

A Genuine Rival

I really appreciate your article “No Political *Burqas* for Us” in MANUSHI 129.

You wrote: ‘Aversion to engaging with people who have an opposing viewpoint is a sign of low self-confidence. It is like putting women in *burqa* for fear that exposure to men would tempt them to go astray.’ I am, however, tempted to think that the reason for putting women in *Burqas* is not the fear that exposure to men would tempt women to go astray but the other way round—it is the fear that men would be tempted to go astray.

The two articles “A Superhit Goddess” and “A Made to Satisfaction Goddess” on Santoshi Maa (also in MANUSHI 131) by Philip Lutgendorf were very interesting.

Santoshi Maa was Parvati’s granddaughter. Given the age-hierarchy in Indian family life (of ordinary people as well as of gods and goddesses), Parvati is likely to have reacted to the rising popularity of Santoshi Maa as ‘*Do din ki chhokri, hum se takkar leney chali hai!*’ (This upstart is trying to challenge us!). So she has a grouse against her granddaughter.

The conflicts between Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, and Santoshi Maa are inherent because their attributes are antithetical. The goddess of wealth lands her worshippers in the quagmire of ever increasing lust and greed. The more wealth one has, the more one desires. On the other hand, Santoshi Maa leads her devotees to contentment—contentment that comes after having done one’s best, which is not to be confused with sloth.

There is a saying:

‘*Go dhan gaj dhan vaji dhan, aur ratan dhan khan,*

Jab aye santosh dhan, sab dhan dhuri samaan.’

(Cattle, wealth from elephants/

Responses to MANUSHI

All the wealth that may come from trade/ as well as wealth from a mine of precious stones/ All these into humble dust fade/When one finds the treasure of contentment)

So Lakshmi has a genuine rival in Santoshi Maa. Given this context, the coming together of Lakshmi and Parvati against Santoshi Maa is the most natural thing.

Lakshmi Bhargava, Bhopal, M.P

Mainstream MANUSHI

Hearty thanks for bringing out a special issue on animal rights (No.132) I am particularly happy at your critique of Prafull Bidwai’s report. In fact, his book on nuclear non-proliferation also is rather shallow, and I felt “short-changed” after reading it—in every way. His other articles in newspapers are O.K. in general, but he lacks the depth needed to write sustained analytical accounts.

Although I can’t read all the articles from your magazine on the Internet, what I do see looks great and so do the titles of other articles.

I would like more people to know about MANUSHI. I have forwarded your website to many people before, but am not sure whether you have taken systematic efforts at self-promotion. I think MANUSHI used to be way more famous earlier than it is now, but that may also be because of the proliferation of many other magazines. Irrespective of that, you have to advertise more—and try to reach out to the mainstream as much as to the intellectuals and activists.

P. Mathur by email

MANUSHI Response

Since MANUSHI remains heavily focused on work within India and survives on a shoestring budget, we are unable to take out enough time for participation in international NGO networks and campaigns. That is why MANUSHI is not as well known internationally, as it is within the country. NGOs connected with international funding agencies are actively promoted by grant giving agencies. For good or for worse, MANUSHI has not so far sought such patronage. Therefore, it is dependent on the informal network of its readers and supporters for enhancing its outreach. In India, even those who may never get to see a copy of MANUSHI are familiar with the organisation through a whole range of other MANUSHI activities which are also covered by the mainstream media.

However, we fully agree with you about the need to take steps to increase the visibility and availability of MANUSHI. The task is not easy given the very limited resources we operate with. Advertising and promotional campaigns cost a lot of money. Given our rather strict policy regarding funding---we neither take grants nor accept advertisements---we are unable to invest necessary resources for promotional activity. We need the help of MANUSHI readers and friends to figure out whether we should change our policy or explore some alternative methods of fund mobilisation. MANUSHI will soon be 25 years old this December. We need new strategies and approaches to accomplish the many different tasks, apart from publishing the journal, MANUSHI has undertaken. We invite readers to send in their suggestions.

