



LETTER TO MANUSHI

I'll Read It Aloud...

... When we got *Manushi*, we found that everything written in it was linked to each moment, each aspect of our lives. We've read *Manushi* so closely, we love it so much, that we almost know every word in it by heart. We liked everything in it, especially the poem, *Trishanku*, and the reports... but what sank into our hearts the moment we read it was : "I am a woman and if I live I fight, and if I fight I contribute to the liberation of all women, and so victory is born even in the darkest hours."

Send us 25 to 30 more copies as soon as you can, but at least half of them in Hindi, because we feel it should reach the poor women of our society, who are the living proof of all that is written in *Manushi*, who are doubly oppressed – by the socio-political structure and because they are women...

As soon as we talked about *Manushi* to the women who do the sweeping and cleaning in our hostel, one of them said, "Give *Manushi* to me. I'll read it out aloud to everyone. My husband..." She couldn't say more, but we – any of us – could have said what she left unsaid! And then six, seven, eight, so many women began to speak together – "Give *Manushi* to us... to me... to me..."

We have been so inspired by *Manushi*... new forms of work lie before us... write to us about what we should do for *Manushi* and Manushis.*

Rajbala and Surina, Chandigarh

Manushi will be of tremendous use to our women's study circle... I am a clerk in a college library... we read *Bayaja* regularly. Last month we collectively read Simone de Behaviour's *The Second Sex* in Marathi translation. We have all kept

*indicates translation from Hindi

in touch with the powerloom workers here. Fifty per cent of them are women. They had a heroic struggle last year. The women were the most militant, believe me... We celebrated March 8th, by holding a small meeting which was attended by women of various classes.

Neelima Kamat, Belgaum.

Our comrades in the battlefield, poor women, are helping us in the organization. We plan to read *Manushi* out to them in a group. We have prepared hand-made posters on the women's problem, in which we have said "Read *Manushi*" and given the contact address of *Manushi*. We have put up these posters in various places and are making all efforts to publicize it. Recently, there have been incidents of atrocities on women in Patna city. I shall be sending you a full report soon...*

Mani, Patna

Our Sisters Abroad

The journal has arrived and I whooped down the corridor. How exciting, thrilling - I'm so excited by it all that I'm just about crying... The combination of personal experience and reportage will be dynamic. If it becomes, as you intend, a link between women working in different areas, that will be wonderful. A blurb about *Manushi* will appear in *Women and Labour*, and other feminist journals here.

Gail Pearson, Australia

I read my *Manushi* carefully from cover to cover and I can't tell you what a great job you've done because the words escape me. But I am enclosing the description I wrote for submission to as many American publications as I can get to take it, to try to spread the news of your existence, to raise support and hopefully funds. I thought I could easily collect a small amount from my students

as a goodwill gesture ... After all, I'm going to use the poems in my course on the neo-feminist novel...

Tobe Levin, US.

The first issue is really marvelous and encouraging... The problems of Asian women living in Britain have begun to be discussed, both in the general women's movement and by organizations set up by Asian women themselves. A journal like *Manushi* is also relevant in this context... I am writing to give support, and congratulate you on behalf of all the women who have seen the paper. The response has been really encouraging here...

Adi Cooper, UK

Congratulations! I was very impressed by the first issue. I hope you will be able to keep up the concern and quality... I'd like to see a series of articles done on rape and its cousin, eve-teasing. Most women I've talked to here do not understand it, or why it happens.

Rape must be seen not as the result of a man's uncontrollable lust, but rather as an act of power, domination, humiliation. It results in a society which degrades women to sex objects, less than human and subordinate to men... A man rapes out of hatred and the desire to subjugate, dominate and control a woman. Sex is only the means, not the end...

My feeling is that women must come to terms with rape and understand it thoroughly before they can understand the status and problems of women... In the Indian context, rape takes so many forms, from the landlord's use of his women labourers to sexual harassment of factory workers of secretaries by bosses, to rape of poor women by police and to the methods of torture in prisons... I am more familiar with it in the

American context, but the underlying thread is the same...

Edie Robinson, US.

Bourgeois Feminists ?

... We are strongly in agreement with your position that freedom from oppression for women is possible only through a radical change in this unjust system, and that only the toiling women can lead this struggle for liberation.

However, the editorial ... does not provide a class analysis of women's oppression and treats women as a homogenous group... It fails to locate women as part of an oppressed section within an oppressive society, as a section of toiling people who are fighting for their liberation – as this system exploits not just women but also men...

Thus *Manushi* has failed to differentiate itself from the bourgeois feminist magazines of today.... We feel that *Manushi* ought not to publish articles like "Letters Written At Death's Door", which read more like the sensational gossip columns...

Pennurimai Iyakkam (Movement for Women's Rights), Madras.



