



Nowadays, there is a growing emphasis on how a person looks. A makeover is the 'in' thing. Considering the tremendous amount of emphasis given to looks by a certain section of the media, it's bound to remain so for a long time. Even the reality-TV shows, which claim to be *the* platform for budding singers, make sure that the singers look no less attractive than film stars. While there is nothing wrong in looking good, the overemphasis on that particular aspect is not correct. And, it is more applicable for the way in which women are perceived in society. TV serials and films show the true '*bharatiya naari*' as a woman clad in a *saree* with *sindoor*, *mangalsutra* and lots of heavy jewellery, a woman who stays at home. The vamp, if in a *saree*, wears a revealing blouse or shows her skin in Western outfits. She does not take an interest in domestic chores. The problem here is that both these perceptions are extreme stereotypes. Why do the films and serials not have stories about real, complex women that we can identify with?

The fairness cream advertisements show how miserable life can be if you are not fair. One of the daily serials also takes a cue from this and its story revolves around a dark complexioned female protagonist and the troubles in her life due to her skin colour.

With no offence to Sania Mirza and not to undermine her achievements, why does she get more media attention than other sportswomen like Anju Bobby George and Mithali Raj, to name a few? For that matter, why does Yuvraj Singh have more ad campaigns than Mohammad Kaif and Zaheer Khan? It is high time that we as a society look inwards, and question ourselves

Responses to MANUSHI

about our engagement with superficial things such as glamorous looks.

Sneha Banerjee, New Delhi

Overcoming Ahalya's Curse

The story of Ahalya, in the epic *Ramayana*, is well-known in India. The new-age short story by P Raja has reversed it. It is retold and redefined with a modern approach, and thereby it's infused with a new vision. We find here that though Ahalya is married, she is a virgin. She is longing for fulfillment when Indra comes into her life; her soul accepts him as her true husband. He shows her that she has power, something that Gautama had allowed to slumber. She is neither faithless nor unchaste. So she warns Gautama that a faithful woman like her can also put a curse and Gautama instantly turns into stone — thus ends the story.

Today, if a husband is impotent or unable to procreate he is never blamed. Instead, his wife is cursed. The male view sees the woman as having a thousand (*sahastra*) holes all over her body, i.e., flaws in her personality. It does not treat her at a par but as someone who is full of deficiencies and shortcomings. Hence, restrictions are imposed on her. Now women are overcoming the restrictions and limitations that have been imposed on them for centuries. They have also gained new insights into the roots of prevalent male attitudes, tactics and approaches. They are trying to compensate for the loss of dignity that they had to suffer till now with a new

energy that was in any case always inherent in them. Today, they are endeavouring to become "*sahastrakshini*". This story should be highlighted on TV in serials.

Vrinda Dabholkar, via email

Plebiscite in Kashmir

This is in response to Madhu Kishwar's article: "Why Fear People's Choice?" in issue No. 131. I believe the idea of plebiscite is now outdated. Even President Musharraf is now prepared to give up Pakistan's insistence on plebiscite as the only acceptable solution. Moreover, solutions like the Good Friday agreement in North Ireland are being considered. In his book "Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Path to Peace" Sumantra Bose underlines the inherent dangers of plebiscite whereafter those who end up on the wrong side may create problems. He has supported his view by describing the consequences of the plebiscite in Yugoslavia after which Bosnia seceded from it because the plebiscite went in favour of secession. The non-participation by Serbs ended up by making them feel marginalised and frustrated and they created a lot of trouble in Sarajevo. Also the Croats got support from Croatia to create their share of trouble. Only the Muslims were satisfied with the plebiscite outcome, but they are a small minority. However, I was thrilled by your argument that since elections come again and again it is a better instrument for knowing peoples' will since they

can change their view again and again while plebiscite forces a once-for-all choice.

Prem Sahajwala, New Delhi

Nothing is Easy in Bharat

As ever I was pleased to receive the latest issue of 'Manushi' No. 152, a few days back. What a sad reflection on the level of social/political/economic morality in society is mirrored through the first two articles, "The Battle Continues" and "Dreams Die First for Girls". One can only pray that your struggles for the model hawker market in Sewa Nagar ultimately succeed against all the negative forces aligned against you. Why is nothing easy in Bharat?

Furthermore, I want to bring a minor error in the text of "Gandhi's Paradox" by Lester Kurtz to your attention. On page 23 are listed the five vows included in Gandhiji's 'Ekadash Vrat'. The third one should surely read: *Asteya* (non-stealing), rather than *Satya* (non-stealing).

David Hopkins, via email ☐

Grandma

*My childhood's perennial sight:
Taciturn grandma rooting turnips
Muddy sluggish rivulets trickling down
Shilla's ashy slopes;
I could hear their dark whisper
Of melted snow
Burying Nana's earth-bound feet
Her patched old apron, a frozen leaf
Her cinnamon claw-hands
Smelling of sweet soft earth
Sometimes as I dug up
Passed secrets of creation,
She spared me a soiled flick
And growled dimly,
Hadi ko nahin kutro—
Yeh tumhe pakad legi...
Don't gnaw on bones —
It will catch you...*

Alicia L. Ermey



Women Bhakta Poets

*Should I marry and experience family life?
Why did you give me this charm and beauty?
Only good things should emanate from my lips
Grant me the boon of birthlessness?...*

*You can confiscate
money in hand;
can you confiscate
the bodys glory?...
To the shameless girl...
where's the need for cover and jewel?...*

*He bartered my heart,
looted my flesh,
claimed as tribute
my pleasure,
took over,
all of me.
I'm the woman of love
for my lord, white as jasmine...*

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