

Letters to Manushi

Dowry Debate

Just finished reading your article on dowry in **Manushi** no.53, and felt compelled to write to you immediately. As compared to your first piece, I find the current article extremely lucid, with little possibility of creating the kind of misunderstanding, to which you refer.

On this issue of dowry, I feel that your arguments are compelling; that the linear causation from wife murder to identifying dowry as the major cause to seeking a ban on dowry or boycotting dowry marriages is misplaced; that it is faulty on both logic and facts. A minor point I would like to add is that while you make no suggestion about abandoning the antidowry struggle, it may be possible to reaffirm its necessity - for pushing for less showy marriages where the value of the girl's natal family is not put up for assessment.

While I completely agree with you that without a major modification in inheritance laws in the directions you suggest, neither the girl nor her family will feel pushed in the direction of opposing dowry, I wonder if the resistance to giving girls equal shares in natal property comes only from wanting to wash one's hands of them. Particularly in rural areas, where subdivision and fragmentation of land has acquired serious proportions and sections are pushing for a law of primogeniture, what does a daughter, who, in all likelihood is not living in the natal family, do with a small plot that she inherits? Since she and her marital family are unlikely to farm it, are we visualising the likelihood of sales? Or are we asking that the imputed value of her share in natal property be given

to her when her parents die? This issue needs clarification.

Secondly, if, as a wife, a woman has as much right over her husband's property, does the inheritance structure suggested by you imply that she is a double recipient? I am not sure of the law on this and would welcome your considered opinion. And, does inheritance imply only a sharing of assets or also liabilities? Here, I am referring not just to the usual refrain amongst sons that they are saddled with the responsibility of the family as the justification for not sharing property with their sisters, but also to an interesting case of a retired man with no sons and one daughter to whom all his property had been passed on. After retirement and the death of his wife, since he did not want to or could not stay with his daughter, he asked for maintenance. The daughter argued that since she was now part of another family she would not accept responsibility for her father.

Finally, with reference to your suggestions about a *shadinama* and your descriptions of an ideal woman I sense more than a slight bias against men. What intrigues me is how we move from a formal stress at one level about women as oppressed and requiring discriminatory affirmation, to a situation of equality...

Harsh Sethi, Delhi

The Volcano

...On reading your article, I could not hold my tears, and cried and cried.... This is the story of many Indian women. To be very frank, it is my story....

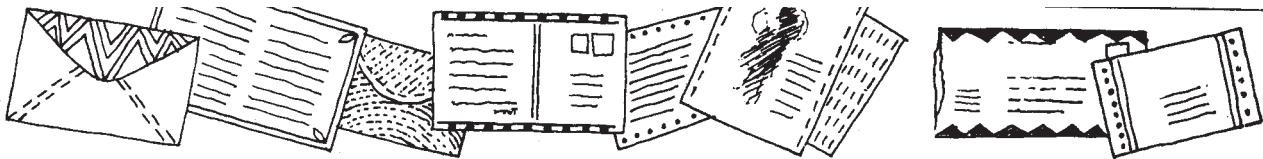
At last, I have got a job in a school. My colleagues and children love me

very much and I love them as much, but my home front is the same. I am a battered wife. Sometimes, for "having affairs with my young relatives" (totally absurd), sometimes, for extravagance, sometimes, for laughing, and sometimes for nothing.

Ninety percent of our relatives think it must be my fault, I must be provoking it. The very close ones, who have witnessed many incidents, are helping me. My two children are also witnesses. The degree of violence is increasing every day. I have to produce so many stories of accidents to explain the bruises when I go to school.

The violence started soon after my marriage which is a decade old. Sometimes, it is unbearable yet I drag on, fearing that at any time the volcano will burst.

