



Yes, She is My Sister

Who am I? I am what you are. You are what I have for years desired to become. I found a copy of **Manushi** on the desk of a colleague in my department. I am busy with my thesis, my experiments, lectures, seminars and so many other things. But I have to interrupt my thesis work and write to you first...

"Gargi...one of many" is, in many respects, my story. I am also a doctor, who, in these 28 years, has seen and suffered much and also shared the sufferings of others. The sisters of my class read *Manorama* and *Grihshobha* but what is the relevance of a "recipes special issue" to those who have to strive painfully for every morsel of food? When I looked at **Manushi**, I wondered whether I was having a dream...

I keep writing about what I see, hear, know. Some of my writings have been printed but most of them are not worth printing. Today, on seeing **Manushi**, I feel I can write for **Manushi**, and reach my thoughts to my sisters, so that the blame for woman's oppression is not placed on woman herself...

When people have seen me weeping for another woman, they have often asked: "Is she your sister?" Today, when I read **Manushi**, I felt as if my voice was echoing from every corner of the country and the world: "Yes, she is my sister!"

Some time ago, when I was posted in Ghaziabad, I was returning from the market one evening. It was raining heavily. Suddenly, I saw a sight which made my heart and mind shrink in horror. A woman wrapped in rags, was picking out a few

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grains of rice from the overflowing drainpipe of a house, and eating them. A stream of fire seemed to flow down my throat, my tongue felt scorched. In a country where such terrible physical tortures still exist, do we have the right to cry about our mental torments? I went to a nearby shop and got some food packed for her. People started collecting and the whisper went round: "Is this lady doctor related to that beggar woman?" Well, if not her sister in this birth, she must have been her sister in a previous birth...

Dr Saaya, Meerut

(translated from Hindi)

Developing International Relations

...We were very happy to receive recently issue No. 10 of **Manushi**. Your magazine is one of the most popular in our women's liberation library here in Detroit. It really helps us feminists in America to get a world view of the women's liberation movement.

Indeed, developing international relations with feminists worldwide is one of the most important activities of our women's liberation committee here. Women in every country on earth are raising profound questions of freedom and new human relations. These questions cannot be "left to the side" but need to be developed as central to a philosophy of liberation. We consider this task to be as critically important as the movement demonstrations and picket lines in which we participate...

Mariana Louise,

News & Letters, USA

Anti-Women Jokes

...I am enclosing two newspaper cuttings which I found quite obnoxious: "On Delhi's cocktail party circuit J.K.

Galbraith says: 'The characteristic of an underdeveloped country is their overdeveloped women,' " and "In Bombay, inaugurating the 30th biennial conference of Maharashtra state women's council ...Mr Hidayatullah regaled the audience with some typically jokes at the expense of women." (Times of India, April 3).

That a noted economist like Galbraith should make such a remark, when it is well-known that women in underdeveloped countries have lower chances of even bare survival! As for Hidayatullah's "regaling the audience" with sexist jokes, it is more the rule than the exception that while somebody is inaugurating an event which is supposedly for encouraging women into the mainstream, he should revert to age-old jokes and make a mockery of the whole thing.

It may be a good idea to start a regular column in **Manushi** to draw attention to such remarks...

K. Jayanthi, Bombay

One Sided Thinking?

I have been reading **Manushi** and also showing it to my women comrades. It seems that Vasudha Dhagamwar in her article has emphasized the fact that Savitri was put into jail because she is a girl. She has mentioned that girls from middle class families also wear boys' clothes but they are not imprisoned, which means that Savitri was put in jail because she is a labourer girl. However, Vasudha Dhagamwar has not laid enough this very important point. This shows one sided thinking which is visible in those who raise women's question..•

History shows that when the means of production came into the hands of a few, and society became divided into classes, the division of labour distanced

women from production and made them into the property of men..Only in a society free from exploitation of all kinds,where production is collectively controlled, and private property does not exist, can women be freed from oppression...so the women's struggle is linked with every struggle.

Roysha Singh, Bhopal
(translated from Hindi)

We feel that this criticism is misplaced as Vasudha did emphasize the fact that Savitri was imprisoned because she was a poor, working girl. On the other hand, it is also a fact that no boy, rich or poor, is likely to feel the need to wear girls' clothes as a protection from violence or to better his chances of procuring employment.