A Voice For Millions

I used to feel that I could do nothing to spread awareness among women because it is such a vast areas and I am all alone. But now I feel it is possible because through *Manushi*, I will be supported and helped by many other women like myself...

"Hostels or Prisons" present the truth as it is. I know this only too bitterly through my own experience which has been even worse than that shown in this survey... In Madhya Pradesh hostels the situation is terrible. Girls do not even have the right to ask for medical aid when they are unwell. They are completely dependent on the whims of the matron... And any girl who protests is called immoral.

... If this is so, boys should be far more "immoral" because they protest about everything – small or big, right or wrong! Is the responsibility of the whole social and national morality on the shoulders of girls alone, even though they have no identity in this male-dominated society? And inspite of all this responsibility, why so many restrictions on girls ?*

Sonali, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

I've just got copies of *Manushi* and hasten to write to say how warmed and moved I am by its courage. Keep going – you know how many millions may find some sort of a voice here. I'll certainly make sure these copies go as far as I can get them in Hyderabad and that whatever little we might be able to contribute in regular payments will also come. All power to your elbows and warm, warm wishes for many, many issues to come.

Suzie Tharu, Hyderabad.

With Open Arms

... Our magazine was received with open arms by all the girls in our college. I could have easily sold about a hundred issues of Hindi... I will arrange a meeting with girls and some lady lecturers...

Santosh Gupta, Bhatinda.

... Happy to tell you that *Manushi* is getting popularity among the young generation here... for it reads interestingly ... We are translating the poems *I am a woman* and *Wedding Invitation* into Kannada and sending them to an anthology of poems written exclusively by women...

V. Vanaja, Mysore.

Jargon & Generalizations

... The good things about *Manushi* first. More power to you. It was wise to bring it out simultaneously in Hindi and English. English journals tend to get across to a limited, and especially with women readers, to an elitist public... Keeping the price of the journal down as you have managed to do must have taken effort, and you deserve a bouquet for it too...

I found your editorial courageous: be

careful of using too many rhetorical questions and slogans, thought, and generalizations must be examined for their honesty and validity before being flung into the fray (for instance, *is it true* that the "personal" or "private" attitude



can only "trivialize" social issues like the oppression of women at home or at work, and hinder concrete action?)

I thought the poems were second-rate to pretty awful, *Wedding Invitation* being about the best of a bad lot, and the song at the end of V. Meera's otherwise intelligent and perceptive article about the worst. A poem is not a hook to hang a slogan on.

Suggestions for the future : 1. Keep your claims modest and as free of jargon as possible. 2. Do not lower your standards of creative writing for the odd story or poem which happens to sum up the feminist issue so neatly. 3. Might it not be a good idea to get men readers and contributors actively involved in *Manushi* ? 4. Is it wise to present only one side of the picture all the time? 5. Perhaps you could publish objective and/or critical letters to *Manushi* as well as straight compliments?...

Lalitha Maasen, West Germany

An Urgent Need

... I fully support your new venture as it's an urgent need in our country, a need for us women to realize first and foremost that the women's question is a question at all...

Nalini Nayak, Trivandrum.

... Please do send me at least ten extra copies of the next *Manushi* for propaganda purposes. This Tamilnadu is certainly one of the more backward places as far as the situation of women is concerned... All good wishes and courage in the struggle. We will try to get together a team which can translate

Manushi into Tamil.

Gabriele Dietrich, Madurai

The Right To Our Names

Your first issue was as good as the expectations built up... Reading Meera Dewan's article, I am prompted to share a similar experience with your readers. I applied for a job and was given the standard employment form – name, address, father/husband's name... I left the last column blank and submitted the form. Inevitably, the person in charge approached me questioningly.

“Why have you left this part blank?”

“Because since I am divorced, I use neither my father's nor my ex-husband's name.”

“Why can't you use your father's name?”

“With my married surname?”

“You've retained your surname, I see. But why?”

“To keep the same surname as my children.”

“And you don't want to use your husband's name.”

“Of course not.”

“But you have to write something...”

“Will a thumb impression do?”

What's all this hassle about a middle name anyway? Men don't write their wives' or mothers' names on job application forms. And for that matter, do middle names mean anything at all? If not, why can't we just dispense with them altogether.

Meher Pestonji, Bombay

Only A woman?

My congratulations for this courageous effort ... The conditions created by the present social system have moulded our psychology so that we ourselves uphold this system. Women have become the instruments of women's oppression ... even educated, working and so-called “intellectual” women do this, that is why girls in hostels have to suffer the tyranny of women wardens. How many “Meera Dewans” have to face the taunts and suspicions of other women – their sisters – for the “crime” of having left their

husbands, as if a woman has no identity without a husband...

Even though we may call ourselves leftists, our way of thinking has become distorted so that we think, “A woman is only a woman. Even while protesting on the streets, she should not have a *lathi* or a stone in her hands or even carry a flag. She should only have a broom or a rolling-pin”.*

Kamla Chaturvedi, Rajasthan.

