

REPORTS

CALCUTTA

Bengali Version of Manushi

When we first saw Manushi, we were overwhelmed by it and realised the dire need of a Bengali version of Manushi. We feel that different classes of women need to be exposed to feminism. We wrote a letter to Manushi, asking for their help in bringing out a Bengali version. On June 25, Madhu Kishwar of Manushi came to Calcutta to discuss this possibility.

After several days and nights of discussion and debate, we have come to the conclusion that we need to prepare ourselves and invite the help of other women before bringing out a Bengali version. We have decided to work for about three months towards this end.

We intend to meet as a study group to read and discuss writings relating to feminism and social change so as to arrive at a common understanding of our situation and problems as women. We will also discuss articles from Manushi, translate them into Bengali and circulate them in handwritten form among our friends so as to gauge the response of other women to the idea of such a magazine in Bengali.

We feel that the Bengali version should have a specific focus on what is happening to women in Bengal. We, as a group, intend to undertake regular investigative reporting on atrocities against women in and around Calcutta, so as to build up an information network in preparation for the Bengali Manushi. We will also try to find out about women's agitations and struggles, wherever they are occurring.

We hope to carry out a survey of any one group of working women in Calcutta, with a view to familiarize ourselves with

the living and working conditions of different sections of women and to organize ourselves more as a working group.

We plan to bring out a pamphlet explaining why we feel the need for a Bengali version of Manushi. We will circulate this among women and ask for their response, suggestions and active support. We hope any of you in Calcutta who are interested in working towards bringing out a Bengali version of Manushi will join us in the activities we are planning. Please write to us c/o Manushi.

In sisterhood,

**Archana, Paramita, Chanchala,
Meeta**

BAGHPAT

Police Run Amok

On June 18, 25-year-old Maya Tyagi with her husband Ishwar Chand and two others, was driving from Faridabad to her parental village Sankalputhi, to attend the wedding of her niece. A tyre of the car got punctured and the driver stopped at Baghpat chowk to get it repaired. While this was being done, a policeman in civilian dress tried to molest her. When she protested, her husband who was standing nearby, came up and gave the man a beating. The man left but returned in a short while with a police force which started firing at them. Terrified, they tried to drive off but the car would not start, so three of the occupants including her husband, got out and tried to push the car. Two of them were shot and killed. Another ran towards the crowd which had collected but was shot dead.

After this, Maya was dragged out of the car, beaten up, stripped and paraded



-Kathe Kollwitz

naked through the market place. People who tried to intervene were threatened by the police. She was then taken to the police station and raped by police officials. She has given their names in her application to the District Magistrate, written on June 21. Jagbir Singh, a local advocate, who belongs to Maya's village, moved an application for her release. The next day, judicial magistrate visited the hospital as Maya was not in position to be brought to court. He granted bail at 2.30 p.m. but she was not released until 8 p.m.

The police now allege that the three men killed were notorious dacoits and that Maya, the wife of one of them, supplied the ammunition to fire on the police. They say that members of the public who witnessed this "encounter" between police and dacoits, were so infuriated that they stripped and beat up Maya. They claim that they rescued Maya from the crowd, gave her new clothes, and that the charge rape is absolutely baseless.

Three women MPs—Gita Mukherjee,

Aziza Imam, Kanak Mukherjee, visited Baghat with the Home Minister. Villagers unanimously testified that the police version is a complete fabrication and that police forced Maya to sign her name as Sudesh, a wanted dacoit. The women MPs have now written a letter to him, demanding a judicial enquiry into the incident. There was an uproar in Parliament and on July 2, the Chief Minister of UP ordered a judicial enquiry.

However, police officials have not been transferred or suspended so they are in a position to tamper with evidence and terrorize witnesses. While politicians seek to make capital out of the incident (Raj Narain held a rally at Baghat on July 4), Maya, widowed and pregnant, is being hidden by her dazed family members because her life is now in danger.

