

# Diva

A Quarterly Journal of South Asian Women



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Cover: IN THE MARKET PLACE IN LADAAKH, HIMALAYAS

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## PROFILE OF SOUTHASIAN COMMUNITY

by

Brenda Cranney

South Asian, as a broad category, refers to people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. I have not made any distinction between immigrants from these four countries and immigrants of Indian origin from Fiji, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Caribbean and Mauritius. South Asians come from diverse and heterogeneous ethnic groups. But I have attempted to generalize the experiences of Sikhs, Bengalis, Gujratis, Hindi and Punjabi speaking Hindus, Pakistanis, Sinhalese and Tamils.

To put the present South Asian experience into context it is necessary to look briefly at the beginnings of South Asian immigration in Canada. Sikhs from the Punjab region were the first immigrants to arrive in Vancouver in 1904. They were needed to work in logging so the government imposed no restrictions. As the economic climate began to change, the government started to impose restrictions on South Asian immigration. The new immigration policy outlined the 'continuous journey' stipulation to cut off South Asian immigration. Between 1919 and 1930 only 422 new immigrants arrived from India. The total number of South Asians in Canada in 1950 was 2,148 (Buchignani, 1985. Pg. 105).

In 1951 a quota system was set up allowing 150 Indians, 100 Pakistanis and 50 Ceylonese per year to come to Canada. During the 50's Canada continually upped the occupational criteria of South Asian quota immigrants. This increased the number of professional, managerial and technical workers among immigrants.

Toronto's South Asian settlement started with the rise of professional-class immigration in the mid 1950's. The point system came into effect in 1967 and continued the trend of selecting an immigrant population that was highly educated and professional.

In the late 1970's economic recession resulted in the restriction of people coming into Canada. From 1975 onwards, sponsored South Asian immigrants (family class) made up most of the immigrant population. This has meant a shift in the occupational background of South Asian immigrants. A government preference for skilled blue-collar immigrant workers has also impacted on South Asian immigration.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF SOUTH ASIANS IN CANADA

1950	2,148
1982	200,000

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF SOUTH ASIANS IN ONTARIO

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
1981	70,000

Most centered in and around Metro Toronto.

The South Asian population in Canada as of 1982 was estimated at 200,000 (Buchignani, 1985. P. 115). Ontario has a South Asian population of 70,000 most of which is centered around the Toronto area. In January 1985 the City of Toronto, Planning and Development Department put out a report on the community profile of South Asians. In the 1981 census 8,655 people described themselves as belonging to an Indo-Pakistani ethnic group in the core of the city. In the metropolitan area 69,725 belonged to the Indo-Pakistani group (City of Toronto, paper 1985).

Although the South Asian community is distributed across the Toronto region there is a major concentration in Rexdale, Jane-Finch, Flemingdon and Thorncliffe Park, northern Scarborough, St. James Town, Parkdale and the Wallace - Emmerson/Dufferin Groves area. (City of Toronto, Paper, 1985).

**Employment and Education**

Canada's Immigration policy determined what type of South Asian immigrants came to

Canada in the late 60's and early 70's. This group was from an urban educated middle class background. Most were professionals and white collar workers who came to Canada to better economic conditions for their family. The point system made it possible to bring in only the well educated and professional South Asians. As Canada's employment needs and economic conditions changed in the 70's the government encouraged more sponsored immigration which attracted blue-collar and semi-skilled workers, many of whom did not speak English as well as their predecessors.

Although the government was responsible for bringing in educated immigrants they did not take on the responsibility of providing employment. Canada would not recognize degrees from South Asian universities. The Ministry of Education evaluated B.A.'s as being equivalent to Grade 13. Masters degrees were often overlooked altogether. Professionals such as dentists were required to undergo professional examinations but facilities to do this were not available. Union regulations made it difficult for tradesmen to work in their own trade. Many South Asian immigrants were unable to obtain employment in their profession so they took lower paying jobs that did not make use of their skills.

Government agencies also discriminated against South Asians in respect to employment. Many South Asians were trained to work as civil servants but this was not recognized in Canada. For instance, the Civil Liberties Association has three positions held by South Asians out of 235 top ones. The Human Rights Commission does not have a South Asian member (Bhausahab, Paper).

The latest South Asian immigrants face more difficulty in obtaining employment as they do not have as many skills and are often less educated than the earlier ones. South Asian women in this group, in particular, face even more discrimination in the employment struggle. They not only face the general discrimination against women but also the discrimination against visible minority immigrant women. Many South Asian women are not fluent in English therefore it is easier for them to be exploited in terms of jobs and pay. They are not familiar with labour laws and work rights. Many end up in the lowest paid, back-breaking work available i. e. the garment industry. Tania Das Gupta comments "They are in a sense a captive labour force, drawn on when the need arises." (Polyphony, V8 No. 1, 1986, P. 69). Compared with Canadian women in factory work (6%), South Asian women had a higher percentage in manual work (11%) such as assembling, fabricating and repairing. (Asianadian, Vol 1, No. 4, P. 2).

As an immigrant group, South Asian women have one of the highest percentages of literacy. In one particular study 83% could read and write, 26% had diplomas or technical education, 36% had B. A.'s and 23% had M. A.'s (South Asians in Transition, 1980 paper). In contrast South Asian women had the highest rate of unemployment. There has been little effort invested in understanding this phenomena.



TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF LITERACY IN SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN

Can Read & Write	83. 3%
Have Diplomas / Technical education	26. 7%
Degree of Bachelor of Arts	36. 7%
Degree of Master of Arts	23. 3%

**(This is one of the highest percentages of literacy in an immigrant group.)**

In the study cited below, categories of employment were:

Professionals 6. 2%  
Supervisors 3. 3%  
General Office 16. 7%  
Skilled Work 6. 7%  
Semi-skilled 13. 3%

These figures certainly show no correlation to the educational backgrounds given.

The under-utilization of professional training is very high in South Asian women. Some professionals found it necessary to take clerical and factory jobs. Many women from middle class backgrounds in India find themselves in the working class in Ontario.

**FAMILY**

"South Asian women bring with them the conditioning of a particularly rigid, patriarchal society. Entering a highly advanced, industrial society, they experience double oppression: feudal oppression at home and exploitation at work. Moreover, in the Canadian context, they lack the informal support system of the extended family and friendship structures that they had in their home countries." (Polyphony, V8 No. 1, , P. 68). This statement by Tania Das Gupta sheds some light on the stresses a South Asian woman faces.

Many South Asian women had not worked outside the home prior to coming to Canada. The family unit was of uppermost importance and the woman was responsible for providing and maintaining a good family life. Economic pressures in Canada make it necessary for South Asian women to work outside the home, often in very strenuous low-paying jobs. This places stress on the woman as she must also maintain the home in the traditional way. She often does a 'double-day' of work - outside the home and then inside the home. She must also deal with the guilt of not providing the traditional 'mother-role' for her children.

The weakening of traditional extended family ties (often imposed by Immigration Policy) places another burden on South Asian women. They are often socially isolated and do not have the resources to call on for help with babysitting etc. The fact that children are exposed daily to 'Canadian culture' and often adults are not, can lead to a severe generation gap. Women, it seems, must struggle to keep their own cultural and religious traditions alive for the family.

There is growing concern in the South Asian community for seniors. The Immigration Policy allows parents to be sponsored if they are over 65 years of age. Thus many seniors cannot work and do babysitting and housework for their children. Many families live in the suburbs so social and cultural activities are not readily accessible. There was some suggestion in the media that seniors were being abused by their families. Facilities for seniors, such as Gray Tigers Senior Club, are starting to develop.

Men have traditionally been the providers for their families. In Canada, they often have difficulty finding a good paying job or any job at all. They must also put up with discrimination in the work place. There seems to be an increase in 'wife-battering' in the South Asian community related to economic burdens and undermining of self-worth. (Polyphony, V6 No. 1, 1984. P. 197). As women gain economic independence they also gain independence in attitudes, thoughts and behaviour. This independence can cause a conflict if the husband is unwilling to accept the non-traditional role of 'wife'. The South Asian Social Services report an increase in marriage breakdowns and have doubled their counselling services over the last five years.

## **Community Resources /Cultural and Social Services**

Community resources for the South Asian population fall into three categories:

1. Cultural Organizations
2. Social Services - state organized and run
3. Social Services - community organized and run

The Bengali community has two major organizations; Prabasi, established in 1969 and the Bengali Cultural Association established in 1974. The Canadian Sri Lanka Organization is the major organization for Sri Lankans in Toronto. Cultural organizations have been formed by various groups with the intention of preserving cultural, religious and ethnic traditions. The Sikh community had four Gurdwaras in Metro Toronto These Gurdwaras are

an important part of community life. Births, holy days, deaths and marriages are celebrated in the Gurdwara. In 1977, the Sikh Social and Educational Society was established. There are other smaller community groups. The Zoroastrian community formed the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario in 1970. A community prayer hall was set up in North York. These are just a few of the organizations that have been set up by the South Asian community. The varied ethnic backgrounds of South Asians are represented in many organizations throughout the city. It is estimated that there are at least 60 South Asian organizations in Metro Toronto (Buchignani, 1985. P. 184).

There have been many Social Services organized by the government to meet the needs of the South Asians in Toronto. These include:

Toronto Board of Education - provides direct service through an assistant social worker and a community relations worker.

The Ethnic Relations Unit of the Metro Police - have officers who speak South Asian languages.

Multicultural programmes - provides grants to ethnic groups (which often causes competition between groups). We need more than an awareness of ethnic foods and folk-dancing which seems to be the focus of 'multiculturalism'.

The Council on Race Relations and Policing which is funded by the Metro Police has representation from South Asian community.

I feel that most of these organizations are problematic as they are only gestures and do not address the real problems. For example, the Metro Police have an Ethnic Relations Unit but the policemen employed might not be trained in issues related to wife assault. Also South Asians are under-represented on the police force even though Sikhs come to Canada with 'policing' skills. The other organizations can also be seen as operating on a superficial level.

The third area identified is, Social Services organized by the community. There has been an increase in services developed to aid the South Asian population, in particular South Asian women. A partial list is included here:

1. Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre - provides counselling in Hindi, Gujarati, Kachhi, Tamil and Punjabi
2. Immigrant Women's Centre
3. South Asian Women's Group - support groups, informal counselling



4. Catholic Family Services - worker who can provide counselling in Hindi and Urdu
5. Central Hospital - hospital services in 40 languages.
6. South Asian Social Services - settlement services, consultation re. family and marital problems.
7. COSTI IIAS - outreach programme in Jane-Finch area
8. Care-Ring Rexdale - social support services
9. North York Women's Shelter - services in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi
10. Flemingdon Health Centre - staff who speaks Hindi, Kachhi
11. South Asian Centre - ESL courses available
12. Association of Women of India in Canada
13. Gray Tigers Seniors Club - counselling service for seniors
14. Globe Rangers Youth Club - geared to South Asian adolescents
15. Shirley Samaroo House - immigrant women's shelter.

There are many other organizations that address the needs of immigrant women in general.

## **RACISM**

The South Asian immigrant experience in Canada has been fraught with racism, racial prejudice, racial discrimination and racial violence. It began in 1904, when Sikhs first arrived in Vancouver and continues today. The Komagata Maru affair in 1914, was a prime example of the state's ideology of 'white supremacy'. The energy that went into maintaining a 'white population' was astounding. Canadians used biological criteria to stereotype immigrant groups. They believed that people could be divided into races on the basis of skin colour and facial features. Since most of our immigration was light-skinned, the South Asians were visible and easy targets.

The period between 1974 and 1977 saw a major increase in racial violence towards South Asians. The media must take some responsibility for perpetuating this racial violence. During this period Toronto based papers began to associate South Asian immigration with high levels of unemployment. Any situation involving South Asians was dramatized in the media. In 1977, violence, harassment and vandalism against South Asians was rampant in Metro Toronto. By 1979 racial violence had subsided greatly. Other forms of racism were still evident. Discrimination in job situations, education, immigration, housing are still being documented.

In a recent study, Characteristics of South Asians in Toronto, 1980, women, youth and seniors were asked about racism. Some of the statistics from this survey are shown below:

### Is Your Community Subjected to Racism

<u>Category</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Very little</u>	<u>To some extent</u>	<u>To a very great extent</u>
Women	6.7%	3.3%	33.3%	23.3%
Youth	5.6	22.2	50.0	13.9
Seniors	5.3	10.5	26.	26.3

These statistics agreed with a similar study done in 1978 by Henry. This study also showed that Southern and Eastern Europeans tend to be more racist than Canadian-born persons or persons born in Britain, United States or Western Europe, though Canadians seem to make no distinction between non-whites who are Canadian-born and those who are recent immigrants. Members of the South Asian group are seen as a single category 'immigrant' whether born in Canada or not. (Characteristics of South Asians in Canada, 1980, paper).

