



## Letters To Manushi

### Awareness Is Protection

My sister from Meerut sent me a *rakhi* this year on the occasion of Raksha Bandhan. According to our custom, a brother sends some money to his sister when he receives a *rakhi* from her. However, as I did last year, this year too I wish to send a subscription to **Manushi** as a gift to my sister so that she may become more aware of the problems faced by women. The awareness of women's condition generated by **Manushi** will prove to be a real *raksha* and armour of protection for her—such is my belief ••

**Banmali, Chandigarh**

(translated from Hindi)

### Some Comments

...I bought a copy of **Manushi** No. 16, at Kodaikanal, recently, and would like to offer the following comments..Sohaila Abdulali's powerful article should be given more publicity. It is brilliantly written, candidly reported, and bears the stamp of true agony. Recently there was a terrible case of rape in Bangalore. It was given coverage by the press for a long time and we were all shocked and concerned. However people soon started implying that the girl was happy to be raped, that one of the rapists was really her lover, and to "pile horror on horror's head", we read that her family had actually disowned her...

Madhu's story "Twenty Or Twenty Five" is so true of all of us middle class women who plan and plan to save for ourselves yet yearn to share with our servants who are in a worse plight. Yet which is worse—to be able to say openly: "My husband has left me. I've lost my

job", or to pretend, being middle class, that one's husband's earnings and spendings are all in order, that we've no problems, we're as good as anyone else, while we re-elastic old bras, convert bed-sheets into handtowels and so on, just to keep our children well fed and secure in front of their rich friends? That was a good story...

**Iris Devadasan, Bangalore  
Tamilnadu Police**

...In July an ordinary person who claims to be a member of the AIADMK lodged a complaint that my brother is a naxalite and that we have arms and extremist literature at home. The police then came to our house, saying that they had a warrant to arrest my brother. Since my brother was not at home, they came twice more, and insisted that he and I should go to the police station. We tried to contact our civil liberties lawyers but unfortunately they were not in their office. At 6.15 p.m. we were forced to go to the police station. There the sub inspector and assistant commissioner started questioning us. They kept on using obscene language. Some police constables also went to our house and used obscene language to my sister and mother. We consistently fought back, and exposed the police atrocities on innocent undertrials. They could not tolerate this, and detained us for about one and a half hours. Finally they let me go, but stripped my brother and put him in the lock up.

At 10 p.m. two lawyers contacted the police, who got alarmed and immediately released my brother. They hushed up the case and destroyed the complaint letter. After that, we tried to contact some lawyers and newspapers to organise a protest, but could not succeed since the

police had hushed up everything. The next morning, one of the constables came and told a family friend of ours: "Children like this should not come to the police station. They create a problem for the police administration." Since then, there have been constant enquiries about my father. People from the CBI and the Q branch have come to our house for enquiry...

**Sunila Singh, Madhya Pradesh  
Things Left Unspoken**

...I visited India for the time in December 1980. I had been invited to attend the wedding of a friend from London who was returning to his ancestral village in Gujarat to celebrate an arranged marriage with a girl from Bombay. The experience of this wedding, the friendliness and hospitality offered by the relations and the people of the village—was one of the most vivid and memorable experiences of my entire life. Further, India made a profound and lasting impression on me. I was anxious to learn as much as I could about the condition of women in India. When I saw painted along walls in Bombay, the slogan "Read **Manushi**" among other feminist slogans, I made enquiries ••! have read every issue of **Manushi** since then.

A year later, my 18 year old daughter—was so fired by my enthusiasm that she chose to go India. She spent six very happy months in India, travelling widely by bus and train. For a large part of the time she was alone, and ...she met with only kindness and curiosity. No man molested her; no one offered her violence. She was able to talk to people all over India, and learnt to love the country and its people. By the time she came back to England, she had decided to change her! university degree course, and she is now studying comparative religions and

sociology...

