

Readers' Forum

== Mothers or Nothing? ==

Recently I received the news that I had become eligible for the 1994 Heras Birth Centenary Award, given to the MA student standing first in Ancient Indian Culture at Bombay University. I've always been against this system of rewards and competitive scrambling to come first. But after years and years of people never really caring to listen to anything I may have to say on many subjects (I'm interested in subjects ranging from politics to women and children to environment), this came as a pleasurable and positive stroke. My opinions have always been passed off as insignificant, as if I was not qualified to know anything about any field other than what they saw me in — my home and housework.

I love being my children's mother and have a really lively relationship with them which may be why they listen to me; they can see the inner fears which I don't always articulate when I ask them not to do certain things (late night parties, pub visiting) that others their age from a certain economic strata are doing. I also love my home and find peace here. My husband works in Bombay and comes here every eight to ten days for a short break. He likes the relaxation I provide because of the clean and orderly atmosphere and good food, etc. He is very friendly and fun and takes good care of anyone who is in need and can run the house when I am ill. But all of this

is just not enough, especially when in company one just becomes faceless and anonymous when certain things are being discussed. Housework is such a job and the more professionally you do it the more you're likely to annoy someone, or get admiration from some and derision from others.

Now I am considering working on a PhD from Deccan College and am in the process of discussions for potential topics. How things have changed. Now my relatives, for example, say "You certainly know a bit about this... or that..." and they pay attention. I am saddened that I needed a certificate for them to hear me. But at least now I can throw some ideas around.

It is so rare that people acknowledge the influence women's interests have on their families. This shouldn't matter, we should just carry on and talk to those we can and behave as if stupid people don't exist. It was a

woman, Harriet Taylor Mill, who influenced her husband, John Stuart Mill, when he wrote *On Liberty* and she said: "It is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they shall either be mothers or nothing; or that if they have been mothers once, they shall be nothing else during the whole remainder of their lives." (1851)

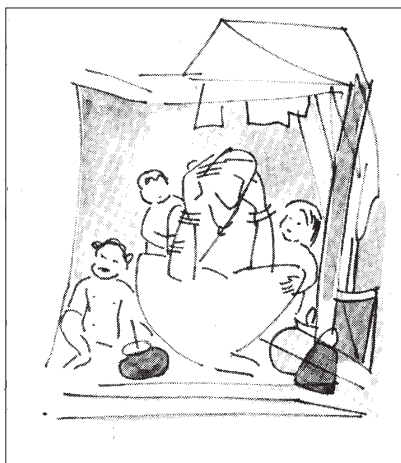
The only danger is that mothering and housekeeping is being scorned more and more, even by women. *Just* housewives are now suffering more and more from feelings of inferiority and anxiety. How do we make society value work and not status?

Susan Dhavle, Pune, Maharashtra

== Dangers of Alcohol ==

Article 17 of the Constitution of India proclaims India's resolve to bring about prohibition — except for medicinal purposes — of intoxicating drinks and drugs which are injurious to health. Yet four decades after our Constitution came into being, the consumption of potable alcohol is still growing at a rapid rate. Part of the reason is that the government gets 15 percent of its total revenues from the duties on liquor.

No organ functions as an independent entity in the human body. Alcohol tampers with the functioning of virtually every organ from the moment it enters the body. Its effects on the brain, however, are the most



damaging. Professor Mahdi Hasan, who is the founder/director of the Interdisciplinary Brain Research Center (IBRC), says that ethanol, the active ingredient of alcohol, is a central nervous system depressant. Ethanol affects the cells of the cerebral cortex, depressing its inhibitory functions. This leads to many drinkers losing their sense of shame and inhibition during the period that alcohol is present in their system in sufficient quantities. Professor Hasan, who has done extensive research on neurochemistry, says: "The first system to be affected and the last to recover is the reticular system of the brain." The reticular system is a complex, anatomically diffused network of nerves that receives sensory inputs from all the body systems and sends messages both to higher brain centres and to descending motor and autonomic tracts.

IBRC studies also confirm that alcohol causes a drop in the blood-glucose level (hypoglycemia). The brain can utilise only oxygen and glucose as a source of energy for sustaining itself. The lowering of the blood-glucose level, coupled with the dehydration that alcohol creates in the body, can cause severe damage to the cells of the brain. Heavy abuse of alcohol can cause irreversible damage by killing cells in different parts of the brain and disrupting the connections between nerve cells. Other frequent chronic effects are the loss of sensation, blockage of memory formation, and impaired physical coordination.

