

REPORTS

DELHI A Landmark In Struggle

On December 21, 1981, another of our sisters became a victim of bride-burning. 25 year old Rita was married to Satish Chadha in early 1981. Satish has a flourishing export business. His father owns a double-storeyed house in Kirti Nagar. We were told that Rita was being harassed by her in-laws, ever since she got married. She was taunted and told to get more cash from her parents. She was not allowed to mix with the neighbours or to go alone to her parents at Adarsh Nagar. One day, she got fed up and went to stay with her parents for a month. But then they persuaded her to go back to her husband.

On December 21, at ten in the morning, her husband, father-in-law and mother-in-law tried to kill her by pouring kerosene on her and setting her alight. When she tried to resist, they beat her till she was half dead, and forced her to sign a statement that she was committing suicide. At this time, she was six months' pregnant. Two hours after being burnt, Rita, who was in an unconscious state, was taken to the hospital by Satish and his father. She was naked without even a blanket to cover her, though it was mid-winter. She was admitted into AIIMS after which none of her in-laws went to see her. Her parents arrived, and fortunately, after medication, Rita survived. She gave a statement to the police that she had been harassed by her in-laws, and they had also attempted to murder her. The father-in-law was arrested but released on bail and that was the end of police action. The in-laws did not pay for Rita's medical treatment though perhaps they paid the police something, so as to escape punishment.

On January 9, a cold, rainy day, Rita's mother, brother, sister-in-law and sister came with about seven women of Janwadi Mahila Samiti, to demonstrate outside Satish Chadha's house, and demand back the dowry. About nine policemen were there to protect the Chadhas. The Chadhas' immediate neighbours wanted the matter to be hushed up and denied that Rita had been harassed. They wanted a truce between the two families. But many of us from the neighbourhood, who were not associated with the Chadhas, came out to support Rita's parents. Many people could be seen coming with their umbrellas to join the demonstration. The slogan-shouting continued for an hour but the Chadhas did not come out nor did the police bat an eyelid.

Finally, after three hours, the doors opened and with the consent of the police, one of the Samiti women went in to ask that the dowry be returned. Rita's brother said he had spent one and a half lakhs on her wedding. And then, in the drizzling rain, one by one, all the dowry articles including television, radio, dunlop sofas and mattresses, beds, 25 *tolas* of gold, steel utensils, decoration pieces, dressing table, desert cooler, were brought out. Rita's parents demanded that the Chadhas be hanged, and asked the neighbours to throw them out of the colony. Many people supported them. Some suggested that the Chadhas be painted black and paraded on donkeys.

A police case has been registered but when action will materialize nobody knows. However, the success in getting back the dowry is a landmark in the struggle. It is still doubtful whether Rita will survive but it is certain she will never



go back to that hell, since in those seven months of married life, she regretted ever having got married. Perhaps this is not only Rita's verdict but that of all those women who have had similar experiences.

—Seema Ahuja

Minority College— The Axe Falls On A Woman

In November 1981, Ms Tardeep Nagra, a young Sikh lecturer in SGTB Khalsa College of Delhi university, cut her hair short. The principal of the college, Mr Randhawa, summoned her and insisted that she apply for three months' extraordinary leave so that her hair could grow back again. Her colleagues say that the matter was discussed in the governing body and Nagra was under threat of suspension or dismissal. So she was forced to apply for and proceed on leave.

In an interview quoted in Weekend Review, the principal Mr Randhawa, did not deny that Tardeep Nagra was forced to take leave. He said: "I have absolutely nothing to say on this matter. I am not bothered by what the *lala* press says.

What the Statesman said yesterday or the Hindustan Times will say tomorrow, I have nothing to say on this matter.” In June 1978, the president of the Delhi gurudwara management committee had written a letter to the principal, saying: “It has been observed that some of the staff show disrespect to their hair/beards by cutting or trimming the same...” However, it is significant that only a woman was picked out for deterrent action.

The vice-principal’s comment was: “I am a staunch Sikh, and I cannot tolerate this kind of defiance. By cutting her hair, she has become *patit* (fallen). I am told her father and husband are also very angry... And for a woman to cut her hair is considered bad not only in Sikh culture but also in all traditional cultures—in your grandmother’s time, if a girl cut her hair, she was abused by being called *sarmundi*. After all, a girl’s hair are her jewels, her beauty. Personally, I do not like these pants and blouses that girls wear nowadays, all this westernization...”