Three years ago, when I was struggling to make him happy, I took him to a psychiatrist. This doctor, after listening to my husband's complaint of my not being responsive sexually, asked me the reason. With all the strength I could command I dared for the first time in my life to confide that after a violent scene, with bruises on my face, lips bleeding, I could not enjoy sex, with the same person who had battered me. For a woman, sex is nothing but a matter of feeling. Can you imagine that professor, tagged with so many degrees, Indian and foreign, answered with manly command that the battering could not happen without a reason. He also said that this happened in every home, yet women did enjoy sex. He told me I should change my attitude, my behaviour. I looked at this doctor helplessly and followed my husband home, where I received more bruises,



just for having told all to the doctor. Since then, I have read many books and articles on the topic, and confided in many friends, and now believe that it is not my fault. I am not at all guilty.

I hate the institution of marriage. It is a slaughterhouse. Our blood flows into its foundations. Don't enter it. It is dangerous. Every man, however loving, changes as soon as he enters this institution. Break it, crush it...

Name Withheld

For No Reason

...I know what it feels like when you tell people that your husband beats you every day for no reason, and no one believes you.

I was a battered wife for 15 years. My husband was an alcoholic and a womaniser. He beat me every night and used to throw me and my two children out on the street, usually in just our nightclothes, and many a time half conscious and bleeding, every single person in the locality just watched while my children screamed for help. Nobody wanted to get involved. We were staying in an elite Christian society, St. Pius, Mulund.

I was only 19 when I got married in 1967. I did everything possible to get my husband to give up drinking - medical help, Alcoholics Anonymous, appeals to his parents - but nothing worked. He never gave me money for the house or told me what he earned. I had to manage all household expenses from my income.

Nobody believed that he beat me for no reason. I was told time and again that I invite the beating. My husband began to play god many times when he beat me, he used to point to the picture of Christ and say: "If you believe

in god, call him down to help you." When I told my in-laws, my mother-in-law said that this was the done thing in their family and I had no choice but to bear it. He even beat my mother once, she was hospitalised for a week. I begged them to lodge a police complaint but they refused. I do not blame them. Because society is ever ready to point fingers at the woman and her parents.

He was very sure that I would always come back like a dog, as he used to say, to be kicked again by the master. Till on February 13, 1983, when I got thrown out, I decided never to go back. I left the house with nothing but my gold ornaments. I was earning only Rs 800. My husband refused to contribute anything to the children's upkeep. I approached the church but was ignored. Lawyers I went to, dissuaded from filing for separation or maintenance. I decided to forget the past and concentrate on my career. When I started succeeding in my career, the colony at St Pius tried to tear my character to shreds. For 13 years they spread false rumours about me. I used to get anonymous calls from men. Many of my husband's friends would pester me thinking that a single woman is easily available. But I ignored all this and I have not only survived but triumphed. I had no money and no roof over our heads. Singlehanded, I made a new life. Both my children have done very well in spite of all odds.

On January 5, 1988, my husband expired. My in-laws deliberately did not inform me about his last illness so that I could not even see him before he died. They saw to it that I and my children were dispossessed of all the monies and property left by him. In

Catholic marriage, divorce is not possible, and there was no legal divorce or even separation between us. I went to court for the house since it was bought by us after marriage. I won the case and got the flat. This was another victory for me. A woman can survive without a man. The odds are heavy but the victory is sweet.

Josephine Fernandes, Bombay

Unspoken Factor

... As one who is concerned about women's problems ... I fully agree with you that marital violence is not due to dowry, but that dowry is an expression of violence on women. It is a way of exercising and ensuring man's power over woman. Basically inadequate people who suffer from severe feelings of inferiority try to compensate for their shortcomings by showing power over weaker people. These weaker people are women and the poor in any society... Even in so called happy families, we know how women are reminded of their inferior status in subtle ways.

Women who are financially independent and have the support of their natal family usually decide to separate from the husband when the violence goes much above their level of tolerance. The memory of the violence keeps them away from the husband for a few months or a few years. When the wounds start healing they start getting doubts about their own wisdom in separating. The husband starts making attempts to reconcile. They know how vicious he was yet they go back... The real reason is, to put it crudely, sex, the unspoken.