I visited Chandigarh some days ago and a friend gave me *Manushi*. Once I started reading it, I couldn't put it down. This is the first time I have read such a magazine. I'm quite sure this magazine of ours will inspire young women.

I'm a student of law... I've found that a girl who laughs aloud on the street is stared at by everyone while no one looks at a boy who does this. When boys pass remarks, girls just bend their heads and walk away instead of reporting... My brother told me, “If a boy comments on you, don't answer, remain silent, otherwise you will be pursued by him.” At first I followed this advice, but I used to boil inside.

Now I always confront such boys. When I look at the other girls, I think, “If only I could collect them together and tell them that we ought to resist such behaviour, we should go and talk to such boys, explain to them...” I will give this magazine to every girl I know. I will send you Rs. 10 a month regularly so that we may take our magazine to as many girls as possible...*

Punam Sachdev, Kurukshetra University

I think it's an admirable venture and I fully sympathise with your difficulties. The librarian of our university has promised to subscribe... The general attitude seems to be rather pessimistic. One needs to ... think constructively...

Oh, I know what women suffer, as a girl I've gone through similar experience too – catcalls, remarks, looks... We need to build up our morale to face such situations, change our passive attitudes and walk with a raised head and confident look on the streets. The average girl...

bends her head and walks on, flushing with anger.

But what about the nearest police station? Where are our rights as citizens of India? How many of us really exercise them? And those who do, why don't they let the world know what sort of a reception they get when they lodge a complaint of this nature?... As for the women ministers of this country, they can hardly raise their heads from cutting inaugural ribbons to look into such matters.

Last year, I did an interview for *Youth Times*, entitled “Why Purdah?”... I stood up for the rights of women, while my classmate Rafath, who wears a *burkha* to college, said that woman is a sexual symbol... and therefore should be hidden... I got a score of letters full of praise but quite a few sent me dire warnings about the impropriety of girls voicing their opinion about religion.

Nishat Hyder, Hyderabad.

The better Sort Of Men

When I was at Pune... I came across *Manushi*... It reminded me of some lines of Eleanor Marx... “Women are the creatures of an organized tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organized tyranny of idlers... Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand that their emancipation will come from themselves. Women will find allies in the better sort of men, as the labourers are finding allies among philosophers, artists and poets. But the one has nothing to hope from man as a whole, as the other has nothing to hope from the middle class as a whole...”

Narayan, Kharagpur.

Manushi... is unique. It has discussed everything under the sun connected with women. The magazine has been passed to my co-workers and they have all appreciated it.

Siraz Sheikh, Baroda.

... I am very glad that such a magazine for women exists in our country... I want your magazine to be read by the masses.

Sunil Kumar Garg, Patiala.
Need For Co-ordination

To make publication and circulation of *Manushi* more efficient, should not we form *Manushi Forum* or Co-ordination Committee of *Manushi* in various centers/ If we have such groups in Bombay, Hyderabad, Baroda, Amritsar, Delhi our work in terms of (a) collecting ads, (b) raising funds (c) getting goods articles, poems, pictures can be organized and regularized. Moreover, they can also have seminars, workshops, discussions on women's question.

Vibhuti Patel, Bombay.

... The Editorial Note spells out your aims and I wish we could have similar efforts in every region and language to motivate a band of dedicated young women to break away from the present...

S. Sharma, Trivandrum.

... *Manushi* should have very many more pictures otherwise the pages look very monotonous. If you can, you must publish plays on women's situation and write a note requesting women's groups to stage them in their own localities and discuss them. The Hindi films running should be discussed and analysed in each issue as has been done in the first issue...

Lalitha Dhara, Bombay

You are courageous to bring out this journal. Women have to speak together. There is so much darkness all around and within. One must combat it, one can only combat it, by speaking. Speaking together...

Meena Alexander, Hyderabad

... I am absolutely delighted – that people there have clearly worked so hard to get it off the ground, that it is there... I can't tell you how pleased I am... I will be in touch with a couple of Asian women's Organizations here to see if they will take it up...

Satish Kanwar, UK.

Manushi is excellent. Congratulations: ... I think we should send one copy to all *Pacific and Asian Women's Forum* members ... I feel under foreign subscription rates you should

mention at least Asia if not also Africa and Latin America in order to emphasise that *Manushi* is keen to establish contacts with women in other third world countries...

Kamla Bhasin, Thailand.

Women's Lot

Congratulations on your collective effort. I liked particularly the poems and film reviews.

There was a very good point in the article on Birth Control. The men never get sterilized; it is always the women who have to. Men have their excuses ready – that the operation will make them weak and they will not be able to carry much weight, and other such trash. It is usually women who have to be hospitalized for more than a fortnight...

