

Letters to *Manushi*

Put Off

There was a time when I was a keen reader of **Manushi**, but that ghastly issue on Bhakti poets or what-ever put me off completely—although I did notice that it got reviews in some papers.

Naira Ahmadullah, Bombay

Another *Manushi*

I am an ex-political prisoner and now work at the Ambedkar Open



University on daily wages and also work part-time for a small paper. I have a two-year-old daughter whom I have named **Manushi** with great pride. I have been so deeply influenced by **Manushi** that I hope that when my daughter grows up, she will work for the same goals and take part in your movement.

Your magazine's philosophy is that woman is strong, not weak; it was this thinking that made me name her **Manushi**. Only the future will tell whether my dream will come true.

K. Rajamma, Hyderabad

Shameful Incident

It was a black day for Saharanpur

on May 26, 1993. At around 2 p.m. on that fateful day, a burqa-clad woman, called Usha, was just about to enter the district court when suddenly a few men pounced on her. In a fraction of a second, they had torn all her clothes off and left her naked. Abuses were hurled at her and she was beaten as well. The group of men grabbed her breasts, and touched her private parts. The bystanders were mute witnesses to this shameful incident. The irony is that all this occurred just outside the Saharanpur district court.

In this dishevelled condition, the men dragged her to the Sadar police station. The whole crowd followed with the aim of getting her arrested. Unfortunately, there was no Krishna in the crowd who could save the honour of this Draupadi.

In a badly injured condition, Usha arrived at the Sadar police station. There a policeman gave her a *lungi* and a shirt. Usha attempted to lodge a complaint against the offenders, but the police were unwilling to take any action. According to them, Usha had deliberately torn off her own clothes and was trying to blame others because she had been accused of theft. At the police station she was beaten and prevented from meeting anyone. Later, she was sent to the Rampur police station in a truck along with male policemen. She was kept at the police station for three days and continuously subjected to torture, such as having a chair pressed on her hand. Finally, some social workers, journalists and women's organisations managed to get her freed.

The 35-year-old Usha is a resident

of Naya village in Saharanpur district, block Rampur Maniharin. Her husband, Ramkishan, is a carpenter. Just opposite their house lives a Gujar family. This family wanted Ramkishan to sell them his dwelling place so that they could extend their own house. However, Ramkishan could not be persuaded to sell his house. When negotiations and even threats failed to make Ramkishan change his mind, the Gujar family accused Ramkishan and Usha of committing a theft.

The village panchayat was called to discuss the issue. On April 30, 1993, 36 community members collected and there was a great deal of questioning and cross questioning. The courtyard and walls of Usha's house were dug up and examined. A thorough search was carried out. The ground was dug up in a number of places, but nothing was found. In reality, no theft had taken place. The accusations had been made to harass and disgrace them in the eyes of the village community. There were four sittings of the panchayat. Ultimately, the panchayat delivered the verdict that Ramkishan and Usha were innocent.

The panchayat's decision angered the Gujar family. They could not reconcile themselves to the vindication of Usha, particularly since she happened to be a Dalit. They had hoped that Usha and her husband would feel so harassed that they would leave not only their home but also the village. Eventually, on May 20, 1993, the Gujjars went to the Rampur police station and lodged a report of the theft. The police actively helped them and brought Ramkishan to the police station. They subjected

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him to third degree treatment for five days so that he would admit to having committed the theft. Eventually, a few influential people intervened and Ramkishan was released on bail.

In the mean while, Usha learnt that she had also been mentioned in the report To give her side of the story, on May 26, at around 2 p.m., Usha went to the Saharanpur district court where the above mentioned incident occurred

For two or three days, the newspapers kept up their misinformation campaign that the woman had torn off her own clothes outside the court because she wanted to discredit some people. Later, we learnt the truth. We rang up some women's organisations in Delhi for help. The Gujar community is very powerful in Saharanpur. For a while even we were perplexed about what we should do next. Until then the accused had not been arrested. Some women's organisations, such as Disha Samajik Sangathan, Vikalp Samajik Sangathan and Mahila Samakhya, jointly decided that on June 9 they would go to the district official's residence and present their demands to him. Accordingly, a demonstration was taken out on that day. Rural women also voiced their demand that Usha's tormentors should be brought to book.

After this the campaign for justice to Usha gathered momentum and the newspapers also brought it into focus. On June 9, 1993, *Navbharat Times* and some other papers carried reports about the demonstration. The Delhi-based People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) gave an assurance that it would investigate the incident.

Nothing came of it, however. Since there was no help forthcoming from outside quarters, local organisations such as ours decided that we would follow up the case ourselves.

