



# Letters To Manushi

## No Better Gift

I am teaching in a girls' college in Pune and shall be shortly leaving the college to join my husband. I have been thinking of a parting gift to my college and I am sure there can be no better gift than a subscription to **Manushi**. So I am sending money for a special five year subscription in English since the majority of the readership would understand English...

Sunita Pandhe, Pune

## The Educated Woman

Is education making women independent? I do not think so. I have seen many educated women making a sorry mess of their lives. I have seen a woman lawyer, who should know the law better, enter into a bigamous marriage. I can understand her physiological and sexual needs but her education and economic independence should have made her pause and think of the consequences.

I have seen a fully trained nurse leave her husband only to get married to a father of seven children whose first wife is nursing a nine month old baby. After marriage, this nurse does not dare go out alone anywhere. What attracted her was the bundle of currency notes the man showed her.

This proves that even an educated woman can be lured by money. Few women want to earn a living by working if they can have free lodging and boarding. What we wish for is an educated woman who knows the meaning of emancipation.

Shailbala Motiwala, Ahmedabad

## Positive Image

...I thought it might be a good idea if **Manushi** could include in each issue a brief write up about girls and women who are independent, self sufficient, active and successful in their respective professions and have achieved this status entirely on their own merit without the help of influential husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, uncles, or the use of female tactics...

Aban Bana, Delhi

## A Women's Organization Is Needed

Kheda district of Gujarat is famous for tobacco. 20,000 women work here in the production of tobacco. They work in a total of 720 factories, of which 199 are registered under the Factory Act. The other 521 employ a maximum of 19 women workers, thus escaping the provisions of the Act.

Of the women workers, 12 percent are girls under the age of 18, 60 percent are women between the ages of 18 and 40, and 28 percent are above 60. About 45 percent of the women are contract labourers. These women are afraid of losing their jobs so they work eight to 10 or sometimes even longer hours each day.

Mahila Sewa Trust of Kheda district and the women's wing of the Ahmedabad trade union jointly conducted a survey of the conditions prevailing in this sector. The survey found that a family of five members gets an income of less than Rs 2,000 a year. Most of this money is spent

on bare survival. Hardly any money is available for medical care or education purposes since 48 percent of the families are burdened with heavy debts.

Only 34 percent of the women labourers get the minimum wage prescribed by government. Very few of them get casual leave. Many of the women suffer from ailments arising from constant contact with tobacco. There are no safeguards provided to them, because employers wish to make as large profits as possible. Today the 20,000 women labourers demand minimum wages, and minimum safeguards against health hazards. They need a women's organization to help them organize and fight for their rights.

Pradeep Deshpande, Gujarat

(translated from Hindi)

## Struggle In The Family

Congratulations to Kiran Singh for her bold and right step in taking her father and others to the and also congratulations to **Manushi** through which we got this inspiring news, in the article "It's only a family affair" (No. 14). I related the event to at least 20 people and had discussions with them for hours.

...I would like to inform you that at the time of my sister's marriage in February 1982, we went through a lot of hardship and struggle for three months to convince our parents and relatives of the need to have a registered marriage, without dowry or religious rites. Ultimately we won. The wedding was a unique function. The

registrar conducted the marriage at home, and a litterateur was the guest of honour. We donated Rs 1,111 for the lepers' home on this occasion. Surprisingly, parents of bride and groom agreed to be witnesses and everything went off smoothly. My sister is a lecturer and her husband a bank employee. They had a beautiful daughter last month. We named her Chilika but without any religious ceremony...

**Manoj Kumai Panda, Bolangir**  
(translated from Hindi)

### **Goddess Or Victim ?**

...Early this month I had gone to Nepal for some days. There in Tribhuvan university I saw some slogans on the walls demanding a ban on exploitation of women in advertisements. However I could not meet any activist of Mahila Sangh but a friend promised to get me literature about their struggle against atrocities on women in Nepal. Their experience can be of help for us also.

