

Pricking the 'immigrant's dream' with a pen

Immigrant specialist and social worker Anu Peshawaria has proposed an international law to check the abuse of Asian brides in inter-state marriages.

And her book, 'The Immigrant's Dream', talks in detail about horror stories of women married to NRIs.

For the US-based lawyer, the battle to 'prick the NRI groom phenomenon' among the South Asian community is a long-drawn one.

It has been 25 years since Peshawaria, a one-time junior Wimbledon champion, has been fighting the cause of Indian and South Asian women living in the US and trapped in bad marriages and continually abused.

Fighting such legal cases free of cost, Peshawaria has put down 10 such cases, the laws and the rights that women can take refuge in, in her book, which will be launched at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in the capital Tuesday.

'In the past 10 years, I have noticed that the number of immigration related cases in the US have increased drastically. Every other day, an Indian immigrant woman married to an NRI comes to me to fight abuse. They are usually cheated and trapped in bad marriages,' Peshawaria, 45, told IANS in an interview.

'I help these women but I have written this book to spread awareness among people at the grassroots that one must be careful while choosing a husband for their daughter and not fall for the dollar bait,' she said.

Written in English, Peshawaria plans to translate the book into Hindi and Punjabi in another six months and distribute copies, especially in Punjab, from where most of these cases are reported.

Peshawaria stressed that families, who look for NRI grooms for their daughters, must verify the antecedents of the person, get his details from the work manager, check his immigration status, verify whether the girl will get a work permit. And most importantly, the girl should go on a work status rather than as a dependent.

'There's no point in talking about problems and not look for solutions. I would like to point out the serious lacunae in the law.

'Suppose a man gets married in India and seeks divorce in the US, within six months he will be able to get it, while the girl here is trapped in a bad marriage. In India, it is not easy to get a divorce. Therefore, when it comes to inter-state marriages, there should be an international law which countries must adhere to,' Peshawaria said.

'An international set of guidelines will benefit children the most. I have come across cases when one of the parents gets custody of the kid in one country and in the other country the other parent has custody.

'Twins and siblings are separated when a parent takes one of the children and goes off to another country leaving the other behind. This is cruel,' she added.

Quite surprisingly, 90 percent of the women cheated into marriage refuse to come back from the US.

'Besides fear of facing social stigma back home, these women are more empowered in the US. For instance, according to Section 360 (Violence against Women Act), an immigrant woman is allowed to stay and work in the US even after she has divorced her NRI husband, who is a US citizen.

'According to the Community Property law, a woman is entitled to 50 percent of her husband's property. So after divorcing her husband, she is not penniless. In India, a woman has to fight for maintenance,' she said.

Yet another solution she offers in these cases is amendment of the Indian laws and bending them towards laws like the Community Property law.

'At the end of the day, people have to become more aware and that's what SevA Legal Aid, my support centre, does by talking about the issue in temples, gurudwaras and other places in the US.

'I come to India every year and I am trying to spread awareness here as well. I will be meeting members of the National Commission for Women,' she said.

The NRI population in the US is close to two million.

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