



Responses to Manushi

Destroying Minds

In *Destroying Minds and Skills* (No. 102, 1997) the title says it all. As a victim of English medium education and one who has taught at an IIT for about 18 years, I am convinced that the domination of English in India is even more pernicious than outlined in your article. It is clear to me that as long as English remains the medium of instruction in our universities we will never amount to much in science and technology. The medium itself destroys self-confidence and a sense of self-worth in most young people. Without self-confidence there cannot be much innovation or invention. Those who know English well come from the top five per cent of the country's population and they are not the ones who are interested in teaching, research, or technical jobs. Contrary to the perceptions of the Indian elite, science, technology and innovative thinking will only be possible when English is banned as a medium of instruction and taught only as a foreign language.

The domination of English also restricts our interaction with the rest of the world. Our academic, industrial and political elite are comfortable only with their counterparts from

the UK and the USA. We know very little about how things are done in Japan, China and many European countries. This makes us focus on how things are done in the USA. A country that has very little to offer us in terms of public health, public transportation, urban planning and way of living at low energy levels. On the other hand, students in China have no qualms about obtaining training and higher education in any country around the world as all foreign languages are equally difficult for them. I will not be surprised if they can access more ideas from around the world because their minds and skills will not get destroyed to the same extent as ours.

Dinesh Mohan, I.I.T., Delhi

Rubbishing West

I have noticed in Madhu Kishwar's articles the words "Western counterparts" used more often and most of the time in negative connotation. She seems to project the idea that Indian women are much better than their "Western counterparts". My guess is that she much have visited lots of countries but not stayed for extended time period. I can understand why she feels that way. I used to think the same way while I was living in India. I have been in the US for almost 12 years and I now understand a lot of things about American women and why they do certain things in certain situations. There are lots of American women who devote their whole life to their children.

Madhu Kishwar is doing the same mistake journalists do here about Indian culture and Indian women. My point is that she cannot suggest the superiority of one culture or the other. The fact is that both Indian and western cultures have positive or negative ingredients for women. The truth is that all women are the same beneath the outer layer. Women from different cultures behave in certain ways because of the society they live in and what is expected of them.



One day women will have the courage to behave the way they want to and not according to what is right or what people expect out of them. I love my Indian culture but I think very few people are ready to realise the holes in our culture. Unless, we don't start looking into the drawbacks of our culture, we can never improve the lives of Indian women. On the surface we seem to be progressing but no real progress will come about until we don't start self-introspection.

Amita Sharma, USA

In the last nineteen years of Manushi's existence, I have written only three or four articles which make some reference to Western feminism. Every thing else I wrote is a no-holds barred critique of India and aspects of Indian culture which have become oppressive. I find it sad that anytime there are a few lines which indicate that there are some advantages Indian women have in some respects, people accuse us of Western bashing. Do we have to be altogether self-hating in order to prove we are not anti-West?

Madhu Kishwar

Without a Mother Tongue

I enjoyed reading the article: *Destroying Minds and Skills - Dominance of Angreziyat in Our Education* in Issue No.102. The ideas expressed give vent to feelings many of us have had when using a foreign language to express ourselves. I read the following recently India Discussion Digest put out from Bowling Green University in Ohio:

Goswaami Tulsidas the illustrious *sant-bhakt-kavi* (saint-devotee-poet) was born in Mughal India during the reign of Akbar. He chose to compose in Avadhi, the dialect of the people rather than Sanskrit, the

language of the Gods. As Harishchandra, the poet was to sing much later on....

*Sanskrit padhe jatan kari,
pandit bhaye bikhyat.
Paye nij bhasha gyan bin,
kahi na sakat ik bat.*

During the later part of the nineteenth century many so called "upper class" Indians started learning English to be in the good books of the then imperial masters. Poet Harishchandra wrote that couplet to impart what I believe is a left-handed swipe (an indirect satire) on English learning/speaking "baboo's" of that time. He did it by saying that there are people who have become famous pandits by learning "Sanskrit" (implied English) but can't even express a single thought (correctly) since they lack knowledge of their own mother tongue.

One of my friends with whom I discussed this couplet interpreted it differently saying that one can become a highly learned person by studying Sanskrit (or for that matter other classical languages) but to correctly express oneself one needs to use one's own language, that is mother tongue. I think, however, that the previous paragraph puts it in the correct perspective of that time.

**Jagdish Chander, Wisconsin,
USA**

Insight into a Culture

I am a Brazilian girl who lived for some months in India, more precisely in Srinagar. Reading **Manushi** articles made me want to go back. I think it is important to have an insight into the culture, by reading about it from that society's point of view. It is rare in the West to find articles which are not Eurocentric. Congratulations.