**Manushi** is a maivellous unique magazine, offering an intimate glimpse into the lives of Indian women of the kind that is rarely discussed and little known...I read it every month with interest and sometimes close to tears. If I have a single criticism, it is that my abiding memory of Indian women was of their brilliant beauty and gentleness...I Am sorry that so little appears in **Manushi** which reflects ? this side of the nature and personalities of Indian women. In this respect you have much to teach us...Often our anger at the injustices we see and experience all the time makes us harsh and bitter towards others. We frown a lot, and speak roughly and are angry in our speech and manner. Of course there is much to be angry about, and we must not lose this campaigning sense, for it is the only way we shall win the rights that we and our sisters in other countries deserve to obtain after so many years of Suppression. But gentleness and softness matter too. Otherwise we risk becoming like the men we wish to change. Therefore I would ask for more articles which reflect this great virtue of Indian women not their docility, for I have learnt trough **Manushi** that not all Indian men are automatically docile, and even if they seem so it often des a deep anger—but their capacity for tenderness and tolerance, their sensitivity to the emotions and I things left unspoken...

**Angela Lambert, England**  
**Humanising Force**

...My husband, an engineer by |profession, is working for a trade union— Chhatisgarh Mines Shramik Sangh at Dalli Rajhara. We live in a mine workers' *basti* which lacks en the basic civil amenities. The life of the miners is one long struggle. Worse still is the life of women miners and male miners' wives who toil endlessly to eke out a living, The women here have to fetch headloads of firewood from the jungle kilometres away, to keep their *chulhas* burning.

Living in a working class colony has been a great learning experience for me. It has exposed to me the shallowness of my

own middle class values. It has made me realise that the so called problems that so many of us crib about all our lives are nothing but assumed problems and fears. This realisation came to me only after having seen the struggles and sufferings of the working class around me. To put it in my husband's words: "Living with the oppressed is one of the greatest humanising forces." I am glad **Manushi** is working for the cause of the most oppressed section of society...

**Sunita Pandhe, Madhya Pradesh**



### **Practical Help**

... I wish to make a suggestion. If you have sufficient staff, together with "Letters To **Manushi**", why don't you have someone to give answers to those who need help and have queries? For example, if a woman has need of some help with regard to her in-laws demanding dowry, and has no one to turn to, you could supply her with the names and addresses of some social or legal organisations in her city whom she can turn to for help. Similarly, women having legal, medical, emotional, social problems can be advised or told whom to contact in relation to their particular circumstances. This will be a major service to women struggling ineffectively in their own little world with their problems...

**Annamma Philipose, Jullundur**

*So far, whenever a woman writes to us for help, we write back immediately, suggesting who she can contact in her city. We have done this in an informal way because we are not always in a position to give address ,there being no reliable directory of such organisations. In future we will make it clear that apart from publishing such letters we do also try to help in practical ways, including offering legal and other advice. Many woman both from Delhi and other places also come personally and discuss their problems with us. We try to help in whatever way, the women concerned desires.*

- *Manushi*

### **Gandhi's Day**

On October 2, Gandhi's birth . anniversary, the government ordered all liquor shops to stay closed, because that is the day Gandhians visit Rajghat. "If I had the power, the first thing I would do is see that not a drop of liquor remains in the country." These were the words of Bapu. But after national independence, the whole country has become a drunkard. This country faces a problem of scarcity of drinking water, but there is no scarcity of liquor. In Gandhi's time, liquor shops used to be picketed. Today political leaders preside over inaugural functions of liquor factories and distilleries. Those who speak against alcohol are considered mad... Violent fights, terrorism, ruffianism, hundreds of accidents and loss of life are caused by liquor. Thousands of women are every day beaten up by their drunken husbands. Some of these women commit suicide by taking poison or jumping into wells with their children. Many women have to take to prostitution in order to feed their children, because their husbands waste their money on drink. Drunken men even snatch the wages of their labouring wives, and grow violent, even murderous, if the women refuse to part with their earnings— Yet people think *there is nothing wrong in drinking*

— **Dilip Shikhare, Koltiapur**  
*(translated from Hindi)*

## Human Rights For Women

The year 198J witnessed the birth of two women's organisations in Austria and West Germany, Amnesty For Women and Terre Des Femmes, both dedicated to supporting the struggle of women and women's groups active in the developing world. Each has taken the concept of human rights to demonstrate the many ways in which the humanity of women is denied. For example, can we speak of human rights for women where the veil is imposed, where segregation exists,, where female babies are neglected, and often allowed to die, or where, as in India, young brides can be burned wjth impunity? Each of these organisations focuses public attention on the indignities and brutalities to which women and girls are subjected, and attempts to show how global patriarchy functions, despite differing cultural contexts, to oppress us. Our goal is also to promote insight into our own lives as women, to understand how we suffer from our assigned status as the second sex in ways not unlike our sisters elsewhere in the world...