The working class South Asian is more visible and faces more overt forms of prejudice and discrimination. Some South Asians feel that their concerns are not being fairly represented. As told by a working class Sikh in Toronto;

"One of the things which puts me off about the Toronto Sikh community is how the rich and well-off people control everything. When the government wants to know what Sikhs want they run to the doctors, engineers and professors. What do they know about discrimination, unemployment, or immigration troubles? Who are they to speak for me? We working people are never heard from."

(Buchignani, 1985, P. 176).

The government has done little to counteract the anti-South Asian feelings. Canadians are not made aware of why certain immigration policies are in effect. The economic recession is seen by many to be connected with the increase in non-white immigration. The government does nothing to educate the general public about this myth. Prior to the South Asian influx the government made no attempt to educate people about the country's need that determined this influx in the first place.

It remains to be seen whether the decline since 1979 in anti-South Asian prejudices will continue or whether new economic pressures will make South Asians a visible minority to scapegoat. It is also important to note that discrimination against South Asians has not received the attention by the public or government that is given to discrimination against some other communities. A good example of this is that the provincial commission on intolerance was set up in Alberta after a teacher was accused of being anti-semitic, but nothing was done when a 15 year old Indian boy was shot in a shopping mall in Toronto in 1976. (Buchignani, 1985, P. 216). The list of violence against South Asians could go on and on but it does not elicit public outcry or government intervention.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The South Asian experience in Toronto has been a stormy one. Although racial violence has decreased, racial discrimination and racial prejudice are still experienced by many. At the government level South Asians are still discriminated against. South Asian immigration is restricted by the fact that India has only one Canadian immigration office. Immigration officers in Canada are given too much power to evaluate immigrants. With the degree of discrimination that has been documented it is probable that the Immigration Department has as many racists as any other business.

Gender, race and class are factors that combine to make the experience of the South Asian immigrant woman a stressful one. She is at the lower strata in the employment market. She struggles against oppression in the work place and at home. Most women are sponsored immigrants so they cannot benefit from many social services that are available to others, until they become citizens.

There needs to be much work done at a government level to eliminate racism directed against South Asians. The community and private sector are active in this area but without much support from the government, for example, legal rights and police protection, they are at this point fighting an uphill battle.

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## WHERE ARE HER SISTERS?

by

Sheelagh Conway

I'm sitting in Mary's apartment now. It's a weeping afternoon in March. The rain pours down steadily, softly, insidiously from a grey bewildered sky. It's comfortable in here in Mary's apartment with its soft warm red oriental rug. Her pictures on the wall are about young women alone; always alone. One woman is lying on the grass and far in the distance is a house. Is that Mary? Mary knows about aloneness. I'm standing at the large apartment window now overlooking the Danforth with its gray dismal brick walls. And that rain is incessant, insistent. Tears of rain pouring down the window-pane. Each one flows down cascades down the cold glass, merging with others below and soon there is a collective tear that forms a little rivulet and it gushes down like lightening, down, down, down. The earth is weeping. Mother earth. The feminine form.

I'm leaning against the window now staring out. I'm wandering back to the soft rain of my native land. It used to come from the sullen skies and fall softly on the bogs where the wild cry of the curlew could be heard as she flew overhead. It was a soft rain that fell on the pearly limestones until they glistened. And the sheep stood silently on the hillsides their sodden wool saturated. They stood and gazed as though they no longer existed other than entities of soft warm rain. We all got wet and we would sit by the hearth of our humble cabin and watch the steam rise from our clothes and merge with the smoke as it all swirled up the chimney. That was a symbol of our poverty and our hopelessness. The legacy of imperialism and the way the Brits left us to nurture our own despair. But still we were The Emerald Isle where the fields defiantly turned into a vibrant green when the sun shone. That was home. That was my beloved Ireland. God, how I miss the fields and even rain.

Mary", I said "how ever did we end up here on such a dismal day. How have we come to leave Ireland and her raging beauty?" We both knew the answer. There was nothing for us in Ireland, except marriage and ten kids; struggling with a man who probably liked his drink at the pub every night and kept his woman in line with a few good kicks every now and then to show her who's boss.

Forms emerge on that window-pane and the rivulets are a raging torrent. I can see the face of that man who told stories at the Irish cultural concert last night. I went there because I felt lost and maybe alone. Irish people are my own people. We understand each other. We all know

about the silent sheep on the mountainsides as the quiet drizzle saturates their wool. I don't belong in Canada. I'm an immigrant. I'm a Canadian citizen but my experience doesn't count. That's what they said at the Council last week when I called them to find out if they would give me a grant to write another book and to pay the rent and feed two kids. Why? I asked. I implored. And I knew the desperation was etched in my voice. Why? The panel was looking for 'Canadian content' was the reply. But isn't Canada supposed to be a mosaic? I mean I'm writing about Irish women. I want to tell about the battering and the motherhood and the ten kids and how women of Ireland are always portrayed by Irish male writers as whores in a brothel or madonnas on a pedestal. I mean we were caught in the vice-grips of sexism and patriarchy and we came to Canada thinking it would be different. That we would never be beaten or raped in Canada. That we would be paid well for our work because there were laws. LAWS Ma'am. Laws to stop discrimination. And we could afford apartments like Mary's over the Danforth in Toronto. And we could afford to buy an Oriental rug with warm resonances. And we'd hang pictures of ourselves alone on the grass in some meadow watching the farmhouse beyond where all the activity was. Why is it that Mary's picture bothers me so? Why is that woman on the grass on the meadow so forlorn?

My story doesn't have Canadian content. I'm not part of the mosaic. What is the mosaic anyway? Maybe like a stained glass window where all the pieces come together to make a picture. Different colours through which the sun shines. Pieces fragmenting the sunlight. Pieces coming together. But now I know I'm not one of those pieces. Not this Canadian piece or any other. The mosaic is patriarchy. Men define the mosaic. Apartments over the Danforth don't save us from battery. And my friend Linda who is part of the mosaic and is Canadian lives in poverty too. She struggles to pay the rent and feed her kids on peanut butter sandwiches. Would her story be accepted by the Council? Or do we prefer the famous male authors whose smug faces peer at us from the Toronto Star. They write respectable fiction and they read at Harbourfront and they get nominated for prizes. And last week I read about one of them who crashed a real fancy award ceremony in Paris and this year he will actually get invited to the event because his award-winning novel was nominated for a prize. Linda can only ever dream about Paris and she can't even afford a TTC pass much less a trip to Paris.

Yes, that form is emerging clearer on the window-pane in Mary's apartment. That man who told stories at the Irish cultural concert last night. I went there because I felt lost and alone, maybe. Out of place. Out of the mosaic. Lying on the grass looking up at the farmhouse where everything was happening. He stood on the stage and out came that familiar old Irish brogue transporting me back to my old hearth at home in Ireland. You see I did feel at home. And then as he continued, his hat cocked sideways nonchalantly on his head, his mouth contorted into a wicked smile, swaying back and forth with a pint of beer in his hand and a cigarette stuck between his fingers. His story about a man who prayed every day at Mass for the widows. The character emerges as an exploitative pig, a sexist pig. And the audience reels with laughter as the man plays it on the stage. Sexism is a hilarious caper in Ireland. Men are the heroes. Women are the poor dim-witted fools always caught in the net. Paper dolls moved about to satisfy the male ego.



Christ, I hate this sexist bastard on the stage. I want to grab his stupid hat and dash it to the floor. Take his glass of beer and throw it in his face. I want to take his nonchalant cigarette and stub it out. I want to strip him of his layers and stand him there naked and tell him to stop humiliating women to make people laugh. For now I know that he is humiliating all women, not just Irish women. "Stop it!" "Stop your patriarchal piggery!". I hate him now. He is still laughing, smirking, swaying on the stage. The audience loves him. In the dressing room before the concert I met him and he strained to see what the button on my dress said. He saw the red bar but couldn't read the word.

"I'm tryin'" says he in a devil-may-care manner "ta see what ye're against!"

"Oh" I said, "my button?" I looked him in the eye and said calmly "I'm against pornography. The word on the button is pornography".

"Oh, I see" he said and backed away. I had heard his stories about prudish women and macho men. I once booed him at a folk evening in Toronto when he sang the most vile sexist songs in his carefree, swashbuckling, cavalier manner. I hated him then. One of his songs was about how he was going to screw a reluctant woman who was on a pedestal.

"I want to get ya to kow-tow, kow-tow, kow-tow" And as the woman complied more and more he then asked: "And how are ya now?" His song ended triumphantly. He had won and the woman had lost. Was she an Irish woman? Or any woman? Was he an Irish man? Or any man? Mary walked out in disgust saying that she had left Ireland to escape all this. But had she?

The rain is streaming down the window-pane now. I mean streaming down in torrents. It's raging.

That man's face is sneering at me. The man on the stage who plays in an all-male folk group. The Master of Ceremonies said last night that this was a well-known Irish group in Toronto and we should be proud of them. After all we are all Irish. We are all immigrants.

And now that man whose picture appeared in the Toronto Star is snickering, the man who crashed the fancy award-giving ceremony in Paris. Did he wear a dashing black dickie-bow and black suit? (He thanks her for doing the typing of his manuscript in the acknowledgements at the front of his book) . He is part of the mosaic. The light shines through his glass showing a brilliant hue. Canada's own. But he is supposed to be an immigrant. He came here from another country.

He is dancing now with the Irish man on the stage. They're doing a jig. They are jubilant. And the crowd loves it. And it is all happening at Harbourfront.

Last week the editor of a feminist press said Harbourfront was so prestigious that people WAIT to get asked to appear there.

Why does Mary's picture haunt me so on this rainy afternoon? The picture of that woman alone lying on the meadow.

Where are her sisters?

.....

Sheelagh Conway is an Irish immigrant woman who came to Canada in 1979. She lives with her two daughters in Toronto. She is author of A Woman and Catholicism: My Break With The Roman Catholic Church. PaperJacks, Toronto, Canada. 1987. Price:\$4.50 Canadian.

Courtesy, PAKISTAN PROGRESSIVE, Vol. 9. No. I, Summer 1987, (Originally published in HARVARD DIVINITY BULLETIN, VOL. XVII, No. 2, 1987.)

## EQUAL BEFORE ALLAH

### Woman-Man Equality in Islamic Tradition

by

RIFFAT HASSAN

(Views expressed in the FORUM are not necessarily those held by *DIVA*.)

I have been asking questions such as "What is the Islamic view of women?" and "What does it mean to be a Muslim woman?" for a long time. I was born female to a Muslim family living in Lahore, a Muslim city in a Muslim country, Pakistan. Not until 1974, however, did I begin my serious study of women's issues in Islam and - I am still shocked to reflect - this happened almost by accident.

I was, at the time, faculty adviser to the Muslim Students' Association chapter at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater. (I had acquired this "honour" solely because there was no Muslim man on the faculty and it was mandatory for each chapter to have a faculty adviser.) Their annual seminar included an address by the faculty adviser, so I was asked - albeit not with overwhelming enthusiasm - if I would read a paper on women in Islam. I knew that speakers were not generally assigned subjects and that I had been asked to speak on women in Islam because, in the opinion of the group, it would have been totally inappropriate to expect a Muslim woman, even one who taught Islamic Studies, to be competent to speak on any other subject pertaining to Islam. I resented what the assigning of the subject meant.

Still, I accepted the invitation for two reasons. First, I knew that being invited to address an all-male, largely Arab-Muslim group that prided itself on its patriarchalism was itself a

breakthrough. Second, I was so tired of hearing Muslim men pontificate on the position or status or role of women in Islam, I thought that it might be worthwhile to present a woman's viewpoint. I began my research on the subject more out of a sense of duty than out of any awareness that I had embarked on perhaps the most important journey of my life.

I do not know exactly at what time my "academic" study of women in Islam became a passionate quest for truth and justice on behalf of Muslim women - perhaps it was when I realized the impact on my own life of the so-called Islamic ideas and attitudes regarding women. What began as a scholarly exercise became simultaneously an Odyssean venture in self-understanding. But "enlightenment" does not always lead to "endless bliss". **The more I saw the justice and compassion of God reflected in the Qur'anic teachings regarding women, the more anguished and angry I became at seeing the injustice and inhumanity to which Muslim women, in general, are subjected in actual life. I began to feel that it was my duty - as part of the microscopic minority of educated Muslim women - to do as much consciousness-raising regarding the situation of Muslim women as I could.** (emphasis added).

