



Many Battles

...**Manushi** is becoming progressively better and one can feel the change from stories of torture and cruelty against helpless women to stories where the women have taken a stand and resisted oppression. Also, I like the fact that you take up subtler issues and not only gross ones like beating, forced sex, dowry, killings.

The other day, I was speaking to my mother who runs a school for little children. I asked her whether crying boys are called “girls” as a mode of humiliation—as if to say that inferior behaviour like crying is okay for inferior creatures like girls but not okay for superior ones, boys. My mother said she would try and stop people from saying such things because she appreciated the point I was trying to make about discrimination.

One issue which bothers me a lot is that of remaining unmarried. I find myself being questioned by men and women, (more women) all the time. They keep telling me I am making a mistake. Others, of course, prefer to believe that no man wants to marry me. Frankly, I do not know which category is larger. Not that one changes one’s lifestyle because of what people say but this mentality of people should be changed.

Shaati Chattopadhyay, Bombay

Indian Women Abroad

...Perhaps you know that women are in trouble here too because men, even though they do want to enjoy themselves according to the local culture, are totally against their wives

doing the same. They want their wives to be the same as they were in India. Men treat their wives as slaves or even worse.

A working woman has to do three jobs in a day. She has to look after the house, she has to go out to earn and she also has to look after her husband and children. Still, the man is not satisfied. He wants to be treated as a king. When he comes home from work he wants to be served tea and dinner right away. If he is in a bad mood he has the right to beat his wife and subject her to indignities.

Men say they respect women very much. This is true only to the extent that when a man goes out his behaviour to other women is good. But when it comes to his wife, his behaviour is inhuman, undignified and unjust. The question of treating women as equals does not even arise...

Bimla Chugh, Canada

Ray Of Hope

I was fortunate to come across a copy of **Manushi**. This effort by women to play an independent role in working for women’s liberation is praiseworthy.

I brought up my daughter, Rajni, under very difficult circumstances but, inspired by ideas of women’s freedom, I got her educated as a doctor. I got her married to a young lawyer. She had two beautiful daughters within five years of marriage. She pawned her jewellery and opened a dispensary. She also had a good job in the municipality. She was the most popular doctor in her village. She was only 27 years old. And on May 23, 1984, I suddenly got a telegram that Rajni had died.

Letters To Manushi

When we went there we were told that she had committed suicide by swallowing poison. We got a terrible shock. We are not sure whether she committed suicide or died in some other way. But in any case, this is a kind of silent mental torture unto the death. That an educated, self sufficient woman should have to take poison and die under her own roof is very painful.

After this happened, I began to think more seriously about women’s situation. I see a ray of hope in **Manushi**. My second daughter, Charu, is doing MSc in Mathematics. I want her to read **Manushi** regularly. Her husband is a sensible youth. I am subscribing for both of them...

Ek Nath Salve, Chandrapur

(translated from Hindi)

New Roles, Old Values

The first woman on the Gujarati stage was Mary Fanton, a Parsi woman, who appeared in 1865. Male artistes who could perform female roles were considered among the best and were much in demand. Women playing women’s roles became common around 1930 or even later. Today, though women do act female parts their hold on the stage is negligible. There are only a couple of well entrenched actresses who can influence the decision making process. They are also the ones who draw packed houses...

In the early part of the century, it was uncommon for women to go to see plays. Even today, the female audience is a passive one. They accompany their male counterparts who decide whether or not to go to a play, which play to go to, how much money to spend and so on...

From 1930 to 1984 the stage has

undergone many external changes. Costumes for women are designed to attract male audiences but this modernity remains restricted to dress. The values presented in characterisation of female characters are designed to reinforce male superiority...

Under the auspices of Ahmedabad Women's Action Group, I studied 35 plays put up in Ahmedabad city from November 1983 to January 1984. They were staged by commercial groups from Ahmedabad and Bombay and by local amateur groups.

My analysis revealed that in 84 percent of the plays there were more male than female characters. Most of the male characters were older than female characters. Most of the women were shown as young wives, young mothers or college going girls. Women were shown older only when portrayed as mothers. But men were shown older in many roles like those of a father, successful professional, political leader.

