



Letters to Manushi

Nurses— The Cursed Nightingales

Recently, while I was in a ward, a staff sister approached me and to my surprise, requested me to take the responsibility of having broken one syringe. She explained that she had broken it by mistake. The hospital rule is that if a sister makes such a mistake, she has to pay the price of the syringe, while a doctor is totally excused for doing the same thing. The funny thing is that since most injections are given by the sisters, naturally they are the ones who happen to break the syringes. Then why this double standard ?

If one agrees that the recognition given to a particular professional group should be in proportion to its usefulness to society, then doctors and nurses deserve equal respect. But one observes that there is a vast difference in the status of doctors and nurses. Even though nurses are more skilled in certain areas than are doctors, they don't get any credit or creative satisfaction but are left to do all the monotonous jobs...

In our morbid society, intellectual work fetches more respect than manual labour. A white-collared officer is always "superior" to a labourer. Further the doctor-nurse relationship reflects the man-woman relationship in our society. A doctor, even if a woman, becomes the husband figure, ordering, scolding, dominating the nurse. This is clear from the fact that male nurses command more respect from doctors, patient and sisters. Doctors admit that they don't feel free to order or shout at brothers, whereas sisters are at times even physically

assaulted by male doctors...Nurses are often exposed to sexual harassment by every man in the hospital—superintendents, doctors, patients, relatives of patients and even ward boys. Relatives of patients in private wards frequently harass nurses, especially during night duty. Since they are influential people, they threaten the nurses. The timid ones submit while those who do not, have to face complaints, suspensions and remarks in their records like "disobedience and negligence"—as if to please every male is also part of their duty. Many doctors have an exploitative attitude towards nurses. When one doctor was asked : "How can doctors be motivated to go to rural areas ?" he answered : "Post beautiful nurses at primary health centres." When posted in villages, nurses are very insecure. They are looked on as free prey for all the village ruffians. There was the tragic case of Ms Vaidya who was murdered in Vada village, Maharashtra, because she refused to give in to the sexual overtures of the local leaders.

Nurses are very low-paid and have a crushingly heavy workload. They are made to do many chores which are not part of nursing. In spite of all this, what independence and authority do they have ? Even a village health worker with three months' training is authorized to dispense drugs like sulfa and chloroquine while a sister with a training of over three years has to get a doctor's signature even if she only wants an aspirin from the hospital for her own use!

Dr Rani Bang, Wardha

Towards The Light

...My family members have been trying to force me to marry but I want to get a job and be independent. I am determined not to marry till I find a partner who thinks as I do. I have managed to study so far, facing great opposition. I have broken many social rules and intend to break more in future but I used to feel very isolated...

I was beginning to lose courage. After meeting you, it was as if the sleeping forces within me were awakened. When I met sisters like you, I felt that I can also do what I want to in life. I realized that the mirage of married bliss will dissolve, and not satisfy my thirst.

When I returned home from my visit to you, I began to feel more acutely the predicament of being a woman. All family relationships appeared to me highly artificial and temporary. I began to feel that my identity was being robbed and that I could not endure this life any longer...

I came to know that I had got a research project to conduct a study of women convicts in Bihar, UP and MP. My friend Rita sent me telegram to inform me of this. But when I got ready to leave, my brother who had not been speaking to me for many days, suddenly blocked my way and refused to let me go. My mother had to submit to him. I was in great mental torture but I had the faith that Rita would definitely take some steps to get me out of the house. She knows all about my family circumstances. The night before the appointed date, Rita and Madhu both

came—it was like a dream come true. They both helped me to leave the house and go to Varanasi. My brother said: “I am not going to take any responsibility for this girl—let her do whatever she wants.” So with my self-respect intact, I left, now I have been appointed as a lecturer. I can hardly believe that I have achieved so much. I am staying in the women’s hostel and am also trying to popularize Manushi. Rita and I have begun the study of women convicts. It is a very interesting but complex task.

Well, I have faced so many ups and downs, there will be more in future but now I must not be afraid. I have got inspiration from all of you and trust that I will continue to do so. Now I feel the world cannot harm me if we all stay together. And it is for us to move out of the present darkness towards the light...