## The Need for Women's Theology in Islam

Despite the fact that women such as Khadijah and 'A'ishah (wives of the Prophet Muhammad) and Rabi'a al-Basri (the outstanding woman Sufi) figure significantly in early Islam, the Islamic tradition has, by and large, remained rigidly patriarchal until the present time, prohibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought. Thus the sources on which the Islamic tradition is based, mainly the Qur'an, the Hadith literature (oral traditions attributed to the Prophet), and Fiqh (jurisprudence) have been interpreted only by Muslim men, who have arrogated to themselves the task of defining the ontological, theological, sociological, and eschatological status of Muslim women.

Hardly surprisingly, then, until now the majority of Muslim women have accepted this situation passively. **They are almost unaware of the extent to which their human (and Islamic, in an ideal sense) rights have been violated by their male-dominated and male-centered societies, which have continued to assert glibly and tirelessly that Islam has given women more rights than any other religious tradition.** (emphasis added). For Muslim women, kept for centuries in physical, mental, and emotional bondage, analyzing their personal experiences is probably overwhelming. While the rate of literacy, for example, is low in many Muslim countries, the rate of literacy among the world's one-half billion Muslim women, especially the majority who live in rural areas, is among the lowest in the world.

Today, largely due to the pressure of anti-women laws being promulgated in some parts of the Muslim world, under the cover of "islamization," women with some degree of education and awareness are realizing that religion is being used for oppression rather than for liberation. To understand the strong impetus to "islamize" Muslim societies, it is necessary to know that the greatest challenge confronting the Muslim world is that of modernity. The caretakers of Muslim traditionalism are aware that viability in the modern technological age requires adoption of the scientific or rational outlook, which inevitably brings about major changes in modes of thinking and behavior.

Women, both educated and uneducated, are participating in the national workforce and contributing to national development. They think and behave differently from women who have no sense of their own individual identity or autonomy as active agents in a history-making process or from women who merely regard themselves as instruments designed to minister to and reinforce a patriarchal system they believe to be divinely instituted.

In the recent past, many women in Pakistan were jolted out of their "dogmatic slumber" by the enactment of such laws as the Hadud laws (capital crime) or the Qanun-e-Shahadat (law of evidence), and by threatening legislation pertaining to women's Qisas and Diyat (blood fine) aimed to keep women "in their place", which means secondary, subordinate, and inferior to men.

In the face both of military dictatorship and religious autocracy, valiant efforts have been made by women's groups to highlight cases of gross injustice and brutality toward women. **It is still, however, not clearly and fully understood even by many women's rights activists in Pakistan and other Muslim countries that the negative ideas and attitudes about women prevalent in Muslim societies are rooted in theology.** (emphasis added). Unless and until the theological foundations of misogynistic and androcentric tendencies in the Islamic tradition are demolished, Muslim women will continue to be brutalized and discriminated against, despite statistical improvements relating to female education, employment, or social and political rights. No matter how many socio-political rights are granted to women, as long as they are conditioned to accept the myths used by theologians or religious hierarchs to shackle their bodies, hearts, minds, and souls, they will never become fully developed or whole human beings.

In my judgement the importance of engaging in a serious theological discussion of women-related issues in Islam today is paramount to liberate not only Muslim women but also Muslim men from unjust structures and laws that make a peer relationship between men and women impossible. It is good to know that in the last hundred years there have been at least two significant Muslim thinkers --- Qasim Amin from Egypt and Mumtaz Ali from India who have been staunch advocates of women's rights. **Still, knowing this hardly lessens the pain of also knowing that even in this age, characterized by the explosion of knowledge, all but a handful of Muslim women possess any knowledge of Islamic theology. It is profoundly discouraging to contemplate how few Muslim women there are in the world today who possess the competence, even if they have courage and the commitment, to engage in historical-critical study of Islam's primary sources and to develop a theology focusing on women-related issues in the specific context of the Islamic tradition.** (emphasis added)

## The Jewish and Christian View of Creation

My inquiry into the theological roots of man-woman inequality in the Islamic tradition led me to expand my field of study in at least two significant ways. First, realizing the profound impact of Hadith literature upon Muslim consciousness, particularly the two collections, Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim which, next to the Qur'an, the Sunni Muslims regard as the most authoritative books in Islam, I examined with care the women-related ahadith in these collections. Second, I studied several important writings by Jewish and

Christian feminist theologians who were attempting to trace the theological origins of the anti-women ideas and attitudes found in their respective traditions.

As a result of my study and deliberation, I perceived that not only in the Islamic but also in the Jewish and Christian traditions three theological assumptions are the base of the superstructure of men's alleged superiority to women. These three assumptions are: (1) that God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man's rib, and is therefore ontologically derivative and secondary; (2) that woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is customarily described as man's Fall or man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and hence "all daughters of Eve" are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt; and (3) that woman was created not only from man but for man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not of fundamental importance.

The ordinary Muslim believes, as seriously as the ordinary Jew or Christian, that Adam was God's primary creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib. If confronted with the fact that this firmly entrenched belief is derived mainly from the Bible, and contradicts the Qur'an, this Muslim is almost certain to be shocked. **The rather curious and tragic truth is that even Western-educated Muslims have little idea of the extent to which the Muslim psyche bears the imprint of Jewish and Christian ideas and attitudes pertaining to women.** (emphasis added).

Without some knowledge of what the Bible says about the creation of Adam and Eve, I do not believe that it is possible for Muslims to evaluate to what degree their views regarding women (particularly with reference to the issues of her creation and her responsibility in the Fall) have been influenced by the Jewish and Christian tradition rather than by the Qur'an.

The biblical account of creation consists of two different sources, the Yahwist (10th century B.C.E.), and the Priestly (5th Century B.C.E.), from which arise two different traditions. There are four references to woman's creation in Genesis: (1) 1:26-27, Priestly tradition; (2) 2:7, Yahwist tradition; (3) 2:18-24, Yahwist tradition; and (4) 5:1-2, Priestly tradition.

Study of these texts shows that the Hebrew term "adam" (of the soil) function mostly as a generic term for humanity. Pointing out that the correct translation of this term is "the human," Leonard Swindler (Biblical Affirmations of Woman) observes: "It is a mistake to translate it in Genesis 1:1 to 2:22 either as 'man' in the male sense, or as a proper name, 'Adam.'"

Of the four texts referring to creation, undoubtedly the most influential has been Genesis 2:18-24, which states that woman (ishshah) was taken from man (ish). From this text it has generally been inferred that (1) Adam was God's primary creation from whom Eve, a secondary creation, was derived; and (2) Eve was created simply and solely to be the helpmate of Adam. Sheila Collins (A Different Heaven and Earth) concludes: "The seeds of woman's subjection and of her predilection to evil are to be found in Hebrew culture and Hebrew religious tradition". However, as Clark and Richardson (Women and Religion) note: "It is to the Hebrews' credit that they did not, at least in the literature contained in the Jewish canon of the Bible, interpret the stories of Genesis 2 and 3 (Eve's creation and her part in the first sin in Eden) as a justification for negative attitudes toward women. Eve, strangely enough, does not function as any kind of female symbol in the Old Testament." In the Christian tradition, however, Eve's derivative status and connection with the Fall have been used to allege man's superiority to woman.



Feminist theologians of the modern era, both women and men, are acutely aware that traditional interpretations of the Yahwist's account of woman's creation in Genesis 2:18-24 have been strongly anti-women and have through the ages caused women "immeasurable harm," (Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex). While some of them consider the texts irredeemably sexist, others believe that if the Genesis accounts of human creation are understood in the light of modern knowledge in general, and modern hermeneutics in particular, they reveal new meanings that startlingly oppose traditional exegesis.

**It seems both strange and ironic that while in our times an increasing number of Jews and Christians are rejecting traditional interpretations of the story of woman's creation, Muslims, who, generally speaking, are ignorant of or hostile to Jewish and Christian religious literature, continue to hold on to them, perceiving them to be necessary to preserving the integrity of the Islamic way of life. (emphasis added)**

## Creation in the Qur'an

While specific reference is made in Genesis to the creation of Adam and Eve, there is no corresponding reference in the Qur'an. In fact, there is no mention of Eve, (Hawwa') at all in the Qur'an. The term Adam occurs 25 times, but there is no categorical statement in the Qur'an that Adam was the first human being created by Allah. The term is used most frequently in reference to more than one or two human beings.

That the term Adam functions as a collective noun and stands for humankind is substantiated by an analysis of the several verses in which it occurs. The collective use of Adam is corroborated by the fact that the Qur'an sometimes replaces the term Adam by al-insan or bashar, which are both generic terms for humanity. Here it is important to note that even though Adam usually does not refer to human beings in a particular way, as pointed out by Muhammad Iqbal: "In verses which deal with the origin of man as a living being, the Qur'an uses the words Bashar or Insan, not Adam which it reserves for man in his capacity of God's viceregent on earth....The word Adam is retained and used more as concept than as a name of a concrete human individual." It is noteworthy that the Qur'an uses the terms bashar, al-insan, and an-nas while describing the process of the physical creation of human beings. It uses Adam more selectively to refer to human beings only when they become representative of a self-conscious, knowledgeable and morally autonomous community.

Instead of "Adam and Hawwa'," the Qur'an speaks of "Adam and zauj." Muslims, almost without exception, assume that Adam was the first human being created by Allah and that he was a man. If Adam was a man, it follows that Adam's zauj, or mate, would be a woman. Hence the zauj mentioned in the Qur'an becomes equated with 'Hawwa' (Eve). Neither the initial assumption nor the inferences drawn from it are, however, supported in a clear or conclusive way by the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an states neither that Adam was the first human being nor that Adam was a male. The term Adam is a masculine noun, but linguistic gender is not sex. If Adam is not necessarily a man, then Adam's zauj is not necessarily a woman. In fact, the term zauj is also a masculine noun and, unlike the term Adam, it has a feminine counterpart, zaujatan. (Here it may be noted that the most accurate English equivalent of zauj is not "wife" or "husband" or even "spouse" but "mate". The Qur'an uses zauj with

reference not only to human beings, but to every kind of creation, including animals, plants and fruits.)

Why then does the Qur'an use zauj and not zaujatum if the reference is indeed to a woman? In my opinion, the Qur'an leaves the terms Adam and zauj deliberately unclear, not only as regards to sex but also as regards to number, because its purpose is not to narrate certain events in the life of a man and a woman (i.e., the Adam and Eve of popular imagination) but to refer to some life experiences of all human beings, men and women together.

The Qur'an describes human creation in 30 or so passages which are found in various chapters. Generally speaking, it refers to creation of humanity (and nature) in two ways: as an evolutionary process where diverse stages or phases are mentioned sometimes together and sometimes separately, and as an accomplished fact or in its totality. In the passages in which reference is made to Allah's creation of human beings as sexually differentiated mates, no priority or superiority is accorded to either man or woman.

In summary, the Qur'an evenhandedly uses both feminine and masculine terms and imagery to describe the creation of humanity from a single source. That Allah's original creation was undifferentiated humanity, and neither man nor woman (who appeared simultaneously at a subsequent time), is implicit in a number of Qur'anic passages.

## Hawwa' in the Hadith Literature

If the Qur'an makes no distinction between the creation of man and woman, as it clearly does not, why do Muslims believe that Hawwa' (Eve) was created from the rib of Adam? Although the Genesis 2 account of woman's creation is accepted by virtually all Muslims, it is difficult to believe that it entered the Islamic tradition directly for very few Muslims ever read the Bible. It is much more likely that it became part of Muslim heritage through its assimilation in Hadith literature, which has been in many ways the lens through which the Qur'an has been seen since the early centuries of Islam.

Hadith literature, which modernist Muslims tend to regard with a certain skepticism, is surrounded by controversies, centering particularly around the question of the authenticity of individual ahadith as well as the body of the literature as a whole. Noted Islamicists, such as Alfred Guillaume, H.A.R. Gibb, and M.G.S. Hodgson have underscored the importance of the Hadith literature, stating that it not only has its own autonomous character in point of law and even of doctrine, but that it also has an emotive aspect, hard to overstate, relating to the conscious and subconscious thought and feeling of Muslims, individually and collectively.

That the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib had become part of the Hadith literature is evident from the following hadith cited by Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad in their article, "Eve: Islamic Image of Woman":

When God sent Iblis out of the Garden and placed Adam in it, he dwelt in it alone and had no one to socialize with. God sent sleep on him then He took a rib from his left side and placed flesh in its place and created Hawwa' from it. When he awoke he found a woman seated near his head. He asked her, "Who are you?" She answered, "Woman." He said, "Why were you created?" She

said, "That you might find rest in me." The angels said, "What is her name?" and he said "Hawwa". They said, "Why was she called HAWwa'?" He said, "Because she was created from a living thing."

