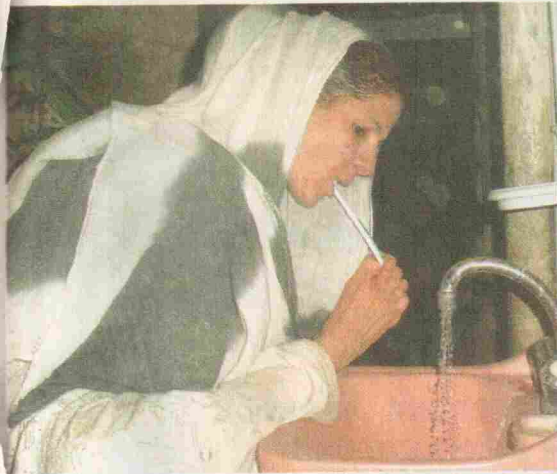
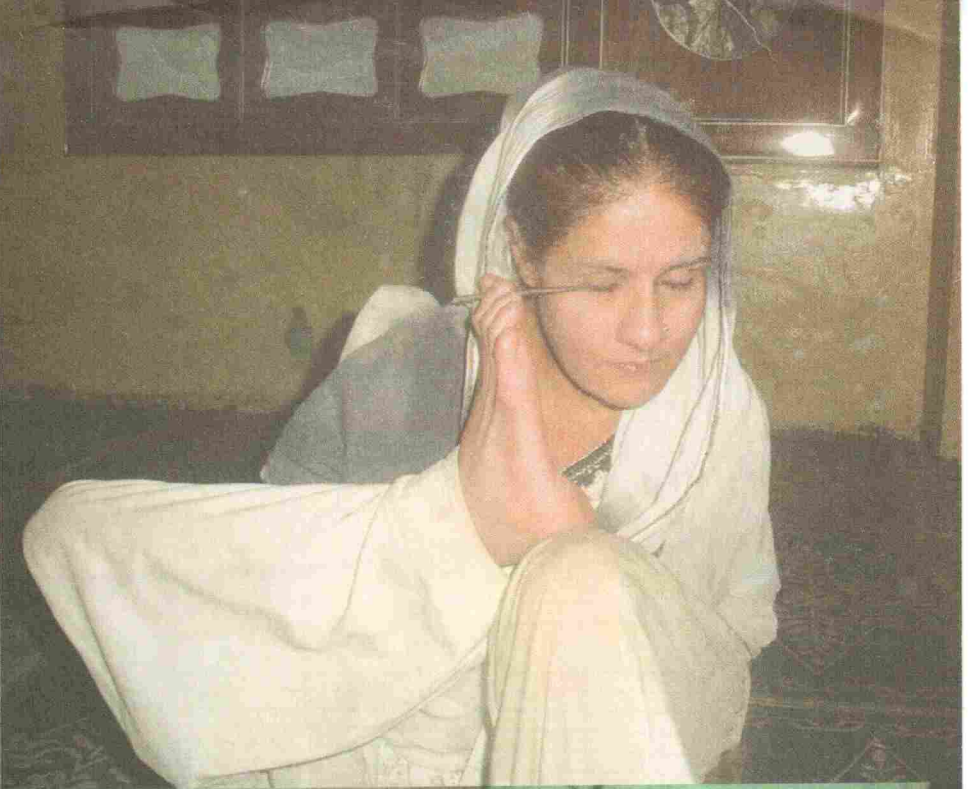


## True Grit

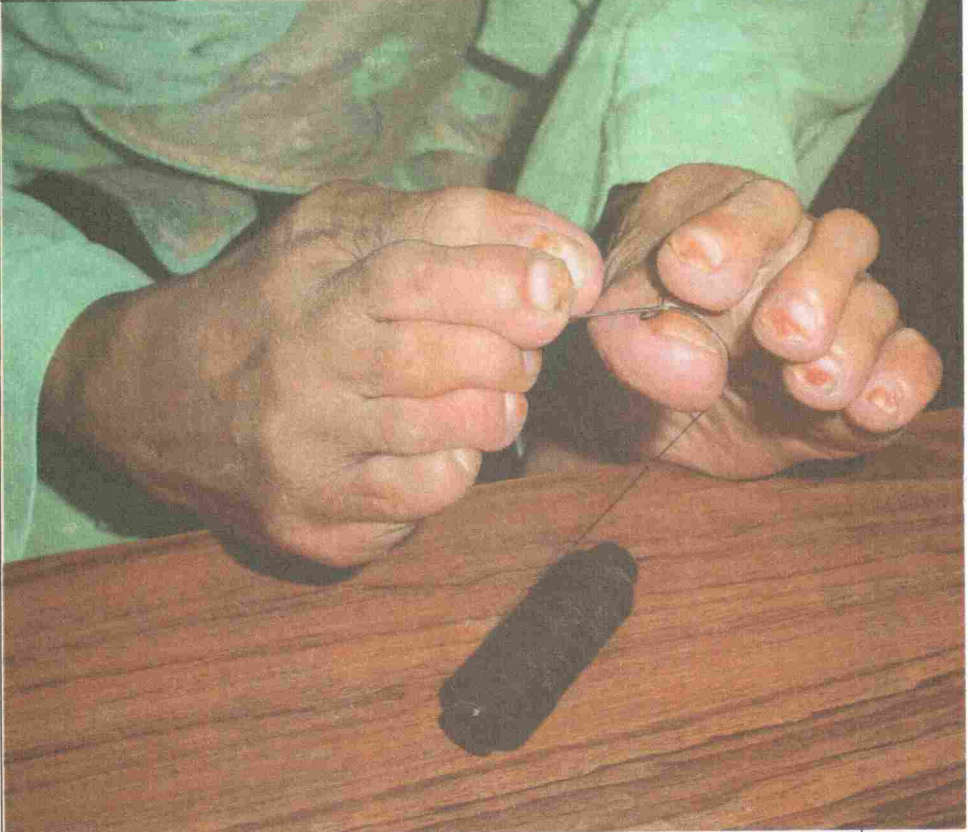
**MULTAN** – “What household chore do you find most difficult?” asks 40-year-old Shama Riffat. “Ironing clothes,” I reply. She bursts into peals of laughter. “I iron my father and my brother’s clothes everyday,” she gurgles. Besides cooking, cleaning, embroidering and teaching she runs a successful business from home. Her incredible joie de vivre spills over everything she touches and makes “Shama *baji*” the most popular figure in the neighbourhood. Incredible, for a



woman who was born without arms.

The eldest of three sisters and a brother, Shama lives with her parents in a small house situated near Pak Gate in the walled city of Multan. Her father runs a small general store close to their home and Shama packages the *mehndi* he stocks. “My brand is so popular, I can’t meet the demand for it,” she gloats. “I want to expand my business by buying an automatic henna filling machine but am presently constrained by a shortage of funds.” Future plans also include the establishment of a boutique. “I want to provide employment to the girls in the neighbourhood so that they no longer remain dependent on their men folk,” she says determinedly.

This matchless grit and



determination is what has come to personify Shama. An outstanding student, she was forced to abandon her studies after primary school because of her disability. “She’d often return with injuries,” remembers her father Riffat Hussain. “She’d fall because of the rush at the end of the school day and couldn’t get up by herself.” But Shama refused to let this bog her down. She continued on a self-education plan, devouring books at home. Today, she teaches Quran and Urdu free of charge to children from the neighbourhood. She shrugs off all praise however. “I make better use of my spare time this way,” she says diffidently. “Allah has empowered me so I can help others rather than beg for alms.” ■

— N.S.