grab her left breast firmly, leading her over to his bed. It would only take a few minutes for him to penetrate, ejaculate and come out of her. She would empty his bed immediately. He would swear angrily and within a few moments fall into a snoring sleep.

Dano found this nightly ritual hard to bear. She was never wet inside and it hurt when he entered her. But that was not the real problem. Taj Din, unlike every normal man in the village, hated a dry cunt. From the beginning of their marriage, Taj Din was unhappy and disgusted about it. At first, in order to please him, Dano would squeeze him from inside. But after her last son she couldn't do it anymore. And now, even her nipples did not swell when he grabbed her left breast. The pain increased over the years and lately it had become so excruciating that she could not remember bearing such pain even during her last childbirth which was the most painful of the three. Every night she prayed to the God Almighty to make Taj Din forget that he needed to do it. Every night he would come to remember it.

There were many side effects to this problem. The biggest one was that she had become so afraid of water that she stopped drinking it. She avoided taking a bath as long as she could. And when she had to, it would take several hours of fortification and then she would tightly shut her eyes, invoke all the spirits of the dead prophets and saints for help before pouring water on her body. And she was absolutely unable to stand the rain. Rain drops fell on her like a shower of bullets. She reacted to it so strongly that even her mother-in-law became sympathetic and told her not to go out in the rain for any reason whatsoever. She went so far as to do the chores herself that required stepping into the rain.

But most of Dano's chores involved the use of water. Thus most of her everyday chores had turned into ordeals to be gotten through. She knew it was punishment for her sin of not wanting her husband. She repented through suffering, as was proper.

1976 was a strange year for her. Taj Din, having a developmental attitude towards life, finally landed a job in a factory in Lahore (the oldest and biggest city in the province of Punjab). He was now unable to come back to the village every night. The distance was 40 miles but it took a two-hour ride on the bus and then an hour of walking. He had also discovered the benefits of working over-time so he only came home once a month.

Dano was pleased. It was clear that the God Almighty and approved of her actions and was secretly rewarding her for that. After giving it a lot of thought she reached the conclusion that it was her absolute obedience to her mother-in-law that the Almighty approved. She increased her vigil in that direction.

Taj Din was a dependable and hard-working man, the dream of any employer. He advanced rapidly. Within a year his brothers were all working in the same factory and he himself was bound for Saudi Arabia. And that is how his family came across what was described in the village as "big money."

It took Taj Din only two years to come back and buy a brick house with two separate rooms, a tiny terrace, a built-in toilet and a covered kitchen. He paid in cash. He had bought the house in a small rural town 10 miles from his village because he knew many people there. It was safer and cheaper for the family compared to the big city of Lahore.

Busy as he was, he still did not forget to call for the water every night for all the two weeks that he was there. But Dano endured really well. So much was happening, they now possessed four wooden chairs, three tables, a handsome "Durrie" and two decoration pieces. Taj Din placed all of these, along with a 'charpai' into one of the two rooms, creating a "bethuk" (sitting room), a sign of immense status and respectability. A black and white television and a tape recorder were to follow shortly.

She was grateful. All the women in their village envied her. And rightly so, Taj Din knew how to take care of his wife and children. So the night before he was leaving for Gujrat, Dano shyly picked his tumbler of water even before he called for it. Taj Din graciously overlooked this discrepancy and relieved himself as he always did.

Dano was so grateful to him. She had so little to give him. She felt sad for a while but then realized that is probably how God wanted it to be. He gave so much and took so little. She took everything and gave hardly anything apart, of course, for three male children.

On top of this, she had to curse her evil nature when she realized how relaxed and contented she felt when Taj Din finally left with his mother.

The house was new and clean. Children were out for the day. She had nothing to do. No one to cater to. It was a strange feeling. The monsoon breeze was getting chilly and the blue of the sky was about to hide behind heavy grey clouds. She was sitting aimlessly under the mango tree. Suddenly she had the urge to sit in one of the four wooden chairs. It seemed quite logical to do that when she was on her own because these were the first chairs she had in her home. She saw them before in the huge house of the landowner of her village. But these were her own. She had the opportunity to sit in one of these before but that was when Taj Din had just bought them and everyone was there to see them. She wanted to sit in them now that she was alone.

She got up from the charpai and went into the "bethuk". The room was full of smell of newly varnished wood. The four beautiful chairs sat in a line by the wall facing the entrance door. A newly made charpai was by the opposite wall. The shining wooden table was put between the space left by the charpai and the chairs. There was a colourful bedcover on the charpai. Equally inviting, but she was positive she wanted to try the chairs first. She chose the one in the far left corner.

