

Letters to *Manushi*

Not Factual Enough

Inheritance of land by women should be argued on a practical basis and **Manushi** No. 57 is not factual enough. It implies a sort of common model everywhere... India is a very large country with many variations, and direct inheritance for daughters in one society may be different in a second society.

A long while ago I worked with the census commissioners among the Gaddi caste of the Brahmour district of Chamba state, now in Himachal Pradesh. The Gaddis were about 70 percent of the population and were Rajputs as was the then Raja. The state owned all land. There was no private ownership of land although if you were a citizen, you could occupy any agricultural land available. Occupied agricultural land passed down to sons, brothers and *gotra* members in that order. Widows could use the land during their lifetime. In the absence of heirs the land reverted to the Raja who could auction it within the village. Each village was self contained, and public facilities like common land and springs were used only by villagers.

When India became independent, the Raja's powers ceased and the land became privately owned by the occupiers. Rules were changed so that sons and daughters had the right to use their parents' land. Within a very short time, daughters' husbands refused to accept the rules about rotation of crops or joint communal work to build up embankments. The unity of the village was destroyed. At the same time, *patwaris*, who were outsiders, were imposed on the village under the new system, and daughters' husbands, by paying bribes, got much of the common



land registered in the names of outsiders.

Local villagers already had to migrate to the plains for three months a year as the land was too subdivided to produce enough subsistence crops. Rights of daughters made the situation worse and a petition was sent to the government, to prevent women inheriting land. A number of women signed this document...

William H. Newell, Australia

Why Indeed?

I have read the article on inheritance rights for women by Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita in **Manushi** No. 57. But there is a problem even more crucial than denial of inheritance rights - the problem of not considering a woman a human being. Why is the girl given as a gift (*daan*) to the bridegroom? Why has she to touch the husband's feet on the first night? Why has she to fast for the longevity of husband and male children? Why has she to put on *sindur* after marriage when a man does not do it? Why has she to change her surname? Why has she to wear white clothes after her husband's death?...

Even educated women do not have any existence or identity of their own. Then why should she have rights in properly - for her demanding husband, in-laws or children?...

Women's organisations at the national level make a hue and cry over superficial issues, from price rise to special brands of cigarettes for women. But how many have seriously thought about eradicating customs and taboos which are the greatest hindrance in the upliftment of women?...

No external force or law can help women. It is she and she alone who can get it done. If every woman on earth recognises her potential and is self confident, the day will not be far behind when sex discrimination will vanish. After all, a helping hand is always at the end of your arm.

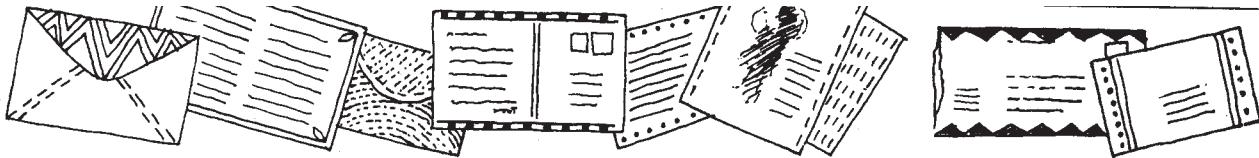
Suresh Jindal, Kurukshetra

Tackling Rape

I would like to express my respect and admiration for the courage of the members of AWAG, as described by Ila Pathak and Amina Amin's report in **Manushi** No. 58. The invitation to incite a debate is an active testimony of concern and passionate urge to stop the most heinous kind of assault - rape.

Farida, a child, is raped. Her parents "bear the shame" and move away. The law is efficient in assisting the criminal. AWAG reacts.

It is not for one to answer the questions put forward, in approval or otherwise, but to understand the enormity of the problem. The solution adopted by AWAG strikes the mind as the only practical and immediate one available. But to consider it an end in



itself would be to underestimate the problem. Rape, to my mind, is not only a physical assault but the unthinking acceptance of a framework of attitudes and thought processes accounting for the "accepted" rape through ideologies and beliefs. To bring about change an awareness has to be brought about not only in the minds of women but in men too, who have to liberate themselves from the images they have accepted.

It is important to generate a kind of awareness in a criminal's mind. Did Anwar, when he was made to ask forgiveness from Farida's family, realise his crime? Was it done due to mere bullying or guilt or shame? Since the structural implications have to be understood to effect longlasting changes, maybe a bridging of the hiatus between intellectual discourses and practical courses would help.

Besides, one should not undermine the legal machinery. True, the law started working after AWAG's hue and cry, but reforms within the system are imperative for fair administration of law and justice.

To react to violence with violence seems to have a short term effect that is lost in the enormity of the problem, but it is a sad fact that it probably is the start required.

That is how, perhaps, revolutions come about, that is how Tiananmen squares come about. Therefore, the call of the hour is to move from a superficial understanding, a scratch on the surface, to a deeper understanding, a revolutionary change.

Pratiksha Baxi, Delhi

Anju's Story

The story of Anju Khanna in **Manushi** No. 57, haunted me for a long time. If a woman of her affluence, intelligence and education could not save herself from impending disaster what would the fate be of a woman in less fortunate circumstances?

How could neighbours be so apathetic? Why do people not intervene? Why did her family not insist on taking her back home when they knew that her husband and in-laws were torturing her? Shame on the Gandhigram police for being so corrupt! I just hope that for once this true life story becomes an Indian film story and the son Arjun grows up to take revenge for his mother's death by killing the man, his so-called father.

