



## Responses to Manushi

### Muslims Need Quota

In Madhu Kishwar's article *The Logic of Quotas* (MANUSHI 107) you have referred to the Muslim community (men and women) demand for a Muslim quota within the proposed women's reservation bill. While admitting its logic in terms of under-representation, you have brushed this demand aside on the ground that establishment of communal electorates was rejected by the national leadership during the freedom movement. This is simply not true. What the national leadership had opposed all along was separate electorates and not reservation for the Muslim community. Even the draft Constitution provided, on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, reservations for Muslims in public employment and legislatures, but on the basis of a joint electorate. This was skilfully manoeuvred out of the final reading of the Constitution and the Muslim community was fobbed off with assurances by Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel of 'generous' treatment. But the Muslims have been consistently under-represented in legislatures and today in the Parliament their deprivation level is 60 per cent. From several important states, there is no Muslim representation at all. In some state assemblies, there are simply no Muslim MLAs. So the Muslim demand for the quota has an existential logic if democracy and social justice, in a plural

and segmented society, mean participation in governance and sharing of power by all segments.

Since 1994, the demand for reservations for Muslims has been on the national agenda but the proposal for reservations for women in legislatures created a critical situation. Obviously if Muslim men cannot get elected, under the present dispensation, Muslim women will not be. This will mean that the deprivation level will rise to 75-80 per cent. So the Muslim community has no option but to ask for a proportionate share out of the 33 per cent, which is 4 per cent for Muslim women. The situation of the OBCs or of relatively advanced minorities, Christians and Sikhs, is quite different. They are all well-represented in the legislatures.

The Muslim community does not mind whether men or women of high caste or low caste represent the community. It needs representation to articulate its problems and sensitivities, because no one else will.

I do not know why reservation for women is not being demanded in public employment or higher education.

**Syed Shahabuddin, Delhi**

### No War Can Be Won

I am sorry I did not congratulate you earlier on your article *BJP's Wargasm* (MANUSHI 106). But on reading some of the letters you received on it and especially that of T.R.N. Rao's from the US, I am urged to write now.

I thought the article was excellent and put into words what Anand Patwardhan has captured in his film *Father, Son and Holy war*. If Rao sees that film alongside reading the article, he may reflect more deeply, than emotionally, on the real dangers of these fatal trends unleashed by the present BJP Government—one of them being the critical mode of permitting the explosion of the bomb. Sitting far away in the US, it is easy for him to pontificate on the sacred texts. It may be good for him to come to India and experience the manner in which these texts are being used to spread hatred and division in the Indian populace—much of it funded by NRIs like him, probably.

Unfortunately, he hasn't been reading MANUSHI over the years. If so he would have seen that MANUSHI unhesitatingly lashes out when religion or the *shastras*—be it Hindu or Muslim are used to ostracise women, reinforce majority consciousness or justify domination.

After having lived in the West, I would expect Rao to be more tolerant to cries of pain in his motherland, to be more intellectually discerning and to rethink his position on 'security'. The article of Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee, *Riding a Tiger* (MANUSHI 107) will help him understand that no war was won by a country that had nuclear weapons.

**Nalini Nayak, Trivandrum**