According to Professor Hasan, "Alcoholism is a condition in which an individual loses control over his intake in the sense that he is unable to control the urge for further drinks, or to stop before getting intoxicated. Alcohol is one of the prime factors in



nearly half the murders, suicides, and accidental deaths in societies where it is most deeply entrenched into the fibre of people's lives, such as in the USA. More than 20 million adults in the USA are hard-core drinkers and 70 percent of the adults drink. Back in 1957, the American Medical Association declared alcoholism a disease as well as an illness.

The most tragic effects of alcohol include mental retardation and birth defects in children of some alcoholic mothers. This means that those caught

in the vortex of alcohol harm not only themselves, their families and society, but also future generations. Since it is chemically a small molecule, alcohol is readily absorbed by the walls of the stomach into the bloodstream, where it is transported throughout the body. Alcohol can also pass through the placenta to the developing foetus and can be transmitted through the breast milk to newborns.

In addition to endangering physical and emotional health, alcoholism often causes extreme suffering to family members, as alcohol facilitates extreme mood swings and violent tempers, and decreases many drinkers' ability to function well enough to earn a living.

Huma Hasan, Ghaziabad, UP

==== Power Grabbers ====

The recent crisis in the ruling Telugu Desam party in Andhra Pradesh has brought out the latent anti-women attitudes of men towards women in politics. The crisis started



N.T. Rama Rao and Lakshmi Parvati

with the allegation that Telugu Desam party's founder, supremo and then Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's second wife, Lakshmi Parvathi had acquired extra-constitutional power both in the party and in the state government, and that N.T. Rama Rao was promoting her as his successor.

N.T. Rama Rao (73), a widower, married Lakshmi Parvathi (41), a divorcee, in 1993. N.T. Rama Rao had 11 children by his first wife. His two sons-in-law, Mr N. Chandra Babu Naidu (present Chief Minister of AP) and Dr D. Venkateswara Rao (floor leader of Telugu Desam party in the Parliament) were given a great deal of power since the inception of the party in 1982. Since the entry of Lakshmi Parvathi into Rama Rao's life, the sons-in-law have felt their positions threatened.

In the last week of August, 1995, all of Rama Rao's family members, including his sons-in-law, managed a coup against the aged supremo with a single point programme of hatred towards Lakshmi Parvathi — because despite being a woman, she was showing signs of having political aspirations. To achieve her goal, she was believed to be building a group of her own in the party.

The statements issued by the sons and sons-in-law and others are quite revealing: Rama Rao's son, Harikrishna, wept on the stage saying that his father was a tiger but this woman had made him into a cat. His elder son-in-law, Dr D Venkateswara Rao, narrated a story where a stepmother was ill-treating her stepchildren. He explained that the father of the children did not realise this in the beginning, but when he did, he gave a good thrashing to the stepmother, with the strong implication that in the case of Rama Rao, he had failed to put his

wife in her place. This Member of Parliament was openly suggesting that Rama Rao should have controlled his wife by thrashing her.

The younger son-in-law, Chandra Babu Naidu, who has become Chief Minister, said N.T. Rama Rao will remain in history as a man who lost power for the sake of a woman. (Are women such worthless creatures?)

The Tamil superstar Rajanikanth who came to Hyderabad as a peacemaker between the two groups, described Lakshmi Parvathi as *Dushta Shakti* (evil power). He also said that Lakshmi Parvathi is an example showing to what extent women can go if they are given a chance. Their common allegation was that Rama Rao was

good, but she misled him and ruined him. (Is N.T. Rama Rao such a naive person to be misled by a person who is 32 years junior to him?) They said that though they still respect Rama Rao, it became inevitable for them to topple his authority to save the party from the clutches of Lakshmi Parvathi.

In spite of their "Save democracy, Save Telugu Desam party" slogans, one point which did not escape the public is that sons and sons-in-law are as power crazy as Lakshmi Parvathi. The latter was resented and seen as an illegitimate grabber simply because she is a woman and a second wife to boot.

**Nirmala Yarlagadda,
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