Renu Dewan, Jhumri Telaiya
(translated from Hindi)

From A Pakistani Sister

India for me was quite an experience. Though both countries were one only 30 years ago, yet after visiting India, I am seeing Pakistan in a new light. I



—Jolly Rohtagi

thought both countries would be the same but now I notice a lot of difference which was there all the time, but which my lack of exposure prevented me from seeing. How wonderful it would be if I could travel all over the world...

I am finding the attitude of men as well as women most confining. It was probably that way always but I had taken it for granted. I get more mad now, I find the concept of *chadar* and *chardiwari* even more stifling.

In Pakistan you wake up with religion and go to sleep with it. You might think I am anti-Pakistan but I am not...

Since I came back I feel all the more isolated. I want to share my happy experience about India and about Manushi but it seems that the people I come across are not interested. And I will not have Manushi ridiculed.

When I went to college after my results came out, none of the junior girls were interested in my plans about further education. They all wanted to know whether I had become engaged or married, if not, why not, and if I don't want to, something must be terribly wrong with my chemistry and I should consult a psychiatrist! My best friend who is having an affair, and is having a terrible time because he is such a chauvinist, gave me a long lecture on the ecstasy of love, and how she is changing her boyfriend by totally merging with him! The complete “oneness” of married life which is above all things in this world! The next time I hear the word “marriage” I shall go crazy! The best thing I can do is stay aloof...

I often think about all of you and how I enjoyed doing a little work, with you. I wish and pray for all success to Manushi...

I hope the relations between the two countries improve so that we can at least write to each other freely. Also, women of both the countries, by meeting each other, can do a lot not only for themselves, but for this subcontinent as well...

She asked us to keep her anonymous

Usually Better

I work as assistant cum clerk in the laboratory of the animal husbandry department. A year ago, I came to know about Manushi through a woman friend. When I read it, I realized that this is a magazine which studies the difficult situation of women and inspires women to come together. Since then, I have been reading it.

Sisters, a woman in this society is besieged by difficulties. She constantly feels insecure. Social and political institutions do not give her justice. Everyone treats her as an object of consumption and her status is that of shoes which are worn on the feet. All this in spite of the fact that women usually do all kinds of work better than men do...

Sisters, I am confident that if this magazine starts reaching women, all of us who have been crushed for centuries, who have been mere domestic servants, and taught to be contented with that position, will get inspired, come together and will realize our freedom. I am trying to reach **Manushi** to other women...

Harcharan Kaur, Jullundur
(translated from Hindi)

Our Basic Freedom

I am sending you two clippings from the Times of India, of 12.3.81 and 14.8.81:

“The Muslim community of Akola has decided to boycott the marriages and funerals of two Muslim families who do not stop their female members from seeing cinemas. An announcement to this effect was made last evening on loudspeakers from mosques in the city” and “Unmarried Sikh girls have been prohibited from visiting cinema halls in the Khandwa region, and families violating this decision would be boycotted by Sikh community members. A decision to this effect was taken by the Gurudwara Prabandhak Samiti at a specially convened meeting in Khandwa.”

I am shocked at such blatant practice of double standards and infringement of basic human freedom—or aren't females considered human in these communities? I think it is high time women started condemning the religious heads who preach thus, I would also be interested to know from readers of Manushi residing in Akola and Khandwa, the reactions of the concerned women.

Jayanthi, Bombay

Our Life Depends On It

...I understand India is building a nuclear facility for generating nuclear energy in Bombay. Is this true? ...All the native Americans in the south-west of the USA are being relocated from their ancient homes so that uranium can be mined there. The USA government as well as large corporations are responsible for this. In other places where uranium is mined, the waste is left where children can play with it. The radioactivity from this can cause cancer and birth defects.

These are usually poor or native American children...

The nuclear issue is a difficult one. Since it is entirely male-controlled, highly scientific and difficult to understand, it is easy for women not to pay it much attention. But the very life of the planet depends on our getting control over this very scary situation...

Linda Marie, USA

Arms In His Sink

I was most interested to find the existence of a medium which expresses Indian women's ideas and thoughts, Although I have been brought up in Kenya and have lived in the UK for the last 14 years, I am still bound to the Indian tradition and consider myself very Indian.

