

ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND MARITAL VIOLENCE

South Asian Women's Organizations in the United States

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Based on a two-stage questionnaire with six South Asian organizations that focus on South Asian women, this article examines the factors that determined the creation of such organizations. Through an analysis of their organizational ideology, structure, goals, and strategies, the article demonstrates their relevance and the instrumental role they play in shifting marital violence among South Asians in the United States from a "private problem" to a "social issue." Central to the analysis is how ethnicity and gender intersect in addressing social change. These organizations are a growing social movement.

For centuries, marital violence has been perceived as a part of the normative structure in patriarchal societies (Dobash and Dobash 1978, 1979, 1981). Although policymakers, social scientists, and social workers in the United States have been giving increased attention to marital violence in recent years, scant attention has been focused on the role of community-oriented organizations in addressing the problem and in making it a social issue.

Drawn from a larger study on marital violence among South Asians in the United States, this article looks specifically at the rise of a new set of South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWO) in the United States, whose center of focus has been South Asian women. South Asia includes the people from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal. This article examines some of the causal factors that determined the creation of these organizations and their relevance in the United States. It examines their role in bringing change at the individual, community, and

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societal levels. The article demonstrates that these organizations are a growing social movement, enhancing the efficacy of the larger movement to end violence against women. Through an analysis of these SAWOs, this study expands the discourse on domestic violence to encompass an analysis of ethnicity and gender.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section, briefly reviews the major theoretical and conceptual considerations pertinent to understanding SAWOs. The second section outlines causal factors for the emergence of SAWOs in the United States. The next section explains their organizational ideology and structure. The fourth section explains the organizations' goals and strategies. The final section discusses the importance of SAWOs as a growing social movement in addressing violence against minority women.

EXISTING THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Two major theoretical approaches in the study of domestic violence include the "family violence perspective" and the "feminist perspective." In the former, the family is considered to be the basic unit of analysis, whereas in the latter, the abused woman is taken as the unit of analysis (Kurz 1989; Strauss, Gelles, and Steinmetz 1980).

The family violence approach views marital violence as stemming from the personal characteristics of the wife or husband or from the internal and external stress factors that affect the family. Family theorists see violence as arising from character flaws in the individuals forming family units. The causal factors of violence are thought to range from violent socialization during childhood or learned behavior in the male's family of origin to alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illnesses, or lack of self-control (Stacey and Shupe 1983). Variations in this approach regard violence within the family as a product of frustration stemming from factors such as an individual's lack of goal fulfillment, unemployment, poverty, or cultural deprivation (Freeman 1984). Some early psychological perspectives asserted the wife's psyche as the causal factor for marital violence and as such seem to adopt a "blame the victim" approach (Snell, Rosenwald, and Robey 1964). Understanding violence as learned and cyclical in nature is a popular view among adherents of the family violence perspective (Launius and Lindquist 1988; Walker 1979, 1983).

The second theoretical framework, one frequently termed *feminist*, does not limit causes of domestic violence to psychological and micro sociological factors, but considers global pervasiveness of violence and its acceptability. Rather than focusing on the family as the unit of analysis, feminist theorists emphasize the position of the wife as the victim and see wife abuse as a reflection of the social structure (Pagelow 1984). According to this view, wife abuse is not an act of deviance or a breakdown in the social order, but arises out of the very same normative structure that defines women as inferior, reaffirms dominance and aggression as positive attributes in men, and underrepresents women in all spheres

of social, economic, and political life (Dobash and Dobash 1981). The dominance by men in heterosexual intimate relationships is seen as having its roots in the patriarchal values of society at large, mirrored in the legal structure.

It is ironic that although feminist scholarship in the United States has addressed the issue of marital violence and criticized mainstream work for excluding gender concerns, it has excluded the experiences of ethnic minority women, especially immigrant women (Ngan-Ling Chow 1993). The relevance of ethnic-based women's organizations in addressing violence against women has received almost no attention in the organizational or social movement literature. There is a conspicuous gap in the literature about structural and cultural factors that legitimate domestic violence among ethnic groups, especially recent immigrant groups. Neither the family perspective nor the feminist perspective have addressed the linkages between ethnicity and gender in addressing the problem, its resolution, or sources of change.

