

Letters to Manushi

Not Hindu Dharma

We have much enjoyed reading your fine magazine. You are successfully tackling some very tough issues. We were especially impressed by your article on the 1989 elections (Manushi Np.54-55) in which you mentioned personal research you have conducted on communal riots. Have you done this for Bhagalpur?

We have a special interest in the exact events of this riot (or, as you say, pogrom might be more accurate). The Ram Janmabhoomi issue has led to open calls for or endorsements of violent means by certain sections of the Hindu world, particularly the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. We find this quite contrary to Hindu *dharma*, and the Bhagalpur riots are an excellent example of where this kind of talk leads. However, as you point out in your article, accurate reports of what happened are not easily found. Even with our New Delhi correspondent interviewing members of the prime minister's party who personally visited the area, we could not get a completely clear picture. One great missing link is exactly how the riot started. There are reports that the Hindu procession was already armed with guns at the point they entered the Muslim neighbourhood.

Rev. Swami Arumugam Katir,
Hinduism Today, USA

Buyer's Market?

I have just finished reading your views on dowry in Manushi No. 53, 1989. I wish to ask: in the buy and sell game called marriage, more so in a buyer's market like India, is there any hope for the seller to bargain her way out, considering the limitations you so rightly point out. Do you really think that given the right to inheritance, the intrinsic



value of women is going to be created overnight? Will it not pave the way for the groom to bet on a more propertied bride? This may create a more legalised system of interfamily transaction of money power. An essential outcome of such a right would be: no property, no marriage...

A woman, it is said, is made, not born. She is brainwashed in favour of societal practices. In the light of the compulsion to make her marriage a success, she compromises, and lives on with a dream that is seldom realised.

In view of these and many more bindings, do you find it possible for her to bargain for a better position in society, in marriage, or any other relationship? Here, I am ruling out those exceptions who put up a fight because, as you said, individual battles lead to demoralisation and little social change. Can women be organised as a force under some union? Your proposition, though sound in all aspects in the long run, lacks viability in the short run.

Kavita, Lucknow

Concern for Life

I read the letter by Veena Bhatia in **Manushi** No. 54-55, and felt greatly

depressed at the murder of Deepika. This has become the order of the day because of the indirect support in the form of inaction by the so-called guardians of law and order, I mean the police administration. I wish they had some sense of duty and concern for human life.

Deepika's murder is a manifestation of the utter and deliberate failure of our social as well as police system. I feel neither Manushi nor any individual can end this growing trend, and the only way to set it right is for society to devise suitable measures such as absolute boycott.

The agony of our system is that only the police can enforce the laws that guarantee social security, but at the same time, it is the police who have least respect for law or for law abiding citizens. Pradeep and many other degenerate culprits are jailed for a few days and then let out on bail. I feel that a few days in prison is perhaps too small a punishment for such people who are committed to lawlessness. I wish they could be hanged and an end be brought to such depraved and antihuman elements.

N. P. Amoli, Chandigarh

While we understand your anguish, we feel that the death penalty is not the solution to the problem. We have explained our position in Manushi No. 31, 1985.

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Mystic Feeling

Congratulations on the tenth anniversary issue. For me, this issue is a revelation in the field of literature. I had never known that there is an ample early Indian poetry and I am most impressed by the examples given of *bhakta* poetry. I know as good as nothing about

European mystic poetry, only that it exists. I have the Oxford Book of Mystical Verse, and just took it down to count the female names. I counted 30 names, far more than I would have expected. One of them is Sarojini Naidu. I came to the conclusion that at bottom mysticism does not make a difference between the religions. It is basically the same feeling which inspires the poets to write or make poetry of a certain kind. In all the poetry you quote I find a strong sexual undertone. I would like to know whether this element exists also in male mystical poetry. I suddenly got interested in mystical poetry, and would like to find somebody qualified to compare the Indian kind with various European kinds....

