

Following is the brief writeup of Rakshak delegation's interaction with MOIA during Rakshak's Representation to the MOIA subcommittee on ' NRI Marriages'

(July 25th, 2007 (11 AM, Akbar Bhavan, New Delhi)

Mr Nirmal Singh: Is Rakshak based in America or India?

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Sir, Rakshak is an NGO registered in the US and we are representatives of the Rakshak India arm.

Mr Nirmal Singh: What does Rakshak do?

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Rakshak is an international organization dedicated to preserving the institution of family and preventing elder abuse.

Mr Nirmal Singh: Then how do you get involved with this committee.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): We would like to draw your attention to how the misuse of laws in failed NRI marriages is a cause of elder abuse in our society.

Mr Nirmal Singh: We will let them make their presentation (referring to the Rakshak team comprising of four members) and then they can leave. We shall have our meeting after they leave. Are you ready?

Rakshak Representative (Lady): We need a minute sir while the LCD is being connected to the laptop.

Mr Nirmal Singh: I think you may start without it.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Sir, we have taken the trouble to present some important data in the form of visual aids and would like to be able to project the same.

Another member: We could start until then and they could make the presentation subsequently.

Mr Nirmal Singh: Let them start, then they can leave and we will have our meeting later. All right you may please start. I give you ten minutes.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Yes sir, I shall try but I may need somewhat more than 10 mins in order to present the facts that we seek to place before the committee.

Mr Nirmal Singh: We do not have so much time. I told you we can only give you 10 minutes. Please continue.

Mr Ramuwalia: I think that the focus of your talk is not the agenda of our meeting.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): I have not even begun. How sir would you know what the focus of my talk is going to be?

Mr Ramuwalia: All right then carry on.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Starts presentation on causes of failed NRI marriages and how every failed NRI marriage cannot be termed a fraudulent marriage.

Mr Nirmal Singh: you need not educate us about these things. This is not the focus of our meeting.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Sir, what exactly is the focus of the meeting then?

Mr Nirmal Singh: The focus is the issue of abandoned NRI brides.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Let us talk about abandoned NRI brides then. Presents the reasons for false claims of abandonment and how gender-biased laws are misused. Also describes the contradiction in unsubstantiated numbers of alleged NRI brides by the NCW and the WCD versus the statements on record made by the MOIA on the floor of the parliament.

Mr Ramuwalia: These numbers are absolutely true. What are you talking? You have no experience.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): With due respect sir, despite all your experience you would be hard put to substantiate these numbers. In fact earlier, I had the opportunity to interact with the representatives of the social security departments of Punjab and Andhra Pradesh present here and they gave the official figures of abandoned NRI brides from their respective states at 14 and 17. Am I correct?

Representatives of SS dept: Right.

Representative of WCD: These numbers are unsubstantiated sir.

Mr Nirmal Singh: Anyhow I don't agree with what you are saying. Most people here do not agree with you.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): That is your prerogative sir. You may not agree with me but kindly let me present my case.

Mr Ramuwalia: What are you saying? You don't know what is happening in Punjab. Every house in Punjab is suffering because of this. Come and see how the women are treated there, no better than shoeshine.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): That is the other issue that needs to be scrutinized as what is the special situation in this small region in Punjab known as the Doaba. Presents the reason for immigration from Punjab and draws parallels with the desperation to migrate in AP, both of whom are apparently the regions with the largest numbers of abandoned NRI brides.

Mr Ramuwalia: What are you saying? You are anti women.

Mr Nirmal Singh: You have two minutes to wrap up your presentation.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Kindly allow me to conclude and also give Rakshaks recommendations for taking a balanced and unbiased view of the situation while framing new laws and legislation. Ends presentation.

Mr Nirmal Singh: I would like to reserve my comments. I thought you people had done some research etc that is why we invited you. However everything that you said was very general in nature. Any of the women present here who would like to comment.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): Sir, actually you have made your stance very clear from the beginning of the presentation without any reservations. We have done a fair amount of research in the issues pertaining to NRI marriages and the phenomenon of abandoned brides. We have made every effort to place on record all relevant material pertaining to the same.

Representative from ?: We agree that failed marriages are different from fraudulent marriages and every failed marriage cannot be termed a fraudulent marriage.

Representative from NCW: I do not want to get into the number crunching debate but we have done so much work at the grassroots level and do you think that it is without any experience that we have brought out this book on abandoned NRI brides.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): The first step to effectively tackling a problem is to define the extent of the problem. Despite the opportunity that the NCW enjoys of working at close quarters with these alleged abandoned brides, the NCW has been unsuccessful in garnering any data even on the true numbers of such women. This however does not deter them from labeling the phenomenon as alarming. 100 odd abandoned brides from a diaspora of approx 25 million NRIs can hardly be termed alarming.

Representative from the dept of Law and Justice: I would like to ask a question. You said that the laws in India are gender-biased. Can I ask how you can say that?

Rakshak Representative (Lady): I would like to answer that... interrupted by Mr Nirmal Singh.

Mr Nirmal Singh: We are not trying to initiate a debate.

Rakshak Representative (Lady): We have a law whereby a woman can accuse a man of abuse verbal, physical, economic etc etc. Do we have a similar law for men? After all abuse may be perpetrated by members of either sex.

Mr Nirmal Singh: All right. You can give whatever you want to my secretariat and you may please leave.