In our country and many others, the only legitimate way a woman can

satisfy this need is through marriage. Our upbringing inhibits this urge to such an extent that many of us do not even know we have the urge. Even women who return to violent husbands do not always realise that this urge is distorting their perceptions. Once they return, the old story starts again. Many women feel ashamed to admit it. Some realise they have made a mistake. By then, they are so battered that they lose all interest in sex and realise the brutality of marriage.

Everyone knows about this unspoken factor. There are instances where the girl's father has to provide for all her needs after her marriage, from toilet soap to furniture. When he asks why he should keep her in the marital home when he has to provide for all her needs, the immediate reply is: "Doesn't your daughter need a husband?"

There are a few women with high self esteem who do not fit this pattern. Such women are called proud and arrogant in our society.

Unless our views of morality and women's chastity change, unless girls are brought up with self respect, and unless remarriage becomes common, women will not protest against marital violence.

Separation and divorce are difficult decisions to take unless double standards of morality change. I write this to point out the complexity of the problem. While many women endure violence because of financial dependence and lack of external moral support, it is also because of our system which does not take cognizance of woman as a biological being.

G. Bharathi, Hyderabad

Anita's Story

Anita's story (No.53) is very true. In this Nehru centenary year a lot of lip-service has been paid to the cause of children, particularly in the month of November, climaxing with "Chacha Nehru's birthday" which was

celebrated with pomp and show in bright areas of Delhi and other cities. After the noise and glitter everything returns to its own place.

There are many children like Anita for whom nothing is done. My own working woman sends her son to school and has arranged for tuition for him, but for her two daughters there is only housework. Some children are employed in factories and small businesses; the so-called lucky ones like Anita go to school, but they also have to work more than their capacity, for their family.

School curriculum and syllabus even for children of well to do parents is burdensome. Whether the child understands or not, the teacher has to cover the vast syllabus. Children memorise things and write them in the examination.

Every sentence of Madhu Kishwar's "Towards More Just Norms of Marriage" found an echo in my heart. Still, in many parts of India, educated women are not able to decide whether or not they will take a job. I know a newly married girl, M.Sc. in Zoology, who, when asked whether she wants to work, replied "I may work if my husband or in-laws like, otherwise not." As though she has no wishes in the matter, or is not even a personality, a human being....

We have to give girls control over their own life. This, I think, would be much better than just marrying and bearing children.

Manjula Vaishwanar, Durg

Congratulations to **Manushi** and Poonam Kaul for the moving article on Anita. This in-depth research makes one helplessly aware of the realities that young girls face. Such humane investigations communicate much more than a lot of papers read at seminars.



Madhavi Desai, Ahmedabad

Congratulations on the long piece on Anita in **Manushi** No.53. Alas, our country is full of Anitas, I meet them again and again... Please don't print any more stories like Mulk Raj's "The Breath on the Mirror." I was surprised to find such a story in **Manushi**. We know that such things happen, but is it decent or dignified to recount all these details?...

Thomas Gay, Pune

Image and Reality

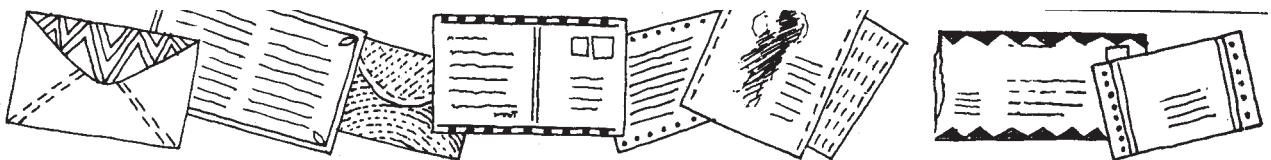
I have been reading **Manushi** for about two years, and I am very sorry to say that your standards are deteriorating day by day. You are always projecting women as weak and as a sex object only. I don't know what you want to convey through Mulk Raj Anand's short story "The Breath on the Mirror" in No. 53 or the story "Dishonour" by Sa'adat Hasan Manto in No. 49.

