



Voice of SNEHA

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A Status Report on Violence Against Women

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

From the Editor's Desk

Sneha has quietly provided guidance and support to Connecticut based South Asian women who are physically or emotionally abused by their spouses or other family members. Championing such an unpopular cause is like swimming upstream but the rewards of bringing social justice to an underclass are soul satisfying, even if only small dents are made in the steely walls surrounding the issue of violence against women (VAW). The impact of grass root activism across many communities worldwide is finally being felt as VAW comes into focus of many nations for reforming and implementing social programs that will lead to gender equality and balance of power; the absence of which leads to violence.

The issue of VAW, which has been shrouded under layers upon layers of traditions, is now finally on the forefront of agendas of many organizations that can actually effect substantial changes through policy-making and financial and non-financial incentives. For example, UNIFPA (UN Population Fund) addressed a congress of religious heads in Bangladesh recently, urging them to promote full and equal participation of women in society. That is a significant step in a society where only a few years ago a Fatwa was issued against a female writer for daring to express her feelings about the impact of restrictions placed on women in Bangladeshi society. Whether UNIFPA's overture turns out to be a mere photo-op or truly results in actual policies to promote equal opportunities for women remains to be seen. However, UNIFPA's gesture of promising computers to the group of young Bangladeshi women has raised their awareness about the exciting possibilities.

VAW is included in the UN's strategic focus to bring about gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Especially encouraging is the fact that VAW is being taken seriously on worldwide basis. It is on the agenda of the governments of USA, India, as well as other member nations at their federal, state and local levels. Their objective is to eradicate VAW, including violence perpetrated by intimate partners (IPV). Undoubtedly, it will be a very long and painful climb but the first steps have been taken to get some collective arms around the magnitude of this worldwide problem by arriving at a common definition of what constitutes VAW, finding common methodologies and common measures to gather and analyze the information.

The UN has established timelines and attached accountability for reporting progress as the UN and the rest of the world have recognized that though mired in a myriad of local cultures and customs, VAW is more than just a social nuisance. The cost in lost productivity, healthcare and pursuing and bringing justice are prohibitive; in billions of dollars! In fact, according to a 2003 report by USA's Center for Disease Control, the cost of IPV alone

exceeds \$5.8 billion annually. Of this, \$4.1 billion is in direct medical and mental healthcare services and \$1.8 billion in productivity losses.

This realization has resulted in implementing programs at various agencies including social services, police, healthcare providers, justice departments and other public institutions for reporting VAW and IPV data. Various UN agencies, including the UN Development for Women (UNIFEM), are enforcing similar reporting requirements to agencies in the countries that have traditionally lagged in treating VAW and IPV due to cultural bias and stigma. UNIFEM has a clear mandate to promote mainstreaming of women through education and economic opportunities in its member countries.

Although these sources can only yield a partial picture of the magnitude of VAW and IPV, they are likely to provide accurate data on causes and patterns of violence so that programs can be tailored to achieve positive resolutions. A recent report, "WHO Multi Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence" by the World Health Organization provides a dismal picture of the status of women and VAW in the participating countries. WHO collected data from 24,000 women in eleven countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia, Montenegro, Thailand and United Republic of Tanzania) where the range of IPV is between 13% in Japan and 61% in Peru, with most sites falling between 23% and 49%. The most recent progress report titled, "The World Women, Progress in Statistics" issued by the UN on January 18, 2006 states that the number of countries that are now conducting such surveys has risen to 68, with 38 countries having national coverage. So, we are still a long way away from achieving the goals of equality and social justice but the first steps of this journey have marked the beginning. Now, it is up to us to keep the momentum going.

IPV among the South Asian women in Connecticut is found to be across all socio-economic classes and across all levels of education and professions. Sneha handles the cases of IPV and family related stressful situation with cultural sensitivity and confidentiality. As the South Asian population grows in the state, the demand on Sneha's resources is also growing.

In April, Sneha held an open house where two successful women, Razia Hashmi and Rachna Agrawal and Abul Islam, an entrepreneur based in Connecticut talked about how they overcame personal difficulties and how they succeeded against all odds. (Story on Pg.4)

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SNEHA At A Glance

- ◆ A not for Profit 503 B organization serving South Asian Communities in CT, NE and USA for the last 21 years.
- ◆ Focus on women and families, including seniors who may lack natural network and family support.
- ◆ 24/7 Support Helpline maintaining utmost confidentiality.
- ◆ Provide linkage and referral services to mainstream government and private organizations that support family, legal and immigration issues.



