



Thought Provoking

This has reference to Madhu Kishwar's review of Nihalani's three films, published in **Manushi** No. 20, under the title "In the name of man-hood, not humanity."

You are right in pointing out that the popularity of *Ardh Satya* is due to its Amitabh Bachan film like ending which gives a false satisfaction to viewers that finally, after all, good has won over evil. It is true that a more natural ending would have been one where Velankar again compromised with Shetty, as this is what Velankar has been shown doing all along. A well known drama, *Ek Aur Dronacharya*, is more satisfying in this respect because it shows reality and does not turn away from it at the end. While *Ardh Satya* shows corruption by compromise in the police force, *Ek Aur Dronacharya* shows the same phenomenon amongst academics. But then, one can financially afford to be more realistic in a dramatic production than in a commercial or semicommercial movie.

You point out that in *Akrosh* "It is highly significant that none of the tribal women are shown bottling up their rage." It is true that women, particularly tribal women, are the most oppressed section of society hence they have bottled up their rage against their oppressors much more than have any other section of society. But don't you think the desperation and helplessness has been made so much a way of life for them that it is not unnatural for a tribal woman to look on while the man attempts to protect the family and its honour—of course, as he deems fit?

Letters to Manushi

To me, it appears that those who are more oppressed need a much higher degree of provocation than do those less oppressed. Thus, while an urban woman rightly gets angry at an eve teaser, a poor, helpless woman in a village may remain apparently quiet even after suffering a sexual assault. Of course, when she is provoked she may really become a Durga and may kill the attacker barehanded.

At least, these movies are thought provoking and this is a big change for Hindi films.

V.K. Tondon, Roorkee Delicate Balance

I liked the Ismat Chughtai inter-view as well as her story in No. 19. It brought a delicate balance to **Manushi** which, I think, sometimes *seems* to lack humour and the kind of common sense that Ismat Chughtai represents. But perhaps the story of women in India is not really funny—and how can you make it so?...

Vasantha Surya, Madras Bimonthly Not Enough

We have tried to expand the sales of **Manushi** here but the biggest obstacle is its being published once in two months. I think this question needs to be thought about. Even at the cost of reducing the number of pages, it should be published every month on a definite date.

We have to stimulate the desire to read amongst people. As it is, a majority of Indian women are un-educated. How effective will it be to feed her this elixir at intervals of two months? I would like this liberation magazine to be published in the 16 major languages of India, and to be published regularly...

Kamla Mahesh Sinha, Nasik
(translated from Hindi)

While we fully agree that it would be better to bring out a paper monthly, weekly or even daily, if possible, we are constrained by our very limited resources. Earlier, it was difficult even to bring out the magazine on time every two months. Last year, we did manage to bring out all six issues, and we hope to stabilise the situation this year. While it is not possible for us at present to bring out the magazine monthly or in more than two languages, it is our hope that women's felt need for more such forums will stimulate the production of other women's magazines in regional languages by other groups, who could perhaps then coordinate and translate material from one language to another. A few such regional language magazines and newsletters are now in existence.

—**Manushi**

Struggle For Dignity

After a long time, I saw **Manushi** again. The film reviews are interesting and enlightening. I found the review of *Gandhi* a well thought out analysis. The positive and negative points of the film had been clearly brought out. But I think that Gandhi's work for un-touchables was just playacting, on which the Congress is still cashing in today. Apart from keeping a couple of untouchables in his *ashram*, Gandhiji did not in any way attack the structure of the caste system. Gandhi was not a true sympathiser of dalits, and they are realising it today.

I liked the article "I fought for my life and won" by Sohaila Abdulali. She has continuously faced and overcome insecurity, fear, anger and helplessness. She has confronted the

physical and psychological insults and tortures heaped upon women — and she has won. By printing the article with her own name and photograph, she has once again demonstrated her courage... Every woman should hold her head high and live with dignity like Sohaila.

