



Letters To Manushi

He Died For A Cause

My husband, Sumeet Singh, editor of *Preetlari*, was brutally murdered by madmen in the name of religion. He had established a relation with your magazine. He felt strongly for women's emancipation...

Poonam Sumeet Singh, Amritsar

We were deeply shocked when we heard of the murder of Sumeet Singh. He was only 30 when he fell to the bullets of extremists on February 22, at village Lopoke, 25 kilometres from Amritsar. We knew Sumeet through correspondence over the last few years. He was a sympathiser and supporter of *Manushi* and had translated some articles from *Manushi* for publication in *Preetlari*, the progressive literary journal in Punjab edited by him. Sumeet's grandfather Gurbaksh Singh had set up a commune of like minded liberals called *Preetmagar* near Amritsar. He also edited *Preetlari*. After his death, Sumeet's father Navtej Singh took over the affairs of the commune as well as the editorship of *Preetlari*. When Navtej died two year ago, Sumeet took over these responsibilities. Like many Punjabis, this family was not conscious of differences between Hindus and Sikhs. Some wore long hair and beards, others did not. Sumeet had cut his hair and had married a girl from a Hindu family. He and his brother were going on their scooter to do some shopping when they ran into an ambush by four Sikh gunmen, who mercilessly gunned down Sumeet, disregarding his brother's pleas that Sumeet was also a Sikh. Sumeet had always taken a bold stand for secularism and communal amity

aid had refused to cow down to repeated threats. In his untimely death, all those who are struggling for justice and peace have sustained a loss. May his martyrdom inspire all of us firmly and peacefully to oppose those vested interests who perpetrate terror in the name of religion.

—**Manushi**

Women's Strength

I was happy to read about Seethalakshmi's struggle in No. 18. It was an inspiring account of reality. We should spread two ideas, that women is not *abala* but *sabala*, and that no decision regarding her life should be taken against her will, not even that of marriage. A girl living in my neighbourhood had done her MBBS and MD and it was inevitable that dowry be given at her marriage. She, however, told the boys who came to see her: "You are not bullocks to be bought and sold. Human beings do not have any monetary price. Only animals are sold but I want to marry a man, not an animal." Surprisingly, she found a good husband who did not take any dowry, and she is now settled in the USA. It is necessary for women to be strong like this...

Buddhanbhai Trivedi, Ahmedabad

(translated from Hindi)

Opposing Injustice

...In Ahmedabad city, about three women are reported to have been burnt to death each month on account of domestic discord. Recently, AWAG, in coordination with other womens organisations, took out a joint demonstrations to the in-laws' house of Varsha, who was burnt to death. When we confronted her mother-in-law, she said:

"Do what you like, I do not care." We shouted slogans and enacted a street play outside the house. The neighbours were thus informed of what had happened but the mother-in-law stood on the balcony, combing her hair, as though oblivious of the situation. At the Alice Bridge police station, we demonstrated until the police officers came out, spoke with us, and promised that the case would be handed over to the crime branch, and investigated properly. Thus our four hour long demonstration forced the perpetrators of injustice to reckon with public disapproval...

Vijaya Desai, Ahmedabad

(translated from Hindi)

What It Means

...**Manushi** has helped me keep India in mind since a six month stay two years ago, and has helped me to understand what I saw. There is just one thing that has been puzzling me. Perhaps you could print, for us English speakers, a translation or explanation of what the word **Manushi** means ?...

Hilary Withey, England

The word Manushi at its simplest means woman. However, the word is not commonly used in Hindi. It was coined by us because we felt dissatisfied with all the existing Hindi words for woman. For instance, the words Stree and Aurat mean woman but can also be used to mean "wife". The word Mahila has the connotation of "lady." All these words, including Nari, is only use refer to an adult woman. Therefore, we felt the need for a new word for woman, in keeping with what we felt was the spirit behind the magazine Manushi is derived from

the Sanskrit word *Manushya* which means human being as opposed to *Purush* which means man. *Manushiye* as an adjective can also mean humane.

The emphasis is on humanity, not manhood, because we feel manhood has mostly been expressed through violence, warfare, aggression and domination. Thus *Manushi* would literally mean female human.

-Manushi

Real Freedom

Please accept our congratulations for publishing Gail Omvedt's findings on *devdasi* prostitution...In the northern parts of Karnataka we have another heinous festival of young boys spraying coloured water on naked dalit girls. As Gail points out in her article "The *devdasi* system enslaves women and oppresses dalits in the name of religion. If men are dalits women of this group are dalits among dalits."

