

*In Manusbi No. 41, we had published a letter from a woman who was being maltreated by her husband and in-laws and wanted advice, under the title "What Step To Take?" Her name was withheld at her request. We asked readers to respond to her request for advice. Some of the responses were published in No. 42-43, and three more responses appear below.*

### **What Step To Take ?**

This is a response to the letter "What Step To Take?" in **Manushi** No. 41.

Marriage is not an end in itself. It is a way leading to a fuller life. Husband and wife are equal partners. ... Talk to and face your husband as a full person and not as half of his self. ... To help him become mature, you will have to be a full grown woman yourself, not a cow taken from parents' protection shed to husband's shed.



To be a **Manushi**, you will have to work hard, know yourself, your surroundings and your society. Your parents gave you dowry but did not help equip you to fight injustice. ...

You could develop some skill to earn your own living. This is a must before you step on to any new path. While working

## **Letters to Manushi**

to make a niche for yourself in this manmade society, do not forget others like you who are downtrodden. Helping them will broaden your vision and give you strength to tight. ...

We must remember that man and woman are not opponents; they are complements to each other. We must have a friendly approach while trying to solve our family problems and other problems of life.

**Jaswant Kaur Gill, Faridkot**

After reading the letter "What Step To Take?" I cannot withhold the urge to write to that suffering sister. My suggestions to her are as follows. In the three years or more that she has been married, she must have realised that her in-laws are inhuman and her husband is no better. When a man does not even go to the hospital to see his own son and wife, it is inhuman. Many differences between husbands and wives are smoothed after the birth of a child. But this has not happened in her case.

When he comes back from his deputation, she should talk to him frankly and take steps for separation. She is qualified so she should seek a job to support herself and her son. Her parents seem to be sympathetic so they are sure to help her get resettled in life. But she should prepare herself to live

separately from them. She should also

write to the employer of her husband, and let him have a true picture of the man.

After the separation, if the husband really repents and mends his ways and becomes as dutiful to her as he is to his own people, she can think of forgiving him, otherwise not. Even so, she should live with him separately from her in-laws.

**Chimmayee Das Gupta, Patna**

● This refers to the letter, "What Step To Take" in **Manushi** No 41 and the suggestions appearing in **Manushi** No. 42-43.

After going through the letter, I feel that it will be best for the writer of the letter to leave her in-laws, otherwise, when she returns, she will again be subjected to continuous harassment, both mental and physical. It will be best for her to start living on her own with her baby without depending upon anybody. It would be good if her parents help her to regain confidence to become self dependent.

But she should not talk to her husband or "make him understand" as suggested by Ms Bhatt in **Manushi** No. 42-43. She has suffered horrendous physical and mental abuse for three years and now again going for a compromise would be no less than begging. Her husband seems to be a self centred inhuman. She should not expect a change of heart or anything good from this selfish, cruel and careless man. As far as I understand, the writer will not be able to prepare her husband to live away from his parents.

It is generally observed that girls are harassed more in joint families. After marriage a girl has to suffer harsh and insulting behaviour from all her in-laws for not bringing enough of dowry and becomes a common servant of the household. Here I would like to bring to your notice a recent case of dowry death. Harsh Rangra, M Phil student and teacher

in Bal Bharti School, Pusa Road, was burnt to death on the night of January 16 by her in-laws at their Lawrence Road residence. Harsh was regularly harassed, mentally tortured and taunted by her husband and his parents for not bringing enough dowry. Ironically, Harsh and her husband Sanjay, got married after a courtship. So staying separately from in-laws after the marriage has at least one strong advantage—a woman feels confident enough to talk to her husband in case of conflicts.

Kamala Jaya Rao has raised certain vital questions (Manushi No. 42-43), which need to be debated. First, a woman has to be bold enough to rebuke this man oriented society. The foremost thing a woman should do is to be financially independent. Kamala Rao has very rightly suggested that the woman concerned should "say no to such harassment and walk out." It will be a new beginning for her and a path to be trod by others also. ....

There is no denying that companionship is equally necessary not only for woman but man as well. But this should not be related to complete dependence and sexual gratification. It is not easy to get a good companion and develop good relations. It takes time and also requires complete understanding in a free, relaxed and cordial atmosphere. The woman concerned will be free to find a new companion of her choice, if she feels the need, after divorce.

