

Surprising Regulations

I was amazed to learn of the unreasonable regulations with regard to the operation of cycle rickshaws in the city of Delhi. It is indeed surprising to learn that there is a restriction on the number of cycle rickshaws that a person can own and that the fines and conditions are more stringent for cycle rickshaws than other motorised vehicles. Cycle rickshaws are non-polluting and an efficient system of transport over short distances. This mode of transport is used extensively in China and the Indo-China region. I think we should learn from their experience and actively encourage the use of cycle rickshaws throughout the country. The rules and regulations should be so formulated, that they do not impede their use.

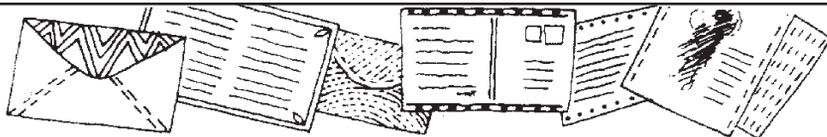
I was happy to learn of the *Lok Sunwayi* that was organised on the issue. If I can be of any assistance, please let me know.

Maneka Gandhi, New Delhi

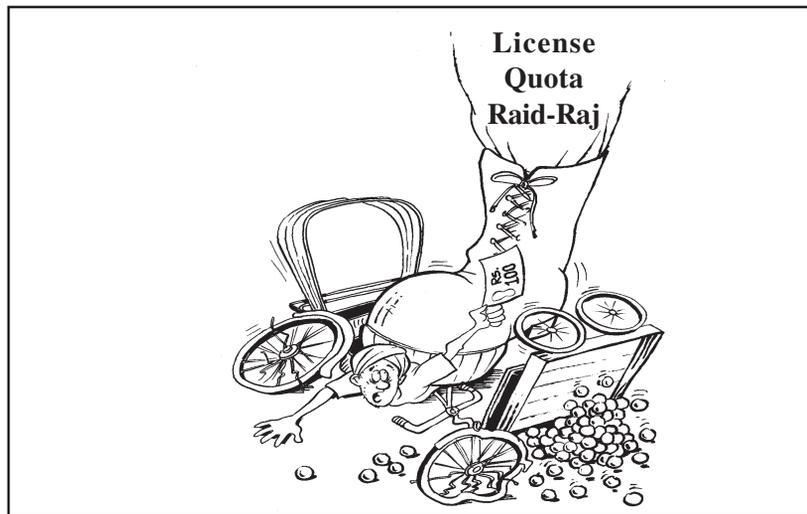
Common Cause

In issue No. 126, The description of the problems of the street vendors and rickshaw pullers and owners appears similar to the problems of the so-called “informal sector” everywhere, including here in Kenya. Recently the government officials have looted and torn down kiosks which they claimed were “illegal” destroying the hard work of many people and taking away their livelihood.

I also enjoyed the “Legal but Not Available” article on abortion in India... a difficult issue but handled in a straightforward informative manner. “Begging for a Greater Cause” was insightful but somehow left me wanting more contextual information to fully absorb this definition of “begging” in this



Responses to Manushi



woman's life. “A Bit of Wall” was wonderful in terms of how it built up the everyday trust and interaction of Muslim and Hindu communities during the very time of the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya.

Issue No.127, describes the campaign for cleansing governance. This is definitely needed in African market places as well. Please continue to follow this issue, as I assume you will because MANUSHI is directly involved. “Typecast Early” on teenagers and gender roles had some positive surprises, especially that a majority are in favour of equal sharing of household chores. I am not sure how to interpret this, as this is a rare occurrence in most countries of the world, despite other changes in gender roles and opportunities for girls and women.

This is just some of the feedback on your many excellent articles. I hope to be going to Somalia next month and will try to gather some information that might be interesting to MANUSHI's readers.

Pamela Collett, Watamu, Kenya

Freedom in Chains

This is in response to a reprint of your MANUSHI article on *Sati*, in *Hinduism Today*. I found the piece most thought provoking.

I am a 44-year-old Anglo-American male, who is currently incarcerated deep within the walls of a Texas prison. This particular situation has been in effect for ten years, and shall continue for some time to follow.

The deserved “shackling” of my physical freedom has led to a search for a spiritual path that would give this prisoner a sense of “purpose” in life.

After a serious study of the monotheistic faiths, it becomes rather clear that such beliefs were far from possessing the qualities that are desired for discarding monotheistic concepts. I began reading Hindu books, which in turn led to the imbibing of the teachings of Sri Rama Krishna.

I then declared the intent to have my prison file officially record "Hindu" as my personal religion preference. Thereon, a most curious chain of events began to transpire, and continue to do so to this very day. It seems as if prison authorities, all of whom are Christian, look upon this declaration as an act of an insane individual, and as an attack upon their religious creeds.

Various officials have taken it upon themselves to impose Christian beliefs upon me and even destroyed my Vedic books. Possession of my of *japa beads* has been refused (Christians are allowed their rosary). They refuse to provide an adequate meatless diet, deny physical release from prison because of my refusal to participate in "cognitive restructuring" (a euphemism for brain wash) programmes that impose monotheistic values upon participants. I have received physical assaults for protesting against the tyranny of such acts. At times, it is rather depressing, and even appears hopeless, but the words from my new copy of the Bhagwad Gita reinforce the "I" when all seems lost. In a way, this is all rather humorous, as America has convinced the world that it is a land of unshackled religious freedoms. But the reality is that such freedoms do not exist for those who "dare" to oppose the monotheistic culture in America.