This hadith clashes sharply with the Qur'anic accounts of human creation while it has an obvious correspondence to Genesis 2:18-33 and Genesis 3:20.

Some changes, however, are to be noted in the story of woman's creation as retold in the above hadith. It mentions the left ribs as the source of woman's creation. In Arab culture great significance is attached to right and left, the former being associated with everything auspicious and the latter with the opposite. In Genesis woman, is named Eve after the Fall but in the above hadith she is called Hawwa' from the time of her creation. In Genesis, woman is named Eve because "she is the mother of all who live" (thus a primary source of life), but above she is named 'Hawwa' because she was created from a living thing (hence a derivative creature). These variations are not to be ignored. Biblical and other materials are seldom incorporated without alteration in ahadith. The above example illustrates how, with respect to woman, Arab biases were added to the adopted text.

Citation of the above hadith, and those like it, by significant Muslim exegeses and historians show the extent to which authoritative works both of Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic history had become colored by the Hadith literature. In the course of time, many ahadith became "invisible", the later commentators who had cited them to support their views. This practice made it very hard to curtail their influence since they became diffused throughout the body of Muslim culture.

Perhaps no better proof of how totally ahadith such as the one cited above have penetrated Muslim culture can be given than the fact that the myth of creation of Hawwa' from Adam's rib was accepted uncritically even by Qasim Amin (1836-1906), the Egyptian judge and women's rights activist. His books *Tahrir al-Mara* (the Emancipation of Women, 1899) and *Al-Mara al-Jadida* (The Modern Women, 1900) were epoch-making in the history of Muslim feminism. Amin's romantic interpretation of the myth, reminiscent of Milton's, shows that he did not realize how fundamentally the issue that concerned him most deeply, namely, woman's social equality with man in a strongly male-centered and male-dominated Muslim society, hinged upon acceptance or rejection of the creation story and its anti-women interpretation. Nor, unfortunately, do many present-day Muslim women's rights activists realise that this myth undergirds those very anti-women attitudes and structures they seek to change.

Yet such ahadith are found not only in the significant secondary sources of Islam but are also in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (compiled by Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, A.H. 194-256/A.D. 810-870) and *Sahih Muslim* (compiled by Muslim bin al-Hajjah, A.H. 202 or 206-261/A.D 817 or 821-875), the two Hadith collections regarded by Sunni Muslims as being second in authority only to the Qur'an. They were painstakingly collected from oral transmissions traceable to the sayings and precepts of the Prophet himself.

While it is not possible to give a detailed critical analysis here of either the "isnad" (list of transmitters) or the "matn" (content) of the six ahadith that deal with the creation of woman, a few comments on both may be useful. Analysis of the "matn" of the ahadith leads to identifying the following common elements in them: 1) Woman is created from a rib or is like a rib. (2) The most curved and crooked part of the rib is the top. (3) The crookedness of the rib (and of the woman) is irremediable and any effort to remove it will result in

breakage. (4) In view of the above, an attitude of kindness is recommended and those who wish to benefit from women are advised to do so "while crookedness remains in her."

Concerning these statements the following observations are made: (1) The rib story obviously originates in Genesis 2 but no mention is made in any ahadith of Adam. This eliminates the Yahwist's androcentrism but also de-personalizes the source of woman's creation (i.e., the "rib" could, theoretically, be non-human). (2) the misogynist elements of the ahadith, absent from Genesis, clash with the teachings of the Qur'an, which describes all human beings as having been created "fi ahsan-i taqvim" ("most justly-proportioned and with the highest capabilities"). (3) I cannot understand the relevance of making the statement that the most crooked part of the rib is the top. (4) The exhortation to be kind to women would make sense if women were, in fact, born with a natural handicap and needed compassion. Is "irremediable crookedness" such a handicap? (5) The exhortation to kindness seems to be pernicious, smacking of a hedonism or opportunism, which is hard to appreciate even if women were indeed "irremediably crooked."

The theology of woman implicit in the ahadith is based upon generalizations about her ontology, biology, and psychology that are contrary to the letter and spirit of the Qur'an. These ahadith ought to be rejected on the basis of their content alone. (emphasis added) However, "matn"-analysis (which was strongly urged by Ibn Khaldun, A.D. 1322-1406) had received scant attention in the work of many Muslim scholars who insist that a hadith is to be judged primarily on the basis of its "isnad." With regard to the isnad the following points may be noted: (1) All these ahadith are cited on the authority of Abu Hurairah, a Companion of the Prophet who was regarded as controversial by many early Muslim scholars, including Imam Abu Hanifah (A.D. 700-767), founder of the largest Sunni school of law. (Here it is pertinent to note that though a more critical attitude toward hadith and hadith-transmitters prevailed during the earliest phase of Islam, later it became a "capital crime" to be critical of any Companion.) (2) All of the ahadith contain a number of transmitters who were single reporters. Eminent scholars of hadith defined a "sahih" or sound hadith as one that is related in the first place by a Companion, in the second place by at least two Followers, and thereafter by many narrators. (3) All of the ahadith are "da'if" (weak) because they have a number of unreliable transmitters.

**I regard the issue of woman's creation as more important, philosophically and theologically, than any other. If man and woman have been created equal by God, who is believed to be the ultimate arbiter of value, then they cannot become unequal, essentially, at a subsequent time. Hence their obvious inequality in the patriarchal world is in contravention of God's plan. On the other hand, if man and woman have been created unequal by God, then they cannot become equal, essentially, at a subsequent time. Hence any attempt to equalize them is contrary to God's intent. (emphasis added).**

Given the importance of this issue, it is imperative for Muslim women's-rights activists to know that the egalitarian accounts of human creation given in the Qur'an have been displaced by the contents of ahadith even though this cannot happen in theory. **The only way that Muslim daughters of Hawwa' can end the history of their subjection at the hands of the sons of Adam is by returning to the point of origin and challenging the authenticity of the ahadith that make women derivative and secondary in creation, but primary in guilt, sinfulness, and mental and moral deficiency. (emphasis added)** They must challenge the later sources that regard them not as ends in themselves but as instruments created for the convenience and comfort of men.

My Break With The Roman Catholic Church

A WOMAN

AND



CATHOLICISM

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## COMMENT:

The above article is reprinted in FORUM to create basis for a discussion about an issue, which along with the issues of privilege and class, is perhaps the single most important issue facing women in Muslim countries.

The thrust of the present article reflects a popularly held view of Islam in today's Pakistan. That is, to try to rationalize Islam by denouncing the irrationality of 'Ahadith', while finding the Quran un-mistakeably correct with regards to women's origin thus her role and status in a Muslim society. The same argument is then expanded over to a comparison of Islam with Christianity and Judaism, in which Islam, most predictably is proven to be the "better" religion. Similar behaviour can be seen in other religions, where people attempt to modernize and justify their beliefs.

The movement to modernize and rationalize Islam is an old one. In Pakistan, this movement was strengthened in the 1940's. One of its major exponents, Ghulam Ahmed Pervaiz, through his numerous books and the monthly publication TALU-I-ISLAM, (Lahore, Pakistan) struggled to salvage Quran through denouncing only the 'Ahadith' regarding many thoughts and ideas of Muslim theology including the role of women.

**But is it rational? Because it seems that it is also Quran and not just 'Ahadith' that allows a man to have four wives at one point in time provided he can keep justice between them; it describes women as men's 'tilth' (KHAITI); It allows a woman half that of a man's share in their father's property; it asks for two women to witness a legal document of financial nature in place of one man; the blood-money fixed for a murdered woman is exactly half that fixed for a murdered man.**

The above examples are an attempt to invite a discussion that is balanced and investigative and not just geared towards evolving the "safest point of view on religion.

Readers who wish to respond to the article can send material by June 10 for it to be published in the second issue.

THE 1988  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
OF  
CANADIAN ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION (CASA)

The CASA is holding a 3-day international conference in Windsor. Starting from June 9, more than 50 speakers will discuss cultural, political and developmental issues concerning South Asia, Southeast Asia, Japan, Korea and Peoples Republic of China. Issues concerning Asian Canadians will also be discussed. Problems relating to women's rights and Asian Canadians are to be part of most panels.

SOUTH ASIA PANELS

1. Anthropological Investigations in India

Akram Rajput (Algoma University College) Chair

Carol Ellison., Jean Michaud (Laval), Radhika Shekhar (Ottawa), R.D. Singh (Windsor)

Aminul Islam (Wright) Discussant

2. Mode of Production Debate and South Asia.

Abdul Q. Lodhi (St. Thomas) --- Chair

Hasan Nawaz Gardezi (Algoma), Hamza Alvi (Sussex, Colorado)

Mohd A. Qadeer, (Queen's) --- Discussant.

3. Social and Political Impact of Afghan Revolution

Hasan Nawaz Gardezi (Algoma) --- Chair

Omar Lateef (Committee of Progressive Pakistani Canadians), Jamil Rashid (Queen's)

Jane Thomas (Human Concern International)

Bilial Hashmi (Eastern Washington) --- Discussant

4. Status of Women in South Asia.

Sylvia Hale (St. Thomas) --- Chair

Tania Das Gupta, Fauzia Rafiq, Judy Whitehead (New Brunswick)

Prabha Mukherjee (York)

5. Language and Literature in South Asia

Kay de la Ronde (Shastri Institute) --- Chair

'Bubenik (Memorial), David Atkinson (Lethbridge), Shehla Burney (OISE), R. Alain Everts (Wisconsin)

Prabha Mukherjee (York) --- Discussant.

## 6. Hindi Literature

Rama S. Singh (McMaster) --- Chair

S. P. Dwivedi Singh (Calgary, Vedanand, Manitoba), Vijai Bahadur Singh (Central Tibetan Institute),

K.N.Bansal (University Grants Council, India), Shashi Prasad (Sault Ste. Marie), Brij Sinha (Saskatchewan)

## 7. Pakistan's Language and Literature in Canadian Perspective

Abdul Q. Zia (Laurentian) --- Chair

Panel: M. Fiaz, A. Q. Lodhi, Parvez Wakil, Uruj A. Zaidi.

## 7. Provincial Councils System and its Impact on Sri Lanka's Administrative Decentralization

Siri Withane (Windsor) --- Chair

E. Corea (International Development Research Centre), A. J. Wilson (New Brunswick),

M. L. Marasinghe (Windsor), S. Withane

## ASIAN CANADIAN PANELS

### 1. Contemporary Issues for Asian Canadians: Women and Family;

Audrey Kobayaski --- Chair

Prabha Vaidyanathan (Wilfred Laurier), Josephine Smart (York)

The CASA is a voluntary, non-profit organization. According to its newsletter, ASIA HORIZON, CASA "seeks to expand and disseminate knowledge about Asia in Canada, through teaching, research and publication.---- It is an academic learned society open to all persons interested in Asia and the study of Asia".

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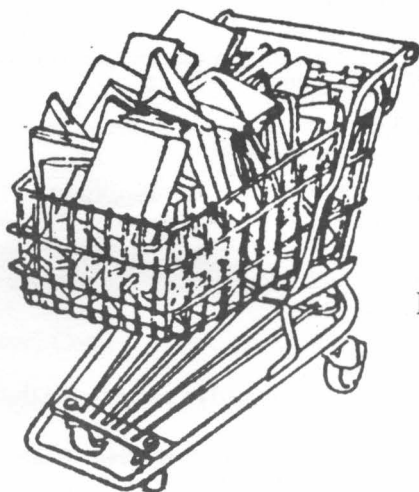
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## **EVENTS**

**MONTREAL, CANADA**



**THIRD  
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The Third International Feminist Book Fair is happening in Montreal from June 13 to June 18. The Book Fair is for publishers, writers, booksellers, readers, literary agents, distributors, translators, librarians, teachers, thinkers, and internationalists interested in women's writing and publishing.

Major themes are:

Writing as a Dangerous Profession

Eroticism

Feminism and Islam

Feminism in North American Native traditions

Pornography and Prostitution

Dreams, Magic and Symbolism in Latin American Literature

Women Confront the Medical Establishment

Mystery and Sci-Fi: redefining Violence

Censorship

Poetry is also a Weapon

Writing in Exile

The Fair has also generated a series of parallel events including art exhibits, theatre, performance, music and other entertainment to add to the festivities.

The tradition of the Book Fair began four years ago when a small group of women in the British publishing industry brought together 100 women publishers from 22 countries to

create the first fair in London in 1984. The momentum grew in 1986 when organizers in Oslo welcomed over 250 publishers from 40 countries to the second Fair.

The President of the third fair is Quebec writer Nicole Brossard. The administrator is Diana Bronson, a feminist organizer and sociologist.