Every movement in India has failed to liberate the people and the dalits in particular. We feel that all these movements have failed because women, who form half the population of society, were kept out. The dalit movement, which we call the real freedom movement of India, should not fail. Dalits must keep the women in the vanguard of the movement. Only then will they succeed. On behalf of *Dalit Voice*, and other persecuted minorities, we pledge our wholehearted support to your journal and we seek your support in our liberation struggle.

V.T. Rajshekar, Bangalore

Exposing The Truth

...I very much appreciate the articles in your journal. Your work in exposing dowry deaths and other stark injustices against women has been successful to a degree. The pity is that there is not much publicity here for *Manushi*. I have been trying to gain more readers by contributing my copy to a library near my house....

Recently, a very cruel rape had taken place in the forest district of Wynad. I wrote about it in *Kola Kaumudi* where I am employed as a columnist. I have quoted from the article written by Sohaila Abdulali in *Manushi* No. 16, because hers

is a case of bravely facing the consequences of rape, in contrast to the usual pattern. Women do not come out so bravely because of the social taboos and the tragic consequences they have to face...

K.Ajitha, Calicut

On Prostitution

I was very glad to read the articles on prostitution by Gail Omvedt and Mangala Nori in *Manushi* No. 19.

The only criticism I have is of Gail's statement that "It is overwhelmingly dalit girls who become *devdasis*." As far as I



know, this is not true in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There the dalit castes were strictly forbidden to have sexual relations with upper caste persons until very recently. As usual, the penalty was worse if the man was of dalit caste and the woman a caste Hindu. In such a case, the man would be put to death. I have known cases of such lynchings even since 1947. Even when the man was of upper caste and the woman a harijan, both of them would be driven out and expelled from the local caste group along with their families.

In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, most

devdasis traditionally came from the melakkar or drummer caste of temple musicians and dancers. They were relatively "high" ranking caste Hindus, even though the women were regarded with the same ambivalence as is usually directed towards upper class courtesans. In Tamil Nadu there is also a "lower" caste, the kuthadis, who were puppet players and *devdasis* for the non Sanskritic village temples, but they too were caste Hindus. It was generally recognised that the harijans had a more "correct" sexual and family life than the caste Hindus, no doubt because most of them lived in villages, segregated in their own communities, and because they are less patriarchal than the higher castes, allowing free divorce and remarriage.

Today, no doubt, there are many harijan prostitutes in cities, as there are of other castes, but harijan prostitutes are still very rare in villages.

Kathleen Gough, Canada

Muslim Women

I would like to suggest that you write about the lives of Muslim women as well. You will say that *Manushi* is for all women. But there are separate laws for Muslim women in the matters of marriage and divorce.

Today, middle class Muslims, by and large, are trapped in conservatism and blind superstitions. They think it shameful that a woman should study and take a job. As an educated Muslim woman, I know their problem. In my heart I have a desire to do something, but I cannot understand how to go about it. Many women are compelled to blame god and fate for their condition, and to accept it as unchangeable.

I have studied up to MA under uncongenial circumstances. Our family is uneducated and often, in spite of myself, I have to succumb to their will...

Batulbi Babaso Pathan, Kolhapur

(translated from Hindi)

Masters And Slaves

There are many popular sayings which are direct attacks on women's self respect. One of these is "*Joru ka gulam*" (slave of his wife). ...I do not understand how any wife can make her husband a

slave within the framework of the patriarchal family in which we live. It is impossible to make a husband a slave since the wife does not have any material basis to enslave him. ...On close observation one finds that men referred to as slaves of their wives are those who do not have the manliness to beat their wives, who quietly listen to their wives' loud complaints, or who show a little consideration and help out a bit with the housework. By calling such men slaves of their wives, other men warn them not to treat their wives in a way that offends the dignity of all masters. If a man is manly he must intimidate his wife. In our society, the relationship between husband and wife is one of master and slave. If a master does a slave's work, he is to be pitied or laughed at. I remember, once a man came to wash clothes at the public tap. He also had his wife's sari to wash. Seeing this, the men standing around laughed at him and called him *joru ka gulam*. Ashamed, he washed all the clothes except the sari, which his wife later washed...

Men are ever ready to convince women that there is no slavery involved in doing housework, that to look after the family is a noble and creative task. Why then do they themselves feel so ashamed to be seen doing housework? ...These manly husbands who treat their wives as slaves should be laughed at and scorned...