An alternative framework is what I call an *ethno-gender* approach. It is based on the intersection of ethnicity and gender as a significant analytical category in the discourse on domestic violence. It posits a two-dimensional approach in conceptualizing a framework for analysis, especially in the immigrant context. These two dimensions are gender and ethnicity. Here, gender is a social construction that defines and evaluates the roles and expected behavior patterns based on one's biological sex. Gender thus means to be male or female in terms of appropriate role performances, personality structures, attitudes, and behaviors, which is accomplished in concrete settings (Richardson 1988; West and Zimmerman 1987). Ethnicity is defined as having two dimensions: One, as cultural differentiation based on some element of primordiality, such as race, origin, history, and language, combined with cultural specificities such as distinct religious practices, nomenclature, particularized customs, beliefs, and values (Geertz 1963); two, as a social construct that is dynamic, manipulated, mediated, and symbolically manifested in social interaction in situational contexts (Ben-Rafael 1982; Hecter 1975; Shokeid and Deshen 1982).

Although ethnic minority women who are victims of marital violence confront problems on multiple fronts, based on their oppression on sexual, ethnic, cultural, legal, and economic grounds, this approach emphasizes the intersection of ethnicity and gender because cultural differences form an important basis for the social construction of a national culture in a foreign land. Ethnicity becomes the basis for group identification and solidarity in an alien country. At the same time, specific physical features and cultural habits remind the dominant group and the immigrant group of their foreign background—regardless of their previous socioeconomic class—thereby stereotyping, boundary marking, and restricting total acceptance of the immigrant by the mainstream (Ngan-Ling Chow 1993). The social situation is frequently manifested in the dominant group forming the core and the subordinate group being allocated a peripheral position in the social, economic, and political structure of the setting. Consciousness of being distinct from others in the same setting thereby can lead to boundary formation, maintenance, and some degree of

latent and manifest conflict because of discrimination based on a dominant-subordinate structure in the social, economic, and political context.

Although studies have shown that there is declining significance of class identities and that identities and solidarity are exerted by more manifest markers and politicized issues such as race, ethnicity, and gender (Emmison and Western 1990; Graetz 1983, 1986, 1992; Waters 1994), this framework does not preclude the role of class, but rather emphasizes the increasing importance of the inclusion of ethnicity with gender in addressing marital violence. Ethnicity and gender may gain or recede in salience in reaction to specific contextual changes; however, in the immigrant context, although class differences exist, for immigrants previous class distinctions become decontextualized and frequently ethnicity cuts across class in the immigrant's identification vis-à-vis the dominant group. Ethnicity is frequently the most visible marker of differentiation.

As women, immigrant women (unlike immigrant men) have to cope with gender boundaries that define them as subordinate, based on the patriarchal norms and values of both the immigrant and mainstream cultures. As an ethnic minority, regardless of class affiliation in their home country, immigrant women (unlike women from the dominant culture) have to cope with semipermeable boundaries that allow them, as subordinate group members, to partially internalize the norms and values of the dominant culture while being excluded by the dominant group from total membership in the dominant culture. Ethnicity becomes the most manifest marker that is intricately woven with gender in the fabric of an immigrant woman's social identity.

This ethno-gender perspective posits an ethnic/gender interaction, because focusing on gender alone excludes cultural distinctions in gender relations as well as majority/minority group distinctions in ethnic relations, in explaining the social problem of marital violence. Although gender role stereotypes oppress women under patriarchy, ethnic minority women, especially recent immigrant women, experience dual subordination based on their gender and their ethnicity.

Rather than emphasizing only sex-gender systems, for ethnic minority women problems of adjustment to the contradictions and conflicts arising out of a binary cultural experience must be included in the analysis of domestic violence. The ethno-gender approach posits questions on how gender relations are constructed and how cultural concerns are articulated at the individual, organizational, community, and societal level. Attitudes, perceptions, belief systems, abuser aggression, response of victims, forms of resistance, social networks, and organizational strategies can be best explained by analyzing the complex pattern of gender relations within a cultural milieu chosen or imposed on marital relations. Efficacy and measures of success in the mainstream movement on domestic violence cannot be arbitrarily defined as the criteria to evaluate ethnic minority women's concerns. Courses of action, strategies, distinctiveness of culture, and structural arrangements have to be understood and addressed by looking at ethnic minority women based not only on their gender but also on their position as an ethnic minority. One can then examine how gender and ethnicity are addressed by the SAWOs in shifting

the problem of marital violence among South Asians in the United States from a personal problem to a public issue.

