



Readers' Forum



==== Transforming Old Traditions ====

It is fun to celebrate Rakhi. It is an ancient family festival when sisters tie a beautiful and sacred thread on their brothers' wrists and wish them long, healthy and prosperous lives. Raksha Bandhan means binding oneself in a promise of mutual caring and concern. Brothers normally reciprocate by giving some money or gifts to their sisters to express their good wishes for them. It contributes to maintaining caring and loving traditions in families and in the society at large. Brothers and sisters are often sustained in their closeness by renewing their promises every year to be there for each other and share each other's pain and pleasure and provide help whenever needed.

Rakhi often helps keep brothers and sisters connected even when physical distance or life's circumstances keep them apart. Most people love celebrating this festival and look forward to renewing their promises to care for each other as long as they live. "It is usually the longest lasting relationship with any close family member in a person's life.

Women often suffer emotional conflicts and stress when their natural and deep attachment to the members of their family of birth is not encouraged and sometimes not even acknowledged. All of us feel intense attachment with our brothers and sisters and want to express those feelings in ways that can be of some help. Many women are unhappy because of the way the tradition is interpreted and are thus inhibited in offering the help they want to. Recent years have seen a hardening of the custom of brothers giving something to their sisters during Rakhi that result in the perception that the bond is only one way, with gifts flowing from brothers to sisters. Even many professional women who are well-off and independent are unable to help their families of birth.

Many times, women help their brothers and sisters secretly and carry the burden of hiding the fact. They don't share such information with other

members of their marital family. The resultant guilt feeling and stress is another cruel injustice that women bear, especially since these very women do make a contribution to the welfare of their marital family as well.

We need to transform the Rakhi and Tikka (another festival to commemorate the brother-sister bond), tradition to acknowledge the potential of women. We need to create a social climate where sisters feel as comfortable in helping a brother as brothers do when they help a sister. If sisters, married or unmarried, are entrusted with the responsibility, and encouraged to help their brothers, this will generate a higher sense of self-worth among them. Forward looking societies look at traditions with a lot more deliberation and are willing to make tradition as dynamic as possible so that the higher and creative needs of the society are not sacrificed. With a desire to enhance the beauty and meaning of Rakhi and to make it comprehensively more encompassing I wish to put forth the following simple suggestions to forward-looking members of our society:

- Brothers and sisters should tie Rakhi to each other. We only need a wrist to tie Rakhi. It is a mutual relationship and the celebration should say so. Both may give sweets to each other and both may give presents to each other, if they so desire.
- If you have only brothers or only sisters in the family, then you should tie Rakhi to each other, celebrating each other's lives and your trust and love for each other. Of course, give sweets to each other and presents, if you desire.
- Tie Rakhi to near or dear cousins; they may be first or distant cousins or they may be children of your parents' age-old friends. One can go much beyond blood relatives and tie Rakhi to those who one feels emotionally close to. They give a great feeling of security, connection and affection of the kind one gets from one's own siblings. Rakhi can be extended to value and honour these relationships also.

Gifts add complications to very sweet and noble celebrations. They should not be more than a token of affection and mutual concern expressed so well in the

ceremony. If we keep Rakhi free from overemphasis on gifts as the major meaning of the ceremony, it might have deeper impact on our souls as we grow.

Rakhi cultivates a caring and loving tradition, and renews its promise every year to lend beauty to the day and to our lives. We can maintain and at the same time transform our good old traditions to meet the needs and demands of changing times. Let us take another small step towards the difficult goal of expressing our mutual love and concern in both old and new ways. We can carry forward this spirit of the mutuality of human worth and the crucial importance of caring for each other in this and every other celebration, as well as in every other aspect of our lives.

Jyotsna Chander, Plover, Winsconsin, U.S.A.

===== Self-Hating NRIs =====

I would like all those, who are awe-struck by Indians working in, the Gulf countries or planning to work there, to read this.

Indians go abroad basically for three reasons: The salary structure abroad is lucrative, technical advancement and working conditions offered by foreign jobs still remain unmatched even by the best Indian companies and the image the “foreign returned” Indians portray is attractive.

I am an architect working in Dubai on my own employment visa. I came here to earn as much money as possible in the shortest time and then return to India to fulfil my dreams.

While in India, I was under the impression that Indians are invited to work in foreign countries because of their intelligence, hard work and professional skills which many Indians possess. I assumed that if an Indian did well, he or she was appreciated for it. I thought they must be feeling happy on meeting fellow Indians abroad. I looked up to these NRIs and thought that people who had developed good taste (in clothing, food, etc) must be very competent, knowledgeable, well-organised, self-respecting and, in general, honest human beings. So they must be good representatives of India, doing their country proud by projecting our positive qualities. But I was wrong, at least about Indians in the Gulf.

Indians are invited to the Gulf countries because they are cheaply available. Those of us working in the Gulf are not necessarily highly qualified, brilliant or skilled. If a good candidate insists on a good pay package, he or she is likely to be beaten by an Indian who is willing to work for less. Indians in the Gulf are

generally not pleased to see new arrivals from home. They try to impress the newcomers and are jealous that the newcomer might start earning the same amount of money as they and will soon know about their pretentious lifestyles. They refuse to accept that all of them have come here to earn money. Instead they pretend as if they were already ‘this rich’ in India. They spend money needlessly and in useless ways. All this just to project themselves as a richer class. Certainly these Indian traits are watched and lead to the popular perception of India and Indians.

Gulf-returned Indians do not look, behave or talk as they do in the Gulf. So, don’t form any opinions from their appearance. They are so overwhelmed by their inferiority complex here that appreciation in India is their sole means to derive a false sense of achievement or happiness. India does not get a good name by these Indians in the Gulf. An average Indian here comes across as a selfish, jealous, cowardly, self-doubting slave-who would do anything for more money. If one marvels at the British success to divide and rule in India, he should visit the Gulf countries to know that no extraordinary skill is required to do so.

Vandana Vishwas, Dubai, UAE

Do you think other Indians in the Gulf see you in similar light? Every time I say any thing negative about Indians as a group, I remind myself that the same could well be true of me because I too am One of “them”. Or do you think you have altogether escaped what you describe as the negative Indian traits? What do you think are the reasons for such low esteem among us? **Editor** □

APOLOGY

We regret that this year MANUSHI issues have been consistently delayed due to various reasons. While we will try to catch up in the coming months, we assure our readers that this will not mean any loss for them because our subscriptions are calculated on the number of issues due to a subscriber (1 year = 6 issues, 2 years = 12 issues and so on) rather than any fixed time period. Fortunately most of the material we publish doesn’t get dated.

We thank you for your patience and cooperation and will try to do better in the coming months.

Editor