



Readers' Forum

Happy Being Housewife

I am a 30-year-old housewife, but I do not like being compartmentalized under a neat heading. Forced by society's cut-throat competitiveness to give up reading, singing, sketching and dancing during my student days and later in my career as an interior designer, I rediscovered these delights after marriage when I accompanied my husband to a small town which had no use for my profession—and what a blessing it turned out to be!

Why is being a housewife considered to be so degrading? Is one's worth only to be measured by how much money one makes at the end of the month? I am a housewife by choice. We are not affluent but I find motherhood, "wifery" and running a household interesting, challenging and important enough for me to be home with my children. Raising children is not just a matter of food, health and education. It also involves instilling values, giving children security, love, warmth, being there for them not as a sacrifice but because I really, truly wish to.

There is a new type of societal pressure amongst women of my generation. Today women are expected to contribute to household expenses, run a house, bring up children—in short be "super women". How many of these women are actually happy, relaxed and convinced that they are doing exactly what they wish without any feelings of guilt? Why are we trying to do everything at once? What happened to division

of labor? My husband earns for the family—he misses out on so many aspects of parenting. He has no time to stop and stare. I was such a slave to society's standards of success and happiness (read materialism) and look at me now! Shielded from politics, manipulative colleagues and away from the rat race, I am more at peace with myself than I ever was.

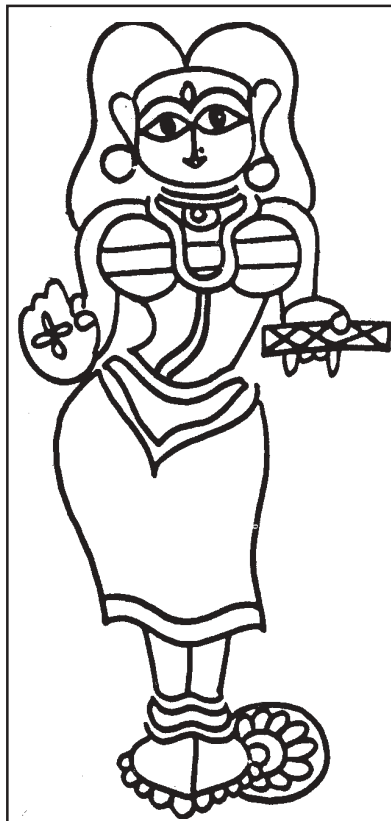
The only hiccups I face are the looks of incredulous wonder. Then there are the do-gooders who ominously, prophesise that one day my children will no longer be

dependent on me and then I will realize that there is nothing left. However, I'm proud to help and encourage my children till they are independent. I expect nothing in return except to be there if and when I'm needed. It seems so simple to me!

**Suman Ganapathy, Gurgaon,
Haryana**

*It is indeed absurd that anyone should try to guilt trap you into believing that your life is less worthy simply because you are not bringing a pay packet home. **Manushi** would like to see more of your kind of women—happy, contented, caring, and loved, well rooted in their families and capable of building a joyful life for themselves as well as others connected with them.* **Editor**

Let Rabri Have Her Chance



I know for sure that many a legislator have fathered as many children and are proud of their wives and their own prowess. They have also admired Rabri Devi's husband and jostled to be near him, when he was negotiating the fate of India and played the role of king maker. His nine

children did not matter then, If it was anything it was only a matter of joke in stag parties but hardly ever a matter for scorn.

If one was to consider, why Mahatma Gandhi wanted a farmer to become Prime Minister of India and what he actually meant, could he mean a farmer such as Mr. Deve Gowda should become prime minister of India? Did he mean that a farming gentleman of leisure who can sit behind the sandalwood door, when it is raining outside and when farmers are on their field sowing? If we consider from this perspective our present chief minister of Bihar, we will find that there is hardly anybody who is more oppressed than her.

In the last years of the twentieth century, when the world is looking at the transformation of world culture, here is a woman with nine children. This is the contribution of the gentlemen of politics, who have ruled India for fifty years. I am in no mood to spare the luminaries of the first Indian cabinet nor the second, who set the tone for future development, which has lead to this tragic situation for countless women in this country. The women of all religious denominations and oppressed communities suffer from child birth. Lucky are the women who merely suffer when you compare them with the millions that die.

But the buoyancy of the Indian woman is expressed in the audacity of Rabri Devi to stand up and say—I will look after my nine children and also my husband in jail. I will look after the state just as well, and hopefully in that order. Because the country needs more husbandry than heroism. The endless loot of Indian people in the name of development has done more harm to India than the second World War did to the world.



