

Our Questions

...I feel that it would be good if the questions of women readers could be answered through the health column in Manushi. The column in issue No. 7 was extremely useful. Unfortunately, some people think the truth is not good or not "decent" and refuse to read about it. However, we should not let this affect us. Please do consider my suggestion that women's health-related questions be answered in Manushi ...

Bimla Dhawan, Hansi

(translated from Hindi)

We do plan to continue the health column on a regular basis, and we invite your suggestions, ideas, help. We would also be happy to answer specific health-related questions from readers, in this column. We will preserve your anonymity, if you so desire.

—**Manushi**

Not So Woeful ?

...Right now, Manushi reads rather like a documentary entitled: "Woe, thy name is woman." While these problems we face are very real, I am sure you will agree that for a magazine to be a truly meaningful form, there should be equal treatment of both negative and positive aspects of the status of the Indian woman. There are situations and areas where woman is not the oppressed species, and where she does gain many undue advantages and considerations which are relics of the "weaker sex" era...

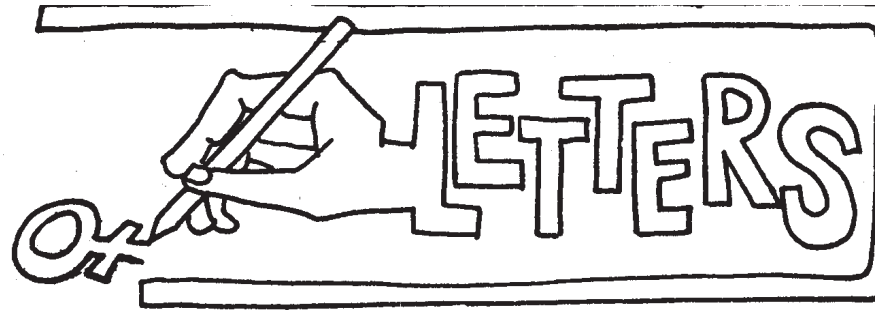
....It would be really worthwhile if women could share their experiences at work, study, home, through a column like "All in a day's work", or have an exchange of views on specific problems of employment or the lack of it. Even if we don't shake any governments, it will be a forum of expression and information...

I got interested in Manushi when I was in Delhi recently, and felt it can be developed into a formidable rival to the usual run of commercial women's magazines. I do hope it will grow nationwide...

Bharati Sadasivam, Madras

What Can Be Done ?

... I am a clerical worker in an institution where about 300 women are



employed ... You have asked me to help in reaching Manushi to many more women. This is my desire too. But I am facing a problem—very often, when I talk about Manushi, I am told that it is one-sided and it turns every woman against every man, and gives an impression that all men are bad. Please tell me how I should answer this argument...

...Recently, I met a woman in Patiala general hospital. She has been living there for about ten years. She is



completely paralysed from the waist downwards ... She told me that 13 years ago, she was married to a man who owned a tent shop in West Patel Nagar, Delhi. He had a stepsister who always quarrelled with her...One day, she was sitting in the sun on the roof of the three-storeyed building where they lived. Her sister-in-law pushed her down and she fell to the ground floor. Her in-laws found her unconscious and took her to hospital, where they were told that she would never be able to walk again.

When she told her husband what had happened, he made her swear by him that she would never tell anyone that it was her sister-in-law who had pushed her. He felt that if this got to be known, it would be difficult to get the girl married. So she agreed not to tell the truth to anyone. After some days, she was sent to her

parents. They admitted her in this hospital. Sometimes, they take her home but she spends most of her life in the hospital. She wrote many letters to her husband but received no reply. She used to spend her time praying for his health and long life.

One day she came to know that her husband had got married again. She was deeply hurt. The people in charge of the ward consoled her and made her eat her food. Since then, she has stopped praying— she has lost faith in prayer. Now she wants to get back all the goods which she had taken in dowry to her in-laws' house. Ever since she heard of her husband's re-marriage, she wants to punish him in some way, but she is unable to walk or move around. Do you think anything can be done for her ?...

Aruneshwar Kaur, Patiala

(translated from Hindi)

Criticizing The Rape Bill Or Political Activists ?

