

# Letters to Manushi

## Entitled to More

This refers to Kamlesh Mohan's letter "Women Labourers" in **Manushi** No. 53, 1989. She states: "The women said they are paid less than men for the same work, on the ground that they are less productive than men."

The working environment is an aspect of the work itself. One approach to improving women labourers' lives is to demand a better working environment; another is to seek compensation for tolerance of a poor environment. An agency should document the various types of work done by women, and the various aspects of the work environment, (such as abnormal positions, strains) laid down by the ILO classification of allowances. This may help in putting forth a claim for a woman to be paid if not more than a man, as recommended by the ILO, at least the same as a man.

In the organised sector there are industrial engineers whose task is to study work in all its aspects. This is a profession of recent origin. Some time ago, a national convention of the Institute of Industrial Engineers was held at Bombay. There are hardly any women working as industrial engineers in India. Women should be trained for the purpose of studying women's work especially in the informal sector, in which most Indian women work. As Java Arunachalam points out in a recent article in *People's Action*, 94 percent of the world's working women and 89 percent of India's working women belong to this sector.

**S.V. Anbazhgun, Kudremukh**

## Matrilocal Marriage

I have read Madhu Kishwar's extremely interesting article "Towards More Just Norms for Marriage" in **Manushi** No. 53, 1989, and I fully agree with the 10 points of the proposed

*shadinama*.

Apart from romance, temperament and background, the three greatest essentials for a happy marriage, the other three ingredients for success are equitable monetary arrangements, same parity in educational attainments, and locale of the marital home.

Many anthropologists believe that at one time descent was matrilineal. Children belonged to their mothers who stayed in their natal homes. Patriarchal societies overpowered such matrilineal ones everywhere, due to their better skills in warfare. But traces of earlier arrangements can be inferred from literature and seen in some places where old customs survive. Matrilocal marriages, for instance, survived till recently in Kerala and in the Garo and Khasi hills, as I have seen with my own eyes.

I was in Burma as a youth, before 1941. My impression was that marriage there was bilocal (couple staying alternately or intermittently with the parents of both partners) and often matrilocal, although it was changing to patrilocal. In matrilocal societies, women are happy. They live in their natal homes and have their children with them. The earning husband is an honoured guest, neither a despised *gharjamai* nor a fearsome autocrat.

In patrilocal marriages there is usually a problem between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. This is because women tend to be more possessive about and centred on their children. Fathers are not as deeply involved, hence a problem between father-in-law and son-in-law is far less likely. There may of course be temperamental clashes. A matrilocal marriage arrangement will make for a freer society where both men and women will be happy.

I have seen such a free society in prewar Burma. Even women from Indian communities that practised segregation in India moved about freely in Burma. Some took up occupations even as far back as the 1930s, when they would have been confined to the house if they had returned to India. A case point is that of my own mother, Prabha Ghosh, 1900-57, who was an early believer in women's rights, although her ideas and activities were confined to narrow circles. She inspired her six children to successful careers.

I realise that matrilocal marriages will take a long time in coming. But it fits in well with world forces, and may even be preferable to the nuclear family system, as the working wife will have someone at home to look after small children. Of course, arrangements as suggested in your *shadinama* should first be made. Then the ground or opinion should be prepared for matrilocal families.

**O.K. Ghosh, Calcutta**

## New Ceremony

I have been thinking of an ideal marriage ceremony for some years now. I wanted a ceremony that would treat the man and woman on an equal basis. Here is one such possible ceremony I dreamt of.

The ceremony starts with a leave taking phase, when the man and woman sit with their respective parents at two opposite ends of the same room. The parents thank god for the way the child has turned out, and the child thanks the parents for all they gave.

Then the child asks for the parents' blessings for the future, and the parents agree. After some symbolic leavetaking gesture such as hugging parents or touching their feet, each child takes a few steps away from them and faces the future life partner.



The second phase of the ceremony is that of a new beginning. Each partner asks the other if they have taken leave of their parents and are ready for a new journey. Each assures the other that they are indeed ready. The *purohit* then explains to them in simple language and in brief, that marriage means sharing, give and take. Each would have to give up some individual freedom to gain a companion. Individual values and beliefs would have to be reexamined jointly. He would ask if they are ready to get married. If they agree, he would ask them to symbolically discard some piece of clothing they have on, given by the parents, and to replace it with clothing given by the future partner. Then, they could exchange some symbol of married life, such as a ring or chain, if they wish to. This must be identical for both partners.

The final act of the ceremony would be choosing a name for the new family unit. Both partners would discard the parental family name and adopt a new name selected by them. This new name would be taken by their children, until they in turn choose to marry.

In this way, neither set of parents has an exclusive claim on the new unit. Also, the demeaning act of *kanyadan* is done away with. Why should the woman alone change her last name and wear a *mangalsutra*? In south India a woman prays at Gowri Puja for a good husband, but a man, in the *kashi yatra*, gets to choose between married life and single life. Why shouldn't this choice be given to women too?

If we do away with *kanyadan*, and parents let go of both a daughter and a son, then a girl would not be viewed as a burden and a boy as an asset. Parents would develop close ties with the family of both a son and a daughter, for their

own old age security.

My description of the ceremony is only a suggestion. It can be altered to fit in parts of different communities' marriage ceremonies which are appropriate to the equality concept.

**Arundhati Sankar, USA**

### **Illegally Detained**

I am a journalist. In June 1989 I did a story for a news agency in London, on HIV positive prostitutes detained at the Vigilance Home in Madras. About 27 such women are being held most of them beyond the expiry of their sentence period, for the simple reason that they are HIV positive. Neither the authorities nor the nongovernment organisations seem interested in their plight or in the more crucial issue of containing HIV spread through education. Two weeks ago, I wrote to the public prosecutor in Madras, explaining the circumstances and requesting him to intercede. No action has been forthcoming and I am now planning to file a writ in court seeking the release of the illegally detained women...