Similarly, when a man is condemned for cowardice, he will be told: "*Churiyan pahenkar baith jao*" (Sit and wear bangles). This means that to be a woman is equivalent to being a coward, and a cowardly man is like a woman, but if the Rani of Jhansi showed heroism then "*Khub lari mardani*"* (She fought like a man)—We should oppose all such sayings which diminish our identity.

Kiran, Patna

(translated from Hindi)

Inspiring Lives

I liked the interview with Ismat Chughtai in **Manushi** No. 19. Her suggestions for eradicating the exploitation of women are inspiring. Only education and economic independence can liberate women from the oppression of male society.

It will be good if **Manushi** readers can

be regularly acquainted with such inspiring lives. Ismat Chughtai's story "All For A Husband" was also entertaining and close to real life.

Sushma Dixit, Bhiwani

(translated from Hindi)

A Mere Fragment

I have just seen **Manushi** No. 16. It is just one fragment of reality which is presented in **Manushi**. It is just one side of the coin. If **Manushi** wants to pursue the path of journalism that is beneficial to society, then you should always interview the opponent of the oppressed woman as well, and should present a true picture of things without adopting the mentality of a biased woman. Women should be informed where they are going wrong from the male point of view... Women who are not educated and knowledgeable like you and me can get excited rather than inspired by such ideas and can do much damage to themselves and to society. Please make the journal a beneficial one, not a platform for a movement.

Dinesh Chandra Dube,

Hoshangabad

(translated from Hindi)

Not Liberated

...I would like to extend support to you. I am an engineer by profession and am peripherally involved with a support network for battered women and their children. It is a general feeling in India that women in the west are very liberated and things such as wife beating do not happen here. The statement made by the judges who reversed the judgement on the three people who had been sentenced to death in the bride burning case is evidence of this general feeling. Surprisingly, the incidence of battering here is quite high, and though there is considerable support available here compared to that available in India, women feel just as helpless...

Anjali Joshi, USA

Who Is Responsible ?

...Recently, I had been to my husband's hometown, and I would like to share some of my experiences with you. It is a preindustrial city with feudal values permeating the entire social structure. What amazed me was the peaceful coexistence of the most modern,

advanced, material culture with the traditional, feudal culture. People have very willingly emulated the new material culture of the west without correspondingly imbibing the necessary values like equality, secularism, liberalism and so on. So one sees women using modern gadgets like washing machines, vacuum cleaners ovens, mixers, hair driers, the same time religiously observing the nonrational taboos of purity and pollution, visible in the differential treatment of women in menstruation, and in the rush for a purificatory bath on being accidentally touched by an "untouchable" sweeperess.

I was shocked, saddened and angered by the low status assigned to women in this male dominated social system which creates, and perpetuates cultural symbols and consents to keep women subjugated. This culture is so thoroughly internalised by women that they come to believe themselves to be the "weaker sex." This culture puts heavy restraints on women's exposure to the outside world. The phenomenon of the women working outside the home is neither common nor perceived as desirable, shopping for the household is done by the men or the servants. Limited contact with the outside world further stunts the growth of a woman.

The practice of sexual segregation in family and social gatherings adds to women's ignorance regarding sociopolitical happening such gatherings the men usually talked business, economics and politics of the country, while women discussed diamonds, saris and cooking. Women's obsession with food, clothes and jewellery would anger me, but on second thoughts I wondered who was responsible for the zero level sociopolitical consciousness of women. Was not male dominated society responsible for this?...

Sunita Pandhe, Dalli Rajhara

Sharing

A nice piece of sisterhood news to share with you, and some perhaps, to share with **Manushi** readers, for it might inspire other prize winning women to establish similar endowments.

"An amount of Rs 30,000 has been offered as gift to the Rama Krishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, by Mrs Kamal Das, of the Sahitya Akademi award for creating endowment for research and annual lecture on the position of Indian women or subjects related to Indian womanhood." (Telegraph, March 14, 1984).

Mary Ann Dasgupta, Calcutta On March 8

South Asian Women's Group is concerned with the needs of women whose origins lie in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other countries of the Indian subcontinent. Our main objective is to help south Asian women achieve social and economic independence as the first step towards meaningful integration into Canadian society.

