

# Responses to Manushi

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## A Black Hole

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In your issue No.98 a reader comments on the state of single woman : "Her position in comparison to her American counterpart is much better because family links are much stronger here than they are in the first world. So the chances of becoming lonely are much lower here". OK! Clearly your reader has conducted an in-depth, statistically meaningful survey, funded by a reputable organisation, and spent an appreciable amount of time understanding the ways of family life in the first world to have arrived at this irrefutable truth. Now, allow me to present a rather insular perspective of the life of a woman of Indian origin (myself) who emigrated to the U.S. some 24 years ago at the age of 17 having just completed High School in Delhi. I grew up in circumstances that were admittedly not as privileged as of some but greatly privileged than those of many, and consequently, able to aver with some aplomb that I understand the strong ties of Indian family life (frequently bordering on suffocation ) and life in India in general.

Having been single all my life, being a naturalised American citizen, and being a professional woman I should be able to comment equally on just how lonely life can be in the U.S. for such a person. Over the years I have spent most of my waking moments experiencing the diversity that life offers those living in the San Francisco Bay Area,

and probably every sleeping moment dreaming of ways I could continue to be self-indulgent (for you must surely label my pursuits as being nothing else).

My typical week-day begins with a round through my garden (I have personally planted 90 per cent of all the plant life in my front and back yards) watering and fertilising, feeding my cat, making my lunch, washing pots and pans, making my bed, getting ready for work, spending eight hours doing software development for an infra-red spectrometer that will be housed on an Earth Observation Satellite to evaluate problems related to the lower stratosphere.

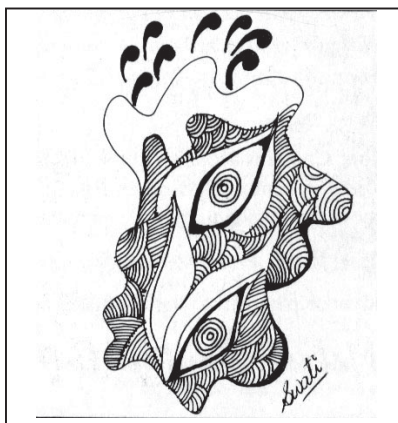
Then, in the evening, depending on the day I attend classes offered by a University of California campus (there are three within a radius of 100 miles), study yoga/aikido offered by one of the adult education centres indulge my interest in Japanese culture by studying the art of making Mataro

Kimekomi dolls offered through the Japanese Cultural Center, or study Ikebana (Sogetsu).

A typical weekend is just as laid back, as I shop, sew for myself and family, go to the library, cinema, bookstore, swim, garden, go to an ethnic restaurant, read, watch TV, attend my Japanese embroidery class, volunteer as a pink lady at the hospital, clean house, do my laundry (no, I do not wait for the servants to arrive for I have none), and on and on and on (how I have spent the past years could fill a tome). My single friends (one of whom I befriended when I was studying piano with her and have known for 20 years) have lives that are equally "lonely". I invite any one of your readers to come partake of our "lonely" existence whenever the fancy strikes.

I have been riled before as well by this attitude which I have come to recognise the leitmotif of your publication. I knew it was not my imagination when a few pages after the aforementioned inane drivel (and the obvious doggerel on Robe/Disrobe) I came upon this from the publisher/editor "This attitude contrasts sharply with the popular western view that assumes that people in by-gone ages were less knowledgeable, were less aware and conscious of their rights and dignity, had fewer opinions, and were therefore less evolved as human beings" etc.

At first I thought she meant that it was a popularly held assumption



amongst Indians on the state of western affairs, but no, I think I was wrong. Tell me Madhu, how many of the following do you recognise as being simply relegated to museums:

Aristotle, Bach, Christ, Da Vinci, Einstein, Freud, Goethe, Handel, Ibsen, Jefferson, King (Martin Luther), Lincoln, Mozart, Newton, Oppenheimer, Plato, Rousseau, Shakespeare (remember him?), Tolstoy, Voltaire, Wright (as in the brothers), Xavier (Francis, St.), Yallow (Rosalyne), Zeno ?

There is little room for such blatant western bashing most especially when it is done in a language not of our making (English), communicated via means that do not have their genesis in the Indian subcontinent (publishing, mailing), in the hopes of perpetuating ideals that are not easily recognisable as Indian (egalitarianism, feminism, democracy).

Life anywhere on the planet owes a great deal to western thought and wherewithal. There have been heroes in western culture in the past, but it has not stopped there we have heroes even today.

On the other hand one can only wonder about the state of affairs of a culture where heroes exist only in what Joseph Campbell called an apotheosised mythic past. Is there archaeological, anthropological evidence that suggests that a “satyayug” existed at anytime other than in the febrile imagination of a Valmiki (did he exist?) or Tulsidas? Where are the heroes today to help the “civilisation” get out of what Shashi Tharoor terms “an advanced state of decay”?

What does it say about a culture whose collective consciousness, ignoring an

immensely talented scribe, becomes so overwhelmed by epic characters who do not, will not, break the boundaries of idealised cultural norms! Perhaps it would be appropriate to liken India today to a black hole — a once shining star which has collapsed, continues to grow dense, where time has stopped, and nothing (not even light) ever escapes! Do you ever wonder, in your capacity as a university instructor, at the naivet of a student body that suggests that one cannot emulate a hero figure such as Sita because we exist in a “kalyug”? (Do you ever discourse with those of a persuasion different than Hinduism?)

