



Letters To Manushi

Putting The Fire Back Into Life

...You are doing something very dear to my heart. After my brother was born, my own parents started treating me as a person of secondary importance, an unavoidable burden, a duty that must be done. And when I got married 10 years ago, I found that a good daughter-in-law is actually a glorified servant. However, because I loved my husband dearly I swallowed my pride. He didn't want me to study further or to work, so I became a glorified servant. I slogged away and tried to win my in-laws' hearts through hard work at home. My husband is an only son and when after six years I got pregnant, everyone was thrilled. I love my two daughters, born one after the other, but now I have been certified a useless daughter-in-law. Finally, a year ago, despite being almost a physical and mental wreck, I just revolted and stood up for myself.

Now, at the age of 29, when both my girls have started school, I would like to put this grudge I bear to a positive use, and what better way than to give of myself freely to the cause you fight for, which in future will free women from the chains of discrimination that have bogged us down? So if there is any way in which I can be useful to Manushi, please do let me know. I also need a reason for living, something to put the fire back into my life...

Name Withheld

Disgusting Ads

We read the five disgusting advertisements of Kohinoor coloured condoms in many leading magazines. These advertisements display utter contempt for and violence against women. The pictures are grotesque. What is written

is much worse. A very macho furious man, pursing his lips, says : "It was Tuesday. We had one argument after another. The heat never really wore off. Red it was. Pent up, spit fire angry young man, vengeful red. It took her by storm like I wanted it to." The writing is in red. The man, furious, is riding a motor bike. The man in the advertisement for the black condom says: "I could feel the devil rattling in my bones. I scared the hell out of her, but she understood."

Birth control is a very sensitive issue. It involves very personal relationships and therefore has to be handled with great sensitivity. Today, women are becoming more and more aware of their own bodies and their rights. More and more women and also men are becoming conscious of sexual relations as mutually enriching and for mutual enjoyment. It is in this atmosphere when the base feelings and attitudes of men and the passivity of women are being challenged, that these advertisements are being flashed. These advertisements advocate rape and violence against women. They reinforce the dehumanization of man-woman relationships. .

We condemn the manufacturers and the advertising agency for trying to sell their products by instigating men to commit violence on women.

Forum Against Oppression Of Women, Bombay

No More Sitas

...The ideals, ethics and morality heaped on women since time immemorial are suffocating and killing. The adjectives used to praise us have become oppressive. Calling us loving, they have locked us in

the closed room of culture, calling us gentle, they have reflected us in a mirror of helplessness, calling us kind, they have tied us in cowardice, they have handcuffed us with modesty and chained our feet with loyalty, so that far from running, we have not been able even to walk...

Now we must refuse to be Sitas. By becoming a Sita and submitting to the fire ordeal, woman loses her identity. This fire ordeal is imposed on women today in every city, every home. Our exclusion from the scriptures, from temples, from *smritis*, is also our strength. We can be fearless since we have no models...

Today we are not Sitas but Saritas, flowing, free, able to cross rocks, capable of generating electricity. Or rather, instead of getting caught in this net of words, why not simply say that we are Manushis, singers of liberation, vehicles of liberation, Manushis...

Saroj Visaria, Varanasi
(translated from Hindi)

A Woman, Not A Slave

I want to tell the world my story through Manushi. On May 25, 1975, I was married to M. Lakshmayya of village Injapur. For one year things went smoothly. My husband is an idler. He does no work while I live by my labour. I also do all the housework. Not a day passed without me being beaten up by him. My parents had given me jewels worth Rs 3,000 at the time of marriage. My husband sold all the jewels and wasted the money on drink and gambling. Whenever I used to go to my parents for refuge my husband would come and take away my son, saying : "The cow goes after the calf." Each time, I did go back to him. When my son was

ten days old, my husband had taken him away, and when I followed, he had beaten and starved me, and made me stay outside the house.

On one occasion, my husband's uncle put some glass pieces in my husband's plate and put the blame on me whereas the truth was that I was away working in the fields. The panchayat sat to decide the matter and the uncle was declared guilty. Ever since, he has been inciting my husband against me and telling him to leave me and marry again.

Now I have come to my parents' house. My husband has again snatched away my three year old son. I know that many women like me have committed suicide. I am alive by the courage of my mother and brother. I am a woman, but not a slave. So far, I have borne every thing, but now I am struggling. I will return to my husband only on condition that he does not beat me, and that he starts labouring every day.

