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# Troubled Marriages: Do solutions exist?

By Swati Desai

Seema was furious with her mother-in-law while her husband Sainath sat quiet, across from her in the therapists office "We were doing fine with each other for the first 10 years of our life in the US, until his mother arrived from India to live with us It has been only downhill for last seven years Everyone is on the edge Even my kids prefer to just stay in their rooms after school," she said Her face was twisted with anger She was leaning forward and pointing her finger at her husband to make her point

Problem #1: Problems with in laws follow several Indian couples to abroad and can become only worse

The therapist looked at Sainath with a question mark on her face He squirmed in his chair Finally he spoke in a tentative tone, "I mean, I know my mother is manipulative I know she demands attention from me and sometimes gets it by playing games But look, she is my mother and I cannot just get rid of her. I keep telling Seema to just adjust a bit for keeping the household happy. My mother is an old woman, she is not going to change It is us who need to compromise". This seemed to have irked Seema more She raised her voice "What is wrong in

telling her that she should not badmouth me in front of our relatives? What is wrong in telling her that we are going on a holiday without her while she stays with your brother in Kentucky?

Problem #2: The husbands divided loyalty is causing the wife to feel sec-

show visible respect to her. He blamed Seema for not joining him in his effort Grandmas quiet contempt for Seemas upbringing of kids was sometimes visible Seemas reaction was always defiant stemming from her feelings of subordinate status in her marriage with Sainath which she

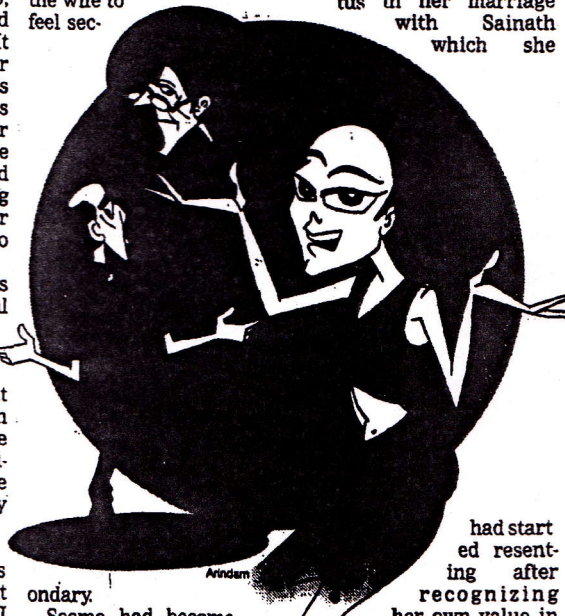
came from her own issues as well but she was unwilling to self-search

Problem #4: Being in the US had changed wives expectations from herself in addition to greatly reduced social expectation from the milieu around her.

Seemas story of emerging defiance against traditions is not so uncommon in modern urban India as well After Seema threatened Sainath to leave, he was willing to go to the therapist and be a meek partner willing to compromise, but he resented Seemas rigidity to no end Finally, they ended up making arrangements with his brother to have his mother for six months of the year in spite of his wifes debilitating medical condition

This solution of compromises from husband helped the wife to feel some power and to ease the tension at home The therapist noted, it made their marriage functional but not meaningful For a meaningful marriage, Seema and Sai Nath need to make a commitment to honest self-search, she said Seema cannot keep using her mother-in-law as a target

She must separate her own issues from the marital ones Sai Nath be assertive, with both his mother and his wife. (The author, a psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles and a mental health consultant to South Asian agencies, is on a visit to ISB, Hyderabad)



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Seema had become independent earning member of the family a few years after coming to the US Her children were brought up in a society where the age-based hierarchy was not as important and Sainath constantly struggled to teach them not to question grand- ma on everything, also to

had start- ed resent- ing after recognizing her own value in her job as an account- ant In reality, she had start- ed resenting all traditional expectations of compromis- ing because she had seen her own mother losing herself Her rage would just push her and Sainath into a silent mode for days at a time

Problem #3: Wifes anger