Sardara Singh, Patiala
(translated from Hindi)

New Ways Of Life

...Our organisation, Chetna, a progressive, democratic, cultural forum, has printed pamphlets against dowry. About 60 young men of our organisation have recently vowed not to take dowry when they get married. We have decided to carry on a campaign against dowry. The pamphlet is the first step in that direction. At our meeting on January 26, we took another revolutionary decision. We will discard the caste names that are usually joined to our first names. No member of Chetna will use a caste indicative surname in future. I have dropped the name Sharma and joined the name Saraswat to my first name..-

Amarnath Saraswat, Gorakhpur
(translated from Hindi)

Thought And Action

...Throughout history, though there were women scholars even in the Vedic age, at no time have women been regarded as more important than men or equal to them. Women have generally been cloistered in their homes. The typical idea that a woman can look after the home best is still prevalent. While a woman's greater capacity for endurance, gentleness and sensitivity are conceded, she is also expected to be the eternal sufferer—

Any person's psyche is conditioned by concepts prevalent in general consciousness, which intrude into his or her thinking and actions. Thus an Indian woman might believe in her absolute equality to a man, except in physical capacities. But in a situation that demands the application of this principle, she may act differently. Symbols such as Savitri

and Sita in her subconscious may influence her actions. In her personal life, she may be more submissive. Motivated by love and selflessness, she may be a regular martyr.

Sexism is prominent in religions too, even at a metaphorical level. Men have institutionalised their chauvinism, and their standards have come to be accepted as inviolable norms..-

Mani Ramarao, Madras
Right To Life

...I was glad to hear about the case filed in the supreme court, challenging



the unconstitutional denial of land rights to Ho adivasi women...I wish to tell you about another exploited tribal woman. If you know of any constitutional remedy to help her, please take some action.

There is a high official in Jamshedpur who has many servants—a cook, a bearer, a washerman and two *ayahs* in his bungalow. One of the *ayahs* is an adivasi and the other is not. The adivasi woman has been working there for 15 years but she is paid only Rs 120 a month, while the other woman who has worked there about three years, is paid Rs 250 a month. Both of them do similar work. In fact, the adivasi woman is harder workerd.

The poor adivasi woman does not dare demand a raise because two bearers who dared make such a demand have already been dismissed from

service. This woman has spent the best part of her life working here and is uncertain of getting another job at this age. She cannot risk losing the pittance she has.

Under our Constitution, the right to life is guaranteed to every citizen. Can we say that this adivasi woman has the right to life when she is paid such a low wage today, when prices are so high? If her right to life is being snatched away from her, can the courts or the government do anything for her?

I wrote to the People's Union for Democratic Rights about this case. They informed me that minimum wage is not guaranteed to domestic servants. The Minimum Wages Act applies only to workers in government enterprises, companies and to contract labour.

This woman's employer is a very obstinate man. If he is openly confronted, he will immediately dismiss the woman. He is also a very influential and well known man, so he cannot easily be brought to the dock. Is there any way of extending legal help to this woman?...

Hira Lal Srivastava, Jamshedpur
(translated from Hindi)

Man Born Of Woman

From March 1 to 3, the Islami Alami Ijtama was held at Ararhia in Purnea, Bihar. About 40 lakh men gathered at this religious meeting but not a single woman was allowed to attend. If women approached or stood in the nearby fields, men would go in a group to turn them out. Announcements were repeatedly made over the mike: "Do not allow women to come. It is the duty of men to send away any woman who comes in."

Islam nowhere forbids women to participate in religious gatherings or to hear religious teachings. Men and women go on the *haj* together and pray together there. When questioned, some men say that women are impure hence they were forbidden to enter the meeting. But if woman is impure, how can men, who are born of her womb, be pure?

Khurshid Jahan, Bihar
(translated from Hindi)

Women Die, Campaign Succeeds

...Several women have died in the sterilisation campaign that has been going on in Rajasthan for the last two months. The People's Union for Civil Liberties is conducting an enquiry in which I am participating. I have just returned from Sawai Madhopur district where I had gone in this connection. In this district about half a dozen women died on the operating table.

