



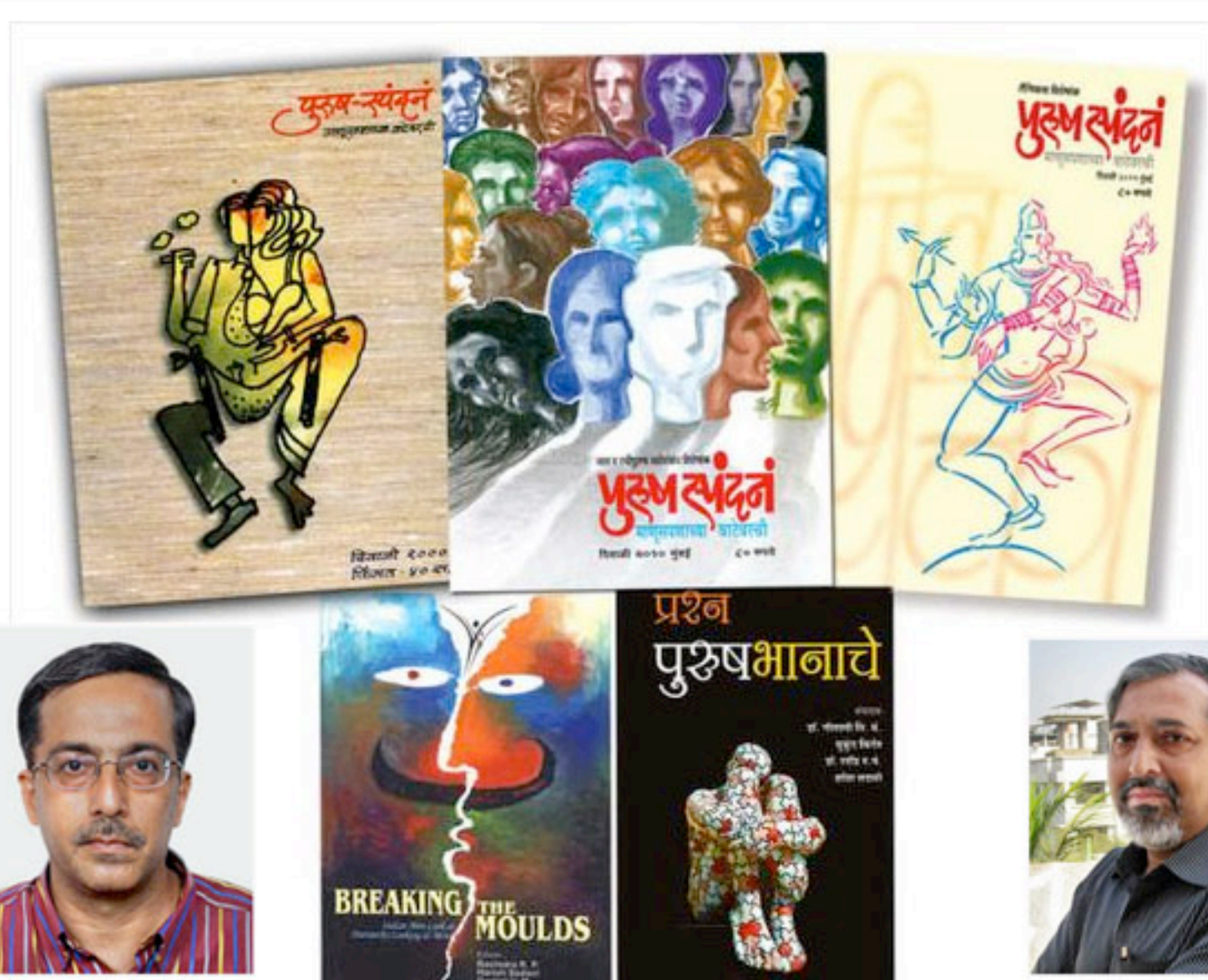
Of a different pulse

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An unusual outlook: Purushspandana volumes.

The editorial team: (Left) Harish Sadani; (right) Ravindra Rukmini Pandharinath.

For the past 17 years, Purushspandana, a Marathi periodical for men, has been debating gender issues and the male psyche

We have a handful of men's magazines. But going by their index, Purushspandana is clearly a suspect entry into the category. Neither does it have the typecast look nor covers with glitzy photos of hourglass models in designer wear. Going by the articles it publishes — short stories, poems, plays, commentative pieces and interviews among others — Purushspandana gives the impression of a magazine with a literary bend. But that is not its target genre either.

Published in Marathi, the annual magazine that has been hitting the stands during Diwali for the last 17 years stands on an unusual platform that bridges both the genres — of a men's magazine, a thinking one at that, and literary at the same time.

"Purushspandana," explains Harish Sadani of Men Against Violence and Anger (MAVA), a voluntary organisation that brings out the periodical from Mumbai, "panders to the over 100-year-old tradition of publishing special Diwali annual numbers of popular periodicals in Maharashtra." But its content, Sadani underlines importantly, "is purely on man-woman relationships and the issues that spring from it."

At a time when public rage against sexual harassment of women has reached our streets, and debates are spiralling on the need to have basic changes in men's outlook and conditioning to bring about long-term transformation, Purushspandana, with a circulation of over 4000 copies, is as much an unusual presence as it can be a significant contributor to a better situation. Particularly when used as a model to raise gender debates among men, young and old.

Sadani says this was exactly the premise that led MAVA to think up Purushspandana. "We have been working with men to have a gender just society. During debates with men, both young and old, we felt that there are so many issues men would like to discuss and there should be a platform for them to express their thoughts, read others and debate on the male psyche."

He, along with Ravindra Rukmini Pandharinath, co-edits the magazine. Ravindra outlines the specific issues that they have been focussing on, "The last issue was about family and man-woman relationships. Exploring the changing nature of 'family' as a subsystem in Indian society over the last decade, our magazine attempted to deliberate on the impact of family on relationships. We have also discussed sexuality in two themes, caste and family system."

In the coming edition, it "might discuss forms of violence against women and religion through technology or media." In April/May, after the topic is finalised, an editorial note is prepared encapsulating the theme. "We define the boundary of the issue to be covered, and its relevance. We then prepare a list of probable writers on the topic. It is an important process as we need to research the strengths and limitations of the writer before suggesting the topic," says Ravindra. Most times, "the invited authors are happy with the topics suggested as they seldom get an opportunity to write on them in such depth."

In addition, college groups with whom MAVA works on gender sensitisation, "are encouraged to conduct surveys and group discussions on related topics and write reports on them."

Where Ravindra would like to differentiate Purushspandana "from other Marathi publications" is in their rigorous editing. "We want to give our readers sharp, insightful and absorbing pieces. We edit our stories to quite an extent. Sometimes, we don't publish stories invited from authors."

A newer debate on gender is always welcome. "In fact, the whole idea is to encourage newer thinking and critique of the existing progressive discourse. Yet, we do not publish stuff that has a clear anti-woman, casteist or communal overtone." At the beginning only men writers were welcome but women too are contributing to Purushspandana from the last two editions.

So where is Purushspandana available? "Besides some bookstores, it goes to activist organisations, academics, libraries, youth groups, colleges, etc. across Maharashtra. To reach out to men in the interior areas, we use an informal network of friends. We also organise symposia and seminars on the theme of the magazine to carry further the discourse," says Ravindra. From this year, the magazine will be available for sale on the web. "Being an NGO, we are always short of funds which sometimes affects the look of the magazine. We are, however, planning to tie up with a distributor who would offer Purushspandana as a part of pre-publicised package at Diwali across Maharashtra," says Sadani.