In children's plays too, mothers, sisters, fairies, goddesses, princesses and witches were young and beautiful. The older women were either grandmothers or witches. In contrast, older men were magicians, monsters, kings, headmen of villages. Thus children are bombarded with the message that youth and beauty are the essential virtues of a woman.

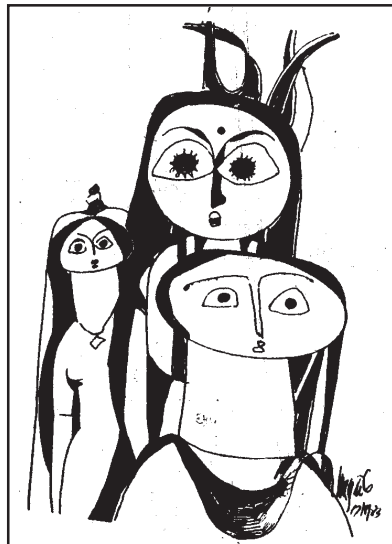
Though many women were shown having jobs very few were presented through their work regardless of their family relations. In 56 percent of the plays the marital status of women was specified clearly while men's marital status was specified only in three percent of plays.

Most plays revolved around men. Those which revolved around women depicted the men dominated phase of the woman's life. But men dominated plays show men's relations both with men and with women. Thus in 72 percent of plays relationships between women do not exist. Most relationships occur between men or

between men and women.

Where relationships between women do occur they were within the family or acquired through men of the family. Female characters who are employed are not shown having contacts with other women but are shown out to catch men. Thus whether a woman goes out or stays home all her activities are directed towards men. She is never shown self reliant or independent.

Women characters appear in simple comedies or family melodramas. But when the play has a serious theme such as social change women characters either do not exist or are shown as inane creatures. This was so in 28 percent of the plays. Even in family melodramas



and love stories men lead the story and take the major decisions.

Thus, on the whole, the Gujarati stage portrays woman as young, attractive and entirely dependent on men. All her activities are directed towards men. This is a very comfortable picture for the man in the audience and pampers his ego.

Ha Joshi, Ahmedabad

One A Day

At least one case of violence on women is reported every day in the papers in Maharashtra. We do not know how many more occur. One such

case was that of Jhumur in Aurangabad, Marathwada.

Jhumur was a Bengali girl, beautiful and a good singer. She fell in love with a man called Ranbir Purokastav. Her parents agreed to the match and celebrated the wedding on November 25, 1982. However, Ranbir's family did not attend the wedding.

Immediately after marriage, the couple began to quarrel. Ranbir began to beat Jhumur. She did not tell her parents or neighbours about this conflict. She only told a couple of women friends. Ranbir used to try to prevent her from visiting her parents, saying that they were poor and that keeping up relations with them would lower his prestige.

In the two years following her marriage, Jhumur spent a total of about nine months in her parents' house. She used to seek refuge there but Ranbir would write letters and call her back. The first time she became pregnant, Ranbir forced her to have an abortion. The second time, he wanted her to have an abortion again but she refused, and went to her parents. After her baby was born she returned to Ranbir. On August 28, 1984, at 3 p.m. At 6 p.m. the news was received that she had died.

On September 3, 1984, many organisations, including the two communist parties, the Janata party, BJP, Stri Atyachar Virodhi Parishad, Sarvahara Mahila Aghanli, Sangharsh Vahini and Purogami Yuvak Sanghatana, organised a demonstration to demand that the post mortem report be issued immediately and that Ranbir be arrested. Jhumur's 40 day old baby was also taken in the demonstration. The police assured the people that the enquiry was being conducted, they said they had found photos of many women, love letters and other items in Ranbir's house and had confiscated them. Jhumur's family and the people of Aurangabad are now demanding that Ranbir should be sentenced to death.

