



## Letters To Manushi

### Genuine Grooms

The Chandigarh Nonsense Club celebrated women's day by presenting a unique satire in the form of a sale counter, where a variety of bridegrooms were put on sale. The counter, inaugurated by club president, Jaspal Bhatti, declared Rs 420,000 as the discount price of an IAS officer, as against the prevailing price of Rs 600,000. Similar 20 percent discounts were offered on all the grooms. A doctor was available for Rs 355,000, an engineer for Rs 280,000 and a clerk for Rs 7,000. Posters announced that the grooms were "genuine and guaranteed", and that payment could be made in instalments. A brass band played as the grooms, attired in ceremonial clothes, walked to the showroom. About 2,000 girls surrounded the grooms, and shouted for more discount. The grooms were paraded through the premises of the government college for women in sector 11.

Through this ridicule, the attempt was made to encourage young women to reject men who carry a price tag, and men to resist being put up for sale. It was an interesting method to highlight a potent social evil.

### Poonam Bindra, Chandigarh Change Ourselves

I read No. 39 and found the article "Was Sita Mrs Ram?" very interesting. Unfortunately, some

women feel delighted at the prospect of changing their name after marriage. Suppose Sabrita Das marries Sona Rout. She becomes Mrs Rout but why does he not bear the name Das? Even highly educated women do not complain about bearing the husband's title or name.

Also, after marriage, the man does not stay in the woman's parents' house but she has to stay in his parents' house. A woman often asks the husband to fetch her after marriage, but she does not go to fetch him after marriage. Educated women must change themselves in order to change society.

**Soudamini, Phulbani**

*(translated from Hindi)*

### Marring Effect?

I would like to make a suggestion. I sometimes find the front cover of **Manushi** printed in a very gaudy colour like a very hard red or hard green. Such colours not only look gaudy but also mar the effect of the very expressive and thematically relevant photographs that you publish on the cover. Simplicity and good aesthetic sense are not mutually exclusive.

### Bhargavi Bhatt, Bhavnagar Warmth And Happiness

...I feel a certain warmth and happiness when I think of **Manushi**.

...I am a 22 year old from a very orthodox family. Life has been a series of conflicts and contradictions. I have not done anything spectacular. I have

done MA and am now teaching. I am facing a great deal of opposition at home and in society. My refusal to get married does not exactly help matters.

Recently, some girls have come together to form a group. Named Prachodana which means inspiration, the group began in January 1986. We have between 10 and 15 members, although only five are active.

We conducted a survey which failed through lack of planning. We helped a young woman to establish her identity away from the parental home which was a prison for her. We also took up a case of wife beating, and one of rape that was being hushed up by the local police. We conducted a public meeting and got this case filed in court...

**Geetha, Trivandrum**

### Staying Balanced

I am an Indologist from Yugoslavia and teach the history of Indian philosophy, at my university back home. I am now in your country, which I love, for some research and further reading. I am impressed by the women's voices which have come up in India now, and I appreciate the role of **Manushi** in it. It is not easy to keep the balance you have achieved between a popular journalistic standard, a politically aware approach, a didactic one, and a serious level of women's studies and research. I wish you all the best...

**Rada Ivekovic, Varanasi**

## What Step To Take?

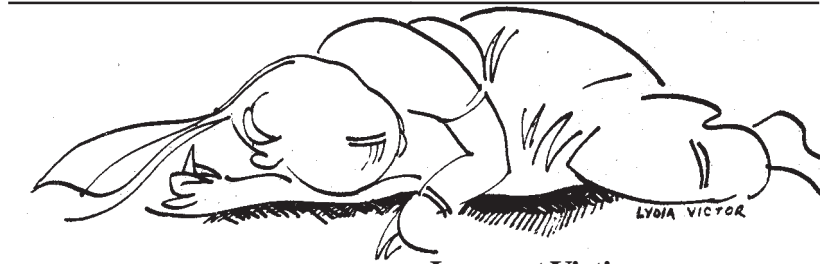
I have been married for three years. I want to reveal the tortures I have undergone, so that young girls can be warned not to expect marriage to be a bed of roses. I would like my name to be withheld.

Our marriage was arranged through relatives, and matters of dowry were sorted out before the engagement. Yet, the trouble started at the wedding ceremony itself. Though the wedding was at a prestigious club, my in-laws were dissatisfied with the food. My mother-in-law left, voicing her feelings openly. My father-in-law stayed on but refused to eat anything.

Next day, when we reached my new home, my mother-in-law told me in front of a huge gathering of relatives to change the sari I was wearing as it was too cheap for her family status. I complied without a word. Then she openly ridiculed my dowry and the gifts my parents had given my in-laws. My jewels were taken away and I was told to wear glass bangles at the reception. My in-laws kept repeating that their son could have gotten Rs 500,000 in dowry.

The five days in that house seemed like five years to me. My husband was then recalled from leave. My husband was the silent type. He was very dutiful towards his parents and did not even try to understand my agony. When he came to know I was pregnant, he said he was not ready yet to support a child and I should have an abortion. At every festival, his parents taunted and insulted me because they thought my parents had not sent enough gifts and sweets. My husband would buy presents for all his family members but nothing for me.

