



LETTERS TO MANUSHI

Valuing Our Singleness

Reading the article "Women against Dowry" raised a number of questions in my mind. Despite the many evils of the system of marriage in this country, how many women have really raised their voice that they would choose not to marry at all? Work done in the Canton delta in China shows that for nearly a century a large number of women took a vow never to marry or having married, refused to live with their husbands. Among the reasons cited for large scale resistance among women to marriage was the evils of the Chinese system of marriage.

In this country, I am not aware of any sisterhood of women who prefer a single status over marriage. Parents would rather succumb to dowry pressures and see their daughters married off, even if this may mean eventual death, rather than value singleness and life. Is the state of singleness really so unattractive? While there is need for reform in the institution of marriage, there is no doubt also a need to minimize the overemphasis on marriage in a woman's life.

Rehana Ghadially, Bombay

Boycott Dowry-Marriages

Congratulations for bringing out **Manushi**, a magazine which women were badly in need of. "Married, Marketed, Murdered..." the thought-provoking article on the alleged burning of innocent girls whose parents could not provide rich dowry, brought tears to my eyes. Marriages can be simple, in a civil court or a temple, in the presence of some persons, without any decorations. After marriage, a party may be given, and its expenses shared by both parties.

Why are Indian girls such cowards as to agree to marry a person who is not

marrying her but her money? We should boycott dowry-marriages.

Kamlesh Pal, Delhi

Supporting the Movement

What strikes me most about the magazine is its boldness. I sincerely hope you can keep this up. The article "Women Against Dowry" was thought-provoking, especially when she says it is other women who help burn their daughters-in-law...! I know it is unreasonable to expect 50 percent of the population to be united on any one issue, but women should at least be aware of their plight and support the feminists, even if they are unable to participate actively in the feminist movement.... This does not mean that men should be excluded from the movement. In the long run, it is humanism that we are aiming at...

R. Jayanthi, Bombay

Loving, Trusting, Valuing Women

I want more women to know about you so at the end of this you will find the names and addresses of some of my friends that I'd like to send gift subscriptions to...

Is there something you want me to do for you from here?

Do let me know.

Why can't woman be woman's best friend?

Why do women hate women?

Why do women murder women?

Why do women put down women?

Why do we spoil our sons?

Why do we train our daughters — our own kind — to be subservient?

Why don't we love our daughters as much as our sons?

We are at fault. We have to begin

with ourselves — now.

Not expect a change of attitude from the male. If we change our attitude towards ourselves, the way we look at ourselves, the way we value ourselves, the way we bring up our children, the future will have to change.

It is first of all in our hands to change ourselves — to love each other, to trust, to value, appreciate and honour ourselves.

Zarine Malik, Simla

We Demand an Apology

I enclose the following because I believe that **Manushi** can do something to put a stop to such attacks on women in the media. The following is a box item in the Deccan Chronicle from PTI.

"Girls likened to Newspapers, New



Delhi, Nov. 3.

Mr. H. R. Khanna, former judge of the Supreme Court, said today 'Girls are like newspapers.' Addressing the students of Lady Shri Ram College this evening, he observed how 'both have forms, always have the last word, and both have great influence. While back numbers of either are not in demand, you cannot believe everything they say', he said. He also said that they both are thinner than they used to be and get along by advertising. Finally, he advised, 'Every man should have his own and not borrow his neighbour's.' How is it that male public figures are permitted to get away with such disgraceful statements? Everything about this passage shows the Judge's utter lack of respect for

women and the crude chauvinism of the “learned” personage.

And such a person was responsible for dispensing justice at the Supreme Court!

What is even more painful is the students appear to have borne the insult perfectly quietly. (I am going by the newspaper report. If the women of the college responded in any way, I’d like to hear about it.)

Wake up, women! Mr. H.R. Khanna owes us an apology.

