



No More Camouflage

I would like to share my personal conflict in my married life with you. There are many women facing similar situations who camouflage their feelings in the world of friends, relatives, neighbours, and colleagues.

I am a 33 year old double graduate, married for 11 years, with two children aged nine and seven. My husband was a wealthy businessman and we got married with much fanfare. After marriage, we used to go out a lot. He would spend money lavishly and I used to be passive, decorated, always smiling, and was much admired by all his friends. This rosy picture did not last long. Within two years of our marriage, his business began steadily to go downhill, and finally all was lost...

My husband stayed home, worrying and doing nothing. I was working as a clerk even before marriage, and I still have this job. My husband had said that I could leave the job if I wished to, but I stuck on, mainly due to my father's advice. Eight years have passed and my husband is still unemployed. He drinks every night with his friends. We are entirely dependent on my salary and he keeps asking for money. In spite of our hardships, he bought a motor bike, and the creditors were at our door. He used to drive around in a drunken state. Imagine my anxiety, keeping awake half the night, waiting to hear the bike's sound and the final crash. When I ask him to stop drinking and ruining his health, he shouts and uses filthy language. Then I end up crying silently. We never speak to each other

LETTERS TO MAN US HI

without the conversation ending in a fight or a long silence, sometimes lasting months...

This trouble reached a peak when he started beating me. He used to spit and become very violent. Whenever I broach the subject of taking up any kind of work, he comes out with a number of grandiose schemes which I know from experience are nothing but a pack of lies told just to keep me quiet. I spend my whole salary on the family, and when I run short of money, I borrow from my parents or sister. All my pleadings do not affect him. He refuses to take a job with a lower than four figure salary. If it were not for my understanding parents and my job, I would have become a nervous wreck...

Though I have a sunny nature, the cold, unsympathetic attitude of my husband is warping my personality. I have started to scream at my children and shout at him. Once, when he beat me and I left the house for three days he went and stayed with a friend for a month. I was told that he was very unhappy, so I became anxious. I started remembering the few happy times we had had together, so I accepted him back. When he came back on his own, I told him that he should not hesitate to stay here, as it is his home.

Now, a few months later, life is the same—joblessness, drunkenness, quarrels, abuses. What is the answer to my problem? Should I accept the situation and let life drag on or should I constantly keep fighting, or should I take a bold step? These questions keep cropping up in my mind, leaving me an embittered

woman.

Maria Theresa, Bangalore Fight For Selfhood

...Sometimes, I feel we are slipping backwards. I watch friends settle down and have children. Each of them is oppressed—those who are employed have to try and make it in both worlds, combating the unchanged attitudes of family members while those without jobs are bored but seem unable to help themselves...

All this is getting me down, therefore I would like to make a request. Could you please feature women who have succeeded in achieving something? This minority can inspire us, convince us that it is possible to be yourself, and respected for being your thinking self. Otherwise the cruel and idiotic demand to "adjust" is going to corrode the will of the women who are trying to develop themselves...

It is a constant struggle to resist the need for male support, for some prop to hold oneself up. This inspired the following lines:

The Discovery

*I looked for you in a million
different places,
In roads, in trains,
In my dreams and fantasies.
You were not to be seen.
I spoke to you in a hundred different
languages,
With my eyes, with my voice,
Shouting and pleading for a reply.
You were not to be heard.
I reached for you
in every way I knew,
Sometimes groping like a child in*

*the dark,
Stretching out my arms
to touch you.
You were not to be reached.
Succumbing to despair I returned
home in vain
Resolving, to overcome my loneliness
and pain.
Alone, alive, I looked within myself, You
were there...within me.*

What is the cause of women's low self-esteem ? I think we have long enough looked to men to solve all our problems...For me, women's fight in India today is a fight for selfhood...

Sunita Rao, Delhi

...**Manushi** and the seminar held at Ahmedabad some time ago have made me start thinking about how to change the attitudes of women. I think such a change can be brought about by education. If a special subject like "Problems and status of Indian women" can be introduced at the high school level, and developed as a full-fledged subject upto the post graduate level, I think it will be a very important step in the direction of women's liberation...