He did not even give me enough money to run the house. Still I made every effort to charm him. I made his favourite dishes, wore the clothes he liked, mixed with his friends and did



everything to please him. But he never appreciated anything. Instead, if anyone praised my cooking, he would get jealous and would not speak to me for days.

Two years passed. I conceived again. I told my husband that even if I had to leave him I would have this child. I developed complications during the pregnancy and had to have a caesarean. My parents looked after me throughout. My husband did not even come to hospital at the time. My in-laws came to see me 12 hours after my son was born. They said they were busy watching the video movie of their newly married daughter's wedding. My mother-in-law spoke loudly about the lovely wedding and the dowry and cash given.

Today, my son is almost a year old. Although I am unwell, I have to do all the work singlehanded, ever since I arrived at my husband's home, 25 days after delivery. My husband never offers any help nor does he have time to take me to the doctor. I have now been admitted to hospital because of ill health. My parents are again looking after me. My husband has gone abroad on a deputation. His parents continue to harass my family for gifts. I don't know what to do or where to go. Could any of you offer any suggestions to help me? What step should I take?

### **Name withheld**

*We invite readers to respond to this letter, as the writer requests. Her predicament is not an uncommon one, and a debate on what women should do in such a situation needs to be initiated. We will forward your letters to her.*

—Manushi

## Innocent Victim

I want to remind you of a past event. In December 1986, I came to you with a letter written by the girl I love, Ranjana Singh, who was being confined and tortured by her family. You said that since she was still a minor, she could not marry me yet, but if her parents tried to get her married against her will, you could take steps against them.

Ranjana's father, Santram Singh, a colleague of mine in the Punjab National Bank, Balrampur, had threatened to kill her in 1985 when he came to know that we wanted to marry. He got a transfer to Bahraich and withdrew Ranjana from college. This summer, he sent her to Balrampur to sit for the examination.

May 8, 1987, was Ranjana's eighteenth birthday so we submitted an application to the registrar. Santram Singh came to know of this. He immediately came to Balrampur, and forcibly took Ranjana back to Bahraich where he tortured her from May 8 to 11 and killed her on May 12. On May 13, he filed a false report that Ranjana was upset at having not done well in the exam and had committed suicide.

I heard about the murder only on May 19. I sent some people to Bahraich who confirmed its truth. I am now myself in danger from Santram Singh. I have got myself transferred to Gorakhpur. Santram Singh, having murdered an innocent girl, is comfortably continuing in his position. The police and administration are blind.

**Ashok Saxena, Gorakhpur**

*(translated from Hindi)*

## Subtle Exploitation

It is frustrating to see the social order so blatantly in favour of male chauvinism. My mother and women of her generation feel that things are much better for us than they were for them. I agree, but I also feel that the exploitation now is more subtle. If women of my mother's generation were not allowed to work, girls of mine are encouraged to work in an office, and also to work at home singlehanded. Our freedom to move about freely is marred by the mental and physical humiliation one suffers in the name of eve teasing.

**Geetanjali Gangoli, Delhi**

## Too Naive ?

With due respect I decline to renew my subscription. In the light of present day female awareness, progress and near equality, your magazine is still clinging to negativism. Don't you have some positive stories to tell your readers? Why are you so naive? I know everything is not rosy and green, but there are many oases which provide relief. Why does the magazine have to be dull, boring and one sided ? People read magazines for relief, not for sorrow. I am sure there are a lot of

women who have succeeded in their fields. Why don't you tell stories about those females?

**Pritam Singh Bhutani, USA**

## Whom Drought Kills

Most districts of Maharashtra have been suffering under drought for the last three years. Drought is a topic of discussion amongst ministers and money is sanctioned for relief but little of this money reaches the people. Many are being forced to migrate to urban areas.

Mangaltai works at the government's employment guarantee worksite, in Solapur district. She used to take her small son along with her as there was no one to look after him at home. There is no provision for shelter or water at the worksite. The little boy suffered a heat stroke and died. The sun shines on all alike but children of Mangaltai's section of society become its victims. The ministers who constantly tour the drought stricken areas do not seem to meet women like Mangaltai.

It is said that drought is a natural phenomenon. Why then does it affect only certain sections of society ? Even within these sections, women are worst affected. When social burdens

have to be borne, women are in the forefront but when benefits are to be shared, women come last of all.

When asked what relationship women have to drought, women of Dhamni village, Satara district, replied : "Our day starts two hours earlier than usual and ends two hours later. We have to walk a kilometre to get water. The village well has dried up so we have to walk to a well near the pond." In Larewari village, Leelatai slipped and fell into the well and drowned. Deaths like hers do not figure in government statistics nor are women like her taken into consideration when the water policy is drafted.

In 1886, when this area suffered a severe drought, people had to work at stonebreaking. Today, a century later, the same work is available to people. Men often migrate to cities, leaving women to take on the work of stone breaking. Showing the cracked palms of her hands, Vimaltai said: "My mother too did this work. How many more generations will have to live with cracked palms?"

