

Letters to Manushi

Writing in Hindi

I want to know whether Manushi accept Hindi articles. I belong to a province of the Hindi belt. I have less command of English. I like Manushi's awless voice and feel a deep desire to write an article for Manushi. Can I do it? I want to express my deep sense of gratitude to Manushi. K. Jain, Dewas, Madhya Pradesh

It has been a matter of great regret that Hindi Manushi had to be discontinued for lack of sufficient good mate-rial available for us to publish. We welcome 'and regularly publish articles and stories sent to us in Hindi; we routinely translate from Hindi to English

Editor

A Medico's Experiences

I am a final year medical student. The caricature of a typical medical student is that of a blind information slogger. True to this I spent my first three years of MBBS chasing marks and information. The next year was a turning point. I was getting increas-ingly uneasy with my studies which appeared to me totally inadequate and theoretical. At this time I happened to read a few powerful critiques of modern medicine. These had a powerful impact on me, quite simply because they made a lot of sense.

Let me also share with you some of my experiences in my own hospital. When I was posted in Cancer O.P.D., I was shocked to find every other woman suffering from cancer of the cervix. Day after day, we saw so many women being treated for advanced cervical cancer. The real impact came when we took their history. The typical

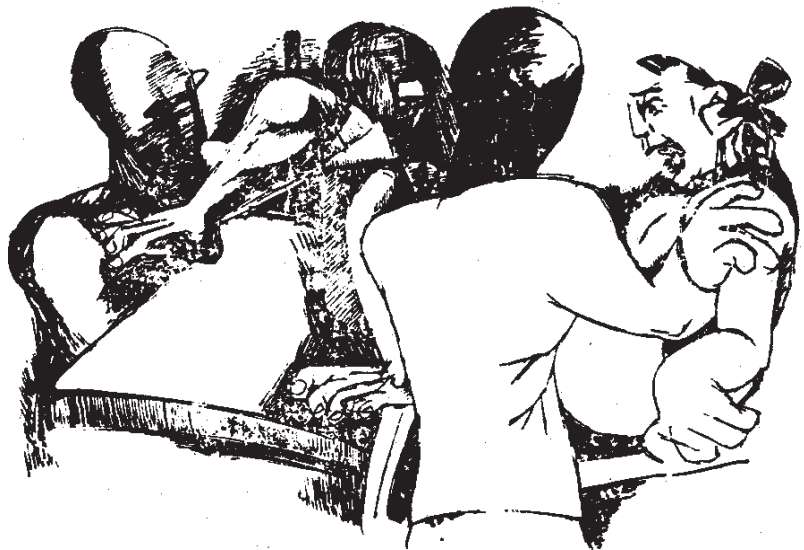
history went like this: poor woman; married at the age of 13 (immediately after menarche); 3 or 4 children by the age of 20; multiple sexual partners; no history of contraception; history of abortions; and, finally, manifesting late signs and symptoms. I have heard this history so many times that I can almost predict what she is going to say next. These days I am posted in the Labour Ward. What do I see there? Fifteen year olds coming pregnant. And what poor care they get!

Contraception is considered the exclusive domain of the woman. She is supposed to protect herself from unwanted pregnancies. Now this burden on women has probably led to a lot of stress and psychological ill-effects. Males have been only too happy to let females handle the sen-sitive problem of contraception. Not only is it a sensitive issue for women but also a major health issue. The responsibility for contraception has been very heavy. For instance, 2,218,000 tubectomies were performed

in 1980-81 as against 574,000 vasectomies. At the other extreme, even failure in conceiving is blamed squarely on the female. Either way, it's a female's problem!

The health situation of the women I see in my hospital (and most other government hospitals, I suspect) is so poor and hopeless that I really don't know how to analyse it. At my maternity hospital the situation is akin to something out of the dark ages... In comparison to the other parts of the hospital (surgery, for instance) the facilities available at the maternity wing are extremely poor. We don't even get enough cotton! We have to reuse the same needles for injections and at times even the gloves are not available. Another thing I have noticed is this: IUDs like the Copper-T are inserted soon after delivery without the permission of the mothers.

