

Responses to Manushi

Judge the Song on Merit

This is with reference to the article *Contextualising Vande Mataram* (MANUSHI 111). I was not surprised by Irfan Ahmed's anti-Bankim attack in the guise of contextualising *Vande Mataram*. I was surprised that no one at MANUSHI detected the flawed logic Mr Ahmed used to condemn the song. An article with such lopsided logic should never have been published, least of all in MANUSHI. I have come to respect MANUSHI more than any other Indian publication in English in India or the US. Mr Ahmed used an age-old tactic—a clear strategy of “if you can't attack the message, shoot the messenger.” Nothing in Mr Ahmed's article says anything about the song itself or its meaning. Instead he limits his criticism to ‘Guilt by Association.’ Even if Bankim Chandra was as anti-Muslim as Mr Ahmed says, it does not change the meaning of the song. And just because the BJP associated itself with the song does not make it anti-Muslim. Yes, context is important, especially so when something is taken out of context to twist its meaning. In this instance exactly the opposite is the case. Mr Ahmed has put his criticism in the context of Bankim Chandra's views to twist the meaning of the song. This is innuendo. It would be best to translate the song into English and see if it can apply to the aspirations of any motherland – *Mataram*. If it says anything against Islam (or any

other religion), then, and only then, reject it.

Judging the song by Bankim Chandra's views or where he included the song has nothing to do with its meaning or sentiment. In my view, the real problem the opponents of the song have is that it is in Sanskrit—the language of the Hindu scriptures. That is what bothers people like Mr Ahmed. I have always maintained in all my writings that the rights of the minority are the responsibility of the majority. Muslims have as much right to live and prosper in India as Hindus or Christians and every other Indian. But trashing *Vande Mataram* based on Bankim Chandra's views takes us back to dangerous policies of appeasement.

Personal views or associations of any artist, be it a writer or a jour-

nalist, do not diminish or influence the value of his or her creation. Respected revered and idolized writer and journalist H.L. Mencken was considered the icon of American journalism. And then it was ‘discovered’ that he was an anti-Semite. Do his personal views negate all the profound things he wrote and said as a great journalist? If Omar Khayyam or Khalil Gibran were anti-Hindu and if a communal Muslim organisation adopted one of their poems as inspiration, would that poem be less beautiful, less meaningful? The most glaring example of this ‘shoot the messenger’ tactic is the Jewish opposition to the music of German composer Wagner, who held anti-Semitic views and was Hitler's favourite composer. For some years, Jews in Israel banned Wagner's concerts for these two reasons. Recently they recognised the folly of mixing his admirers (being Hitler's favourite) or his views with his music. The same test should be applied to *Vande Mataram*. Judge it on its merit—its meaning, not by its associations, or by fears of some imaginary anti-Muslim sub text. Please publish the song with its English translation.

D.V. Gokhale, Los Angeles, USA

We Kashmiri Pandits

I feel you have consistently ignored the plight of Kashmiri Pandits in your various articles on Kashmir. Though I am a Pandit, I



ANOOP KAMATH

Vande Mataram

*Mother, I bow to thee!
Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Cool with thy winds of delight
Dark fields waving, Mother of might,
Mother free.*

*Glory of moonlight dreams
Over thy branches and lordly streams,
Clad in thy blossoming trees,
Mother, giver of ease,
Laughing low and sweet!
Mother, I kiss thy feet,
Speaker sweet and low!
Mother, to thee I bow.*

*Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,
When the swords flash out in seventy million hands
And seventy million voices roar
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?
With many strenghts who art mighty and stored,
To thee, I call, Mother and Lord!*

*Thou who savest, arise and save!
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave
Back from plain and sea
And shook herself free.*

*Thou art wisdom, thou art law,
Thou our heart, our soul, our breath,
Thou the love divine, the awe
In our hearts that conquers death.
Thine the strength that nerves the arm,
Thine the beauty, thine the charm.
Every image made divine
In our temples is but thine.*

*Thou art Durga, lady and Queen,
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,
And the Muse a hundred-toned.
Pure and perfect without peer,
Mother, lend thine ear.*

*Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark of hue, O candid—fair
In thy soul, with jewelled hair
And the glorious smile divine,
Loveliest of all earthly lands,
Showering wealth from well-stored hands!
Mother, Mother mine!
Mother sweet, I bow to thee
Mother great and free!*

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee
(English rendering by Sri Aurobindo)

