

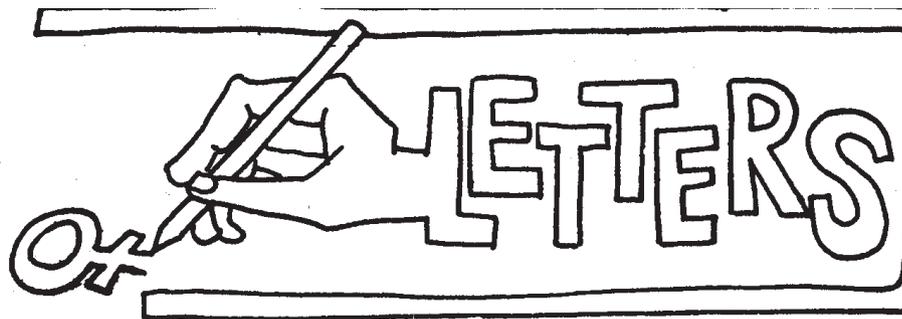
A Door Always Open

My husband and I work together on a rural development project. You have asked me about my life. I have learnt that I must hide nothing, nothing is so special in my sorrow and we must talk about our sorrows. We then realize that we all have the same problems and also that they are problems to be solved. My life has become an open book...

Recently we had a new experience. My German feminist friend Beatrice wanted to interview me and my maidservant Bibi (who comes from a dalit village but is now educating herself and participates in our group). As we talked we found that Bibi, Beatrice and I had many experiences in common. We are divorced and all of us had taken the lead in getting divorced. We had to give up our claims to education for the sake of our brothers – Bibi even elementary education, Beatrice and I higher education. All of us are education-oriented. All of us had a tough time after marriage. Bibi's marriage was arranged by her parents but both of us got married on our own. None of our parents supported us in breaking away. Bibi was surprised that we three could have similar experiences.

I spent 15 years of my life as a housewife... Now I have freed myself from many things – I don't have to care for ornaments, dressing up, unnecessary mannerisms, cooking artfully and giving parties, doing embroidery – nothing expressive but repetitive and artless lace work. My, all this was really killing me! I realize this after stopping it. After I left my first husband, I entered the world for the first time, where there was no security and I came to realize that I had been paying too high a price for that security...

Now my concept of the family has changed. A family should not be a fixed rigid relationship but a fluid, creative one. The members need not be related through blood or marriage but they should be friends. I want a home where people can share, relax, live creatively and really care for each other. The members should not be possessive either of people or things



though this does not mean no privacy. At present, family homes are suffocating and killing the growing life. They are the domain of a patriarch (father) who lets others stay only if they behave in a certain way. This is against human life... I have a close friend Nayana who is a rural activist. Once she and I were walking in the jungle and we crossed a wooden frame which was the gateway to an adivasi village. Nayana remarked: "Kusum, this is our house – a mere door which is always open. You can go any way and it makes no difference. Anyone can come and go and it does not have to be possessed by us but is still ours." This is exactly my idea of home...

Kusum Karnik, Pune

Inspiring Each Other

I work in the government women's welfare centre, teaching needlework to destitute women. The atmosphere of this small hill town suffocates me but what can I do? I have shown **Manushi** to many hill women. Every day, I have to go far from the town, climbing up steep pathways to reach the women whom I tutor. When I return at night, utterly exhausted, I have to grapple with the problems of women and orphaned children. I work day and night but am paid only Rs. 300 a month, that too after a delay of several months. Often I get fed up of this life and think of doing desperate things... There is a workers' movement in our town. Often, while returning in the evening, the voice of the workers' leaders used to attract me. I realized that in their speeches, they were criticizing a social system in which not just workers but also peasants, youth and all

women are oppressed. I contacted some communist activists and when they talked about class divided society, my eyes were opened... In this conservative society, girls are not allowed to even approach communist thinking, so the leadership of the movement remains in the hands of men. I find that even men who call themselves communists consider it a sin to involve the women of their family in the movement. I often wonder how these socialists who talk of class struggle but are themselves divided into classes (half the society-women-being totally ignored) will be able to prepare the ground for class struggle. When I read about the Tebhaga movement in **Manushi**, I realized that the women of this country have struggled with great courage. If you publish the life stories and pictures of Kalpana Dutt and other such brave women, you kindle a spark of inspiration...*