For rental of booths or tables in the exhibition hall and for attending the fair, write to:  
3rd International Feminist Book Fair 1988  
4060 Boul St-Laurent, Bureau 204,  
Montreal, Quebec.  
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or Call:  
(514) 843-3169

### AUTHORS EXPECTED

The following is a list of authors that are expected to come to the third Fair:

Marion Kraft RFA	Sonia Montecino Chile
Ellen K. Kuzwayo South Africa	Claire Michar France
Sylvia Lago Uruguay	Astrid Roemer Surinam/Pays bas
Emma LaRocque Canada	Esther Rochon Canada
Nicole Laurin Canada	Janice Raymond USA
Claire Lejeune Belgium	Sonia Ramzi Egypt/France
Aicha Lemsine Algeria/UK	Milleray Quiroga Chile/Dominican Republic
Andree Levesque Canada	Flora Nwapa, Nigeria
June Levine Ireland	Marlene Nourbese Philip Canada
Dorothy Livesay Canada	Karen Nolle-Fisher RFA
Anna Livia England	Greta Nemiroff Canada
Audre Lorde USA	Suniti Namjoshi India/Canada
Fadela M'rabet Algeria	Aura N. Roman Lopez Puerto Rico
Alanis O'Bomsawin Canada	Libby Oughton Canada
Julietya Pinto Costa Rica	Silvia Plager Argentina
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Jimena Pizarro Chile	Lee Maracle, Canada
Michele Iacrosil, France	Dacia Maraini, Italy
Catherine MacKinnon, USA	Sister Anita MacWilliams, Tanzania
Daphne Marlatt, Canada	Nell McCafferty, Ireland
Mary Meigs, Canada	Giovanna Merola, Venezuela
Antoinette Moalbaye, Chad/Canada	Erin Moure, Canada
Angelina Muniz, Mexico	Rocio Rosero, Equador
Mariella Sala, Peru	Olga Ampara Sanchez, Columbia
Eve Zaremba, Canada	Ahdri Zhina Mandiela, Canada



Mariella Sala, Peru  
Sonia Sanchez, USA  
Gail Scott, Canada  
Gertrude Shope, South Africa/Zambia  
Makeda Silvera, Canada  
Barbara Smith, Canada  
Elizabeth Souza Lobo, Brazil  
Rosemary Sullivan, Canada  
France Theoret, Canada  
Carmen Todon Armas, Peru  
Linda Ty-Casper, Philippines/USA  
Louise Vandelac, Canada  
Betsy Warland, Canada  
Kathleen Winter, Canada  
Regina Yaou, Ivory Coast

Olga Ampara Sanchez, Columbia  
Josephine Sappor, Ghana  
Ann Allen Shockley, USA  
Marthe Rosenfeld, Belgium/USA  
Zdena Skvorecky, Czechoslovakia/Canada  
Donna Smyth, Canada  
Dale Spender, England  
Celine Tanguay Desrochers, Canada  
Miriam Tlali, South Africa  
Janette Turner Hospital, Australia/Canada  
Mariana Valverde, Canada  
Mair Verthuy, Canada  
Zoe Wicombe, South Africa/Scotland  
Marina Yaguello, France  
Jean Yoon, Canada

(This list was put out in March 1988. Some changes or additions are to be expected.)

*Diva* supports and appreciates the initiative and the continuation of the tradition of an international book fair for feminist authors and publishers. A marked change has been observed in the development and promotion of feminist publishing industry since the First Book Fair in 1984. Apart from bringing together contemporary authors and publishers it has strengthened the international feminist movement to a considerable extent.

But it becomes indeed difficult to support and appreciate when one glances through the foregoing list of expected authors. Out of 78 feminist writers, 40 are from Canada and the USA; 8 are from Europe; and about 30 are unevenly divided between the rest of the world.

Representation of Asian writers begins and almost ends at the Philippines; And according to the above list, no one is coming from India Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka.

We only hope that the publishers from Asia, Africa and Latin America are better represented than their authors.

### FEMINIST WRITERS FESTIVAL

Three days after the Fair in Montreal, a Feminist Writers Festival is being held in Toronto. More than 12 writers from outside Canada are coming to this festival which will be held in the Brigantine Room at Harbourfront from June 20th to 22nd. (For information on the Festival call Women's Press (416) 598-0082).

UPDATE ON HUDDOD ORDINANCES, 1979.  
PAKISTAN

RAPE  
AND  
CONSENSUAL SEX WITHOUT MARRIAGE  
ARE THESE THE SAME?

by

RUBYA MEHDI

*INTRO: The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinances, 1979, was promulgated by the Martial Law regime for so-called 'Islamization' of the legal system in Pakistan. This ordinance along with other Muslim laws promulgated by the present government not only signify a breach of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights but is considered to be a severe set-back for rights of women in Pakistan. It is to be noted that these laws were enforced inspite of clear opposition from women's organizations in Pakistan.*

DIVA intends to continually discuss and expose these laws in coming issues. A detailed backround paper will be published in the second issue. (July 1988).

This article is an update on one of the Hudood Ordinances.

The injustice with which the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinances, 1979, was created in Pakistan, is well known. The Ordinance has been widely applied in Pakistan since 1979. In 1983 there were 1,682 cases tried under the Ordinance. Again in 1984 there were 1,843 cases.<sup>1</sup>

With this Ordinance, consensual sexual intercourse without marriage was declared unlawful, punishable by Hadd or Tazir. Punishment under Hadd is stoning to death (in case of a married person) and a hundred lashes in a public place (in case of an unmarried person). However, as the proof for trial of a case under Hadd is so strict i.e. the requirement of four pious, male, Muslim, eye-witnesses, who have seen the actual penetration of the act, most of the cases were tried under Tazir, which provided a comparatively lighter punishment of imprisonment which may extend to 10 years, and whipping numbering 30 lashes.

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\*sexual intercourse without marriage.

1. Criminal Justice in Pakistan, by Ch. Abdul Majeed A. Auolakh. 1986, p.54.

This ordinance also deals with the crime of rape. The standard of proof in rape cases under Hadd is the same as in Consensual Sex (four pious Muslim male eye-witnesses). Punishment under Hadd for a rapist who is already married is again the same as in Consensual Sex (stoning to death) while for an unmarried rapist sentence of death is added including 100 lashes. But most of the cases were decided under Tazir as no rape was committed in front of four pious Muslim males. Under Tazir, punishment of 30 lashes is inflicted on a rapist (as in the case of Consensual Sex). However, imprisonment for Consensual Sex is 10 years where 25 years imprisonment is provided for a rapist.

Moreover Section 18 of the Ordinance provides punishment for attempting to commit the above mentioned offenses of rape and Consensual Sex Without Marriage. According to this section 'any act towards the commission of the offence, shall be punished with imprisonment, or with whipping or with fine.'

As we can see, there is very little difference made between Consensual Sex Without Marriage and the heinous crime of rape. This lapse resulted in the situations where a woman comes in the court for a case of rape against her but gets herself involved in a case of Consensual Sex and is convicted for it. Because proof of four pious Muslim male eye-witnesses is not available, medical report have not shown that there are any signs of resistance on her body, so the conclusion is drawn that she was a consenting party because the act has been committed and she has made a confession of it by bringing the case to the court. On top of this she is convicted for it while the alleged man is acquitted because of 'benefit of doubt'. Another point worth noting is that this Ordinance excludes female witnesses from a case of rape or Consensual Sex. Only male witnesses are accepted, which means that if a rape is committed and witnesses happen to be women or non-Muslim men, they are not reliable.

Another important aspect is the humiliating and disgusting situation where the parties alleged are sent for medical examination during the trial of the case. A medical examination consists of checking the potency of men. Women are examined for the situation of tear in the hymen and for the existence of semen in the vagina. The clothes and bedsheets are confiscated and examined for the existence of semen. As far as the case of rape is concerned medical examination of the vagina of the woman and potency of the man could be justified. But what about the cases in which the consenting parties involved in the sexual act have to go through the medical test, and especially in the cases of 'attempt' when the test is made where no act is committed.

This Ordinance makes hundreds of men and women extremely vulnerable, where they could be arrested on suspicion and sent for medical examinations of the vagina for the existence of semen. Man's sexual potency is checked and the clothes they are wearing are confiscated by the police and in the end it is proclaimed that it was only a suspicion. This procedure can leave permanent effects on the personalities of the parties involved.

Even in the cases of rape, medical examinations have been used for drawing disgusting conclusions. I can mention at least two cases of rape where on the basis of medical reports the court decided that the involved women were girls of loose character and habitually enjoyed sexual intercourse.

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\* "Falak Sher vs. the State", PLD 1982, Federal Shariat Court (FSC).

\* "Bahadur Shah vs. the State", PLD 1987, FSC 11.

Further, it is under consideration of the courts in Pakistan that the specimen of semen of the accused person should be obtained and grouping of the semen should be done so there is no doubt left that he/she has committed the sexual act. One wonders that if this procedure is adopted in Pakistan would the proof of four pious Muslim male eye-witnesses be required? (the clause is required by the Quran and Sunnah).<sup>2</sup>

I would like to mention two other cases. In the case *Muhammed Nawaz vs. the State*,<sup>3</sup> where a man and a woman were found to be living in the same house. There was no evidence that they were having sexual intercourse but the trying agencies acted on the basis of the 'possibility' of it. The man and woman were sent for medical examinations. Medical examinations, including the chemical report of the clothes, were found negative in character. It did not support the allegations of 'Zina'. Both the man and the woman were released.

Another case is the case of 'Attempt'. A girl went to get her clothes stitched in a tailor's shop. The tailor and the girl were suspected of 'Zina'. The police were sent to the shop, they entered and found the girl sitting on the cot that was there for the customers. Both of them were found dressed properly but were still arrested. I quote:

"A bed-sheet and a piece of cloth suspected of being stained with semen were taken into possession. Both of the accused were medically examined by different doctors who took urethral swabs and pubic hair of Muhammad Zahoor accused and these were sent to the chemical examiner. Vaginal swabs of Mst. Shahnaz were also taken and sent to the chemical examiner. The results of the vaginal swabs, urethral swabs and pubic hair were found to be negative. The bed-sheet was also found not stained with semen. Only a piece of cloth was found to be stained with semen."

The court decided that the visit of Mst. Shahnaz to the shop could have been for the innocent purpose of getting her clothes tailored. The case of 'Attempt' to commit 'Zina' was not established.

This is not an example of a few cases. There are hundreds of cases of 'Consensual Sex.' Rape is an established crime while 'Consensual Sex' is not. Medical examination in rape cases is justified but it cannot be justified in the cases of 'Consensual Sex'. Even so the state agencies insist on treating the two acts as equally criminal, thereby humiliating and disgracing innocent people.

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2. the possibility was discussed in the case of "*Ehsan Begum vs. the State*", PLD 1983, FSC 204.

3. PLD 1983, FSC, 522.

ROOTS

by

Ismat Chughtai

Translated from Urdu by Aqila Shaheen



**INTRODUCTION:** Ismat Chughtai is one of the foremost short story writers in the subcontinent. She started writing in 1936 and published her first two short stories in 1939. She not only helped change the concept of short stories in Urdu literature, she also shocked people out of the accepted role model for women writers in India. She did this both through her direct approach, and her choice of pertinent issues.

**ABOUT THIS STORY:** This story is historically placed in the Indian subcontinent in August 1947, when the British government of India, after 200 years of colonization, decided to leave the Indian subcontinent. This decision was prompted by the effects of the second World War coupled with a strong nationalist movement. The nationalist movement in India was comprised of two major currents: the Muslim League which wanted British government to divide India on religious basis; and the Indian National Congress which demanded independence for a united India. The Indian subcontinent was formally divided into two countries on 14 August, 1947, creating India and Pakistan to ostensibly become homes for Hindus and Muslims respectively.

**ROOTS** depicts the pain and turmoil created by this political decision on common people of the Indian subcontinent, Hindus as well as Muslims, who for centuries had lived together.

The idea of expelling minorities from the state, was a complicated matter in our area. The local Hindu leaders, for example, flatly refused to do this because people were too assimilated for them to try to sort minorities out. The process, they said, would require a large budget and separate staff. And that could be an unnecessary burden on the state. They, however, agreed to set aside pieces of land for incoming refugees.

Now there was a question of a few Muslim families too. There were those who were close to the Rajah and therefore definitely would not be leaving. Then there were those who quickly decided to leave and were busy packing. Ours was a family that came into the latter category.

Initially, it was a slow start. Nobody in the family was paying much attention to it. Then my older brother, who lived in Ajmer, came and tried his utmost to convince us to pack and leave. His pressure worked well for a few days but then the family went back to its snail-paced speed.