Manushi is a journal about women and society. Do you want to say that women in this society have an image, character or picture like that of the heroines of these two stories, or that society considers them to be like this? By publishing such stories you are not doing anything to improve the image of women. Rather, you are deteriorating it further. You should give stories in which woman is projected as confident, strong and independent. Don't depress women by giving such vulgar stories. Tell them how to build a positive self image and self confidence.

S.K. Jindal, Kurukshetra

What is Militancy?

... Many of the middle class, urban values that I find around me hurt me and they form the main source material for my writings. For example, *The Green Frock* was sparked off by a real incident, when a group of militant, self-righteous women, traveling in the first class compartment of a local train, drove out a young woman with a child on her hip and a big basket of steel



utensils on her head. I cannot forget the look of helplessness on the face of the young woman, as she stood on the platform, when the train moved away.

I could not sympathise with the upwardly mobile crowd which had asserted its right to the exclusive use of the first class compartment for which they had paid through their noses. Instead, I felt guilty for not having said a word in favour of the poor woman. Hence, the expiation of that guilt in the form of a short story.

Similarly, it hurts when some of my colleagues tell me that they lock their maidservants at home when they go to work, in order to prevent the maidservants, who have been brought all the way from Kerala, from falling into "bad company." Perhaps these incidents have their own justifications, but inhumanity involved is appalling.

Charanjit Kaur, Ambarnath

No Dowry

I am a Jesuit parish priest, working here since 1958. In the sixties, I was at Dhorwa, the location of the Heavy Engineering Corporation. At that time, the factories were being built, and the labourers lived in impossible circumstances. I was there when the Ranchi airport was being enlarged and thousands of labourers came from all over.

One day, a group of 60 working girls came to me in a group. They had not received their pay for three weeks. After a full day of talks with the contractors, they finally agreed to pay the girls. According to my calculations, the amount due was Rs 2,000 at Rs 2 a day. But the contractors were ready to give only Rs 200 for 60 girls for three weeks' labour. And they would deduct money for brooms and other material

lost by the girls. Finally, they gave Rs 4 as payment for 60 girls' labour for three weeks. I took these Rs 4 and threw them in the face of the contractor in the presence of hundreds of onlookers. He then paid Rs 200, so that the girls could go home to their villages.

Tribal girls here are not bound by the terrible dowry system but in the towns it is slowly creeping in. Though



town girls are more aware of their rights, they are oppressed. Parents arrange marriage and often the girl does not really consent but will not say so, out of fear. Many of these marriages go to pieces and many more are unhappy for life. Thousands of tribal girls from Chota Nagpur work as maidservants in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi. Many lead a very difficult life, no freedom, very low wages, often forced into sex....

George Zwysen, Ranchi

Bhakta Poets

The tenth anniversary issue on women *bhakta* poets is marvellous. Not only does it put together the "lives and poetry of a whole range of extraordinarily courageous and creative women", but the very act of bringing this subject centrestage is an act of extraordinary courage and creativity.

The issue deserves to be discussed at various levels. We are planning to hold a meeting in which the articles will be presented and discussed in simple Hindi. Let us hope that the major effort put in by you will have some matching contribution in a much larger group.

Sharada Jain, Jaipur

Why Women Want Sons

... I run a small primary school and find great satisfaction in it. When the children's mothers come each month to pay the fees, I learn about their condition, their sorrows and problems, their attitudes to their children. How one is trying to get a son into the Model School while her daughter studies in the government school; how another gives birth to one daughter after another in the hope of having a son, and keeps weeping. Those who consider themselves educated and modern go for an ultrasound test and having ruthlessly destroyed a piece of their own flesh and blood, prepare for the next child. Or how a husband comes home drunk at night and beats up the children for not having done their homework, while she, getting up early next morning, gives him breakfast and then sets out to look for a woman to give her children tuition and to do their homework for them.