Methodology

This study was conducted over a three-year period (1990-93). Because research in the area of domestic violence is limited by ethical and practical barriers, sources for data collection were extremely difficult and limited (Strube 1988). To maximize data collection, the data for this study were drawn from diverse sources. Data sources included unstructured taped interviews that I conducted with 25 South Asian women who were victims of marital violence; questionnaires to South Asian organizations; participant observation of some of these organizations; and gathering of secondary sources, such as newspaper articles, monthly bulletins, and pamphlets.

The primary analysis for this article, however, is drawn from data gathered from six SAWOs. These organizations are Apna Ghar, Maitri, Manavi, Sakhi, Sewaa, and Sneha. In the absence of any systematic list of South Asian organizations addressing the issue of marital violence, I developed a list of South Asian organizations and contacted these organizations to cross-check and seek out names of organizations that may have been excluded. A list of 15 organizations was the result. The first stage was an open-ended questionnaire sent to the 15 organizations. Nine of these organizations replied; three did not reply despite three follow-ups. Three questionnaires were returned unopened. The questionnaire included organizational profile questions, aims and goals, organizational strengths and weaknesses, contacts with other organizations, nature of assistance and resources, causal factors for marital violence, areas for improvement in organizational support, and areas for legislative change.

Replies were coded into categories. Based on an analysis of the first questionnaire, additional questions were formulated and a second questionnaire with two sections (close-ended and open-ended questions) was sent to each of the organizations in 1993. Six of the nine organizations replied. Questions that guided the research included organizational profile, goals, strengths, weaknesses, ideology, causal factors, and strategies for the resolution of marital violence. In addition, I observed four of the organizations at their meetings and had informal conversations with a few of the founding members.

Data were analyzed using the grounded theory method. Data analysis included the organizations' strategies, structure, ideologies, and relevance. Central to the analysis were questions such as: Why were these organizations created? How do they differ from other mainstream organizations? What roles do they play in shifting domestic violence from a private problem to a public social issue? This article discusses the relevance of these organizations and their contribution to both the South Asian community and the larger movement against domestic violence.

EMERGENCE OF SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Two movements form the background for the creation of the organizations studied here. They are the Battered Women's Movement in the United States and the United Kingdom and the Women's Movement in South Asia.

Prior to the mid-1970s, marital violence was perceived as an individual problem; hence, little attention was devoted to this abuse. In 1971, in the outskirts of London, a grassroots organization of women organized the first shelter for abused wives, thereby initiating the "Battered Women's Movement" (NiCarthy, Merriam, and Coffman 1984; Pagelow 1992). By the mid-1970s, leaders of the feminist movement stated that marital violence was unacceptable and created the Battered Women's Movement in the United States. Prior to this, marital violence was seen as an individual problem. Women who stayed within the relationship were frequently defined as masochists who provoked men to be abusive. The Battered Women's Movement was central in transforming marital violence from a private, individual problem to an important social problem. Movement activists put forth the view that the abuse women experienced in marriage was a reflection of the unequal status that women had in society; they blamed the existing social structure in defining male aggression as acceptable and frequently desirable (Schechter 1982; Walker 1979). By doing this, the Battered Women's Movement shifted the attention from individual abusive men to men as a class who are a product of their socialization in a patriarchal society (Schechter 1982; Stordeur and Stille 1989). This definition produced a movement focusing not on treatment or punishment of the individual husband, but on creating shelters for women and providing them with legal intervention, economic and social resources, and alternative living situations (Adams and McCormick 1982; Davis 1987). The Battered Women's Movement also increased public awareness and support for the protection of battered women. A consequence of this was the creation of shelters and pressure for legislation to protect women from marital violence.