This arbitrary interference with the personal life of a woman teacher by the authorities of an educational institution, is just one of many injustices that go on unchecked in the so-called minority colleges—St Stephen’s, and Khalsa co-educational colleges, and Jesus And Mary and Mata Sundari women’s colleges. It is well known that governing bodies of these colleges are dominated by religious leaders, who often have no pretension to academic training or background. Some of them are not even matriculates. A great deal of discrimination is practised in the appointment of teachers, administrative staff and admission of students, preference being given to those who belong to the particular minority community.

In recent years, there has been an increased whipping up of communal sentiments in Khalsa College. Notices forbidding smoking have appeared, lathi-wielding sewadars guard the premises, and some teachers wear long kirpans to class.

Ms Kapoor of Mata Sundari women’s college says that there is much less communal feeling among the staff there.

Teachers have a long history of united struggle for their rights and are much more liberal in their personal lives too. There are many cases of inter-religion marriage among them. Even the principal has liberal attitudes on this question. But there is an institutional attempt to interfere with teachers’ lives. Some jathedar members of the governing body regularly make speeches at annual functions, condemning short hair and sleeveless blouses. On one occasion, a governing body member who was on a selection committee, suspected that a particular candidate had short hair and wanted her to be asked to open out her hairdo so that his doubt could be removed. Some time ago, a kirtan competition was organized for the teachers.

More significant is the fact that the supposed minority character of the institution allows corruption to proliferate unchecked. All the office staff are women, except for the head clerk who uses his favoured position to tyrannize over them. Some years ago, two women office workers wrote a letter to the principal complaining that this man sexually harassed them and tried to molest them. The principal tried to convince the women of the man’s good intentions and innocence. However, since there were a number of other charges against him, he was suspended temporarily. After his reinstatement, one of the women who had complained against him, has been suspended, and the other has been transferred with the threat of suspension hanging over her head. Their complaint, of course, has been buried.

11 karamcharis have been suspended in 11 years. One woman librarian is being systematically harassed, has been suspended, and is not being paid her salary. None of the workers are members of the university karamchhari union. Ms Kapoor says: “Such harassment of karamcharis creates a feeling of fear among teachers too.”

So-called minority colleges have assumed a great deal of administrative freedom. They openly flout university regulations. Some time ago, Mr Kapoor, a teacher in Khalsa college, filed a

petition against the authorities for misappropriation of funds—since they had taken Rs 80 lakhs for construction of the college building which the university engineer has assessed at a cost of 27 lakhs only. Similarly, in Mata Sundari college, three accountants have been got rid of in the course of ten years. This makes it easier for records to be bungled. Teachers are denied access to their salary statements and it once happened that the money deducted from their salaries as part of the compulsory deposit scheme was not deposited by the authorities for a whole year.

In 1974, the Delhi gurudwara management committee had filed a petition claiming that university regulations should not be applicable to Khalsa and Mata Sundari colleges, since they are minority institutions. Four teachers from each of these colleges filed a counter-petition, claiming that they could prove from records that these colleges were not set up by the Sikhs for Sikh students. A majority of teachers of all four so-called minority colleges also sent letters to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, asking that the minority status of these colleges be nullified, or in the alternative that teachers be given the option of shifting to other colleges. The case is still pending in the high court since the management has not filed a rejoinder. In the meantime, the college authorities continue to act arbitrarily as in the case of Nagra, and the university does not interfere to check these irregularities.

The fact that the majority of teachers in these colleges belong to the minority communities and yet are opposed to the declaring of these colleges as minority institutions is an indication that minority status is not in the interest of teachers or students but will in fact only give more power to the authorities to curtail the rights and liberties of the academic community.

At The Heart Of High Fashion

Gujarat handicrafts emporium is one of the most popular shopping centres in Connaught Place. It has registered a 32.74 per cent increase in sales over the last six years. Yet the workers have

received an average increase of only 2.60 per cent during that period. Some assistants have been paid only Rs 300 a month. Others have not been paid at all since seven months. They get few holidays, often work overtime and miss their lunch break without any compensation.