Since then, officials of the Rampur and Sadar police stations have been dismissed. Cases have been registered against four policemen and several other policemen from the two police stations have been transferred to another district. The accused have been arrested, of whom one has been re-leased on bail. The majority of the people from Naya village support Usha. For her safety, policemen have been deployed outside her house.

The magistrate's report is still awaited. It is difficult to predict the outcome of the slow legal proceedings. Usha, however, has not given up because she feels that there are women who support her. To further strengthen her resolve, Mahila Samakhya is shortly going to begin programmes in Naya village and its neighbourhood.

**Shashi Maurya,
Mahila Samakhya, Saharanpur**

Significant Findings

Only in the recent past have women been freed of certain controls imposed on them by their family. With greater education, more and more women are taking up employment and earning their own livelihood. This has brought about a change in attitudes. Many women have opted to postpone marriage. In a large number of cases they have been motivated to do so by their families, who aspire to a better standard of living.

Against this backdrop we undertook study of the attitude of

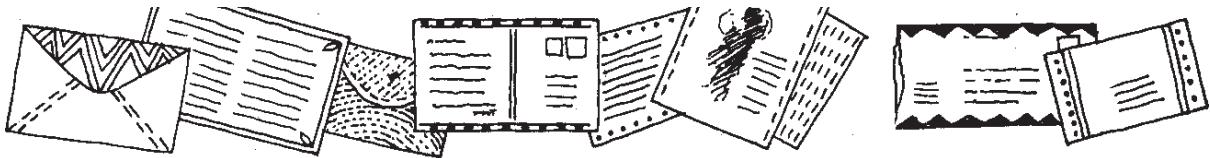
unmarried working women towards marriage, dowry and careers. The study was conducted in Tirupati, the famous temple town. The sample consists of 101 unmarried women, school teachers, college lecturers, office staff, professionals and technical personnel.

The women had differing reasons for taking up jobs. In the sample 89 percent cited economic compulsions as the main reason for taking up jobs. Only 11 percent felt that there were no economic compulsions that led them to work.

Many respondents (34 percent) stayed on their own (this includes women staying in the working women's hostel). Though unmarried women had a certain degree of economic independence, their role as earning members did not alter interpersonal relationships to a significant extent.

C. A. Hate's study (1930) reported that nearly 50 percent of the unmarried educated girls expressed a desire to remain unmarried. The Tirupati study, however, revealed that many women wanted to marry and have a home. Given a choice between pursuing a career and becoming a house-wife, the majority of respondents in Tirupati (64 percent) preferred to combine both. A much smaller number of women (28 percent and 8 percent) wanted to be just careerwomen and housewives respectively. This finding is corroborated by a study conducted by Prema Jauhari (1970) where she found that almost all the unmarried working women (92 percent) emphasised the necessity of marriage.

**I. Sobhavathamma
M. Suryanarayana Reddy, Tirupati**



Improving Livestock

The article by Sagari Ramdas on livestock (Manushi No 76) covered a very important issue. It is important to have a more widespread knowledge of the condition of our livestock in our country because the items of our daily consumption, such as milk, milk products, eggs, and mutton are directly related to livestock. Also, we should ensure that our food is produced in a healthy environment.

Livestock in India is in very poor condition. There is, of course, the old problem of low productivity and lowered fertility. But new breeds of livestock that are being reared are not healthy either. Research on livestock is carried out only in agricultural universities and laboratories and stays confined there. This research has no connection with agriculture or the lives of those who subsist on agriculture. The universities do not bother to find out about the realities of farming, the techniques and problems of animal care. The role models of these institutions are western research centres and western textbooks, which they try hard to emulate. The only link they maintain with the lives of the farming community is through TV programmes for illiterate farmers and training camps. The universities believe that farmers do not know anything at all.

If farming were to become really profitable and women and men of the farming community were encouraged to take an active part in the research work, farming would not be in as bad a situation as it is today.

The mindless replication of western practices is evident in the

way that new farming techniques and research by agricultural universities overlook important factors such as regional variances in animal rearing practices or the country's unique environment, culture, and climate.

For example, the Jersey cow was introduced to improve milk production. This breed of cow consumes far more food than the indigenous cow. Since community-owned grazing lands have all disappeared, stall feeding of animals has become absolutely necessary.

Those introducing new breeds of livestock do not match them with new crop patterns. A breed of Jersey cows was introduced which has to be stall fed. About the same time, a new hybrid variety *jowar* was introduced in this region which yields a low quality of fodder. The indigenous variety of *jowar* produces superior fodder that lasts all year, whereas the fodder from the hybrid variety gets spoilt quicker.