A number of women's organizations including National Federation of Indian Women, Janvadi Mahila Samaj, Manushi, Stri Sangharsh, held a public meeting on July 4 to protest against this atrocity. It is significant that most women MPs have come together on this issue and that it is arousing widespread anger.

DELHI

Policewoman Burnt to Death

This is the photograph of Veena Sharma, who was recently burnt to death by her husband Jitendra Nagrath in her Timarpur residence. She was in the kitchen, cooking for her husband when he poured some highly inflammable material on her and set her ablaze. He then ran out, screaming that the gas cylinder had burst. However, this was found to be not so, and the four-year-old son testified that his father had set fire to his mother.

Veena was a sub-inspector of Delhi police. Her death came as a terrible shock for many of us not only because of the brutality of the murder but because it was hard to believe that a police officer trained in self-defence should have been unable to defend herself.

At first, the case appeared to be one of marital discord, leading to violence by

the man. The marriage was a strange one. Veena had married Nagrath against the wishes of her parents. She was an MA in Hindi literature from Delhi University, while he had barely passed the seventh standard, was physically handicapped and had never had a regular job. From the beginning, Veena was the primary breadwinner of the family. Though Nagrath had no regular income, and wasted much money, drinking and gambling, yet he resented Veena's independent income, was madly suspicious of her, forbade her to mix with colleagues and friends and refused to help with housework or childcare. He often battered both Veena and the two small



Veena Sharma

sons, so that she was forced to leave the younger child with her mother, because he was in danger of being severely injured by his father. Veena used to say that she could not leave Nagrath since she had chosen to marry him against her parents' wishes and her divorce would interfere with her sister's chances of finding a good match.

However, on meeting Veena's family, several alarming details emerged. Though they do not underestimate the violent propensities and vindictiveness of Nagrath, they feel that the murder was the

well-planned work of a gang with whom he was in league. They say that evidence at the murder site supports this suspicion. They feel that Veena was blackmailed into marriage, that as a police officer she may have incurred the wrath of a gang and that there is more to the murder than meets the eye. Since Nagrath's father is a retired police officer too, they fear that the case will get hushed up and therefore they want it to be transferred to the CBI. We hope women's organizations will come together on this issue and demand a CBI enquiry into this case.

BOMBAY

Another Morcha By F.A.R.

On the night of April 11, 15-year-old Gosiyabee of Shivshakti Nagar, Turbhe village, Thane district, was raped by Prakash, a local ruffian, police constables Kalkund and Borekar and a friend of theirs. Prakash broke into the girl's house, gagged her and carried her into the fields. There, these four men raped her through the night. They threatened her with a knife, saying: "If you tell any one of this, we will finish you off. And after all, we are from the police. To whom will you complain against us?"

Bleeding and weeping, Gosiyabee was going towards the well to drown herself, when the local people discovered her and prevented the suicide. Last year, two rapes had taken place in this area with the active involvement of the local powers-that-be—a contractor, a moneylender and the *Sarpatil*. On November 19, 1978, Shivshakti Nagar residents had demonstrated outside the police station in connection with those cases.

This problem of the unsafety of women arises in every Bombay slum. Women are beaten up by drunken husbands, tortured by in laws, molested by local ruffians, exposed to rape when they go to deserted places for their ablutions, and entrapped in prostitution rackets which flourish in slums.

On May 18, the Forum Against Rape took out a 100-strong morcha in front of

the Turbhe police station. About a 100 local women and men spontaneously joined the demonstration. There was a lot of anger among the women, yet they remained peaceful inspite of the provocative attitude of the police. They also demonstrated outside Prakash's house. The Forum demanded that since two constables of Turbhe police station were involved, the case should be, transferred to CID. They also demanded that proceedings be immediately launched against the two policemen who had been arrested and released on bail, and that the fourth accused should be arrested. They demanded a copy of the medical report because it did not mention the girl's injuries which members of the Forum had seen on her body.