In Kathmandu we visited a temple called *kumari ka mandir*. A female child of the Sakya clan is confined in the temple until she reaches puberty. We met the so called virgin goddess. She is at present nine years old and has been staying for the last five years with the family of the priest. She is not allowed to move out of the temple which is on the first floor of an old Building. She is allowed to go on the terrace only after the sun sets. It was really torturous to see her condition. When we saw her, she was crying but no one was paying any attention to her. She seemed ill but the priest said she cannot fall ill as she is a goddess.

### **Navsharan Kaur, Amritsar** **What Workers Should Know**

I have just finished reading the article about women in the cashew industry in Manushi No. 12. I have read many horror stories of women's labour, but this one is particularly searing. Yesterday I purchased one pound of cashews for \$7.60, that is for \$ 17 or Rs 170 a kilo.

The workers should be informed of this, so that they are aware of the indefensible difference between their wages and the current US market price. I

feel both outraged and helpless at this terrible situation.

If we boycott cashews, women lose their jobs, but if we purchase them, we perpetuate conditions so detrimental that women workers cannot even comb their hair because of the injuries on their hands.

In any case, I salute the staff at **Manushi** for your perseverance and enthusiasm and for bringing the plight of Indian women to international attention...

**Marcia D. Miller, USA**

### **Solidarity With Pakistani Women**

As a women's organization we condemn the recent attacks made on women demonstrating in Lahore by the Pakistani government. It is the basic right of every human being to protest against discrimination and inequality. The Pakistani government has violated these basic civil and human rights, and has tried to crush the demonstration with violence, thus highlighting their own retrogressive



step of denying women their dignity and rights.

Law, be it religious or civil, is what people make of it. Rationality and the evolution of history are with the women who demonstrated, and to unleash repression on them is an offence of the worst kind which will be criticized and condemned the world over.

### **Forum Against Oppression Of Women, Bombay**

### **Public Inconveniences**

As a foreign tourist I have spent quite a time wandering through the streets of New Delhi, and have on a number of occasions suffered discomfort due to the lack of public conveniences. Despite the facts that women constitute half the population, and that men are to be seen urinating unashamedly on almost every street, the government has recently seen fit to provide far more facilities for men. It appears that the provision of urinals only is considered to meet the needs of the public. Are women only "private conveniences" ?

I believe there is a very serious issue at stake. I have not had first hand experience of living in an urban slum area but I have observed on numerous occasions the fact that only men are to be seen using the areas beside railway lines during the daytime. Having been molested whilst trying to urinate in what I believed to be a private spot, I can sympathize a little with the problems women in such areas must face every day. Added to the discomfort and shortages inherent in living in such conditions they must have to cope with the continual threat of molestation while attending to the most basic of functions.

As an outsider I am not in a position to say what should be done about this most obvious discrimination, but may I suggest that a mass urination by women in front of parliament may go some way towards publicizing the problem? Modesty can easily be overcome in large enough numbers, and in the cause of necessity.

**P. N. Peace, Vishakhapatnam**

## Fills A Need

...I was impressed by some of the articles in **Manushi** No. 14, January-February 1983. The article "Sumitra...One of Many" was a very good lesson to all women to have courtage and self respect, and to stick it out, instead of committing suicide, under physical and emotional humiliation. A woman like Sumitra is one to be truly admired. I felt that Sumitra's husband was in a sense also under the domination of his family and his mother. When Sumitra was living with her in-laws, he was so spineless as not to have a thought of his own, but treated her exactly as his mother did. Only after husband and wife moved away did some improvement take place. Sumitra is an inspiration to keep struggling for what one thinks is right.

I also wish to mention Madhu Kishwar's article "Some Aspects of Bondage—The Denial Of Fundamental Rights To Women." She has brought to light and clarified so many aspects that no one has ever mentioned or understood, especially the point that censorship by the family at some stage becomes the woman's internal self censorship and that is the point of her final silencing. That is how woman allows her own bondage to continue, and perpetuates it for future generations. Your journal really fills a need...