I can even reconcile myself to the lack of facilities but what is most painful is the attitude of the doctors and the staff of the hospital toward



Letters to Manushi

the women patients. The word 'callous' would be an understatement. Many of the doctors and even students become very insensitive to the plight of these poor patients after some time in the hospital. Somehow the hospital has a way of killing the sensitive being in all of us when we enter its portals. At least for me, it took a lot of effort to finish the labour postings without losing a part of me. I did not even mind not learning anything in O&G but I definitely minded losing my sensitiveness. I had to be constantly on guard, searching for bad practices, lest I miss them in the all prevailing attitude of callous indifference.

There were a few bad experiences even outside the maternity hospital. When I was in surgery, one day we were examining a lady with some breast problem. Immediately all of us crowded around her and started palpating her breast, without her permission, of course! No one bothered to ask the patient whether she minded so many students feeling her. The last straw was a Post Graduate student (male) who thought that the 'case' was worth photographing. He pushed the lady's upper garments out of the way and took a shot of her breasts - without permission again. Would you believe this? On another occasion when I was in the operation theatre, a very popular professor was operating on a lady with breast cancer. He did a mastectomy and while doing it he remarked to his assistant, "She is a fifty five year old lady, so why bother about her beauty?" The implication was, since she is old, why bother to do it with a lot of care? ... This kind of attitude is only too common...

G.N.Madhukar Pai, Madras.

Protesting the Ban

On the May 21, this year the government of Andhra Pradesh announced a ban on the CPI(ML) (People's War group) and eight of what the government described as its front organisations, including organisations of agricultural labourers, tribals, coalmine workers, women.

That the banned group believes in the use of violent means and has indulged in substantial quantity of violence, especially in the last two years, is no justification whatsoever for this extra-legal attack on its entire social base and political supporters, especially when the social base consists of the wretched of the earth. We neither defend nor condone the violent methods of the People's War group, and have explicitly condemned certain acts of arbitrary violence such as blowing up railway tracks and causing derailment of trains. But such acts do not by any means justify the denial of political freedom to a whole political movement. What is being banned in the name of political violence is the politics and not just the violence. Politics, even violent politics, cannot be treated as criminality. A sensitive understanding of its social context and significance must be demanded as an essential ingredient of a democratic polity's attitude towards even a violent political movement.

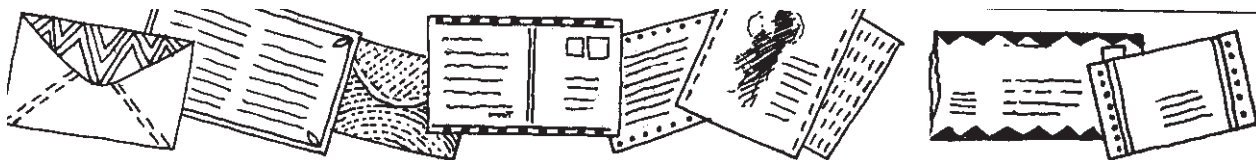
It should be added that the men who are ruling this State are hardly the right ones to brand others as criminals. Their mafia style activities and their colossal corruption are common knowledge, and if violence and unlawful activities are sound enough reasons for banning a political organisation, then it is the Congress

(I) that will first have to be banned.

We believe that political movements should, under all circumstances, be dealt with politically and not condemned as criminal gangs. Our apprehensions that the already grave human rights situation would worsen as a consequence of the ban, are being proved to be well-founded. To give a telling instance, from the very day of the ban the Chief Minister, the Home Minister and police officers have been threatening the press in very offensive language. Arrogating to themselves powers that the Act enabling the ban does not even contemplate, they have been talking of issuing a code of conduct to the press laying down what it can publish and what it cannot publish regarding the affairs of the banned organisations. Police atrocities on the rural poor (in the name of suppressing naxalism) have received considerable publicity in the press and the suppressed anger of the government has now found expression in dreams of censorship not sanctioned by the legislation. For instance, the government insists that when an 'encounter' takes place, the press should publish only the police version and not the People's War Group's version!

