



Responses to Manushi

Insulting Hanuman

I think, to many of your MANUSHI readers, the idea of Hanuman as Ram's 'sidekick' must sound like an abomination, because no one in their right mind should attribute the status of the lackey (what else does a 'sidekick' mean?) to *Bhakta* Hanuman. And to finally hint, only to hint, of course, that Sita and Hanuman may have been erotically involved is the second abomination. Mr. Philip Lutgendorf, in his article *Like Mother, Like Son* (MANUSHI 114), ought to have been a little more cautious regarding such statements and insinuations.

That there were 'virile' monkeys who were eroticised by women is hard to deny. In the carvings of a temple in Bhubaneswar, a monkey is shown tugging at the skirt of an *alasya kanya*. The monkey has an erection. Close by is the image of *Vrishakapi*, a tall and straight-standing simian making bold advances toward a woman who seems willing to reciprocate, though she remains somewhat restrained.

Virile simians may have been part of the culture of the times and their attraction for females of our species is perhaps undeniable, as the temple wall reminds us. But to even vaguely suggest that Hanuman had felt erotically for Sita and vice-versa would be, I presume, quite scandalous to many of your readers. Hanuman as a 'playboy'? What an image.

Prithwiraj Misra, Cuttack, Orissa

Korean Feminism

I received my first issue of MANUSHI since I first came to Korea six years ago. It was like meeting an old friend. I particularly like MANUSHI because it shows non-Western feminism in theory and action. This is especially important to me now since I teach at a women's university in Korea and I feel it is important to demonstrate to the students that there are alternatives to American-style feminism. Korean women themselves, of course, have created a Korean feminism, but the average student looks only across the Pacific Ocean for strategies and examples.

While I feel that the smaller, more ethnically homogenous European nations such as the Netherlands, Finland and Scandinavian countries can also offer examples of feminism pertinent to Korea, I find that there are unexpected affinities between Korean and Indian societies. The dowry system, for example, is a burden on women and their families in both countries. In Korea, while there are no bride burnings, there have been cases of young wives committing suicide over the dowry demands of their husbands and in-laws. As in India, dowries have been going up as women lose economic clout. Some things in Korea can only be understood in relation to Indian society.

Traditionally, also, Korea has had a very powerful patriarchal structure greatly enhanced by the introduction

effectively in the 1500's - of a particularly severe Neo-Confucianism that greatly devalued and restricted women. Among other things, aristocratic and middle-class women practised *purdah*, including a form of veiling; inheritance and continuity of the family line was focused on the eldest son; widows could not remarry (though village people arrange "abductions"); and women eventually lost the right to inherit land and participate in natal family rituals. Unlike Indian women, Korean women severed formal ties with their families when they married, but were never an official part of their husbands' family until after their deaths, and then only if they had a son to perform the ancestor rites. Women did not have names, only designations of their relationship with a man or child.

A lot has changed in the past century and most especially within the last two decades, but the primary function of a woman is still to get married and bear a son for her husband's family. The students, of course, feel they are the only women in the world under this kind of pressure. They want to get married, but they want to be able to enjoy their daughters and have a companionable relationship with their husbands; the feminism they know, American feminism, is remote from their own experiences and those of their mothers and grandmothers. MANUSHI is a breath of fresh air for these young women. And MANUSHI keeps me fresh. It keeps giving me new ways to perceive the world.

Cheryl L. Hyland, Seoul, Korea □

Apology for Error

In the *Readers' Forum* section of the last issue, we incorrectly stated that Prithwiraj Misra is based in Vishakhapatnam. He actually resides in Cuttack. The error is sincerely regretted.