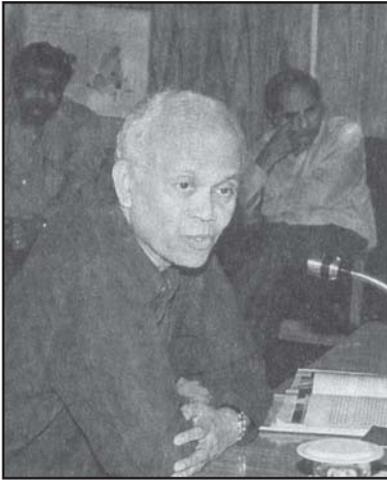


Responses to Manushi

Need More Such Indians



The July-August issue of MANUSHI made interesting reading from beginning to end. Your interview of Dr. Mashelkar was like a beacon of hope. The youth of our country are aping the West indiscriminately, politicians are only interested in feathering their nests, and fundamentalists are determined to divide the nation along communal lines. We desperately need more Indians like Dr. Mashelkar who are willing to work with a broader vision and who think positively.

I also enjoyed *Pochamma's Goddess*. It has the makings of a powerful film.

Dr. A. Lobo Gajiwala, Mumbai

A Disappointed Supporter

I did not want to write this because I do not wish to cause you discomfort.

But since you insist on knowing the reasons for my discontinuing the bulk sale of MANUSHI, I am speaking out my mind to you. For a long time, despite MANUSHI being made available at my friend's bookshop, who sells exclusively progressive and alternative literature, I found very rarely four copies being sold, most of the time only two or so. Anyhow, I was bearing the cost of the unsold copies all these years because of my commitment to MANUSHI and alternative literature and magazines. For some years I have been very much frustrated over what is happening around me, especially the growing religious fundamentalism and globalization. Being neither an activist, nor an intellectual, I felt very uneasy. I felt like putting a stop to selling MANUSHI. My aged friend, out of dejection and personal problems, also gave up the shop.

My love for MANUSHI dates back to 1980, when it was edited by a MANUSHI collective with a Marxist bias, with a variety of news about struggles. From that time till today, MANUSHI has changed very much – from collective editing to your single editorship, strongly communicating your philosophy and worldly perspective. I have no objection to that per se, but I feel that the democratic space for different political views is fast shrinking because of your strong commitment to your own line of thinking.

Then, the views of NRIs are

finding their way into MANUSHI. I strongly oppose the NRI culture. I cannot even tolerate these people talking about Indian culture, tradition, religion and human rights, after they have ditched their fellow country men, the poor people of this country, out of selfish greed, giving intelligent ruses for their migration. They are the enemies of the common people of this country, helping imperialist powers, such as the USA, to bulldoze third world countries, their economies and their people. They are intelligent criminals and white collar mercenaries. They can vent their views in courts, but do not deserve any space in an alternative journal like MANUSHI. Maybe MANUSHI depends on their subscriptions and donations for its survival.

I am an independent Marxist. I strongly support feminism and Dalit movements, but I am dead against the Maneka Gandhi type of animal rights and vegetarianism, as I see them as covert moves made by brahminical elements and revivalists of religious fundamentalism, trying to gain currency in the name of compassion and health. I am a staunch anti-traditionalist and despise the inhuman caste system imposed on us by the culture and religion of this land, which are being paraded by western countries and cultures as worthy of emulation.

Actually the long journey of MANUSHI dampened my enthusiasm, but your genuine concern for human

rights, for the problems of the people of Punjab and Kashmir, made me continue my support for MANUSHI. My own incapacity to become an activist and my own frustrations dampened my enthusiasm further. However, I will be watching the progress of MANUSHI as a subscriber and I hope it will become a source of inspiration to many who oppose oppressive systems and fight for an egalitarian society.

M.S.P. Rao, Nellore

MANUSHI's Reply

I am really grateful to you for taking time to provide us with such a detailed feedback on what you have found lacking in MANUSHI. Far from causing me "discomfort," I feel very touched by your having continued trying to reach MANUSHI to a larger audience, even when you were not happy with many of the changes in MANUSHI. I am very pleased that you continue to subscribe to MANUSHI. You need not feel dis-heartened that very few copies of MANUSHI sold from your friend's bookshop because most other outlets which stock MANUSHI do manage to sell all the copies they order.

*I would like to clarify some basic facts with you. Firstly, in the early years of MANUSHI, though we mistakenly used the term, there was nothing resembling a collective. A number of people attended meetings claiming to belong to a MANUSHI collective, as and when they pleased, but did no work whatsoever. The myth of the collective nearly killed MANUSHI. I have even written on this in my article: **A Horror of 'Isms: Why I do not Call Myself a Feminist** (see **Off the Beaten Track: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women**, OUP, New Delhi, 1999). The bulk of editorial work was done by Ruth Vanita and me. In fact, today, MANUSHI gets a far larger range of articles, which bring more diverse*

viewpoints into MANUSHI. Also, many more people are involved in supporting MANUSHI., including those in the Editorial Advisory Group.

As far as NRIs are concerned, you and I differ in our assessment of their role. I consider them to have the potential to be important catalysts for change and improvements in India, just as the Non Resident Chinese have been for China. That is why we have even formalized that arrangement by including a number of NRI MANUSHI friends and supporters in our Editorial Advisory Group.