Voice of SNEHA

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Sneha is planning a fundraiser in September, when it will be presenting Trithy Umrigar, the author of, "The Space between Us". The novel focuses on the relationship of an upper middle class Parsi woman and her maid, who, despite of their different socio economic levels, form a bond through their common experiences of physical and emotional abuse typically perpetrated against women and social underclass in Mumbai's society. Trithy will be reading from her novel and will be interviewed by a panel. (Interview on Pg.6)

Hopefully, you will all join in supporting Sneha's goal and mission to support South Asian community by participating and donating generously.

-Pratima Mehta

(Please note that Sneha is registered as a 503 b organization and as such your contribution to Sneha is tax deductible.)

India Responds To VAW

Data on VAW and IPV in India is not readily available due to a lack of mechanism for identifying and reporting but a January 2005 report by the Government of India is encouraging. Responding to the "United Nation's Questionnaire on Implementation of The Beijing Platform for Action" India said that the following measures specific to VAW have been taken. India has:

- ◆ Conducted a pilot project to study efficacy of community based strategy of installing neighborhood committees to create zero violence zones
- ◆ Set up all women police stations in 14 states to facilitate the reporting of the crimes against women. India has also set up Voluntary Action Bureaus and Family Counseling Centers within these police stations to provide rehabilitative services.
- ◆ Set up Family courts in some states to adjudicate cases of maintenance, custody and divorce.
- ◆ Established "The Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalat"; an alternative justice delivery system for speedy resolution of cases involving justice for women.
- ◆ Installed Nari Adalat and Mahila Punch under the Mahila Samakhya Program in selected districts of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat. These are outside the normal justice system and use community pressure and informal social control to punish perpetrators of violence and restore women's rights in family. Typically, they handle cases of domestic violence, rape, child abuse and harassment.
- ◆ Launched Swadhar (2001) for destitute women, women rescued from trafficking and prostitution and women released from prison.
- ◆ Scrutinized rape laws with a view to make them more equitable.
- ◆ Brought violence in focus at the highest state level annual conferences for police officials.

- Pratima Mehta

"Caught in the Middle: Children's Reactions to Violence in Home"

Have you ever wondered what goes through children's mind when they witness violence between their parents? Do they feel powerless, as if they have no voice? Do they blame themselves? How do they react?

Every year, an estimated 3.3 million children in United States witness physical, verbal, and/or emotional violence in their homes. Such exposures to domestic violence have multiple short and long term effects of on children:

- ◆ It may also lead to violence against their children. For example, children could be hurt when household items are thrown or while trying to protect their parent.
- ◆ Witnessing of violence can lead to both behavioral and emotional difficulties.
- ◆ Violence against a parent may interfere with their ability to care for their own children.

Children who witness violence in their home may show:

- ◆ Fear
- ◆ Worry about their safety or their parents' safety
- ◆ Aggression towards other children or adults
- ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Stomachaches and/or headaches
- ◆ Difficulty eating
- ◆ Low self-esteem
- ◆ Withdrawal
- ◆ Academic difficulty in school
- ◆ Behavioral acting-out in school
- ◆ Feeling responsible for the abuse
- ◆ Guilt

Children may not show any symptoms until months or even years after witnessing the abuse. If children you know are witnessing domestic violence and showing any of the symptoms listed above, there are ways to help them.

First and foremost, encourage them to talk about their feelings. Although this can be uncomfortable for you as the adult and you may feel as though it is an "adult issue" that should not be raised with children but letting them know that it is okay to speak about the issue can be immensely comforting in itself. Talking allows a child to express their fears and worries. If a child is not comfortable talking or is too young, they should be encouraged to express their feelings and worries in other ways, such as writing or drawing.

Additionally, for a child experiencing significant symptoms, you may consider seeking out professional assistance. South Asians are reluctant to seek outside help with mental health concerns, as we prefer to keep family problems private. Nonetheless, a child witnessing domestic violence often needs specialized support that only a trained individual can provide. Collaboration between community members and trained professionals can help reduce the consequences of domestic violence on our children and help ensure that the cycle of abuse ends.

-Trupti Rao.



Voice of SNEHA



A Letter To Sneha Supporters From The Co-Presidents

Dear Sneha Supporters,

As Uma and I end our successful three years as Co -Presidents of Sneha, we have the immense pleasure of introducing two very competent board members Ms. Malavika Vidwans and Ms. Mira Patel who have accepted to take over as the co-presidents for the next two years.