Gangabai of Khatau said that this time, it is difficult even to get work at the guaranteed employment worksites. "Even to get *chatni-bhakri* we have to block roads. Only when we stage this kind of protest do we get work", she said. This is one reality. Another reality is that the Maharashtra Cooperative Bank is spending Rs 27,000 for a diamond nosering to present to Sonia Gandhi on her visit. How long will this farce continue?

**Chetna, Bombay**

*(translated from Hindi)*

## Emerging Protest

On May 21, 1987, Mahila Manch succeeded in getting Rajkumari, a 25 year old woman, her dowry back from her husband, Dinesh Gupta. Rajkumari, married two years ago, was forced to get cash, a refrigerator, a scooter and gold bangles from her parents. When they refused the last



**Women of village Maheswad, district Satara, blocking roads to demand employment**



demand, Rajkumari was harassed. Her parents say that lawyers refused to take up their case because Dinesh is an ex MLA's cousin. Bania community organisations held meetings to pressure him, but in vain.

Mahila Manch tried for three months to hold negotiations but Dinesh's family refused to appear. On May 18, a public meeting was held and then a sit-in protest at Dinesh's house. On May 21, all the wedding gifts were returned and he promised to return the cash paid, Rs 27,000, in the form of a fixed deposit in her name.

At the public meeting, some nurses approached the Manch and told them that 12 days earlier, a junior doctor had tried to rape a student nurse. The victim, Saryu Varma, was under extreme pressure from the management of S.N. Medical College not to lodge a case. She was disturbed and confused.

After a meeting with the Manch, the nurses decided to approach the district magistrate and demand the arrest of Dr Sanjeev Yadav, who had made the attempt to rape. About 200 nurses came out, shouting slogans, and marched for two hours to the district magistrate's house. After six hours of agitation, the authorities accepted in principle their demands for arrest of Yadav, security for nurses, no victimisation of the protesting nurses, and a senior nurse to accompany any junior nurse sent on night duty. On May 26, Sanjeev Yadav was quietly released on bail.

These two protests have had an impact in Agra and many women have begun to show interest in activating the Manch further...

### **Shiela Drona, Kanpur Meet In Bihar**

From June 26 to 28, a south Bihar women's camp was organised at Ranchi. Its aim was to bring women's organisations and activists of the region in active contact with each other. The camp began with group

songs and went on to discuss the Hindu Succession Act and the Dowry Prohibition Act. We concluded that dowry is a means to deprive women of inheritance rights and that we need to fight for women's equal rights in property.

The next day, we discussed the problems faced by women's organisations and activists such as family responsibilities, lack of honesty and discipline, economic dependence, conflict between different groups, lack of unity and unnecessary interference by men. On the third day, we planned to bring out a regional bulletin *Nari Samvad* from south Bihar and to hold demonstrations in different places on August 4, to demand amendment of the Dowry Prohibition Act, formation of women's cells and implementation of antiobscenity laws. The meet ended with songs and slogans...

**Renu Dewan, Ranchi**

*(translated from Hindi)*

### **Fighting Alone**

I am a victim of the crime of a Congress (I) MLA, Dr Rajkumar Jaipal of Ajmer. I completed BA honours in English from Rajasthan university last year. While I was studying, Jaipal's sisters were my friends. They persuaded me to help campaign among women voters for his election from the reserved seat of Ajmer west. After his victory, he met me several times to thank me. I returned to Udaipur to my parents' house after my final exam. He sent me telegrams asking me to go to Ajmer. I did not go but I did not take his telegrams amiss as I considered him a brother.

On Bhaiduj day in 1986, Jaipal suddenly arrived at my house in Udaipur. Only my sisters and I were at home. He had dinner and then asked for coffee. I made the coffee. He then must have mixed some sleeping draught in my coffee. I began to feel faint and went to sleep.

My sisters were in another room.

Jaipal then raped me. I realised fully what had happened only next morning. When I threatened to tell my parents, he promised to return soon and marry me. So I kept quiet.

A few days later, he returned and gave me a written statement that he had married me. When I questioned the validity of this, he told me that his father is a lawyer, and both his parents have been members of the cabinet of the Rajasthan government. They had assured him that this was a legal marriage.

I then went with him to Ajmer and began to live with him there. But I soon heard that he was about to be married. When I questioned him, he said that he was not really married to me. By this time, I was pregnant. He told me to get an abortion. He also threatened to kill me. I returned to my parents who made many attempts to intervene. But Jaipal and his parents were adamant in their refusal to accept me. They said we were trying to blackmail them.

The police refused to help me. Social workers were afraid to speak out since the culprit belongs to the ruling party. I have now filed a case of rape in Udaipur court. A warrant was issued but he was not caught by the police. The whole party is with him. No disciplinary action has been taken against him. He has got bail which I am now challenging.

He continues to threaten me. He wants me to withdraw the case and get an abortion done. But I will never withdraw the case or get an abortion. He has denied me the right to wifehood but cannot snatch away my right to motherhood. I am now seven and a half months' pregnant and am fighting all alone. My neighbour who is a subscriber to **Manushi** was the first woman who gave me the moral strength to fight the crime. She told me to write to you.

**Swati Lodha, Udaipur**