M. Suganamma, Saidabad
(translated from Hindi)

The Few Successes

...I continue to find Manushi very interesting and informative. The quality and standard have improved. It portrays the oppressed state of most women in our countries, but it would be nice to sometimes have accounts of the more successful amongst women. One admits that these are few and far between. Still, to alleviate depression and to encourage people generally, it may be an idea worth considering. My regards to all working for Manushi and for the cause of women...

Khawar Mumtaz, Pakistan

Preeti's Struggle

...The article on Preetilata in No. 12 reminded us that Preetilata's hopes are still unfulfilled. Even today, it is dangerous for a woman to travel alone in our society, and every day the valuable lives of many sisters are being lost in the name of dowry. The laws of the ruling class exist only in name.

From Preeti's last statement, it appears that many sisters like her are today also following in her steps in the belief that their liberation is not possible without

armed struggle. Preetilata was wounded in the chest by the bottles and furniture used to attack her, that is why she took the cyanide. Today, however, I pray that sisters may not commit suicide, however difficult their situation. Rather, they should fulfil the dream of Preeti and others like her, by unitedly joining the armed struggle for their rights and for justice...

I was very glad to see from newspaper reports that Kiran Singh has been successful in her struggle...

K. Rajanna, central jail, Hyderabad
(translated from Hindi)

How Police Function

...Some months ago, a woman here was gang raped by six men. After some demonstrations and public protests, the police arrested two men, one of whom was a rickshaw puller. A report of this was published in the paper I work on, *Daily Shramik Vichar*, on October 13, 1982. During investigation, I was informed by a private source that another rickshaw puller had admitted to being one of the rapists, and had also revealed that three of the others were plain clothes policemen. This

When I refused to disclose my source, police inspector Awasthy threatened to take action against me and also abused me, asking how I would like to be called an unmarried mother, and saying that journalists are notorious for committing rape. He refused to let me ring up my editor or my lawyer. I protested against his behaviour, but he refused to let me go without making a written statement. I had to give a written statement that the report was based on what was being discussed in public, and that I do not know the rickshaw puller's name.

We published a report of this harassment of me as a woman. Then some women's organizations made a representation to the police commissioner. He openly threatened to pursue me. I said he was welcome to do whatever he wanted. If the police uses the Criminal Procedure Code to harass the press, it will be difficult to publish anything against the government.

Significantly, the police have not yet traced the other rapists, and have now taken the stand that the raped woman was



was the reason why the police had not arrested the other rapists. I published this information, stating that it was based on a rumour in circulation.

Thereupon the Deccan Gymkhana police station issued a notice under section 150 of the Criminal Procedure Code and summoned me and my editor on the charge of defamation. Since the editor was out of town, I went to the police station.

a prostitute! So this is the way the police function...

Amarja, Pane

How I Escaped

...I am the first woman in Karnataka to have filed a dowry case against my husband. My lawyer is of the opinion that the case will not stand, because according to the law the giver of dowry is also punishable. I wish the dowry law could be

amended, in a manner calculated to help more victims like me come out without fear of themselves being punished.

...I was married in 1979. As I am an only daughter, my father spent more than he could afford, and the wedding took place in a grand style. My husband was a government employee. Though I did not

younger unmarried brothers, and two unmarried sisters. Three married sisters also frequently visited the house.

