



## Responses to Manushi

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### Vimochana Report

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*Vimochana's* report on dowry deaths is comprehensive, sensitive and relevant. I wish to commend the team for its excellent work and would like to express my appreciation for their commitment to addressing this continually vexing and increasingly complex issue. Thanks are due to this team and especially to Ms Donna Fernandez for exposing the ways in which our callous bureaucracy continues to practice the most gross violations of human rights in an everyday context.

Thanks to MANUSHI also for publishing this report.

**A.R. Vasavi, Bangalore**

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### Revival Forum

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I have gone through the paper *An Alternative Bill for Women's Reservation*. The case is presented very clearly and convincingly. A lot of time and energy must have been expended in collecting the statistics.

I would like to make an observation on a couple of findings in the paper. At one point it is stated, "But the cultural and educational advantage women in Kerala have does not translate into higher political participation as compared to Rajasthan." Politics is not so much a matter of intellectual

development as of action—at least at the lower and middle rungs. Rajasthan has had a turbulent history when war and violence were a way of life and the women folk had to fend for themselves. Therefore, no fine dividing line has developed between a man's chores and a woman's. It became natural for women to participate in general community affairs even in the British period of comparative peace. Things were very different in the Southern states which were more peaceful and settled over the centuries. There, a clear dividing line developed between men's and women's spheres of activity. Politics and public matters were a man's sphere.

The above inference seems to be borne out by another observation in the paper which states that Nagaland and the North-Eastern states have lower numbers of women in politics as compared to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Here again, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh were as turbulent as Rajasthan. On the other hand, Nagaland and North-Eastern states were protected from large scale fighting due to the terrain. True, there were tribal conflicts but the men folk were never far away from home and village.

Let me relate an incident. Some years ago I visited a North-Indian

friend in R.K. Puram. While I was there his car had a flat-tyre. His daughter, aged about 16 then, came out and changed it, all on her own. This is something no woman in the South would dream of doing—even if she were capable of it. Jokingly I tell the women in Kerala that the women up there are better value for the money spent on them!

**C.J.M. Mathew, New Delhi**

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### Modernity of the *Shastras*

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I applaud you for your courageous article *When Leaders Mislead: Puri Shankaracharya Exceeds His Brief* (MANUSHI 118).

You have stated "Even our *shastras* and *smritis* repeatedly emphasize that codes of morality must evolve with changing times." I hope to see an elaboration of this in a future issue of MANUSHI giving the chapter and the verses. It is gratifying to note that the antidote to the current obscurantism of religious leaders is in the *shastras* and *smritis* that they extol and rest their authority on.

**Paul Preamsagar, New York, USA**

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### The *Fire* in Demand

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Thank you for the permission to translate your review of *Fire*. I was also glad to read the responses of two Indian women, which tempered your review a bit. I think that the women who voted *Fire* the best film of the festival were more love-struck than racist on seeing two beautiful actresses in a love situation; that you didn't see the quality of the other films in the festival (many women-oriented films are experimental and often very low-budget); that many, especially young women, are more influenced by the love content of a film, than by any other quality.

**Paula Young, Burzet, France** □