**Shyamala Nataraj, Madras**

### **One Useless Law Less**

We are from Bailancho Saad, a women's collective in Goa. We have taken up issues like the effects of tourism on women in our society, the commercialisation of our local festival, the carnival. We have also worked on amniocentesis, and a Bill has been introduced in the assembly to ban it.

We also take up individual cases of wife beating. Last year, we took up a case of a woman who was being harassed by her husband for various reasons, including money. Since her husband's brother, also involved in beating her, was a police officer, the police was not

registering her case. We got the case registered by putting pressure through demonstrations. Cases of wife beating and cruelty were registered but we then discovered that the Dowry Prohibition Act is not applicable to Goa. Goa got liberated from Portuguese rule on December 19, 1961, while the Act was passed in July 1961. All laws prior to liberation had to be adopted by the Goa assembly, and this Act was not one of the laws so adopted.

Under the Portuguese Civil Code applicable to Goa, the husband and wife have equal inheritance rights. We have not had many wife murder cases here, so maybe nobody felt the need to introduce the Dowry Act.

The police officers say they do not know whether or not a case can be registered, but we are keen to go ahead with the case. We wonder whether we should demand that the Act be extended to Goa, or, given that it has so many loopholes, whether we should demand new legislation.

**Sabina Martins, Goa**

*The Dowry Prohibition Act has proved singularly ineffective as hardly any cases have been registered under it (see Manushi Nos. 16 and 24 for an analysis of the Act and amendments to it). This is partly because of the absurd way the Act is framed, which makes it impossible to distinguish between gifts and dowry, and partly because the private nature of dowry transactions makes it very difficult to legislate or police them out of existence. Cruelty and violence to wives is a criminal offence, whether or not dowry demands are involved. If dowry demands are part of the pretext for violence, these can be mentioned in the case registered under the IPC. As you have already registered cases against the husband's violence*

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*under the IPC, registering a case under the virtually unimplementable Dowry Prohibition Act would serve no purpose. Nor is there any point wasting energy in having yet another paper tiger introduced on the Goan statute books. It would be more useful to build social opinion against dowry and other practices that are harmful to women.*

**Manushi**

## Ten Years

Against all odds, **Manushi** has survived and completed 10 years. It was towards the latter half of 1979 that some friends thrust a copy of **Manushi** into my hands with a request that I subscribe to it. I was not sure what would lie in store for me. But I felt at the time that a journal like **Manushi** needed support and took a subscription. Though I have differed on many of the issues (not communicated to the editors) I have enjoyed reading every one of the copies I have received since then. It must have been toughgoing, ploughing a lonely furrow, as it were. Congratulations,

**PS. Seshadri, Ahmednagar**

## Arranged Marriage

I read with interest your analysis of the dowry debate in **Manushi** No. 53. I agree with you that the discontinuation of dowry will not elevate the status of women if their overall position in society remains the same...

However, I feel that dowry is only a symptom of a larger disease which was not dealt with adequately in your analysis. I see dowry as an extension of the arranged marriage system which I think is the root cause of women's misery. Arranged marriages are usually financial transactions between two families, and do not serve the interests of the bride and groom. The way some brides and

grooms are coerced into an arranged marriage amounts to a violation of their human rights.....

The recommendations you have listed apply mostly to arranged marriages in which the families of both partners play a major role. Given the prevalence of arranged marriage in India, I can see why you found it necessary to involve the parents in the financial commitments. But what happens to people who have so-called love marriages?

Besides, is financial help from parents vital to a successful marriage? I realise that women are socially, politically and economically disadvantaged and therefore need the initial support of parents. But I personally do not believe that inheriting parental property enhances one's overall status. Many parents use inheritance as a weapon with which to manipulate and control their children. The fear of being disinherited forces many son and daughters into marriages or careers for which they are disinclined.

Dowry and inheritance are two sides of the same coin. Both demand adherence to a hierarchical family structure and an economic structure in which there are distinct classes of propertied and landless people.....

**Rasna Warah, Kenya**

## To Earn Money?

I have been a sporadic reader of **Manushi**... Recently I came across *Roshni*, a play published by you. I would like to point out two things, about this publication. Firstly, Rs 5 is pretty expensive for just one play, especially in Hindi.

But even more disheartening is the fact that a group like yours, which claims to be progressive, asks people to take

permission before staging the play or publishing parts of it. Do you not know that a play is published to be staged? If you people are so possessive about your play, why do you publish it - only to earn money from its sale!?

What a difference between your group and Jagori, who sell a collection of 14 plays for Rs 20, with the open invitation to stage them as and when possible.

Kindly publish an explanation....

**Anjali Noronha, Harda**

*Manushi, unlike many other groups which publish material on women's issues, does not ACCEPT grants or subsidies from any institution, governmental or nongovernmental. Hence all costs have to be covered by sales. Rs 5 banfy covered the publication costs of Roshni, not counting the labour put in by a number of unpaid volunteers. There is no way Roshni, at Rs 5 per copy, could be a profit making publication.*

*We routinely, not just in Roshni, but in Manushi and in all other publications, ask that permission be taken before material is reproduced in any form. This so that we can maintain a record of the many ways in which the material is used by a wide range of people in their work. Anyone planning to stage or otherwise use the play would lose nothing by writing us a letter. In fact, most of those who have staged Roshni so far have been happy to share the experience with us.*

*It is also possible that commercial agencies could wish to use or reproduce the play in some way, in which case copyright norms should be adhered to. A statement of the kind we have inserted is found in the vast majority of published plays, including street plays, the world over.*

**-Manushi**