



## LETTERS TO MANUSHI

### Starting At Home

I got **Manushi** at just the right time when seven of us are thinking of forming a society which will fight for the liberation of women which will be a part of the fight for the liberation of India... I work in a hospital. I think the situation in Calcutta hospitals has deteriorated. Mine is a children's OPD where women bring their sick children to take two days' medicine. The women are shabbily treated because they are poor. They are always scolded first and then given medicine...

A young married doctor works here. She tells us of her miserable condition at home. It is a joint family dominated by the mother-in-law. Though it is a love marriage, she has no liberty to go and buy books or go anywhere else without the escort of her husband. The daughters-in-law are kept engaged in cooking the whole day. As the doctor started getting encouragement from her friends, she began to continue her studies. She has stopped sitting idly in front of the TV set with other members of the family.

And then she got her copy of **Manushi**. Her husband asked, "Surely, you are not going to start a movement right in your own house?" "Why not?" she retorted with head high, "One should start all good things from one's own home! And I am going to do it." She said to her friend, "You don't know how much suppressed fire there is in me. I will not bow to anybody's will. Am I not a human

being with self-respect?... He has been a shy, obedient son of his parents, knowing 'helplessly' that his young, healthy, doctor wife is being transformed into a good-for-nothing household slave in his own house." I hope that you are getting thousands of letters like this from all over West Bengal. You will get many more!

### Chitrita Chaudhuri, Calcutta Women Against Women

You have shown a tendency of merciless criticism of the enemy. This is right but nowhere have you pointed out the female flaws which go against women's emancipation... I can give you my own example. My wife is at present pregnant and cannot do house-hold work as before. I try to give her every possible help but my mother does not want it. She says that her mother-in-law did not care for her and she was a mere working machine in the house. So she is not in favour of males having a soft corner for their wives... You show that men are since long oppressors and have not changed. There are cases, though very rare, of men treating women equally. You should interview them...

### Kulwant, Bhatinda In the Hands of Every Women

I used **Manushi** in many of my working areas. The hostel girls among whom I work liked it very much. Some girls came forward to share the bitter experiences in their lives. Only I have to translate each article because they do

not know English. I wish **Manushi** to be in the hands and minds of every literate woman and toiling woman in this country... I promise you that I will do whatever I can for **Manushi** and manushis.

M. Malliha, Madurai

Everybody's life is full of surprises, some pleasant, some unpleasant. The best surprise I've ever had was when I saw **Manushi**. Words fail me as I attempt to write about how I feel. All I can say is that **Manushi** is all that women have waited for... I am busy introducing it to more and more of my friends. I could collect subscriptions easily but I want **Manushi** to go to people who'll read it... We won't let **Manushi** fade out of our lives. It would be an unbearable shame if **Manushi** were to close due to lack of funds. **Manushi**, wait for us, we'll sustain you! I will send you some poems. I hope I'll have the honour of getting across my views to women all over the world through **Manushi**.

### Vandana Chatrath, Amritsar A Lot to Weep About

You may like to publish the pertinent remark of one of my women colleagues on the news item stating that Ms U. Arora, a legislator of the Rajasthan Assembly and a member of the *Nasbandi Samiti* (Sterilization Committee), caused a distraction in the proceedings of the House because she wept when a question regarding the *Nasbandi Samiti* was being discussed. While most of my





colleagues seemed embarrassed by the incident, one remarked, "What is so disgraceful about weeping? The helpless weep, the sensitive weep. In any case, the women of our society have a lot to weep about!"

### Dr. Devhuti, Delhi University Sexism in Textbooks

I am writing this to remind you as to how the textbooks read in our schools continue to be highly sexist. I had first raised the issue of sexism and Indian textbooks in the summer of 1978. But for all the shove-it-under-the-rug tactics of the Indian government and its educational agencies, sexism continues to rule in the 1978-79 textbooks. I have just completed an analysis of 18 Hindi and English textbooks prescribed for high school students. Many of them have been prepared by the prestigious NCERT and the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad. Most of them still use male-centred language, often to the total neglect of female contributions in nation-building. They still tacitly support physical and verbal abuse against women... the steady recurrence of incompetent females as role-models will, I am afraid, convince young, impressionable Indian girls that they really are silly little things who can never be more than someone's lust-object, dish-washer and baby maker.

### Narendra Nath Kalia, New York All Men Are Brothers

Right from the editorial, it seems as if the magazine is meant exclusively for

women. Many of our male comrades feel that it instantly alienates them when they read "No, sisters... Yes, sisters" I think everyone is agreed on the fact that women are always the victims of sexual violence. *This happens To Some of Us* reads like the adventures of a blundering college girl and is contradictory to the magazine as it shows how women themselves allow their bodies to be abused....

*When Women Protest* picture shows four policemen escorting one girl demonstrator. Isn't there a law which says only women police can touch women? If there isn't I think it is time we made the demand...

As for the article *Unpaid, Unrecognized*, I got the feeling that both the writer and the women interviewed have a disgust for housework... I think housework is just a necessary part of our lives... If there is sufficient understanding in the relationship, I think it can be quite easily shared so that the woman has more time to pursue her other interests. I know from experience how time-consuming housework is. Not only that, even if you have some hours left at the end of the day, your energies are so sapped that you cannot concentrate on reading or thinking properly...

### Lorriette Benjamin, Pune Women's Work

For me, the publication of *Manushi* has been like the breaking of a stifling silence. Though I was not involved in bringing it out, I find it an integrated part of my life. Send me 500 copies for sale here...