Living alone is another vital question, mainly in the context of Indian atmosphere. She has to develop a strong will power for this...

Naresh Sachdev, Faridabad

### This Time, In My Name

Below, we are publishing a letter from a woman whose story had appeared in **Manushi** some years ago. Her name too was withheld at her request. She had been harassed for dowry and cruelly treated by husband and in-laws. When she finally left their house, she was not allowed to take her jewels and clothes with her. Recently, we heard from her again, and are publishing extracts from her

letters, under her own name\*

...It has been a long time since I was in touch with you... With god's blessings, I have come a long way. My father has stuck to his decision that he has no objection to keeping his married daughter in his house. In 1983, I filed an application for maintenance under section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code and was awarded only Rs 400 per month from January 1986. I have also filed cases for return of my *stridhan*, judicial separation and revision of the maintenance order. I have very good women lawyers fighting for me.

Being a wife, I have dared go to court—for this reason, I have become a kind of "diseased" person in my Sindhi community. ...Some time ago, when my husband met me, he told me very arrogantly that he could get a bride from an affluent family, even though he is 40 years old. He has also threatened to use hoodlums and physical force to make me sign divorce papers. ...I want future security; my *stridhan* should be returned. My parents had spent a lot on the marriage and my in-laws do not have the slightest inclination to return anything....

I owe a lot to **Manushi**. It was **Manushi** which inspired me in my initial struggle against injustice, and made me feel like a human being while society condemned me for having raised my voice against my husband and in-laws. You also put me in touch with the lawyers. And today, when I am trying to gather all the bits and pieces of my life, it is again **Manushi** that uplifts my spirits—I am pleased to see that the magazine looks more impressive and bright than it did some years ago. Even the layout seemed neater....

My only major worry is my parents' welfare. My father is 62 years old and has retired. We run the house on a fixed budget. My father has to undergo financial, mental and physical strain. I have decided that once I get alimony I shall repay him the lawyers' fees. At present, I have only my savings to rely on.

At times I feel isolated but I shall not give up. God bless my parents with happiness. Had it not been for their support, I may not have survived.... You

are most welcome to print extracts from my letter, and this time, with my name.

Deepa Jyoti Samtaney, Bombay

### Reaching Out

I have not written for some time, because I write only when I have something definite to say. As a medical intern, I have given **Manushi** to the nurses with whom I come in contact. The nurses here were quite impressed. They circulated amongst themselves the couple of issues I had, and read them. Most of the nurses come from poor families and live on a stipend. They cannot afford to buy magazines or to write letters. So please send some selected magazines by VPP to me, for them to read. ....

In the medical college attached to Rewa hospital, nurses are treated as slaves of doctors. They are constantly scolded and their only response is to go into a corner



and cry.

These nurses are supposed to be undergoing training to be economically independent, but they are not allowed to develop self confidence.

The nurses are not secure. VIP patients from wealthy families treat the nurses as objects of entertainment and behave as if they are wife substitutes. Doctors have to intervene to protect the nurses from these patients' misbehaviour. But when doctors

too scold the nurses, they feel helpless to protest. ...

**Phool Chandra Baudh, Rewa**  
(translated from Hindi)



## Film Reviews

Reading film reviews in *Manushi* has always been a pleasure to me. I am expressing here some thoughts as a supplement to the thoughts in the review of *Mirch Masala* (*Manushi* No. 40)...*Mirch Masala*, like Ketan Mehta's first film, *Bhavni Bhavai*, uses Brechtian techniques. A certain amount of crudity is part of its design. All the characters are typified and crudified to demonstrate their part in a social situation. Thus, Sonbai is a woman with dignity and self respect; the Subedar is money power, male domination and violence; and the watchman is the saviour of good values, protector of helpless women.

The film is not an exercise in realism of the kind seen in many art films. Mehta uses nonrealist techniques. In realist films, the actor tries to bring out the complexities of a character and identifies himself with the character. Here, Nasiruddin Shah does not identify with the Subedar's character but "shows" us the type that the Subedar represents. His acting is one of the most brilliant examples of such nonrealist acting.