Historical studies have not yet conclusively revealed the origins of women's oppression or of violence against women, though many theories have been advanced. We agree that hope of an exploitation-free society lies only in the many ongoing struggles against oppression and injustice.

Understanding The Reality Of Women's Lives

I was happy to see the article women in village Punjab— "Family life— the unequal deal"— in No. 11, 1982. It is this kind of detailed research — the measuring of work hours, food intake, and the like — that is needed to understand the reality of women's lives. It will also help us discover concrete solutions to the problems women face. Too often, people speak of lives and women's problems in broad generalities.

I was particularly struck by the discussion about the relative food intake of men and women. The distribution of cooked food is clearly within the control of women, yet women still receive less than their fair share. This means that women themselves participate in their own exploitation, though of course there is also pressure from outside. This realization should not lead to accusations against women for their stupidity ; rather, it indicates the depth of the control that society has over women. The consciousness of men, and more

importantly, of women, has come under society's power...

Moreover I know in my own heart that even I and the other readers of Manushi are not above such mind control. We all cheat ourselves in our efforts to show our love to our fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Worse yet, we do not balance this with similar sacrifices for our fellow women, our mothers, sisters, daughters and friends. We always assume that they will also make similar sacrifices, whether it is putting up with less formal service at meal time or sharing in less of the food. Don't our womenfolk deserve as much respect from us as do our menfolk ? Understanding the role that society's brainwashing plays in our exploitation, we get an important indicator of where to begin changing society. We must begin by changing our own understanding, our own beliefs and our own ideals. The ideal of woman as incense—the more she burns, the sweeter is life for those around her—must be abolished from our own minds and behaviour. We must create our own new ideals and learn to live by them.

Hazel Lutz, Ranchi **Making Possible The Impossible**

...I was born in a Sikh family settled in Patna. As a child, when I saw the ten gurus being worshipped, I used to feel surprised that the gurus who were reformers in their own times, have been made into deities now. From my elders' talk, it appeared that everything happens according to god's will, but whenever any unhappy event took place, it was explained as the fruit of our sins in some previous birth...

...I still remember the day in 1972 when the huts near my house were set ablaze. In a while, Chinta's mother, who worked as a domestic servant in our house, came weeping because all the things in her hut had been reduced to ashes. She was cursing her fate and saying that this had happened as a punishment for her sins in a previous incarnation. I was stunned...She used to work very hard washing dishes in several houses, for which she got a wage of only Rs 25 a month. Her husband used to forcibly snatch away even this meagre wage, get drunk and then beat her and the

children. I used to wonder how she endured all this. Gradually, I began to understand that fatalism, superstition and religion help to perpetuate these gross injustices against women...

In 1976, after I passed the intermediate examination, my family began the search for a suitable bridegroom for me. On the one hand, they were convinced that I would definitely marry whoever I was destined to marry, but on the other hand, instead of waiting for destiny to unfold itself, they were busy exhibiting me in Kanpur, Lucknow, Delhi, Hyderabad, Jamshedpur, Ramgarh and so on. Sometimes my interest in studies became an obstacle, sometimes my short height, my simple unfashionable way of dressing or my unwillingness to accept the restrictions imposed on girls. Time kept passing, and I passed BA as well as a course in business management. When I joined MA, people kept telling my parents that the difficulty in finding me a husband was because I was studying too much. I was infuriated by such remarks, and also fed up with the search for a groom. My father arranged for me to go and be seen by a boy in Chandigarh, but I refused to go. I said I was not interested in getting married, and told my sister who is two years younger than me, to go in my place if she wanted to.

At the same time, I became friendly with a classmate in whom I found a support for my way of thinking. He was a science student who had switched over to philosophy, in search of a rational morality. We both took a special paper in ethics and tried to understand the present social problems in the context of scientific values. Our common values deepened our friendship into love and we decided to get married. After a year long struggle, we got married by a legal ceremony without dowry and without any religious rituals. Our parents, relatives and friends attended the marriage.

I feel we need a revolution in thought and morality if we are to free ourselves from false values and superstitions which we are clinging to in the name of Indian civilization, culture and tradition. I feel that

women will play a crucial role in this revolution, to work for which is the aim of my and my husband's life...

Kanwaljeet, Patna
(translated from Hindi)

Strong In Struggle

I enjoyed reading your magazine very much, especially the extracts from Amrita Pritam's book. As a lady doctor, I have found that we women are the stronger, not the weaker sex. There are many uneducated labourer women in villages and towns, who are bold enough to try and solve their own problems.