Nearly all those involved in sales are women. The men are employed in the administrative section. Sales in this emporium is a very strenuous job, requiring the woman to be constantly on her feet, constantly pleasant to every customer. Yet the average increase in the salary of a sales assistant in 1979-80 was only 0.50 per cent while the increase in prices was 21.4 per cent.

The management has been indifferent to the workers' problems, has refused to get the accounts checked, to give any information regarding the promotion policy, or reasons for the non-implementation of government pay scales. Recently the workers have formed an association with a woman as secretary. They were finally given a patient hearing by the new managing director Ms Sudhahnalalia. Previously, no one had ever listened to their demands. However, only one concession—a daily one-hour break—has been won. The workers have given the management a specific time limit in which to deal with the major demands regarding salary scales. They are planning a prolonged agitation if management remains adamant.

—Pushpa Mehta

BIHAR Murdered For Having Daughters

Dumka, a small town in Santhal Parganas, witnessed an exclusively women's demonstration for the first time on October 19, 1981. 200 women from the villages around Hansdiha, about 30 kilometres away, demanded action against the Hansdiha police station in-charge for having hushed up the murder of Sulochana by her husband.

Sulochana had been married for more than ten years to Satyanarain Mal. She bore him seven daughters, three of whom survived. She was severely maltreated,

and at last sought refuge in her cousin's home. A local people's organization called Lok Samiti, which is organizing legal aid, helped Sulochana to file a suit in Dumka court claiming maintenance from her husband. On August 19, before the case had come up for hearing, Sulochana's husband came and persuaded her to return with him, promising that he would not maltreat her any more. She believed him and went back to the torture house.

On August 21, villagers saw her body floating in the village well. The police accepted the husband's version that she had committed suicide because she was suffering from cancer, and allowed the body to be hastily cremated. People suspect that the police were bribed. There is no medical report to prove that Sulochana had cancer, nor do any of her friends know of this.

After two months of petitioning the higher officials with no result, women activists of the Lok Samiti organized the protest demonstration under the banner of Mahila Mukti Manch. The march was led by the elderly Khalidan Bee, a deserted woman who has learnt to be independent, and a little educated tribal young woman Pushpa. Men reacted by jeering at the slogan: "Exploitation of women—stop it, stop it." The administration showed indifference; the deputy commissioner, though he had been intimated in advance, was not present in his office. People in the courts commented: "If this were a Jharkhand Mukti Morcha demonstration with people marching with bows and arrows, the whole administration would have been on the alert." It seems that Indian rulers pretend to respect non-violence but really respect only force.

- B. N. Juyal

Landless Fight Back

Six blocks in Patna district have been marked in red on the map by the administration as a region having a "parallel government" run by the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha, an organization of landless labourers. However, no official can conceal the extreme poverty which prevails in rural Bihar. The landless, who are lower caste people, mostly

"untouchables", are made to slog in the fields from dawn to dusk for a pittance of 1.5 kg of rice a day. However, the labourers first started their struggle not against this economic deprivation, but against the oppression of women.

In revenge, landlords, with the active help of the police, exiled 500 people from their village Akbarpur. They now live in rotten patched little tents on the lawns of the dak bungalow at Paligunj. Telling me about their sufferings ever since they were exiled three years ago, Jeera Devi said that Rambadan Singh, a landlord, had openly declared that he would employ only young women in his fields. Lalmani said that once Rambadan Singh had broken into her house in broad daylight with the intention of raping her young daughter but he was chased away by the people. As a result, all women were barred from entering the fields to relieve themselves, and whoever was caught in the fields was beaten up. The rich landlords treat poor women as common property to be thrashed, toyed with, raped, offered to friends as a sign of "hospitality."

The police also make sport of the women and always assume that the poor workers are thieves. Whether the dacoits assault the rich or the poor, the dacoits get the loot and the poor get the punishment. After all, it is not a coincidence that the Bihar home department in a 1978 survey found that out of 4,000 jail inmates 3,800 were poor. The DSP, Massaurhi block, also said that it is only the poor who need to steal. So whenever dacoits loot the rich, the police beat up the workers.

It was in these conditions that small groups, Nav Janvadi Jana Sangathanas, sprouted in the villages. The first thing they did was to organize a night-watch in the fields, to prevent molestation of women. These groups merged into the Bihar Pradesh Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in Patna on February 23, 1981, in a rally remembered for the large number of landless labourers who took part in it—not at the call of any political party but on their own initiative. They presented a memorandum to the governor, demanding implementation of the minimum wages act and protection of the honour of the

women against police high-handedness.