Male immigrants from India have been coming to Canada from as far back as 1904. The majority of them were Sikhs from Punjab. Their families were not allowed to immigrate... This was a time of intense racism which reached a peak with the Komagata Maru incident when a shipload of passengers from India were refused the right to land and refused food, water or medicine. One person died and several suffered from malnutrition before the ship was made to turn back under guard. It was not until 1920 that wives and children of legal Canadian east Indian residents were allowed into Canada... East Indian women generally come to Canada as sponsored relatives. Our dependent status and our socioeconomic background combine to isolate us. Though more of us are entering the paid workforce today, we are concentrated in low paying and traditionally "female" jobs. Due to our social dependence and often the inability to speak English, we are vulnerable to oppression at work, outside and at home...

Our group provides free services in supportive counselling, interpretation, and a newsletter. We also hold monthly meetings and are trying to conduct research related to immigrant women...

Tania Dasgupta, Canada

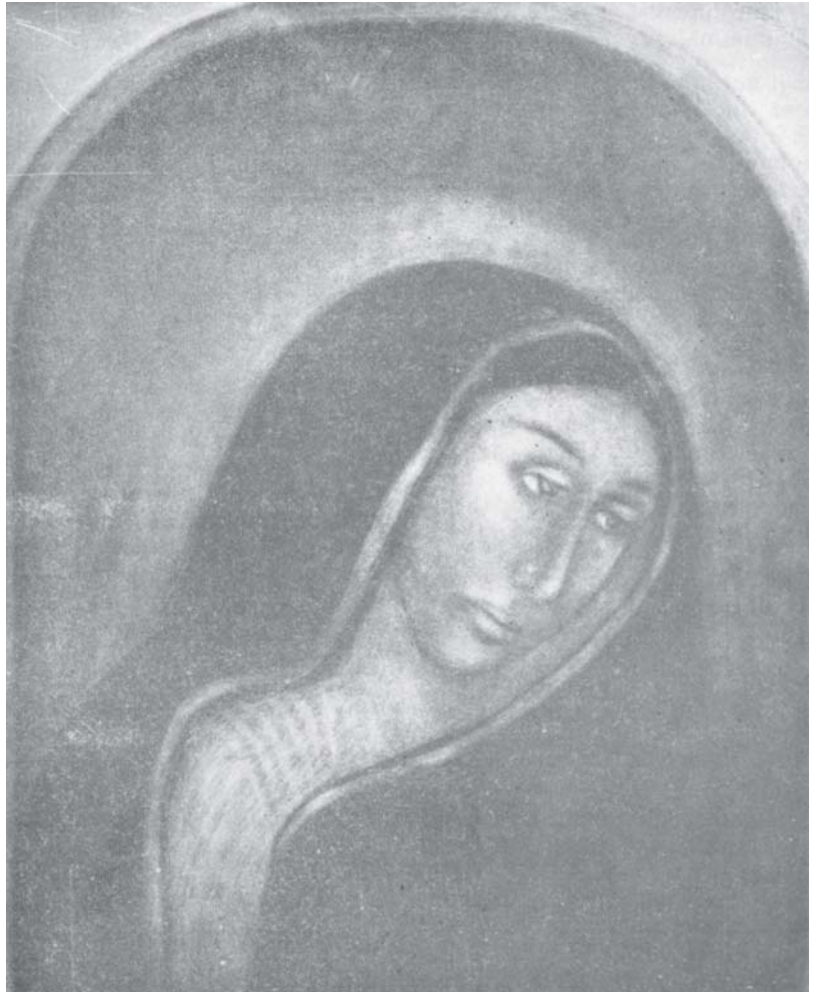
Retaining Our Names Is Legal

I am writing to you to seek legal advice since whoever I approach does not understand my viewpoint. I am emigrating to the USA as my brother's blood relative. He is a citizen of USA. I got my passport made when I was unmarried. I got married in May 1983. I want to retain my maiden name. I do not want to use my husband's name.

Am I required to notify the passport

her lawyer, to retain her name in her passport. She won the case. I cannot find that issue of **Manushi**.

It is not illegal to retain your maiden name is legal under the Indian Passport Act, 1967. It is advisable that you change your status from unmarried to married in the passport and where the column asks for your father's or husband's name, you enter your husband's name. The US consulate is not likely to refuse a visa on this ground. It is advisable for you to get



authorities that I have got married? Is it illegal to retain the maiden name in the passport if a woman is married? Is it required that I change my name in the passport? Do you know of any case where husband or wife are refused visas if the wife retains her maiden name? I read a letter in **Manushi** where a woman in Ahmedabad had fought with the help of

your marriage registered in court to avoid any controversy with the consulate.