When I try to share my thoughts with the women, they hesitantly begin to agree. Then I feel a great need for **Manushi**, and feel that there is a great need for literature on women's problems, especially in Punjab. So I am sending my subscription to **Manushi** and am also persuading our college library to subscribe.

A month ago, I had a son, and was struck by a song which is commonly sung by women at a son's birth in

Hissar district, Haryana. The song is in Haryanvi and gives a glimpse of the attitude of the family to the woman:

*O brother of the young girl, *I have given birth to a first daughter*

O brother of the young girl, put my bed in a corner

*O bastardly woman**, I will put your bed in the rubbish heap.*

O brother of the young girl, get me some hot water

O bastardly woman, I will get a virile bull to urinate on you.

O brother of the young girl, get me some warm halva

O bastardly woman, I will get you buffalo dung.

O brother of the young girl, get me unripe coconut

O bastardly woman, I will get you broken potsherds.

O brother of the young girl, I have given birth to a son (this time)

O brother of the young girl, put my bed in the rubbish heap

O my blessed (lit. green) woman, I will put your bed in a corner.

O brother of the young girl, get a virile bull to urinate on me

O my blessed woman, I will get you hot water.

O brother of the young girl, get me

buffalo dung

O my blessed woman, I will get you warm halva.

O brother of the young girl, get me broken potsherds

O my blessed woman, I will get you unripe coconut.

* She refers to her husband as the brother of his sister

** The word used throughout for the woman is *jachha*, a woman who has just given birth, for which there is no English equivalent.

Rajbala, Sangrur
(translated from Hindi)

His Life and Hers

I am a 14 year old student. I am sending you some observations of mine on the commercials that appeared on Doordarshan's national channel at prime time, from 8 to 9 p.m., from June 1 to 13, 1989. A total of 124 commercials appeared, of which nine did not portray human beings.

The activities that both boys and girls were shown performing were: reading comics, riding cycles, running, doing acrobatics, rowing a boat, driving a van, waiting to be served at table, and eating chocolates.

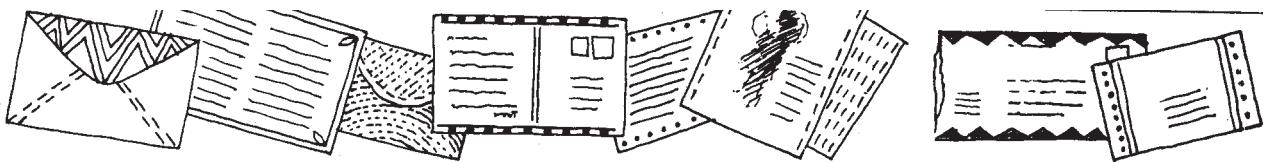
However, in a number of

commercials, boys and girls were shown performing activities in which boys took the leading part and girls played a subsidiary role. Thus, a boy was shown leading a team to victory in a quiz programme, while a girl was a member of his team, a boy was shown winning a computer game and a girl congratulating him, a boy was shown standing first in class and a girl congratulating him, boys returning from playing games were met by girls on the way, a girl was shown riding pillion on a cycle and on a motorbike driven by boys, also, sitting in a motorboat steered by a boy. A boy was shown playing at being the head of the family and returning from work while the girl played at being a housewife and serving drinks; a boy was shown rescuing a girl from kidnappers; a boy was shown dreaming of becoming strong and a great sportsman while a girl dreamt of becoming beautiful.

