

# Responses To Manushi

## Errors & Contradictions

I am writing to you about your piece *Kashmir and Kashmiriat* in issue No 82. On my first reading more than a week ago I had felt vaguely that you were rather oversimplistically mixing language and religion. On my second reading this morning I have a feeling that my first impression may be wrong. The realities on the ground, as analysed by you, seem to be reinforcing that vicious nexus.

It is really shocking that Kashmiri political elites can be so “de-identified” as to dig the mass grave for their own language! The only trace of humanity left in them is that they still talk among themselves in Kashmiri. Your point about the non-pseudo-species identity of Kashmiriat is well-made and that, I think, should be the focal point and fulcrum of public policy in Kashmir, or Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh with due regional and cultural autonomies, in federal India.

One or two printing errors apart, may I draw your attention to an apparent contradiction in your write-up? Please refer to pages 3 and 6: What script is Kashmiri presently written in - Persian or Arabic? Moreover, you may also like to cross-check whether Uttar Pradesh is the land of Urdu’s birth.

I am greatly impressed with the objectivity and comprehensiveness of your Kashmir report *Voices from Kashmir* (*Manushi* No. 83). Civil rights groups and reports like yours

can do a lot to bring about a qualitative improvement in the situation. It so happens that I am simultaneously reading Gisela Bonn’s *The Indian Challenge*. Her account of the Bangladesh liberation war is very moving and revealing, especially for me, I suppose, as I happened to be in Canada during those fateful days and had followed the events only through the Western press and electronic media, and thus missed many intriguing details.

My only worry today is that we should not repeat the same mistakes in Kashmir that Pakistan did in East Bengal. To be fair to the government, our record is not as bad, but the situation is still very bleak and disturbing to a nationalist and democrat. Democratic and federal initiatives and timely action are the only way to salvage our credibility and the national interest in Kashmir.

I was also impelled, however, to put two question marks on page 16. You beg questions on these two points, for deep down, you seem to be contradictory and unconvincing. One, our security forces from all available accounts seemed to be under great pressure from the militants. Would it not be suicidal for them to sell back the seized guns to the militants? Two, a CRPF commandant transferred to Punjab from Kashmir in 1991 who wishes to go back to Kashmir to get rich by corrupt practices at the height of militancy also sounds unconvincing. These are, however, only minor chinks in your armour.

M. P. Singh, Delhi

*It is your contention, not mine, that our security forces are "under great pressure from the militants". While the government propaganda makes it out as if the security forces are risking their life for the nation, in actual fact they are lending support to terrorism in a variety of ways.*

*Urdu emerged as a language in atleast three different regions of India, each with its distinct flavour. However, the standardised Urdu in use today is identified with the Braj and Khari boli regions of India, the modern day U.P. Kashmiri is in fact written in the Persian script, and not the Arabic. My apologies for the error on page 6.*

- Madhu Kishwar.

## A Mistrusted Community

I have read your report: *Voices from Kashmir* in **Manushi** 83. Though it throws light on the situation in Kashmir, it does not take into account the discrimination faced by Kashmiri Muslims all over India. Even in Hyderabad Muslims are not fully trusted. They are thought to be pro-Pakistani (particularly in cricket matches involving both the countries) and they are accused of “increasing their population” because they do not practise family planning. These are all misguided notions, but are prevalent even in the minds of the so-called urban (Hindu) intellectuals. The situation is often volatile and can turn violent at any time, particularly in the hands of self-propagating goonda politicians and land-grabbers.

The box on page 9, *Seeds of Revolt* gives the impression that this type of treatment is meted out only to Kashmiri Muslims. But the army is a law unto itself. It can do anything and if the police and the BSF dare oppose or resist it, then the army comes out against them in revenge. This happens in other parts of the country as well — in Punjab, in the North Eastern states or during anti-naxalite operations in Andhra Pradesh. The majority of people are discriminated against despite a much touted socialism. If people think that they are being discriminated against because of their region, religion or language, they are being misguided. Discrimination is practised and promoted by second-rung politicians and the rising classes and castes who are all clamouring for authority and political power.

**K. Suresh, Krishna Dt, A.P.**

### Wrong on Facts?

Leela Damodar Menon's article, *From Mother to Daughter* (**Manushi** 84) is yet another example of the attempts of revivalists in the country to appropriate history for their parochial ends. It is also meant for the consumption of those run-of-the-mill sociologists and historians who are unable to distinguish between a matrilineal community and a patriarchal one.

It is true that women in the matrilineal Nair community of Kerala were in a comparatively better position than the women of other communities (this was true of matrilineal communities the world over). This does not, however, contradict the fact that the Nair community too was organised on a patriarchal power structure, and hence, was not free from the subjugation and sexual exploitation of women which were the

hallmarks of such a power structure. It is astonishing that the author has tried to paint such a rosy picture of feudal society in Kerala by concealing, distorting or explaining away (as it suits her purpose) facts, which, unfortunately for her, are well-documented. I wonder whether it was just pristine innocence that prompted her to make assertions like, "for Nair girls, marriage into a higher caste...was for better progeny", without a trace of irony.

Though Nair women theoretically had the right to marry the men of their choice and to divorce their husbands, they were rarely allowed to exercise this right. The decisions were taken, more often than not, by the senior male members of the *Tarawad*, mostly by the *Karanavar* himself. About Namboodiri men marrying Nair women, the author remarks quite innocently: "That they did not have to maintain their wives was advanta-

geous to them." Of course! Especially since many of them tried to emulate King Solomon in the number of 'wives' they could take. Little wonder, then the Soori Namboodirippad, the villain and clown rolled into one in *Indulekha*, the first novel in Malayalam (1889), has acquired immortality as the archetype for male sexual promiscuity.

It is indeed unfortunate that an article of this nature has been given space in a journal like **Manushi** which has championed the cause of the rational, scientific approach to women's studies. Many serious readers of **Manushi** might find their knowledge of Kerala history too limited to subject the article to the ruthless criticism it deserves.

**K.M. Sherrif, Bharuch, Gujarat**

*We invite more facts and further discussion from readers who are knowledgeable about the matrilineal system in Kerala.*

-Ed.

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