Herta Haas, West Germany

Teaching Sons

You are doing a wonderful thing for women, keep it up. But I would like you to think of the parental aspect too. I find parents need to be educated long before their children can be. Parents need to change their attitudes before women can be respected, or men allow them to be considered equals. Sons have to be taught, not daughters.

Jyoshri Lobo, Dalsingpara

Indian Women Abroad

In *Manushi* No. 50-51-52, there was a letter by one Mr M.G. Pandya of Rajkot entitled "Phoren Based Fraud" that saddened but did not surprise me. I am one of the founder members of an Asian and Indian immigrant women's organisation in the USA that deals with such issues on a regular basis. Our group, Manavi, was founded in early 1985. Since then, we have worked with more than 74 south Asian women who have faced severe difficulties here. A large number of Indian women are physically abused by their husbands on a routine basis in this country, and only a fraction seek outside help. Many women are abandoned without any financial support, for no apparent reason. Another

sizeable number are abandoned in India, the new bride being left behind with a promise that she will be sent for. In most cases, the woman suffers unnecessarily due to her lack of knowledge of US laws. Upon divorce, a wife is legally entitled to a reasonable financial settlement from her husband even if the marriage lasted only a short time. This means she has to sue him in US courts. This is not an easy procedure. There may be a high cost in time, money and heartache that the woman has to pay. Also, the game of appeal and reappeal may be started to harass the woman. But there are generous lawyers who take on cases for insolvent wives, where the legal fees are transferred to the husband. Recently, we have found that the reciprocity laws between India and the USA are easier than was previously believed. . .

Shamita Dasgupta, USA

Advertisements

While appreciating your concern for independence of editorial policy, and not compromising the honour of women by accepting ads, I still feel you could lessen your financial problems by accepting ads which do not clash with your policy. A total ban on ads, I am afraid, will make your burden almost unbearable. You have fought bravely for 10 years and deserve all credit, but I wonder if you are not limiting your fighting capacity, by sticking to an almost puritanical standard in matters of ads. Gandhi was very brave and yet even he had to make compromises. These are only my humble suggestions for whatever they are worth.

R.N. Tikkha, Patiala

*Thank you for your concern. We do not have a total ban on ads, as we accept some kinds, for example, those from book publishers. This strict selectivity is not merely because most ads make a degrading display of women, but is also because we do not wish to use the pages of *Manushi* to sell shoddy, overpriced consumer goods, or government propaganda.*

Further, our experience in the early

*years of running *Manushi* showed that the amount of time and energy we had to spend on chasing potential advertisers was not commensurate with the revenue realised. Advertisers often wish the magazine to be changed to suit their requirements. For example, they often want a glossy cover with a glamorous face on it.*

*We feel that *Manushi* should be financially supported by its readers if they find it useful, so we introduced the dual subscription rate, and have always shared financial problems with readers. Since we stopped looking for ads, *Manushi's* financial position has stabilised, although it operates on a tight budget.*

Since you mention Gandhi, it is interesting that when he took over the editorship of "Young India," he stated that it would be run without ads as it was his "view that a newspaper ought to be conducted without advertisements", and pointed out that he was already running the Gujarati "Navajivan" without ads.

Manushi

New Experiments

This is the story of my daughter and how she changed her life. The first change I noticed in her was when during her MA in social work, she returned from a camp in the Chambal valley. She was struck by the state of the poor who had known nothing but poverty for generations. She had also met some dacoits who had surrendered but had no opportunity to get work. Chambal was dry for miles and miles with no sign of cultivation. She talked about it for days.

This was the time my daughter's best friend was getting married. My daughter reluctantly accompanied her to the beauty parlour where hundreds of rupees were spent on the bridal make-up. At the wedding, my daughter didn't eat. She came home and looked for food. She said she didn't want to waste Rs 150 on food at the hotel so she had told her friend's father to put her share of the

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money in the drought relief box.