Sneha has really grown over the past three years to become a very responsible and a contributing member of the society. We served a total of 100 women and their families from Connecticut who sought help from Sneha. They called us on our 800 toll free help line, e-mailed us thru our website or contacted us thru friends and supporters. We did our best to assist each and everyone in rehabilitation. We accompanied them to the court, took them shopping for necessities, to the counselor's or lawyer's office or just talked to them.



Sneha's New Board (left to right) :Malavika Vidwans & Mira Patel, as Co – President, Trupti Rao as Board Member, Rubina Islam and Sheila Sinha as co-treasurers

Building Support Network

We built relationships and networks with local shelters, attorneys, counselors, communities, NGOs outside of Connecticut. We encountered and resolved problems and issues ranging from visas, child custody, abandonment, behavioral problems and divorce issues. We lent support to the efforts to mobilize changes in the statuses of H4 visa holders. We contributed letters, testimonials and statistics in support of the efforts to get H4 visa holders work authorization and eligibility for VAWA. As part of the membership drive, we held open houses outside of the Hartford area.

Community Outreach

To effectively communicate with the community, we prepared a Sneha documentary explaining the beginning of Sneha and its role in the society. We created a new Sneha website, which holds a lot of the information and answers for women seeking direction and guidance. We created Sneha bookmarks in various languages; Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Urdu. As our work grew and we expanded, we inducted 5 new board members.

We nominated Sgt. Alpa Ladani for the Woman of the Year award 2004 at the India New England ceremony and she won the first runner up award. Past president Madhu Chandra was the finalist for 2005 for her

work and contributions to the cause of Sneha.

Fund Raising

We hosted 3 very successful fund raising events. Our chief guests were actors Rahul Bose and Konkona Sensharma, Dr. Kiran Bedi, , Atty. Preeti Bansal and DJ Rekha Malhotra. We held book discussions that were well attended and are a favorite with people in this area. Authors Dr. Mira Kamdar and Ms. Shauna Singh Baldwin were our guests.

We received our first federal grant and we used the funds to make the Sneha documentary to raise awareness. With the great support and contributions from the community, we have been able to raise substantial funds for the past years. These funds have been used to buy airline tickets for women, medical costs, groceries, transportation, shelter expenses and financial aid to women and their families.

We are listed with the United Way and continue to receive contributions from our supporters. Uma and I urge you to contribute generously to Sneha.

All donations are tax deductible.

Vote of Thanks

We at Sneha will be ever grateful for the continuous help and assistance from Atty. Nawaz Walah and Dr. Hira Jain. Special thanks to Mr. Joe Matthew Kavampurath for sponsoring events for the past years. Additionally, our heartfelt thanks to Shalini Kantayya a CT resident and Fulbright scholar in journalism who helped us with the documentary initiative , to Sujatha Srinivasan for helping us to bring out our first and second edition of the newsletter Voice of Sneha, to Anusha Srivastava for getting us our first interview in the Mantram magazine and for contributing articles, to Mr. Sharmaji of Haveli restaurant's and to Mr. Naik and Ambassador of India restaurant's for their catering services and use of their premises for our events.

We thank all those who attend our events religiously and volunteer their services.

Sneha has been fortunate to have a great team of board members who put in numerous hours and selflessly dedicated their time and efforts. Madhu, Malavika, Mira and Rubina worked diligently with the cases. Mira and Sushma did a great job in keeping our accounts balanced and up to date. Aysha created great flyers and brochures and Parvati was in charge of the mail box. Trupti represented us at seminars and conferences. Sree made sure that our taxes were filed. Kshiteeja, our in-house counselor helped our cases and providing advice to the group. In 2005, we inducted Sheela, Shazia and Rubina as board members. We made lasting friendships with so many people within the South Asian community and outside. General members Jaya, Amena, Pratima, Jyothi Sandya, Sarju, Parveen, Ami, Lakshmi, Sowmya, Malati, Lata, Bela and several members and supporters helped plan our events. The bonds that we formed in Sneha have empowered us to empower other women. We also experienced many exciting and tumultuous times when planning the fund raising events. We can never forget the thrill we had at the dinner we hosted for Rahul Bose and Konkona Sensharma. It was a pleasure serving the Sneha board and hope to see you all at all the future Sneha events.