Activities only boys performed were winning a race, chatting, surf riding, yachting, becoming a "superhero", looking for food in a lunch box, playing a piano and a saxophone. Activities only girls were shown performing were: getting burnt while cooking, modelling, going to parties, swinging, swimming, figure skating and showing off beautiful hair.

The disparity between men's and women's activities was even wider. The only activity both were shown performing was going to a party. Apart from this, women were shown performing mainly domestic activities, focusing on the woman's service role, namely, serving food, washing and cutting vegetables, cooking, washing clothes, feeding children, tying husband's tie, packing food for children, bathing baby son, applying medicine on a child, reading stories to children, cleaning house, stitching clothes, shopping, waking husband up in the morning, admiring husband, receiving guests and serving them tea. Women were 12 times shown using products to improve their looks.





The recreational activities women were shown performing were doing origami, swinging, playing a piano, taking photos, listening to music, sitting in a boat trailing hand in the water. The only work activities outside the home women were shown performing were teaching, and getting a headache at an office desk.

On the other hand, men were shown in a number of work situations, namely, as porters, contractors, engineers, salesmen, landlords, policemen, astronauts, designing clothes and instructing models, loading camera. Men were shown in outdoor activities: playing games, doing exercises, riding bicycles and motorbikes and truck, steering a boat, flying a helicopter, standing at a bus stop. At home, men were shown waiting to be served at table, appreciating food cooked by a wife, teaching son and playing games with sons, treating his own dandruff. Men also appeared displaying washed clothes, lecturing about a power generator, sitting at an office desk and lecturing about a product, and reading newspapers. The only articles a woman was shown promoting were articles of toiletry.

Lavanya Viswanathan, Delhi

Success and Power

May I ask why you so seldom give "success stories" and profiles of "successful" women in Indian society. Though I live abroad, friends keep me informed of Indian women rising to the top of their profession, women of great power in the world of business and establishment politics including the bureaucracy. In these parts, such women become role models for school and college girls. Do you not have

similar needs within the country?

I write this not because of any attachment to worldly success but because women's movements do not necessarily want revolutionary socialist goals but rather an extension of whatever the present class ordering of society provides to women as much as to men. From that perspective, the greatly increased numbers of women in the higher civil services, professions including science and technology, and various other fields, who seem to combine their careers with marriage is a matter of some satisfaction to many of us oldies; and unless your organisation has some ideological reasons for disliking the conventional criteria of equal opportunities, it would be interesting for some of us to read of such high powered women who are able to combine demanding careers with no doubt a bourgeois lifestyle.

Ranjana Ash, England



Economic Freedom

... Recently, I came across *Manushi* in a woman friend's house... Middle class women in our society suffer greatly due to evil customs. If they do not get help from their parents, they have to live a suffocating and humiliating life in their marital homes. You should emphasise the importance of economic freedom for women. Women who do not wish to get divorced but who are educated should be helped to stand on their own feet...

Kiran Tandon, Delhi
(translated from Hindi)

From Assam

On August 26, at about 7 p.m., a 21 year old girl, Deepika Das, was found murdered at Ramdiya village, a few miles from Guwahati. The case, as narrated by Deepika's father, is as follows.

In 1983 when Deepika was a 15 year old student of class ten, she was abducted while returning from school, by Pradeep Das, son of a schoolteacher, Baneswar Das. She was taken to Guwahati and kept there for 11 days. Her father, Kandarpa Nath Das, filed a case in the local police station the day after her abduction. But the officer in charge did not take any interest in the matter. Pradeep took Deepika to his village, Pangaltola, where he married her without informing her parents. When her parents came to know about the marriage, they requested Pradeep and his parents to postpone the marriage so that they could arrange it in the traditional way. But the marriage was not postponed.

After marriage, Deepika continued her studies and appeared for the high

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school exam. After much persuasion, Pradeep allowed Deepika to continue her studies at a college in village Hoyo near her parents' house. But he did not like the idea of Deepika staying with her parents. So, he first brought her back to his village, and then, after a few months, shifted to Deepika's parents' village, Ramdiya, where both of them started living in a house just next to her parents' house. Pradeep bought a spinning loom with a bank loan and started a business.