From the late 1970s and early 1980s, Third World feminist groups began addressing the "women question" in their countries. Various women's organizations were created to deal with the issues that had an impact on women. They focused on the global and internal oppression and exploitation of Third World women. Special emphasis was given to the various forms of violence such as rape, widow burning, dowry deaths, female infanticide, amniocentesis, and marital violence that occurs in their countries (Bush 1992; Everett 1979; Kishwar and Vanita 1986; Liddle and Joshi 1986). Movement activists questioned the normative structure and culturally prescribed values within the institution of marriage and family. Most important, they initiated legislative changes that protected the rights of women. They demonstrated and advocated for social change and were central in bringing the problems of Third World women to the fore, making it an important

of expertise. The lack of a traditional hierarchical structure in most of these organizations is because of an articulated or unarticulated belief that such hierarchies are to some degree the reflection of asymmetrical power relations under patriarchy. Monthly meetings are held to discuss issues and update members on the various activities of the organization. The emphasis is on collectivity. This is not to say that these organizations lack leadership or that conflicts from latent leadership do not arise. The research indicates that leadership in most of these organizations tends to be based on two criteria: the central role played by the founders of the organization and active involvement and commitment in the activities of the organization. None of the value-oriented SAWOs had sought state funding, because they perceived this as demanding some degree of compromise of their values. These organizations are, however, well networked with other nongovernmental organizations that address domestic violence or immigrant rights. There is an emphasis on coalition building as a vital means to bring about social change.

Organizations with diffused ideology tend to be more formally structured. Among the organizations studied, *Apna Ghar* is the only organization that has a shelter and is funded by the state. Using state resources means needing to work to some degree within the confines of bureaucratic structures because the organization must conform to the state-defined specifications about the allocation of funds and use of the shelter. Organizational membership thus necessitates the inclusion of non-South Asian representatives as board members; issues of ethnicity and gender are addressed through a service-oriented approach. This organization is extremely successful in networking with other service organizations.

The one unspecified ideology-based organization, *Sneha*, is differentiated in structure from the rest by its membership size. A consequence of having limited active members is that its nebulous structure evolves from the selective service provided at a given time. These are primarily support, listening, providing information, and referrals.

Although all these organizations are South Asian women-focused, organizational membership criteria tend to vary. Some of these organizations tend to include only women as members, whereas others include both men and women. Membership is predominantly South Asian, with Indians forming the largest group.

A common feature of the organizational structure among SAWOs is the connection between the direction of the growth of membership and who the founding members were. For example, the New York organization started by young women professionals tends to have predominantly young women professionals; the Philadelphia organization, initiated by two South Indian women, has predominantly South Indian women professionals; the Chicago and New Jersey organizations are a mixture of older professionals and homemakers; however, this dimension cannot be overemphasized, because membership can also be partially linked to the profile of the South Asian population in these areas.

A major difference between these organizations and other women's organizations in the United States is that, although women-focused, these South Asian organizations address the cultural factors that differentiate the family structure of immigrant families; they also address the problem of tactics of control used by the

organizations work to organize women for empowerment by linking personal and political aspects around a range of issues, especially the ending of violence against women. Here empowerment means power to attain an internal strength, the right to determine one's choices in life, to achieve self-reliance, to free oneself from any form of coercion and violence, to reject the existing structures that discriminate on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and the right to influence the direction of social change. An important part of this type of empowerment is the need to redress any form of change that excludes the acknowledgment of cultural diversity and its inclusion in influencing the direction of change. The underlying premise is for South Asian women to attain greater control over their own lives and exercise more power. As they do so, they will be able to break down some elements that result in their multiple oppression in the United States. The unit of focus is the South Asian woman.

Diffused ideology is an organizational ideology emphasizing more dispersed values that loosely form the basis for the structure, goals, and activities of the organization. This is not to say that such organizations do not have a set of values, but one central value does not determine all dimensions of the organization. For example, although the problem of male dominance is addressed, the struggle against patriarchy is not an explicit core value that defines all other dimensions. Rather, a set of selective values, such as dignity of women within the institution of family, economic equality, and protection of children of abused women, pervades the organization. Although having elements of a feminist framework, this ideology is more diffuse and includes components of the family violence perspective, as contrasted to a feminist perspective on violence. The attempt is to address issues pertaining to women's rights while providing services that make the family viable as an institution. The organization Apna Ghar is an example.

Unspecified ideology is an organizational ideology with an amorphous set of values. It results in a perception among the organizational members that there is no specific value or set of selective values that directly correspond to their structure, goals, and activities. The organization Sneha fits into this category. The organization perceives itself primarily as a service agency that assists individuals in need, without regard to articulating a specific organizational value or set of values.