Perhaps one can suggest that the reason such a figure cannot be emulated is because it is an anachronism and should be relegated to a museum for the sole purpose of scholarly research.

It may be time, dear editor, to get off that self constructed supercilious high horse and at least smell the chai (coffee not being the beverage of choice in India). Another option may be for me to stop reading your publication from cover to cover, or better

yet, to stop reading it entirely!!

**Dipa Suri, California, USA**

*Dipa, we welcome your criticism. This kind of feedback is essential for **Manushi's** health. As for your threat of stopping to read **Manushi**, do you believe in reading only those magazine, books or authors you agree with all the time?* **Madhu**

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### Dismal Scenario

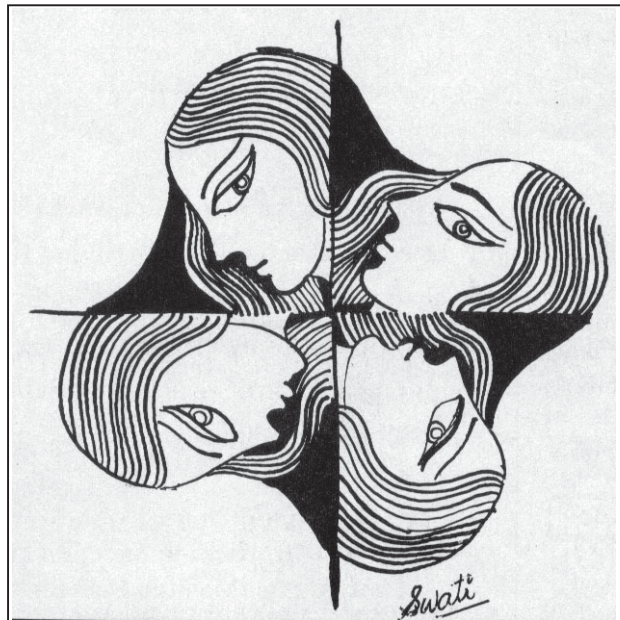
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I am glad to say that of the magazines and books I read on women's issues, I liked **Manushi** a lot. I have also started reading the back issues of **Manushi**. I really appreciate the idea of the magazine sustaining itself on the basis of subscriptions and individual contributions. As I was going through the magazine I felt some responsibility towards it. I feel like writing many things for **Manushi** but I can't do so since my English is poor and I don't know Hindi.

As I grew up, I considered myself a bold woman who has overcome a lot of difficulties and now has a job of her own. I was always bold enough to protest against any impropriety. But after

reading about women's condition in various magazines, about rape, dowry harassment, ill treatment and gender discrimination, I am shaken. There is no word to express the grief I feel for women and their vulnerability. I am becoming weaker after reading about their situation.

This is the first time I am writing to **Manushi** and gradually I would like to contribute more to **Manushi** by sending articles and introducing it to my friends and especially to men. I would like to keep in touch with **Manushi** as long as I



can since nobody knows when I would be made a victim by this male dominated world.

**Seema Sarkar,  
24 Parganas, WB**

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### **Deserving Democracy**

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This in response to the article on economic reforms in double issue Nos. India is a resilient country, and its people deserve decent leadership. I wonder when the people will realize that. I wonder when the people will realise that they will not get decent services (public or private) unless they take the initiative to provide them the services themselves. When will India's people get the leadership they deserve?

**Prita Kulkarni, California, USA**

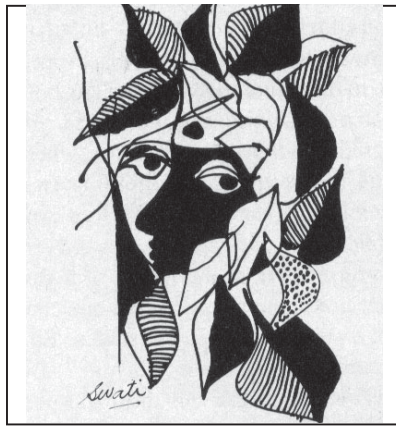
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### **Campus Elites**

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This is in response to Madhu Kishwar's article on beauty pageants and their spread to India and other lesser developed countries (Issue no. 88). I enjoyed the portion of her article describing her time at Miranda house, her Presidentship of the Student's Union, and the stand she took there. It is not that I was ever in a similar position. I did my undergraduation at the University of Maryland, in the US. The situation she describes actually reminded me of the cliques and elitism I experienced in high school. The University of Maryland did have its share of elitism, notably among the "Greeks" (Fraternities and Sororities.) They were usually children who had wealthy parents and were often from New York and New Jersey. They were perhaps 20 per cent of the campus population and the rest of us this one year when, instead of having "Greek Week" (which was really only attended by Frat and Sorority houses). Our Student Council voted to have a "Festival Week" with events for everybody. It went on very well.

**Kirk Davis, Maryland, USA**



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### **Re-examining Sita's Role**

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I recently read your article, "Yes to Sita, No to Ram!" in issue 98. I was intrigued by your analysis of Sita as a wife. I would like to further examine your interpretation of Sita as wife and its relevance to women in India today.

The "Sita-like behaviour" you describe is an approach to empowering women with which many western feminists, including myself, are not familiar.

Coming to India would provide me with an opportunity to study the theory and practice of this approach firsthand. I could then bring my experience back to the U.S. and help American feminists reexamine our view of Sita and, therefore, reexamine the values we assign to Indian women today.

**Casey Iezzi, Philadelphia, USA**