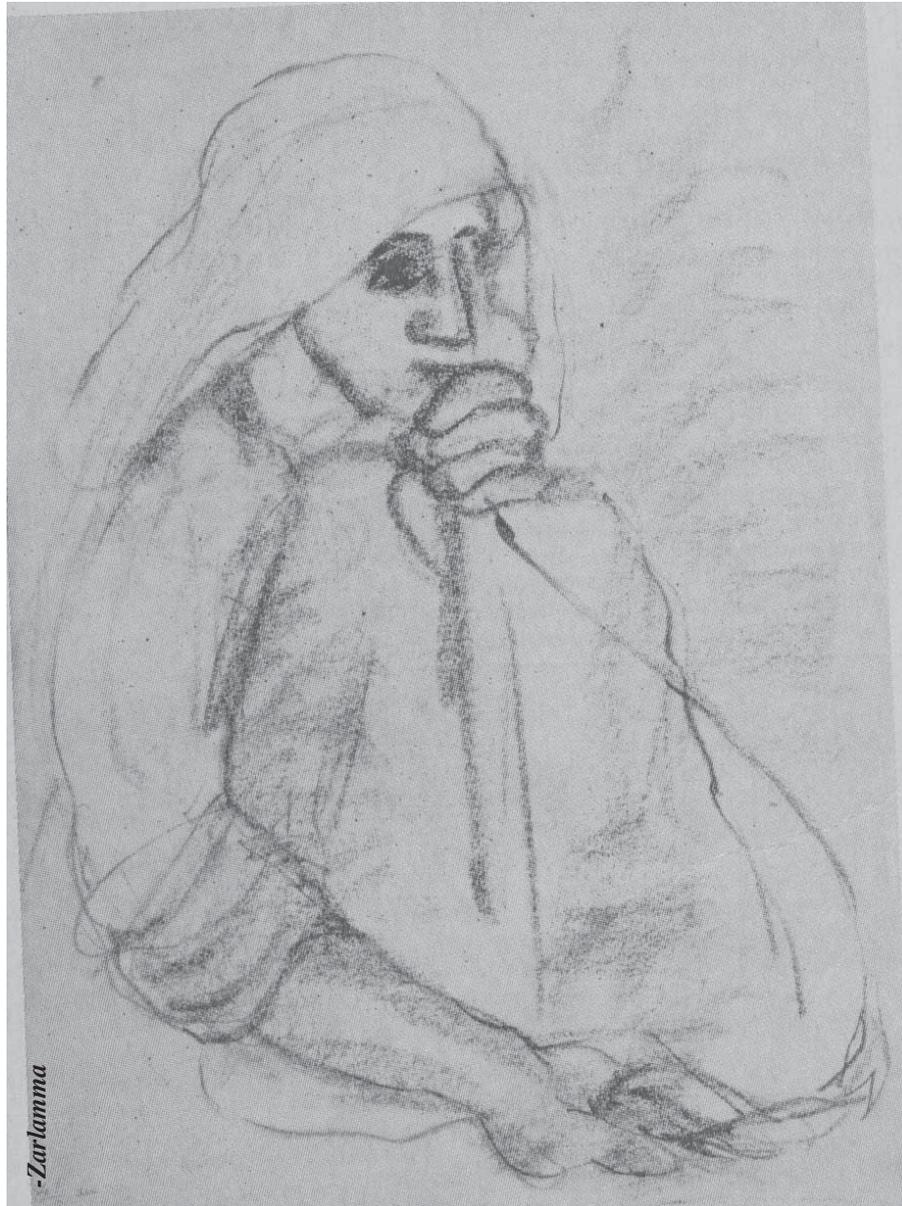
Then started the trouble. My mother-in-law and husband asked me to get a scooter, a diamond ring and electric gadgets from my father. I was thunderstruck. I knew how hard it had been

them believe that I was happy in my husband's house.

I had to get up at 4 in morning and do all the household work without taking any rest. It was always after midnight by the time I lay down as my husband never returned before that time. I fell ill as I was not at all accustomed to such treatment, but no medication was given to me. I was not allowed to write to my parents and their letters were never delivered to me. I grew emaciated. Whenever any of my relatives came on a visit, I was humiliated beyond description. My husband daily beat and tortured me till blood flowed from my nose and mouth. He happened to see my diary in which I had written my woes. For this offence, I was forbidden entrance to my husband's room and was often made to sleep in the open verandah on the floor.

All the members of the family would insult and ill treat me openly. When I tried to protest, my husband asked me to commit suicide if I could not bear it. In a blind rage I went and poured kerosene on myself but at the last moment I threw away the matchstick and resolved never to try it again. My husband used to frequently tell me to go and drown myself in the tank. He used to boast of his illicit relations with other women. I came to know that he was suspended from his job because of his bad behaviour with women in the office.

I resolved to get out of his house whenever I got a chance. I had no way of informing my parents of my sufferings since I was virtually a prisoner in my husband's house. After everyone had eaten, I would be given a measured quantity food and was never allowed second helping. My husband never spent even 10 paise on me. My costly saris were torn and made into bedsheets and curtains. I was not allowed to listen to the radio or to read the newspaper. At last I managed to send word to my parents. They came and begged my in-laws to send me with them for a few days. My mother-in-law refused point blank and asked my father to transfer the small site he had to my husband's name. That night I was inhumanly treated for having asked my parents to come. The next day, I managed



-Zarlamma

continue my undergraduate studies, I was an expert in embroidery, painting, knitting. My husband used to say that he was lucky to have me as his wife. For the first month I was well looked after. His was a joint family consisting of his mother, two

for my father to raise the money for my wedding. My brothers are still studying and my father has no income except his meagre pension. So I kept quiet and did not tell my parents anything about the demands for dowry. I succeeded in making

to give my parents a chit in which I asked them to save me. My father took police help and took me away from that hell of a house. My shameless husband told me that if I wanted to stay there, I would have to stay as everyone's slave but not as his wife.