Women have played an important role in all the struggles launched so far. The BPKS handles petty theft by beating up the thief or confining him in a room for a few hours. Those who molest women are given a thrashing, and paraded round the village on a donkey, with their heads shaven and faces blackened. In Lahsuna, the labourers refused to work on the fields of landlord Tuntun Singh because he had raped a woman. What happens when the police interfere is clear from another case in the same village. Kishori Singh, accused of raping Phenkani Devi, was surrounded by angry villagers but the police intervened and assured them that he would be punished by law. Instead, Phenkani is now in Patna central jail while Kishori has disappeared. The villagers claim that he has been escorted to safety by the police.

The Bihar state administration has reacted to all this in a predictable fashion. Over 200 people, including a large number of children, have been imprisoned and a 5,000 strong police force is swarming in the villages.

However, spirits are high. On September 24, 1981, a rally of landless labourers surrounded Bikram police station demanding immediate release of two labourers who had been taken into custody. It was the women who dared to break through the police station gates. Sharda Devi, a district committee level member of BPKS, said: "We have suffered the worst and we have to rebel first of all." Chandravati, a girl of 15, shot by the police at point-blank range in Pirhi village, has become a heroine. Chandra muneshi, her sister-in-law, who has lost four family members, said: "I will not leave the Kisan Sabha. It is our organization."

—Anjali Deshpande
(from Mainstream)

Adivasi Women's Camp

A camp for adivasi women was held at Lonjo from November 26 to 28, 1981. On the first day, a number of problems affecting adivasi women were discussed, like the exploitation of women in mines, women having no right to land in spite of doing most of the agricultural work,

women being forced into prostitution and treated as dishonoured, though the men involved remain respected gentlemen. Shanta Bai, who represented the Chhattisgarh Nari Mukti Manch described in detail the struggles waged by her organization, and also expressed the need to have regular meetings in every village. On the second day, participants shared their experiences at home and at the workplace. It was felt that in all spheres it is the woman who is victimized. This sharing helped all those who were coming out of their homes for the first time, to express themselves.

The discussion was followed by a cultural programme to which the village people were invited. The participants acted out the various ways in which women are exploited and this was followed by an open discussion. It was interesting to hear the men's reactions. One of the issues raised was wife-beating. According to the gentlemen here, the wife should keep quiet even if the husband returns home drunk and abuses or beats her. Why? Because he is drunk, and even if he beats her, it is only to show her the right path. This implied that even a drunken man is better aware of the right path than is a woman! The camp helped us women to understand each other better and to speak to one another with mutual trust and confidence.

—Ann Mattam

PUNJAB Preventing The Man's Re-marriage

Recently, more than 400 teachers, both women and men, staged an angry demonstration in Tapamandi town, against Rajkumar, a government employee, who is the husband of a teacher named Kamla devi.

Kamladevi was married 12 years ago. She has two daughters and a son. Rajkumar used to torture her in various ways—by keeping her hands under the wooden legs of the bed, and by tying her up and imprisoning her. He once forced her to resign her job, but she was later able to withdraw the resignation. She is now living separately from him and has filed a suit for maintenance.

Rajkumar used to accuse her of being immoral and ugly, and has now contracted a second marriage, though he pretends that the second wife is the wife of his nephew.

He denies having remarried, and wants Kamladevi to return. But she is afraid that he will burn her to death if she does so. The demonstrators were demanding that Rajkumar be arrested and prosecuted, and all those helping him to hide his re-marriage be punished.

ANDHRA PRADESH Today's Draupadi

A woman abused some influential villagers because one of them had made advances to her daughter-in-law. The same night, she was virtually stripped naked on the road. This happened on September 16 at Pedda Chelmade village, in Medak district, the prime minister's constituency.

45 year old Golla Parvathamma belongs to the shepherd caste. On September 12, a villager, Tenugu Srisailam, made advances towards her daughter-in-law, Satyamma. The next day, the village Gollas held a meeting and decided that Srisailam should touch Satyamma's feet and apologize to her. But Srisailam's family rejected this. Three days later, Parvathamma's son, who works as a labourer in Hyderabad, came to the village. He went to the Tenugu house to protest against the incident. He was abused and there was a scuffle. The same night about 30 people, armed with lathis, attacked her house and beat up her husband.