I knew then that her mind was made up. Even when lighthearted talk went on in the drawing room about parties, gifts and marriages, she would quietly walk out. Now she has met and married a person as simple, honest and rigid as herself. They wear simple cottons, taboo sugar, bread, fast foods, tinned stuffs which they say are luxuries with no food value. They have no television or electric device in their home. They write about their discoveries and experiences, observations of life around them, in a little house miles away from the city. They grow vegetables and mushrooms on their terrace and feed them with natural manure like peels and waste from the kitchen.

They do all the work themselves and have an understanding between them. They have very friendly relations with all the neighbours.

The struggle is for me, who see my daughter an exile from all her old friends and companions, denying herself the food she has grown up with, tearing herself from old traditions and customs. I am old now, and have led a comfortable life. Maybe now, I too will slow down, follow her path of simplicity and realise how little it needs to be happy.

Sati Surinder Singh, Delhi

In Affluence

Anju Khanna was the daughter of the prosperous Khanna family of Jhansi. Her father died in 1986 but she lived in a joint family consisting of his three brothers and their families. They owned three cinemas and several other business concerns. Anju was an MA BEd. and a first divisioner throughout. In January 1987, her marriage was arranged with Deepak Kumar, after a very brief acquaintance with his family. The

wedding took place in Delhi and Rs 500,000 was spent on the dowry and the celebrations.

After marriage, when Anju went to Bombay to her in-laws, she found that her husband was a drunkard and gambler. Very soon, her husband and in-laws demanded that her paternal uncle give them Rs 200,000 and a Maruti car. He, however, expressed his inability to meet this demand. Anju began to be maltreated, beaten and humiliated. She was not allowed to go out anywhere or even to write to her mother. Friends and



Anju

relatives who visited her witnessed her humiliation. Her family received reports of the torture of Anju, and they sent Rs 25,000 to her husband in March 1987. But her in-laws were not satisfied and the tortures continued. Anju's sister and cousin who visited her in August 1987 witnessed her sufferings. She wept and pleaded with them to take her with them to Jhansi. Since she was pregnant, she was allowed to go, and in October she gave birth to a son, Arjun, in Jhansi. When her mother-in-law visited Jhansi for Arjun's naming ceremony, she tricked

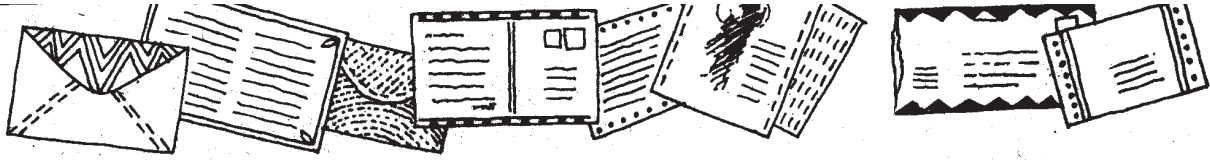
Anju's mother into giving her her jewellery, which she never returned. She had already earlier taken away all Anju's jewellery. Anju had narrated this in her letters home.

Anju's sufferings continued after she returned to Bombay but she told her family not to give in to her in-laws' demands. In August 1988, Deepak visited Jhansi and threatened her family that he would insure Anju for a large amount, if they did not give him the money he demanded. He and his mother insulted Anju in front of her family but they kept quiet. On a later occasion, Deepak told them that he had now insured Anju for Rs 150,000. But the Khannas did not take this seriously. They say they thought that Deepak, now that he was the father of a son, would behave himself.

In March 1989, Anju's cousins, Sanjay and Hemant, visited her in Bombay. She showed them her hand which was badly burnt, and told them that her mother-in-law had deliberately burnt it by putting it on a frying pan. She wept and asked them to take her to Jhansi else she would be killed. But her in-laws refused to send her so her cousins returned, leaving her there. A few days later, Anju's in-laws forcibly took her to Gandhigram, Gujarat. Her neighbours say that Anju wept and said she did not want to go as she felt she would be killed there. But no one intervened.