In my neighbourhood there are two cousin sisters Saeeda and Najma who are married to two brothers. One brother is deaf and dumb. Saeeda, who is married to him, does not like him, and carries on with Najma's husband. Najma has to fight with Saeeda and drag away her husband from her. Najma is even willing to exchange husbands but until then, she will not let an illicit affair go on.

I wish I could fly to your office and describe to you the lives of many of my female patients. My motto has been "Break traditions!"

Shailbala Motiwala, Ahmedabad

Knowledge Is Power

...I found issue No. 10 very good I very much liked the article on Amrita Pritam... I have distributed copies among teachers and students of my college....I am thinking of getting my medical friends to start health and sex education for girls in schools, because knowledge of the body is power...

I feel there is a need to involve professional women in the women's movement. I intend to organize a seminar in our college for this purpose. It will be difficult because many students feel they have not been discriminated against in any way. ..On March 7, we had an exhibition of posters, songs, and a fantastic skit. Also, a protest demonstration in front of one of the houses where a young woman was burnt to death for dowry.

For March 8, a friend and I wrote a letter to the newspaper on the exploitation of women. It was very well received by many of my college mates but one boy in

my class told me that if I go on at this rate of talking about exploitation, no one will marry me!!!

Geraldine Devaraj, Bangalore
Ongoing Struggle

In Manushi No. 10 there were two letters related to the rape incident in Hazaribagh last June, when six boys attacked and overpowered 72 girls and two teachers. When the nuns asked the girls why they could not successfully defend themselves, the girls, all illiterate tribals, replied: "The jungle is very familiar to us. We anticipate attack by animals but not by men." The girls are too poor to possess shoes so they could not use these as weapons.

They were unprepared, yet they fought back. Fortunately, the sisters registered a



police case and the culprits were arrested. Some of them were college students, and a rumour circulated in the fowti that the convent would be attacked by students. But it is encouraging to know that the girls have not given up going to the forest. Now they go armed with scythes. But the publicity has meant a decline in enrolment of girl students in the Grihini training programme at Hazaribagh this year. In the tribal belt of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh many girls receive a useful education through the Grihini training programme. This is certainly not appreciated by people who could get the girls as cheap labour before. The Hazaribagh case is not an isolated one. Boys try to harass girls and their sponsors at many Grihini centres. Once they entered a centre and one of them held a nun at knife point while another raped a teacher. In spite of this, the nuns

did not cow down and the programme continues. Let us give courage and support to those who are fighting this menace.

J.B.T.N., New Delhi

Film Portrayal Of Rape

...I have just received issue No. 11 of Manushi. It is excellent. The discussion on the new divorce bill is very revealing. A lot more women should know the different angles involved. Would you allow me to summarize it briefly, giving Manushi as the source, and try to publish it in a newspaper?

...You may have read about the rape and murder of a nurse, Barnali Dutta, in Cooch Behar. The girl was prevented from crying out by a sticking plaster pasted on her mouth. This was the method used by the rapists in the award winning film "Adalat aur ek ti mey." Letters in the Amrita Bazar Patrika have been condemning such films, saying that they incite ruffians and teach them new techniques. I think this is unfair. I thought the film was a sensitive portrayal of the vulnerability of young women. It gives an idea how unprotected women are and how they must learn to protect themselves. How can we say that ruffians would not have had the idea of using sticking plaster unless they had seen it in a film? In fact it is possible that the film maker got the idea from a real life incident. More such incidents may have received publicity after the release of the film. Unless a proper study and analysis of rapes is done, I don't think a bold and well-made film can be condemned outright. Those who condemn such films are really offering the reactionary solution that women should remain within the four walls of home, eternally subject to the domination in guise of protection, of father, husband, brother...

Vimal Balasubrahmanyam, Calcutta
Nepalese Women In India

...I am sending you an extract from Nepali Ekta, a monthly bulletin of All India Nepalese Unity Society: "...There is a rising incidence of crimes against Nepalese women in India. Organised gangs traffic in poor Nepalese girls and: today, most of the prostitutes in the big cities of India are Nepalese girls trapped

by adverse socio-economic conditions and at times by physical abduction and coercion...In recent months, the involvement of the "guardians of law and order" in the rape and abduction of Nepalese women has become apparent...