Suhas Oza, Ahmedabad

...I am impressed by the range of interests to which **Manushi** relates. However, I have a suggestion which has come to me as a result of having spoken to a number of young women. Many of them feel like passive spectators and sympathizers towards various causes to which they have become sensitized through their reading. Would it be possible for **Manushi** volunteers to organize study and discussion groups in various localities ? These groups could consist of 10 to 15 women living in the same area. They could also help gather data regarding the issues that **Manushi** seeks to highlight.

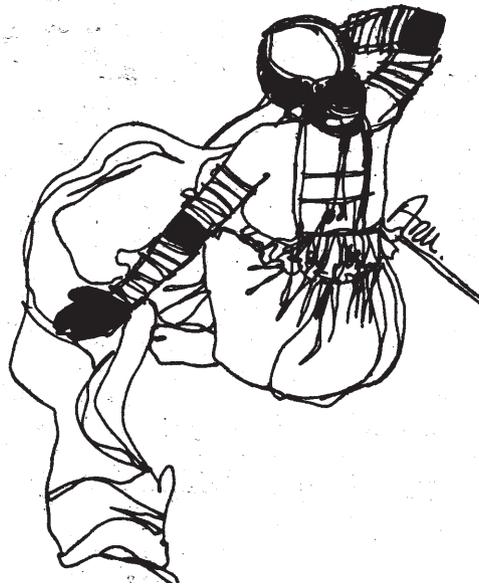
This kind of group activity would get women more actively involved and also help them analyse their lifestyles, fears, and attitudes towards the problems raised by your journal...

Arati Luthra, Delhi

...The problem of dowry is very complex. I think you should deal with it systematically and coolly although I know it is not possible for us not to get agitated

about it. It is terrible that women should get their share of the family property in the form of dowry with all that it connotes, yet get their share they must. Tell them how. Tell their parents how. Also, what rights a housewife should have in the earned income of her husband needs to be analysed, since her own contribution in the form of housework remains unseen, unsung...

Devahuti, Delhi



Wonder Working Tears

Some time ago, a play called "*Kaye Fasle*" by Surinder Sahni was telecast by Jullundur Doordarshan. The play is about a Ph.D. woman lecturer who defies social opinion to marry a stenographer. The woman is ambitious and intelligent, but is expected to behave like a traditional daughter-in-law. She tries her best to attend to her sick mother-in-law and also prepare her lectures. Her husband and mother-in-law are not satisfied. They expect her to take leave on the day she has to appear for an interview for the post of reader in the university. She, however, goes for the interview, and the mother-in-law dies shortly afterwards. The husband turns against the wife and the conflict escalates. Finally, a family friend who is an advocate, tries to mediate. Both husband and wife try to justify themselves by blaming each other.

The advocate produces his trump card by persuading the so-called "liberated" woman that her seminars are less important than her family life. He manages to bring the two together for a reconciliation, but they again start shouting at one another. Just as she is leaving, the husband holds her back, touching her shoulder with great tenderness. In a second, she rushes into his arms, sobbing, and the play ends. Where are all the ideals of ambition, career, blah-blah, and what of the husband's insults and allegations ?

Many such plays and films are shown ending with women's tears. Tears solve all problems, wash away women's liberation and purify the soil for male dominance to take root...

Surinder Jyoti, Patiala

DTC—Ordeal For Women

Travelling in DTC buses is an ordeal for women. Young women, old women, even school girls, are subjected to sexual harassment and body abuse, in defiance of every code of human decency. Attempts made by commuters, women and men, to battle this phenomenon are ineffective in the face of the magnitude of the problem. We feel that it is only concerted action and support from the traffic authorities and law enforcing agencies which can make it possible for women to travel in Delhi buses without fear of being sexually harassed.

Entrance and exit points of buses should be kept clear of crowding. For this, the ticket vending system should be changed so that people do not have to crowd at the entrance of the bus. The driver and conductor should be officially instructed to take action against offenders, and to assist women. If they refuse to take the bus to the nearest police station, when requested to do so by a woman, they should be punished. Complaint books should be prominently displayed and checked by inspecting staff. A mobile court should be instituted to fine culprits on the spot.

Conductors should ensure that no woman travels standing while ladies' seats are occupied by men. Seats reserved for women should be given to them, to protect them from being pushed around and

sexually harassed.

We strongly feel that women commuters should be given the power to ensure that appropriate action is taken by the authorities. Women commuters should be given the authority of traffic wardens. This system exists in Calcutta. Wardens could include members of women's organizations, employed women, students, and housewives. Each woman warden should have an identity card which would entitle her to see that precautions and rules are enforced. These women wardens should function as a citizens' bureau under the office of the district commissioner of traffic police. ...