### **Annamma Philipose, Jullundur Letter From Prison**

...I have been sentenced to life imprisonment, and do not know when I will be released...

This is the story of how I came to be sentenced. There was a very wealthy man in our village. He was drunk with pride, and took the help of his relatives to commit all sorts of injustices. He thought every woman his legitimate prey. He could not bear anyone else in the village to live well, dress well, eat well. He took it as an affront to his status. One 20 year old widow, whose husband had died at the age of 22, lived in our village with her baby daughter. Her husband had two brothers, the elder of whom was a ruffian. The woman got a pair of bullocks from her parents' house, and

sowed some millet and cotton on tier husband's familial land. She had refused to remarry. One day, her husband's brother and the scoundrel afore-mentioned got drunk and uprooted the crop which the widow had planted. She fell at their feet and begged for mercy but they were adamant. It was alleged that these two men also made an attempt to rape this woman...

... Another time this rascal way laid a young, newly married woman who was going to the fields to give food to her husband, and raped her. When I confronted him, he rebuked me and declared that no one could stop him doing what he liked. The next day, this woman and her husband left the village and went to settle elsewhere...

There were many such incidents, but no one dared say a word to that man, because it was known that he could have anyone killed or maimed if he chose to... Once he beat up his own brother's wife who had just given birth a week before. The villagers opposed this and I encouraged them in their opposition. The man had disappeared for five days. When he returned and learnt that I had encouraged his opponents, he made ready to attack me. Since I had been forewarned, I armed myself in self defence. He attacked me in the night, and that was the end of him.

The police concocted a false case, procured false witnesses—some relatives of the man, some bribed, some intimidated into giving evidence—and managed to have me convicted. Yes, sisters, I was wrong. People like this man do not go to prison, though they perpetrate injustices of the poor— Though I did something wrong, ten benefited and only one suffered by my action.

I have always considered women mothers and sisters, and will continue to do so. I am not upset by being in prison. After all, so many comrades have been martyred on the path of revolution. I am upset only when I wonder when how long it will be before all women—students, workers, agricultural labourers—are liberated from injustice. I send a red salute

to all sisters and brothers who are struggling to fulfil the hopes of sisters who have died for cause...

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

## Who Draws The Line?

Among the many inequalities we face as women in this country elsewhere is the restriction on movement, which you have discussed in **Manushi** No. 14. This is a restriction imposed mainly by men on women, on the pretext that "bad elements" in society make the roads unsafe after dark. As a result, women who do venture out alone after dusk are automatically assumed to be women of dubious character. This kind of mental pre-arrangement by men towards women is great obstacle in women's struggle for equality. Not only in this instance, but always, man draws the line, and woman can cross it only at some risk.

Every night at 9 p.m., after work, I walk a lonely, dark stretch of road to an ill lit bus stop. Sometimes, cars slow down near the bus stop and the drivers peer out at me, offering a lift, before moving slowly away. A friend says that the area being near a five star hotel, it common for men to look for pick ups at bus stops. For three or four days consecutively, the cars slowing down, drivers peering out and then driving away began to be a routine thing. One night a seedy looking fellow at the bus stop asked me why I was not getting into one of the cars. Though my sharp retort telling him to mind his own business sent him skulking away, he was obviously convinced that I was one of "those women." What else can a woman possibly be out for alone at night?

Value judgments of this sort are inevitable if a woman chooses to or has to observe slightly unusual work patterns or lifestyles. If the lout at the bus stop, in all likelihood a drunkard and wife beater, gets certain satisfaction in telling her what he thinks of her, even educated, "aware, progressive" people cannot help feeling she is a "bold" girl. Would not a 9 to 5 job be just right and keep everyone happy?

**Bharati Sadasivam, Madras**