Although the SAWOs may vary in their ideology to some degree, a common theme that binds them is the underlying philosophy to support South Asian women. Most important, they not only emphasize gender systems but situate themselves to address the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity.

The SAWOs tend not to have branches, and contact with their membership is direct. Common to all the SAWOs is that they are structured around voluntary membership. Their central commitment is to address the problems of South Asian women in the United States, specifically marital violence. Many of these organizations have been officially incorporated and have obtained nonprofit status. There are, however, some structural variations in these organizations, based on their ideology. Organizations based on a value-oriented ideology tend to be predominantly nonhierarchical and are characterized by a less-formalized structure with volunteers dividing the tasks among themselves based on their interest or their areas

issue for Third World women in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Until recently, little attention was paid to the structural and cultural context in which marital violence occurred within the South Asian community in the United States.

The 1980s witnessed the rise of SAWOs in the United States. What was the basis for the creation of these organizations? Although South Asian organizations existed prior to 1980, their establishment was a symbolic representation of their ties to their home country; they helped construct a national culture in a foreign land through cultural, social, and religious activities (Bhattacharjee 1992). South Asian men had greater visibility in these organizations and tended to be the locus of control. These organizations, however, did not address the different experiences of immigrant men and women (Vaid 1989). In fact, the gendered division of labor was reinforced within the social institution of the family and social and religious organizations of the South Asian community.

At the same time, the specific concerns of ethnic minority women have been frequently excluded by white U.S. feminists, thus marginalizing women like South Asian immigrant women. South Asian women felt an increased need to organize and address the problems faced by the women in their community. A consequence of this was the emergence of a new set of South Asian organizations in the United States beginning in 1980 whose focus was South Asian women. In a short span of 10 years, many SAWOs have been established as part of a growing social movement to address the problem of violence against women in their community (Sakhi Collective 1992). These organizations created a space for South Asian women to discuss issues that were pertinent to them as women and as South Asians in the United States and provided tangible support and services for South Asian abused women. Intersecting gender and ethnicity by their very existence and in the issues they articulate, these SAWOs attempt to protect and empower South Asian women, while simultaneously demarginalizing them from the larger movement to end violence against women.

ORGANIZATION IDEOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

The success of a social movement is contingent on its ability to convince its potential members, and sometimes the larger public, of the merits of its ideology (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988). Organizational ideology is a set of ideas and values that are socially constructed by the organizations that form the ideational framework; this framework defines the basis for its membership, organizational structure, goals, and strategies. The organizational ideologies of the SAWOs, based on my findings, fall in three categories: value oriented, diffused, and unspecified ideologies.

Value-oriented ideology can be defined as organizational ideology with a set of core values that are explicit and directly correspond to the structure, goals, and activities of the organization. Four of these organizations—Sakhi, Manavi, Maitri, and Sewaa—fit into this category (albeit to varying degrees). Their value orientation is explicitly feminist, with the struggle against patriarchy central. These

abuser within the immigrant context such as the "green card" factor, language barrier, and lack of information or access to support services.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The goals of a movement involve some element of being collectively defined. The success of the goals to a large degree cannot be discussed without simultaneously addressing organizational strategies, because individual participation depends to a large degree on the perceived usefulness of the goals and the feasibility of goal achievement (Klandermans 1993). An analysis of the goals and strategies are crucial for examining the success of a social movement. The goals of SAWOs can be divided for analytical purposes into three categories, although they are all interconnected and are prioritized differently within each organization. These three goals are organizing South Asian women, ending domestic violence, and community education.

Organizing South Asian Women

Until recently, South Asian women in the United States have been relatively atomized or marginalized. This atomization has resulted in South Asian women remaining relatively voiceless and powerless. The "dual marginalization" of South Asian women through exclusion of gender issues by mainstream South Asian organizations and relative exclusion of diverse cultural contexts by women's organizations led to a lacuna that needed to be filled. The realization of the above by South Asian women and the need to articulate the gender ethnicity nexus resulted in the formation of these women-focused organizations. By speaking of their most intimate relations, South Asian women began to socialize and organize around their most intimate, individualized, and atomized experiences. As in the women's movement, by defining and sharing their private problems and experiences as South Asian women in the United States, some of these women realized the need to mobilize and organize around the manifestations of oppression that South Asian women experience as women and as ethnic minority women.