Smita's face often resembles that of a mother goddess, with "against evil forces" writ large on it. This is emphasised at the end when she takes a sickle in her hand. The idea of the mother goddess is subtly present in the *garba* dance sequence since this dance is performed in front of the powerful mother goddess, Amba, riding on a tiger. Elements from the commercial Hindi film have also been borrowed, for example, the character of the watchman, a well known stereotype.

The film, like a poster, drives home a point by emboldening essential aspects and fading out other details. The film aligns all elements to stress the basic theme, of women's emancipation. ...

**A K. Rajwade, Bombay**



## Another View

.....I think your Hindi film reviews read

as if the magazine is anti Hindi films instead of anti male chauvinism and patriarchal attitudes in them. You tend to choose films which do not make much of a dent on the filmgoing public. *Kalyug Ki Ramayan* was such a film. This year saw two films which were both box office hits, and women oriented — *Nache Mayuri* and *Pratighat*. I found the former very positive in its approach. The strength of the woman's determination came through despite all the woven in melodrama. The second too had its strong points—the woman's determination, her influence on her child and on the students. But the ending was very negative. Why don't you review such films too? ...

**Susan Abraham, Chandrapur**



## Legal Farce

A woman named Pamabai of Jashi village, Man taluk, Satara district, filed a case for maintenance against her husband. On October 5, 1987, the magistrate's court at Dahiwari ordered her husband to pay her Rs 150 a month. The case had been going on for five years so he was also ordered to immediately pay her Rs 7,000 in cash. On October 25, Pamabai's husband killed her.

Over 200 cases for maintenance are in progress in the Dahiwari court. The question arises : of what benefit is the law to women ? It is the lawyer who benefits most from the legal process. It is extremely difficult to make the husband pay up even after a maintenance order is issued. If he fails to pay, one has again to go to court, hire a lawyer and pay lawyers' fees and court fees. Women in rural areas also have to spend money on travelling to and from court. The truth is that the law does not really help women, but adds to their suffering.

**Chetna, Maharashtra**

(translated from Hindi)



## Different Trends

...This is a personal response to the article "Using Women As A Pretext for Repression" in *Manushi*

No. 37. I fully agree that a clever lawyer would have no trouble evading the

antiobscenity law to keep on publishing pornography, while government could use it to close any paper it did not like. The law is, as you say, a pretext for repression.

I was concerned to see in the article a reference to some women's groups backing it "taking their cue from similar campaigns in the West." I do not know what campaigns are meant. Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) is the biggest group here campaigning against pornography. Before us, there were other groups campaigning about women's representation in the media. Their work was mostly about women always being shown in subordinate roles. They eschewed the issue of pornographic representation, for fear of this leading to more censorship. ...

We at WAVAW think pornography is violence against women and encourages such violence. We have also campaigned for changes in the rape law and defended women who have taken action against violent men. We also demonstrate against the low sentences men are given for killing or attempting to kill women (three years is quite normal if he was her husband, lover or exlover). And a first time offender who behaves himself gets out of prison after a year.

As individuals, some of us also work with unskilled women, minority group women such as those caught by anti immigration rules, and antinuclear struggles. I don't know anything about other Western countries and their antipornography groups. I am just trying to tell how it has been for us over the last few years.

**Sandra, England**



## Discards At Forty

... At a five day training workshop for women labourers in Kanpur in 1987, I witnessed a callous betrayal of human dignity. As part of the programme, each woman labourer is paid Rs 10 a day as an incentive for participation. Consequently, the majority of women suffered boring lectures on family planning, savings and so on, only so that they could get Rs 50 at the end of the workshop. But there was a catch. Orders were to recruit only women between the ages of 18 and 40 years. I

asked the education officer organising the workshop the reason for this rule. He had brutally turned down a very old woman's plea to be enrolled for the workshop. "Well, you see", he replied "After the age of 40, women can't muster up any leadership qualities. They can't concentrate their energies on establishing a women labourers' union. After 40 years, women's potential is finished and they are unconcerned about everything except their health." The woman he had turned down had a benign smile and a diminutive figure. She had been thrown out by her sons and was "working hard to support herself.

The question that comes to my mind is: what about our political leaders and ministers who are well over 60 but are tenaciously holding on to power? As usual, different sets of rules for men and women, for the rulers and the ruled.

