

## Responses to Manushi

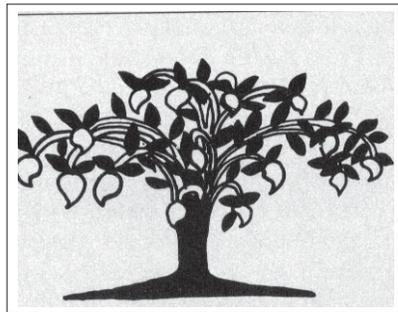
### Didi/Amma Obsession

This is in response to Anu Venugopalan's *Flip Sides of a Coin* published in Responses to **Manushi** in Issue 94.

*Didi*, *amma*, and I would add *beti*, also, far from being obsessions, are traditional forms of address. *Didi/amma/beti* are only half the story, and being aware of only half a fact is usually confusing. This is perhaps the reason why Anu Venugopalan is all mixed up. It is very common for women also to address unknown men as *bhaiya/babuji/beta* according to the age of the man addressed. The western 'sir' or 'madam' is used only in big cities like Delhi. In South India, all women, regardless of their age (even small girls) are addressed as *amma*. I find this soothingly pleasant.

I think that the minimum time required for interaction between two persons varies from culture to culture. In our country, this minimum time required for interaction is very short because of the spontaneous *apnapan* inherent in our culture. A difficult word to translate into English, *apnapan* is a feeling of closeness between two people as if the person was a member of one's own family. While the English word 'intimacy' usually implies a closeness that is built up over a long period of time, *apnapan* can develop quite quickly.

So many times during train journeys I have asked unknown boys (co-passengers, of course) to get me things from the platform at train stops. Almost always these boys have refused to take money from me. I admit that sum has always been trivial, never exceeding five rupees or so. Even then, this gesture is touching. So many times I have shared meals with fellow passengers in train journeys and very often I have had frank and interesting



discussions with them. These passenger on my second class sleeper journeys behave entirely differently than AC sleeper passengers, who are somewhat less inclined to talk and share and are definitely less friendly. Air passengers are even worse. Often the whole journey is over without even one sentence being exchanged between two fellow adjacent passengers. The passengers of a second class sleeper of a train are obviously a true sample of Indian Indians and are, therefore, very different from the more affluent and

westernised passengers travelling by AC class and by air.

Anu Venugopalan says: "I suppose posing as *mmas* and *didis* is a good practical strategy." By using the word "posing" she reveals her way of thinking. If one only poses as a *didi/amma* without having any genuine feeling, one will never get the right response. Madhu Kishwar was able to get the right sort of response from that drunken man (When India "Missed" the Universe, Issue No 88) because she felt concerned about the welfare of that man. That concern showed in her tone and in her behaviour, and the man (despite being drunk) responded to that feeling of sisterly concern. I am sure that just 'posing' without feeling a genuine concern would never have elicited this response.

I also have had some similar first hand experiences. Once I was buying vegetables from a vendor when four or five boys came along and started bullying him. They wanted money from him for their campaigns in their college elections! The poor vendor was almost in tears. I talked and reasoned with them. After listening to me for some time, one of the boys said, "She is like our mother. Let's go."

My younger sister is married to an Englishman and lives near London. Her son, i.e. my nephew, finds it very strange and hard to believe that our maid servant here addresses me as

*mummyji* and my son and daughter-in-law as *bhaiya* and *bhabhiji*, respectively.

So it is not only the *didi/amma* relationship which is called into play in day-to-day life here, but almost all other relationships as well. There is usually no 'posing' with an ulterior motive. These forms of address and the responses are both spontaneous and deeply rooted in our culture.

I still remember the *mohalla* (neighborhood) culture of old when family relationships were extended to the *mohalla* also. Every person of the *mohalla* had to be one of the following: *dada/dadi, tau/tai, chacha/chachi, bua, didi, bhaiya/bhabhi*. The cold, feelingless and characterless uncles and aunts were not prevalent then. I feel so funny when small children and their parents as well call me aunts.

**Lakshmi Bhargava, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**

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### Unfair Labeling

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Recently I read *A Half Step Forward* by Madhu Kishwar in Issue No. 92-93. The intention here is not to comment on the content of the article which itself can be debated but to register a strong protest to the tendency of arbitrary labelling of organisation.

The Centre For Women's Development Studies (CWDS) is an autonomous research organisation and its faculty consists of researchers and activists drawn from different disciplines and backgrounds. The

Centre does not have any professed political ideology although it does not actively discourage its faculty members from taking any ideological position on issues of concern to them. I do not think within its organisational structure the Centre promotes homogenisation of ideas and anyone's ideology. Those advocating autonomy and democratisation should not rush to label institutions on the basis of ideological positions taken by any of its members.

