

tory? During the Shah's regime all they could look at was the West.

Women who chose the traditional covering at this time were threatened to be expelled from the university and so it became national resistance. In 1978-79, it became clear that what the people were looking for was a religious alternative, they felt that religious, moral and spiritual values were a betterment to society and their way of life.

It was actually democracy that brought religion into power...

Q: ..{Feminists} who say that the patriarchy of Islam is hurtful to women. How do you see these issues?

{In Islam} Women are free to work and earn as a result of their work. There is no such thing as a man dominating the earnings of a woman. Now whether this type of interpretation has occurred later as a result of a particular misogynist viewpoint, that's something else, but according to the text and scriptures a woman keeps what she earns. So we have financial independence, human values which are exactly the same as the man. Her rights to the marriage are the same.

We have a decree in Islamic jurisprudence, the woman can obtain a salary for working in the home of her husband. That has been recently implemented in the legal framework of the Iranian civil code. That means that when a woman wants to obtain a divorce, she can ask for the years she has worked in her husband's home...

Q: Why then would you say

that Muslim feminists are also critical of Islamic structures? For example, the right of the man to beat his wife.

That is one specific point in the Koran. It is specific only to where the woman becomes unfaithful in her marriage...

{On polygamy} In the Koran [there are] cases where women need to be taken into the sphere of the family, [for example, due] sometimes to the imbalance of the population. One man should do this not on the basis of his egocentric lust and desire, but he should bring her into the spirit of the family, to help her and her children to overcome the disaster, and financial problems that she may have.

Q: What are the issues happening currently affecting Iranian women?

An issue affecting Iranian women is the struggle to engage in the decision-making process. The women have to be more effective in projecting their particular views, to be able to prove to the administration that it's to the benefit of the whole country to incorporate women's views and concerns at the national level. It is happening more and more as women are becoming more active and informed, they are developing their strategies at the NGO and the national levels.

ANTI-FATWA CAMPAIGNER WINS JOHN HUMPHREY FREEDOM AWARD

Sultana Kamal, Bangladeshi lawyer and women's activist, is the winner of the 1996 John Humphrey Freedom Award, a \$30,000 award given annually by the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development to honor a human-rights activist.

"Never show your enemies that you are afraid. Never," says Kamal, 45, who has worked for 25 years for the poor, including street children, victims of fundamentalist Islamic assaults.

She and her colleagues at the legal aid group, Ain-o-Salih Kendra, have also taken on conservative Muslim leaders, challenging rulings or *fatwas* of Muslim clerics against women accused of adultery and other transgressions of Islamic laws. They have compiled a list of 243 cases of "*fatwa*-induced violence" against village women, most of them accused of adultery and ordered flogged. Several of the victims, who had been raped, were reportedly forced to marry their attackers.

In a landmark case, Kamal was able to secure the jailing of a local *imam* and eight other men in the village of Chattokchora over a *fatwa* that led to a woman's suicide. The *fatwa* stated that the woman had committed adultery because she had remarried, and ordered both her and her husband to be stoned, and her parents beaten. After the woman killed herself, the men were convicted of abetting the suicide.

According to Kamal, women are routinely targeted in the *salish*, a form of arbitration session traditionally held to settle land or family disputes and presided over by local notables.

These are being increasingly used to punish those accused of

misbehavior, even though Bangladesh's constitution allows no substitute for the court system. *Fatwas*, historically rulings on points of law, are being stretched to include judgments on evidence.

As a result of her work, Kamal has received numerous threats and, last year, members of a radical Islamic group threw gasoline bombs at her home.