And what was the response of the police - those guardians of 'law and order'? The Turbhe police station registered a case of rioting and trespass against the demonstrators, who had remained peaceful throughout !

The Forum is following up this action by going regularly and meeting women of Turbhe. A pamphlet had been brought out analysing the case and also the increasing incidence of violence against women all over the country. Forum members discussed these issues with the women of Turbhe and asked them to offer support to Gosiyabee.

These discussions are proving fruitful. For instance, at first the women were shocked when a Forum member told them she had no intention of getting married, but gradually they all started speaking out. One woman said : "My husband beats me daily", another : "Even in rich middle class families, men beat their wives." One of the Forum members told of her own experience — her husband has stopped beating her after she joined the Forum because he knows all the women will take a morcha to his house and beat him. The village women were struck by this, and on being advised to do the same and help each other, they on the spot formed a Mahila Suraksha Dal (Women's Safety Group). Suddenly an old grandmother spoke up : "You are right,



Picture of an anti-dowry demonstration organized by N.F.I.W. In the centre is Satyarani Chadha with a picture of her daughter Shashibala who was burnt to death a year ago by her in-laws. The case is still pending with the crime branch. The police had made it a case of "suicide". Since then Satyarani Chadha is in the forefront of every such demonstration and has vowed that she will either get justice or die on the doorstep of "justice-givers" !

a woman should not get married." The question of housework was also discussed and the Hindi Manushi distributed, even though only one of the women and a few children are literate. The Forum has prepared a play to be presented in the area.

(Compiled from the Forum pamphlet and reports by women who participated)

DELHI

Anti-Dowry Protests

On June 19, 1980, the National Federation of Indian Women organized a demonstration in protest against the increasing incidence of atrocities on women, particularly dowry murders and the callous indifference of police and government to them.

Several hundred women marched from India Gate to Boat Club, carrying placards protesting against the burning of women for dowry and other crimes like rape, molestation and ill-treatment, and demanding stringent laws and their implementation. One of the placards referring to the dowry deaths of women, read: "In 1975, 300 women died. In 1978, 200 died. How many will die in 1980?" Women shouted anti-police slogans and chanted "Nari Ekta Zindabad" (Long live women's unity). The rally was addressed by Gita Mukherjee, Sushila Gopalan, Aziza

Imam, Pramila Dandavate, Vimla Farooqi and others A short play called *Aurat* (woman) was put up by the Jan Natya Manch. It was watched with interest by the agitating women who had come from far-flung areas like Shahpur Jat, Nangloi, Tilak Nagar, Hauz Khas, Sundernagri, Mangolpuri. The women, predominantly rural, were visibly moved by accounts of bride-burning by four bereaved mothers. Altogether, seven mothers of dowry victims were present at the rally.

A memorandum was sent to the: Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and a deputation met the Lok Sabha Speaker. The memorandum called on the Prime Minister to make amendments in the law so that dowry be made a cognizable offence and demanded that no gifts be given at the time of marriage. To protect women who are driven to suicide, a clause should be inserted in the Indian Penal Code to provide that driving a person to suicide should be treated as murder. It should be made clear that no woman can be made to come to a police station, or be locked up between 8 p.m. and 6 am. and if need be, she can be kept under house arrest only.

A few days earlier, the NFIW had also organized two protests against police inaction after the alleged dowry murder of a young girl, Jaswanti. One demonstration was at Police Commissioner Bhinder's

office, the other outside the Nangloi police station. Om Swaha, a play on dowry deaths, was presented.

Women displayed great anger and militancy at this rally. They insisted on going to demonstrate outside the house of Jaswanti's husband, even though this was not part of the original plan. The police hastily shielded the house from the women's fury, otherwise they might have executed summary justice for the death of Jaswanti.