Byasa Bijalwan, Chamba

Indian Sisters Abroad

...I work as an organizer of an adult education project for women of ethnic minorities in Britain. Many of them do not speak enough English to cope with practical matters of daily life here. Though our aim is to provide English tuition to women, our groups tend to function as support groups where women talk out many of their problems of adaptation. Living here, many pressures are intensified for these women, as their husbands are afraid that the women's traditional role may get disrupted by western values and therefore become more conservative than they were in India. Dowry pressures

increase in many families, there are more restrictions on women's freedom of movement ...

As a feminist, I find it difficult to know what kind of support to give to such friends... Reading **Manushi** this week was a very exciting experience as it seemed that it was the kind of journal one might be able to introduce to Indian women – women for whom a British feminist journal like *Spare Rib* would be quite inaccessible... I am also sure that many women who would love to read **Manushi** will not actually feel free to have it in their homes...

Marion Molteno, UK

Raddi Fund

This is an open letter to all friends and supporters of **Manushi** who realize **Manushi's** lack of funds. Why not start a special 'RADDI FUND' which means contributing the money earned by selling old newspapers, magazines, tins, clothes, to **Manushi**. To this 'Raddi Fund' even house wives with no special means of income can contribute and give much needed support to **Manushi**.

To initiate the 'Raddi Fund' I am sending a sum of Rs. 25 which is in anticipation of the raddi to be sold this month.

Shashi Sail, Mahasamund

Biased?

...I am a 23 year old girl, waiting for my enrolment as an advocate in Jabalpur High Court. I have gone through the legal column with care, but I am disappointed by the biased view taken by **Manushi**. Moreover, some of the issues are very dull for young people and middle class families, because you just narrate the awful state of women and do not give any solution. Anyway, you deserve to get a big congratulation and good wishes as you have taken a step forward towards the common goal. I have been a student of Jammu University and I will make sure that **Manushi** becomes a habit of hostel life for the girls there. **Manushi** should also give tasks to the readers so that they can add

their energy to the fulfillment of the mission.

Sukhversha Mehra, Jabalpur

Why Kanyadan?

...A girl is not an inanimate object... Then why is the relationship between husband and wife made one of gift-taker and gift?...In our scriptures, *Kanyadan* (ceremony at marriage when girl's father gives the girl to the groom) has been called the greatest *Dan*. One who has not given this gift or alms, is deprived of giving the greatest gift. But why is only the daughter given? This is not a great gift but an example of discrimination between daughters and sons. They say the idea behind *Kanyadan* is that the feeling of protectiveness is strengthened by the feeling of giving. But has the almstaker never deposited the given object back on the threshold of the almsgiver? How often married women have to return to their parents' home! Then what is the significance of this gift?



...Any girl conscious of her identity will feel the futility of this ritual. Then why are we silent? It is young girls who will have to courageously break this evil custom. After all, what objection can the givers and takers of gifts have to it?*

Madhu Agarwal, Varanasi

Seeds of Change

...You said you would like to know how I developed. In school and college, I was awfully traditional in my thinking, awfully religious and used to even do meditation in the hope of attaining *nirvana*. But I changed when I was 21. I stopped wearing saris, started on trousers, cut my waist-long hair, and found a job instead of going onto higher studies. I changed so drastically that none of my friends could recognize either my appearance or my attitudes. There were several reasons for this change. For a long time, I was frustrated being a woman. My life seemed to be totally controlled by people and circumstances. I felt very vulnerable and used to get terrific fits of depression every evening. I got infatuated with a boy in college with whom I didn't even talk much. I used to just moon about him from a distance and it took me a year to get over him. Suddenly I found it didn't matter any more... Sheer economic necessity also – like looking for a job and not finding one for a long time – contributed to make me feel disoriented. Though I seemed to change overnight, the factors had been building up for a long time. The only thing still making me unhappy was my ambition to do well in life. I wanted to complete MA and get promotions. Only after I realized that this whole society and system is quite wrong in its values, that getting on in life is not important, that one has to get away from petty involvement in one's own affairs, did I stop participating in the rat race...

