

Responses to Manushi

A Historical Fiction

I appreciate the space you devoted to the review of *What the Body Remembers* in issue No. 119 of MANUSHI. Readers write to tell me it has touched a chord, and helped them discuss what happened to women in their families during Partition, sometimes breaking silence for the first time.

So I found it most amusing that while your reviewer praises “an imaginative narrative laced with beautiful prose”, she would have preferred me to write a *Thelma and Louise* or *Charlie’s Angels* set in the India of the 30s and 40s. I’m glad I didn’t oblige.

Setting aside the current fantasies of upper class women worldwide, perhaps your reviewer should read each MANUSHI issue of the year 1999 which is also the year of publication of this novel. If only to remember that the state of comparative freedom and options she and I enjoy today were not and unfortunately are not, the norm. I wish my women characters, Satya and Roop, had other options open to them in that polygamous marriage of the 30s and 40s. The novel shows in several places that other women of lesser classes in those times were on the streets protesting and picketing and going to jail. However, since I wasn’t writing science fiction but historical fiction, not a history of

the feminist movement during the freedom struggle but a novel, I had no intent to “create new ways of being” as your reviewer would have preferred, nor any pretensions to “uniformly describe the experience of all Indian women.”

Reframing history to show women’s stories while transmuting a tiny bit of pain into beauty was my goal. Apparently this reviewer wanted revisionism as well — a disservice to readers that no critic should advocate.

**Shauna Singh Baldwin
Milwaukee, USA**

Hypermasculine Sexuality

I would like to bring the following observation to the debate over Tomi Ungerer’s cartoon which shows nuclear tipped missiles as male sexual organs. A few years ago I speculated that fascism is rooted in a hypermasculine sexuality and that the Nazi salute is an obscenely phallic display. I communicated this speculation of mine to the well-known psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakkar and he wrote to me that he has taken note of my idea. One is also reminded of Bal Thackeray’s notorious remark when the nuclear explosions were carried out that the world will now realize that Indians are not eunuchs.

Perhaps I should add here that it is Dr. Kakkar’s thesis that ecstatic mysticism is an expression of the distilled feminine sexuality in the

human psyche with deep self surrender being the essence of both. I for one would go along with this view.

S.A. Owais, Srinagar

Demand for More

I read Mrs. Sushma Swaraj’s interview in MANUSHI No. 121 with great interest. In fact she is one of the very few politicians who carry a very clean image and are respected for their good work by common people. I request you to also interview Mr. P.Chidambaram, Ms. Maneka Gandhi, Mr. Arun Shourie in this new series.

Atoorva Sinha, through email

More on Economic Reforms

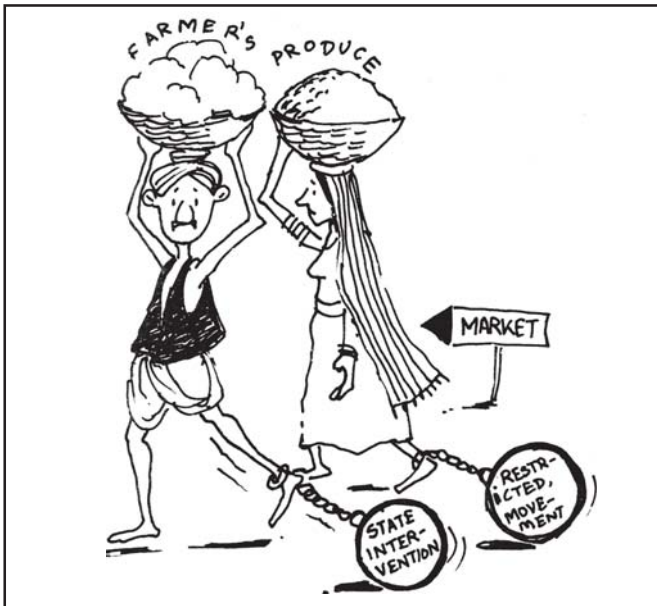
Your article on economic reforms in Issue No. 92-93, (*A Half Step Forward, The Thwarting of Economic Reforms in India*) is truly refreshing. Many women activists seem to have problems with the market economy in general and economic reforms in India in particular. This is not to suggest that the market economy is a perfect or even a good system, but viewed in the context of the available options, it has substantial advantages. It also has much greater operational flexibility and is essentially negotiable.

Liberalization cannot be halted. But the government is not paying adequate attention to women’s economic concerns in its policy

pronouncement. New guidelines are announced by regulatory authorities everyday. It is therefore worthwhile to remind some of its most virulent critics that this is not a spectator sport. There are no bystanders in the game — women are either going to use it to their advantage — or be used by it. It is time to take stock of the situation.

While much has been made of the South East Asian currency crisis, the fact remains that despite bad investment policies and weak regulatory authorities of many of the affected countries, this hot money did substantially contribute in the creation of an impressive infrastructure which cannot be taken away by fund managers and speculators, however ruthless they may be.

The South Koreans or Indonesians are unlikely to relapse into illiteracy, the roads or bridges or communication networks will not collapse because of currency



depreciation. The point is, resources are available in the international arena and India needs them.

Some areas which merit India's needs attention are: developing expertise in the area of analyzing institutions, policies, markets, and instruments, with a view to facilitating women's participation and working out an agenda which spells out specific areas and modalities rather than general demands for more

subsidies which are so easily agreed in principle but rarely acted upon in practice. NGOs will have to play a critical role in economic development which can be ensured through substantial skill upgradation, transparency, accountability and viability.

The financial sector's responsibility towards women and evolving a mechanism for integrating women in the development

process need to be taken up on a priority basis. Further, as with policy in any other areas, decision makers require several inputs for formulation of economic policy. Opinion articulated and moved through relevant forums plays a vital role.

It's time women's organisations learnt to lobby effectively to have women's concerns included in the agenda of reforms.

Shikhi Sharma, through email

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