There have been other women who have ruled the country or parts of it earlier but they did not have to bear nine children. Being a woman from an oppressed class, and being a woman of upper class is a very different proposition.

The women of upper strata, who have ruled us, had imbibed male values and when they left their position, the women of India had made no progress. Thus the male bastion and all their artilleries were organized in the defence of these ruling women. The male dominated country saw in them the numerous Devis who are even today worshipped in many temples.

Subhachari Dasgupta, New Delhi

False Progress

Making my yearly visit to India after the explosion of the new “progressive economy”, I am struck by change in the sound of women’s voices in the street, in the temples, in bazaars. The petulant whine of the middle class urban Indian woman contrasts most unfavorably with the sunny tones of poor women in the countryside. Dissatisfaction may be a deeper reason for the dissonance. My women friends in India and the NRIs tell me economic liberalization has created more opportunities for urban women in India. That it is “no longer as bad as it used to be” and in fact, middle class women work and advance and that those who own

business get power in professional life, that laws have changed and times have changed and this is the age of cellular phones, refrigerated Pepsi, electric rice-cookers and canned *masalas*. By this criteria, yes indeed, things are better.

My male relatives and friends in India tell me the days when a woman could lose her reputation by being a model or an actress are gone. They revel in the availability of western tapes, CDs and software, bottled mineral water and catalogue shopping. But is this progress? I am not persuaded. Women in India confuse consumerism with freedom. Technology will not change the fact that it is/will be urban women who are expected to produce more and faster as a result of new technology without commensurate change in their status in the household.

If urban Indian women are to be part of the economic progress of India, we need capital to start up business or to invest for independence in our old age so as not to be dependent on a son or sons—or even on daughters.

However, urban middle class parents still spend lakhs on a girl’s wedding, jewellery and gold bangles and young women are silent, even complemented on their parents’ extravagance. It seems to me that even in middle class homes, Indian women are still property to be transferred in virgin state, and are not expected to be autonomous—especially in regard to monetary decisions. So consumer goods have not changed our thinking in this respect either.

Our Indian men have done this before and they are about to do it again: They will liberate the Indian middle-class urban women just enough to make them presentable for international business, just enough so that the West can be

persuaded that Indian men are “just like us”, or “not as repressive as men in Islamic countries”. Indian men will allow just enough liberty for Indian women to bring in money, but not enough that they may have to share power. Will that lead to greater choice for Indian women in family affairs and family economics? Will it lead to less sexual harassment or sexual assault or more value for feminine values? I hope I am wrong, but I predict it will not.

If more and better choices became available to Indian women, not merely between brands of dishwashers and cars, but between, for instance, homemaking vs. working, marrying vs not marrying, having children vs not having children, then we could call it progress. If more Indian women could choose their own mates, decide how many children to have, make spending decisions and define their lives then we could call it progress. Consumer goods do not equal liberty, nor do consumer goods change the values, the character or the mentality of the people using them. Women with toasters and dishwashers are women with toasters and dishwashers, not women with Freedom.

**Shauna Singh Baldwin,
Milwaukee, USA.**

Our Own Way

I am one of those who believe that given our heritage and civilisational values, we should and can tackle Indian women’s issues differently from what the West does. Without minimizing the deprivations and disabilities to which our women are subjected to by our society and the vast majority of men in that society, I think it is possible to utilize elements of strength in our society in tackling women’s issues.

**R.Venkatanarayan,
Noida, UP**

Sieving

*She picked up the dish,
Sieving out carefully the stones from the grains.
She had the necessary concentration and sureness of touch.
What was she sieving out?*

*The colour, romance and playfulness of life.
Each stone took along with it a part of her spirit.
She did it every day, letting the stagnation set in.
The eyes strained with pain,
Yet the hands searched feverishly
For that one stone which just might escape her close scrutiny,
her inner sensor.*

*It had to be all even,
The orange, black or white.
A plain uniformity of colour and texture,
Without a smudge, scratch or hard edge.*

*She did it now without having to look,
Her hands searching out and rejecting all that was different.
Feelings, emotions, desires, rage all flicked away like those
irregular stones.*

*She did not flinch, nor did her features change.
Nor could any wicked desire set her cheek aflame.
She kept on sieving,
Till the black hair turned to white, the taut skin into wrinkles.*

*Now when her inner suppression,
her sublimation seems complete,
Her concentration sometimes wavered,
Leaving a stone or two untraced,*

*Her habitual control slackened,
allowing some long-suppressed desire,
Some half forgotten dream,
Too stubborn to be erased without trace.*

*Breaking the monotony of her consciousness.
She kept telling herself,
Nothing at all mattered now.
Yet the dream persisted.*

Kumool Abbi