If my writing appears to predominate – the reason is simply that we don't get enough good writing. Since the last several years Nehru Memorial Library Archives has been taking all our papers – including rejected manuscripts – for their social science research archives. Anyone can go through those and see what an awful lot of junk we get by way of articles. This was the main reason for closing down MANUSHI in Hindi. During the last 22 years, I have often thought of closing down MANUSHI in English due to a paucity of good material.

Personally, the compulsion to fill so many pages with my own writing in MANUSHI has been very taxing for me. It allows me no time to do other writing. You would have noticed that as the quality of articles being submitted to us is improving, my own articles are getting shorter.



I hope no matter what our differences, we will continue to have a common position on issues like combating illiteracy, as well as the rights of Dalits and other vulnerable groups in our society. As regards MANUSHI having a Marxist bias in the early years, I have made it repeatedly clear that we have avoided all "isms" — including feminism and Marxism. However, MANUSHI was, and continues to be, pro-poor and prioritizes the rights of the marginalized groups in our society.

Some people see that as Gandhian, some interpret it as Marxian. We, however, prefer to avoid "isms," prisms, and instead look at each issue clearly on its merit.

Editor

The Joy of Sharing

Madhu Kishwar's article *When Giving and Receiving Become One* (MANUSHI 116) was magnificent and brought back several wonderful memories from my childhood. In the late fifties, during my way to school, I used to see a countless number of people getting a drink of buttermilk at a Vazhiyambalam (a wayfarer's hall, literally, a "temple on the way") which was set up by a local Naayar family. Next to it was a tall pigeon shelter set up by a Konkan Brahmin family where rice was spread for the birds. My mother (bless her soul) oftentimes had so many visitors with whom she shared the food and that she herself never got to eat before 2 p.m. She was the last one to eat. Often she had very little of the curry left for her. In my ignorance, I used to get angry at the people who made this happen, but now I am becoming more like my mother and understand her better.

Every month there were many festivals on which people were fed, both at home and in the temples, for



days on end. Almost every day, especially Saturdays, many beggars were given food, clothing, some money or a whole coconut. Sadhus could come in on any day and were treated with special respect. We have a saying, "*Kotuthaal Kollathum kittum*," which means "If you give, if you donate, you will get back even in Kollam (a city, an anonymous place)."

Many westerners picture Indians as an uncaring people. This stereotype is reinforced by the work of missionaries such as Mother Teresa. But my childhood memories are full of hundreds of giving people. Thank you for offering many insights on this point and reminding us of who we really are.

Mohan, Missoula, U.S.A.

No To MANUSHI

I was once a subscriber to MANUSHI but do not care to renew my subscription, though, of course, I am very much concerned about the suffering of Indian women, and your championing their cause is unparalleled by any other women's magazine. However, I have a strong feeling that Indian women would have been in a much better position but for the 16 long years of demonic rule by the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. It's a bitter fact that even educated women think she was great and a champion of the poor and

under-privileged. No Indian women's magazine has ever exposed her demonic rule, leave alone the proclamation of Emergency. Your esteemed magazine, too, never cared to do this. No wonder her family party, Congress, is a big party, equal to BJP, even under the leadership of a foreigner, because she is the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi. There is every chance that Indira Gandhi's grand daughter will become Prime Minister, if not Sonia Gandhi herself! That is the extent to which our foolish people heroine-worship Indira Gandhi, especially our ultra-foolish Indian women. So, because MANUSHI has not taken seriously Indira Gandhi's crimes on our women, just because she is dead, I would not like to renew my subscription.

Citha, Chennai

Women Ascetics

This is in response to the article *Caught in the Wheel: Women and Salvation in Indian Religions* by Manisha Sethi (MANUSHI 119). She writes: "The Digambaras insisted that ascetic nudity was a prerequisite to the path of liberation and therefore, the woman's inability to shed clothes excluded her from ascetic life and enlightenment. Women's assumed continual requirement for clothes indicated that they could never be free from the powerful emotions of shame

and fear arising from their naked bodies." In this context I would like to point out that there are at least two major women ascetics of India who went about their lives without clothes: Lalleshwari in Kashmir and Akka Mahadevi in Karnataka, both devotees of Shiva.

S.A. Owais, Srinagar

Ways of Academics

Manisha Sethi's academic piece *Caught in the Wheel* (MANUSHI 119) is disappointing because she has merely piled one reference upon another, in a build up towards nothing of depth or significance. It's probably a part of a Ph.D. work on Jainism and women. She virtually has no reflections of her own to offer.

Her use of the word "soteriological", as in "in most religious traditions women are not considered legitimate soteriological agents ..." or, later, in "the most striking feature of Jainism is its recognition of women as legitimate soteriological agents...", is an obfuscation. Could she not say simply — women as agents of salvation? Or, Jainism recognises women's legitimate part in the doctrine of salvation? This is the way of the academic, always stuffing sentences with big words, when simple ones would do just as well.

Prithwi Raj Misra, Cuttack

ERRATA

We sincerely apologise for the error on page 15, in *Shiva's Consorts* (MANUSHI 118): The sentence "Shiva-Shakti union lies in an earlier conception of the cosmos as a dynamic duality between purusha or consciousness and *prakriti* or generative matter..." was inadvertently printed as "Shiva-Shakti union lies in an earlier conception of the cosmos as a dynamic duality between purusha as generative matter and *prakriti* as consciousness..."

Editor