There was and continues to be a need to address sexist violence and ethnic marginalization by challenging/reforming the institutions such as the family, the economy, education, law, the state, media, and politics that perpetuate these problems for women in general and for immigrant women in particular. Marital violence within the community provided a concrete issue around which to organize. Central to these organizations is the belief that organizing South Asian women will lead to solidarity and empowerment.

Ending Domestic Violence against South Asian Women

For most of these organizations, focusing attention on the problem of marital violence in the South Asian community became a concrete basis around which

These obstacles for victims of marital violence in the South Asian community have led SAWOs to develop a number of strategies, including developing contacts with job training centers and checking their accessibility to South Asian women, initiating language training classes (ESL) or connecting victims with existing programs, assisting in writing resumes, locating jobs, and attaining work permits. This is often done through networking with other organizations or contacts within the community. Saksi, Sewaa, Manavi, Maitri, and Apna Ghar made contacts with job training centers, Saksi initiated its own ESL classes, and Manavi taught career counseling and held a job search workshop.

The strategy in general has been for resource development and community-grounded action that links the macro and micro levels to address issues of central importance to South Asian women. Because social change for South Asian women cannot be addressed without changes in the perception and structure of the South Asian community, an important organizational goal is that of community education.

Community Education

For many South Asians, religious institutions play a central role in defining their community identity. Temples, mosques, and churches establish and perpetuate the link with their historic and cultural roots and are the arena for the construction and maintenance of values, beliefs, and customs of the immigrant community. These centers of worship become the caretakers of tradition in an alien Western society. These religious institutions become the basis for social interaction and social cohesion. A central aspect of this is the gendered relations that are constructed and perpetuated by the rhetoric and sociocultural activities of these institutions. They play a central role in the reproduction, maintenance, and moral legitimation of the South Asian woman's identity as the keeper of family honor. Problems such as marital violence are not addressed because they threaten the moral solidarity of the community. Immigrant women are expected to sacrifice their individual identity to the priorities of their husbands, fathers, family, and community. Images of the home and the family as a private haven in the normative structure of the South Asian community thus allow the problem of marital violence to be silenced.

Because these religious institutions play such an important role in community identity and moral legitimacy, SAWOs have developed an organizational strategy that targets the inclusion of these institutions in bringing about social change. SAWO leaders have met with the religious leaders, discussed the problem of marital violence, sensitized the laity about gender issues, held informative classes, and initiated programs that increase public awareness. Some of the South Asian organizations, especially Saksi, have used the strategy of leafleting in areas dominated by South Asian populations and have been successful in spreading to the public the seriousness and consequences of marital violence on women. They distribute literature at temples, *gurdawaras*, and mosques in Long Island and Queens and have had leafleting sessions in Brooklyn and other parts of New York. By sensitizing religious leaders and holding talks in religious areas, some of these

provisions to protect immigrant women, such as a "Self Petitioning" provision, which allows a woman to petition for her own permanent resident status if her husband is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident who has failed to file a petition on her behalf and (a) if she has been married to her husband for at least three years or (b) if she has been abused by her husband. Such legislation is a big step in removing a major structural impediment that forces abused immigrant women to stay with their spouses; thus, the SAWOs attempt to articulate the needs of immigrant women through pressuring for legislative change.

Although legislation is one of the problems, the literature indicates that responses from law enforcement officers are inadequate (Caputo 1988; Field and Field 1973; Hamlin 1991; Pirog-Good and Stets 1986). A victim's fear of her legal status compounded by cultural and gender stereotyping on the part of police officers, inadequate training programs for officers responding to calls from abused women, and the officers' reluctance to arrest abusers become major obstacles for the victims' protection and need to be addressed. Saunders and Size (1986) note that officers who had traditional perspectives on women tended to take the least amount of action in domestic violence situations that needed intervention. For South Asian women, the situation becomes even more problematic. Some of this stems from fear of the police or the realization of the police officer's apathy when calling the police station or the communication barriers between the victim and the police officer in discussing the problem.