And on March 27, 1989, Anju's family got a phone call from her mother-in-law's brother to say that she was burnt and in hospital. However, her in-laws said the burns were not serious and she was not in danger. This was a lie, because Anju had received 80 percent burns and by the time her mother reached Gandhigram, she was already dead.

Anju's mother-in-law said that there



had been a quarrel because Anju wanted to take a teaching job, which her husband and in-laws opposed. There had already been several quarrels on this issue. Therefore, Anju had committed suicide.

Anju's uncles say that when they tried to stop the cremation and insist on a second post mortem, her in-laws' lawyer threatened them that her infant son would be killed if they persisted. However, after the cremation, Arjun was handed over to the Khannas. They then filed several cases against Anju's husband and in-laws, alleging murder. The Gandhigram police appear to be bribed, as they arrested the Kumars after great delay, and had them released on bail the same day. However, Anju's uncles are determined to fight the case up to the supreme court, if necessary.

P.R. Shukla, Jhansi
(translated from Hindi)

And in Poverty

Retired chief justice P. N. Bhagwati's observation that the Indian police was a group of organised antisocials in uniform proved to be more than true in the case of Moti Birua, aged 25, a tribal woman who was raped and killed in Manjhari police station, Singhbhum, Bihar.

She was taken to the police station on December 10, 1988, for interrogation in connection with the murder of her lover, Rajendra Sabaiya, a day earlier. On the 12th a constable informed her relatives that she had absconded from custody. Next morning, she was found hanging from a tree near the police station. The police claimed she had committed suicide. But three other tribals, who had been kept in the lock up in the Sabaiya murder case, say they saw her sitting in the police station till 8 p.m. on December 12. The post mortem report

showed that her tongue was inside in her mouth and there was no mark on her neck, but there were many marks of beating on and around her abdomen. It appears that she was raped, tortured and then her dead body hung on the tree. When the headman of Bara Mouda village where Moti lived, went to lodge a case of rape and murder, the police refused to register it. He then filed a petition with the SP, Singhbhum. But the SP, without calling for a second post mortem, as required by law, ordered Moti's relatives to bury her under police surveillance. After much ado, the officer in charge and the ASI of Manjhari police station were suspended, leaving the constables scot free. The two suspended officers were never tried for rape or murder. It is learnt that after a formal departmental enquiry they were reinstated. No one knows where they are today.

Victor Das, Singhbhum

Who was to Blame

This refers to the piece "Adding Insult to Injury" in **Manushi** No. 54-55. The item "Orissa's Women", published in *The Times of India* of November 1, 1989, mentioned in the piece, was filed by the news agency, PTI. I thought of drawing your attention to this so that readers do not misinterpret it as having been filed by me, as I am the *Times of India* correspondent in Orissa.

As a person deeply committed to feminism, I, too, condemn the news agency item's attempt to stereotype women as being uninvolved in electoral politics and the trivialising manner in which it sought to blame women for the poor representation given to them by political parties. And, like you, I also strongly disapprove of the heading "Ladylike Reticence?" given to another

news agency item mentioned in the same piece.

Debashish Munshi, Bhubaneswar

Errata

The last four lines of the English translation of Archana Varma's poem *God*, in **Manushi** No. 56, were inadvertently omitted. The complete translation is printed below. We regret the error.

God

*It is hard to say
how the weather office
would have decided its speed,
at how many miles an hour.
Only one window remained open,
Wrenching the curtains,
banging the panes,
the storm
burst inside.
Before it could be closed
the whole window
with its frame
fell outside -
then there was nothing to stop it.
Pictures, flower vases,
books or the table lamp -
who knows
which fell first -
all were smashed.
The labour of years
was telling a fearsome tale.
I stood, trying to tell
whether or not
there ever was anything there.
Next morning
he got up late.
He asked for tea
- in the same godlike style.
He had no idea
that all was not well
today, in his world,
that usual things
were not in their usual places.
He had only slept and gotten up.*