M., Bombay

“From a Modern Babylon”

...We are sorry to admit that in West Germany nobody cares about half a million

people dying slowly of starvation any more than he cares about sports events or about the mounting price of petrol (which he wouldn't really need if he drove not such a big car!) It is not known here that the riches of five per cent of the world population is gained at the expenses of the underdeveloped nations. Everything possible is done to veil this fact, to deceive people. There are campaigns to prepare the western people for more military expenses. This time for reasons of petrol supply, the US will kill more innocent victims...

Looking out of our windows, we can see a part of this monster town, Frankfurt, where about 50,000 bureaucrats in the course of their usual work, hatch designs to bring to 1.5 billion people in the world – despair, poisoning, droughts, starvation... not more than two miles away we can see the skyscrapers where they sit behind thick glass walls, connected to their computers, telex and telephones. They are no more men – they have become robots and a woman is never among these “decision-making” people. Women have to serve them as secretaries... We both are unemployed students. Probably, for these bureaucrats we are as much “not understandable” as you, the Indian women in Bombay or Delhi. We are separated from them by as great a distance, though in the same city. But when we walk on the street, we have to breathe the stench from their big cars and from the chimneys of their industrial plants.

The contaminated air gets into our flat and one of us falls ill every winter. And at least half of the population of this city has to bear this burden of the completely contaminated environment!... In a circle of ten miles around our house, you can find factories for all those products which are bitterly needed by the poor elsewhere. For instance, Hoechst, Merck, Siemens, Telefunken, Opel, Braun. Here everything is available...but do you think there is even one small tool, one book, one medicine which would be produced for non-profit reasons? Do you think they'd give away without payment the least thing? Oh no! They'd rather throw away

the surplus so that the price should not fall!... Certainly there are a lot of West German development projects in India and no one here knows whether they are actually helping the oppressed or not. If we could get proper, independent reports, we could convince people who donate money to such projects, that such charity is being misused...

Joja and Jojo, Germany

Ragging and Rapist Culture

Today I heard some students boasting about how they rag their juniors. It made my blood boil and I remembered how, when I joined IIT 15 years ago, I was shown a picture of a naked woman and forced to describe in detail the various parts of her body...

Ragging is the culture of vulgarity, barbarism, dehumanization and regimentation. It is in no way different from the culture of rapism. At that time ragging culture was confined only to defence, engineering and medical colleges, but as I had foreseen, it has now spread to all other colleges as well. This culture contributes to the disrespect of women and involves women too in this. Struggle against ragging culture is inseparable from the struggle for women's liberation...

Narayan, Kharagpur

Lighting Up the Woman Within

... My involvement with the women's question is a long story. It began when I did my MA in sociology and faced the fact that women were being used as prostitutes; unwed mothers were being thrown away as “fallen women.” It was a revelation – a spark that slowly but surely lit up the woman within me, making me resolve to stand up for “my own.” I felt then that these women are “my own.” Somehow now I fall in love and feel a tremendous sisterly bond with every exploited so-called “fallen” woman, even if I can't do anything for her...

Rosamma Philip, Pune

I study in Class XII in Sophia College which is for girls only. I first came across **Manushi** when my teacher read out an article from it, about Mills and Boon

novels. I asked my teacher to lend me the magazine for a day, I read it and subscribed for it. It's an eye-opener. Newspapers give us very little about everything...

Nafisa Damania, Bombay

Spreading Our Ideas

I thoroughly enjoy reading **Manushi**, although all of it is not all that ‘enjoyable.’ In fact, it is the only non-technical magazine which I read with interest. I am a girl of 18 but I feel very strongly about the equality of the sexes and rebuff any attempt at male chauvinist pig jokes, much to the annoyance of those around me who remark that I'm very sensitive. I think that if there were more of such sensitivity around, the world would be a better place to live in.

Gayatri Saberwal, Delhi

Please write your full address each time

These are only a few of hundreds of letters which come to **Manushi**. This tremendous support and love from all of you really gives us strength and courage. We reply to each letter personally – this takes time and energy so please have patience with us if we take some time to reply to your letter.