I left without taking any of my jewellery, clothes, furniture. Now I am studying and am looking for employment. My husband filed a case of desertion against me. I filed a case against him under the Anti Dowry Act. The cases are still going on.

Name Withheld, Karnataka
The Story Of Many

...I am writing to you the story of a friend of mine, as she related it to me. She looks extremely miserable all the time, and seems to be constantly cursing herself. One day I asked her why she was so sad and she told me the reason.

She told me that her parents are very suspicious of her. When she was in the eighth standard, one day her cousin brother waylaid her on the way to school and teased her. When she told her parents, they blamed and scolded her, saying that her cousin could not have misbehaved unless she had provoked him. Many restrictions were placed on her movements. After this, a master kept to give her tuition at home tried to misbehave with her. When she complained, the master accused her of being badly behaved so her parents again scolded and beat her.

Now, her parents keep a watchful eye on every movement of hers. They object to her talking or even smiling at any relative. They suspect her of immorality if she is friendly with her male cousins. If a male classmate comes to her house to borrow a book, her parents create a scene. If she dresses well or smiles and laughs, she is suspected of having an affair. This treatment makes her feel so degraded that she is tempted to commit suicide. Her parents threaten to stop her studies and to marry her off to the first man they can find, whether old or deformed. Her story must be the story of many girls. What can be done for her?...

Bimla Dhawan, Hansi
(translated from Hindi)

Tortured For Years

...I am 26 years, married, a housewife, and a mother of two children. I was 21 years old at the time of my marriage. I was smart, tall, slim, fluent in English, and was a very free person. I had no inhibitions about my husband's drinking and smoking. I had passed BA.

All my dreams came to an end when on my wedding night came a drunken husband whose first question was whether I was a virgin. Since I was a smart, English speaking girl, he thought I must have had affairs with many men. Then started the endless story of my torture and agony. I passed nights and nights crying and praying to god for justice. My husband is a drunkard and a sadist. My parents are weak. Though they have sensed their daughter's agony, they do not want to believe it lest she become a lifetime burden for them.

My husband has linked my name with every Tom, Dick and Harry I have ever spoken to so far. At parties I used to sit like a scared chicken, not talking to anyone, yet at night this drunkard inflicted physical and mental cruelties on me. Slowly feelings of self respect and rebellion entered me. I started returning his kicks and blows. It fetched me nothing. I only became a laughing stock for the neighbours ..

I do not want a divorce since a woman becomes very insecure and the children develop a complex. I want to stay separately with my children, and earn my own livelihood. I have no one but you as my own. If you could please find a suitable job for me, you will help an anguished, tortured sister...

Name Withheld
Identifying As Women

...I would like to congratulate you on the excellent Manushi No. 12. The first women's magazine giving such a substantial and thought provoking picture of a wide range of women's lives ! The prose is stimulating but the poetry is also very touching. Especially the poem "Identification" made me think a lot. I am a student of BSc, and I wish you a very

happy and successful future for the magazine...

Manjula, Banasthali

Inspired To Act

Your magazine is indeed an eye opener. Do such things happen ? one is tempted to ask. I am taking up the matter of Valambal (see Manushi 12, 1982) with the inspector general of police in Madras. You are doing a very very valuable service. Please keep it up.

Inspired by your magazine I am trying, together with all the women's organizations in Madras, to press for the creation of a separate cell run by women police to deal with rape, wife beating and child beating by drunken men...

N. Shanmugandra, Madras
South Asian Women Abroad

I would like to congratulate you on your efforts in bringing out your journal Manushi. We receive it regularly.

Our organization is known as the South Asia Community Centre. It is a non profit service organization designed to assist immigrant women from South Asian countries—India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, with their adaptation and integration into life in Canada and particularly in Quebec.

We offer a variety of free services to these women, such as the following: information on immigration and citizenship, job and vocational counselling, family and individual counselling, an interpretation and translation service, a drop in center, information and referral in the realm of community services, such as for health, recreation, and daycare, and also publish a monthly newsletter. We will soon be offering free English and French second language courses to anyone interested, and also plan to begin a cooperative, where South Asian women will be able to market their various handcrafted items, thus enabling them to increase their earnings. We feel that the services we provide are greatly needed here in Montreal among the women in the South Asian community, who often have nowhere else to turn when they encounter difficulties in living here...

Rita Bhatia, Canada