As a consequence of these threats journalists are already feeling insecure and uncertain about what they can write. Civil liberties organisations are also being threatened that they will also be banned unless they "behave themselves properly", to use the words of M.V. Mysoora Reddy, the Home Minister of the State. The intent to intimidate is evident.

In the villages the police have



intensified raids, threats, arrests and torture, not only of persons allegedly having connections with the banned group, but also the cadre and sympathisers of other CPI-ML groups which have not been banned. The people are living in a state of unprecedented terror.

On the third day of the promulgation of the ban we realised that the ban was in fact illegal. The ban was promulgated under sec 15(2)(b) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908, which is applicable to the so-called Andhra Area of the State, and the Public Security Act, Fasli 1348, which is applicable to the Telangana Area.

However, Section 15(2)(b) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908 was struck down as unconstitutional by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court as far back as 1952, for the reason that a restriction on a right guaranteed by Article 19(1) without the provision of judicial review is not a reasonable restriction. For the same reason the Public Security Act is also unconstitutional.

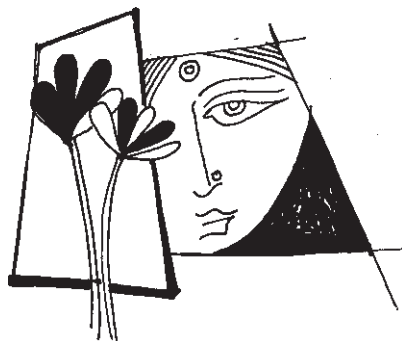
We brought this fact to the notice of the public and the government through press releases. And yet the state government continues to assert that the ban is in force and that it will be enforced ruthlessly. When questioned about this attitude its comment is that 'those who think the ban is illegal can go to court about it,' as if the government has no obligation to govern according to the Constitution, and as if judgements of the Supreme Court are not binding on the government.

It is our request to you that you put maximum pressure on the government of Andhra Pradesh to withdraw the ban order, which is not

only unconstitutional but also contrary to a humane and democratic understanding of social struggles and political movements. We request you to write letters to the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and encourage others to write letters demanding that this ban be lifted.

K. Balagopal, General Secretary Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee

...Recently a young friend borrowed some of my copies of **Manushi** to read. I asked her what she thought! about what she had read.



She said that the issues were good, but were too depressing. Life isn't that bad.

What I would like to see more of in **Manushi** are articles on women who have made it through their own efforts (either in or out of India). Perhaps **Manushi** could also publish tips, ideas on things women can do for themselves. When I did some communication training some time ago the bottom line was to leave the person feeling resourceful... Keep up the good work and your spirits...

Mary Lightfoot, Bodhgaya, Bihar.

While I most thoroughly applaud your attempts to raise the consciousness of Indian women and Indian society at large and would not miss a single issue of **Manushi**. I

wonder if life as a woman in India can be ALL bad. I left India 10 years ago and have since made my home in the United States. I am afraid sometimes that I get ratification for my decision not to live in India from reading **Manushi**.

Is it possible for you to find some stories/features that are positive? Some situation where a family loved their daughter enough to take her away from a bullying husband? Some story where a brother was true to his Rakhi promise and gave his sister protection? Some story where an Indian father-in-law came to the protection and assistance of his daughter-in-law and stopped his son from wife abuse? Some story where a mother-in-law decided the daughter-in-law need not "pay her dues"—or is this only possible in an Amrita Pritam fantasy? Is there no time when an Indian woman stood up and said "I'm mad as hell and I am not going to take it any more!" whether to her parents, her in-laws, her husband or to the society at large?

Is there no love in any family for a girl-child? Love enough to say she is not "parayi", but belongs to no one but herself? If so, could **Manushi** please thank and celebrate the men and women whose thinking HAS moved forward? I have a radio show called Sunno! in Milwaulkee for Indians and I get enough criticism so that I know it is easier to criticise and to protest than to create something meaningful, thought-provoking and aesthetically whole—as you must know in building an organisation like **Manushi**. It is much tougher to create rather than decry. Please, if you can, write about those who have made

Letters to Manushi

changes in their thinking. I would be interested to know the factors that caused them to change.