Also, even if you have written to us before, or are a regular correspondent, please do write your address in full each time on your letter, because we cannot possibly remember so many address. If your address is not on your letter, we have to hunt through the files to find an earlier letter and locate your address. This adds to the delay in replying. And please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope or letter form if possible, because postage is eating up a large chunk of **Manushi's** very limited funds.

Dear Subhaga,

We got your inspiring letter and very much want to be in touch with you. Please tell us your name and address because it is our policy not to print letters from people who are anonymous to us. We will certainly preserve your anonymity in print and otherwise. If you want us to do so.

- Manushi

“If there is any theory to support discrimination between human beings, that theory is a fraud.”

—Savitribai Phule

JANUARY 3, 1981, was the 150th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule, one of the pioneers within the nineteenth century social reform movement for women’s and dalit rights. She was married at the age of nine to 13-year-old Jotiba Phule, one of the founders of the dalit movement in Maharashtra. With his encouragement, she studied at home and passed the teachers’ training examination. The local Brahmin community protested to her father-in-law, there was conflict at home as a result of which both she and Jotiba had to leave the house.

In 1848 they started the first school for girls at Pune. Savitri was 18 at this time. When she started going out to teach at the school, there was great furore in the town. On her way to school, she was constantly taunted and harassed by men. Abuse, cowdung and stones were flung at her. On one occasion, a ruffian accosted her, told her to stop going to school and threatened to rape her if she continued her work. Savitribai gave him a couple of slaps, a crowd collected and the man fled. After that, she was not harassed in this particular way. Her comment on the experience was : “I am going to teach my younger sisters. When you throw stones at me, I feel that you are throwing flowers and it inspires

me to continue doing my duty towards my sisters.”

Savitribai was also active in the struggle against untouchability. She and Jotiba opened a school for dalits and fought against the segregation of wells.



Savitribai

They expanded the sphere of their activity and undertook the education of Brahmin girls, thus incurring the fury of the upper castes. One of their most radical actions was the establishment of a *Maika* – a refuge for upper caste child widow who

became pregnant. Such women were usually driven to backstreet abortion or were murdered by their families. In the refuge, they could deliver their children without fear. Jotiba and Savitri adopted one such child and later supported his inter-caste marriage which also aroused tremendous opposition.

Savitri was a woman of dauntless courage and active imagination, displayed in her lifelong fight against such practices as child marriage, infanticide and the shaving of widow’s heads. It was she who conceived the idea of asking the barber community to refrain from shaving widow’s heads – a plan which proved quite effective. She often plunged alone into dangerous situations – once she rescued a harijan girl and Brahmin boy from a mob which was ready to tear them to pieces because of their inter-caste relationship. She also did pioneering rescue work during the plague of 1897 and the famines of 1876 and 1896.

Savitribai was a writer and poet-she published several collections of verse. Yet today, she is remembered, if at all, as the wife of Jotiba Phule rather than as a pioneer in her own right. We need to study and restore to the historical record the life and work of such women. □

Latest On The Rape Bill

During the last session of parliament, the new rape bill was introduced, and was referred to a select committee for consideration. The committee consists of 15 men and 7 women ! The bill is supposed to come up again in the parliament session beginning February 16. Please write out your views on the bill as soon as possible and send them to us to be forwarded to the select committee. For information in the bill, see the law column “Our Rights and Wrongs” in this issue.

A Reminder to Our Oldest Friends

If you have been receiving **Manushi** ever since the first issue (January 1979) then your subscription expired with the sixth issue. Please renew! If you have been receiving **Manushi** since the second issue (March-April 1979) then your subscription expires with this issue. Please renew before the next one comes out – that is, as soon as possible! One year’s subscription of **Manushi** covers six issues – as and when we are able to bring them out !

A Note Of Caution

We have been receiving reports from many friends in India and abroad that several people have been wrongly projecting themselves as representatives of **Manushi** and have even been demanding hospitality and traveling expenses in our name. We do not even know who these people are. So please do not accept anyone as a **Manushi** person, unless they have a letter from **Manushi** on a **Manushi** letterhead.