Police officials often respond to the situation with their own stereotypes of the immigrant community and a lack of sensitivity of the plight of immigrant women. If there are no visible physical marks of abuse, officers are often reluctant to arrest the perpetrator. In some cases, the inability of the woman to communicate her situation to the officers because of language barriers results in the officer letting the abuser become the communicator of the situation. This can result in the abuser not getting arrested, as I found out in my interviews with some of the abused women. Many South Asian women who are in violent situations in their homes and have a language problem are thus reluctant to seek the help of the police. All of the SAWOs have developed strategies to start sensitizing officers in their areas to the needs of South Asian women.

In addition, judges have also been criticized for being an impediment in women receiving protection under the law. Schechter states that advocates for battered women report that in some cases judges have inadequate awareness and "inaccurate information" about family law. She says, "If the legislature has recently enacted new laws, ignorance tends to multiply" (Schechter 1982, 168). Often the courts are not aware of the marriage customs among the various sections of the South Asian community, such as the lack of legal documentation of marriages, dowry, rituals of gift giving, and sexuality. A consequence is that women who are victims of marital violence and attempt to obtain a divorce are at a disadvantage because of the lack of understanding of the cultural dynamics by lawyers and judges. SAWOs provide courts with expert witnesses who can explain the cultural specificities for cases that require such information. In addition, inadequate provisions for South Asian language interpreters in U.S. courts or, when available, the frequent use of South

Asian men as interpreters, whose own gender biases may influence their interpretation seriously damage the case an abused women has against her perpetrator. To counteract this gender imbalance, where South Asian men become the voices for South Asian women who are victims of marital violence, SAWOs such as Apna Ghar, Sakhi, Maitri, and Manavi have developed two important strategies. They provide South Asian women as interpreters and act as watch-dogs, drawing attention to the judge when the male interpreter has inappropriately translated the proceedings. Another important organizational strategy used by all the organizations is to provide the women with legal assistance. When a woman cannot afford the legal costs, SAWOs try to find lawyers who do pro bono work.

For immigrant women, the stereotypes, negative attitudes, and false perceptions of ethnic minorities by providers of medical care can lead to insensitivity and an apathetic behavior toward the victim. In some cases, communication problems can result in an incorrect diagnosis of the problem. As stated by Hamlin (1991), "negative behaviors exhibited by health care providers toward victims lessen the victim's willingness to seek help" (p. 403). SAWOs have initiated the process of contacting hospitals in their area, culturally sensitizing health care providers; acting as interpreters for medical personnel; and, most important, having the latter inform victims of the existence of South Asian organizations that are committed to addressing the problem of marital violence. For example, Sakhi's interns visit hospitals to distribute literature and make contacts with social workers, advisers, and medical staff. Apna Ghar speaks on domestic violence to health care professionals. At all points, there is a serious attempt on the part of the SAWOs to articulate issues pertinent to South Asian women.

Micro level

Although there has been a serious attempt to address the problem of marital violence within the South Asian community at the macro level, a considerable amount has been achieved by SAWOs also at the micro level. By micro level, I mean the organization's direct interaction with and services provided to individual women. Between 1985 and 1993, these SAWOs have recorded approximately 1,071 abused South Asian women who have approached them. Almost one third of these women approached the organizations in 1992. This number is based on adding up the numbers reported in the second questionnaire by each organization and in itself is indicative of the organizations' growing visibility. The following are some important organizational strategies at the micro level used by SAWOs.

Abused South Asian women who seek the assistance from these organizations are usually allocated a volunteer who interacts with them at an interpersonal level. These volunteers provide the women with pertinent information, suggest alternative options available to them, listen to them, counsel them, provide practical aid such as helping them remove their personal belongings if they decide to leave their home and supporting them through the steps necessary to end the cycle of violence perpetrated against them. Counseling provided by SAWOs vary from trained counselors to volunteers who are trained to counsel on an informal nonlegal basis.

Volunteers are trained to informally counsel victims of marital violence and provide group support. Apna Ghar has a 24-hour emergency hotline, individual and group counseling; Sakhi had training in individual advocacy sessions for volunteers. A few of the organizations also provide victim support groups where victims meet other victims, discuss their problems, support each other, provide solidarity, and help each other in the process of ending the violence perpetrated against them. Both Manavi and Sakhi have advocacy support group and victim support group meetings.