The medical team works with great speed, completing about 150 or 200 operations in the course of a single day without conducting the necessary preliminary examination. Most of the women who died were pregnant when they underwent the operation. This shows how little value a woman's life has in the eyes of society. The doctors are interested only in reaching their targets. Even if some lives are lost, the national programme is still called successful...

Asha Bhargava, Jaipur
(translated from Hindi)

Students Or Slaves ?

Recently, I visited the Gandhigram Rural Institute in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu. This institution professes to train students as rural development workers on Gandhian lines. When I reached the campus, I was surprised at the behaviour of the boys, who came out of the hostel and obscenely teased us.

As days passed, I noticed that the students seemed depressed and frustrated. One day, one of my friends wanted to get her slipper mended by the cobbler, who sits near the boys' hostel. She and I walked up to him. Immediately, a female warden sent us word that we were not to go anywhere near the boys' hostel. This kind of segregation seemed very strange to me. I questioned the girls about it and was shocked to hear that girls and boys in this institute are not supposed to talk to each other, even if they are classmates. If they happen to talk the authorities immediately write to their parents.

The girls told me that any girl who falls in love with a boy will be sent home immediately. Such cases have occurred in the past. Girls are not supposed to go outside their hostel after 6 p.m., not even to the library which is adjacent to their hostel. However, boys can use the library up to 9.30 p.m. Girls are not allowed to go to the department store except on Sundays. Girls are not allowed to go home at all during term time, not even at weekends. They can visit their homes only during vacations, provided they bring a letter from their parents. Once in a way, they are allowed to go and see a film, but they must be escorted by a female warden. Otherwise, they are not to step out of the campus. Their letters are censored.



It was ridiculous to see how the watchman came every night at 9.30 and locked up the gate of the girls' hostel. One day, my friend asked him if he was protecting or suppressing the girls, and why he did not first lock the boys' hostel. She also told him that we would remove the tiles and jump out. This comment shocked the staff who began to worry lest we corrupt the girls.

We found many types of discrimination prevailing. For example, the girls have to prepare their own *rotis* and are not served food. They have to work in the mess. But boys are served their food, and their *rotis* are prepared in clarified butter. Only boys are allowed to participate in functions and cultural programmes. There is a feast day when girls go to the boys' mess for dinner. But male and female wardens

sit in front of the girls while they eat.

The students do not have a union or association. When I asked the students why they do not fight for their rights, all of them said that anyone who dares question the rules will immediately be sent home or will be failed in the examination. Their universal comment was that if they protested, instead of getting the degree in three years, they would get it in 10 years, because they are completely dependent on the staff for internal assessment and for marks in the examinations. Therefore each student concentrates on somehow getting the degree and leaving the institution. Some of them said that they had lost their creative personalities after joining this institution, but they do not want to spoil their career prospects by putting up a fight. The girls said that their hostel is worse than a prison.

Sunila Singh, Madras

Servility, Not Respect

...Recently, I had a very painful experience. I attended the 71st Indian Science Congress at Ranchi. The university authorities had invited world famed Odissi dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi to participate in the cultural programme. Her programme was scheduled for the evening of January 3. Unfortunately, the prime minister also arrived that morning. All the authorities were busy looking after her all day. Panigrahi and her accompanists arrived but there was no one to receive them. They had to find their own way to the university office. The office was locked so Panigrahi had to go to the local market and contact the authorities on the phone. Then she went to the hotel. Still, no one came to guide her to the auditorium because everyone was so busy with the prime minister.

Panigrahi and her accompanists made their own way to the auditorium which is about 10 miles away. There, they found the stage in a mess. There was no green room and no curtain. There was only a transparent cloth hung on one side of the stage, and meant to serve as a temporary green

room. The audience could see though it and make rude comments as she changed into her costume. There was no one to offer her a cup of tea, no heater to warm her feet and no carpet for the accompanists to sit on. It was snowy winter, and the temperature at Ranchi that day was six degrees fahrenheit. The dancer had to perform, as usual, barefoot.