Deepika's parents were witnesses to Deepika's constant torture by her husband. Unable to bear the sight of such inhuman treatment of his daughter, Kandarpa Das informed the police inspector. But no action was taken. Finally, Deepika left her husband, returned to her parents, and filed a divorce petition in the sessions court, Guwahati. She also resumed going to college. But, one day, Pradeep forcibly took Deepika back to his house where the tortures began again. He warned her parents not to interfere in his personal life. And finally, on August 26, Deepika's body was found hanging from the spinning loom. Many parts of her body were bruised and her neck bore marks of injury.

Pradeep was jailed but let out on bail. It is alleged that Pradeep murdered Deepika with the help of his brother and uncle.

Veena Bhatia, Delhi

Hard Struggle

I have been reading the back issues of **Manushi**. In all my life, I have never read any contemporary journal with so much interest and so much seriousness. As a progressive person I have thought

of women's "backwardness" and their "progress", that too from a Marxist point of view. But **Manushi** has so developed my theoretical viewpoint that I only now feel the true grandeur of being a Marxist. It has now become clear that the issue is not just of backwardness and progress, but of "slavery" and "liberation." I have as though got a tool to fight the system, for which I was unconsciously searching and which was right near me, before me, in my own family and in many other families yet had not been seen by me until now. **Manushi** has opened to me a field of action, wherein, I am convinced, no supposed political struggle can truly succeed unless it proves its worth.

I have earlier heard a lot about women's liberation and read a little too. But I have not found anywhere else the kind of direction given by **Manushi** to observe labouring women, to learn from them and to take initiative to change their entire familial and social set-up.

I have read all other articles by Madhu Kishwar relating to dowry except the controversial "Rethinking Dowry Boycott." I have read a bitter critique of this article in a Malayalam women's liberation magazine *Manavi*. Without reading the criticised article, I can say that the critique is superficial and results from misunderstanding. To criticise the article apart from the whole series of earlier articles on dowry is incorrect.

But the suggestions given by Madhu Kishwar in her clarification in **Manushi** No.53 appear completely impractical. Sisters will have to struggle hard both inside and outside the family in order to get equal inheritance with brothers. I will

write my opinion on this in detail later.

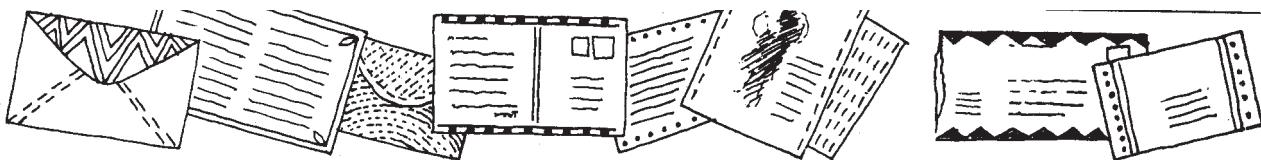
I have said that I consider myself a Marxist... People like me do not get the necessary help from communist parties and groups. These groups do not appear ready to encourage the initiative taken by the lower sections of society. They prefer to impose their policies from above. They do not consider it necessary to learn from the people. It can even be said that in a way the leaders fear the initiative taken by ordinary people. Unless this unfortunate situation is rectified, we cannot convert the struggles of the lowest sections into a large scale political force.

A.K. Ravindran, Aikkaraparambil
(translated from Hindi)

End Violence

The women's organisations in Sri Lanka are in a state of disarray. In the north and east, there are attempts to set up rehabilitation and relief projects specially directed at women, young widows, for example, whose social situation is really deplorable. In the south, many of the progressive women's groups who were supportive of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the ethnic problem have come under fire from the so called patriotic forces. Many of the groups that were located in the rural areas are finding it increasingly difficult to continue with their work programmes; some are relocating in Colombo, trying to feel their way as to what is possible to do in terms of work, given the existing turmoil.

