

# Responses to Manushi

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## Misleading Title

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This is with reference to my article ' on the Dogri writer, Padma Sachdev, in MANUSHI No. 123.

I am surprised and disturbed to see the title you have given to my article. I have nowhere suggested that Padma Sachdev is the "mother" of modern Dogri poetry. The title is highly misleading as well as factually incorrect. Modern Dogri poetry predates the appearance of Padma Sachdev on the Dogri literary scene. It is unfair to those modern Dogri poets who wrote before her, like her first husband, Ved Pal Deep, and others like Ram Nath Shastri and Dinu Bhai Pant. The title, if ascribed to me, affects my credibility as a chronicler of Dogri literature. If it is taken to be given by you or the editorial staff of MANUSHI, it affects, in the eyes of those familiar with Dogri literature, the credibility of MANUSHI.

**Shivanath, Delhi**

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## Towards Circumspect Activism

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This is in response to Madhu Kishwar's article, *Law Against Domestic Violence*, on dowry deaths and domestic violence in MANUSHI No. 120. Thank you also for providing a platform for honest self evaluation by women activists on this issue.

In 1983, when the law to deal with dowry deaths was passed, women's organisations felt a sense of victory, thinking that the perpetrators of torture against women would definitely be punished and that the incidence of dowry deaths and domestic violence would decrease. After 17 years, I feel that the

expectations at the time of making the law, that women would get justice and crimes against women would lessen, is not going to be fulfilled. While making reforms or formulating laws we forget that the execution of those laws will be accomplished through the police and by legal redress. India's legal machinery is so slow that the time and money wasted only brings dejection. The police are insensitive towards the vulnerable groups. We also seek police help and judicial solutions instead of turning to family and society to solve problems.

I live in Mahaswad village in Satara district. People are generally aware of article 498A but, despite this, the mother, father and brother of a woman who complained of mistreatment refused to file an FIR. I have seen innumerable cases where after the death of a woman, policemen reduce her in-laws to a state of fear and get them to hand over huge sums of money. Even the mother, father or brother of a dead woman try to manoeuvre an out-of-court settlement instead of pursuing the in-laws in order to have them punished. As a result, the in-laws pay off the parents of the girl as well as the police and get their son married again. Here, too, only the in-laws benefit. Even the parents of the girl do not feel the need to get justice for their daughter. This has become the normal course of action. I have commonly observed that 498A is used as a threat, usually against women. It is seen in many cases that women who want to live separately from their in-laws and want a share in the family wealth make threats of taking recourse to 498A, since it is a non-cognisable offence. Fearing jail

for the female members of the family, the in-laws readily agree to compromise. Even if the husband is unwilling, the complainant wife gets all her demands met.

In many cases, I have observed that if the complainant under 498A has children, she gets her demands readily agreed to by her in-laws. Despite the husband being unwilling, the in-laws urge their son to compromise for the sake of the children. Grandparents also tend to think of their grandchildren and generally agree to satisfy the complainant's (woman's) demands.

Feminists have earned success in getting strict laws passed; these are exerting some pressure. However, the crimes against women have not become preventable through police machinery and the judiciary.

My experience is that most often it is the community that can act as the problem-solver. I would like to narrate my own family's problem: After the marriage of my cousin sister, she became a victim of maladjustment within the in-laws' family. For instance, she was unhappy that she was not being allowed to go swimming, and with the family rule that women must eat only after the entire family was through. She also felt she could not live with her mother-in-law, whom she believed should live separately from her only son. With nothing working out, this couple decided to divorce. It was agreed that my cousin would get back her jewellery and also the entire expenditure of the marriage. Both would be free to remarry. In this episode, the boy's uncle played a positive role in

getting the matter settled, as he felt that marriage is not only between two individuals, but also a relationship between the families. Both families also have a responsibility towards the community.

I feel that solutions come more easily when they are sought within the family and community structure instead of taking recourse to police and the law. Often, the community is unable to help and police support is necessary.

I would like to narrate another personal incident to illustrate that family or social support is better than legal intervention: My *Bua's* son was unhappy with his wife as she would threaten to kill herself whenever they had a quarrel. For this reason, he wanted to live separately and left home to live with friends. My *Bua* and the rest of the family felt that the wife had no place to go to and hence should continue living with them even if my *Bua* insisted on living elsewhere. In this incident, family attitude was very balanced. Very often women's organisations are not viewed as impartial or judicious. The provision 498A is used to harass the in-laws. Hence, these families distrust women's organisations and do not expect them to be impartial.

I feel that the approach of women's organisations may be at fault here. By changing laws, the social problems are not going to be done away with. Despite this, we think it more important to change the laws.

Recently, the Maharashtra government passed a law stating that in the case of a minor girl's (below 18) marriage, the Brahmin who performed the ceremony and the main invitees to the wedding would be liable for prosecution. This law does not ensure that girls will enter matrimony only after 18. The parents have now made it a habit to bribe the school clerk for a false birth certificate and pay the

police to stop them from registering a case.

The problem for parents of girls is what to do with daughters who have finished their seventh class study. There are no schools in rural areas beyond seventh standard; still, parents do try to send their child to a nearby village if a bus is available. But even in this case, what does a girl do after her tenth class?

In Mann *taluka* there are only two colleges. Remote villages cannot afford to send their girls so far, every day. There are no vocational diploma courses available here either. Therefore, parents have to either keep their daughter at home or get her married.

I am writing to you with a past experience of 15 years. I realise that this, and my knowledge are limited.

**Chetna Sinha, Mahaswad,  
Mann Taluka, Maharashtra**

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### Unsatisfactory Title

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I am not at all happy with the title *State Supported Utopia* that you have given to my article in the column, "My Vision for the Future" in MANUSHI No. 121. I prefer calling it *A Woman's Utopia*.

**Asha Kachru,  
Ranjole, Distt. Medak, A.P.**

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### Ill-Informed Reformers

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I read with interest your journal on the web and found it very interesting and enlightening. Please start a column on common misconceptions that circulate about the Hindu religion and customs. This would be very useful to youngsters to rationally respond to questions from members of other faiths.

I especially enjoyed your article *From Manusmriti to Madhusmriti* in MANUSHI No. 117, also posted on the website of *Hinduism Today* under the

title *Manu and the Brits*. I was really glad to read, after a long time, a rational and balanced article on these issues. Your observation is very appropriate that only those social reformers who are rooted in their community and who understand the nuances of our social system tend to be successful in bringing about positive changes in social norms and practices. The Temple Entry Movement led by Madhurai Vaidyanathan Iyer and Rajaji, for instance, was very successful, since these individuals were respected by the larger community and their arguments for change in our social practices were based on an understanding of the *dharma* of our times. Gandhi's phenomenal success was also due to this. Sometimes the westernised liberals just repeat the same hackneyed accusations without even a cursory knowledge of the facts. Last year, in an article in *The Economic Times*, Mr. T. K. Arun (who is a regular columnist with the paper) wrote that Adi Sankara had ordained that "molten lead be poured into the ears of those *sudras* who hear the Vedas recited".

I have heard this earlier from other politicians like Annadurai. Since I am well versed with Sankara's work, I was puzzled. I wrote to *The Economic Times* as well as to the author about the source of his diatribe. I got no answer. This particular accusation is repeated ad nauseam. However, after all my investigations, I find no such decree by Sankara. This is just one such example. The western liberals in India seem to have borrowed their views from the British about our past traditions. Most of the time such critiques are based on total lies.

I am glad that your article reaffirmed my conviction that it is not necessary to be a westernised liberal to be a reformer.

**R. Vaidyanathan, Bangalore.**