



Letters To Manushi

Consequences Of Dependence

I remember this widow distinctly because she was my neighbour. Her husband was a leading surgeon, who suddenly died. His relatives gathered at the house. After the funeral, the brother-in-law went to his dead brother's hospital and disposed of all his surgical instruments, the linen, the furniture and the medicines. The sister-in-law took full charge of the residence. The widow was expected to sit in a corner, clad in white. She did not dare ask any questions, and was not given any information. When the mourning period was over, she found that her new saris which her husband had bought for her before his death, had been taken away, and she was given only a pittance out of the proceeds of the sale of the surgical goods. Luckily for her, they could not touch the insurance money...

The same was the plight of a Muslim widow who was not supposed to come out of mourning for a period of four and a half months. Her husband was a mill worker. His friend took her thumb impression to get her the provident fund. She went on asking for the money but never got a paisa.

Recently, a young businessman died in an accident. The young widow had full faith in her in-laws. She got a cheque of one lakh from the insurance company. Her in-laws took her signature which she gave in good faith. One day her four children were sent back from school as their fees had not been paid. She went to the bank and found hardly any money in her account. The insurance money had been deposited

in her brother-in-law's account. Ultimately she had to go to court to get the money back.

All this goes to show that a responsible husband should prepare his wife and tell her what to do in case something happens to him.

**Shailbala Motiwala, Ahmedabad
Not Sure**

I must apologise for the delay in renewing my subscription. This was because I was not sure how I felt towards **Manushi**. Though it is true that the plight of women in this country can never be exaggerated, and we must do everything we can to focus everybody's attention on it, I am not sure that **Manushi's** uncompromising antimale attitude is entirely helpful in this struggle. The general attitude that women are inferior to men must be eradicated, and in this deeply ingrained attitude, women are as great offenders as men. In every case of bride burning, there seems to be a mother-in-law involved as well as a husband... We can use our strength effectively by being clear, firm, fair and united, but let us not divide humanity into two airtight units, at loggerheads with each other. Let us not have ridiculous stories like "Naya Gharvas" which appeared in No. 17, but rather human and understanding ones like "Twenty Or Twenty Five" in No. 16. If **Manushi** wishes to cater to school libraries, stories like the former must certainly be out...

In my own house, I feel that my husband and I have succeeded with our daughter and son. Priya would be genuinely surprised if anyone suggested that she was inferior to a boy. Nalin treats girls and women with great sympathy and friendliness, and as equals. In **Manushi**, we could probably discuss how, to "catch them young"...

I cannot bring myself to think of men in general as enemies. There are so many nice men I know who would do more for women than many women would. We should welcome the help and opinion of such men in the columns of **Manushi**. In any event, I have decided to support **Manushi** because it is an effective platform for women, and helps make us more aware of our problems. I wish **Manushi** great success...

Gita Nair, Pune

It is unclear to us how some readers get the idea that Manushi is antimale. We nowhere state the problem as one of good, kind women versus bad, cruel men. We are fully aware of the fact that women are divided against each other, as are the members of any oppressed group. The situation, as we see it, is that power, economic, social and political, has come to be concentrated in the hands of men as a group. Teaching children to consider themselves equal, while desirable in itself, will not alter the fact that they will grow up in a society where men have privileges, powers and freedoms that women do not have. Perhaps it is equally important to make children aware of these existing inequalities so that they learn to fight and deal with them.

Manushi attempts to reflect the existing situation and the attempts to change it. Manushi has always had many male readers and active supporters. The writer of the story 'Naya Gharvas' is such a man.

—Manushi

Forced Prostitution

We found that the practice, of prostitution is becoming widespread in and around the villages of Nandikotkur. People feel that women are a source of earning income. Husbands force their

wives to practise prostitution. Many women told us that their husbands threaten them with dire consequences if they do not earn through prostitution. There are cases of parents similarly forcing unmarried daughters into the profession. The local administration, when approached, showed complete indifference to the phenomenon.

