



## Responses to Manushi

### The Role of NGOs

This refers to *Destroying Minds and Skills* by Madhu Kishwar in MANUSHI 102.

The English language has indeed got a vicious grip on India, especially the elite who, in turn, are being aped by the lower-middle class in the familiar slave-mentality syndrome. I agree with you that we Indians are obsessed with the English language, and I am no exception. But I can say without hesitation that I still have not acquired the skills to speak or write in the language I wasted so much time, money and energy to learn. Had I given similar attention to my mother tongue, Oriya, or the national language, Hindi, or Urdu (of which I don't possess good knowledge), and gone about my task systematically, by now I would have been proficient in them.

However, the purpose of this letter is not to discuss this subject. I write with reference to your statement in the same article that you are opposed to accepting any government aid, and particularly international grants, to run MANUSHI. In your words, "...the long-term consequences of taking that route are more harmful, even though in the short run it seems to pay off". I am curious to know why you think that accepting international grant is harmful.

In the past two years, an English daily carried a series of your articles on non-governmental

organisations (NGOs), wherein you wrote about the corruption afflicting NGOs in India. I don't remember whether you raised an objection to national/international grants made to NGOs.

Do you also oppose today's NGOism? I have heard that now you do not have any reservations against NGOs seeking American and European funding. Is this true? (By NGOs, I mean professional organisations which survive on government or foreign doles to run their social-work projects and phony people's movements). One noteworthy point about these NGOs is that they are redefining the very term to suit their interests. To evade criticism and sidetrack the real issue, they say that anything outside the government is an NGO.

I am strongly opposed to NGOism. Under the garb of social service, the NGO sector in the Third World is being used by the developed world to perpetuate slavery, corruption, dependency and indifference to healthy and revolutionary politics. I am aware of all this and therefore, am worried. However, it is unfortunate that the complexity and sinister implications of this issue are comprehended by very few members of the intelligentsia. And those who do understand, do not take any concrete step to tackle the malaise. Many intellectuals don't even try to understand the problem, simply because it conflicts with their interests, since they are involved

in promoting NGOism and seeking foreign funds themselves.

If you agree with my point of view, that is, if you really oppose foreign donations and the business of NGOism, I will be very happy. I hope to get support and information on this issue from a crusader like you.

**Radhanath Pradhan,  
Samajwadi Parishad,  
Bhavanipatna, Orissa**

(Translated from Hindi by Manushi)

*I don't know which of my articles you read in which English daily. I haven't written any for an Orissa based newspaper. Very often, newspapers and magazines lift my articles or extracts from MANUSHI and reprint them without informing us. You will get a much better idea of my views on this subject if you read my rather exhaustive article in double issue 92-93 of 1996 available from MANUSHI for Rs 30.*

*The main point that I make with regard to NGOs is that I find their blind opposition to foreign investments puzzling and even duplicitous considering that almost all of them are dependent on foreign aid money for their very survival. I personally find the culture of aid dependence offensive and harmful. However, I would encourage Indian businesses entering into collaboration with reputed foreign companies because this promotes a healthier business climate in India. State monopolies and numerous bureaucratic*

controls have made it impossible for people to earn their livelihoods or generate wealth through honest means.

Even if NGOs were not guilty of corruption, as you allege, MANUSHI says 'No' to all aid money for social and political activism—American, British or even that coming from the Kingdom of God himself—because it is destroying our self-respect as a people. I will soon be writing a more detailed article on this because this is one question I am repeatedly asked.

**Madhu Kishwar**

Courtesy : DOWN TO EARTH



### Addressing Real Issues

I write in response to *Riding a Tiger* in MANUSHI 107. The article made an interesting reading. However, I felt that it concluded on a vague note. The author writes "...there is time still to turn back." It is not clear what manner of 'turning back' he is referring to.

I'd like to point out that all protest concerning nuclear tests is made by the English speaking intelligentsia with a negligible audience. Mr. T.N. Rao's letter (MANUSHI 107) and such other hate-mail received by publications like *Frontline* indicate the aggressive propoganda of unreal issues undertaken by the so called nationalists—the BJPites or others. Of course, the other political parties too continue to protest but I don't think they even understand the issues they protest against. For them, there is hardly a difference between nuclear tests and onions, both are simply 'political issues'—meaningless and baseless.

Here, in Lucknow, the state government appears to assume

issues where there are none. The latest being—erecting statues of unknown heroes and heroines of Indian history, mandatory recital of the *Saraswati Vandana* in schools and a mandatory code of conduct for teachers. Every day, the ministers unveil giant-size statues of a leader or freedom fighter to decorate the narrow lanes and busy *chaurahas*. It began with Ambedkar (we also have an unfinished Ambedkar Park worth Rs 100 crore) and now Narendra Dev, Deen Dayal, Uda Devi, Lord Laxman and Rana Pratap are awaiting their turn. Consider that while we don't have proper electricity in most parts of the city, the statues are illuminated with 10-20 sodium lights each. They even have guards to protect them against hooligans of rival political parties.

The recent fuss about the *Saraswati Vandana* is equally absurd. The schools lack good laboratories, furniture and staff. The syllabus has not been updated in years. But the government is not expressing any concern towards that. Personally

speaking, I have been educated in five different schools and two universities. In all these institutions, whether missionary, government or private, the prayers were as meaningful as the *Saraswati Vandana*.

We need to address the real issues concerning education. Such as the bias for urban, English-medium students, even in the civil services exams, or lack of good teachers and updated syllabus in *sarkari* schools. The fact is that a large number of children in the country do not go to school at all. If singing the *Saraswati Vandana* can ensure curing all

these ills, I am ready to sing it 24 hours a day.

Another point I'd like to make is that if the mandatory code of conduct charted out for school-teachers was to be applied to the ministers, not one of them would be eligible to hold office.

I also object to the "security" around ministers which is actually a status symbol. At least a 100 ministers reside in the state capital, and there are frequent visits by Union ministers, party leaders etc. As a result, the city traffic is constantly thwarted to make way for them. How can these "public servants" going in for, say, social functions, deserve priority over school going children and office going people?

Perhaps I am old-fashioned and therefore stress on the 'old' issues such as safe drinking water, efficient public transport, adequate food, a decent health care system and yes—quality education for even poor children. We must stop this wastage of public money on useless politicians and worthless statues.

**Atoorva, Lucknow**