B. Kamakshi, Hyderabad.

Seeing through Our Own Eyes

Lorriette Benjamin’s letter in **Manushi**, third issue, was a typically male response to the story “This Happens to Some of Us.” Most of us found the story very touching and true to life. Though all of us may not get pregnant, men’s attitudes to our bodies and emotions do reflect the experiences of Seema in the story. And we all do experience these attitudes, feel hurt, and suspicious towards our own selves, our convictions, our bodies: “It’s all our fault that we are immature and we ‘allow’ men to use our bodies.” And we think “Is it true that we asked for it? Maybe.”

But this is the very illusion we have to break out of and begin to attack in society as well, definitely not succumb to it and reiterate it.

Sujatha Gotaskar, Bombay

Reaching Out to Our Sisters

Manushi... covers an incredible range of women’s experience. Believe me, you speak not only to Indian women but to all of us who have, although in different cultures, experienced rape, battery, sexual and economic exploitation and the contempt and stereotyping of women by the media.

Perhaps most painful to me to read was the report on women garment workers in Kanpur. Although the article specified that the factories in which the survey was conducted produced police uniforms, I found myself thinking of the masses of Indian-manufactured clothing

sold in cheap boutiques in the US and Europe—cotton shirts and pants which have become almost a uniform for many American men and women students — and the human, female reality that must underlie those low prices and the mass production of those garments. I shall never look at a rack of such clothing again without thinking of that reality...

Manushi shows us both the oppression and the beauty of Indian women. May she grow and reach out to more and more women both at home and abroad...

Adrienne Rich, USA

A Clenched Fist

...Being somewhat familiar with the Indian scene, from my own experience as well as from various readings, **Manushi** struck me as being the strongest feminist magazine I have ever got my hands on, and I have been a regular reader of several German, French and American women’s magazines. **Manushi** tops them all as far as its radical and uncompromising commitment to the women’s cause, its combativeness and general substance are concerned. Reading through it, I almost visually realized a clenched fist behind every article, ready to strike back at all the atrocities inflicted on women, especially in a country like India where the condition of women most strikingly reveals the defects of the whole society. I express you my boundless respect and admiration and wish you all strength and support on earth for the struggle...

Marina Schneider, West Germany

Losing Our Chains

... My first experience of rebellion against set patterns was when I went into a temple during my period, expecting the walls to cave in and some calamity to befall me in the next few days. Nothing worth recording occurred and years later, when I shared this experience in a women’s group, I discovered I was not the first to have rebelled in this way! I have all along been discriminated against by men and women because I am tall,

talk loudly and articulately and laugh at things that I find funny. I also do a lot of things that people don’t often see women doing in this country, for which I am treated as a eunuch or a freak. Since I don’t think this is my ‘personal’ problem, I shall lose no opportunity of speaking loud and clear about it. ...

Yes, women of the world, unite, we have a lot to lose (thank god!) but a lot lot more to gain.

Janaki Nair, Bangalore

The Struggle Goes On

Comradely greetings and much applause, dear sisters! I first read about



Manushi in *The Guardian*, a USA paper. I then asked a Kenyan student friend at Delhi University to send me a copy.

Great, just great! Most of all I support your ideology which places the feminist struggle within the context of class struggle and then goes on to recognise the need for women to organize as women and to focus on issues which closely affect women.

To have established a collective is a great accomplishment. There must be many tensions and problems. I wish you well in all your efforts.... The struggle goes on. I am sure we have much to learn from you — let’s keep in touch.... I will try to publicize **Manushi** here — the Hindi edition might appeal to more working class Asian women though of course, most Asians here are Gujarati speaking.

Zarina Patel, Kenya, East Africa

We are a women’s magazine in Kenya and our attention has been brought to **Manushi** by a friend who has a very high regard for your effort... May we have permission to reproduce an article on dowry murders? We would give credit to **Manushi** and inform readers that they can subscribe to it ... we would also like

an exchange subscription...

VIVA, Kenya

Sharing Experience

...*M sprint* grew out of the *Scottish Women's Liberation Journal* which we began just three years ago. At a workshop at a Scottish Women's Liberation conference, a group of women seeing the need for a Scottish feminist journal, called meetings to set one up. From quite a number of women came a small core collective who produced four issues of the Journal. The Collective had been open and many women came to collective meetings who had not up till then been involved in the work, and who we felt, mainly wanted to influence the direction of the journal without wanting to do the work involved in producing a publication, raising money and maintaining it etc. It got to the stage where there were two distinct groups of women in the collective whose conflicting policies made it impossible to produce a journal together. We agreed to split.