Read the article "The New Rape Bill" in Manushi No 7, 1981. The latter half of the article is shocking and damages the proper analysis of the new rape bill in the earlier part, so that the reader gets confused about the purpose of the article.

Starting from the sub-title "Only Policemen Can Rape ?" on page 44, many sweeping statements are made about political activists and about several political organizations. The criticism of political organizations starts by ridiculing joint actions. Stating the importance of joint understanding, the author fails to appreciate the role played by joint activities such as morchas and public meetings which help the participants to realize the existence of the

common enemy against whom all the exploited sections of society have to fight together. Today, when very few people get agitated about incidents of rape, joint actions are also important to have some influence on as large a section of the people as possible.

When the author makes the statement: "Many of our organizations find themselves floundering for fear of going too far", it is very vague and is not followed by any concrete examples or suggestions. Then comes the very irresponsible statement: "Any man can rape", followed by the equally irresponsible comments about men from all progressive political groups.

Here I am not discussing the author's suggestion that "in every case of rape, the man should have to prove whether the woman consented", as this is a very complicated question, and detailed study of the existing laws has to be made before discussing this. I am mainly reacting to the statements about political activists and organizations, which side-track the main subject of the article.

Making such statements is not only unfair but is dangerous as far as furtherance of women's movements is concerned. It is indeed immature to create the impression that it is very common for political activists to rape women colleagues. I have been working for the communist party of India (marxist) for the last eight or nine years, and have had the opportunity of observing men comrades not only from my own party but also from other communist parties. I can confidently say that women are completely safe in the company of communist men, not only their co-workers, but even the women among the people. Even if a minor sexual insult occurs, action is definitely taken against the culprit.

The author mentions one experience with "a well-known socialist group in Delhi university" where such a complaint taken to the group was ignored. When the name of the group is not given, such a statement has no value. Why is the author trying to defame the only section among men which clearly and actively supports women's movements? What is going to be achieved by this?

As it is, bourgeois papers in our country are always writing about

women's questions in a reactionary manner. Very often in fiction, relations between political, especially communist, men and women are portrayed in a perverted manner. If, in addition to this, feminists start writing in such a manner about leftist men, both the working class movement and the women's movement will suffer badly.

Kalpana Jawlekar, Pune



—Purni

Politics In Our Daily Lives

Congratulations for having kept Manushi alive and going! When Manushi was just coming up, I thought it ought to be more theoretical and ideological. But I have changed my position since then. Too long have we been laying emphasis on "giving" theory and politics to people, and the consequence has inevitably been squabbles, splits and endless discussions with no concrete end-product.

I think politics can never be "given" to people, especially where women's struggles are concerned. It has to come from our daily lives, experiences and circumstances. Politics is not "out there", divorced from our experience, but is very much within it. Intellectual snobbery overlooks the fact that the struggling people do have quite a sense of politics in their own way. You don't have to demonstrate on the streets to be "conscious" and political. In my own experience with other women, I realized

that a lot of women who we may think are "unaware", are actually quite conscious of their oppressed position, and do protest in their own way, against their parents or husbands.

The problem lies in the fact that because of the overarching hegemony of patriarchy. Women just accept their position as society determines it. There can be no protracted fight unless women become aware of their position. And that awareness will come not by any formal utterances of theory but by such attempts as Manushi. Manushi was long-awaited and much-needed—a medium to bring together and lay bare the struggles, frustrations and despair experienced by women and expressed by women themselves. It is this approach which brings women together and forms a sisterhood for a protracted struggle. There can be no political struggle against oppression unless we share our experiences and relate to each other through them, to realize that we are a force which can influence change...

However, I do feel, that perhaps Manushi could be a bit more interesting. It is certainly not boring, but the younger girls between 14 and 18, because of their socialization, would be more attracted to short articles and stories. I know you are short of finances and that is one reason why the magazine may not look enticing (sic) to the reader...Wouldn't it be possible to reproduce in one column sexist images in the media, especially in children's books? Highlighting such aspects does build a lot of awareness...

-Anjana Mangalagiri, UK

Goddess Or Prisoner ?