—CISRS, Secunderabad

More Responses

The story “Naya Gharvas” came as a real surprise. Rarely have I seen women’s love celebrated in Indian stories. I personally liked the solidarity Beeja and Teeja displayed. In my own life I have received emotional and social satisfaction only from women friends. The flaw in the story is that it suggests that women who challenge society’s norms, and design their own unique life styles, will survive only if they receive some supernatural protection, in this case, from the male ghost. Exchanging one sort of dependency for another is not a solution to our problems.

Rehana Ghadially, Bombay

...I can’t tell you how much I enjoyed reading “Naya Gharvas.” It is certainly unusual, not to mention warmly wise and witty. Though I do not know Rajasthani, I can appreciate the challenge of translation, from my own experience of working with Urdu poetry. Your translation seems extremely successful to me, and I hope you have the wherewithal to continue including this sort of piece as much as possible in the future...

Carla Petievich, USA

The Best So Far

...“Naya Gharvas” is the best piece of creative writing you have ever printed, by far. Of course, I can only comment on the English version but it gives me the feeling of a complex mixture of folk tale directness and simplicity with an intricate and florid subtlety and craftsmanship. However, I had a strange, intuitive feeling at the end of the tale that perhaps the part where the cousin comes to the door, and especially the transformation of Beeja into a man, are separate stories in some sort of cycle that

accumulated around the original story, and they are sort of tacked on here, very artfully, no doubt. Also, more importantly, to my unfamiliar eye, there seemed to be something of a less convincing feeling in the ease with which Beeja gives up being a man and averts the tragic ending that is inherent in the structure of the story up to that point, and in the lack of resistance by the ghost chieftain to undoing the transformation for which Beeja had asked... This wonderful story by itself is enough to justify a half dozen issues of even a major literary journal...

I do not know who wrote the law article but it is unnecessarily hard to understand, too much formality and legalese. It could have been half as long



-Lydia

and more focused on what is significant in the legal question about land rights. A lot of the reports are now doing the job of being descriptive and concrete, which is good. Though the article on hazards of the pill does represent a consistent position - it troubles me by its total air of unreality. Are physicians likely under any conceivable circumstances to do the kind of screening they indicate they feel is necessary for the use of the pill? To maintain that an oral contraceptive is the best option in only very few instances, while talking nostalgically about the cervical cap as a slighted but significant contraceptive method for most of India, is bizarre thinking that could not be maintained in five minutes of coherent consideration. The most astonishing

thing is that they claim they are talking about rural India..

A Friend

We Are Strengthened

...The letter Madhu had written to Justice Bhagwati of the supreme court, was read out to our women in yesterday’s meeting. After reading this letter, a lot of questions were raised regarding the property rights of women. Many of our village women started giving their own experiences of exploitation by their brothers who have deprived them of their share in the parental property. By taking up such issues we are strengthened...

Burnad Fatima, Kallaru

Link With Struggle

.....I am really glad that you have been able to keep up your good work. I have been a reader of **Manushi** ever since the first issue. At that time I was living in Bombay and therefore was more closely involved in the women’s struggle, and associated with other women who felt as strongly as I do about the oppression of women.

Now I have been out in this Sheikdom in the middle of the Arabian Gulf for the last three years. I am married and I recently had a son. I welcomed him with mixed feelings. I wanted a daughter because I thought I would understand a woman better. Yet, may be a son is better because life will be easier for him. He is not born with a handicap of sex. I have very few delusions about motherhood. The only way in which I want to mould my son’s thinking is in his attitude towards women so that he grows up with a healthy respect for them.—

...My feeling of complete isolation from the struggle is diminished only by the timely arrival of **Manushi**, which brings me close to women who think and feel as I do. Apart from the correspondence with friends, it is the one major factor that rekindles my spirit...

Letha Saldanfaa, Qatar

Weakness And Strength

You can send me five copies of **Manushi** for distribution. I have a few suggestions to make. Just as you regularly print film reviews, you should also print book reviews from your point

of view. You should have a column providing information or suggestions regarding employment avenues for women, because economic independence is our most vital need.