- Uma Narayan and Jyoti Ramesh



Voice of SNEHA

2006 Sneha Open House

The 2006 SNEHA Open House was held in Cromwell on the afternoon of April 2nd, with an inspirational theme, "Succeeding Against Odds: Personal Stories of South Asian Entrepreneurs and Professionals." The purpose of this annual event was twofold: to inform community members about the mission and the goals of SNEHA, and to showcase the achievements of three local South Asian professionals who succeeded despite the obstacles they faced along the way.

The first South Asian woman to speak was Dr. Razia Hashmi who is currently the Medical Director for WellPoint (Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Connecticut). In addition to her medical degree, she also holds a Master's Degree in Public Health (MPH). Engaging, and charismatic Dr. Hashmi spoke about her experiences as a minority professional in the U.S., as well as about some obstacles she has faced, both professionally and personally. Dr. Hashmi's key message was that women have the power to fight against discrimination and injustice by communicating with the uninformed and educating others, who may be misinformed about South Asians and their culture. She is a proponent of merging in the mainstream while maintaining one's individuality and ethnic identity.

Accomplished Kathak dancer, Ms. Rachna Agrawal spoke next of her experiences and insights on her journey to success. She currently teaches at the Connecticut India Performing Arts Center and is also on the faculty at Kathak Nritya Kala Kendra in Chicago. Ms. Agrawal shared her poignant, personal story of having to leave her hometown of Bihar after her neighbors discovered that she was studying Kathak, which was inaccurately associated with prostitution at that time. Many in her hometown disapproved of her involvement with Kathak and threatened to hurt her family if she did not quit her training. In response, Ms. Agrawal moved away from Bihar and courageously began living independently in Delhi at the young age of sixteen. Ms. Agrawal's message to the audience was that to achieve your dreams, you must make a commitment, persevere with courage and look for inspiration within yourself, even when faced with opposition from others.

The final speaker was Mr. Abul Islam. Mr. Islam is the President and CEO of AI Engineers, Inc., which is a minority owned mid-size company. He is also on the board of directors of the CT Business and Industry Association. Mr. Islam shared his experiences of starting up his own company and how he overcame roadblocks. In recounting his experiences, he acknowledged the ongoing support and assistance he received from his wife Rubina who is a SNEHA Board Member. He offered concrete suggestions on ways that the audience could pursue their own business ventures. Mr. Islam cautioned that individuals who are seriously interested in starting their own businesses need to first assess the potential hardships realistically that both, they and their families can face, which makes family support a crucial element for running one's own successful business. Next, they need to secure the assistance of lending institutions, such as the Small Business Administration. Finally, these individuals should become actively involved in the minority suppliers' program and other business networks.

Following the conclusion of the speaker presentations and a lively question and answer period, attendees had an opportunity to browse and purchase various jewelry, clothing, and beauty supplies that were on sale by women-owned and/or minority-owned entrepreneurs.

- Trupti Rao



Speakers at the 2006 Open House (From left to right) Mr. Abul Islam., CEO of AI Engineers Inc., Ms. Rachna Agrawal, Connecticut based Kathak artist and Ms. Razia Hashmi, Medical Director at Anthem of CT.

Our Next Event in September 2006

Sneha's next event is a book reading and panel discussion with Trithy Umrigar, the author of "The Space between Us". The book is well acclaimed by critics and is riveting reading about the common thread of human strengths and weaknesses that binds the very disparate lifestyles of the upper middleclass and the lower strata of Indian society. Please Note: We have the books available for those of you who would like to read it before the event. The cost is approximately \$20.00 and is available by calling 860-658-4615.



From a Listening Post to Pro-activity

Societal Dynamics Impact Our Role

Over the years, Sneha has evolved to meet the changing needs of the community. We are noticing a marked change in the type of requests that come in through our help lines and contacts. At its inception 20 years ago, we just extended a friendly hand to South Asian families. They sought us out for support and information to ease the pain that arises from lonely task of settling in a new environment in a foreign country. Then in the 80's as parents of the first generation immigrants started to come either on temporary or a permanent basis, we provided venues for networking meetings to remove the intense sense of isolation and alienation that a sudden uprooting and transplanting in a foreign culture can cause .

Now with the influx of temporary workers who come here on HI visas, we are seeing different types of problems besieging the unsuspecting new immigrant families. They are not only unfamiliar with the landscapes and social environs but are also facing intense pressures generated by the work environment that demands productivity at warp speeds. Add to that the fact that many of the new migrant workers are married to professional women whose status is reduced to a dependent spouse who are not allowed to work, and you can see why the incidences of violence in families are increasing and resulting in dysfunctional relationships.

