

Letters to Manushi

Purpose of Punishment

This is in response to the article: "How AWAG Dealt with a Rapist" (Manushi No. 58).

What should be the punishment for a particular crime? This is a complex question and it is almost impossible to reach a final conclusion. The main issue is: what is the purpose of giving punishment? Is it to improve the thinking of the offender or is it to instil fear in the mind of the criminal as well as other potential criminals?

The most important consideration should be whether the punishment given has the potential to be effective in crime deterrence without snuffing out the right to live. Our judicial system is incapable of doing this.

Two things can be said about the aforementioned article:

(1) violence always breeds counter-violence.

(2) that public humiliation such as '*paanch jooton ki sazaa*' at the *panchayat chaupal* can also be quite effective in dealing with ordinary petty crimes.

Pramod, Delhi

(translated from Hindi)

No Longer Helpless

In Manushi No. 58 I read how AWAG dealt with the rapist of Farida, and I really appreciate the steps that the members took to bring the wrongdoer to book, but it made me sad to know that some did not like the action taken by AWAG for they felt that AWAG had "lynched the law."

What sort of law was it that AWAG "lynched"? The law which failed even to register a complaint against the brute who had committed

such an atrocity on a five year old girl, the law which let the criminal go scotfree instead of punishing him? Had the police and the law done their duty Farida's parents would not have had to leave the locality, while Hafiz continued to live there as usual.



What law did AWAG break when it beat Hafiz and asked him to apologise for his crime? The law in our country, as we all know, is in reality a paper tiger. If action was really taken as per the provisions in the law then AWAG and other such organisations would not have to do what it rightfully did, but when the guardians of the law fail in their duties, it is necessary to wake them from their slumber by bringing pressure on them which AWAG did.

As to the question whether this is the only method left to women to fight violence against them, my answer is that greater public awareness and participation of the people is needed.

It is for them to rise in action against such atrocities instead of being mute spectators and waiting for

someone to do something. It is here that woman's role assumes greater significance, for if she will not make efforts to improve her lot then who else will? AWAG's action also drove home the point that we are no longer going to take things lying down, for years of taking things lying down has resulted in this state of affairs. Such action by women will certainly intimidate the wrongdoers and make them realise that they cannot do as they please.

Kauseen Ishrat, Ranchi

A Vantage Point

Manushi is a magazine that continues to disturb me very much. Some time ago you published the story of a *dhobi's* daughter (see Manushi No. 53). You showed how the girl's parents together managed to earn about Rs 3,000 in Delhi and by buying and selling *jhuggi* plots, earned enough to spend Rs 30,000 on a sister's wedding. In spite of all this money these people were poor, and not willing to spend money on diet or education for their daughter. I am baffled. I can't understand what kind of poverty we are dealing with here. It is not a "money poverty."

I am an Indian Christian priest's wife. We do not earn the kind of money the *dhobi* does, yet we have been able to pay for good education and diet for our children. Over the years we have accumulated many books and indulged in various hobbies. Our lifestyle is so different from the *dhobi's* that the two cannot really be compared except that they are lived out on the same economic terms, more or less.



Why is there such a vast difference? Is it that we had a legacy of a good education ourselves to start with? Was it that which made us choose such different priorities from the *dhobi's*? How can we help people to use their own earnings to enhance the quality of their lives without interfering with their right of choice? Perhaps "choice" is the key to the whole matter. We, though financially not very well off, have been able to choose what we will spend our money on. We have an inner security that enabled us to resist societal pressures. The *dhobi's* poverty is "poverty of choice." He has been denied the inner resources to do other than what is expected of him - he must pay for an expensive wedding; he *must* fulfil family and caste obligations even if these are quite unreasonable. He cannot really choose.



Jane R. Caleb, Dalhousie

Reading your letter we are reminded of a common Punjabi saying: "Apni akal aur doosre ka paisa hamesha zyada nazar aata hai" (one's own wisdom and another's wealth is always over estimated). Before you go on to condemn the dhobi's family for what appear like "unwise" choices you need to consider the following.

The income this family earns is the product of an enormous number of working hours put in by three to four people. The work involved is so hard that it does not leave them much

time or energy for any other life.

