

## Transnational Abandonment - Saheli's Efforts

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***Sujata**, the mother of a new-born, was abandoned at an apartment that had been rented by her husband in a suburb of Boston. She was here in the US on a H4 (dependent) visa, unable to work and earn a living. Over the past couple of years domestic violence advocates at Saheli helped Sujata obtain child support from the abusive spouse through the separation/divorce process, and accompanied Sujata to legal aid and to court hearings many, many times. Sahelis helped her obtain her work authorized U Visa, and provided transportation and baby-sitting services for all her legal appointments. We have also taken her grocery shopping and to hospitals, as needed. Sujata has now reached a stage where she can work (she has an MBA and should be able to find a good job). Today, Sujata still needs help to pay for driving lessons and buy a used car so she can become truly independent.*

Behind each and every successful case the domestic violence advocates at Saheli remain painfully aware of many more women who still need to be helped. The abandonment of South Asian wives in the home country is a growing serious problem in the US. Most abandoned women fall into three groups:

- (1) a woman who is residing with her husband in a foreign country suddenly finds that her husband has disappeared leaving her and the children with no funds in rented apartments where she has no means of paying the rent;
- (2) a woman who has been living in the US on an H-4 visa is taken back to India and left there without a passport, visa, and money, thus leaving her without any means of rejoining her husband and family; and
- (3) a woman is married before her husband leaves for a foreign country but is never sent papers and documents for a passport or visa to join him. Alternatively, a man who is already living abroad may return to marry and then leaves with promises to send for his bride. However, the papers never arrive.

***Mala**, settled in Rhode Island originally, was on an H4 visa, and currently resides with a friend in MA. She was married for 7 years, and has a 3 year-old child. Last year when they all visited India, her husband held onto the passports and returned to the US by himself, abandoning Mala and the child in India. Saheli is working with immigration lawyers with offices in both the US and India to help Mala and her child achieve US resident status.*

Saheli, a community-based organization in New England, was founded in 1996 with the mission to empower South Asian women and their families to live safe and healthy lives. Led by a small staff and

many dedicated volunteers Saheli is headquartered in Burlington, and has service advocates in Quincy and Shrewsbury. Saheli is uniquely focused on the needs of South Asians (from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Staff and volunteers speak many South Asian languages, including but not limited to Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, and Punjabi.

A large number of South Asian marriages take place hurriedly, mostly when men go back to India for a visit to find a woman to marry.

Saheli advocates have worked with women who have experienced all forms of wife abandonment. Saheli has put these women in touch with lawyers and is helping them obtain assistance from various institutions in their home countries and in the US as well. Abandonment cases are very costly both in terms of working hours spent and in terms of the funds needed to bridge the initial monetary gap.

Transnational abandonment of women may seem to be a new emerging face of violence against women but this traumatic situation has been around for years and is only recently coming to light. Women have mostly suffered in silence regarding this. Worst of all, fear of threats towards themselves and their family, towards their aged parents and other loved ones, not to forget the incredible social stigma surrounding these issues – all these additional pressures make women suffer all the more in silence.



Saheli works very hard to empower South Asian women and families to be safe and healthy in the United States. Contact Saheli Boston: [info@saheliboston.org](mailto:info@saheliboston.org) and we can support you and share resources for your needs. Call the bilingual helpline at 1-866-472-4354. All services are free and very confidential. We shall stand by you through this difficult time in your life.

**Domestic Violence Against South Asia's 'Disposable Women'.** [Lucy Clarke-Billings](#)

<http://www.newsweek.com/transnational-marriage-abandonment-new-form-violence-against-women-503285>

**Transnational abandonment is on the rise, in the UK and US**

"Transnational marriage abandonment lies at the intersection of immigration and patriarchal control, allowing abusers and states to enjoy impunity for violations committed against women in transnational spaces." [Pragna Patel](#) and [Sundari Anitha](#) 6 June 2016,

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/pragna-patel/transnational-marriage-abandonment-new-form-of-violence-against-women>