It is only recently that I have become aware how very oppressive every society is to women, I am writing my Phd thesis at present, and as you must be aware, am facing great pressure from my family to get married. It is not only the family but also the society we live in which pressurizes us in this way. I know that the "security" marriage gives is very false and temporary, and if I am to help womanhood, I must not fall in that trap. **Manushi** can definitely help in raising my consciousness and therefore I would like to support its existence.

I am fully aware that I am one of the "privileged" and that my other sisters do not have the opportunities to do as their heart tells them to do, I would like to help these sisters in any way I can...

I would like to end with the saying: "You start by sinking into his arms and end up with your arms in his sink."

Jaya Chauhan, England

Refuse To Succumb

Dowry is a disease which is fast spreading"...Dowry is a disease and so is marriage. Even women who want to remain independent are forced to fall prey to this disease. I feel that if those of us who do not want to get married, refuse to be pressurized into it, this refusal too will help to eradicate dowry. But if women themselves think they are inferior to men and cannot live without being dependent on men, then will not this dowry epidemic keep spreading?

Sugandhi Mary, Bombay
(Translated from Hindi)

How "Art" Can Dehumanize Women

I run a school of Indian dance in Nairobi. My grandfather came from Lahore to this part of the world at the turn of the century—In *Manushi* No. 7, 1981, there was an article on devdasis, I was shocked to read that the devdasi cult of temple prostitution still exists in parts of India. I wish I could stretch across the ocean and unite with all sister devdasis in their struggle against oppression.

When I started dancing on stage, I realized that there was so much lechery in the audience that at times, I felt dehumanized as a woman. The "spirituality" of Indian classical dance is mainly a romance for the idealist. Women dancers and their art have been made a commodity under the capitalist system. I wish all women dancers, both young and old, classical and non-classical, could build up an organization or some means of communication with each other, so that they could fight the exploitation of their bodies.

I also believe that as culturists we can contribute to changing attitudes towards all the oppressed but first we have to analyse and weed out elements in our own dances which lead to oppression or sexual exploitation. If we do not do this, we would be against liberation of women and the struggles of devdasis for social justice.

Neera Kapur, Kenya

Polish Women's Struggle

We are thrilled at the possibility of contact with you. Our women's organization started work in November 1980...We encourage women to struggle against the existing exploitation and oppression. Our demands include the following :

1. Both parents should get three years' leave alternated between them to enable them to share childcare.

2. Equal pay for equal work. Most traditional women's jobs are the most monotonous and in the worst working conditions. Women are paid less than men even though women's jobs are as physically and mentally demanding.

3. Implementation of the law of equal opportunity for women, as regards

admission into male-dominated fields of study at universities. Women with equal or superior qualifications to men are discriminated against and not promoted to managerial positions, This should not be so.4. Availability of contraception. At present, in Poland, abortion is much more widely used than contraception as a means of birth control. The evidence for this is that 60 to per cent of contraceptive sheaths do not work, there exists only one kind of loop which is very bad for the woman's health, and only two kinds of contraceptive pills are available, both of which affect hormonal balance severely. Therefore the abortion rates are very high the majority of abortions are performed privately so statistics are not available, but the official figures of abortions in hospitals is as high as 180,000 a year! We also undertake consciousness-raising activity amongst women. We hold meetings with the official women's organization "Liga Kobiet." We try to consolidate the women's movement. We try to create pressure groups and conduct programmes on the radio, write articles in the press. We have held seminars on "The differences between the sexes" and "The international feminist movement," We have arranged meetings with famous women to discuss how women can build their careers, with marxists and catholics to discuss their attitude to women's issues, and with women scientists. Every week we hold such discussions. We are also translating books written by women.

We have just prepared an exhibition on women's theatre. We plan to broadcast radio programmes on women's music, theatre, creativity. We hope to inspire a new women's movement within the Solidarity movement. We have recently held a meeting of women delegates from factories. We have also invite two German women's theatre groups to come to Poland. One of their plays is about a women's strike. We would like to hold a contest for women photographers.

Dear sisters, these are only points but of course everything is more complicated. We would like to tell you more, and know more about your organisation, your journal.

Krystyna Kowalewska, Poland