In closing, "Thank You" for writing such a thoughtful article.

Timothy Eby, Texas, USA.

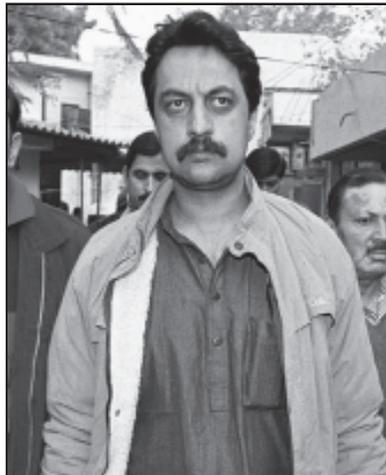
Points to Ponder

The recent happenings in India and actually all over the world makes one feel extremely powerless and distressed. I do have other friends, but I know that they too must be very unhappy with all these tragedies going on. I cannot dump my frustrations on them, and hence my letters to you again and again.

Your issue No. 128 carried an article, "The Idea Was to Break Us..." by Shankar Sharma.

Compare this to the coverage that Ms. Arundhati Roy's court case and arrest received. I am not judging Ms. Roy or Mr. Sharma. I am trying to compare the coverage that each of their cases received in the media.

Ms. Roy's conviction was based on a law which is rarely used (it probably should never be used). She got a due court process, and was awarded a token one day imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 2000 (else another three month imprisonment). Mr. Sharma and Ms. Mehra were harassed (harassment is a very commonly used tool) for a long time, did not receive due processes and Mr. Sharma was put in the same Tihar jail for two and a half months (without the option of paying a fine). While Ms. Roy's case got highly



publicised within India and outside, Mr. Sharma and Ms. Mehra's case did not. That is, the media acts courageous without actually being courageous.

Or, there is this huge distraction-machine which gets people's blood boiling on some issues and effectively allows other indignities to continue.

Likewise, the media has taken a lot of pain to take the government to task over the killings in Gujarat. But such efforts have hardly been taken to cover the brutalities in Jammu and Kashmir. That is, the media has covered the obviously grotesque but not some other topics which are equally worrisome. Why is this so?

People are talking about religious fundamentalism. All the different ways that people are segregated are also talked about. How about suggestions for uniting people?

(a) Let us hold blood donation camps during religious festivals, say Id, Diwali, Buddha Purnima, Guru Nanak Jayanti, Christmas, etc., and hope and pray that people donate blood across religions (example, a Hindu blood donation drive during Id).

(b) It hurts to see people writing columns against religious schools. At present *madrassas* and Hindu schools are being blamed for the hate all around. Isn't a religious school the right of the people?

Instead of demanding that they be closed, we should fund these schools across religions. For example, let there be Hindu funded *madrassas* and Muslim funded Hindu religious schools. Is it possible to start such funding agencies? Maybe some of your readers might know of *madrassas* that would accept donations from Hindus. If so and if it is okay with MANUSHI, could they please let us readers know?

(c) How about an All-Faith-Temple? This probably is not something that readers of MANUSHI can implement, so maybe this is not possible. But at least we could keep this in mind.

I read a little about the Swadhyaya movement of Maharashtra and Gujarat. Will Manushi be able to get us some information on it?

Uma Iyer, Bonn, Germany

We feel privileged that you shared your thoughts with us. We hope to carry information about Swadhyaya in our forthcoming issues. - Editor

Suggestions to Improve

I have two suggestions to make MANUSHI more attractive and useful for the students community. It would be better if MANUSHI can regularly publish fact sheets on Indian women. It should also publish the abstracts of very important studies (research) carried out in the discipline of Women's Studies. I know that right now MANUSHI is engaged in serious effort and action. Still, MANUSHI can spare a page or two for these purposes. Such information will be highly useful for scores of students of Women Studies and may also increase the circulation of MANUSHI.

Dr. K. Saroja, Dharwad, Karnataka

We will seriously consider your suggestions after exploring whether any other institution is performing this service. -Editor

Let's Act Now

Your recent issues of MANUSHI on community involvement in civil and corporate cleanliness and public accountability are indeed very good and a source of inspiration to many.

Today again after a gap of some years, India is burning or about to burn in a communal conflagration. Everyone is very afraid, particularly our Muslim friends who expect the worst. We need to do something and fast. Please think about this problem and write on it, suggesting concrete steps that we can take to diffuse the situation and build permanent bridges of friendship. I suggest you be very frank as that will help solve a long festering problem.

Malabika Pandey, Allahabad, U. P.

Errata

There are a few errors in the letter of mine which you have published in your latest issue No. 128. "Of Scientific Attitudes". The sixth paragraph where ever you have mentioned IIT campus, it should be Harish-Chandra Institute campus. That is, "Regardless, some people within our Harish-Chandra Institute campus have tried to raise money for the workers....." and in the last paragraph, "..... who do not mind the ill-treatment of workers or the exploitative system of contracts in place at Harish-Chandra Institute,..." Please correct the errors.

Uma Iyer, Bonn, Germany

We sincerely regret the errors that inadvertently crept into your letter. Thank you for pointing them out to us. - Editor