

# Legal Times

LAW AND LOBBYING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

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## Seeking Shelter



**A WAY OUT:** Aruna Vallabhaneni seeks asylum because of family violence in India.

BY JIM OUPHANT

The beatings were relentless, severe enough, she claims, to force her to have a hysterectomy, enough to cost her her sense of smell, enough to leave her homeland—and two children—behind.

Aruna Vallabhaneni's husband battered her, verbally abused her, and threatened her life. Eventually, she went to the police in her native city of Hyderabad, India, and had the husband arrested.

Then, she says, her own father, who had helped arrange the marriage, went to the police and got

the charges dropped. The husband returned home and beat Vallabhaneni savagely. And her father told her that he and her mother, mortified by her complaint to the police, would commit suicide if she did so again.

Vallabhaneni left India in 1997 on a temporary tourist visa to the United States. Once here, however, she refused to return and sought political asylum. She is part of a growing legion of women from the Third World who are seeking the United States' protection from abusive family members.

"Under that system, if what happened to her is  
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Asylum law heads into controversial new territory as women stake their claims on the need to escape family violence.