Expansion in The Scope of Problems

In 2005-2006 the number of calls on Sneha's help line has gone up by 5%. The problems encountered are also more complicated. In the past, the volunteers answering the phones mainly served as 'listening posts'. The women who called just wanted to 'vent' their feelings to somebody - preferably anonymously, so that they would not feel judged. This year, that seems to have changed. People are ready to take charge and work toward changing the situation they are in. This includes men and women from all strata.

We have contacted legal services and Counseling/Health care personnel for many callers. There was even a need for retaining help of a corporate/ financial lawyer. Here is an example of situations that we encounter; husbands start companies listing their spouses as Presidents or major Executives to qualify for certain grants and government loans. Wives sign the necessary papers without asking any questions but if their marriage goes downhill, the spouses find themselves caught in complicated financial situations, without the full understanding of consequences to themselves. Another change we found was that some women, especially the younger women, feel free to talk openly about their relationship issues. They do not feel the 'stigma' that is traditionally associated with divorce. This actually makes it easier for us to help them. Recently two young ladies in such situations needed financial help. So, we could take advantage of their skills, one was an excellent cook and the other a fashion designer. One provided home cooked food for sale and the other had an exhibition of clothes that she designed. Both young women waived confidentiality and met with their customers. We also helped some men who sought information on family issues.

Organization Growth Reflects Community 's Needs

Sneha's publicity and Outreach committee has met with success. This year, we got many calls from southern and eastern regions of Connecticut. Sneha's presence at various conferences and workshops has helped us make contact with state personnel. We were asked by the state social services agencies on numerous occasions to help . It is heartening to know that the mainstream agencies are becoming aware of South Asian needs. Sneha has again provided them with interpreters and counseling services.

Sneha volunteers help not only financially but also by providing their services and time. It is also supported by many of you who choose to donate generously.

-Malavika Vidwans

Immigrant Experience in The US

I was part of the first wave of Indian students to come here for higher studies thirty five years ago. Most of us came with very little awareness of what to expect here. India was yet to become the economic and IT superpower that it is now. International calls were expensive and sometimes it took days to connect. Lack of communication brought a level of isolation that none of us had experienced before. It, however, had a beneficial effect. It made us look to our fellow Indians, without regard to language, religion or regional differences, to fill the vacuum in our lives. We developed friendships that in many cases have endured the passage of time. Most of us talked about going back. We acted like sojourners. Over time, however, we developed roots here without even realizing it. Now, this is our country. Our children, relatives and friends live here. We still love India, but this is where we belong.

This country was very different then as well. Very few people knew about India. The Vietnam conflict had deeply divided the country. Draft age college students were dropping out in large numbers and looking for peace in Eastern philosophies and music. Ravi Shankar was the best known Indian here.

Let us skip now to the post 9/11 world. This country does not seem to be as welcoming as it used to be. There is wariness if not hostility towards immigrants especially from South Asia. We still get students but we are also getting a large number of people on short-term work visas and relatives of people settled here. A relatively new category is undocumented workers who constitute a large part of the vast underground economy of restaurant workers, taxi drivers, nannies, etc.

Given the diversity of the immigrants, the issues are more complex now. However, underneath the surface the issues are quite similar to what we faced. There is still loneliness to contend with. Despite globalization, there still are cultural assimilation issues and then there are the practical matters of getting work permits, proper visas, and employment.

Fortunately for new immigrants, there are a much larger number of options available to help them cope with the stresses of living here. The first and foremost still is the informal and formal social networks of Indians here. There are various Indian associations, various regional and language based associations and places of worship that provide a social support network for the newcomers. There are volunteer groups, like Sneha Inc. in Connecticut that I have been involved with. Sneha provides support to women , involved in stressful situations including domestic violence. We also help women with day-to-day issues such as finding a doctor, a beautician, or an immigration lawyer.

Town libraries can also be a resource. My friend and I taught Hindi language courses for children and for adults at the Simsbury library in Connecticut. The students came from diverse backgrounds.