I own and manage a press. People try to demoralize me. The atmosphere here is such that no one allows women to go out of the house, and society is not

willing to tolerate a woman who does it. Many people give character certificates to me and other women like me. It is after all a crime that I am living the life I want to, so they have the right to pass remarks and defame me.

There is not a single women compositor in Patna but I am learning this job too and will soon be able to do it. We bring out a women's newsletter called *Rashtra Gaurav*. We hope it will develop into a feminist magazine. Give us your suggestions... we don't have strong team here. Most women, even educated women, look with fear and suspicion at work which requires them to come out. They say with sorrow, indifference: "Only if my father allows, is it possible for me to help..." They are not yet prepared to take the risk of being



banished from the safe prison of the family.

### Kiran, Patna Our Sisters in Pakistan

I found the magazine very informative and forceful on the women's question. I have not seen any other real women's magazine of India. The so-called magazines for women actually manage to do more damage to the status of women. We don't have any magazine in Pakistan. There have been attempts to bring out one in Urdu and a fairly good one was started but after a few issues, closed down due to unavoidable reasons... I try to keep up with the developments in the women's movement internationally, but I feel that the nature



of the women's movement in third world countries is essentially different from that of developed countries...

**Khawar Mumtaz, Punjab University, Lahore**

### **Matrimony – At What Price ?**

Matrimonial columns are by far the most regularly read features of our newspapers. I thought perhaps I too should place an advertisement : "Wanted a virgin groom, tall, handsome, educated, simple and homely. Should be a teetotalter, non-smoker, virtuous, pious and proficient in household duties."

Would any man qualify? The atrocious ads we read daily are shocking and to think that they never elicit a protest from us, the women of India!...

Nothing can change if we continue adhering to the status quo because we do not want to endanger our chances of getting married... When we are asked such insulting questions by prospective grooms as "Have you had an affair?", "Have you been kissed?" "Do you know how to cook?", "How tall are you ?", do we ever realize that a man does not become immoral if he has slept with a woman before marriage whereas she is branded a "fallen women", unfit for marriage? A man does not become characterless if he smokes and drinks whereas a woman does! Have we women fallen so low that we are prepared to sell our integrity and self-respect just for the sake of getting married? Are we capable of nothing better?

**Madhu Baveja, Patiala**

### **Linking Up**

This is the **Muvman Liberasyon Fam** from Mauritius. One of our members who is studying in Delhi sent us a copy of **Manushi**... It's the first time we have across such first-hand information of women's plight in India. Rape, sexual violence, sexual discrimination against women at home and at work are common practices in our country as well. We have joined the MLF, a feminist movement here to fight all forms of sexism present in society.

We find it important to link up with feminist groups in other countries... We

also publish a feminist magazine – about four issues a year, and a newsletter twice a month in Creole language...

**Alhunj, Member of MLF, Mauritius**

### **Enthusiastic Supporter**

My letter which appeared in the second issue of **Manushi** had been edited, leaving out the enthusiastic support I had expressed and voicing only the criticism. This criticism was only intended to provide a more balanced footing. Could you add this note to say that I am very enthusiastic about **Manushi** and really appreciate it. I have been continuously questioned as to how I am advocating **Manushi** when I had criticized it rather strongly.

**Meera Basu, JNU, Delhi**

### **To Keep Ourselves Breathing**

Thank you for being. I have begun to do my bit to let people know that you have come to live and that it is up to keep you breathing I have enclosed an oft repeated tale with a few suggestions to see whether we can work together to fight traditional forms of tyranny against women. I would be very happy if many of us are able to express our opinions on what we can do to help ourselves in such issues.

**Kamakshi Balasubramanian, Hyderabad**

### **Not for Profit Alone**

We are keen to see the journal available here... we would be glad to take on the circulation job more as a gesture of international solidarity than as a business venture... we are a co-operative of four women – all committed feminists... we shall attempt to take the journal to the Indian community in Britain.

**Lynn Alderson, Sisterwrite: Co-operative Women's Bookshop, London**

Even though I am a man, I feel that what **Manushi** says or stands for is my stand. Hence, I am sending some subscriptions and will try to get more in my individual capacity, not for profit's sake, but for the ideals of **Manushi**.

**Naresh Kumar, Magazine Centre, Bangalore**

### **Common Cause**

We have translated two articles from **Manushi** into Kannada to publish in magazines here. A write-up is also being published on the importance of **Manushi**. Some two years ago, a group of progressive women made an attempt to publish a magazine about women in Kannada. Because of practical difficulties they have given up the idea. At present, there are hardly five or six progressive journals in Kannada...

I am a young boy of 24, interested with honesty to get liberated along with other human beings from the cruel clutches of the existing society... In 1977, we started a progressive magazine in Kannada **Baduku**...

Here some four of five ladies are more interested in progressive movement and to change the whole structure of society. Two or three of them are much influenced by Marxism. They are mobilizing women and are making prompt efforts to organize women in this town... we have formed the district wing of *Samudaya*, a progressive cultural organization and we are enacting dramas like *Belchi* which we have produced three times a month free of cost, to educate the masses...

**Manglura Vijaya, Gulbarga, Karnataka**

### **Biggest Mistake**

I have always felt from the start that pricing the magazine at Rs. 7.50 was the biggest mistake. In most people's minds, anything offered at such a low rate induces an apprehension – they begin to suspect some sort of propaganda. Can't you change it with a long note of explanation ?

**Kersi Sabawala, Baroda**

These are a few of the hundreds of letters that come to us. We try to personally answer every single letter. But sometimes our replies get delayed because of overwork. Please forgive such delay and keep sending us your views, suggestions, criticisms.

Even if readers want their letters to remain anonymous, they are requested to send us their names and addresses for our record. We have had to withhold some anonymous letters this time.