One of our neighbours has nine children, four of whom died due to malnutrition. Now, the wife is expecting again. The doctors refused to operate on her because she is too weak and has no stamina at all. But the husband refused to get operated on the ground that he has heavy manual work to do in the press where he works and cannot afford to stay home for a couple of days! So, the reproduction machine is still on, and is continuing to produce more children!

It would be good to let women know what is happening in other states... I will send you regularly all the pamphlets and magazines being published by us in Telugu...

Ambika Hyderabad.

I am a Hindi teacher... I showed *Manushi* to many women. They were both happy and astonished that women are becoming conscious of their rights... all the writing in the magazine was good, but we specially liked the poems. "The Letters Written At Death's Door" are a horrifying instance of what is happening to women...

Surinder Kaur, Faridkote.

There are very few women in India who are economically independent. And even among these few, only a tiny minority are aware of their social

oppression and willing to wage a *jihad* against it. I am a housewife in my thirties. I have spent most of my life in the kitchen. I've participated in women's protests in this locality. I do a little writing. I could send you reports of women's meetings and demonstrations...

Mamta Chattopadhyay, Durgapur.

All Sob Stories

The first issue appears to be a culmination of "sob stories" of women which are available in various journals flooding the market... Nowhere does the journal even mention women's achievements.

Why is it the Editorial Collective have kept their identity a secret? What are they afraid of? Are they fighting a battle from behind the walls – like a mouse finding security in a mouse trap!! In the feature on hostels, why has JNU been left out? Was it the shortage of space or a bias towards the more strict prisons by overlooking the less strict ones?

...Lastly, the authors are all women... probably, we forget that the male species is as inevitable as women... To fight for the women's cause is to fight for a human cause. Let us not take a superficial approach to the cause of women by "burning bras".

Meera Basu, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

Of Historic Importance

I consider the publication of this journal of historic importance. In the history of women's movement in India, it will occupy the place of a pioneer as a theoretical expression of the movement, and in the history of progressive ideas in India, it will again occupy a prominent place. The front page picture marks out *Manushi* as a different sort of women's journal...

In the beginning, more honest stuff will come only from anonymous women. More autobiographical material on the inner turmoils, desires, frustrations of women of all ages and classes need to be published. Such material can be the only basis to construct a scientific theory of female personality...

Pritam, Chandigarh.

Reaching the Less Literate

Is it possible to translate this magazine into the local languages at least where there is a co-ordinating committee in existence? *Manushi*.... should reach women who are workers in cities and who live in slums... The local language is the best medium of communication. The price of the magazine can be reduced by using cheaper paper ... Is there any co-ordinating committee in Calcutta ? I would like to contribute to *Manushi* through those involved in this city...

Neela Singh, Calcutta

... About the sweeperesses in our Union, none of them are literate. We will be writing for you soon about their problems. Punjab too will regularly contribute to *Manushi*!

... The column in *Manushi* to analyse the modern new wave films is very important. So far, the Indian capitalists class has made fools of the common people through the Bombay formula films. But since that weapon is becoming blunt, the ruling class has spread its tentacles wider through the new wave films. It is unfortunate that the image of woman in these new films is the same as

in the old films, even though the new ones deal with the problems of men, especially of middle class men.*

Sardara Singh, President, Balmiki Sabha, Patiala

Simple Speaks Truth

I hope that *Manushi* will create more awareness about the need for a socialist revolution... I have circulated my copy among my friends, and even the reactionary, confusionary have been impressed because it simply speaks truth.

Yours is a really honest and daring publication. It exposes the exploitation of women in totality and suggests solutions. At least two or three articles should deal openly with the link between women's degraded status and the capitalist system...

Here in Kashmir our democratic politicians have a chauvinistic attitude to women. At a public meeting recently organized by opposition parties in Jammu a former MP Shamim Ahmed Shamim reportedly condemned Sheikh Abdullah... for encouraging women to appear on stage by touring the state with a cultural troupe chiefly comprising

women. Citing religious precedents, he said that these girls were the Izzat of the people and this Izzat could only be preserved within the four walls of their homes.

I am equally disappointed with the local Organization for the Welfare of Women. Last year a friend's sister committed suicide by pouring kerosene oil on her clothes and setting herself on fire. She was driven to this step by her husband's family who were demanding more dowry from her parents. The organization's attitude to this shocked me...

Prabhat Singh, Jammu.

Greatest Obstacle

... Rape is a form of exploitation. To end it, we will have to acknowledge that this is man's biggest crime and women are in no way responsible for it. We are also oppressed through the medium of words, like "Motherhood", *Pativrata* or faithfulness to husbands – there should be separate analyses of such words too. There should be serious discussion of these concepts in all journals, because these words are the greatest obstacle to the freedom of women...*

Kanchan Kumari, Patna