Women's own weaknesses should also be highlighted so that we can acknowledge them, and change ourselves. For instance, women are often found to be more conservative than men are....

There should be an account in every issue of the work of successful women, especially in those fields where women are less active. You do print such interviews, but not in every issue. Apart from interviews with well known women, there could also be interviews with ordinary women who can inspire self confidence in other women...

Urna Bhatt, Nainital
(translated from Hindi)
Our Daily Life

...In our daily life, we are forced to see a great many things which we do not want to see, which discourage us in our efforts to change our lives. For instance, the slogans painted on the roadside walls : "Miracle ! A medicine that will definitely help you give birth to a boy !" Needless to say, it is we women who have to suffer the ill effects of such medicines doled out by quacks and sought after by people in all walks of life...

Of late, there has been a lot of talk against sexual harassment of women on the streets. It seemed as if men had suddenly become our wellwishers. A statement appeared on DTC buses, saying that harassment of women is an offence against the law. Of course, we women know how ineffective all these measures have proved. I was interested to find on September 2, an item in the newspaper saying that the government is planning to pass a Delhi Eve Teasing Prohibition Bill, because the menace of eve teasing has "earned Delhi police a bad name." In the same newspaper, on the same day, appeared an advertisement for a mosquito coil, which showed three men teasing a girl because she has got mosquito bites which look like pimples. Such advertisements encourage men to

harass women, and the result of such harassment is to terrorise women, especially young girls, to the extent that they lose their self confidence, and prefer to stay confined at home rather than venture onto the streets of their own city...

Shashi, Delhi
(translated from Hindi)
A Silent Reader Speaks

...I have been lending **Manushi** to many new readers, and have also contacted a few librarians...So far, I have been a silent reader of **Manushi**. I would like to express my ideas on a few points...

I would appreciate if there are analyses besides reportings of atrocities on women. For instance, what are the root causes of dowry deaths? Is not it embarrassing that despite increase of women's organisations and their activities, dowry deaths seem to be still a problem ? What about the history and origin of women's oppression ? What is the material basis of women's oppression ?

There is a lot of biological, psychological and sociological research going on in developed countries which is smashing many of the myths regarding the inferiority of women as a species. Some discoveries suggest that women have many possibilities which men do not have. For example, women are biologically stronger in the sense that their bodies are more flexible, they can retain their energy for a longer period than men can. It would be very encouraging to read about the results of such research if you could publish them.

If possible, a regular column regarding women's health should be introduced. We women are so unsure about our body and its changes. Knowing about our own health and body will surely build up our confidence.

I was delighted to see "Books received by **Manushi**" as it is just what I was looking for...

Hsila Yami, Nepal
Like A Tonic

...I feel sorry that **Manushi** is not to be seen on the bookstalls as are other magazines. I have now stopped

approaching agents, and am trying my hand at popularising **Manushi** among college girls by lending them a few copies. A few girls have already responded well ..

I was very happy to go through the interview of Seethalakshmi. Many articles published in **Manushi** are like a tonic. I feel confident when I go through them, because I know that I am not the only one suffering but there are many others also struggling with me.

There are so many illiterate women who are being ill treated by their husbands yet they dare not come out of the marriage bond because there is no one ready to take care of them. They are not trained for any job so cannot maintain themselves except by becoming servant maids. Can **Manushi** do anything for these women by printing articles on how they can make a living ?...

P. Shashikala, Bangalore
Roots Of Woman Hatred

According to the Delhi police, there were 339 dowry deaths in Delhi in 1980, 450 in 1981, and 485 in 1982. Bride burning is only an extreme manifestation of the oppression which has its roots in ancient belief and practice. Contempt for women is linked with the belief that only a son can deliver his father and grandfather from hell. Manu Smriti, an ancient law book, says : "Through a son a man conquers worlds, through a son's son he obtains immortality .. Because a son delivers (*trayate*) his father from the hell called *put*, he was called *putra* by the self existent" (IX, 137-38). Consequently, Manu Smriti remarks : "A barren wife may be superseded by another wife in the eighth year, she whose children all die in the tenth, she who bears only daughters in the eleventh." (IX. 81).