In your family if you and your husband both worked to earn, your combined income is likely to be far above that of the dhobi's family. Your husband has job security and perquisites like decent housing, pension, medical insurance or allowances. In addition, your family has been able to afford a major investment in your education. Someone of your social status is likely to have a large friendship, kin and religious network that enables you to obtain a lot of non monetised benefits that the dhobi and his family do not have. The similarity, if any, in the levels of income, is very superficial, and therefore, misleading. You seem to have missed altogether the fact that the dhobi migrated to the city under distress as his family's land holding could not even ensure basic survival for all of them. He still has to send money to pay off regular debts incurred by his family in the village. They are economic refugees without a secure foothold in the city. They are living virtually on the pavement and are unlikely to be able to afford to rent a house from where they can carry out their trade which requires them to be close to a middle class colony.

The dhobi's choices are determined by the precariousness of his existence and lack of any future security either for himself or his family. This is what makes him stint even on subsistence items. To condemn his choices as being innately inferior and to attribute them to a lack of "inner resources" displays a certain insensitivity to the

predicament of someone living a more vulnerable life. It amounts to saying that people are poor because they are foolish.

Undoubtedly, the priorities of the dhobi's family are different from yours. You have chosen more leisure, more books, better food. He chooses to have whatever he can for future security and for expenses such as his sister's wedding. But then people of your and our social status are not compelled to choose between buying books and spending on wedding feasts. We can often afford to do both. Therein lies the real difference.

Manushi

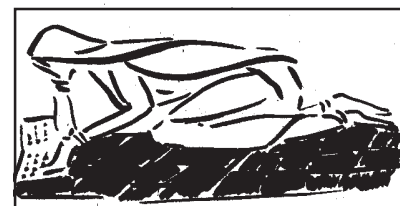
Fathers and Husbands

Thank you for publishing my letter in **Manushi** No. 59, but the name has been printed as Suresh Jindal.

I am very sorry to read the "fatherly advise" preferred by Mr Bhupinder Sharma of USA in **Manushi** No. 59. Mr Sharma was very right to forbid the entry of **Manushi** into his home. It is not meant for people like him who stale thinking.

The basic problem of Indian males is that they have giant sized egos. They feel happy only when their wives serve them like god.

I was also sorry to read the story of Mr Mishra's daughter, Neelam. Neelam was killed not by her in-laws but by her own father. A man spends



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money on a daughter's marriage not from love and affection for her but to maintain his so-called position in society. How many fathers educate their daughters in a way that makes them economically independent? Had Mr Mishra spent Rs 150,000 on his daughter's education instead of her dowry, probably she would have been alive today.

Sushil K. Jindal, Kurukshetra

Painful

I read **Manushi** regularly since July last year. I referred the journal to the library authorities of the ministry where I am working and it is now regularly available in the library reading room. But it gives me immense pain to note that **Manushi** is hardly read by women, who keep themselves busy with periodicals like *Employment News* and *Film Fare*.

P. Senthilnathan, Delhi

Selling Images

Every women's magazine sells its peculiar brand of visual image depending on its readership. The cover girls are a case in point. While the conventional *Woman's Era* sticks to glamour of the milder variety, *Femina* covers have the eye-catching glossiness of the superficially exotic. In contrast, *Woman's Executive Digest* features ultrasophisticates, complete with sunglasses, suit and top hat. Curiously, these magazines borrow from the imperfect but living woman only to give her back a plastic pose.

A classic instance is the "glamorous transformation" feature which *Femina* introduced: "How to

drop your everyday looks and go in for a change of image." A tiny, pale photograph of a girl accompanies an attractive colour blowup in which the same girl smiles brightly with a new hairstyle, heavy make-up, attired in the new "image."

The tie-up of beauty with wealth



and happiness is not accidental. Most fashion features and cosmetic advertisements imply wealth as well as beauty. Beauty is a way of attaining wealth. By being beautiful or trying to become so, you seem to become a little richer (though your pockets are probably lighter) and a little happier.

Each women's magazine also projects a personality image depending on the type of woman to which it caters. *Woman's Era*, which claims the highest circulation, identifies with the homely, conservative woman; *Femina* with the outgoing working woman or socialite; *Eve's Weekly* with the middle of the road; and, *Woman's Executive Digest* with woman executives.