—**Manushi**

The Tangled Web

Amidst the passionate reactions to the traumatic deaths of young women at the hands of their husbands and in-laws, a basic fact seems to lie hidden under a

lot of debris. The emphasis so far has been on legislation as a punishment after the event.. The cry is for deterrent punishments to be imposed on the criminals.

Is it not more logical to try and remove the preconditions which make it possible for such crimes to be committed ? The victimisation of a young woman is made possible because she is first rendered defenceless, unable to counteract violence against her. It is not training in physical self defence which is required because most violent acts begin in the debasement of the victim's mind. A girl is taught by her parents that under all circumstances, her place is in her husband's home. Therefore the primary change required is the instilling of a sense of dignity in young women and their parents.

Even birds make certain that their young ones are strong enough to fly and find their own food before they send them away from the nest. First shackling a girl with a sense of utter dependence and then sending her off to a husband is the source of her demoralisation.

Economic independence is of primary importance but it must be accompanied by the kind of upbringing that equips a girl to face the world, and not to submit to injustice. The immediate problem that confronts a woman when she is threatened with bodily injury is "Where do I go from here?" Since it is clear that parents on a large scale have been unable to offer either refuge or constructive advice, it would seem that the responsibility now rests with social welfare organisations to provide both. A young woman who needs to get out of a hostile environment in a hurry must have a place to go to at a moment's notice. Is it not possible to publicise widely the addresses and telephone numbers of voluntary women's groups which can offer a shelter for a short while, and also offer guidance for obtaining of a means of livelihood?

It appears that this kind of work ought to occupy the attention of our women's institutions more than the carrying of banners or the shouting of antidowry slogans or even than the seeking of ubiquitous legal countermeasures...

M. Vaidehi, Secunderabad Protest By Students

On February 6, students of the Graduate School College For Women staged a protest demonstration against the film *Private Life* which was being screened at Goshala Talkies. Under the banner of the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the girls tore down and burnt the film hoardings, raised slogans against obscenity, and staged a sit-in demonstration in the cinema foyer. On police intervention, the manager stopped the screening. On February 13, the Mahila Samiti held a women's and students' meeting in protest against dowry, rape, sexual harassment, obscene films and pornography...

Renu Dewan, Jamshedpur
(translated from Hindi)

Holi Hooliganism

Violence against women in the form of sexual harassment is at all times a feature of life in Delhi, in the days preceding Holi, this harassment suddenly assumes overwhelming proportions. Under the guise of playing Holi, harassment assumes social sanction. It is interesting to note that the targets of balloons thrown by children are far more likely to be women than men. In 1982, a preplanned attack was made on the women students of Stephen's college. In 1983, a busload of boys drove to Lady Shri Ram college, molested the panicstricken girls and drove away. In buses, gangs of boys harass girls while the other passengers look out of the window.

While girls must be able to offer resistance to such violence, it is also necessary for onlookers actively to intervene on the side of the victims who can otherwise be hopelessly outnumbered. To this end, a meeting of women students' unions and women's organisations was convened

on February 17 at Lady HARDINGS college. It was felt that an all-out effort should be made to build a Delhi based movement against sexual harassment, using Holi 1984 as a takeoff point. On February 22, women students' unions convened a meeting on the campus. They plan to set up an antieveteasing cell in every college, to have police patrols with students' patrols to supervise them, and to involve boys' college in patrol squads. Police and DTC authorities will be asked to increase the number of women's specials on all major routes, to have badged police on all buses, and to instruct drivers that they must drive to police stations when any incident takes place, even if the woman does not complain. Women's organisations can work in own areas towards building women's squads, and holding public meetings to spread awareness. The media can be used for propaganda...

**Indu Kulshreshtha, president
Nari Adhikar Sangharsh Samiti**

Holika*

*Last night, fires crackled
on the roadside
As she burnt.
Today, the streets
teem with revellers—
She is imprisoned, terrorised
Manifold are the uses of fire—
It may sanctify her slavery.
Test her purity,
Join her to his corpse,
Consume her,
Symbolise his victory.
Yet she rises,
Year after year,
And is burnt again
In fear.*

—**Ruth Vanita**

* The ritual burning of the effigy of Holika on Holi eve is supposed to symbolise the triumph of good (the nephew, Prahlad) over evil (the aunt, Holika)