At about 10 pm. four men including Sangareddi, patwari of a neighbouring village came and said that the village sarpanch had summoned Parvathamma. When she resisted, they dragged her to the house of the sarpanch, who, however, said he had not called her. As she was returning, the same people followed her, and pulled off her sari and petticoat. They kicked and beat her. Left with only her blouse, Parvathamma snatched the turban of a passerby, wrapped it round herself, and ran home. The next morning, she fled to another village and did not return home for three days.

The police version is that

Parvathamma's son had attacked the Tenugus' house, and injured three people, so Parvathamma was stripped in revenge. The sarpanch and Sangareddi say they know nothing about the incident.

No case was registered till November. Only after complaints were made to the prime minister and chief minister, did the police finally register cases of causing hurt, outraging modesty, assault and house trespass. However the accused were not arrested. The accused also registered a complaint against Parvathamma, her husband and son for rioting and causing hurt with a dangerous weapon.

Explaining the causes for delay in filing the chargesheet, the sub-inspector, B. Mahender Reddi, said he was busy in September because of the annual inspection of his police station by the superintendent and the sub-divisional police officer. Senior police officers of the district are supposed to visit the scene of the incident when grave offences like murder and dacoity are reported. As stripping a woman is not considered a grave offence, no senior police officer had gone there for investigation. In fact, the district collector Ms Gayathri became aware of the incident, only when it appeared in the newspapers in November. She has directed the revenue divisional officer to conduct an enquiry into the incident.

—from *The Hindu*

VARANASI

Successful Slide Show

The Nari Sangharsh Samiti of Bombay put up a slide show in the Banaras Hindu University women's hostel on November 5, and in the Rajputana boys hostel on November 6. The first part of the show exposed how advertising uses women as sex objects, and contributes to setting up mindless attractiveness as a norm for women.

The second part focused on rape, the false ideas and myths regarding rape which are prevalent in our society, the actual situation, and possible solutions to the problem. The slide shows were followed by discussion.

—Madhu Aggarwal
(translated from Hindi)

GUJARAT

Women Against Anti-Women Theatre

The highlight of this year's drama season was a protest staged by the Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG) jointly with the Swaman Raksha

the minister for cultural affairs and the licence board, appealing to them to withdraw the licence for staging such plays. About 50 women took part in the demonstration. Some of them carried placards with slogans: "Stop insulting women", "Women's bodies not for sale", "Withdraw the play's licence." Leaflets



Demonstrating Against An Anti-Women Play In Ahmedabad

Samiti and the Jyoti Sangh, against the performance of the Gujarati play "Aaje Dhandh Bandh Chhe."

According to Ilaben Pathak, convenor of AWAG, the play abounds in obscene dialogues and scenes. Though it pretends to deal with the rehabilitation of prostitutes, the play is an outright insult to women, who are portrayed as sexual objects. Throughout, the play emphasizes that a woman, to whichever level of society she belongs, can be shown her proper place only by thrashing her. Hence the play is an insult to the dignity of womanhood. The announcements of the play in the local papers, and the hoardings displayed, were aimed at titillating the public.

Prior to the staging of the demonstration, Ilaben Pathak wrote to

were distributed to the public, appealing to them to boycott such vulgar plays, and protest against their performance. The demonstration was peaceful and no one was stopped from buying tickets.

The demonstration seems to have had the desired effect. The licence board informed the producer and the director, that because of the protest against the play, they would like to review it again and see if it could still be allowed to be performed. The troupe has since left the city. Also encouraging is the fact that two other Gujarati plays "Sasro Vechvo Chhe" and "Patni Pyar Line Char" have been issued notices asking them to show show cause why they should be allowed to perform, when they do not remain faithful to the script. Local papers and magazines also took note of this event.

- Amina Amin

MADRAS

Men No Martyrs

In the last issue, we reported that a case had been filed in Madras high court, challenging the reservation of half the seats in buses for women. Bharati Sadasivam reports from Madras: "The reservation of seats for women in PTC buses was upheld by justice G. Ramanujam who said it was neither excessive nor unreasonable, because statistics show that the female population is substantially the same as the male population. Also, under article 15 of the constitution, the state has the power to provide certain special facilities for women."