...According to our ancestors: "Where women are worshipped, there the gods reside." But today, money has to be paid before any man is willing to marry that goddess of ancient times...Today too, Kunti is insulted by Karna, and society is full of Duhsasanas ready to strip Draupadi naked. Women are being bought and sold, and sacrificed before the idol of the demon dowry...

The custom of purdah instead of vanishing is being reinforced not only by the old, but even by the younger generation. How many women today are still kept imprisoned within the four walls

of the house by their families...

Character can never develop in purdah. As early as 1905, Sayyad Aga had called for a campaign against the wearing of the burkah, but today both Hindus and Muslims impose a life of seclusion and purdah on women...

Kamlesh Malhotra, Chandigarh
(translated from Hindi)

“Respect”—For Men’s Concept Of Womanhood

The edifice of Indian womanhood is built around such words as ‘sacrifice’ and ‘compromise’. An Indian girl is taught from the beginning to take second place, to be a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife, but never an individual...

Men state that the amount of respect men have for womanhood in India, is not to be found elsewhere in the world! But what is this respect? Revering motherhood? Protecting sisterhood? These are preconceived concepts into which women are expected to fit themselves. Respect is not given to a woman as an individual having certain rights ...

How many cases do we know where a girl is sent to a mediocre school while her brother attends an expensive school, or a brilliant girl’s studies are terminated so that her brother can have the best education? And this happens in the so-called enlightened sections of society ...

Even today a woman taking up a job is frowned upon. If she continues with it after marriage, she is usually exploited and expected to hand over her salary to her husband...

A woman is revered if she “sacrifices” herself. How often have we heard: “You know, she is a *devi*.” Why? Because she completely effaced her personality and accepted uncomplainingly her husband’s ill-treatment of her. This gains her respect! ...To this day, *Satis* are worshipped. Why? Because they epitomize the negation of a woman’s self in the absence of a husband... It is the concept of Indian womanhood which is given respect, not the woman herself...

Rita Marya, Bangalore

Hidden In Our Hearts

Some days ago, I saw a copy of *Manushi* in the house of a relative, and

read it eagerly...I want to help you as much as I can. I will try to get our railway club and local library to subscribe. Many of my stories and articles have been published in various magazines. I have a strong desire to write for your magazine, to find words for the feelings that throb in some hidden corner of my heart — feelings of anger and resistance against all the atrocities that are committed against women...

Kanaklata, Dhanbad
(translated from Hindi)

Women And Buddhism

...Got engrossed in Uma Chakravorty’s article on “Women In Buddhist Literature.” Could you kindly convey my appreciation to her? She has taken great pains to sift cut relevant material from the vast Buddhist corpus, translated some very revealing passages, and what is most important, presented the whole information in such a well-knit, interesting manner. Hope to read more such articles in future issues... I also like the reviews of various Hindi movies which are eye-opening. Can we not have such reviews written on literary pieces also?...

Y. Wadhvani, Fane

Not The Weaker Sex

I received *Manushi* No. 8. As usual, it provided a great deal of information and food for thought. However the Hazaribagh report on page 16 was somewhat disturbing. According to the report, six boys raped two girls in the presence of 72 girl students and two women teachers. Earlier, these boys had harassed 40 girls and one teacher, by singing obscene songs.

Either the report is printed incorrectly—there were six girls and 40 or 72 boys, or we shall have to conclude that six boys are stronger than 40 or 72 girls. Are we trying to say that men are by nature stronger than women are—so much stronger that the women are unable to defend themselves, even when they vastly outnumber the men?

For centuries, men have been oppressing women. Today, men are irked by the sight of those of us who study, earn, move around freely, live independently. They use rape as an

instrument to teach us a lesson and humiliate us. We will have to combat rape by using our physical force, not by weeping and wailing. I really felt ashamed that in spite of the presence of 72 girls, the rapists were able to go off scot free, “hurling abuses and threats.” Even if the 72 girls had taken off their shoes and thrown them at the men, at least one of them would have got hurt.

Do we still want to preserve the image of ourselves as “the weaker sex”? Surely we can do better than silently suffer assault and later ask the police to take action? Only a child can plead inability to defend itself. But it should be remembered that a child has no rights—it has to live under the control of its elders. We are human beings, not just women but *Manushis*. We will have to defend ourselves. Particularly when we are in large numbers and the rapists are few, there is no reason for us to feel helpless. If we don’t want to be killed we must fight back.