This is very much my attitude to what happened, those other women might not agree. I was one of the original collective who had foreseen a broad-based journal which would be important in spreading feminist ideas and widening the movement in Scotland. We felt that the others wanted a narrower publication which would be of interest only to feminists already in the movement. We spent a lot of time trying to work out a structure to stop similar things happening. We have a core collective, share all work between us, and as new women join in they work with us over a whole issue so that they can see what we do and if they want to work with us and we with them.

We are all volunteers of course, some of us have jobs and some have children. We don't have a 'home' though we have cupboard space in several places... The members of the collective change as people move and, we hope new women join. It is hard work though, and one must be quite committed. Our fourth issue is being printed just now.

I think the collective is much stronger since the split made us work at what had gone wrong and build a structure which ensured a working collective... We have no trouble getting material for the magazine. Our main problem is money. We'd be very interested to hear similar information about Manushi... Keep in touch, Love and sisterhood,

**Sally Henry, for MSPRINT,
Scotland**

A Most Dangerous Medium

...The films *Rati Nirvedam* (Sexy Dreams) and *Avdule Ravakul* (Her Nights) are rocking the whole of South India. They are going to be shown in the North as well and Hindi versions are going to be made. These films are nothing but pure and simple pornography. They are a most dangerous attack on women. And yet why do women bear such insults? Why are women's organizations silent? Why are magazines like Manushi silent? Why are such films not burnt by women?

The cinema is a medium which is reigning over society. Every day in India, 120 lakh people see a film. And we know what these films are propagating...As for the censor board, it exists only on paper. Bribes of about Rs. 36,000 are taken for each scene not cut....

Dilip Shikhare, Kolhapur

Reversing the Centuries

...I am thinking of approaching the Indian community here to send contributions directly to Manushi....I agree with you that Manushi should not become a "successful, educated, middle class woman's affair" for that's not where the main concern is. However, the need to give hope and suggest positives cannot be underestimated. Is there a way we can help reverse the brainwashing of centuries? ...The life of the American woman is in no way easy. There are still battered wives here. But I feel that through their efforts, women here have changed more things in their favour, that

affect the majority of women in practice, not merely in theory, but this is only comparatively speaking....

Iffat Chandra, USA

A Group Response

Our women's group met and discussed Manushi. We tried to think both about the use and scope of such a magazine and about the individual numbers that have come out. The discussions could have been more structured but you might still like to have a report.

We all felt it was important to support Manushi both by writing for it and by contributing towards finances. We decided individuals would try and write but as a group we would report on Hyderabad. We would also welcome assignments from you for special issues you plan. For instance, if you are preparing an issue on women in the Islamic tradition, we would be willing to research and write up some part of it. In fact, one suggestion was that Manushi attempt such a series of mainly informative articles, presenting the position of women in different communities or religious groups. This should include statements made by the official doctrine, the legal position, reports of women's experience as well as our own perceptions of the social basis of the articulated ideology.

We felt Manushi should reprint articles that appear elsewhere. The major gap so far (the comments tend to sound negative. I'm sorry, but I think that is because the dominant response was positive) is in the area of theoretical discussion. It is necessary that analysis should reveal the sexist basis of a phenomenon. Description and reportage, however passionately committed, can degenerate into sensationalism if it is not supported by rigorous probing of the roots of the phenomenon. Take the bride-burning problem. A good one to choose but can we indicate how our stand is any different from that of the other magazines that have taken up the question lately?

Do we also have only a liberal-humanist indignation? Remember what the Imperial Raj made of Sati and why. The editorial tries to do this but does not really probe deep enough. Perhaps the discussion should be thrown open. The question of the photographs that went with the article also came up. Some of us felt they were good. They made for a shock. Seeing these ordinary-looking people turn out to be murderers and victims, one got the sense of the problem being very close. Others felt the photographs were somehow lurid, focussing attention on the individual cases, rather than the issue. And yet it is also necessary to establish the frequency of such events. The line is a slippery one...

