



## Responses to Manushi

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### Down to Earth

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I read the piece about Rajendra Singh and his wonderful work in Rajasthan in your issue No. 123. In fact, I was surprised when I read it. Being a first time reader of the magazine, I was expecting some sort of right wing feminist rhetoric, but instead I was able to read something that was down to earth and made great sense. I think I will continue to read your magazine in future.

**Leo Fernando,  
Chennai**

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### Strikes a Personal Chord

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Before I begin, I should probably warn you that I have never written a letter of this kind to the editor of a magazine. I don't read many magazines because magazines of some substance are difficult to find. My name is Ana Elisa de Campos Salles. I am a Brazilian. Last year, I graduated from Boston College. I came across your magazine quite by accident at the main library of Boston College, and enjoyed it so much, that I ended up reading all the issues they had.

Some months ago, I caught Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* on television. Then a friend of mine recommended that I read *The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy. My interest in India continued to grow from these two introductions (I am well aware of your views regarding the movie, but

if it aroused my curiosity and interest, some good did come from it). Romantic relationship aside, anyone with any sensibility could tell that *Fire* was controversial for other reasons, so I began to look up articles on the movie. I also began to read other articles in your magazine. I ended up reading the issue cover to cover, and other issues followed. I have also been reading a lot of Indian literature since Arundhati Roy's novel, as well as watching the few good Indian movies that are available to me here.

Before I began this concerted effort to know more about your country all I knew was India's geographic location as well as that of its capital, the fact that it had

acquired nuclear capabilities, had surpassed the billion mark in population, and whatever else happened to make the headlines over here. Unfortunately, the little news that does make it here tends to be negative.

In literature I completely avoid anything written about any country that is by someone not from there (unless they have lived there for a very long time). I like your magazine because, though a lot of your articles are about concerns regarding women's rights and how their representation and status may be improved, many more articles have to do with a myriad of other issues, such as the legitimate exercise of law, environmental issues, and nutrition.



These are just as important to me as an interested foreigner in educating myself about everyday life in India.

I enjoyed reading the articles regarding the Tehri Dam Project (issues 91 and 94), the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, and the interview with Iqbal Malik regarding her initiatives to make Delhi free of garbage (both in issue 105). People need to be made aware of the environmental issues as much as any others since these will also impact generations to come as much as reassessment of the constitution or the penal code. I also enjoyed the article *Riding a Tiger*, by Maj. Gen. Dipankar Banerjee (issue No. 107), as well as the interview with Sushma Swaraj (issue No. 121). Both allow a different and more experienced point of view to be heard. They are also extremely interesting for the insight they provide into traditional diet and medicine, as well as ailments. The articles on women's rights in Turkey (issues Nos. 100 and 104) were instructive. The many articles you have dedicated to Sita, her image and popularity, and the many interpretations of the *Ramayan* (issues 90,98, etc.) have helped me to better understand the psychology behind Hindu tradition and thought. I have also enjoyed reading the many film reviews you have published because they take care to include the facts that may form the basis for evaluating the film, as was the case for *Bandit Queen* (issue 84) and *Godmother* (issue 115). The article on *The Chess Players* (issue 92-93) was especially insightful for its historical placement and psychoanalysis.

I understand that you have come under a lot of criticism due to your articles, especially those that addressed *Fire*. I have seen this movie several times now, paying careful attention to different aspects of the movie each time. I have agreed

with many aspects of your criticism, while others I have kept in mind and continue processing. In any case, I must commend you for continuing the dialogue despite the criticism you received from many readers. I think it is admirable that you have gone out of your way to publish differing views on many issues.

Your magazine continues to captivate me because it is very personal in the way it treats the reader/subscriber. The dedication of space for a Readers' Forum, as well as the Responses to MANUSHI section, is indicative of that. But your responses to the letters and desire to know more of the readers' opinions indicate a genuine interest that I have not seen in other magazines.

My father worked for the Bank of Boston in Brazil, and was given the opportunity for transfer several times throughout Latin America. Because my maternal grandfather was Polish, I am slightly above average height and have blonde hair. I also inherited my paternal grandmother's green eyes. My father always placed me in international or American schools, so the curriculum was, for the most part, taught in English. As you may have already guessed, I quickly grew tired of having to explain myself after having stated my nationality. I have an American accent when I speak English, so even my Brazilian peers in school wouldn't believe I was Brazilian until we spoke in Portuguese. Your article "Who Am I? Living Identities vs. Acquired Ones" was very well written, and I could identify with many aspects of it. As you may well know, many general opinions about what a woman's place in society should be that are prevalent in India are very similar to those prevalent in Latin America.

The articles you wrote in issue 102, "Destroying Minds and Skills"

and "Dependent Yet Estranged" also hit a personal chord. The latter especially made me think of my mother. Although my mother has not had much opportunity for higher education, she is extremely intelligent, is fluent in five languages, and has travelled extensively. She learned English when she was in her early twenties, so she does speak with an accent, and like you, she does not pray, count, or joke in English. When I was very young and we were already living in Chile, my mother realized that my brother and I were in serious danger of losing our knowledge of Portuguese, since we spoke English in school and Spanish with our friends. So she made it a point to speak to us only in Portuguese, and to answer us only when we spoke to her in Portuguese. This might sound harsh, but it worked, and I have not stopped thanking her for the valuable skill she preserved in me.

**Ana Elisa de Campos Salles,  
Boston, USA**

*We are glad that you took the trouble to write at length about what you find worthwhile in MANUSHI. We get a lot of letters of praise, but yours is concrete and illuminating. I hope you will continue providing us regular feedback, including when you differ with MANUSHI'S approach or when you want to make suggestions for improvement.* -Editor □

### **When You Write to Us**

In all your correspondence with MANUSHI, including your subscription renewals, please write your full address in block letters clearly. This helps us respond to you promptly.