Source: *Human Rights Tribune*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1997

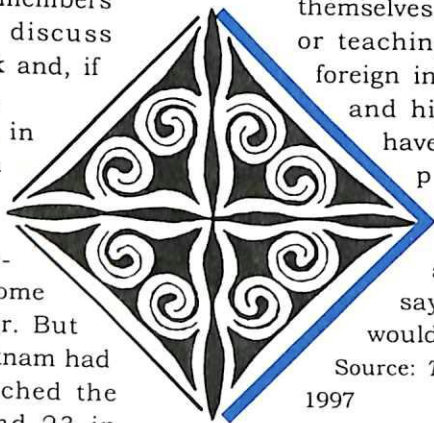
VIETNAM'S LONELY HEARTS

Tran Thi Quy is unmarried and looking for a man who is "honest, knowledgeable and with a firm outlook". Like hundreds of other single people in Ho Chi Minh City, she has joined "Club 30", a lonely-hearts-cum-marriage group. Twice a week, members gather in cafes to discuss problems, dance, drink and, if they are lucky, pair up.

Nothing unusual in that, perhaps. As in other countries, women are discovering opportunities outside the home and are marrying later. But Quy is over 40 and Vietnam had a war. When she reached the marrying age—around 23 in Vietnam—she could not find many men of similar age. Tens of thousands of young Vietnamese were wiped out in the fighting which ended in 1975.

According to a population survey published by the government statistical office, the war left a land short of young men. Of Vietnamese aged 35 to 44, there are twice as many women as men. In addition, most of the widows aged 50 or over lost their husbands some 20-30 years ago. The proportion of widows in Vietnam is "exceptionally high"—five times greater than widowers.

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The phenomenon has embedded itself into popular culture in books and films. Last week, Vietnamese television screened a tear-jerker made by the army film company about two women supporting each other 20 years after losing their men in the battle.

At the Love, Marriage and Family Affairs Consulting Center in the city, Le Minh Nga says that women had nowhere to turn to for help in the lean years after the war. With reform, things have become easier. People can afford to place advertisements in newspapers. The daring ones mingle in the singles bars that have cropped up all over town.

Most of Nga's clients are war widows who have been handicapped in the search for a husband by having to support themselves, working in factories or teaching. With an influx of foreign investment to Vietnam and higher incomes, many have more time and fewer preoccupations.

"Women are coming out and daring to talk about their lives," she says. "In the past, they wouldn't open their hearts."

Source: *The Economist*, 15 March 1997

SWEATSHOP BARBIE

"Appalling" describes the condition of workers at the Bangkok factory producing Barbie dolls. An article in the January-February 1997 issue of *The Humanitarist* reports on the findings of Anton Foek, who visited the Dynamics factory just outside of Bangkok where Barbies, stuffed Lion Kings and other Disney toys are made by 4,500 workers (mostly female).

Foek was greeted by women and children in a rally, carrying banners that said, "We are not

slave labor!" Most of the workers came from northeastern Thailand, where the poverty is abject and extreme. If the girls aren't sold into sexual slavery at 11 or 12, they are sent to work in big city factories to provide a steady income. It's "long hours, hard work, low pay, no vacations, no sick days, no rights. No union and thus no voice."

Many of the workers have respiratory infections caused by inhaling dust (75 percent). Others who work with lead and various chemicals suffer from chronic lead poisoning. If a worker wants to wear a mask, she can, but first she has to buy it; with a \$4 daily wage, she simply can't afford the protection. They are in "a catch-22 situation: if they don't work, their relatives get nothing; if they do work, they get sick from all the chemicals and dust."

Dr. Orapun, who is investigating the widespread illnesses and the cases of workers' deaths in Bangkok, talked to Foek. She started investigating sweatshops in 1991 as the director of Thailand's National Institute of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. First she looked into deaths from Seagate Technology, a computer hard-disk giant, with some 21,000 workers. Thai officials told her to stop but she refused to be intimidated. Shortly removed from her post, Dr. Orapun continued her investigation. By examining blood samples of workers, she has found high levels of lead poisoning. Other diseases are caused by inhalation of dust and solvents.

Foek also visited women who used to work at the factories and are now in Bangkok's hospitals. Twenty-year-old Sunanta, former Dynamics employee, said, "When we get sick, they throw us out." Most have no health insurance. Sunanta added that at least four