



Responses to Manushi

Supremacy of English

In my opinion, Madhu Kishwar's essay *Destroying Minds and Skills*, (MANUSHI 102) should be widely discussed, especially among teachers, because the medium of higher education is a root problem. If the use of English is curtailed at this level then the medium of education will have to change at the school level, as well as in the professional and research streams. Then the state language will also become the business language of private organisations.

Our Bharatiya Bhasha Pratishthapan Parishad [Indian Language Installation Committee] has come to the conclusion that the issue requires Constitutional amendment. To achieve this, it should be put forth as an electoral issue. We need mass awareness to reach this goal. Actually, it is the ordinary people who suffer because of the present scenario. We need to explain to them how they are being harmed by the dominance of English. The intelligentsia also needs to understand how the country is being hurt but it is unfortunate that because of vested interests they have shut their eyes. If only we can open their eyes, then hopefully the problem can be solved.

You understood the implications of the supremacy of English through your own experience, while I did so during my stay in the US. During 1968-70, I was deputed by



the government of India to do an ME in nuclear engineering at New York University. At that time I developed a Radon gas measuring instrument for uranium mines, in conjunction with work on my degree. When, along with my professor, I went to test this instrument in a uranium mine, I saw that he could converse with the least-ranked worker there, which we can't do here. I then understood the value of this – a scientist there could understand a problem better because he got direct feedback on his research.

The incident led me to think that for meaningful research it is necessary to have a dialogue between scientists and ordinary people. This is only possible when there is a common language for everyday conversation, education, and work. I also realised that we can certainly derive information from another language but we cannot generate knowledge in a language that is not our own.

Upon returning from the US, I immediately started using the national language at work. I

successfully organised many scientific conferences, workshops, and seminars in Hindi and, in the end, even submitting my PhD thesis in Hindi. I also had to present the thesis in English because there was little time left before my retirement and I did not want to have my thesis acceptance delayed due to the prejudice of those who only relate to English.

Thus your article reflects my experiences. Now we only have to decide how to solve this problem.

The sooner the problem is solved, the better it will be for the nation and the public at large.

Vijay Kumar Bhargava, Mumbai

*(translated from Hindi by
MANUSHI)*

Cheapening Culture

I find a lot of what you say interesting, though not the way you have acted on the issue of beauty contests while at Miranda College (MANUSHI 88).

Of course, there is no doubt that any self-respecting woman would agree on your position with regards to the beauty contest. However, what interests me the most is to hear about the behaviour in your country and the way western culture is introduced. For an institution like Miranda House to have the values of an ancient culture transformed in such a manner into cheap English/American nonsense, is all proof of the political hegemony of English-

speaking countries and their imperialist designs.

I am from Cyprus, which until 1974 retained its Greek culture for thousands of years. Right after the British left in 1963, the native culture gradually began decaying. People were not listening to Greek music, but preferred English which they actually couldn't comprehend in any way. They became accustomed to a foreign way of life, while looking down on anything of their own culture. This, however, is not done by chance. It was a mechanism that the British set out, so that they could rule their colonies, even after they left them. Believe me, this is what's exactly happening here, and it's interesting to see how it worked in other colonies as well. It is all due, no doubt, to the western politics of consumerism.

Stella Evangelidou, Cyprus

Towards Economic Reform

Madhu Kishwar's article *A Half Step Forward* on economic reforms in MANUSHI 92-93 is a refreshing change.

Many feminists seem to have problems with the market economy in general and the economic reforms in India in particular. This is not to suggest that the market economy is perfect or even a good system, but viewed in context of the available options, it has substantial advantages. It also has much greater operational flexibility and is essentially negotiable.

Moreover the liberalisation process is on. Guidelines are announced by regulatory authorities everyday. This will proceed regardless of the criticism by some NGOs. It is therefore worthwhile to remind some of the most virulent critics that liberalisation is not a spectator sport. There are no bystanders in

the game – women are either going to use it to their advantage or be used by it.

It is time to take stock of the situation.

While much has been made of the South East Asian currency crisis, the fact remains that despite bad investment policies and weak regulatory authorities in many of the affected countries, this hot money did substantially contribute in the creation of an impressive infrastructure which cannot be taken away by fund managers and speculators, however ruthless they may be. The South Koreans or Indonesians are unlikely to relapse into illiteracy – the roads, bridges and communication networks will not collapse because of currency depreciation.

The point is investments are available and we need them. The process of opening up is creating avenues. Women have to participate in the process and ensure access for themselves.

Some areas which merit urgent attention are:

- a) Developing expertise in analysing institutions, policies, markets, and instruments, with a view to facilitating women's participation.
- b) Working out and negotiating

a preferred agenda which spells out specific areas and modalities rather than general demands for more allocations or subsidies. Such concessions are easily agreed upon in principle but rarely acted upon.

The financial sector's responsibility towards women, and evolving a mechanism for integrating women in the development process, need to be taken up as priorities.

It's time for framing issues, time for systematic interaction between various organisations and activists, time for taking up women's concerns with a view to effective lobbying in this area.

Shikhi Sharma, Lucknow

True Compassion

The story of *Ram Dei* (MANUSHI 112) touched me immensely. Compassion often tends to degenerate into pity due to our pride and ego, but compassion in the true sense, as mentioned in Florence Rastogi's piece provides its true meaning: as defined in Latin it means "companion in suffering." Could you convey to Mrs Rastogi our thanks for sharing with all of us this beautiful experience of a compassionate connection.

Balwant Bhaneja, Bonn, Germany □



Courtesy: *The Time of India*