Mallika Viridi and others, Delhi

Getting Together

Just finished reading **Manushi** No. 12. Dr Shakuntala Arora's torture and death was horrifying reading. When we hear of women being subjected to such cruelty, why don't we get together and beat up the man instead of trying to get the police to take action? We have seen for decades what the police are worth, so why go to them? Moreover, why demonstrate after a woman has died, why didn't women beat up Subhash Arora some time during the 10 year long married life?...

In our country, the marriage ceremony is more a pain than a pleasure. The bride's people have to save up money to pay the dowry and also to pay for the party. The friends and relatives grudgingly pull out money from their not so full pockets, to buy presents. Why don't we do away with all this? If two people want to get married, they can decide on a place and announce it to their friends and to a set of food vendors. The place could be some open area like Eden Gardens, Chowpatty or India Gate. The get-together would take place, and people could buy their own food. There is no need for a party or presents...

Shaati Chattopadhyay, Bombay

...I want to share with you my concern regarding the recent news about the amniocentesis tests being used to determine the sex of the foetus, and the subsequent decision made by many women and men to get female foetuses

aborted. While the crass sexism and female foeticide is horrifying, I have a different, very cynical, response from that of the women's groups who have been protesting. My response is: let the tests become widespread, and parents take the decision to abort female foetuses, which, after all, may not be so different from the decision to abort foetuses of undetermined sex. The result will be a shortage of females, and a subsequent further skewing of male-female ratio in the population. If this is marked enough, there will be an acute shortage of brides, which will cause a shift away from dowry and towards bride price, and in other ways too will enhance the desirability and status of women.

In the meantime, there will be a decrease in the population—caused by abortions of females and also by a decrease in the number of childbearing women. This will also enhance the possibility of men marrying women of lower caste, economic and educational status than their own, since those are the families who will be less likely to determine the sex of their children and to abort females. If the test use is widespread enough, the next generation should see a tremendous positive change in the status of women!...

Corinne Scott, Jabalpur

Unfortunately, this logic does not work, and facts show quite the contrary. The low sex ratio or the deficit of women in any society's population is a symptom of the low value placed on their life, and has never brought about betterment in their life condition. It is precisely in regions like Punjab, Rajasihan, Western UP, where there is a greater deficit of women as compared to other regions, that the worst forms of discrimination and violence are prevalent. It may begin with forms of female infanticide and go on to neglect of girl children to the point of letting them die, to keeping women in seclusion and withdrawal from the employment market or the rural labour force, to arranged marriage with heavy dowry, to dowry murders, to restrictions on widow remarriage. All this creates a situation wherein women are distanced from most decision making processes, are

rendered powerless, have a lower life expectancy and are devalued.

On the other hand, in regions such as Kerala or some tribal areas where the proportion of women to men in the population is higher, that is, there is a high sex ratio, their life condition is relatively less crippling as compared to men of their communities. These areas uniformly manifest a relatively high labour participation of women. Women are not kept in seclusion and therefore enjoy the freedom to work. Since women are allowed to play the role of earner, the birth of a daughter is not considered such a catastrophe, so daughters are not killed at birth or deliberately neglected to the point of death. For example, in tribal areas the practice of bride price prevails instead of dowry, and women also have the freedom to marry according to their choice or to stay unmarried. These choices are possible because they are economically not dependent and hence have relatively greater freedom to make such decisions.

Therefore, to accept the first stage of violence on female lives as contained in sex determination tests followed by female-selective abortions is to pave the way for all the other crippling discriminations that such a woman-hating culture will inevitably impose on women

Manushi

A Healthy Process

This letter is in response to Aruneshwar Kaur's letter in **Manushi** No. 10, 1982. **Manushi** is not against men. It is against the exploitation of women or against exploitation of the powerless by those in power. **Manushi**, as I see it, is trying to encourage a compassionate and humanistic approach towards existing societal values, by making clear the discrepancies, by challenging the power structures and the dynamics of the man-woman relationship. **Manushi** is acting as a platform for the oppressed and the weak. There is a lot of anger, hostility and frustration that is going to be expressed. One should look at it as a healthy process.

