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### Building Bridges

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I have been reading **Manushi** for almost eleven years. You have opened India to me as no other magazine could have done. You have brought tribal women into my home, with their struggles, their festivals, their work, their dignity, their humiliations, their strengths and weaknesses - their lives, in short. The spirit in your articles - covering demonstrations, movements, court suits and your gut-level fighting spirit always served and never dampened by your keen intelligence has been of the greatest help to me in keeping alive my faith. My "faith", of course, is in human dignity, simplicity, just being able to live peacefully without harassment — sexual, political, economic, etc. I was happy to get your comments on the biased "spiritual" image of India all too often given out to the West. At the same time, you have brought me to certain realities about such people in India - from their involvement in communal harmony efforts (I remember especially Sant Longowal) to the abandoned wife and children of an ascetic. If great poverty exists in India, you make it clear that not everybody is "spiritual" enough to "transcend" instead of resisting; that poverty is not "fate" but all too often the result of greed, corruption and mismanagement of a government heir to imperialist colonialism.

Your ongoing analyses of dowry and *sati* are immensely instructive.

## Responses To Manushi

Your exposure of the truth in Sikh-Hindu rivalry makes me read with a grain of salt any western newspaper account of "Sikh terrorism".

The frankness of some stories and poems is often jolting, often heart rending. Some leave me shaking and/or in tears (By the way, I am not a great poetry lover).

Yes, you have opened India to me. This is, of course, not your purpose, but only a by-product of your desire to inform and communicate with the Indian community and thereby create the climate and movements necessary to effect the changes you envision. But let me tell you, anyway, how I appreciated *The Sacred Groves* by Frederique Apffel-Marglin (No 82). Her beginning "deconditioning" exercises were quite helpful and illuminating (I have done much "deconditioning" on myself in my lifetime!). Since reading this article (2 or 3 times) I have been wondering how the urban women on **Manushi** staff or those who write your many sociological surveys took this article. I suppose you, too, have been brought up with western scientific perceptions (or non-perceptions) of women and our "biological" functions and are urged (forced?) to buy tampons and their propaganda along with other "modern" (western) products. Can you still identify with rituals such as Frederique describes, or have you, too, become "degraded, fragmented and impoverished"? Perhaps the consciousness of goddesses (the

female principle) is not dead even in cities and among educated women and is sufficient to keep women's consciousness unfragmented. Maybe one of you will write an article in answer to this question! Whether discussing the disadvantages of western-type toilets or the rowdy proponents of *sati*, **Manushi** is always frank, intelligent, compassionate and honest.

Has anyone done an index on **Manushi**? It would be very useful.

**Paula Young, Burzet, France**

*We are currently in the process of completing an index of all back issues of **Manushi**. When it is finished it will be advertised in the magazine and those who wish to can order a copy.*

-Editor

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### Failure of Law

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Having been an activist since my teenage years, I was especially interested in the article by Madhu Kishwar (No.85) concerning activism. It is due to many of the concerns she raised regarding activism as a way to serve ourselves rather than those we claim to be acting on behalf of that I have withdrawn almost completely from my own involvement. I continue to seek ways in which I can be a helpful force in promoting a healthier society which lives conscientiously on the earth. I think that search will be a long one.

There is one point made in this article, though, that I must respond to. This is the statement that “law as an instrument of social reform has worked reasonably well in western societies.” NOT TRUE! Not at all! Perhaps on the surface it may seem that the laws which are made to protect human rights and the environment are being used for such ends, but it doesn’t take much more than a peep below the surface to find that these laws are generally utilised only in the protection of large corporate interests, and white middle to upper class men. If you take a look at who comprises the political and legal bodies of most western countries, and who developed their legal systems, it becomes clear, at least in the U.S., that these institutions have been developed with the interest of protecting people’s right to make money, regardless of the welfare of others. Although at this time much of our environmental and social situations need all the help they can get (including enforceable laws), I think we have to question our reliance on a government, which has only corporate interests at heart, to protect the people and the planet. I would go so far as to advocate that we need to find, as much as possible, ways to work on our own, in our communities, independent of that system. People must be empowered to enact the changes they envision for themselves and their society in their own ways, outside of the established government and political system.

It may be true that such laws have been more helpful in promoting certain issues in western countries than in countries like India. However, it must be recognised that those countries’ governments are filled with their own corruption and ultimately reliance upon them to truly serve the needs of all is quite dangerous.

**Lesley Spector, Oregon, USA**



Shafi Ahmed

### Artists’ Credit

Just a quick note to tell you how much I admired the illustrations you placed with my short story, *A Pair of Ears*. They captured the essence and the spirit of the story so vividly, and were so painstakingly done. It meant a great deal to me that the artist was gentle in his/her rendering. Try as I might, I could find no signature, no acknowledgment of this artist in **Manushi**. Could you please pass on my thanks and compliments to your layout artist and illustrator?

**Shauna Baldwin, Milwaukee, USA**

*The artist you are referring to is Kaushal Shrivastava. We have*

*conveyed your appreciation to him. The reason why his name was not mentioned is that we request all artists (except photographers) to sign their works. The main reason for this is that we have collected all kinds of artwork over the years and much of it was done by artists whose names are unknown to us. Some artists always sign their work and others choose not to. However, after speaking to some of our illustrators, we have discovered that sometimes the artists don't sign because they feel that the signature interferes with the composition. In the future we will make it a point to credit the artists whose names we know.*

**- Editor**

### Notice to British and Irish Subscribers

**Kari Shah of Surrey is no longer handling our subscriptions for England and Ireland. If you have issued any cheque to her please cancel and issue a fresh cheque. You can either send the cheque directly to Manushi or to Sandra McNeill who has volunteered to handle subscription queries from now on. Her address is:**

**Sandra McNeill, 3 Upland Crescent, Leeds LS8 2TB West Yorkshire, England.**

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