वन्दे मातरम्

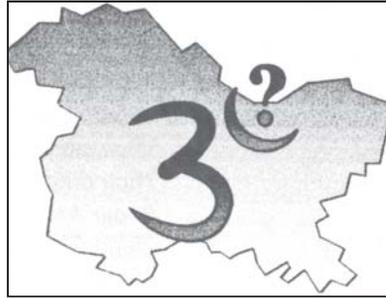
सुजलां सुफलां मलयज-शीतलां
शस्य-श्यामलां मातरम्।।
शुभ्र-ज्योत्स्ना-पुलकित-यामिनीम्
फुल्ल-कुसुमित-द्रुमदल-शोभिनीम्
सुहासिनीं सुमधुर-भाषिणीम्
सुखदां वरदां मातरम्।।
कोटि-कोटि-कण्ठ-कल-कल-निनाद-कराले
असंख्य-कोटि-भुजै धृत-खरकरवाले
अबला कैनो मा ऐतो बोले
बहुबल-धारिणीं नमामि तारिणीं
रिपुदल-वारिणीं मातरम्।।
तुमि विद्या तुमि धर्म
तुमि हृदि तुमि मर्म त्वं हि प्राणाः शरीरे।।

बाहुते तुमि मा शक्ति
हृदये तुमि मा भक्ति
तोमारइ प्रतिमा गडि मन्दिरे-मन्दिरे।।
त्वं हि दुर्गा दशप्रहरण-धारिणीं
कमला कमल-दल-विहारिणीं
वाणी विद्यादायिनी नमामि त्वां
नमामि कमलां अमलां अतुलां
सुजलां सुफलां मातरम्,
वन्दे मातरम्।
श्यामलां सरलां सुस्मितां भूषितां
धरणी भरणीं मातरम्।।

- बंकिम चन्द्र चटर्जी

am not a BJP sympathiser and there are many like me. All my family members—Mamas, Masis, uncles, grandparents—all of them except for one have had to leave their age-old houses suddenly and settle down in various colonies on the outskirts of Delhi or Bombay, or leave for abroad to live with their relatives. Most of them feel very nostalgic about their homeland. And they are rightfully hurt and angry. Though I do not in any way defend the distortions of Brahminism, I also know that though we are a Brahmin family, we also had to struggle to get an education and to get a decent meal every day. Most of us are teachers, doctors, engineers – perhaps in part a consequence of our historic high status. But we are equally desirous of humane treatment, just as any other human being would be—low or upper caste, educated or not, privileged or not. I've found hostility prevalent amongst most progressive and feminist groups towards the sufferings of Kashmiri Pandits. I remember in Saheli they talked about the plight of raped Kashmiri Muslim women, but when I said we should condemn rape on all Kashmiri women, both Hindu and Muslim, I was sidetracked. Even otherwise I felt no one wanted to talk about the Pandits.

Now because of the Pandit-BJP nexus I also feel uncomfortable raising the issue. Some of the problems like housing and the salaries of government employees that the BJP took up were very urgent and the Pandits are thankful to the BJP. I would like to see others take up the issue of Kashmiri Pandits and show solidarity with them by working for them. Why should, for example,



people from Andhra Pradesh not go to Kashmir villages and work for the development of the tribals there, just as Kashmiri Pandits like me are working in the villages of Andhra Pradesh? I feel good about not being too regional in my decisions. My identity is certainly not only that of a born Pandit, I am also a woman, an Indian, a mother and so on. And somewhere I am half German, too!

I think this is one sure way of bringing back normalcy to Kashmir. The wrongdoings of Army personnel and the Border Security Force (BSF) can be alleviated by making them superfluous. But let me say clearly, I am very scared of Islamic fundamentalists, especially their treatment of women. A plebiscite is meaningful once conditions are normal again.

Asha Kachru, Ranjole, A. P.

You have made a very valid criticism. We are only too aware of this limitation and we will try to rectify it soon.

Editor

Judging a Mother's Right

I received MANUSHI 111 today and was quite disappointed when I did not find any comment on the recent Supreme Court judgement about a mother's right as a 'Natural Guardian' for her children. I was waiting for expert opinion from MANUSHI since 19th February. However, you chose to give more emphasis to the

debate over *Fire* and lesbianism which you yourself termed as an 'empty debate' and "phoney issue" in the last two issues of MANUSHI.

Anyway, I have some doubts regarding this judgement and its effectiveness, specially after an article in the *Sunday Times of India Review* of 9th May, 1999 by Pinki Virani. The article relates the judgement to several issues like single motherhood, legitimacy of children, etc. It claims that the judgement "puts women on an equal footing with the man... gives an impetus to single mothers unwed or otherwise." I sincerely doubt this euphoria. As far as I understand (though my information is limited to just newspaper and TV reports) the recent judgement only talks about section 6(a) of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act. The provision regarding illegitimate children is dealt with in section 6(b) which remains as it was. Besides I wonder if the judgement actually corrects the discriminatory parts of the Act in full—what about section 6(b)(c), 7, and 9? They are equally discriminatory against women. They remain unaffected, don't they?