Vasudha Dhagamwar, Dhanbad
(translated from Hindi)

I fully agree with Vasudha that we must learn to defend ourselves against attack, and to demonstrate our strength. However, I wish to point out that the girls attacked at Hazaribagh did fight back. They say: “.. She resisted...but sustained several injuries from the sticks which the boys were wielding. Apolina and I were similarly manhandled—while we were engaged in this encounter, two boys succeeded in taking away Teresa...while we were rescuing Java from an attack, two boys pounced on Monica...” Their resistance was overcome because the six men were armed with lathis, and many girls got injured in the fray. Also, it appears from the report that the attack was preplanned, whereas the schoolgirls were out on a picnic and were absolutely unprepared.

I do not think that a numerically larger group is necessarily always in a better position to fight back. After all, a few Britishers did manage to control millions of Indians for many years. And throughout history, large but ill-equipped armies have been defeated by smaller, well-trained armies. Women are 50 per cent of the world’s population yet in all countries are subjected to so much

violence. Clearly, we have been incapacitated both physically (from childhood trained to be passive and non-combative) and psychologically. The mere idea of our powerlessness is often enough to paralyse us with fear. Often, when attacked, I feel myself freeze with terror before I am able to resist by a sheer act of will.

Considering that rape is not just a physical violation of a woman but becomes a moral and social stigma on her, I felt very inspired by the courage of the Hazaribagh women in openly writing about their experience, using their own names, and demanding justice. Many rape victims are forced to remain anonymous so as to safeguard their reputation. I felt that by their courageous action the Hazaribagh women publicly demonstrated that it is the rapist, not the woman, who has reason to feel guilty and ashamed.

Ruth Vanita, Delhi

Students Against Dowry

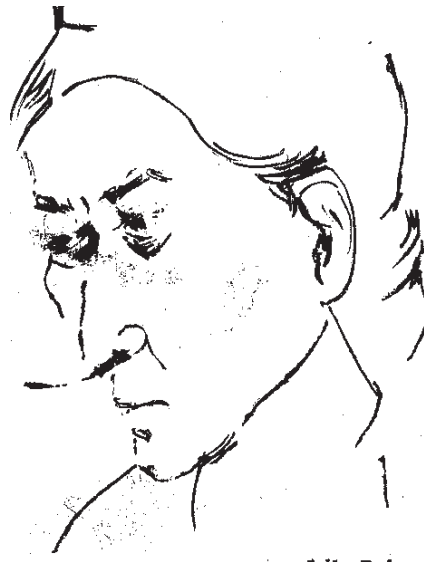
Recently, I conducted a survey in four colleges—St. Joseph's, Jamal Mohammed, Holy Cross and S.R. college—to study the opinions and attitudes of college students to dowry. A sample of 360 students was chosen, and the data collected through a structured questionnaire. 320 students responded, out of which 52.3 per cent were women, and 47.5 per cent men, 38 per cent were undergraduates, 53 per cent were humanities students and 47 per cent science students 64 percent were Hindus, and 36 per cent Christians. 86 per cent were Tamilians and 8.11 per cent Malayan's.

Students were asked whether giving and taking of dowry was a social evil and whether it should be made a cognizable offence. 98 per cent felt that dowry is a social evil, 91 per cent felt it should be made a cognizable offence. 5 per cent said it should not be made cognizable, and 4 per cent expressed indifference. 92 per cent said dowry cannot be justified on any grounds.

It was surprising that 95 per cent of the respondents had neither read nor heard of the dowry prohibition act, 1961. Only one student had read the act, and ten had heard about it. Though most of

them had not heard of the act, they expressed the opinion that the act had not been effective. Some of them quoted Ms Susheela Gopalan, MP, who had said: "The act is the joke of the century, to be kept in the national archives."

Most of the students thought that economic factors are a primary cause of dowry. About 50 per cent specified these factors: inflationary tendencies which place extra money in the hands of the business community; matrimonial advertisements; altered money value over the years, which has raised the amount of dowry; the impact of the green revolution, which has accentuated the



dowry system in the rural areas; unemployment and rising prices.