- Editor

Dialogue of Compassion

Sankrant Sanu's rejoinder to Arundhati Roy's speech in issue 134 of MANUSHI is excellent, I like its language - a dialogue of compassion aimed at reconciliation rather than polarisation. Creating demons is not only limited to Roy, artists seem to have license to get emotionally carried away. I don't know if you saw the BBC interviews of novelist Gunter Grass and film maker Michael Moore on the Iraq war. Michael Moore, for example, while being awarded the Oscar for his anti-establishment documentary, instead of expressing gratitude, started hurling political abuse at the ceremony, "Mr. Bush, you should be ashamed of fighting a fictitious war" (or singer Harry Belafonte calling Colin Powell for acting "like a slave in his Master's house").

Sankrant says that there are better ways of transforming such personal pain into something more meaningful. I whole-heartedly agree with him. But more than artists, it's politicians and journalists who carry weight and responsibility in these matters. They must be reminded of this crucial advice. Thanks for publishing this beautiful piece.

Congratulations also on your interview with Mani Shanker Iyer. It has been a fascinating read. There has not been much written on that sad period of Indian politics and Mani provides an interesting insight into Rajiv Gandhi's leadership. It's honest and sincere. Best wishes to him in having followed his inner call to enter the political arena. Looking forward to the third installment.

Balwant Bhaneja, Canada.

Jargonless Honesty

My first encounter with MANUSHI was when I was a student at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Mumbai. I specialised in

Medical & Psychiatric Social Work there. Prior to that I was in Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi doing Psychology .

I used to read whatever issues of MANUSHI I could lay my hands on - as a student I found it difficult to afford buying it. Subscribing to "non- curriculum" books was a luxury.

What I liked about MANUSHI and Madhu (the two are almost synonymous in my head !) was its honesty and the confidence to not just take a stand but also shift stands over time ... putting itself on a more vulnerable but definitely more humane and "real" platform.

I also like the fact that MANUSHI and Madhu are fairly de- jargonised, don't necessarily align with any "isms" and allow for space where people can agree to disagree.

In spite of having been declared the best student of the year in all three years at the LSR, judged the best student in academics as well as field work in both the years at TISS and other awards - I was disillusioned with social work professionals who distanced themselves from the masses and consequently developed a schizophrenic outlook. In that milieu :

→spouting jargon impresses people never mind whether the people whom it was intended for internalised it or not;

→you are judged "flaky" if you want to look good and dress well;

→the "dirtier" the cause you take up, the "holier" you are considered ;

→"women's cause" is cool to pursue and "other social causes" are "not so cool";

→On the one hand you proclaim that women should aim to be financially independent and at the same time look down upon people like me who come from very middle class families and want to earn money from our

profession—at least enough to be self- sufficient.

→Penury is glorified for social work professionals while one is expected to "teach" the "under privileged" to earn and become independent.

→You proclaim the principle of "non-judgement" and yet judge people, other colleagues, professions etc at the drop of a hat;

Some of these reasons, along with a love for communication led me to join advertising for a short stint.

My sojourn in advertising was, to me, a progression of the process of using human insights to develop communication that is directly or indirectly meaningful to a common group of people. It was a journey to understand the basis and the processes responsible for creating images and spreading perceptions that influence people , from a creator's and not a critic or a recipient's point of view. And right now I am in Singapore working with an advertising firm.

Commercial work seemed the exact anti- thesis of my value systems within the social work arena. However, since the 'communication highway' mirrors beliefs and creates perceptions, working within its structure is an 'active' step within the contextual framework of people's lives rather than outside their reference points.

This in my experience, can help social work organistaions to create opportunities for long term success.

And it is this understanding and experience that I would like to use when I step into my next phase of learning – which would be return to the profession of social work – spending time with different communities of people, places, social issues and studying them , working with them and writing about them .

Mallika Shankarnarayan, Singapore