By organising seminars and disseminating information, we present the work and goals of women's groups in the developing countries to a European audience. Concrete projects by Amnesty For Women include funding a school for girls in an Afghani refugee camp and working together with feminist groups in exile, for instance, the autonomous Iranian feminists in Frankfurt. Terre Des Femmes is raising funds to pay for a word processor which will allow an autonomous women's group in Dakar, Senegal, to begin publishing a magazine which they would like to fashion after **Manushi**. Dr Asma el Dareer of the university of Khartoum, Sudan, has also received our support in her struggle against genital mutilation...

**Tobe Levin, Germany**

## Why Drab And Morose ?

...You have to improve the presentation. Admittedly, yours is a serious magazine but it need not look so drab and verging on the morose. You should employ quotes, thicker types to

break the monotony of continuous text in the same type face. Particularly when a story is long an introduction is quite useful to help the reader to decide to read it. The long story *Naya Gharvas* should have received far better presentation. Such an interesting story and so drably presented. I would like you to take some good help from experts in this field...

**D. Mavinkurve, Bombay**

## Woman's Role

...I was happy to read in **Manushi** No. 17 the stand you have taken against applying Hindu personal law to the tribals. I appreciate your objectivity. The move to introduce a personal law for the Sikhs is indeed a dangerous move. While the Sikhs are progressing well economically, this will be a step *backward*. I do hope that groups



in Delhi and Punjab will take the lead to resist this move.

I read the story *Naya Gharvas*. Though the story is long, the interest is kept up well. The illustrations that go with it are also appropriate. But in the story it is said that the man gives the "seed." This underplays the woman's reproductive role. The man does not give the seed. He gives one cell, the sperm, and the woman gives the other cell, the egg. Only when the two cells fuse does the zygote form which develops into a seed in plants, a fertilised egg in some animals, and young ones in others. The idea that the man gives the seed makes it appear as if the woman only provides the ground for the growth of the seed. It is not so. She contributes equally, and in addition plays the important role of nurturing the zygote into a seed or a baby. We women have

to be clear about this.

Your film reviews continue to be good. I wish they could get wide circulation...

**Jessie Tellis Nayak, Bangalore**  
**Ahead Of The Times ?**

I have a question which I hope will reach the readers of **Manushi**. Considering that this society has shut its ears to the insults of rape and dowry, while women are still fighting for employment and for respect within the family, perhaps this question is ahead of the times.

My sister has a friend who got married five years ago. At that time she had passed MA and *was* lecturing in a local college. Her husband was a final year student in a polytechnic. Not much dowry was given and her father-in-law told her parents: "We do not want anything except your daughter." Perhaps they thought that the girl's earnings throughout her lifetime would be theirs, and would add up to more than a dowry. Today she is earning more than is her husband.

A few days ago my sister told me that her friend is not getting on with her husband. The reason for the discord is that she sends part of her income to her parents instead of handing over all the money to her husband or father-in-law.

I want to ask ; "Why is a married woman's income considered the rightful due of her husband and in-laws ? Why does only the woman have to take responsibility for maintaining cordial relations with the man's family, while the man has no such responsibility towards her family ? Why does the woman always have to go and stay with the man's family, why can the man not go and stay with the woman's family?"

When my sister heard about her friend's problem, she commented : "She should not set fire to her own house by sending money to her parents. Now her husband's home is her home." I did not dispute the point because I felt that anything done before its time is "wrong" and perhaps my sister's friend, though she is in the right, is ahead of the times.

**Anil Kumar Goyal, Kanpur**  
(translated from Hindi) □