And that was when she found the book. It was in a cheap carrier bag of an airline company. Taj Din had packed it but had forgotten to take it with him. She picked it up to put it safely away for him when he would be back next.

A strong urge to see what is inside made her open it. She knew she should not be doing it but there was no one there to witness this unseemly action. There was a fancy comb, a strong scent, and a few other knick-knacks. But what fascinated her most of all was an old book. A book that a lot of hands had held - like her own - "Qissa Yousaf Zuleikha". The book fascinated her because this was about the second book she held in her hand. She liked the feel of it.

She opened the book. It was the first chapter and a woman was telling her story.

"I discovered the pleasures of my body for the first time when I was a budding flower of 11. I remember with utter fondness that hot afternoon when I was alone in the house. I was lying shamelessly on my bed when a hand lightly touched my nipple. I turned my head and saw my strong father staring at my bosom where the three top buttons of my shirt were open revealing my fair flesh. He slowly sneaked his hand in and moved his fingers towards my erected nipples. "His hand was the hand of the God of Pleasures. I felt strange sensations that I cannot explain even if I tried to. My eyelids became heavy and my whole body demanded to be touched by him. He was the God of a thousand pleasures. He touched and squeezed me with my clothes clinging to my craving body. Then he took all my clothes off and touched and squeezed my secret parts. I was unable to stop from coming when he squeezed my "pink pea" and rubbed it in his two iron fingers. I still shudder with pleasure at the memory of it."

A little later in the first chapter, the woman says:

"I could never truly give him back the pleasure that he endowed upon me day after day until I was 14. I now think with disgust about a pleasureless life which would have been my destiny if he had not come to me that hot afternoon. I might never have known the pleasures of my body. Indeed, I am forever in his debt. A debt I could not ever pay back; though I have tried and tried."

And that was when something snapped in Dano's mind. It caused an onslaught of memory that she had never acknowledged before. She remembered the pain, the humiliation and the guilt. She also remembered the utter dispossession of an eleven year old girl-child. She remembered her thighs wet with her father's ejaculation. She also remembered the feeling of drowning into a well of slime. And finally she remembered closing her mind and turning her flesh into stone.

Dano tried to keep the words from going round and round in front of her. She made them stop for a moment: "the debt that I could not ever pay back --- the debt, the god of pleasures -- if he had not come -- if he had not come -- the debt -- I could not ----"


"Liar. She is a liar. L-I-A-R." Dano's voice was hoarse and too low to be called a scream.

When one of the neighbours came that way she found Dano standing in the middle of the terrace soaking wet in the rain. Her face was contorted in a scream. Her hands were twitching uncontrollably. The muscles of her eyes were stretched to the limit and did not seem to move. Her mouth was twitching to form the word "liar" into a soundless scream.

The nearest spiritual healer was brought over to the house.

After much deliberation, taking into account that she had in her possession a pornographic book, ostensibly written by a shameless woman, the village reached the consensus that Dano was such a slave to her body that she went out of her mind because she was unable to spend even 24 hours without a man.

[Translated from Punjabi. This English draft is owed to Corey Levine who edited the translated version of this story.]

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Poems
Seaton, England

[These poems are a dialogue between two women who write to, for and with each other, as friends, poets, lesbians and lovers. "In this kind country," which is the final section of 'FLESH AND PAPER', describes their trip to India and acts as commentary on the preceding sections. Some of the irony arises from the fact that though they are both aliens in the heterosexual world, the white woman is an alien in her lover's native context., published by Gynergy Books, Box 132, Charlottetown, PEI in Canada and by Jezebel Tapes and Books in England.]

IN THIS KIND COUNTRY

by

SUNITI NAMJOSHI
and
GILL HANSCOMBE

Was it quite like that?

(i)

And so you said, "Well, which goddess then?"
I replied, "Come to the country of which
my bones are made up, I mean, the minerals,
the dust and ashes, the named chemicals. Our gods
inhabit birds and beasts and our ruined temples
are still functioning." So we went to India
where a stone is a god -if you say it is-

and where a great many stones are carved with gods,
but just lying about, because , as I told you,
the whole country is a gigantic junk heap.
When we walked about, both reverent and casual,
you were undisturbed. How shall I say it?
You were like me. Did you exercise caution
O my dearest love? You did not question my kinship.

(ii)

Was it quite like that?

We stop for coffee. No
tigers about. And the room air-conditioned. "The
context..." I mumble, break off inane.
"Yes". You're businesslike.

"You people show up badly here."

Is that it?
I'm white. I'm Western Civilization. I'm Christendom,
their blood running in rivers. I'm capitalist
imperialism, overlording their lords. I'm
barbarism: misplacing, renaming. I'm us, not them.