Yet Panigrahi performed without any complaint because for her work is worship. The performance concluded at 10.30 p.m. Then, one person, acting as a representative of the authorities, presented her with a cheque for Rs 10,000 as her subsidised fee. This was the last straw for her. She refused the money and said : “What do you men think we are—dancing girls (*nachnewali*) ? I did not come here just to take this money without respect. Where are the authorities who invited me? I want to meet them.”

The audience did not witness this scene because the lights had been dimmed and people had left the hall. Only a few of us had stayed back. Finally, she left Ranchi without taking any money, and no university authority came to meet her or to apologise to her. The male authorities were still busy with their prime minister.

Why was it that the male authorities paid more attention to a woman prime minister than to a woman artist ? It seems to me that men defer only to women who have political power...

Renu Dewan, Jamshedpur
Unscientific Textbooks

I have just finished my tenth class board examination. I find that my English textbooks of the ninth and tenth classes show women in a very stereotyped and irrational way. The books we have are not just storybooks but are supposed to educate us and inculcate in us a feeling for the role we ourselves should play in society. Such negative images of women therefore do a lot of harm...

The story “All the years of her life” glorifies a mother who spends her life in suffering and sacrifice, helps her



erring children, but shields her husband from the knowledge of their irresponsibility, because she thinks his work outside the house is much more important than is hers, so he should not be bothered with such petty things, in another story “A cup of tea”, the heroine is shown as a woman full of ideas but no real feelings, whose only interest is holding her husband’s full attention. In many homes, women are the sole earning members. But do we have stories about such women?

In a story “Stranger”, a husband remarks that his wife Delia is “just like a woman, ready to sacrifice everybody else’s comfort for your own” and the story confirms that his statement holds good. ...Out of about a dozen lessons which in some way deal with women, there is not a single positive image.

It is time we search for some books unlike these. Are there no other women existing around us except the ones talked about by Delia’s husband? In this age of science, blind acceptance of such stereotypes is criminal. It confirms society’s and women’s own conception of a woman as frail, dependent, jealous, often stupid, and always needing a man to handle her...

Sujata, Delhi

A Success

We are glad to inform you that our celebration of international women’s day on March 8, 1984, was a great success. Amidst hundreds of spectators, half of whom were men and half women, we celebrated March 8 with a seminar on “International

women’s day and the condition of women in Nepal.” We had invited people from various fields, many of whom were women. There were professors, teachers, lawyers, economic planners, writers, industrial workers and farmers. The programme concluded with progressive songs and dances. We are in the process of bringing out a magazine devoted to the upliftment of women and society.

Hsila, Radha, Sushila, Kathmandu
No Change Required

This is in response to Panna Shah’s letter in Manushi No. 21. You are right in saying that there is nothing requiring a woman to change her name after marriage, though it is certainly useful to register the marriage and to keep copies of the certificate in case there is a need to prove the relationship. I married in 1977 but did not change my name. The Indian passport does not require a declaration of marital status. I continue to use my father’s name as identification on all documents, reasoning that even though I am married he does not cease to be my father.

I have travelled quite extensively after 1977. Never once have I had a problem. In some countries, if I was on a dependant’s visa, it required explanation, but that was all. The marriage certificate was adequate proof.

Still, I must warn that some countries may have adverse regulations. My cousin, who has not changed her name either, had to use her husband’s surname in the Netherlands, apparently for legal reasons. The USA makes no difficulties. Many women there do not change their names after marriage.