For people who have an interest in music and dance, we have many people in the area who host house concerts. Wesleyan University has a week-long Indian music festival in the fall, where you can get to listen to many prominent musicians. For people like me who are willing to travel, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan in New York City is a huge resource. They routinely host dance, music and cultural programs. Most larger towns have Kathak and Bharata Natyam dance classes for children. Of course, people always have the option to start their own unique group. Start a book reading group or writer's club. Although all kinds of resources are available within the South Asian community, we should not limit ourselves to just our community



An Interview with Trithy Umrigar

“The Space Between Us” was published by William Morrow in 2006 and was very well received by critics and readers alike. Sneha interviewed Trithy recently. The following interview took place in August 2006 for this publication. (S & T, below represent Sneha and Trithy respectively)

- S: What was the trigger for the theme that focuses on emotional and physical abuse of women in Indian culture?
- T: Despite its prevalence across class, race, ethnic and cultural lines, the abuse of women remains widely misunderstood. Even educated people think that domestic abuse does not exist in certain segments of society or they misrepresent the cause of this abuse. I wanted to show that domestic abuse - both verbal and physical- happens in all walks of life, including among the very educated and affluent. Thus the choice to make Feroz, the educated, rich, well-traveled businessman, the abuser and not Gopal, the poor, illiterate, alcoholic working class man.
- S: Did you start this novel with a mission to peel and expose the layers of the dark side of our society and developed the story around it or was it the other way around, the dark side was unveiled as the story developed? Can you describe the creative process?
- T: The starting point of Space was simply an impulse to tell a good story. I was not looking to have a “message” or “moral.” I was just interested in answering the question: can the bond of gender triumph the division of class? But having said this, I was also conscious of the fact that I wanted my novel to reflect all my complicated- even contradictory feelings about Bombay. I wanted to present the city in its full complexity- the good and the bad, the beauty and the horror.
- S: The characters in your novel are very lifelike, as if you went inside the skins of some real people to create these entities. I, as a reader, felt as if I have encountered some of them in my life? How did you go about developing these characters?
- T: I never felt like I developed these characters. I felt like they developed themselves and along the way, developed me as a writer so that the plot line followed their dictates.
- S: How did you develop the story line and why did you choose to tell the story from Bhima’s point of view?
- T: The story is organic- it stems from an attempt to answer the question I mentioned above: in a class ridden society, can the bonds between women of different class backgrounds win? or will their economic division ultimately triumph? I tried to be fair to both women, Sera and Bhima by alternating each woman’s point of view. But ultimately, my loyalties lie with Bhima and she gets the last word, so to speak.
- S: When you wrote, “The Space between Us” were you writing primarily for women readers because portrayal of Indian men, those with power and those without status, is not very flattering? Have you heard from your male readers?
- T: I try very hard not to think of readership when I am writing. I don’t

want to censor myself in that way. I never meant the portrayal of male characters in this book to be unflattering. Gopal, I think is a very sympathetic character, I see him as a victim, not an oppressor. Freddy Dubash, a minor male character, is loveable and sympathetic character. But the reality of the world is that when people have power over others- as the two of male characters in this novel do, by virtue of their gender, wealth and education etc.- most of them tend to abuse it. And it just so happens that the victim are women. But even there it gets complicated. Sera is the victim of Feroz’s abuse. But by following the society’s strictures, she too oppresses Bhima in some ways. I want my characters to be fully realized human beings, full of flaws and delights and contradiction.

- S: What is next? Are there any novels in the works?
- T: I just sold another novel. The working title is, “If Today Be Sweet.” Its set in suburban Ohio and it deals with a Parsi woman trying to decide whether to return to India or to live with her son in the U.S.
- S: Can you tell us about your transition from being a reporter to becoming a novel writer?
- T: For me, it was surprisingly easy transition because both professions involve telling stories and making people come alive on the page. But I’m forever grateful to journalism for the discipline of writing that it imposed on me.
- S: Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers about you or your creative process?
- T: Just a word of caution: A novel is not a polemic or a manifesto – it is an act of imagination. The characters are individuals, not meant to speak for an entire group of people. I like reading and writing novels that make people question the reality one typically takes for granted. But ultimately, a novel lives or dies not based on issues it tackles but on its literary merit- the development of its characters and storyline and the beauty of languages.

- Pratima Mehta

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The Immigrant Experience

Getting involved with the mainstream organizations can be very valuable. We should not isolate ourselves from the mainstream. This could have serious political and social implications down the road. We should actively participate in local activities and organizations. I have many times referred mothers of young children to the Simsbury Newcomer’s Club. It has been a wonderful place to meet other women in the community.

Getting involved with your children’s school through the parent teacher association or through a volunteer program that every school runs can also be very helpful. I know of many parents who through their children’s schools have been able to organize South Asian cultural programs to bring awareness of our heritage to the local communities.

-Madhu Chandra

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