Someone complained that the graphics in **Manushi** were obscene. Most of us urban 'sophisticates' sprang to its defence, mentally categorizing the comment as coming from a narrow moralistic point of view. But more scrutiny indicated she was right. I don't think the artist was doing this deliberately. It's just the way one's been trained to draw. Our educational systems are ridden with prejudice. Take for instance **Manushi 2**, page 29. Why are the woman's bare breasts so central? Are they necessary? Do they not, in relation to the muscular sexuality of the male legs actually present the excitement of a sadistic eros? Is the woman pleading, protesting or enjoying herself? We get the same ideologically determined figures on page 33 in the women reaching out. The same is true of page 14 of the third issue. The woman (prominent breasts apart) looks as if she is celebrating something through a ritual dance. Why are the onlookers only women and so on. This criticism is certainly not true of all the graphics. The one on page 9 of **Manushi 2** is not offensive. In fact the tensive strength of one who has lived so comes out.

We liked the reports on the lives of working class women. What I would have particularly appreciated is a stronger focus on the peculiar deprivation of the woman in addition to

her caste and class deprivation, and its implications.

...Do we have to steer clear of the personal in all our articles? Many of us find the personal dimensions of feminism the most problematic and therefore the ones that need to be shared most.

Some of us (and we are also responsible for this) felt that there should be more follow-up. Take the hostel issue in **Manushi** which has now been dropped or the Rameeza Bee question. We felt the 'bitty' feeling one often got, going through an issue, could be overcome if we had more special issues - say every third one — which we could help with if the topic was decided on well in advance.

Susie Tharu, Hyderabad

Sisters in Struggle

A friend of mine gave me the Hindi issue of **Manushi**. I do not know how to express my feelings to you. Any woman can understand the anguish of being a woman. But it is an act of great daring to try to understand the condition of women in India. Your efforts will make this task easier and also inspire us to struggle against this inhuman exploitation of us as women. I am amazed at your courage because if we dare to speak out about our own experience, this society has only one punishment for us — the death sentence. In my case too, my husband, my father-in-law and even my father have passed the death sentence on me.

I am an ordinary girl who at the age of 17, was handed over as a *daan* (gift) by my father to my husband. My husband proceeded to use this piece of property given to him as a gift in any way he chose. And then my father-in-law too asserted his right over this property, but when the 'nonentity' dared to resist his overtures, he found rape the only suitable weapon. You must be familiar with this — it is no new story. I have been married seven years and you can imagine how I have spent every moment of my life.

But now I cannot continue like this

any longer. And after reading **Manushi**, I am convinced that I need to break out of this situation. So I am appealing to you and as a sister in the struggle, also telling you to do your duty.

I want you to help me get a divorce from my husband. I need a guardian if I am to get a divorce but my father is not even willing to see me as a corpse at his feet. So I am in great difficulties and need the help of a women's organization. I am confident that you will come forward to help me as soon as possible. And what more can I say ?...

A sister

New Experiments

...Please, let us not raise the price of Hindi **Manushi**. It would be better not to bring it out than to raise the price. I feel that the women on the collective should undertake tours, meet and have discussions with women at various places and collect money after the discussions. Have you tried this experiment? What was the response?

In **Manushi**, you should write an appeal, explaining the problem and expressing your desire to meet women in various regions and take **Manushi** to them. You could give a call to women to make arrangements for such visits. My heartfelt good wishes to **Manushi** ...

Shobhana, Wardha

Here in Gauhati, some of us local progressive girls have decided to translate **Manushi** into the regional language and to publish it as a magazine so that it may help many other oppressed sisters of ours inside and inside our locality. We will take necessary help from you. In Assam, women are struggling against oppression in an organized way, particularly in villages. I will send reports from Assam to **Manushi**.

Our organization *Nari Mukti Santha*, will become stronger by **Manushi**. Kindly let me know if **Manushi** is translated into Bengali. Most of the girls who are interested in **Manushi** are illiterate so we took the decision to translate...

Purnima Paul, Gauhati □