Last January, a 22 year old Nepalese student Kunikip Maya was kidnapped from Nepal and sold into prostitution in Delhi. She managed to escape from the vice den only to fall into the clutches of another rascal from Rajasthan. Her whereabouts are still unknown. Another Nepalese woman was raped and abducted by the officials of Haryana Roadways at Ambala but this case was buried in the files of the Nepalese embassy and the government of India...

The latest reported instance of organized crime against Nepalese women is that of nine Nepalese including three young women and two children, who had reserved railway berths for April 13 from "New Delhi to Gorakhpur on the Lucknow Mail. In the hurry, they boarded a wrong coach on the same train. At Hapur railway station, a TT with four policemen approached them and unceremoniously kicked out the four male members of the group with all the luggage, while confining the women and children inside. At that moment the train moved off, leaving the men behind. The men went all the way to Lucknow, Gorakhpur, and their village in Nepal in search of the women and children, but all in vain. They have been running from pillar to post through the corridors of power in New Delhi but have been fobbed off with empty promises. As it is feared that the railway officials and the police are in connivance with the organized gangs trafficking in women and children, nothing short of a high level judicial enquiry can help trace out the victims..."

Hsila Yami, Delhi

Divorce With Dignity

...I have been following the details of the Hindu Marriage Law Amendment bill introduced in parliament in 1981, 'and I want to express my views on it. I feel that among all the views expressed by different women's organizations in issue No. 11, Manushi's views seem the most balanced but I beg to differ on one point. The bill

should not be introduced for women only. Such a clause would be an acknowledgement of the fact that women tend to be more emotionally dependent on men. Both men and women should respect the sanctity of marriage but the moment either party feels that the sanctity has been broken for whatever reason, the marriage no longer has any meaning. The best the other party can do in such a situation is dissolve the marriage in the most dignified manner possible. Since the majority of Indian women are economically dependent on their husbands, the government should see that proper maintenance laws are made and implemented...

...If divorce on the ground of irretrievable breakdown is made available to both men and women, a woman will not be faced with the temptation to cling on to a meaningless marriage for fear of what the world may say. Instead, she will think more positively, find her own identity, claim two-thirds of the man's salary as maintenance, and give herself and her children a better, more healthy atmosphere in which to live. This would be a healthy parting between two nice people who just couldn't get along, and the man would not be tempted to bring any false charges against the woman, which is what usually happens, creating bad blood, and spoiling the children's lives...

I again stress that Manushi and other women's organizations should suggest proper implementation of the maintenance laws instead of trying to prevent the bill from being passed...

Meeta Sarkar, Agra

Stop Misrepresentation

Enclosed please find a random sample of the tourist literature available to foreigners at the government of India tourist office, New Delhi, and distributed by them worldwide. This letter also applies to publicity material of Air India and private sector tourism organizations and to tourism department posters.

As you can see, various government tourist organizations, especially the ITO and ITDC have been advertising India abroad with a great many photos of Indian women...So pervasive are the "come-

hither" illustrations of women's bodies and faces that it almost amounts to a clear promise that males abroad who feel attracted to these photos, if they should spend the money to fly here, especially by Air India, will have an easy time meeting Indian women, and, I am afraid I must say by the nature of the pictures, striking up sexual relationships with them. The women are always young, well dressed, "respectable" looking, almost always alone and in lonely spots, with neither children nor men present, always beautiful, at least to the western eye, which is not as averse to dark skin and slimmestf as are Hindi film makers, always in languid and alluring poses with eyes looking directly at the viewer, and usually look wealthy and leisured as if they have all the free time in the world to spend with foreign men rather than at work...

I think the tourist office, ITDC and Air India should be pressured into stopping this false advertising... If they must have women in the Indian travel posters and brochures, they should at least show them honestly as inaccessible, constantly guarded by aggressive males, usually surrounded by children, often working, and all ages, not just young and beautiful...

Mathew Negru, Nepal

Organizing At Work

...My friends and I have read **Manushi** and are very impressed by it. We found it very useful in our group discussions. It helps us understand our working environment better, especially the treatment of women workers by our male co-workers and employers. In the course of promoting mutual self-help programmes in poor urban communities, we have found that the consciousness of and the struggle for the rights of women is very necessary.

Therefore we would like to subscribe to your magazine. Unfortunately, we are all girls working in electronics factories, and are unable to afford more than two subscriptions for the whole group. But we have spread the word about the existence of your magazine, and sincerely hope many more women here will subscribe to **Manushi**...

Tracy Pereira, Malaysia