My elder brother was so discouraged. But then Chabha (my young nephew) did the job. He decided to write 'Long Live Pakistan' on the wall of his school. The kids of Roop Chand family were against it. They immediately erased it and wrote 'Undivided India' instead. That led to a scuffle among the kids. The school authorities called the police to bring the situation under control. The children of Muslim families were put in a bus and sent to their homes for safety.

When children of our family came home, their reception was unusual. They were being pampered. No, it was not like other days of the past. In the past when Chabha quarrelled with Roop Chand family kids, my sister-in-law would give him a good thrashing and then would send him to Dr. Roop Chand to receive a dose of Quinine Mixture or Castor Oil as further punishment.

This was because Dr. Roop Chand was not only our family doctor he also was my father's dearest friend. Similarly, his sons were pals of my brothers and their wives were friends with my sisters-in-law. The members of younger generations were buddies too. Thus three generations of our two families were so entangled together that nobody could anticipate estrangement after the division of the country. Although there were extremists in both families and heated 'politico-religious' discussions would take place, overall atmosphere remained that of a football or cricket match.

Father and Dr. Roop Chand had no political differences because they were with one party. The extremists, on the other hand, were gaining ground. The new generation of our family formed a 'Muslim National Guard' under the leadership of my brother from Ajmer. And 'Sevak Sangh' was established by Gian Chand, Roop Chand's son.

Somehow, even this didn't effect the bond of love and friendship between our families.

'I would like my son Lalloo to marry your daughter, Munni' the head of Sevak Sangh would say to the commander-in-chief of the Muslim National Guard, 'I will even bring foot-ornaments



---

of gold for her'. 'Make sure they are not the gilded ones. I don't like them' my brother would retort.

**M**any a times, one party would write slogans on the wall of our house, and the other would erase it and write their own. Father and Dr. Roop Chand just smiled at it while discussing their plans of uniting all of Asia. Mother and aunt (Mrs. Roop Chand) far from these politics, talked about recipes and dowries for their daughters. The daughters-in-law on both sides kept on with their competitive activity of keeping ahead with new styles in clothes and make-up. Things of everyday use like salt, pepper and of course medicines, were still borrowed from each other's house..

If someone fell sick in our family, Amma (mother) would prepare vegetarian food and send a message to Dr. Roop Chand. The message usually was something like 'if you want to enjoy delicacies in food, you know where to come' and Dr. Roop Chand, accompanied by his grandsons, would start out towards our house.

"You are not going to eat there, are you?" his wife would ask.

'No? Oh!' he would appear kind of concerned. 'How else would I collect my fee from them? As a matter of fact, I might not be able to eat enough. How about if I took other kids along with me too?'

'O, God! Don't you feel ashamed to treat your friends like this?' Mrs. Roop Chand would start to reproach him but he would be half way out of his house by that time.

Situations would become even more interesting if Amma was sick herself. Dr. Roop Chand would come running and would say to her 'of course you had to be sick if you were to eat all that 'pilao' and those sweet dishes all by yourself. Listen, whenever you want me to visit, all you have to do is to let me know. Pretensions of sickness are really unnecessary.'

And then some more sharp remarks would be forthcoming from Amma and my father would smile but try to stay out of the fireworks.

Another problem was that whenever Dr. Roop Chand would come to visit us, suddenly, every member of the family felt something was wrong with them.

'What a confusion' Dr. Roop Chand would grumble, 'I am going to poison someone today. Now, am I a vet that I can see all of you in one day?' He would continue while examining each one of us ever so carefully.

And then my father died. He had a stroke and was under the care of a heart specialist but it was Dr. Roop Chand who stayed by his side all night along with my mother and a nurse. After he returned from the burial of my father, he felt all the more responsible towards us. He would visit the schools to get concessions in tuition fees for our youngsters; would make arrangements for marriages and would generally look after the interests of our family. Nothing that was important was done in our household without his approval. The idea of demolishing the existing west wing and adding two more rooms in the house, was dropped on his veto. My nephew Muj-jan refused to take science in his intermediate class, only Dr. Roop Chand was able to persuade him to do so. And when Farida left her husband, he had to approach Dr. Roop Chand to settle

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the dispute. And from the time one of Doctor Sahib's sons married a lady doctor, babies in our family were delivered at no cost at all. In fact Dr. Shela would even bring gifts for the newborn.

**T**his was the level of intimacy, trust and friendship between the two families. So, when that day Chabha came home after that fight with the Roop Chand kids, it seemed strange that he received a hero's welcome. Some members of our family were dotting so much they asked the details of his bravery over and over again. Only Amma remained silent, in fact, from the time the extremists fixed their banners on both houses on August 15th, Amma had hardly spoken. Most of the time, she would just stare at the gap between the two banners.

Then there was the influx of the refugees. Many of Roop Chand's relatives, his daughter-in-law Dr. Shela's parents and his daughter Nirmalla's in-laws arrived from the North and the gap widened even more. When my sister-in-law sent her sick baby to Dr. Shela, she refused to see him. No one discussed this event in our family but the process of packing became hectic. My brother even tried to pack Amma's belongings.

'Don't touch those' Amma spoke after a long time.

'Won't you go?' He couldn't believe it.

'For heaven's sake, why should I go all the way to Sindh to die?'

'Why not go to Dhaka to your third son?' my brother suggested.

'Don't say that.' Amma's sister-in-law found occasion to make fun of her. 'Dhaka is even worse in her view. She thinks Bengalis make a mess while eating rice.'

'Go to Farida's house in Rawalpindi' my aunt said.

'Why among Punjabis, for God's sake! Look at their language, how they speak.' Amma was feeling free to air her prejudices.

'I'll tell you a story,' and my aunt told the story about a chipmunk who won't go even to a palace though the king had sent a horse and an elephant for it to travel on. Everyone burst out laughing but Amma remained sad and angry. She saw the whole house being turned into an irregular mess of bundles, bags and sacks. Various attempts were made to convince her or coax her into leaving but Amma's belongings stayed where they were.

'You intent to die here' my elder brother made his umpteenth attempt. 'No one can stop you.'

'Amma is not in her right mind due to age' argued my other brother.

She remained silent. There was so much commotion around but neither the commotion nor any biting comments could move her from her place. It seemed she was not a woman but a banyan tree that cannot be uprooted even by storms.

**A**t last, the day came when the whole caravan of her sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law and grand children was seated in a big bus. The police supervised the loading. Amma was very sad and helpless. Time and again, she glanced towards the house of Dr. Roop Chand. She felt it to be miles away. The veranda of the house was empty but Amma almost could feel Dr. Roop Chand with his tearful eyes way behind the lattice doors and curtains.

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The caravan left. Amma walked slowly back to the inner courtyard. She suddenly felt afraid. She felt such emptiness in her house that it was inviting all kinds of spirits to come and take over the space. She felt dizzy. She leaned towards a pillar. The room in front of her was the room she stayed in when she came to this house. Her handsome bridegroom had carried her into the room. Where he lovingly un-veiled her pretty moon-like face; where he pledged devotion to her; where their first daughter was born; where her first embryo cord was buried.

Ten more of her cords were buried here. But they all left this room and this womb. For what? For an unknown future, for a cheaper rate of grain? But this room was still vibrating with their sounds. But the rib that other brides touched for good luck, had lost its significance. She stood there with an empty lap, empty hands and empty heart. The emptiness was overwhelming and unbearable. She turned to the other side. She staggered as she saw the room that was in front of her now. This was the room where, after fifty years of togetherness, her husband had died. She could see his coffin here, the whole family around him.

He was lucky. He was buried by so many loving hands of his children. And here she was, an unclaimed, uncoffined corpse. She sat down on the floor. In his memory, she used to light a candle here every night. But tonight she did not do even this. Nothing seemed to be with her but a huge engulfing void.

In the house across the road, it was equally quiet. Except for Roop Chand who was walking vehemently in his veranda. All sorts of curses and abuses were on his lips. He was cursing his wife, his children, his servants, the government, the street between the two houses, the stones, the gravel, anything, the whole universe. The almost empty house across the street was gnawing at him. As if he had demolished and ruined it. He wanted to forget what had happened. He tried to get rid of it but part of his own self, body and soul was not letting it go. He moaned. And then in one decisive moment he turned, approached his car, got into it and drove off.

It was well into the night when Dr. Roop Chand's wife quietly entered the back door. She had two 'thalis' (plates) of food in her hands. The two old women sat silently. The food remained un-touched all night. They were both good at gossiping but this night they were both mute.

Their thoughts had rendered them mute. Maybe the children will die on their way over to Pakistan; maybe they will come back; they struggled for fifty years and now everything is finished; the youngest daughter-in-law is eight months pregnant what will she do if - in a forest? They left everything behind, their jobs, businesses, houses. Now everything will go to waste. Perhaps they will come back. But when? She couldn't wait long. She was like an old withering branch. Life could snap out of her any minute.

Then they couldn't take it any longer. They were crying, clinging to walls and pillars. They were trying to comfort and console each other but their words were not making sense. They were tired. They needed to rest but the thought of maimed or murdered bodies of the loved ones kept them trembling and awake. Sometime near morning they were exhausted to such a limit that they both became unconscious. Or, perhaps, they fell asleep.

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Suddenly there was a tremendous noise. Doors, bolts, chairs and locks were clanking and lights were turned on. Someone was calling from afar. Oh, this was the voice of the eldest son and this was of the youngest, the middle one's too. Have they come back from Heaven? The daughters-in-law were with them too. All the spirits had come alive and all hands, small and big, were touching her. The dry branch, it seemed, started to blossom and she became unconscious again. This time due to overwhelming happiness.

When she opened her eyes. Dr. Roop Chand was there, feeling her pulse.

"Bhabhi! If you wanted me to come why didn't you just say so?" As always his cheery voice came from the other side of the curtain. 'Why do you have to create excuses? And you have to pay my fees as well. I caught your children at the railway station. These rascals were running away, you know.' He kept on giving details.

She slowly pulled herself up and sat on the bed. The curtain was between them. There was silence for a while and then two hot tears rolled out of her glazed eyes. The tears sat glistening like two perfect pearls on the wrinkled back of Dr. Roop Chand's hand.

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THE POSITION  
OF  
HER POWER

by

Fauzia Rafiq



**S**he was the kind one only sees in an Avon brochure. Light brown hair with a tint of gold, blue kinky eyes, straight nose, full lips, wide mouth and a dimpled chin. A woman she had come across years ago whom she remembered to this day by the name of "that classy bitch", once called her the ideal woman of Anglo-Saxon lower middle class, quote, unquote. The bitch thought this to be insulting. It was not. Not to her. The only thing she objected to was the word 'lower' with the term middle class.

She was not only an ideal woman, she was also a wise woman. She had made it a point to enhance and preserve this image since her teens. And now, after about 25 years, she had reason to be proud of her efforts. Little things she had started doing then were now habits that she hardly noticed or paid attention to. Every four to six months, she would change the style of her hair to the most appropriate one at the time. Never too conventional, never too wild. What she did not change was its golden-brown colour. Like the deep blue of her eyes, the golden-brown remained the in-thing in hair colour for conventional fashion magazines.

The only thing that caused her some concern was her skin. It was white like the belly of a Salmon. As time passed by, the blue veins under her skin became more and more prominent. She never found the time or money to keep it tanned. But only her first boyfriends might have noticed that it was too white. She had evolved a useful method of delicately applying the correct combination of foundation cream and Oil of Olay on her body after her morning shower. It not only provided a thin transparent veil to the blue, it also gave a healthy and somewhat tanned look to her skin. None of her boyfriends, not even her ex-husband knew she had hair on her upper lip, arms and legs. The only noticeable hair was on her head and between her thighs. And she took good care of both.

She liked looking pretty. It made life easy on her. And pleasant. Except that she was unable to figure out why she had lost three men and was about to lose the fourth. She had wanted each one of them to stay. She knew she boosted their ego just by being with them. She knew they were all proud of having her. So then why did they always leave?

The man she was going out with was finding more and more excuses to spend less time with her. She recognized the symptoms. Last night he was to come and pick her up to go dancing. She wore her black dress with the burning red jewelry and matching shoes. A real sizzler. No one could help but look at her. But he never showed. When she called his place there was that fucking machine with tasteless loud music saying 'I am unable to come to the phone right now blah, blah, please leave your name and number.....'. She almost drove to his place to find out why the hell he was unable to come to the phone but then she felt tired. Tired of keeping them in line. Tired of feeling outraged. Tired of the fear of being abandoned. Tired of the thought of dancing, of loud music, of attracting men, of encountering women. She went to bed and quietly slept all night.

