



Responses to MANUSHI

Timothy Eby



Peace Behind Bars

Greetings, once again, from the vast wasteland of the Texas prison system!

MANUSHI issue 139 arrived five days ago. Its reception, as usual, proved to be a most informative event. I simply cannot express the level of gratitude in my heart, for your kindness in providing such a publication at no cost for this prisoner. Perhaps the day will arrive when I can “repay” your kindness. Possibly, the computer skills I am to receive in prison could be utilised towards MANUSHI, after I am let out of prison in 2011. Would I have any problem obtaining an Indian visa?

In any event, thank you for giving this soon-to-be 48-year-old prisoner an oasis of inspiration while inside the despotic Texas prison system.

Have you ever thought of doing an article on how the work of Swami Gurumayi Chidvilasananda is transforming the lives of many American prisoners? Her teachings have enabled us to find peace in hostile and violent prisons. The cover

of the envelope I’m sending you this in is a simple act of *bhakti* towards her. Due to her act of grace, many areas my life have undergone intense transformation.

Timothy Eby, Texas, USA

You are most welcome to come and work with MANUSHI after your release from prison. I am not sure about the visa part but you should give it a try anyway and we would be willing to put in a word, if that is of any help.

Indigenous Modernity

I have just finished reading, cover to cover, three very interesting issues of MANUSHI (137,138,139). These issues reminded me of the immense contribution MANUSHI continues to make in defining modernity in India. Modernisation is not something that can be adopted from textbooks, achieved through mere legislation or imported from Europe or America – it has to be indigenous. It results from the internalisation of values in a changing social context over time responding to local, regional and global pressures. In this, MANUSHI has created a useful space through its reports and analytical articles, reflecting the issues, trends and concerns arising from social and political changes in India and the region.

These are not just protest articles, but thoughtful pieces with

constructive social alternatives. The insightful sociological analysis of Bollywood as India’s cultural ambassador (“The Idea of India”, MANUSHI 139) is a fine example. More than their impact abroad, the important part Bollywood films play is in defining the popular worldview we Indians have of ourselves. You rightly point out that Bollywood shows us how to maintain a healthy, creative relationship with tradition while adopting modernisation in appropriate doses, in contrast to the neurotic individualism of American culture and films.

Sankrant Sanu’s article, “Teaching Pluralism and Tolerance” (MANUSHI 137) provides another take on the need for our own expression of a pluralistic system. His observations on western secularism’s origins in the orthodoxy of a centralised church, which led to a long history of religious intolerance and reactionary ideologies in Europe, are astute. As he points out, by refusing to challenge religious exclusivism, the current Indian intellectual may be encouraging the same route of ideological extremism in India.

For communal harmony, tolerance is not sufficient. We tolerate what we do not like. We need to realise the difference between tolerance and respect. What we like, we respect and accept. If anything, in a democratic

pluralistic society, we should be practicing and teaching mutual respect of the communities and sub-communities we co-exist with.

The same theme is reiterated in Madhu Kishwar's thoughtful piece, "Hindu-Muslim Relations in Post-Independence India – Need for a Power Sharing Pact" (MANUSHI 138), where she articulates the need for a well-worked out policy framework for minority rights. Again, the Indian situation is complex where almost everyone is a minority, of caste, language, religion or region.

The desire to maintain a 'separate identity' is natural, but should it be limited to cultural aspects, or should it become a vehicle for demanding "ethnic" or "communal" rights, to redress the political and economic imbalances caused by historical conditions?

Values such as pluralism, equal opportunity, the protection of minorities, an independent judiciary, accountability and transparency are the imperatives of modernity. All these have to be however defined and implemented in a particular geographical and cultural context.

Building modernity on our cultural tradition has been a hallmark of MANUSHI. The introspective contributions that have been my favourites in recent years, other than the ones mentioned above, include Ashish Nandy's millennium piece on the "Vision of India". The interviews with a new generation of politicians, the special issue on the *Teelka* exposé and the analytical reports on the Shiv Sena and on communal tensions in the states (Gujarat, Kashmir, and the Babri Masjid

demolition) have not only been well reported but have suggested positive ways to alleviate problems. Similarly, MANUSHI has been a leader on women's issues by including wide-ranging perspectives on gender relationships covered from the vantage point of family, religion, language, work and politics. Its scholarly examination of Hindu deities – gods and goddesses as modern archetypes, has been unique in developing a better understanding of realistic role models for Indian women.

In summation, material prosperity is important but without human values and religious harmony, such prosperity is unlikely to become sustainable. MANUSHI continues to be a powerful medium for this discussion.

Balwant Bhaneja, Ottawa, Canada

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National Foundation for India
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Phones: 91-11-24641864/65, 91-11-24648490-92 Fax: 91-11-24641867

Email: sentimong@nfi.org.in, www.nfi.org.in