Stall fed animals require different management. It is absolutely essential to have plenty of water. The Jersey cow consumes far more water and food than the indigenous cow. Since it is tied up in one place, it is necessary to wash the cow-shed everyday. There is an acute scarcity of water in large parts of India. But since banks give loans only for Jersey cows, farmers end up having to buy these cows even though they know the Jersey cow is prone to a number of health problems.

Our veterinary health system is inadequate and over-centralised. In Mahaswad (*taluka* Man, Satara district) 20 villages are attached to a veterinary centre. Since farmers have to bring their animals with them, it

means they have to walk to the vet centres. This usually involves walking a distance of 10-35 kms. Even then, there is no guarantee that they will be able to meet the doctor.

These distant vet centres are a big handicap at the time of insemination. Often farmers cannot get the vets to inseminate their cows during their fertile period, leading to a decline in fertility.

The veterinary health system is also inadequate in other ways. I would like to give you an example from my own experience. I have been involved in farming for the last seven years. One of our Austin cows gave birth to a calf at my farm. In India the practice is to let the calf suckle its mother before milking the cow. Only after the calf begins to suckle, does its mother yield milk. Perhaps because the Austin cow's teats are very sensitive, its calf has to be fed milk from a vessel. This cow is able to produce milk even without the calf first suckling it.

My mother-in-law did not approve of this practice. She felt that a calf should drink milk from its mother, so she left the calf with its mother. After two or three days, the cow's teats developed an infection. A doctor had to be called to treat the infection. He would come every day and inject penicillin in the teats. He advised us to milk the cow and then throw the milk away for two days. We did as he had suggested. On the third day, he said that we should take out a little milk and throw it away, after which we could use the rest of the milk.

However, on the third day we also threw the milk away. On the fourth day, the doctor assured us that the milk was safe for use. He said that we

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could throw away the top layer and send the rest to a dairy. However, I couldn't rid myself of the idea that this dairy milk would go to Bombay where my sister and her family live. They get dairy milk at their house. I didn't have the courage to send our cow's milk because I kept wondering about the effects of antibiotics in the milk. I am no medical student, but the senseless in-gestion of antibiotics didn't seem right to me.

I was happy to learn that Sagari Ramdas uses other means of treatment. She mentioned in her article that one or two people in the village have a knowledge about such methods. I do not know if such methods have been documented, but it would certainly be helpful if they were.

Last year I studied goat rearing. I have now started a goat farm. In the course of the training programme, the doctor had a session on diseases that afflict goats and means of treating them. The doctor told us about all the allopathic medicines, in particular vaccines. I tried to find out from him what kind of medicines the traditional shepherds use who have been rearing goats for generations. The doctor said this subject was not covered in the syllabus and he had no knowledge of it. However, he admitted that the goats reared by shepherds were more healthy than those of the government rearing centres.

I agree with Sagari that allopathic medicines are quite expensive. If a goat has diarrhoea, the doctors suggest that it be treated with sulpha drugs. Each sulpha tablet costs Rs 4.



Shep-herds feed their goats with a variety of leaves in their fodder so that they do not develop various illnesses. For example, shepherds mix a few bamboo leaves in the food of their goats because they believe it keeps diarrhoea at bay. If a goat does get diarrhoea it is also treated with bamboo leaves. For a badly infected wound, a paste of bitter gourd leaves is applied on the wound. If the animal gets worms in the stomach, it is treated with carrot leaves.

There are many such indigenous remedies of which the health centres have no knowledge because there is no interaction between the government run goat training centres and the shepherds. Recently the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development began to sanction loans to goat farms for which training in goat rearing was necessary. However, the trainers for the programme were unaware of

traditional goat rearing practices. Since the government does not have a comprehensive policy for live-stock, despite spending considerable sums of money, the condition of live-stock in our country remains poor.

If our farms and livestock are not healthy, we cannot be healthy either. Most of our foods come either directly from this source or are used as feed for livestock. It is our responsibility to acquaint ourselves with this subject. Are the milk, yogurt, mutton and vegetables that we eat every day of good quality? For healthy foods we have to invest money and effort. We have to know about the production process and its problems.

The people of rural areas do not have sufficient purchasing power. Urban people consume much more. People turn their attention to farmers only when an item of daily consumption becomes more expensive. For instance, if milk prices go up, even Limca drinkers object. We should opt for drinks like *lassi*, or sherbets derived from *bel* and raw mangoes instead of Limca. In this way, employment will be generated in villages.

Chetna Galla, Mahaswad
(translated from Hindi)