**S**leep is a great remedy. In the morning she was herself again and aghast at the fact that she had slept with her makeup on. She called him again from her workplace. He was ever so ashamed of his behaviour last night but it was unavoidable. And, great news, wait till you hear this one, he had found the job of his dreams in the States and was leaving within a week or so. And then out came a rather weak and totally unenthusiastic 'how about coming along?'. She said she was absolutely thrilled and yes, she would think about it. He said he was in an awful hurry and would really appreciate it if she told him by tomorrow at the latest. She said she would.

She felt heavy. She knew there was no job and that the bastard was taking the easy way out. She still would have swallowed her pride and would have gone to the States with him but she wasn't as free to do so. She had her mortgage to think about, she was still paying for her furniture. It was difficult to contemplate quitting her job. It paid well and was so easy. She was quite a success at it as well. Her ability to control people was not only used at work, it was also appreciated. She liked controlling people. She did it almost effortlessly.

She would sit everyday in front of one of the doors leading to the office where officers conducted prearranged interviews in tiny bare cubicles; files were constantly fed to the computers, and office clerks busily walked back and forth. She loved this office. No alien could enter it without her consent. She unceasingly treasured and guarded the officers, files, computers, cubicles and all.

She always sat in a high chair behind a counter that encircled her and the door leading into the office. She had a phone, a ballpoint pen and a register. Her world was made perfect by a good-sized smiling portrait of the Queen of England. Though she was quick to see deficiencies in women, she somehow never thought like that about this one. She had a built in sense of awe



and respect for the Queen that she never found any reason to challenge. And it was only fair. After all this was not just any woman. She was dismayed at the royal choice of Diana and Fergie as daughters-in law of the Crown, but she also understood the fact that there were some things that even Queens were unable to control. She kept her cool in that regard.

She kept her cool at all times. She never allowed any of them more than 60 to 120 seconds of her time. If there was resistance to that unspoken rule, she would simply sit and keep on repeating her standpoint without listening to what was being said. She knew what they were saying. If someone was dumb enough, which incidently most of them were, not to get the message by that time, she would start punching her lines on the phone and get busy elsewhere. But the method she most commonly used was the one where she would unilaterally finish her conversation with one and would turn to the other with a 'may I help you?' uttered flawlessly to mean 'what the hell do you want?'

She had also discovered the benefits of knowing in advance if anyone standing in the line would pose problems. She was a good judge of character. She would know at a glance if they were irritating or aggravating. This way she was always prepared.

The only problem she faced at work was that she could never find any time to think. The line in front of her remained long no matter how efficiently she dealt with them. And the lunch break gave only enough time to eat. She was provided with coffee at her counter. Most of the time she liked this. Who needed time to think? But sometimes, like today, she wanted to think. She had to decide by tomorrow. No time. Yet she had to make a decision by tomorrow. This dumbo's 60 seconds are over, she decided and turned to the next in line with her 'may I help you?'

'Y--yes--uh--good morning Miss. I --'

'What is it? Work permit? You have to pay 50 dollars. New rules.'

'Yes. I--I wanted to know if --if my open work permit is here yet please Miss---?'

'Have you passed your medical?'

'Yes, yes, I want to know if the result is on my file and if ---'

'We do not answer queries about the medical here, Sir. You have to find that out from the Ministry of Health in Ottawa'. She turned to the next, 'May I help you?'

'B--but--Miss--'

'Number is in the phone book, Sir'. She was still looking at the next one in line.

He did not hesitate to come forward.

'Yes, Sir?'

'Me meet officer, 9:30.' He offered her a piece of paper. She was opening her register to check the validity of his claim when her eye fell on a thin woman who was third in the line up. The look on her face unsettled her.

'Your name and file number, Sir.'

'Here, this. Here, this.'

She took the piece of paper, entered his particulars in the register but her mind remained on the woman.

'Take a seat. Your name will be called.'

She turned to the next. Now the woman was second in line.

'You need an interpreter? Which language?'

'Italy. Me Italy.'

'Okay, wait over there' she indicated an open space for her to wait. Why do they come to Canada when they couldn't say a word in English? She wondered several times every day. 'May I help you?' The woman was next after this one. What was it? She looked at her. Yes, it was the look on her face. The same look. Her eyes were clear and she stood as if she was standing in a line waiting for the bus to arrive. Yes she knew that look. It was aggravating. In fact she was disgusted with people like her. Stupid fools didn't they know it was not a bank or a bus stop? Standing in this line was not a right. It was their Goddamn duty. But some are stupid. In fact they are all stupid. She suddenly hated them all. So many of them looking at her with expectation, with submission, like dogs. She hated dogs. Especially the ones that had no pedigree. She hated them. Her heart pounded and she wanted to be away from them. Away from Toronto. She wanted to be in California, absorbing all the sunshine that her body could need. Lying side by side with him, cooking together, walking together. She might even have a baby. 'Your file number in Montreal, Sir?' She did not have to listen to his groveling speech to find out that he wanted his files to be transferred from Montreal to here.

'Here is your appointment. Bring this paper with you when you come next time.'

'Thank you, Madam.'

She did not call the next in line. It was her. The one with brown skin and black eyes. She absorbed herself with the appointment register. She needed a minute to set the ball rolling. She felt thirsty for coffee. But it wasn't time yet. People in this line had apprehensive, disturbed, fidgeting or agitated eyes. Not the calm that this one had. It did not seem proper. No, it definitely was not proper. She can't be a citizen. This is not the place for them. May be she is not even a landed. Let me see what her act is then.

'May I help you, Madam?'

At that very moment three young children came running towards the woman. And then the woman did something that was never done in this office. Instead of coming forward when she was called she started talking to her children. She made her wait for a full 40 seconds. This was something she never took from anyone, especially aliens. And this one was not just an alien. She was an alien from Asia.

'Good morning. I am here for a work permit.' She said it as if she was asking for a panty hose in a drug store.

'Your job offer, please.' She did not look at her.

'Here.' She had the paper ready in her hand. Her hand remained extended for a while before it was taken.

'Okay, here is your appointment.'

'I need it today. The---'

'The nearest space I have is for the same date next month.'

'Next month? Who will hold a job for me for a month?'

'May I help you?' She dismissed her.

'No, you have got to listen to me. I have three children and if I lose this job I will have to go on government assistance. I cannot wait that long. I ---'

'Punjabi or Urdu?' she asked dialing a number on the intercom.

'What?'

'What is your mother tongue?'

'Punjabi -- but--'

I've got you now woman. She felt like smiling. 'Oh, hi Cindy. Can we have a Punjabi interpreter out here? Great. Thanks .' She put the phone down. So, the bitch doesn't want to go on Welfare. Too good for it, eh? She even calls it 'government assistance'.

'Why did you ask for a Punjabi interpreter? I can speak a little English.'

She kept scribbling on the paper in front of her. Too good for it as well, eh?

'You asked for a Punjabi interpreter?' The girl was a delicate Japanese.

'Yes. Could you please tell this lady we are booked until the same date next month. That is when she has to come back.'

'Certainly'. The interpreter faced the woman and said in English "We are booked until the same date next month. That is when you have to come back."

'But who will keep this kind of job---'

'We are booked until the same date next month. That is when you have to come back.'

'I have three children ----'

'We are booked until the same date next month. That is when you have to come back.'

'But you can't do that to ----'

'We are booked----'

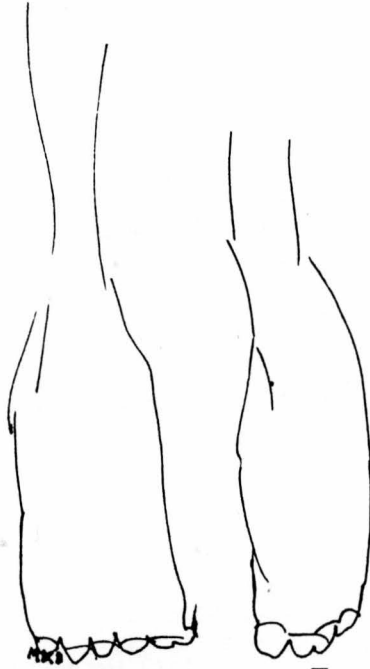
The woman suddenly turned, gathered her children and started walking towards the door. And that is when she looked back towards the counter. Her eyes were full of water. By the time she was out the door her cheeks were must be all wet. So much for parenting skills, eh. Crying in front of her children. The woman disappeared behind the door but she could see her crying in the corridor. In the elevator. In the huge main lobby. On to University Avenue. Hundreds of people looking at her, watching her. She felt a sudden and unexpected urge to run after her and tell her about the other office where she could get a work permit the same day. No, she was not that soft. The creature asked for what she got. People watching. The woman crying. And then they think they have self-respect. It was only proper to do what she did.

Whenever she did something that was proper, she felt good. This was proper. It was good. That is what she liked in herself. She always did what was in her power.

Suddenly, there was no dilemma. She was strong and she had power. No, she did not need him. She could survive without him.

The decision came like an inspiration. Quick, easy and enlightening.

SHORT STORY  
KARACHI, PAKISTAN



**IN  
THE  
LAND OF SERMONS**

by  
GOHAR SULTANA UZMA  
Translated from Urdu by AHMED SALIM

(The following is a work of fiction.. Any resemblance to known characters, places and events is purely coincidental.)

Since a long time now I have not felt like writing. It seemed so useless somehow. I don't know why. Perhaps it was because I was changing, and my attitudes towards life were changing. Things that seemed very important once, did not seem so important any more. I no longer looked at things, people, seasons, with the tinted eyeglasses of my personality. I tried to see them as they were and not as I wanted them to be. And this simplified life a great deal.

Maybe this change in attitude comes from the fact that I now work for a magazine and get to meet all sorts of people with all kinds of problems in my daily routine. That particular day I had to meet and interview a woman whom we generally refer to as a 'prostitute'.

I don't know why the editor wanted me to interview her. What was the story behind it, I wondered. Well, for me it was an assignment that brought in money so I went along to the address provided to me by the editor.

At first I thought that I probably got the wrong house, for the woman who attended the door had quite a sweet, simple face while, I had heard that such women bear the marks of a

on their faces. The woman looked surprised to see me, perhaps because she was more accustomed to meeting strangers who were men.

This is the story of this woman.

The sun beat down hot. A car drew up under a "No Parking" sign.

A traffic cop approached the driver.

"Hey mister, this is 'No Parking'," he said.

"I won't be long. I'll just hop across to that shop and pick up a magazine," the driver pleaded.

A few minutes later when he returned, he found the cop waiting.

"Sir, have some consideration for us" the cop looked around him and said in a low tone.

"What, You're asking for money? Do you know that this is against the law?" the driver was angry.

The cop changed his tone.

"I'll give you a ticket. This is 'No Parking'."

The man thought for a moment, then reached down in his pocket, drew his wallet and handed the cop a ten-rupee note. (approximate Canadian equivalent: 90 cents).

Just then, a hand clapped on the cop's shoulder. It was a constable, cop's old enemy. They lived in the same locality and often exchanged hot words while quarrelling for the tap water. This was the time for the constable to get even, and also build a good record. The constable reported the cop and had him put away.

It was 11:00 p.m. The children had gone to sleep, the food was cold. She knew that her husband's duty ended at 8:00 p.m. Where was he? She was tired from the day's work and her eyes were heavy. Back in the village they were used to sleeping early and rising early. In town it was different and she was still not quite accustomed to it. Her husband was from the same village but he had lived in the town longer. They got married three years ago and she had to leave her home to come here.

She was startled out of her sleep at the sound of the youngest child crying. The mo'azzan (Muslim priest) was calling people to prayer. She was surprised to find that it was already morning. The door had remained open all night. Her husband had not returned.

She was scared. Whom could she call in these early hours? She waited for the daylight to come before going to the neighbours.

Meanwhile, everyone in the neighbourhood except her knew that her husband had been apprehended while accepting a bribe. They told her but she did not understand. All she knew was that she was scared without her husband; all she could do was cry. Her neighbours tried to comfort her. That was all that they could do.

Two more days passed. In desperation, she approached the constable who lived in the same locality and who had safely kept himself clear of all association with the event. She asked him to help her meet her husband.

"Have patience, sister," he said, "it is not advisable for you to go there now. Your husband is under trial."

She cried herself to sleep. The remains of food were nearly finished. She was concerned about her husband's well-being but also that soon the food would run out.



Tired of listening to her daily demands the constable finally took her to the jail where her husband was kept. The warden looked her up and down and said irritably:

"Bibi, your husband is in jail, you can't see him."

"For only ten rupees they sent him to jail?" she asked bewildered and upset.

"Not for only ten rupees but for accepting a bribe," the warden said sternly.

Perhaps he was a very pious man, the woman thought. He had a long beard which he repeatedly stroked.

"What will happen now?" she asked him helplessly.

He stroked his beard, then said thoughtfully, "First the trial will run."