"And the lesbians..." I try again. Mrs. Moore, alone
in the cave, lost her bearings. But that's fiction
and the writer was one of us.

"We must go," you say gently. I make the coffee
taste just like home.

(iii)

But we were late for lunch...

My mother
might wait. In any event
all the servants
would be kept waiting. Why

make an issue
over time for coffee? Time
together -
that was the issue. But we were
together,
not face to face, side by side...
And behind the explanations
the frightening admission:
in this kind country
of exact relationships, there is
no word
for you and me.
Come lover,
they are my kin
and I their alien,
share the bloodied bonds with me.

We can compose ourselves

We can compose an ocean if we like;
deck it about with sand dunes, a
mountain or two, some trees.
Or we can compose ourselves.
But a politics? To invent, just we two,
a view? How to think? What to do?
And a country?
In yours, though the
climate is warm, the buildings fabulous,
though even the rocks have names,
we wither, having no word.
And in mine,
the word is so raw it bleeds; and from
fury of pain, it attacks; and would
maim us daily. We can compose ourselves;
but it's our bodies, not our passports,
fit so uncommonly well.

They invent, circumvent

They invent, circumvent. No tigers here.
Lovers retreat.

At best they smile. They are seemly and courteous.
They sleep apart. Their goddess hides her face.
Shame has many modes.

The family takes trouble, infinite care. The
servants are kind and scrupulous. She does her
best to be a good guest, but has little to offer.
They do it for her lover's sake, who isn't her lover.
The gift of deception is hidden, implicitly prized.

Are they mated or parted? And do they know?

But you like what you see

But you like what you
at least some aspects,
some part of it.
I did not
come into being
a fully grown lesbian
with a knowledge of English,
a trained brain
and sexual politics
inscribed upon it.
These native modes,
these shades of feeling,
return to me an element that feels
like home.
In the West I burn;
here,
when my lungs give out,
I cannot breathe.

I see what I can

I see what I can: monkeys, camels, an elephant,
untethered bullocks with painted horns; manhigh
shelters of tin, plastic, canvas, straw, timber, raffia
or mud; shrines, forts, temples, tombs, mosques
and palaces; bare hills, brown grass and crops of
the equatorial zone.

"There's a god," you'd said, "every 500 yards.
Often a rock painted orange".

We move about. Nobody stares. Only the hawkers
pester.

Sometimes you explain. "The cultures mix badly.
You ask and grab, we give and offer,
become more polite".

(If I don't belong, should I also not look?)
I finger my camera. "Be quick," you advise;
"people are shamed". (You want pictures of poverty?)
Oh yes. Of itself, not belonging makes
me blind.)

At Mahabalipuram lies nine feet of Vishnu, on his
back and awake, sharing the last of seven temples
at the sea's edge.

Untutored, unenlightened, I do not shed my shoes.

In that particular temple

In that particular temple
a god slept
and a goddess danced,
and in another
a goddess slept and a god
danced.
Do I dare say it? Perhaps-
it is possible-
that it's all the same?
That rapt
and dispassionate stare,
the flaring curve
of the gorgeous hip
and the round
and unashamed breasts,
I have worshipped
before. When we make love
you and I
are both sacred and secular.
The goddess's limbs
begin to move.
Balanced underfoot
the world spins.

Because of India

Because of India, before and after,
what could we uncover?
the history not for taking:
the family not for joining:
the cause not for naming:

and lover, what could we discover
in any country or poetry? (being

visitors; and seemly); we can

can

only take the goddess, carry her about,
plait for her a new liturgy (because

of India you came and I return). We can

-I/you can-press dreams and theories, bellies,
breasts, hair, hips, lips; and words; all
plaited now, until tomorrow. I have
told her, lover, to expect
fresh flowers for her feet.

There is no undiscovered country

There is no undiscovered country,
though the beasts are harmless,
and the fish
do not leap to tell us fiercely
we must go elsewhere.
There is only an ordinary planet,
where the shack falls down,
weather prevails,
and we must pay for safety
with a disguised
and difficult deference
and the habit of fear.
And there is only a man-made language
with its logic
of need and greed,
doom, dearth, despair.
But in spite of a hurtful history
shall we speak of a peopled place
where womn may walk freely
in the still, breathable air?

Suniti Namjoshi, born in Bombay in 1941, is the author of Feminist Fables, From the Bedside Book of Nightmares, The Conversations of a Cow and The Blue Conkey Fables.

Gillian Hanscombe, born in Melbourne in 1945, is the author of Hecate's Charms, Between Friends and Writing for their lives (with Virginia L. Smyers).