KERALA

They Dare to Love each Other

In our last issue, we had reported the joint suicide of Jyotsana and Jayashree in Ahmedabad, and had asked readers near there to try and find out more about the case. Patriot of June 30, 1980, reports another similar case :

Cochin, June 29 (UNI) Two college girls who attempted to commit suicide by jumping into the estuary at Vypeen Jetty near here today, were saved by a crew member of a junker service. On seeing the girls, K.M. Mallika and P.N. Lalithambika, jump into the waters with their hands tied together, Lascar Krishnan of the junker made a dive and rescued them. The girls were soon taken to Fort Cochin and admitted in the Government hospital. According to the police, the girls, who were bosom friends and pre-degree students of the Kerala Varma College, Trichur, had left behind a note on the shore stating that they were ending their lives as they could not "bear separation from each other."

Most young women who are sent to college, are pushed into a marriage of convenience immediately after graduation. Very often, this also means the merciless destruction of strong and growing relationships between women, which are not given any social recognition or value, because in our male-dominated society, the only relationship in a woman's life is supposed to be that with her lord and master, his family and his children.

Women like Lalithambika and Mallika are forced to think themselves abnormal because they care so much for each other

and want to be together. They see that it is almost impossible for them to be together in this society, so it seems preferable to die rather than to live as others want them to live, and deny their own identity. Only by offering support to women who are struggling to stay together and love each other, can we make it possible for all women to choose their own ways of life.

If you live near Trichur, please try to find out more about this case, try to meet these women and offer them some support—they must be facing terrible familial and social stigma, ridicule and pressures to conform.

And if you can obtain their address from the police station or their college, please send it to us.

Cases that need Investigation

THE following are cases reported in the newspapers. They need to be further investigated. If you live in the district, please follow up these cases and find out more details, especially what happened to the women later, how their families and communities reacted.

Calcutta, July 7 (PTI) : Three police personnel—two assistant sub-inspectors and a constable were suspended for allegedly outraging the modesty of a married woman from Bangladesh yesterday.

The acting superintendent of police, Mr D. Sarengi, told press-men that two of them—one ASI and a constable—were arrested while another ASL who was the main culprit, was absconding.

Quoting the 25-year-old victim, Amina Khatun, Mr Sarengi said that she was a resident of Jessore in Bangladesh and had strayed to Sealdah station with her four-year-old daughter with the idea of going to Bombay.

Mr Sarengi said one of the ASIs picked up acquaintance with her at the station and brought the two to Nimta police station on the plea of taking them to his house. The woman was then taken to the roof-top of the station house where the two assistant sub inspectors outraged her modesty and drove her out.

Mr Sarengi said, finding the woman

moving aimlessly on the roads of Nimta, the local resistance group picked up the two and deposited them at the police station and here a constable outraged her modesty again. All this came to light when the resistance group personnel came to the police station later to enquire about the woman. She broke into tears and narrated her pathetic story to the group.

Bulandshahr, July 7: A woman of Lohlara village about 40 km from here, was allegedly burnt to death by four miscreants after they had raped her, according to the police.

The miscreants, it is stated, first tried to molest a woman. When another woman tried to stop them, the four men criminally assaulted her. Later they poured kerosene on her clothes and set them on fire.

The gangsters were reportedly under the influence of liquor.

Banda, July 6 : Fourteen young tribal women were criminally assaulted by a gang of armed miscreants who let loose a reign of terror near Gonda village on the night of June 28, according to a delayed report received here.

Lakhan Kol, head of the tribal group, was yet to recover from the shock when this correspondent met him. He said the gangsters dragged all men out of their huts at the point of the gun and kept them at one place before indulging in the "most shameful outrage." The men stood helplessly as the women were raped repeatedly. Around 4 a.m., the gangsters left, taking away a transistor radio, some cash and clothes.

The tribals, engaged in a stone-crushing mill at Bharatkup, reported the matter to their employer who promised to lodge a complaint with the police at Badausa but he did not do so, it is stated.

No attempt has so far been made to apprehend the culprits.

According to one stone-crushing mill owner, about four months ago a similar incident occurred near Gonda village in which eight Kol women were raped by an armed group but the police did not take any action. The victims later fled to Madhya Pradesh. □