The Centre believes in and provides space for both individual and collective initiatives and works with other sister organisations on broader issues despite ideological differences. Over the last 20 years, the women's movement has been strengthened by diverse organisations working together on critical issues of concern to all of us. At several places the article mentions the document entitled 'A Perspective from the Indian Women's Movement' as an AIDWA-CWDS document (see pp.73,75). The document was prepared by seven women's organisations, and it was debated and endorsed by more than 80 organisations all over the country. It cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called an AIDWA-CWDS document. This is not only denigrating other organisations who were a part of this exercise but also undermining the women's movement in India which draws its strength from and builds on so many diverse groups.

**Kumud Sharma, Director, CWDS, New Delhi**

*When introducing the document A Perspective from the Indian Women's Movement I did make it clear that it was prepared by seven convening organisations and named each one of them (p. 53) in a lengthy footnote. Since each time the document was mentioned, one could not possibly name all the seven, I chose to call it CWDS-AIDWA document. It is well known that the CPM women's wing, AIDWA and CWDS participants had an overwhelming influence on its content and ideology, even though everyone in CWDS may not share the same approach.*

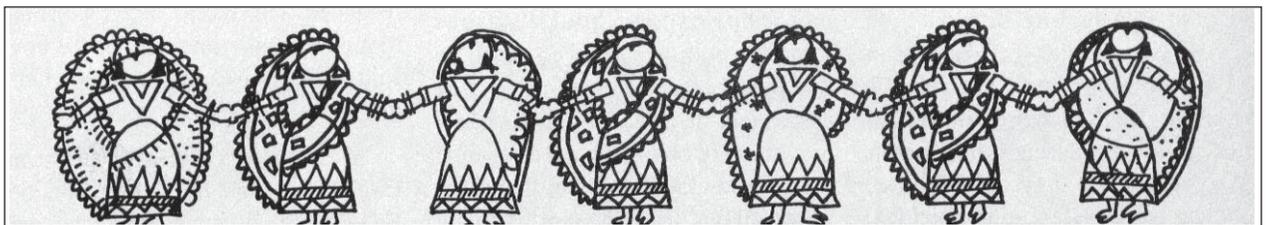
**Madhu Kishwar**

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### Gandhiji's Sensibility

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I was impressed by the thoughtful and well-researched writing in Issue No. 91. Though all issues are done well, this one touched me immensely. Gandhiji's "civilisational sensibility" seemed to prevail in all of the articles whether they were about women's emancipation, environmental protection, or religious amity. Madhu Kishwar's in-depth report on the Tehri dam in support of preserving the Himalayas provided me with a full picture of the controversial project for the first time. It was gratifying to learn about grass-root religious tolerance at play in Orissa in *On Pirs and Pundits*. Ajmer's Hazrat Mayunudeen Chisti or Shirdi Sai Baba's shrines in India are still frequented by both Hindus and Muslims, (or even the present day Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi where both the message and the congregation



is still multi-faith). Raghuraj's contemplative photograph of Shri Bahuguna, solemn and steadfast, reminded one of yet another Gandhi — it is my favourite cover of **Manushi** to date.

How come **Manushi** is not published in Hindi, or for that matter in any other Indian languages? I am sure you have looked at this question before. In the absence of any thoughtful periodicals (my favourite used to be *Dinmaan* and *Saptahik Hindustan*) there is a definite need for a magazine like **Manushi** to be read by Indian women in their own languages.

**Balwant Bhaneja, London, England**

*Manushi* was published in both Hindi and English from its inception in 1978 till 1987. However, the Hindi edition had to be closed down for lack of funds as also paucity of good writing. We are exploring ways and means to revive the Hindi edition and would welcome suggestions and help from all those interested in seeing the Hindi **Manushi** come back to life.

There is a genuine vacuum in Hindi journalism because all serious, quality magazines have died one after the other. It seems that to keep anything other than filmi and sex scandal magazines alive in Hindi will require a much more widespread effort and resource mobilisation than we could muster up in the early years of our existence. Like the English edition, Hindi **Manushi** used to be read by both men and women.

**-Madhu Kishwar**

### Anti-BJP Bias?

This is in reference to your article *Who am I?* in the May-June issue of **Manushi**. In an earlier article, I had pointed out that while you used certain adjectives of a derogatory nature while you talked about the BJP, you refrain from using the same words when you talked about similar attitude of other political parties. Of course, you have the full freedom to write in this manner. But then wouldn't I be right to think that you have a bias against the BJP?