Many thanks for your important and sincere writing.

Shauna Baldwin, Milwaukee, USA

If this is indeed how our readers view Manushi, it is indeed cause for worry. We are only too aware that stories of oppression are just one part of a very complex social reality. We have tried in the past to give accounts of women who have struggled alone or collectively to make things better for themselves and for others. We have also tried to cover the more positive aspects of our society. But we clearly are failing somewhere. We're trying to understand our reader's expectations and requirements better.

It would help us if all those who feel Manushi is missing out on some important dimension would send us a photocopy of a story/article you have enjoyed reading in the recent past anywhere else. This would help us know concretely what you would like to see included in Manushi.

Editor

Increasing Alcoholism

The spectre of large scale alcoholism looms large in Kerala. A flourishing liquor trade, particularly in arrack, and the tacit encouragement extended to it by the state government, have combined to wreak havoc with the health of its citizens.

The total number of arrack consumers in Kerala (60 percent of all males) is around 50 lakh. Arrack available per drinker in the state is therefore approximately 100 liters per year or 274 milliliters per man per day. The economy of the state is vitally dependent on the arrack trade. Arrack, 'the poor man's drink' accounts for 85 percent of the state's excise revenue.

Not surprisingly then, the government is going out of its way to give a boost to the trade. It has announced that the quota of spirit allowed in Kerala will be increased from 1 crore liters to 5 crore liters a year. If blended according to regulations, 1 liter will yield 2.5 liters of arrack. From next year onwards, therefore, 12.5 crore liters of arrack will be legally available in the state's villages and towns. As a result, the government will net an additional revenue of Rs 125 crore a year. (To pay for the ration subsidy announced recently, the government will still have to find an additional Rs 55 crore). The government has its own justification for the above measure. According to it, nothing has changed. The state had already been receiving and consuming 12.5 crore liters of arrack, four fifths of which has been smuggled by liquor barons. "This used to be untaxed, we are just taxing the smugglers," goes the reasoning.

The liquor available today travels thousands of kilometers in tankers, with virtually no check against mid-route adulteration. Far from being a health drink, like traditional drinks such as toddy and other local varieties, arrack does not even have the marginal benefits of these drinks. Most people drink arrack for its anaesthetic properties. Further, information about the synthetics used in arrack is available only to insiders in the trade.

What is at stake now is the future of many Keralites. It is not too late to remedy the situation by taking immediate steps to curb the uncontrolled liquor trade. Some demands which could be raised by anyone interested in protecting the well being of his or her family:

- The government must immediately do its duty. The borders

should be sealed. The number of liquor shops should be reduced to an absolute minimum, and timing regulations should be strictly enforced. If the excise department is unable to exercise this responsibility the people can do so.

- A judicial enquiry and multi-disciplinary study of the liquor industry and its victims should be undertaken. The enquiries should focus on ways and means to repair the damages (where possible) and prevent the future growth of alcoholism.

- A referendum should be held to assess people's opinion on the quality and the kind of liquor they want to drink. The government controlled media should be instructed to give equal prominence to those who oppose the liquor policy of the state.

Now is the time to put decision makers to the test, be they the booth and branch committee members, the state committee, the state secretariat or trade union leaders, journalists and elected representatives in the panchayats, municipalities, district councils, assembly and parliament. After all, haven't they professed their commitment to work for society's betterment?

Padmanabhan V.T., Kollam, Kerala

Sexual Harassment

I enclose a copy of an article from the Stanford Observer, an alumni newsletter of Stanford University, U.S.A., which may be of interest to you, particularly in the context of women in the workplace covered in the recent issue of **Manushi**.

I would be grateful if you could send me a copy of issue No. 68 of **Manushi** so that I could send a copy to Professor Karl. [see box on page 26].

R.T. Krishnan, Madras