



**Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena**

WITH profound sorrow we write about the death of a very close friend of **Manushi**, Shri Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena. Sarveshwarji, aged 57, died of a heart attack on the night of September 23, at his house in Bengali Market, New Delhi. He is survived by his two daughters, Vibha and Shubha.

Sarveshwarji was a very well known and widely read Hindi writer whose work has been translated into many languages, Indian and foreign. As poet, dramatist and short story writer, he was one of those who brought a new burst of energy into Hindi literature - a new concern with the everyday life of the downtrodden, a new simplicity and directness in addressing their issues and a strong voice of protest against injustice not only in social and political life but also in personal human relations. His work is imbued with a fearless opposition to tyranny, and a deep sympathy and love for oppressed humanity. This humane spirit is the common thread running through the various modes - satiric, lyrical, comic or pathetic, that he handles with ease. He was one of the few writers uncompromisingly to oppose Indira Gandhi's authoritarian regime even during the emergency. His play *Bakri*, a scathing satire on the politics of power, was widely staged during the emergency and stirred the conscience of many.

As Raghuvir Sahay put it, "he was on

## He was On The Side Of Light

the side of light", and this was visible in every aspect of his life - personal, social, political. After the tragic death of his wife 16 years ago, he brought up his daughters in the spirit of a friend and companion. The atmosphere of his home was one of unique warmth and egalitarianism.

Anyone working for social change could approach him at any time and be sure of sympathy and support. He was closely associated with a wide range of social, cultural, political groups, many of them small efforts which received his unstinting help. He delighted in building links between such efforts and putting concerned people in touch with one another.

His was an extremely versatile mind - reflected in his active involvement with many art forms such as theatre, dance, music, visual arts. As chief sub editor of the Hindi weekly *Dinaman*, from 1964 to 1982 he set a standard of high quality journalism committed to the struggles of ordinary people. He brought the same energy to his editing of *Parag* children's magazine, a job which he took over in 1982. He was full of enthusiasm to develop the magazine as a vehicle for a meaningful children's literature rooted in Indian culture. In this short span of time, he had begun the effort by persuading a number of well known writers in Hindi and other regional languages to begin writing for children, this being a sadly neglected field in our country.

One would look far to find another writer of his calibre and renown who would be as approachable, as generous with his time and energy to every progressive effort, however small. He offered such help not in a patronising way but as a friend and sympathiser. In so doing, he never insisted on any particular label or ism but responded only to the sincerity and commitment of the people involved. Many young writers and many unknown writers in regional languages got the initial

encouragement and help to publish their work from him.

He came in contact with **Manushi** some time in 1979 when a couple of issues had been published. Since then he gave valuable support and a great deal of love to **Manushi**. We could and did approach him for help in a number of areas ranging from translation work to selecting stories to getting photographs to advice on how to deal with financial problems. When **Manushi** organised a demonstration against a man who had maltreated his wife, Sarveshwarji wrote a report in his much talked about column "*Charche aur Charkhe*" in *Dinaman* and commented. "There should be organisations of social activists like **Manushi** in every *mohalla* to give local support to maltreated women. When a woman fights alone she despairs, and seeing darkness all around her, burns herself to death. We need to prevent these suicides. The government, the laws, the police, even today exist only for the rich. They do not render support to the powerless. It is only educated girls and women of their own group who can collectively fight battles along with such women. Only then can greedy wolves be kept imprisoned in their own dens, and their teeth be pulled out. This demonstration shows the way." Just a few days before his death, on his birthday, we happened to mention that on December 8, 1983, **Manushi** would be five years old. His instant reaction was: "This year I will arrange for the celebration of **Manushi's** birthday." In his plays, stories, poems, Sarveshwarji portrays women with a rare sensitivity. We printed his poem "Kitchen" in **Manushi** No. 15 and hope to translate more of his writings into English.

As a lover of the beautiful and the good, Sarveshwarji partakes of that immortality which belongs to those who, in Plato's phrase, "are more creative in their minds than in their bodies, and are the parents of virtue." □

## Some Extracts From The Poems Of Sarveshwarji

### *Yearning For Liberty*

*You may try your best  
to explain to the birds  
that the world outside is wide  
and merciless,  
that they will lose themselves  
in its vast spaces,*

*that though there are oceans, rivers,  
streams outside  
they will have to wander  
in search of water,  
while here they have only  
to gulp it down  
from a full bowl;*

*Out there food is hard to find,  
Here is grain in plenty,  
out there, the hunter lies in wait,  
here they can sing without strife.*

*Yet the birds persist  
in singing of liberty.*

*Though afraid  
of the hand that may smite,  
they press against the bars  
with all their might*

*and when the cage breaks  
or bursts open,  
they take to flight.*

### *On Assam*

*If one room in your house  
is on fire,  
can you sleep in another?*

*If one room in your house  
is filled with corpses,  
can you sing in another?*

*A country is not a map  
drawn on paper,  
so that even when one part is torn,  
the other remains intact,  
and rivers, hills, cities, villages,  
are still to be seen,  
unmoved.*

*There is nothing in the world  
more important  
than a human life-  
neither god,  
nor knowledge,  
nor elections  
nor constitution...*

*The intellect  
that stands upon corpses  
is blind.  
The rule  
that is enforced by bullets  
is a murderer's trade...*

### *Fire*

*I gave her a flower.  
She changed it to fire.  
The perfume flared, became light.  
The softness spat in my face.*

*She said:  
"Write--fire."  
A few illiterate  
field labourers,  
tired out by the day's toil,  
bent their heads,  
they began to write,  
with more confidence, this time.*

*I saw their fingers,  
moving over the slates,  
turn into flames,  
as they completed the word,  
their hands became torches.*

*"Here, take this now if you want it."  
So staying,  
she gave me back the flower.  
(translated from Hindi by Manushi)*