Bharati comments: "You will be surprised to know how many male voices were raised in protest against the 'fair sex not playing fair' (Indian Express youth page) & male colleague of mine sneered: 'Madras women are smart, they get the best of everything.' While acknowledging the unintended compliment, it would be in order to point out that though the left row and the back seat are reserved for women, it is only during peak hours that this reservation actually works. 'At other times, men do sit in these seats with impunity. On several occasions I have travelled on buses where the last row was fully occupied by men, though women passengers were standing. So though the system exists in principle, actually men passengers take whatever they can, whenever they can. So the martyr stance is uncalled-for."

MAHARASHTRA

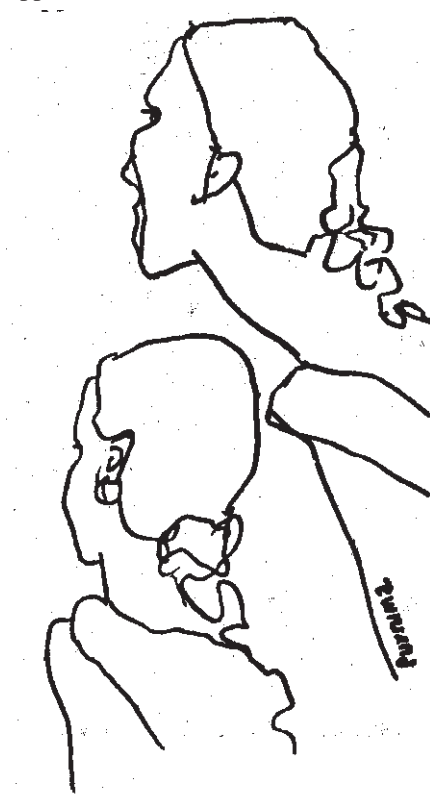
Battles Against The Ban

Recently, a woman named Najma Bangi, living in Bijapur, went to see a film. By this action, she was supposed to have wounded the religious sentiments of the Muslim community in that area, which had placed a ban on women going to the cinema. So the police put her in prison and the authorities of the Anjuman school where she was a teacher, dismissed her from her post.

Najma is just one of many women who have been attacked, fined, and threatened for defying the ban promulgated in various regions of the

country. In Jalgaon, Kadir Patel was fined Rs 51 by the communal tribunal for taking his wife to the cinema. Yusuf of Bhusawal was also fined Rs 51 for taking his wife Noorjehan to the circus. In Akola where the ban has been imposed by Sikhs, Subira was accosted by some youths as she was returning from the cinema. They shredded her dress with razor blades and told her: "The next time it will be your body."

Women like Najma, 22 year old Razia of Jalgaon and Zohra Jabeen of Nagpur are fighting lone battles against the ban, at great personal risk., Razia says: "I have met over 400 Muslim women in the last two months and all except three were opposed to the ban."



It is appalling that in a supposedly free country, women citizens can be blackmailed in this manner, and the police actively assist in denying them their rights, even going so far as to imprison them for disobeying the arbitrary orders of communal authorities.

Mangalore—Follow-up

In the last issue, we reported the protest demonstration by Stree Jagrathi, Mangalore, against the rape of a school teacher Teresa by P.K. Perady. They now inform us that Perady has since been

arrested, charge-sheeted and released on bail. The agitation to have him punished still continues. □

MY BOOK

*I too have written a book
Born of a woman's pain,
Of a man's hunger.*

*People did not read my book.
Perhaps they didn't find time to
read it,
Perhaps they felt
No need to keep it
In their libraries
And reading rooms.*

*Rejected, discarded,
My book has recorded
Man's hunger
For food,
For sex.*

*When he hungers for food,
I prepare it.
When he hungers for sex,
I offer myself.
I become his food.*

*After all, is he not Humanity
Who will fight the good fight?
And so is it not his lawful right
To consume me
To satisfy his hunger ?*

*Is it not his right
To burn my book
In celebration of his "literary
writings"?*

*And yet
I keep writing this book.
Again and again,
I resurrect it from its ashes.*

*From brothels,
From orphanages,
Protective homes, prisons,
I gather grief, pain.*

*I struggle
To assert the humanity
Of woman,*

*To make place in this world
For my book*

—Manimala

(translated from Hindi by Manushi)