Woman's Era concentrates on

dutiful, domestic topics like "Bed-wetting in Children", "The Honour of being a Woman", "How to Choose Curtains." The tone adopted in most articles is that of the parent-cum-teacher explaining elementary things to the simple minded.

Another "progressive" publication, *Femina*, tries to make drudgery sound cheerful for the working woman. Their Self-Reliance Special (August 23-September 7, 1989) exhorts: "Today's ideal housewife is not stuck in the kitchen. She runs a home and an industry. She is feminine, self-reliant, and strong." Progress, for the woman, is shouldering more and more burdens without easing the ones like housework and childcare.

Advertisements too use the personality image with great effect. The most commonly used is that of the efficient housewife who walks the earth in the form of Lalithaji, proving her superiority by buying a particular washing powder every night on television before millions of middle class families.

The media images interfere with a woman's freedom to appear herself or be herself. They play an important part in crystallising attitudes which ultimately prevent the woman from freeing herself. Instead of inducing thought or action they promote passivity.

Usha Zacharias, Bombay

Dowryless Wedding

My daughter, Nisha Dube, was married on February 17 to Kranti Chaturvedi, a journalist, and only Re 1 was given by the bride's family to



the bride-groom at the wedding. This is a model of a dowryless wedding between two Brahman communities. The boy is a Dashora Brahman of Rajasthan and the girl an Audumbar Brahman of Madhya Pradesh.

Suresh Dubey, Indore
(translated from Hindi)

Not for Women?

I am a regular reader of **Manushi**. This time I thought I will send my life subscription which I believe will be a help to you. Some members of my in-laws' family are quite openminded, but still there are some who oppose my reading **Manushi**. They think if I read this magazine I will become revolutionary in my mind and may revolt. So they don't allow women of their family to read this magazine.

I run a school on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar. Out of the 140 children in my school 40 are from the labouring class, and 10 are girls. I also work with another voluntary organisation which works for the improvement of science teaching among children. We publish a monthly science magazine. Many children write letters to us. One of them, a 14 year old girl, writes that she is not satisfied with the treatment she gets from her parents. I will translate her letter from Oriya and send it to you for publication.

In Orissa we have a women's magazine (typical type) with a wide circulation, called *Sucharita*. I would like to write a review of your magazine for this magazine so that a number of other friends can at least know about **Manushi**. I think it would be better to write an article which will serve the

purpose of a review and publicity as **Manushi** needs the kind of publicity which can be done only through personal efforts.

Pushpashree Pattnaik,
Bhubaneswar

Response to a Concerned Father

This is in response to Mr Bhupinder Sharma's letter in **Manushi** No. 59.



Please convey the following points to Mr Sharma:

1) If India was such a beautiful country why did he leave it? Now, if he was here he would have to put less effort into "controlling" his daughters as he would have found many "concerned fathers" like himself who think no end of their superiority.

2) If he is so distressed about his "home loving" daughters going astray, then he should have thought twice before producing four (which he obviously did in the hope of a son).

3) If he thinks only by reading this "dangerous publication", Indian girls are becoming "American trash", then let me enlighten him by telling him that nobody, no place and no publication makes anybody bad. It is when *sanskars* and thoughtful training, trust and love are not given and received in plenty, that one becomes trash, be it American, Indian or African.

4) If he thinks his wife is the "most contented woman in the neighbourhood", then tell him to reflect on this point carefully, because either she is unable to realise her potential or, for her, ignorance is bliss. Actually, he must be made to understand that we can only live this life successfully and happily if we trust and love one another openmindedly and sincerely.

Suman Sharma, New Delhi

First Time Protest

The women's movement has had some effect on the younger generation. I was very happy when the girls of B.J. Medical College openly demanded action against some boys involved in a case of molestation during the festival of Holi. While the authorities were hesitant to take action against the boys as they had links with the chief minister, media campaigns and the efforts of pressure groups had some effect. This is the first time such steps have been taken. Furthermore, the girls bravely spoke out against vulgar jokes and writings of some senior doctors in the college magazine.

Name withheld, on request.