Rupa K. Bose, Delhi



Student Nurses Struggle For Dignity

“You girl, take off your shoes. Idiot of a girl, don’t you hear me ?” This is how Dr V.N Sharma spoke to student nurse Kalpana Shukla in the D. K. government hospital, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh, on February 27, 1984. Kalpana was standing outside the nursery where weak infants are kept. She knew that she should change her shoes before going in but Dr Sharma rebuked her even though she had not yet entered the room. When she protested, he shouted “What should I call you if not an idiot?” and proceeded to shower filthy abuse on her. He also raised his hand as if he intended to strike her. This was the second time Dr Sharma had misbehaved with a nurse. On October 28, 1983, he had scolded and abused nurse Shirley Thomas because she forgot to put the patients’ cards in alphabetical order, and had also thrown a box at her.

On the advice of all the student nurses, Kalpana Shukla sent a written complaint to the hospital authorities asking them to give a satisfactory answer within four hours, failing which the student nurses would go on strike,

The superintendent asked them to wait till March 1 for an answer, which they agreed to do. When no answer was given up to 11 a.m. on March 2, the student nurses stopped work. The authorities then appointed Dr Nigam, head of the ENT department, to conduct an enquiry into the incident. The nurses felt that a nurse representative should have been also appointed, as one doctor is likely to favour another.

Chhatisgarh Mahila Jagriti Sangathan conducted an independent enquiry in the course of which we spoke to many hospital workers, but we found that most of them were unwilling to let their names be disclosed. The authorities said that the nurses should not have gone on strike just because one nurse was harshly spoken to, but the nurses pointed out that this was not an isolated incident. As a routine, the nurses are insulted, abused and rebuked in public by doctors and other authorities. They are also commonly looked upon as women of loose morals, and are treated with contempt.

The director of the hospital feels



that to take action against Dr Sharma will be to ruin his career prospects. Therefore, he tried to assure the nurses that Sharma would not misbehave in future, and they should agree to a compromise. He further said that if Sharma ever misbehaved again he, the director, would take voluntary retirement. The nurses feel, however, that this is only a way of letting Sharma off the hook, the implication being that a doctor’s career is far more important than an insult to a nurse. Therefore, the nurses demand that at the very least, a warning should be issued to Dr Sharma.

—Shashi and Renu
(translated from Hindi)

The Veiled Reality

The burning to death in Ahmedabad on April 12 of 21 year old Varsha has caused a public outcry. Large sums of money are given and taken in dowry amongst the Patel community in Gujarat, but dowry related deaths are not commonly reported, because they are passed off as accidental deaths.

Varsha was married last year, and she had a two month old daughter. She used to be harassed and beaten by husband and in-laws because they were dissatisfied with the dowry given. When Varsha came from Ahmedabad to her parents in Jamnagar for her delivery, her husband Ramesh Thakkar, who keeps a *pan* shop, accompanied her and demanded Rs 4,000 to buy a rickshaw. When this sum was not paid, he was annoyed and

spoke in a threatening manner.

After this, Varsha continued to be tortured and beaten by her husband, her father-in-law, Parshottam Thakker, brother-in-law, Navin Thakker, mother-in-law and sister-in-law. On April 11, she wrote a letter to her father in which she said that her husband had threatened to kill her. She asked her father to fetch her since she feared for her life.

On April 12, Varsha’s two brothers, Vinod and Nitin, reached Ahmedabad and tried to fetch her away on the pretext that her sister’s engagement was to take place. Varsha’s in-laws quarrelled with her brothers and refused to send her with them. The brothers immediately went to the Amraivadi police station and asked for

help, saying they feared Varsha’s life was in danger. The policemen on duty there laughed at them and said they would come only after Varsha was actually killed.

They then returned to Varsha’s in-laws’ house where they heard her screaming for help. She had already been burnt—and the police finally turned up only after her death. It is alleged that Varsha’s sister-in-law is related to a policeman, and that influence has thus been exercised to have the case registered as one of suicide. Varsha’s father, Girdharlal Khimani, has written letters to the police commissioner and other authorities, alleging that Varsha was murdered.

—Jayshri Vadalia
(translated from Hindi)