



## Responses to Manushi

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### An Eclipsed Sun

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This is in response to Dipa Suri's *A Black Hole* published in *Responses to Manushi* (No. 100).

I have just come back from Burlingame, California, after having stayed there for nearly six months. I had gone there to help my working daughter take care of her infant son. Out of 22 houses in the lane, my daughter's house is the only one owned by an Indian family. The neighbourhood is quite friendly. One day one of my neighbours and I were talking about books and the conversation veered to women's issues there. I then mentioned about **Manushi** to her and passed on (No. 98) to her. I also requested her to go through my piece in it. I was very curious to know her (she being an American woman) reaction to the very same lines which Dipa Suri labels as "inane drivel". She (our neighbour) said that the weakening of family ties in America has had a negative consequence by way of increase in broken homes and absence of role models.

Three of the neighbours there are members of a book club which has eight members — all the members are women. I also joined this book club. I came to know about and read some currently-talked about books. On the basis of my interaction with women there and what I read there, I feel that what I wrote is, more or less, the reality.

Dipa's daily routine indicated just one thing: That she keeps herself very busy. Keeping busy is a palliative and is one of the ways of escaping and dealing with loneliness. But just keeping busy is definitely not an indication of total absence of loneliness. What I meant by loneliness was loneliness caused by absence of interaction with family members. By family ties I meant not just the ties between the immediate family members (between parents and children and between siblings) but also the ties between sisters-in-law, aunts and nephews and nieces, between first cousins and sometimes between second cousins also. These relationships often provide a wide spectrum of pleasant companionship, and give a feeling of belonging.

I think that there are mainly two categories of Indians in America. Those belonging to the first are more American than the Americans themselves and find everything Indian distasteful. Those belonging to the second category have become more Indian than they even were when they were in India and feel nostalgic about things Indian. Dipa resents what she thinks is "blatant western bashing", but at the same time seems to see nothing wrong in her "blatant India bashing".

India is no doubt passing through an unprecedented nadir. But then doesn't every country have its ups and downs? In spite of Dipa's condemnation and denunciation, I believe that far from being a black hole, India is at the moment just an eclipsed sun. When the eclipse is over India will shine again.

The interview with Nilofer Gole in **Manushi** (No. 100) was interesting, especially the second last answer and the last sentence of the last paragraph: "If I am a secularist, it does not mean that I am anti-Islam." Applying the same logic, being a Hindu and professing Hinduism does not necessarily mean being an anti-secularist.

Madhu Kishwar's *Naukri as Property* is a true description of the prevailing situation.

The short story *The Carved Box* by Pratibha Ray in **Manushi** (No. 100) was very touching.

Lakshmi Bhargava, M.P, Bhopal

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### Decline in Education

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This is in response to Madhu Kishwar's article *Destroying Minds and skills - The Dominance of Angreziyat in Our Education* in **Manushi** (No. 102). This article has evoked many thoughts in me.

I am doing my second year bachelors in Life Sciences from Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). Instead of going to college, I started learning to paint, weave and dance for a year but have decided to focus on weaving for the next two years.

Many elite, upper, middle class people complain that an alarming number of youth are aspiring for white collar

jobs and are neglecting their ancestral skills. But I feel if we are not able to provide them with the money and benefits their skilled hands deserve, what right do we have to prevent them from doing a government job and earning a few extra hundreds? It seems to me that we are being more selfish in our desperation to preserve our cultural arts. We ourselves don't want to learn them, but we want the sons and daughters of craftsmen to stick to their traditional occupation — money or no money! I know of an extremely skilled weaver-turned-watchman. I also understand why weavers wear only sticky polyester skirts and not clothes they weave. They just can't afford them!

The standard of education in my village near Chitour, Andhra Pradesh, is extremely poor. So I started empathising with parents who withdrew their children from school because if that was the kind of education they were receiving it was better to be working with their parents and earning some money. But a few parents like to see their sons speak a few English words, make it to a B.A. or B.Sc. and get a job. Today, there are a number of unemployed youth in my village with a degree in hand. They haven't done any manual work ever. Now they are literally jobless! This situation troubles me. What we need is academic as well as artistic skill. As Gandhi insisted, manual skill — ancestral or any other — should be a must for every student. Only such a blend of the mind and the body can produce complete human beings. It is only then that we will understand the concept of dignity of labour.

Teaching Indian languages in schools has been of such poor quality and of low priority that even after years of learning a language, very few people develop a good command over the language and a good taste for *desi* literature. In my case, though my mother tongue is Tamil, I learnt to read and write Telugu till class XII. My English



is quite bad. I write short stories and essays in Telugu now and then. Though I express myself much better in Telugu, my vocabulary is frighteningly limited. I try to manage with the few words I know. Ironically, my maternal grandfather was a famous Tamil writer, but my Tamil reading skills extend only to reading film posters, bus routes, etc, even though I speak Tamil. I find it difficult to deal with sociological concepts and ideas in any language. I had to give my love for theatre because my command over any language is poor.

The dominance of *Angeze* in our education has indirectly and gradually led to shrinking of our rich crafts and the lack of respectable niche for artisans and other craftsmen. Our education system has produced confused youth like us who haven't had the courage to think, question and demand the right kind of education we ought to receive which would mould us into more humane, complete human beings.

G. Samyuktha, Chennai, T.N

### Nuanced Approach

Although I have been vaguely aware of **Manushi** for a long time, I chanced upon some of its articles only today on the Internet. As an observer of Indian affairs, I have been quite distressed with the cavalier manner that quotas or disbarments of one kind or another are proposed to solve different national problems. For example, I remember how a few years ago M.L. Fotedar, one of Narasimha Rao's cabinet ministers, proposed that nobody with more than certain number of children should be allowed to run for political office. That was the time Laloo Yadav's star had just begun to ascend. So the idea was that such a disbarment would eliminate a rival. Fortunately, nothing came of that proposal. Laloo might be a bad and corrupt politician but what does that have to do with how many children he has? Likewise, I am astonished at the manner all groups in India have signed on the 33 per cent reservation for women bandwagon. Madhu Kishwar's writing on this issue (**Manushi No. 96**) was the first nuanced article from India I have seen. I do hope that it starts a debate on the issue of reservation and other issues as well.

I have also noted that Madhu Kishwar is not one of those who reject Indian tradition completely. As someone who has worked on the roots of the nature of Indian civilisation, I know that there is in it much that is of great value. We would be better equipped to deal with our current problems if we don't act as amnesics regarding our tradition.

Subash Kak, Louisiana, USA □