

# Scars may remain, but a turning point is close by

By Swati Desai

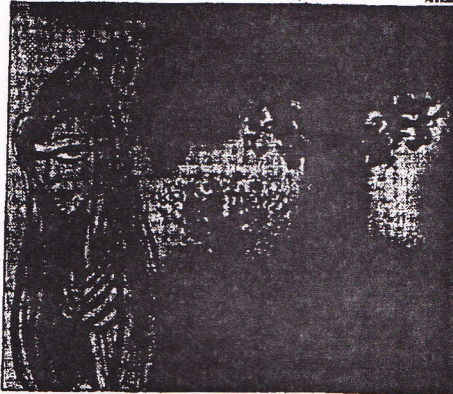
Hyderabad: Sunita met her husband on the Internet while she was working in India and he lived in the US. This led to a two-year intense romance through emails with the husband professing the 'ultimate love'. Her parents' fears of her husband belonging to another community did not deter her from the marrying him.

In the US, Sunita felt awkward about certain expectations from the joint family. Giving a massage to her in laws, bar on conversing with the visitors, and permission to go out only with her sister-in-law all put her in an uncomfortable position.

When she mentioned these difficulties to her husband, he became enraged and accused Sunita of not understanding the customs of his community. The last straw came when Sunita discovered legal papers of her husband's divorce from his previous wife. When she confronted her husband, he claimed that his ex-wife was crazy and had to be hospitalised. His family supported his claims, but things were never the same for Sunita from then. Her mistrust of her husband and his family only added fuel to his rage.

Frequent outbursts of violence finally led her to contact a social service agency.

It took Sunita two years of struggle for finding shelter in a South Asian transitional housing, going through the legal wrangles in divorce



and alimony proceeding, applying for immigration status under special immigration laws, pursuing a nursing education with the help of an agency, fighting allegations from her husband's family of being a bad daughter-in-law, battling depression and most importantly garnering a sense of pride in being financially independent.

Today Sunita shares her apartment with a friend, has a work permit and a job, and drives to her nursing job. She did this with the help of a social service agency and community support. More importantly, it took courage and patience for her to stand on her feet.

Is life better for Sunita today? It is a trade-off between preserving self-dignity and letting go of false notions of security.

Any person who goes through the shock of discovering secrets such as a previous relationship, mental illness, violent behaviour, or alcoholism suffers from some form of post traumatic stress disorder. There could be recurring nightmares, paranoia, total lack of trust in the surroundings and loss of self-confidence. Once these emotions are overcome with a counsellor's help, there is still the feeling of vengeance or self-destruction. The tedious legal and immigration processing too can be exhausting for most Indian women. The option of returning home is shelved

when faced with thoughts of bringing shame to the community back home and worrying the parents. Social service agencies could help, but however the help may come as forthcoming as a victim may want.

The most significant factor that helps the victim is the sense of self-dignity, and the feeling that she has the right to a productive and happy life. She needs to think that what happened to her was an accident, out of her control, and although the scars would remain, she can still rehabilitate herself.

(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.)

## More Indian students off to UK

Chennai: British high commissioner to India Michael Arthur, highlighting the growth in the number of Indian students visiting the UK, said he expected around 25,000 students to go there for further studies in the next two to three years.

"The number of students from India visiting the UK has been increasing in the last couple of years. About five years back, only around 5,000 students from India went to the UK for further studies. Last year it grew to 11,000. This year we hope around 15,000 Indian students will be going there," Arthur, on a visit to Chennai, told reporters.

"We are trying to make our visa operations hassle-free," he said. "Indian students are al-

lowed to work 20 hours a week to meet their expenses during their stay. They can also stay for a few months after completing their education," he said.

Referring to visa restrictions, he said the UK had set up a mechanism to check the quality of education offered at universities and to examine whether the university or college had the requisite facilities.

This had been done with an objective of helping students get quality education. Fifty per cent of the total number of students visiting the UK were from south India, he said.

The high commissioner also said around 30 universities from the UK would conduct road shows in India in the next two to three months.



### HELPLINE

National Domestic Violence

Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE

Specific help for Indians:

San Francisco: MATH 1-888-6

MATH and Narika 1-800-724-2722

Los Angeles: SARANA 1-888-7-SARANA

Chicago: Anna Chen 1-800-17-0757

New York/New Jersey: Jack Hill

Toll-free: MATH 1-732-433-1414, Sarah

1-212-803-8741

To get phone numbers, visit

www.safeline.org