To the question: "Who is the backbone of dowry giving and receiving?", 55 per cent named the mothers of bridegrooms, 9 per cent named the mothers of brides, 7 per cent said it was relatives, and 6 per cent blamed marriage brokers. To the question: "Will you give or take dowry?" 65 per cent of men said they were for not receiving dowry, and 22 per cent were in favour of receiving it. Out of 168 women students, 61 per cent were for not giving dowry, and 9 per cent were for giving it. 12 per cent girls and 10 per cent boys said the giving and receiving of dowry depended on their parents. With regard to their role when their parents give or take dowry at the time of their marriage, 65 per cent of respondents said they would explain the evils of dowry system and persuade their

parents not to give or receive dowry. 16 per cent said they would strongly oppose it and they would even take steps like remaining unmarried or going away from their parents.

According to the students, the government should take these measures against dowry (in order of importance): put a ceiling on all marriage expenses; use education and mass media to spread awareness; establish legal aid societies and special courts to deal with family disputes like dowry and divorce; replace the present anti-dowry act with a more effective act.

Regarding measures students themselves should take, the respondents suggested that boys, should refuse to accept dowry, students should form strong unions to fight dowry and girls should say "no" to men who demand dowry. A sizable number said that voluntary agencies had an important role to play. They should help people to take the issue to the streets, and to organize meetings. They felt that educational institutions are doing nothing in this regard. It can be concluded from the survey that students are against dowry. But the question is: will they put their opinions into practice in their own lives?

J. Felix Raj, Tiruchirapalli

Female Chauvinism?

...Sreekala and I are planning to make some cards, sell them and get some money for Manushi. We are not going to let Manushi die.

Most of the men to whom I have talked about Manushi have a broad-minded view of it. In fact, I got more response from them. At least, they patiently heard me and leafed through the magazine. A few of them feel that the magazine is dry and that it points toward female segregation and female chauvinism ...

Prema Nair, Trivandrum

Blind Hatred Of Men ?

... I have read all the issues of **Manushi** and felt quite thrilled. I found my own voice in it. Thank you most sincerely, for reflecting the feelings of hundreds like me. There is one thing I would like to point out, that the struggle

against male chauvinism slightly gets the colour of blind hatred of men, especially in some of the poems. What we want is justice and equality, not female chauvinism.

...I am doing my best to make **Manushi** popular among those I know. Long live **Manushi**!

Sreekala, Trivandrum

Anti-Men Or Pro-Women ?

We are really surprised that Manushi is repeatedly accused of being anti-men, female chauvinist, male-hating. Why is it that such labels are constantly used to discourage any oppressed group like women, harijans, blacks, when they try to resist injustice?

A glance at any newspaper or magazine will show us how anti-women our society is, how much violence, exploitation and discrimination women face every day. In such a situation, when women are struggling for survival, Manushi's pro-women attitude is

intended to forward our common struggle. Through Manushi, we seek to understand how men have appropriated social, economic, political and legal power while women as a group have been rendered powerless. We also try to analyse how the oppression of women is related to other forms of oppression in our society, whether based on caste, religion or wealth.

One of the important ways in which men are able to ensure their domination in society, is by keeping women divided against each other, in every situation and relationship, especially within the family. For example, our mothers are forced to place restrictions on, and discriminate against us. But in holding back their daughters, they only reinforce their own subordinate position. So also, when women are placed in competitive positions as are mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, what they are competing for is a subordinate position. They are competing for dependence on

a man, dependence which seems to them to be necessary for their survival.

Is it not necessary for us to begin supporting each others' struggles instead of discouraging each other, as we have been taught to do ? When women act against each other, we are accused of being "our own worst enemies", but when we try to support and strengthen each other, we are called female chauvinists!

Manushi is a forum for women to express their experiences, feelings, aspirations, struggles - both individual and collective. Women are usually forced to remain silent about experiences which are supposed to be private, personal, or familial. But we think it is important for women to begin to share their experiences and through such sharing encourage each other to change their lives, so that we can all come together and act as a force for widespread change. □