

Women in Bangladesh

Atrocities against women!



By Taslima Nasrin

RECENTLY THE 17 year old daughter of a poor village labourer was subjected to 110 lashes. Her crime was to give birth to a child whose parenthood her husband refused to accept.

The mullahs and village elders tried her and condemned her to this flogging. Actually she was betrayed by her boyfriend. He promised to marry her, but later left her. She was given in marriage to another person.

After she delivered her child, her husband then accused her of unfaithfulness!

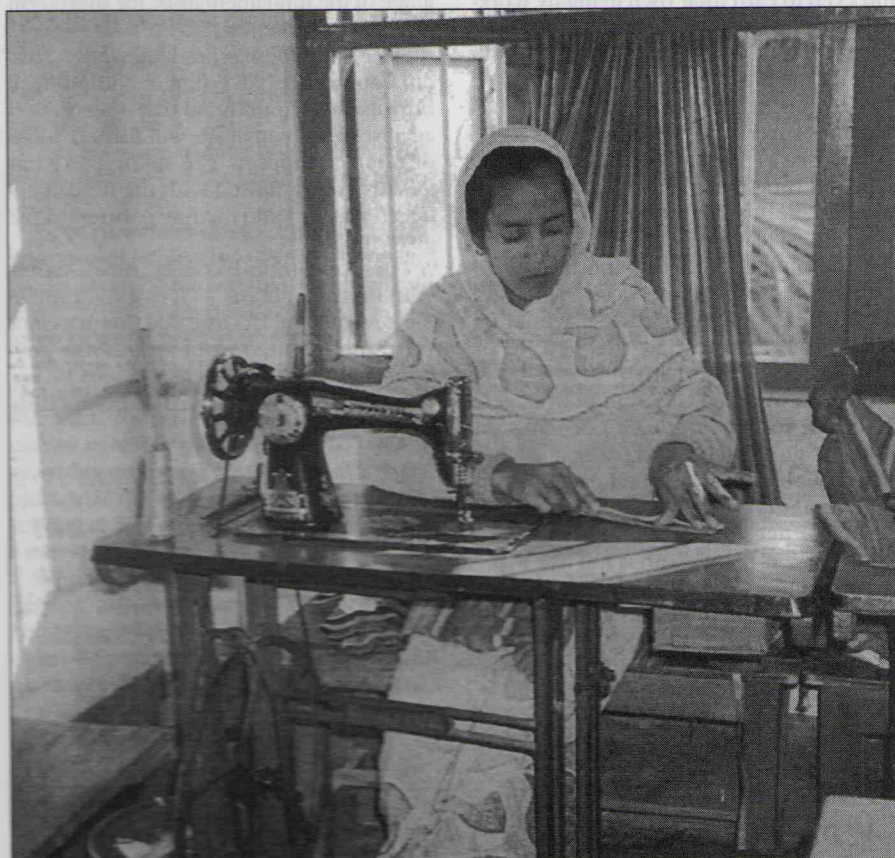
The mullahs tried her and meted out their verdict. They not only assaulted her but forced her husband to divorce her, and extracted an assurance that she would not go to any court of law. This incident is the latest in the long list of acts of aggression and humiliation against women in my country, Bangladesh.

The mullahs tried this poor girl in the second week of February 1995. In June 1993 another young woman of 22 was buried waist-deep in a pit, then stoned 101 times, just because the village mullahs decided that her second marriage was not legal.

It was reported in the newspaper that this particular mullah was eyeing the young woman and was infuriated when she married another villager. The poor woman committed suicide the same night by consuming insecticide.

I cried for her in one of my poems. I felt the mullahs were torturing *me*, and stoning *me* to death.

In the preceding month — May 1993 — a woman was tied up to bamboo posts and then burned to death by the mullahs and some villagers. Her crime? She left her hus-



Many Bangladeshi women have benefited from development programmes. They have been able to earn a living. The mullahs don't like the degree of independence this gives them.

band and eloped.

In the September of the same year, another woman got 101 strokes of a broom after the religious head of a local mosque issued a *fatwah* [death sentence] against her. She was condemned as a shameless woman because she did not stay within domestic confinement and earned her living by selling fiddles. She committed suicide also.

In the same month a young girl was buried waist-deep in the courtyard of a house by the local mullahs for having an affair with a neighbour. The clerics blissfully forgot to note the fact that this poor girl had been deserted by her husband.

Another girl was caned 101 times by the mullahs because she was found to be pregnant immediately after her marriage.

These stories are nothing but the tips of icebergs.

Every year numerous incidents of the torture and humiliation of women by the mullahs are reported in our country.

There must be many more cases which go unreported.

In 1990 it was reported in the newspapers that 6,000 Bangladeshi women killed themselves.

"Husband killed wife", "Bloodstained

clothes seized", "Teenage wife killed for dowry", "Acid thrown on schoolgirl." These headlines regularly appear in newspapers. But many events remain unreported.

In 1989 there were 453 such cases, of which 156 were cases of murder of women by their own husbands.

The Muslim fundamentalists have declared war against women. They have started a movement against Non-Governmental Organisations in Bangladesh who are doing significant work in the fields of education, health and self-employment.

The mullahs consider that most of these services are "non-Islamic." So they are trying to stop the NGOs' work by pronouncing *fatwahs*. As most of the beneficiaries of the development projects are women so, again, the women are the worst sufferers.

There are about 20,000 NGOs in Bangladesh. Of these, about 8,000 are founded by western donors. Among the most active NGOs are the Bangladeshi Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Grameen Bank.

Both these organisations have become targets of the fundamentalists' offensive. Some years back, the mullahs ordered the parents to boycott the 26,000 BRAC-run schools. Attendance dropped immediately. ▶