It is only an *upapataka*, a petty sin, if a man kills his wife, but for a woman who kills her husband, there is no atonement, states Manu

Smriti, XI, 67, and V, 90. There are also innumerable stories and myths which support one sided virtue on the part of the wife. Manu Smriti says : "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, a

husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by his wife.” Today, in our country, many parents reprimand their daughters and drive them to death at the hands of their husbands.

There are about 8,000 widows in Varanasi, wandering in the streets and waiting for death. Many of them, young and old, are there because they have been allowed no other option. In Vishnu Smriti, another famous law book, it is said : “After the death of her husband, she should preserve her chastity or ascend the pyre after him.” Manu Smriti adds : “Nowhere is a second husband prescribed for a virtuous woman.” Of course, a virtuous man can always marry a second wife, even if he has killed the first.

All these beliefs and traditions have their roots in the confusion of biology with morality, particularly the branding of women’s biology and sexuality as impure. Manu Smriti says : “It is the nature of a woman to seduce men in this world.” If women had had the power to frame laws and determine morality, they would have said just the opposite...

S. Aro, Delhi

Same Message, Different Package

There is a new series of advertisements for Duncan tea, which has started appearing on full pages in magazines. Produced by Rediffusion ad agency, these ads seem to be understanding of modern women’s aspirations. They say : “There was a time, not long ago, when intelligence for women was assumed to mean knowing a little embroidery, some cooking and enough simple arithmetic to handle household accounts. Happily, it doesn’t mean the same today.” In similar vein, femininity is defined as no longer meaning confinement and feigned fragility, creativity as no longer meaning producing heirs for her husband’s clan, and knowledge as no longer meaning gossip which took place in kitchen or at doorstep. But these definitions through negation are contradicted by the positive definitions which come through the photographs. Each photograph shows a woman with beauty parlour looks and

vacant expression. In the two cases where she is shown reading or painting, she still has manicured nails and pearls intact. Also, the new woman’s ability to “give a new meaning to everything” is identified with her ability to select a particular brand of tea.

It is no surprise to find that the blatantly sexist advertisement campaign for Rath Vanaspati (“Because the language of a woman is love”) is also designed by the same agency,



Rediffusion. This campaign has spent lakhs to tell us that a woman expresses herself and her love by cooking with Rath, and by training her little daughter to “develop the interests and emotions of a woman”, to “grow more interested in sewing, housekeeping and cooking...”

We can postulate that if the six year old’s emotions are properly channelised, she will grow from Rath girl into Duncan tea woman...

Prabha Krishnan, Delhi Whose Dignity ?

Recently, S.M. Aggarwal, sessions judge, gave a landmark judgment when he convicted the husband, mother-in-law and brother-in-law of

Sudha Goel of having burnt her to death, and sentenced all three of them to the gallows. On appeal, the conviction was set aside by R.N. Aggarwal of the

Delhi high court, who acquitted all three accused. Several demonstrations were held against the decision. On November 10, a requisitioned meeting of the Delhi high court bar association was held to consider the following resolution ; “The Delhi high court bar association strongly condemns the daily demonstrations being held in the premises of the high court by several women’s organisations, attributing motives to the judges and lowering the dignity of the whole judicial

system. To further resolve and condemn the active participation of certain members of the bar association in these activities.”

A few women members of the supreme court bar association who wanted to attend the meeting as observers, were heckled, jeered, and unceremoniously thrown out without any consideration for the “dignity of the judicial system.” Some members of the bar strongly opposed the resolution in so far as it laid unreasonable restrictions on the fundamental right to have meetings and demonstrations. The judiciary should not feel so threatened by healthy criticism. A woman member who voiced such views was heckled by some male members of the bar. The meeting rapidly became rowdy. The president and the secretary of the

association with some other members who had their own motives for supporting the resolution, suddenly put the resolution, to a voice vote. In the pandemonium that ensued, the president declared the resolution passed and walked out, leaving a number of bewildered members who had not had the opportunity to exercise their votes. As such, the resolution cannot be stated to have been passed. The president and secretary later conceded that proper voting was impossible due to lack of decorum. Women members of the high court bar later met and expressed shock and resentment at the manner in which the meeting had been conducted.