If I was rich enough, I would hire a hitman to get that husband and mother-in-law killed. Who said Kans (Shri Krishna's uncle) and Hiranyakashyap (Prahlad's father) were characters from Indian mythology? They are alive and well, living in the form of such husbands. Only by killing them can the stories be completed.

D. Lalwani, USA

Fatherly Advice

I am an Indian father of four homeloving girls. I have come across your dangerous publication in my daughter's bookbag. As Indian women you must be ashamed at least deep in your hearts - ruining lives of girls...

You are shameless women of obvious low breeding who want to drag respectable girls through lives of near prostitution. I have confiscated

Manushi and have forbidden it to enter my home ever again. My daughter confesses that a permissive Indian girl gave her a copy and she took it only to appear polite. She totally disagrees with its slant. I have forbidden her to associate with such so-called Indian girls who have become American trash. It is surprising you actually operate in India, it is obscene. I'm sure you will be exposed for what you really are, if not by me, by some decent Indian man.

The crime you commit is pollution and perversion of Indian womanhood. A woman flourishes in her husband's home but will become rotted flesh if left in her father's home, or worse, as you will have it, to be loose in the world. This is the horror of the USA, so many broken families. Sadly, many Indian women have been lost to the culture of their mothers and are sentenced to a life of independence-independence from love, security and family ties.

...You in India are becoming the very monsters that Indian men are running away from. I have hardship in fixing my daughters' marriages in India. Now **Manushi** wants to drive the last nail in a father's efforts for his daughters... I see sad fathers here who lose their daughters to vice: American boys, liberalism and feminism. I had better see my daughters dead than divorced or having illegitimate relations with American boys...

India is such a beautiful country,... where a woman... lives in contentment, knowing that serving her husband is her duty to god. My wife has devotedly lived these ideals without so much as a peep. She is the most contented woman in our neighbourhood...

Letters to Manushi

You should be tutors of virtue. If you concentrate on this instead of breeding discontent, Indian women would not write to you with all these problems. Basically, they are not proper women. ...the real cause of women's problems in India ... is the faulty character of the girl or her family's neglect to teach her how to run a family or adjust to a husband. Many of these girls are radical and make up stories just to cover their own promiscuity...

I am giving you girls fatherly advice. Don't cast away your own futures and the honour of your fathers by becoming too independent for your own good. Everyone must be led by someone, whether it be an elder, or, for a woman, naturally a MAN.

You are only silly babes afraid of what you don't know, but like others you will fall into the routine of married life and duty.

Bhupinder Sharma, USA

Another Father Writes

Two years ago, I married my daughter Neelam to Deepak Ojha, of Nehru Nagar, Itarsi, Madhya Pradesh. My daughter died under suspicious circumstances on May 3, 1990. The post mortem report showed that she died of poisoning.

Immediately after my daughter's marriage, her in-laws started demanding a jeep and other things, which it was not possible for me to give, as I had already spent about Rs 150,000 on the wedding and dowry. My daughter came home and

told me that she was being tortured and threatened by her in-laws since their demands had not been fulfilled. I told her to be patient. My daughter was patient but her in-laws lost patience and thus I had to lose my only daughter.

I am sure that her in-laws poisoned her. The police treated it as a suicide because a note was found written by my daughter saying she was killing herself since she could not become a mother. This note must have been written under duress because in fact on November 3, 1989, my daughter had undergone an abortion, and a medical check-up following it showed that she was normal.

The Itarsi police refused my request to conduct an investigation. This is surprising because the law says that any death of a woman within seven years of marriage should be investigated. The Ojha family is influential and has managed to silence the police who have not taken action even after the death was reported in several newspapers...

N.P.Mishra, Dewas
(translated from Hindi)

Not So Sweet

Girls below 18 are married not only in backward states like Rajasthan but also in progressive states like Kerala. What can we do to prevent it? A girl of about 16 or 17 is to be married in August. She is educated, a predegree student with a very good record. Her elder sister who is the right age for marriage, is not married. People think that youngsters are more sweet. They prefer a girl of "sweet seventeen" to a 22 year old...

K.K.S. Mohammad, Kerala

Too Depressing

For five years now I've gotten your magazine. The problems and the courage of women in India are overwhelming. Thank you, but I can no longer read Manushi because I find it so depressing. As an American married to a Japanese, my life is in comparison one of ease and wealth. Keep up the good fight for protection under law, literacy and further education and empowerment of women.

Margaret Kanada, Japan

Male Guidance

I am not writing about the harassment women have to face while travelling in DTC buses. I would rather like to bring to your attention a relatively less acknowledged phenomenon. Have you ever noticed how much advice you get while commuting in a DTC bus, especially a crowded one?

As soon as a woman enters a bus, suggestions and instructions start pouring in from all directions. Every second man has something or other to tell her. Examples are: "You should not have gotten into such a crowded bus"; "Do not stand on the footboard"; "Try to move ahead, you will have problems here"; "Get a ladies' seat vacated"; and so on.

Are they really concerned about you? I doubt it. The problem is many of them cannot help advising women. The idea of being mentally superior is deeprooted in their minds. They feel it is their duty to guide women who just cannot manage otherwise. Do we really need their advice? It is high time we start refusing to be directed like this.

Shashi, Delhi