"Trial?" she heard the word and started crying. "Brother, please help me. I am alone in the city. I have no relatives or friends here. My village is far off and there too only my father is alive and he is very old and blind."

"Bad deeds lead to bad results, Bibi, what can I do? The law is very strict. There is Islamic system now, you know," he said. "Do you know that accepting a bribe is a big sin? A man should not sell his integrity for a small sum of money. Now you have to suffer for it."

But why should I have to suffer for what he did, she thought to herself. The youngest child was still fed on her milk but the older two needed solid food. There was nothing left in the house. The neighbours had helped for a while but how long could they go on? They were poor people too. She decided to do something about it.

She asked for the 'Seth' (in charge) at the prawn factory. He called her in and with one look at her healthy village face, told her:

"This is not the work for you. It is too cold in the factory."

"I don't mind. I'll do anything. My children are hungry," she replied desperately.

"All right. Come in the evening. I'll give you some work."

What work can there be in the evening, she wondered. Anyway she had no choice but to go there and find out. The children were restless all day. She placated them till the evening, then walked to the factory. It was empty. The 'Seth' was sitting there alone, bending over his files. There was a 'chowkidar' (guard) at the gate, and that was all.

She resisted at first, but then she started work.

Before leaving, the 'Seth' handed her a ten-rupee note. "Keep this. A beautiful woman like you should not work in the dirt. You can come again tomorrow."

She kept staring at the note for quite a while. What versatility this ten-rupee note had! The bribe for which her husband was languishing in jail; the price for which her modesty was bought; the reason why her children could not go hungry tonight. She left the room without another word.

The warden at the jail had said that the law was very strict these days, that it was the Islamic system now.

Two days passed. The ten-rupees ran out. She decided to approach the bungalows near her house. No one wanted her three kids around, and so she was refused work in every house. The children were wailing. They clung to her.

She went to the jail warden.

"God is great, Bibi, but your husband's freedom is not in my power," he stroked his beard.

"So what is in your power?" she asked. "Can you do what is in your power?"

"In my power?" The simple question tore at the warden's sense of dignity. His throat went dry. But he did not lose his temper. Instead, he thought dispassionately, humanistically. The warden did know many needy people. This woman could amply satisfy their 'need'. If two people fulfill each others needs there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, it would be an act of compassion on his part. Not that he wouldn't demand adequate compensation for it.

The act of compensation did not take very long, but the woman was terribly confused because she could not quite distinguish between the village maulvi's (Muslim priest) beard, the area' peshimam's' (priest of another Muslim sect) beard, and the beard of the warden.

The warden referred her to a 'social worker' who visited the jail regularly. He taught her, slowly at first, the fine points of the trade. He taught her how to be professional about it. And the simple woman learnt her lessons well. At the end of the day when she saw the well-fed, content faces of her children, she often said "God is great".

But her husband was still in jail. His trial being of such petty nature, he could not have a hearing amidst more serious cases. Meanwhile, the entire course of this woman's life was changed. She did not change much herself. She still remained a God-fearing woman and covered her head each time she heard the call to prayer. She considered her money to be hard-earned money.

I searched her face closely as she told me all this, looking for signs of remorse or bitterness. Surprisingly, there were none. Instead, there was a kind of quiet contentment....an expression of her still unspoiled innocence. After all, she was working at the only occupation the society offered for an illiterate and unskilled woman.

"Why didn't you try to go home?" I asked her.

"Things would not have been different there. The village 'Chaudhry' (landowner) is no different from the city 'Seth'. Both extract the same kind of labour from a woman." she replied.

"But you must have had relatives there."

She looked me in the eye.

"I only had my old father who is nearly blind and lives with some other people. How could he keep me and my children? Besides, who would give me food for free? Not even a husband does that."

I was surprised to hear these words. The woman had lost rights to her body but gained an independent mind in the process. Of course, the price she had to pay for it was too dear.

I left her house. There was nothing more to be learnt there. I took the first bus back to the office. Taking out my purse to pay the conductor, my eye was caught by the ten-rupee note that I held in my hand. It seemed to be so mysterious, so full of power. I had lived in a circle of people where I could not have realised the purchasing power of this piece of paper.

It was getting dark. The sun was setting. A mo'azzan called out. Then another and another. I know that they would simultaneously be calling out over the radio and the television. It was an Islamic state and such things were now mandatory.

I penned down my feature story hurriedly and left it at the editor's desk. The first thing next morning, he met me with his face livid.

"What are you trying to do? Would you rather have me close down?" he asked me as he dumped my manuscript in front of me.

In my feature, I had concluded: In my opinion, it is the law enforcing agencies who are solely responsible for turning this simple housewife and mother in to a prostitute. By condemning her husband to retribution that was disproportionate to his crime, they wrecked her life and ruined her home. The purpose of the law is to reform people and not ruin them and turn them into confirmed criminals for the rest of their lives. In this particular case, the law, paradoxically had been very unjust.

"But sir, features like this increase the authenticity of this magazine's reporting."

"Do you realize what kind of government we have here? Your words may be interpreted as subversive. It is an Islamic republic after all."

"Oh, come, come sir. I didn't expect you to be saying such things. You know that such injustices have nothing whatsoever to do with any religion. This 'Seth' that this woman talked about, you know his brother, don't you? These days he is aspiring to become a member of parliament."

"But the Koran comes out strong against corruption."

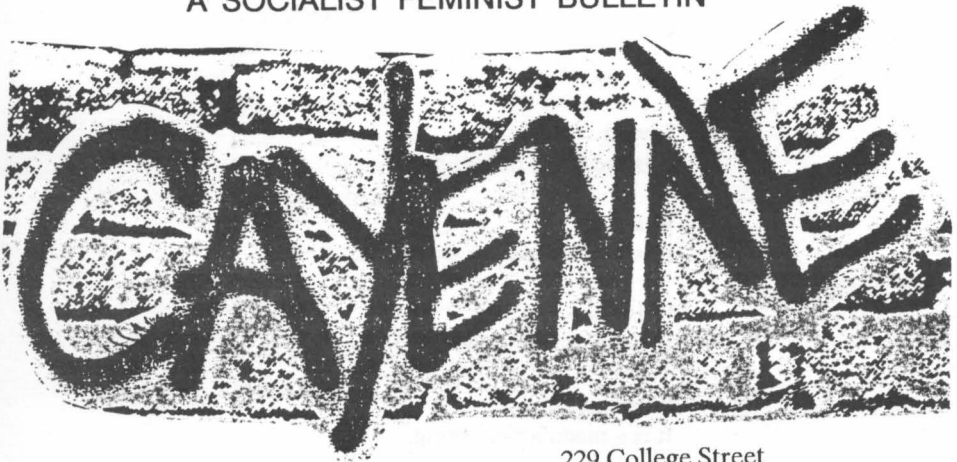
"The Koran also says that pieces of paper don't get hurt but humans do."

"I know, I know, All you say is correct. But this feature cannot be published in its present form, change it a little. Take out the policeman, the constable, the warden, the 'Seth', the social worker, or make them positive. You understand the needs of professional journalism don't you?"

I came away quietly. I feel angry and helpless. I think I may have to give up 'professional journalism' or else write as fiction what I cannot report as fact. Strange, these people who visit art galleries to see naked flesh in the guise of art cannot bear to see their own reflection when a mirror is held up to them.

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## A SOCIALIST FEMINIST BULLETIN



\$3.00 PER COPY

229 College Street  
Suite 309  
Toronto, Canada  
M5T 1R4

**LOGIC**

You are  
what you make of it.  
What you make of it  
May not be what you want.

**DEFINITIONS**

Attachment  
is in the beginning to our end.

Detachment  
It is the end of a beginning.

Wisdom  
It is the source of pain.

Pain  
It is the art of living.

Living  
It is the sense of being.

Being  
It is the meaning of existence.

Existence  
It is the race of survival.

Survival  
It is a meaningless thing.

## **LABOUR**

I was scared  
Yet adventurous  
With bated breath  
I waited for death  
It never came.  
With shrieks I lived the nightmare  
Waiting for an end.  
An end I grovelled  
I begged and beseeched  
An end that taunted  
An end that teased  
I ended, I ceased  
the end unachieved.

## **RESPONSE**

"I am" I say,  
Nobody replies  
"Look at me"  
Blindness abides  
"Hear me" I cry,  
Deafness resides  
"Feel me. I feel, I hurt"  
An abyss decried.

## **LIFE**

You see it....  
It is a bias

You feel it....  
It is a pain

You live it....  
It is a lie.

Himani Bannerji was born in 1942 in an area in India which later became Bangladesh. She studied in Calcutta and came to Canada in 1968. She teaches social science at York University in Toronto. Himani is a prominent poet in Canada. She is known as a strong person who does not compromise her politics to gain acceptability into the liberalism of Western academia. Himani is currently completing her research project in India. These poems are taken from her book DOING TIME (Sister Vision Press, 1986, P.O. Box 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 4E2).

**wife**

I often think of her  
this thing called a wife  
what is she?

I try to think of her  
even as I am  
a woman  
a small limited form  
marked by softness curves  
hair teeth two giving hands  
and a little resting place inside  
which expands with need

But I cannot for the life of me  
I cannot see  
a woman a person  
when I call conjuring her  
out of the air  
"Wife, Appear!" I say  
what appears  
is definitely not human  
but a monolith  
a granite form  
to whom centuries have lent  
their strength shape and colour  
and she is molded into the shape  
of a house



a cave house  
with two windows for eyes  
I see frightened people  
cowering inside her  
husband children and aged politicians  
the world is too dark for them  
she protects them with her rocky strength  
she cannot move  
she is always pregnant  
holding the world like the Noah's Ark  
her feet rooted deep deep  
into the earth of history  
flowers of ritual  
prayers to immobility  
litter her doorsteps  
she is grown dark and silent  
her inner fire warms others.

This is a fearful construction  
I cry I pray  
for an earthquake  
to splinter this rock  
this granite monolith  
a mere form  
built by the male hands  
of history.

**a few thoughts on peace**

--for Nahala

Peace with her brow of patience  
downcast silent eyes and wings of the dove  
treading the rubble and the dust of bombed cities  
is an obscene and fugitive dream  
dreamt by men in power resting awhile  
before pulling the trigger at the next human being  
who protests for a life with dignity.

Peace is not patient nor passive nor silent  
a fleeting marmorial beauty  
a brainchild of the capitalist and the bourgeois historian  
She is restless, strident and strong  
moving like the wind through the earth  
gathering her people who will fight under her banner  
who will say "No" obstinately with the voice of Victor Jara  
to all oppressions, to the last unfreedom.

Peace is the woman of Tyre and Saida  
in her ragged black dress putting back together  
the torn limbs of her child  
in the total refusal of death  
Peace is the women of Vietnam  
whose scream is as wide as the sky:  
"Yankee Murderers!"  
Peace is the woman of El Salvador who aims  
to shoot for the ultimate equality.

**to a young man on Yonge Street**

See this man  
Standing in front of you  
framed by the window  
He is Picasso's man standing  
On two feet  
Nature's acrobat  
He smiles at you from the ground up  
He holds out a box to you  
A quarter for a pencil  
you want to put your heart  
With the quarter into his box  
you want to tell him  
His smile is more enduring  
Than Mona Lisa's  
You want to applaud him  
For the miracle of standing in front of you  
and handing you his hand.

**love in black & white**

"Don't push me, I am on the edge,  
I'll be very, very angry," says a six feet four white  
male to me, who doesn't want to answer a question  
I have asked. I am looking at him, his arms  
are full of Marx and Mao, his pockets are bulging with  
pennies for the Guy Fawkes guys of the  
Third World Revolution  
He is ready to give you pennies, knowledge, high tech  
advice on revolution, everything, even love, to the  
brown/black revolutionary women. Everything.  
But watch out! Don't ask for it though, for anything.  
He will give at his own time, at his own pace,  
at his own demand.

Master, bossman, whiteman, sahab,  
referee of the world's struggles  
don't ask him for an earlier instalment  
of the love, the aid, the advice. Above all don't  
question him about it.  
That pushes him too far  
and he will be very, very angry with you.

And a whiteman's anger  
you know can launch a thousand ships  
destroy a Grenada, if not the world  
or deport a black woman - or anything else  
you care to add.

**some kind of weapon**

If you don't want it  
your life, that is,  
don't just bury it or leave it there  
to wither or to crumble away  
in grains of dust and mould.

If you want you can throw it  
but not away

First  
take it into your hands  
examine it carefully  
hold it as you would  
a piece of rock, an iron filing  
or even a pebble or a stone,  
for an arrow, a knife, a sling.  
Some kind of weapon,  
simple ancient, elemental  
and then throw it,  
strike at something,  
that which is destroying you.