Mangal Khinvasya, Aurangabad
(translated from Hindi)

Creating New Traditions

When my father, Atmarambhai, died, my sister Bharti expressed a wish to go to the cremation ground with the funeral procession. I decided to accompany her. So my two sisters and I set out with the procession. When we came to the crossroads, an elder asked us to go back since our presence would upset the community elders. However, we refused to go back. When we reached the cremation ground, my daughter Ami went to get the wood, and another elder objected. A third told her to be courageous. She replied that she was all right. The pyre was lit and prayers were being chanted. After joining in prayer we went homewards.

We had thought that women would oppose our action but it turned out otherwise. Women accepted the incident calmly. Some did ask us : "Could you bear to see everything ?" When we replied in the affirmative, their eyes seemed to glow with satisfaction.

...All kinds of false ideas are dinned into a girl's head. She is told that women cannot bear to see blood, cannot see a body burning, cannot perform an operation, are always afraid of rats and lizards, and so on.

...We have to begin the creation of a Swatantraya (freedom) Upanishad. The human race has much to learn.

Mira Bhatt, Bhavnagar
(translated from Gujarati)

The Rural Family

I have been in touch with **Manushi** for a long time. What I like about the magazine is its informality...! think its success lies in the fact that it helps those who have never expressed themselves to make a beginning in self expression. Long ago, I wrote something for **Manushi** which I never sent, but I am sending it now. It is about the problems I perceived when I married and came from a Maharashtra town to live in my in-laws' house in rural Bihar. In spite of these familial difficulties, I try to work with women

here. I feel that if a sensitive woman continues to search for a path she can inspire the next generation to continue the search. I should mention that although I have narrated familial incidents I do not intend to criticise the individuals concerned. They too are victims of this familial system.

"When my daughter was born and I returned to my in-laws' house with her, the maidservant said to me : 'You have suffered a loss but the younger bride has gained.' I did not understand her meaning. Then I realised that she meant I would have to give dowry. I did not think I had given birth to an inferior creature but when I found that people around had such a mentality I decided not to have any more children so that my daughter would get the importance she deserved. When five years passed, people were amazed that I could disregard the necessity for a son and could stop having children after producing a daughter.

I find that women here live an extremely constricted life. Most women do not even know the way to the main market in the town. They stay at home all day, every day. At home, a woman's status depends on the amount of dowry she brings, the number of sons she has, her husband's job and so on. These factors serve to divide women and they are unable to build any emotional relationships or friendships with each other.

When I voiced some criticisms of these practices, my in-laws felt hurt and thought I was trying to show off about my parental home and its progressiveness. So I had to control my expressions lest something I said should make my in-laws feel that I was hostile to Bihar.

The daily routine cuts off women completely from the world outside the home. Women spend their time supervising the servants, cooking special dishes and feeding their children even after the children are quite capable of feeding themselves.

Cooking and feeding go on all day. In peasant society a woman has no privacy at all. She is expected to be on duty like a full time servant. Bihar is famous for its hospitality but this too depends on women's labour. At any time of day or night, when a man's guests turn up, he feels not the slightest hesitation in ordering food. The woman has to set to work lighting the *chulha* all over again. The man has no part in this hospitality except to sit and chat with the guests.

The sharecroppers and landless labourers who work on the land may turn up at any moment to ask for something or other from the rich peasant's wife. It becomes impossible for a woman to have any time to herself for reading or writing. Even the old servants of the family consider themselves more prestigious than a new daughter-in-law. She is not allowed to make any change in the family way of life. If a daughter-in-law goes to visit another family her family prestige suffers so the mother-in-law tries to see to it that the young women step out of the house as rarely as possible. Every movement of the daughter-in-law is controlled and watched.

The worst part is that there is no one who understands the woman's feeling of suffocation. My husband does understand me but often his conditioning prevails over his thinking mind. For instance, he feels like eating only if his wife serves him. This gives him emotional satisfaction. So also, after talking for hours on equality between men and women, my husband and his male friends will suddenly say that they have been imprisoned in the house all day so they would like to go for a stroll to the market square. So saying, off they go, never imagining that a woman too may be experiencing similar feelings."

...I trust that our dialogue will continue in future too...

Kalpna Shastri, Bihar
(translated from Hindi)