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A New Newsletter for Women's Studies in India

The Feminist Press

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there are 930 females for every 1000 males. In 1901, there were 972 women per 1000 men.

And when women do survive, the lives they lead are rarely free of constraint: the confinement of middle-class women, including female students, is acute. A survey of women's university hostels shows that women are literally locked in: they are spied upon, forbidden to smoke, to drink, or to receive female guests in their rooms. They are even discouraged from whistling or singing, all in the name of "morality" and "protection." Needless to say, similar restrictions do not weigh upon the male students, nor are Victorian standards expected of working-class women.

Several articles are devoted to the increasingly militant efforts of women employed in factories and on the farms to organize effective labor unions. Working women are the victims of industrialization, which prohibits them from entering the new technical professions while rendering their traditional sources of income obsolete. As a result, women are either thrown out of work entirely, or forced to suffer under the abominable conditions of early capitalism. The major trend, however, is toward female unemployment. As *Manushi* points out, in 1901 there were 525 women workers per 1000 men, while in 1971 that figure had fallen to 210 women per 1000 men in the workforce. And unemployment in a developing country often means starvation.

The editors of *Manushi* address the plight of working-class women in their introductory remarks: "*Manushi* is a journal about women," they write, "but is it possible to talk of women as an undifferentiated mass? Isn't life very different for a tribal woman, a Dalit woman in rural India, a factory worker, a clerk, a doctor, a university student, a middle-class or working-class housewife, an air hostess, a nurse, a woman in purdah, or a common prostitute?" Their answer: Yes, there are a lot of factors dividing women from each other—class, caste, religion, race, education (or the lack of it), one's field of work (in the house or out of it) and many other complex historical forces. Yet if we look at the nature and basis of women's oppression, we discover that our sex determines our common predicament in a very fundamental way. (p. 2)

The need to relate feminism to class and caste is combined in *Manushi* with a radical feminist view of the common condition uniting all women.

As the very existence of *Manushi* testifies, one can suggest that Indian women are farther away from defeat today than they have ever been before. The fact that a feminist movement is evolving in India is highly encouraging. Female voices are now demanding to be heard: the voice of "Kesari," for example, the fifty-year-old migrant worker who describes her life in the pages of *Manushi*, a life illuminated by a growing awareness of the sources of women's oppression. This insight, in turn, is increasing the will to fight. As Marzieh Ahmadi Oskooii proclaims:

I am a woman
A woman for whom
in your shameless vocabulary,
There is no word
Corresponding to my significance,
A woman in whose chest
there is a heart
full of the festering
wounds of wrath,
A woman in whose eyes
the red
reflection of the bullets of liberty are waging,
A woman whose hands have been trained
through work, to pick up
THE GUN.

*Manushi*, in sum, is a very important journal. Published in two separate editions, English and Hindi, it is priced "at half the cost (in India) because (the editors) want to reach as many people as possible." However, in order to grow, they need help. The editors are interested in receiving "articles, interviews, personal accounts, short stories, poems, reviews, paintings, sketches, photographs." Subscriptions for one year (six issues) cost $3, plus $8 air mail postage. Surface mail is considerably cheaper and is available on request. Single issues may also be ordered for $1.20 per copy plus $1.20 air mail postage. Write *Manushi* c/o Ms. Madhu Kishwar, A-5 Nizamuddin East, New Delhi 110013, India.

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