More shocking and questionable is the motive which prompted some members of the bar to pass strictures on the demonstrations held by women's organisations. Why did these members disregard and ignore all previous demonstrations which have been held against various high court judgments over the years ?

Two women lawyers of Delhi high court Punish Both Parties' Parents ?

... My idea is that by law all marriages should be recorded in a register to be kept with a registrar of marriages. Each couple should be given a card of registration. When any dowry death, suicide or murder takes place, the woman's husband and also his parents and her parents should be held responsible. The offence should be punishable with life imprisonment for all these parties. Similarly, rapists too should be punished with life imprisonment. Imposition of such a penalty will deter persons who are likely to involve themselves in such ventures ..

R. Subramanyam, Raigarh Time The Best Healer ?

My sister Kusum was married to Mahesh Kumar, son of Ramswaroop Rajendra Prashad of Goyal Trading Company, Ghasmandi, Gwalior, on November 19, 1980. After her marriage, she often complained to us that physical and mental torture was inflicted on her by her husband and in-laws. Her husband and in-laws also wrote letters to us, full of objectionable language and threats,

indicating their unhappiness about the amount of dowry given by us. We ignored all this, thinking that time is the best healer.

On October 3, 1983, Kusum was found dead in her mother-in-law's bedroom. She had not been ill. Her body was cremated before any of us could reach, and without informing the neighbours or members of the Aggarwal community. The cremation took place in a lonely field. Against the doctor's advice, they refused to inform the police, or get the post mortem conducted. Circumstantial evidence forces us to think that Kusum was murdered by her in-laws who deliberately disposed of her body in this manner.



My father, S.L. Bansal, resident of Shahabad, Kota, lodged a first information report at Gwalior but so far no action has been taken by the police. I have sent copies of the report to a number of authorities including the prime minister, home minister, chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, and police officials ...

Mahesh Bansal, Jodhpur Sustained Resistance

We, the lady staff members of Central Food Technological Research Institute, have been fighting against a local newsweekly called *Radiant*, which is full of slanderous writings on women, Arouncj July 1982, we approached the deputy commissioner, and submitted a

memorandum condemning the cheap and vulgar news items appearing in this newsweekly. We asked him to stop the newsweekly immediately. However, he expressed his helplessness, and asked us to write to the Press Council Of India, which we did. Now the Press Council has asked us to appear before an enquiry com-mittee at New Delhi. We, the lady staff members, have chosen two representatives to present our case before the committee.

E. Rati Rao, Mysore

Harassment In Women's Colleges

I wish to bring to your notice the following news item that appeared in the *Indian Express*, Madras edition, dated October 24, 1983.

"The Association of University Teachers, Tamil Nadu, has alleged that teachers in women's colleges face 'daily harassment, intimidation and an unending stream of memos', adding that there is a case of a principal of a women's college issuing a circular to the teachers to deliver babies during the summer vacation only. The AUT has also alleged that one of the teachers was even forced to run around the college grounds till she aborted."

Padmini Swaminathan, Madras

Five Years Old

My heartfelt congratulations for completing five years of **Manushi**. I am enclosing my life subscription. Seethalakshmi's story was inspiring...One letter suggested that the idea of a married woman helping her parents financially is perhaps ahead of the times. I do not think it is ahead, because I know quite a few married nurses who send more than half their salary to their parents. In fact, they made it a precondition to marriage, and have had no problems carrying out their commitment.

I liked W. Godwin's quote : "All coercion sours the mind." It reminds me of what George Sand wrote: "Conviction must never be imposed by force. Such behaviour is criminal and senseless, for everything born of violence must perish by violence."

Usha Desai, Bombay