There is an interesting coalition of women's groups, a cross section moving from the women's wings of left political parties to nonfundamentalist religious



women's groups who have come together in a campaign calling for an end to the violence. We had a broadbased signature campaign just prior to the state sponsored All Party Conference commenced. The need of the day is very clear - a broad front of women's groups that can link with other human rights organisations and groups committed to the twin principles of peace and democracy in Sri Lanka on the basis of a nonracist, nonchauvinist and nonfascist approach. This may sound like mere platitudes, but that is the only way one can define some parameters for the building of a broadbased group.

The recent killing of a colleague, Dr Rajini Rajasingham, the head of the department of anatomy at the medical faculty at the University of Jaffna, by an "unidentified gunman" is only one bitter symbol of what we have to struggle against.

We do appreciate **Manushi**, especially the pieces on ideology and the structuring of women's oppression on fundamentalist lines; we find them extremely useful for us to gain a correct understanding of the forces that are at work around us...

Sunila Abaysekera, Sri Lanka

Inspiration

... I have just finished reading Poonam Kaul's excellent coverage in her article "Anita - A Working Schoolgirl." This is precisely the kind of data that we require if we are effectively to expose the hoax that is being perpetrated in the name of education and development today...

Some naval wives here have put their creative talents together and are thinking

of producing a pageant based on the women *bhakta* poets of India. Needless to say, this inspiration had been taken directly from **Manushi**.

Lalita Ramdas, Visakhapatnam

Called a Witch

I would like to share a story about a Santhal woman living in Birbhum district, Bengal. My mother was to do an interview with her, so I went along as well. This woman, Mithu Shorel, an outcaste now, is living in Jamboni, a little away from Shantiniketan, with a husband and twin sons. When they married they were both very poor but educated. They got jobs after a few years of hard work, they were able to get along by land and build a house. This came as a shock to her in-laws, who were jealous of her resourcefulness and rise in status. One day in 1985 her brother-in-law had a bad fall from a tree and was taken to hospital too late. Mithu told her mother-in-law that the boy should have been rushed to hospital immediately. The boy died soon after. Mithu was declared a witch and accused of having devoured him. She was taken to four witch doctors who claimed to see visions of her eating up her boy. Some time later two of her sons died and she was again blamed for it.

The whole village was convinced that she was a witch. She got a transfer to another school where her husband's cousin was in charge. He is a drunkard and kept bullying her to sign a bond that she had killed a boy. The new village also ostracised her. People would throw bricks, twist her arm, hit her with bamboo and run away. Her house was destroyed. She went to stay with her mother. There

people threatened her and threw excreta at her room. The panchayat was approached but did not do anything. One day her husband's relatives, all men, got drunk, stripped her and tried to strangle her. She and her husband got these men arrested but they were released after two days. The case reached the district court and dragged for nine months, she won the case, but they appealed to a higher court.

The politicians say they are "behind" her. This cliched promise reflects only too literally the extent of support she can hope to get from them. All her resources have been used up in the case while the defence camp still affords to go to higher courts. She is still in danger of being killed.

What struck me most about her was her completely fearless attitude. She is an intelligent, strong woman with two healthy boys and a supportive husband.

Proma Roy, Delhi

Without Comment

Anju Sharma* is an undergraduate student in a Delhi University College. She is 19 and therefore had the right to vote in the just concluded elections. However, her father did not permit her to exercise her franchise. Her father is a school teacher and holds a postgraduate degree in Hindi. She is the eldest of seven children, the youngest being her only brother. Her mother has also had some schooling and she votes without fail. Anju wanted to vote but her father informed her categorically that she may vote only after her marriage, with the permission of her in-laws!

Prabha Rani, Delhi

*Not her real name