R.K. Yadav

In this article, the only organisation that you have mentioned is the Sangh Parivar. This definitely gives an impression that it is this organisation that is the cause of the problems that you have rightly identified as some of the major issues facing this country. Since you have not mentioned any other organisation, I see a bias in your approach.

In the 1950s, Jawaharlal Nehru said that the majority communalism was a greater problem than minority

communalism. The Hindus in this country decided to give him a chance to establish his version of secularism, considering the massive electoral support that he received. However, what we have seen is the pampering of minority communalism, not only by Nehru but by all those who followed him, and who were proclaiming that each was a greater secularist than the other. There has been a disillusionment with the practice of secularism in this country, and slowly the Hindus in particular have started to wonder if

there is a better alternative. I think the attraction of the ideology of *Hindutva* is due to this search, and a growing conviction that there are solutions to the problems being faced by the country within the parameter of this ideology.

In his book, *India, The Siege Within*, M J Akbar wrote: "It needs to be pointed out that India remains a secular state, not because one-fifth of the population is Muslim, Sikh, or Christian, and therefore, obviously has a vested interest in a secular constitution, but because nine out of ten Hindus do not believe in violence

against the minorities. If all the Hindus had been zealots, no law-and-order machinery in the world could have prevented the massacre of Muslims who are scattered in villages and towns all across the country." (p. 24)

The ideology of *Hindutva* started to occupy the centre stage only since 1986. I do not think that it would be a correct rendering of history to assume that things were well in our country before this, and it was only with the advent of this ideology that we find ourselves in the predicament that we

find today. I think that the solutions to the problems should be found somewhere else.

In your article you mentioned the Muslims who had to flee the Kashmir valley, and put them on par with the Kashmiri *pandits*. The latter have become refugees because of their *dharm* — viz Hinduism. It is a clear sign that Muslim fundamentalism does not brook any relationship with people of other religions. This is seen even in Kerala where a Muslim majority district was carved out by the communist government. The question that arises under the circumstances is what the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in other parts of the country should be. I think it is grossly unfair to club together the suffering of the Muslims who left the Kashmir Valley for economic reasons, and the *pandits* who had to flee for religious reasons. One does not equate the holocaust with the Germans who were killed for resisting Hitler.

**Ashok Chowgule, Bombay, Maharashtra**

*It is quite strange that you only notice my criticism of the BJP and ignore the fact that I did not hesitate to criticise other groups such as feminists and Nehruvian socialists much more strongly in the article on economic reforms.*

*Yes, there are many issues on which I have serious differences with BJP politics, not because I have any blind prejudice against the party nor because I am biased in favour of some other party, but because I sincerely believe that many aspects of BJP politics are extremely harmful for our society. I don't claim that I am always right and the BJP is always wrong. That is why I think it vitally necessary that there be forums where important issues facing our society be discussed and sorted out in a non-partisan*

*manner whereby criticism or defence of any viewpoint is not motivated by malice or blind prejudice.*

*Manushi attempts to be one such forum and, therefore, welcomes criticism and feedback. However, it can fulfill that role effectively only if our readers also rise above partisan politics, even while they may have political affiliations or special sympathy for this or that party or ideology.*

*This country is in a deep mess, and each one of us owes it to our own conscience to rise above narrow political alignments and confront seriously the issues and problems facing us. It is urgently required that we learn to move beyond polemics and work out some type of consensual approach on how to tackle the deep crisis our society is facing today.*

**-Madhu Kishwar**

## Recipe for Disaster

How good it is to see that **Manushi** continues to flourish and keep its critical perspective on issues. We've been opposed to the Tehri dam for years (since the '70s when we lived in Raipur and Mussoorie) and are appalled that construction continues, in spite of the mountains of evidence that it is totally misconceived and a recipe for disaster. We think that you are correct that the only explanation can be the corruption, fraud, and kickbacks involved for such a wide circle of "beneficiaries" while the residents of the Tehri valley and environs have relatively little power and influence. It also indicates the short-sighted sense of power over nature which is found among a certain set of engineers and government officials and politicians who, of course, live elsewhere.

**M. Corrine Scott, Bangalore, Karnataka**

We are accessible through e.mail at [madhu@manushi.unv.ernet.in](mailto:madhu@manushi.unv.ernet.in). When communicating by e.mail to **Manushi**, please mention where you are from. This helps us in filing our e.mail letters

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