

UIA Women's Forum Sydney

15 March 2008

Pleasure being here

Glad to know that UIA is taking such a deep interest in women issues and that the Women Forum's has organised this interaction today. The issues that are being focused on today, are extremely relevant.

While I have been asked to speak, I must admit that I am basically here to listen. I wanted to know from you what your problems are and what are the measures that are being put in place to address them.

What I can inform you from my side is the assistance that GOI provides to Indian women who have been deserted by their overseas Indian spouses.

Unfortunately the number of such Indian women has been on the rise. GOI has initiated a scheme to assist NGOs to take up the cases of such women who have been deserted by their overseas spouses. As the spouses are in Australia, the cases have to be pursued here.

Interested civil society associations and NGOs and community associations can get themselves empanelled with the High Commission to receive some financial assistance to pursue such cases. The assistance amounting to US \$ 1000/- for each case. We understand that this is a very small amount, however it is only meant to supplement the efforts of NGOs themselves and other *pro bono* work assisting such deserted Indian women.

While we have publicised this scheme since the past year and a half, only one NGO in Australia has registered with us. This is the Indian Women's Resource Centre, affiliated to the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria (FIAV).

There are some requirements that NGOs have to meet viz: each having been in existence for at least three years; being known for rendering community services to Indians, especially Indian women; having a sound financial background in order to pursue the case after GOI assistance is stopped; having adequate contacts with legal professionals to take up and pursue the cases on a *pro bono* basis; finally and most importantly, is committed to the welfare of Indian women.

I often get letters from Indian women in Australia asking for my intervention against abusive husband or ex-husband. While I fully sympathise with their plight, unfortunately there is not much that GOI can do in the matter.

What we can do and have been doing in several instances in the past is to approach senior members of the Indian community to see if they can play a conciliatory or advisory role and guide the persons concerned.

Ultimately it is for the community to work with the local Government and local community resources available to render assistance in such cases.

Associations such as United Indian Association as well as other regional associations have an important role play in this in terms of giving support and also serving as a point of reference for women who need assistance. Setting up a helpline and publicising it on a web-page would be useful.

Indian associations also play a very important role in providing linkages to our traditional cultural heritage so that our younger people do not lose touch with their roots and India's traditional values.

If you ask me what traditional Indian values are, I would say:

Attachment to family

Respect for elders

A great sense of tolerance and an openness of mind, which accepts & assimilates the best from all cultures; this in turn leads to an ability to live together with other communities in harmony.

High premium on education and skills

Pride in one's country and its achievements

Substantive contribution to countries and communities where Indian community have settled.

Our various Indian associations, all of them, can also provide valuable assistance to Indian immigrants who have newly arrived by helping young Indian women as well as men to find their feet in a foreign country, integrate successfully and learn the norms and moves of Australia.

Taxi driver – langers; food at any time

Indian community centre.

A place of our own.

India has much to be proud of; and not least on this is her 25 million strong Indians and persons of Indian origin settled abroad, of which you here in Australia form such an important part.

We need to work together in imaginative ways to ensure that we support each other, especially to help out those of us who have fallen into adverse circumstances.

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