



## Readers' Forum



### Politically Powerless

Women in India are politically powerless, weak, and poorly represented in the present system. Their representation has never gone beyond eight per cent in Parliament, 10 per cent in the State Assemblies and 13 per cent in the Council of Ministers.

The corrupt electoral system saturated with money and muscle power has left limited space for women to enter formal political bodies. Only 5.8 per cent of senior management and administrative posts in the government are held by women. In the judiciary only three per cent of the judges are women. They hold 8.7 per cent of 4,928 posts in the IAS, 1.9 per cent of 2,825 posts in the IPS and 8.7 per cent of 741 posts in the Indian Foreign Service. There were 43 women MPs in the 12th Lok Sabha and 19 in the Rajya Sabha. In the total formal workforce, women do not exceed 23 per cent.

The combined effects of gender bias, grinding poverty and lack of basic education has made women's lives in India very vulnerable. Women's political empowerment cannot come about unless the power of the money *mafia* and manipulation by power-brokers are done away with. Essential steps must be taken towards eradication of poverty, eliminating inequality in education, ensuring access to health care and employment opportunities, protecting and preserving the environment, and eliminating violence against women. So far, empowerment for women has merely remained a slogan.

The Congress Party at its special session last month approved an amendment to the party constitution providing 33 per cent reservation for women. However, during the last monsoon session of Parliament, when Mr Vajpayee's government tried to introduce the women's reservation Bill, the Congress backed out at the last minute. It is most unfortunate that the gender and

caste lobbies are cutting against each other to derail the bill and choosing to turn dreams into nightmares.

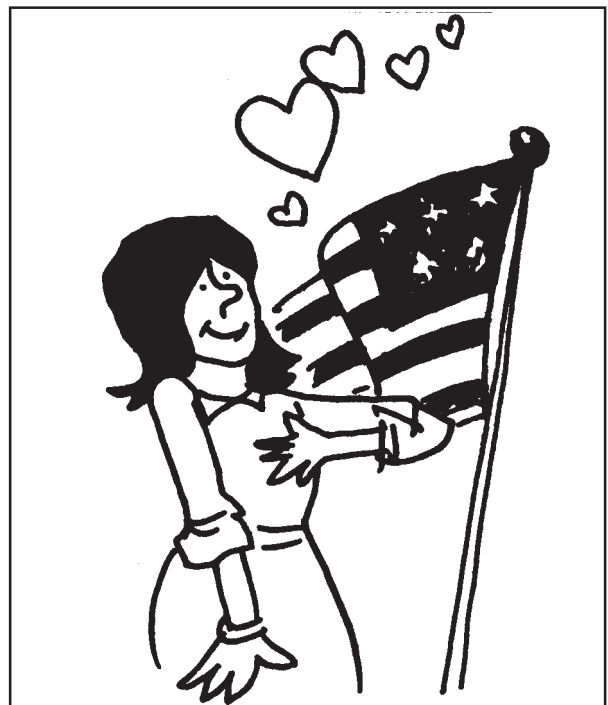
Women need guts to triumph over the deeply conservative social outlook towards women and counter the contempt for their struggle for equality.

**P.B. Rathod, Gulbarga, Karnataka**

### To Indians in America

I spent almost two years in India. Although it was very difficult at times, I learned to love and respect much of Indian life and many of its people.

We need to understand why we wish to live in places other than our native land. Many people harbour fantasies of themselves in other countries or are drawn towards images of "foreign living" that



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are equally fantastic. Leave the fantasy at the cinema. Face reality. The streets of America are not paved with gold. Although the standard of living might be higher along with salaries, so are the expenses. Problems can be paramount. I do know a number of NRIs here who do far better than I. I could easily envy their success. But I also know many that could tell terrible accounts of American dreams becoming a nightmare. Almost certainly, few speak of the difficulties, pain and sacrifices one must make when immersed into a new culture, especially without family or a community that is familiar and will offer support. I have tried on more than one occasion to prepare and warn some of them but was ignored or criticised.

Life in the USA can be very lonely. In this country privacy and independence is prized. Making it on your own, therefore, becomes the norm. I am a single professional woman living in a metropolitan city. I can say, without doubt, that living alone is very hard. It can easily become isolation. This is in contrast to Indian culture where family, friends or a community are an every day reality.

Isolation is a high price to pay for a life abroad. But isolation is inevitable unless you put an enormous effort into creating your own "community" in the USA. I am not making a statement for or against such an effort, as I see benefits in both ways of life, but I know the cost. Probably the most important grain of wisdom I can offer is—love many things and many people in life. Your life will be more satisfying regardless of where you live. I speak of love as a human emotion that is learned, in marriage, in friendship, in family, in living. Be passionate about what you love. Remember, one can have passion for people, food, music, art and much else. Passion is not limited to sexual pleasure. Pursue your passions.

And love is something we must practice. We have a lifetime to do so. The need for it is endless. There is always someone who needs your love and if someone does not love you or rejects your love – go love someone else... and don't forget yourself.

**Bonita Eiden, Florida, USA**



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