**Cidy Damasceno, Santo Andre,
Brazil**

In Defence of English

I am pleased to read the article *An Agenda for India*. This is very interesting article. I agree with 60 per cent of the matter, of general consensus. I am happy over the concern and assesment of statics of fifty years of India's independence. I disagree too on certain points, I will like to give my opinion about the article as below.

I disagree that quality of education can not be improved without doing away with English language. English language has brought us closer to the world, though local, regional and national languages have their own place, additional knowledge of English need not be discarded rather welcome, Knowledge of languages makes people and persons more versatile.

Economic liberisation through privitization of basic industry and essential services People should be employed productively. Corrupt politics, and stagnant economy encourages people's economic initiatives to work hard and earn an honest living. Eradication of poverty should be by giving help in the form of loans and guilty should be punished through recoveries. Fit and healthy should work avnues through creation.

Tax collection should be correct and used productively, intrnational monetry funds, if acquired should be used usefully and feed back in relation to the orginal need based policies, needs to be anaylised and revised in holistic and totality. The total power may not concentrate at any one table, Better co-ordination too is required of varied ministeries or benches to keep an eye on total productivity and wastage. These are some humble suggestions to bring efficiency, which is badly required. People should learn to live with in their incomes and means,

hence black money and inflation may be contained.

**Surinder Khera, Gurgaon,
Haryana**

*These are unedited extracts from
Mr Khera's letter - Editor*

A Counter View

I appreciate **Manushi** because some of its articles (eg. *Symbols of Mental Slavery, Cutting Our Own Life Line*: A critique of the agricultural policy, reports on communal riots, evaluation of the role of self-appointed social reformers, etc.) offer us a critique of the commonly held views that are prevalent among the dominant sections of the middle class in India.

Some of the short stories and folk stories are really touching and appeal to the virtuous side of our nature and help us to cultivate necessary qualities of courage and knowledge. It is the short stories and little experiences of **Manushi**, I enjoy the most.

Ivan Lobo, Chittapur, Karnataka

Love vs Arranged Marriage

This is a follow up on the *Love and Marriage* debate in **Manushi** starting with Issue 80. My observations should be understood to be based on a predominantly North Indian middle class educated sections of our society since I have been limited to observing these experiences so far.

For a long time I naively looked at the debate of love vs arranged marriages as an issue of free choice. That is, the individual should have the freedom to find and decide who she/he wants to marry, and not the parents. However, in recent years, I have come to realise that free choice and marriage are much more complex issues, especially when placed in the Indian context. For



example, how does one explain the choices of many people who desire an arranged marriage?

The issue becomes even more complex with the varying definitions of arranged marriages. It can mean the bride and groom meeting the same day or just before the wedding day, or it can mean “arranged meetings” whereafter the boy/girl have the choice to say ‘No’. In that eventuality, the parents will attempt to find another match. In addition, this decision which the girl/boy makes can take anywhere from one day to a few months.

While some may argue that a person agrees to an arranged marriage because of implicit and explicit family pressures, I think this only partially explains the situation. Certain societal pressures may make arranged marriages a desirable option. For example, the pressure to get married at a young age is very strong, especially for females (between the ages of 20-24 years for women and 24-28 for men). Since university degrees make women “more marketable” in terms of finding a husband, it is acceptable that she be allowed to finish an undergraduate degree and perhaps a graduate degree, before getting married. However, not much time is wasted thereafter. The next stop is marriage. Men are given more time since they need to find a stable job

and make themselves financially secure so they can “support” a family. It is also desirable that a man be a couple of years older than the woman.

With the pressures to do well in school and college, there is little time for socialising, aside from studies. If you are attending an all girls/boys institution, the opportunities of both sexes to intermingle are very limited. In families where “dating” is unacceptable, difficulties in meeting persons of the opposite sex are even more pronounced. Therefore, while one may be desirous of a love marriage, it's quite possible that by the age of 24 the “right” person has not been met. However, due to the pressure of increasing age, one will become open to an arranged marriage (or “arranged meetings”).

I would argue that the desire for parents to marry their children while young is linked to the lack of sexual freedom. Where sex outside of marriage is still a strong social taboo, it is better to ensure they get married soon before they are tempted by sexual relations outside of marriage. Early marriage brings parents peace of mind knowing their duties have been fulfilled.

The perception of marriage that one has experienced may also determine the acceptability of arranged marriages. With arranged marriages, the logic follows that commitment is first and it is from this that love grows. With the strong family ties in Indian society, often marriage is not seen as the coming together of two individuals but of two families. This is especially true for joint families where bringing in a new member into the house needs to be compatible with the rest of the family that already lives there. Therefore, religion, regional background, language and caste can become significant considerations.

Veena Verma, Ottawa, Canada □