Manushi also gives reassurance to women who have been unjustly treated

for no fault of their own, tells them that there are others in their situation, that somebody cares for them, that they can come together to form a powerful force. **Manushi** is attempting to enhance a woman's self-image by citing examples of other independent women. Amrita Pritam is a worthy example. Why try to enhance one's self image? Because if one thinks that life is worthwhile, one can have hope and sustain ambition. A woman with a positive self image will not get exploited by other people and will not exploit others.

In future, **Manushi** can try to portray injustice against both men and women. It can publish the stories of men who, at present or in the past, helped the women's movement. Men who did this have had to put up with severe abuse and ridicule from society. Liberation of women is impossible without liberating men. Congratulations on your brave effort.

Ajita Kale, USA

Regaining Independence

...**Manushi** helps me a lot in my life. You see, I am an unfortunate victim of dowry and of a hyper-possessive mother-in-law who loved her son so much that she could not bear to see me happy with him. She made my life miserable by constantly condemning my parents and the gifts they had given me, thus making me feel like a low down woman. Six months ago, my husband deserted me. I am now living in my parents' house. For three months I did nothing, but then I decided that I would not stick like a leech to my parents. Instead, I would start earning and at least provide myself with a pocket allowance. My husband of course is not aware that I am earning because he would not be able to bear it. I am lucky that at least I am a graduate.

Life is tough though my parents are gems and they support me without bothering about society, because they know I am right. Society does not let anyone live. Anyway, now that I am earning, though only Rs 350 a month, I feel a sense of independence. I feel happy that at least I am capable of earning something.

Yet I am also unhappy that I have lost respect for my in-laws and am also

gradually losing respect for my husband who does not behave like a man but like a mentally deficient child. This man has opened my letters which I gave him to post, with full trust that he would not open them. He betrayed me not only by opening them, but by reading them in his mother's presence. He used to hit me and his parents were happy because they thought their son was setting me right. Now my heart burns when I realize that they have my jewellery, diamonds, gold, silver and all the rich, expensive clothes and beautiful gifts which my parents gave me after my marriage. I didn't bring all these things with me, because I was under the impression that I was going to my parents for a short visit, and would soon return to my in-laws. My in-laws now refuse to give me my jewellery. This annoys me because I know how hard earned the money was that went into buying that jewellery which today these greedy people claim as theirs.

Why are we women constantly oppressed? The tragedy is that my mother-in-law, a woman, is exploiting me, another woman. Her greed has murdered my marriage. She has told my husband a lot of false things against me which he believes because she has a strong hold on everyone in the family.

I am weak but I shall fight with god's help. In the meantime, I shall get my inspiration from **Manushi**. 'I shall draw courage from other women who are also suffering and also learning to fight this disease called dowry. My husband used to feel extremely threatened when I started subscribing for **Manushi**. He tried convincing me not to subscribe for it because he knew that **Manushi** is about women and society. Can you believe it, he told me that if I didn't subscribe for your magazine, he would subscribe to *Woman and Home* for me, but I still opted for **Manushi**. The reason is simple. *Woman and Home* confines a woman only to her house but **Manushi** takes a woman out to society and reality...

Name withheld

Women Members Not Allowed !

In which club do you think women *still* do not have the right to vote or to be elected to office? In the Delhi Gymkhana,

one of the most elite clubs in the country! Women members are called "lady subscribers." A woman who is the wife or unmarried dependent daughter of a permanent resident of Delhi is not eligible to become a lady subscriber. Lady subscribers pay the same monthly fee as do single men, but as soon as women get married they cease to be subscribers if their husbands are in town. On the other hand, if a male member gets married, his wife and children can use the club facilities for an extra payment of Rs 5 only. This discrimination against married women seems to be a hangover of the British days, when the men wanted unattached women to provide company for them in the club.

Lady subscribers are not eligible to vote nor can they be elected to committees. The club owns property worth crores but the women are excluded from all decision making processes. The matter was raised a year ago by some women subscribers, and was debated. However, it was voted down by the men who are in a majority and have a monopoly over the voting right.

A lady subscriber

A Work Of Artifice

*The bonsai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
till split by lightning.
But a gardener
carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.
Every day as he
whittles back the branches,
the gardener croons:
"It is your nature
to be small and coy,
domestic and weak.
How lucky you are, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in."
With living creatures
one must begin very early
to dwarf their growth—
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you
love to touch.*

—**Marge Piercy**