Navneet Sethi, Kanpur



## Questions And Answers Women's Day, Pakistan

Manushi No. 42-43 answered a lot of questions I have been asking myself in the past few months. The interview with Romila Thapar, in particular, satisfied a lot of conflicts I have had on what it means to be Indian, if there is such a thing, that is. I wish you had dwelt more on the question of why goddess cults in India flourish even in areas where women clearly have a low status. Personally, I have known men who have this incredibly intense personal and spiritual relationship with the goddess Durga, and yet harbour rather antiquated ideas on the role of women in their personal life. This is a paradox that has disturbed me, so I was disappointed with the rather brief response.

Your analysis of the revival of Sati as a thoroughly "modern" phenomenon was well thought out and well researched. But sometimes I wonder if this new Sati cult is an indication and manifestation of the rising fundamentalism prevalent in many parts of the world, particularly in the middle east and Iran.

Is this revival a defence, however perverse, against Westernisation?

Rasna Warah, Kenya



...The essay "The Burden of Ropp Kanwar" in No. 42-43 was enlightening. Manushi reported many hidden facts....Also, the essay "The Many Faces Of Sati In The Early Nineteenth Century" was informative. Premchand's story came as a pleasant surprise and we look forward to other stories by prominent writers.

Kavita Bahl, Delhi

The production, presentation and style of Manushi No. 42-43 brought a new angle and a new colour into journalism. The paintings reproduced were moving and beautiful. The issue also brought out different points of view on questions relating to women. Manushi has been regularly commenting on the media. I very much liked the analysis of the depiction of poor women in Hindi films in this issue....

Lata, Bihar  
(translated from Hindi)



## Women's Day, Pakistan

...Things at our end are not too good either. There seems to be a fresh onslaught against women from the establishment. Two incidents in the recent past have got women on their toes. One is the case of Shahida Parveen and her husband, Mohammad Sarwar, who were sentenced to death by stoning for living in adultery. Shahida's first husband had divorced her. After observing the mandatory 90 day *iddat*, she married Sarwar. Her ex-husband, who had not been able to marry the woman he wanted, then filed a case against her. Since the divorce was not registered, the judge held Sarwar and Shahida guilty. The case is now being heard in the high court and they have been released on bail.

This case is yet another under the infamous Hadoop Ordinance. But the sessions judge ignored the provisions of the said law—that there should be four male eyewitnesses of the adultery and that if the persons concerned marry each other, believing themselves to be unmarried they are not guilty. We are therefore hopeful of

an acquittal. We are keeping public pressure on.

The Hadoop Ordinance was introduced in Pakistan through a martial law promulgation in 1979 and confirmed by the present elected government in 1985. Recently, a judge dealing with a divorce case declared that clause 7 of the Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, a progressive legislation, is not in accordance with the Shariat and cannot be applied. The Ordinance has Constitutional protection and cannot be challenged or changed. But this insidious judgment may be the beginning of a process of nullifying the Ordinance, clause by clause.

About 20 women's organisations have formed a Committee for the Repeal of the Hadoop Ordinance. They held a successful public meeting in Karachi and issued an advertisement titled "Should barbarity be sanctioned by law?" asking all fairminded citizens to append their signatures to an appeal for the repeal of the Ordinance. Apparently, *Dawn* and *Jang* were pulled up for having published the advertisement. Ever since, *Dawn* has reduced its coverage of the issue. *Jang* is reported to have apologised for having published the ad.

In Lahore, several women's organisations and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan brought out a very large protest demonstration on February 11, the day commemorating the police *lathi* charge on women protesting the Law of Evidence in 1983. The day is now known as Pakistan Women's Day. Recently, two women of brick kiln worker families were abducted by kiln owners. Kiln workers have been protesting against that as well as the harsh working conditions. These workers, men and women, also joined the demonstration. It was uplifting to see a whole cross section of women—from kiln workers to factory workers to college students to middle class housewives to urban professionals—coming together to protest their discriminated position in society. The central theme of the march was the insidious circumventing of the Family Laws Ordinance, and the inhuman provisions of the Hadoop Ordinance....

Khawar Mumtaz, Pakistan