I read in a back issue of MANUSHI that MANUSHI had filed a petition against these provisions in 1986. What has been the outcome of that petition? I request that you publish an article in MANUSHI which explains which one of the different opinions expressed over the judgement gives the correct view. Either there is some media misreporting or I am at fault in understanding the judgement and its effect.

Atoorva Sinha, Lucknow, U.P.

We assumed that since the Supreme Court judgement you mention had been reported and commented upon very widely in the press there was nothing more to say on the subject. However,

following your request we have asked a lawyer to cover the aspects that you indicate caused confusion and certain related issues.

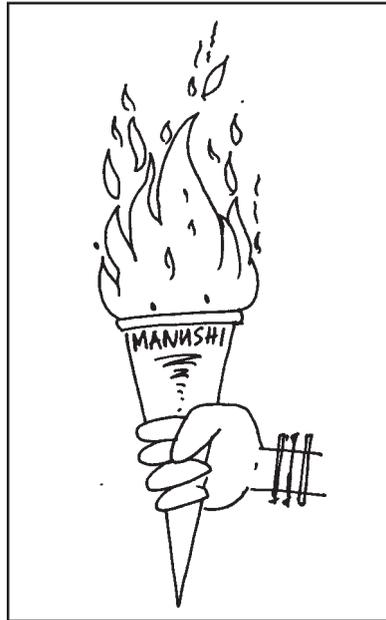
Editor

Old Supporter's Hope

Seeing the usefulness of your magazine, I suggested my daughter subscribe to it. In fact I told many others to subscribe because it is a very good magazine about women and society. I have always been a supporter of the women's cause. I formed an organisation to help their cause in 1986. It was named *Adarsha Mahila Kendra*. The welfare of children and aged persons was also part of it. I even started a magazine for their cause. I was terribly upset seeing so many atrocities committed against women, children and the aged without reason. I could not tolerate girls being killed, etc. I named my magazine **Gowthami**. But all my efforts have led to disappointing results.

I have cut out and preserved a number of articles which your editor Madhu Kishwar wrote and published in various newspapers and magazines. I even welcomed the *New Woman* magazine published by Mrs Hema Malini. Unfortunately that magazine is meant only for the rich and other people in high society, not the welfare of ordinary women, children and the elderly.

In my humble assessment, women are themselves responsible for the increase in atrocities on them. We have no respect for our culture and our love for foreign ideas has increased. We are witnessing an unheard of increase in domestic violence. Parents are unable to get good alliances for their daughters. Each day we have a newer problem to face and we do not know how to protect our women and children. Every day divorce and maintenance cases are increasing.



Your magazine helps create much needed awareness among women. It is fearless. It is bold in bringing out facts which can improve the lot of women. I am old (in my eighties) and I wish to see the day when our women are respected and treated well in our society. I am trying to introduce your journal to all men and women who seriously think about these issues.

M.R. Sharma, Bangalore

Dealing With Sexuality

This is in response to the article, *Women, Sex and Marriage*, in MANUSHI 99, by Madhu Kishwar. I have for years lived the reality you discuss—feigning desire when I was revolted, suppressing desire, becoming frigid, and then pretending to have transcended sexual desire and claiming to be celibate.

The sexual act is validation of self at a very fundamental level. To use one's body as a bargaining chip may achieve something but it also distorts the one psyche, the one body, the one life you have – and nothing quite makes up for that. Any attempt to make a virtue of this enrages me.

What we need to do is to understand and deal with sexuality rather than commodify and negotiate with it.

There was a time when talking about sexuality particularly lesbian, could have damaged the women's agenda. I think it is time to review the whole issue for all concerned. Lesbians require to rethink some of their unnecessarily, even ridiculously, aggressive postures. They should work to formulate wider currency arguments on relevant forums. Closed circuit reflections on the complexity of sexual experience are unlikely to help much. I feel its time for heterosexual women to review if the carefully constructed insulations are still necessary. Secondly its high time we evolved friendship across the barriers which separate us. We really don't need another variant of caste, do we?

Shreya, via e-mail

Too Depressing?

MANUSHI carries such depressing stories and articles about women, society and about the environment that I do not wish to renew my subscription at least for some time.

I have stories of women who have been achievers, who have been able to rise above the usual constraints and restrictions imposed by society, and have been role models for other women in their areas of achievement. If you are interested in publishing such stories, do let me know.

Sushila Rao, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

You are welcome to add cheer to MANUSHI by submitting stories about women achievers. We have in fact, carried such pieces in the past and would be happy to carry more of such realistic accounts of the achievements of successful women and men who have made a meaningful contribution to society.

Madhu Kishwar □