Individual legal assistance is provided for these victims whenever possible. This may vary from providing them with referral for lawyers, helping them attain a protection order, and getting lawyers who will do pro bono work if the women cannot afford the legal costs. Examples are Manavi's free legal clinic and Sakhi, Maitri, Apna Ghar, and Sewaa's assistance in attaining lawyers and legal advice. Volunteers go with these women to the courts and find South Asian female interpreters for them if they have language problems. They also help them apply for a green card, child custody, and child support.

Apna Ghar has been the most active at the micro level. The existence of its shelter with a South Asian focus has been an important contributor to providing an important physical space and alternatives to violent homes for South Asian women (Lynch 1994). Because there are no South Asian women-focused shelters besides Apna Ghar, most of the other organizations help the women by using various strategies. These strategies vary from referring them to Apna Ghar, sending them to other shelters that are sensitized to the needs of South Asians, putting them up with a volunteer, partially paying rent for a temporary accommodation, or getting the courts to temporarily remove the husband from the home. Because SAWOs have limited funds, it is frequently hard for them to provide women with any considerable financial assistance. Whenever possible, funds are allocated to the women on a need base. In certain cases, although cash may not be provided, other material necessities such as food, clothing, and blankets are provided by tapping into the resources of volunteers or members of the community.

Both Caputo (1988) and Walker (1979) show how a large percentage of abused wives stay in the relationship for financial security or because of inexperience in the job market. Although marital violence cuts across all socioeconomic segments of the South Asian community, factors such as level of education, unemployment, and inadequate preparation to enter the workforce all play a crucial role in the woman's sense of dependency and financial entrapment within the marriage. The result is that many women remain within abusive situations. Although many of the women are educated in their home country, some lack the preparation in terms of language skills, corresponding U.S. qualifications, or job training sought by employers. For others, qualifications and training may be outdated because of having abided by the culturally prescribed role of "mother and the home maker" (Das Gupta 1986). For many women, the loss of self-esteem and confidence deter them from seeking jobs or, in some cases, attaining them. Lastly, the lack of a green card for some of these women makes obtaining any sort of legal employment not a viable option.

South Asian women could address issues that were of specific relevance to them. Although domestic violence occurs all over the world, there are cultural and structural differences that need to be addressed when dealing with the problem and resolution for communities such as the South Asian community in the United States. An important goal of these SAWOs is to address the problem of domestic violence among South Asians in the United States at the macro and micro level.

Macro level

At the macro level, the strategy for many of the SAWOs is through advocacy on issues affecting women's rights, with a focus on immigrant women's rights. The attempt is to bring about legislative reform and cultural sensitization in law enforcement and medical care systems. The legislation and policy formulation tactic in the United States has been to develop a broad-based policy that lacks a degree of sensitivity of the distinctiveness of immigrant groups in the same setting. These SAWOs, especially those with a value-oriented ideology, develop strategies to rectify this imbalance. At the legislative level, some of these SAWOs, such as Sakhi, Manavi, Sewaa, and Maitri, are involved with other organizations to sensitize policymakers to formulate policy that protects the rights of immigrants, especially rights of immigrant women.

The quality of legislation, legal enforcement, and legal assistance are essential requirements for victims of marital violence because they provide protection and safety for women. In the context of immigrant women, issues of gender are frequently compounded with issues of immigrant status. Although some South Asian women emigrate on their own independent status, for many other women, their legal status is contingent on their spouses. This dependency often places the husband in a position of dominance and control over the wife and frequently places the woman in the dangerous position of remaining with her abuser due to the fear of finding herself with loss of legal status. A green card is a permit given to immigrants by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service to permanently reside and legally work in the United States. The lack of this green card becomes an obstacle for many immigrant women attaining economic independence from their abuser.

Appropriate legislation, legal enforcement, and legal assistance are needed to provide protection and safety from their abuser. The need to protect immigrant women's rights have led SAWOs to participate in coalitions for immigrant rights and women's rights and actively pressure members of Congress to initiate or help pass legislation protecting the rights of women, including immigrant women. The value-oriented, ideology-based organizations have played an important role in combining gender issues with immigrant rights. For example, the Immigration Act of 1991 allows immigrant women who reside in the United States and have conditional green cards to petition to remove the conditional status and file for an independent permanent green card. She can petition for this by (a) showing that the marriage was a good faith marriage and (b) that she is a battered woman (based on expert testimonials). In addition, the Violence Against Women Act (1994) contains

SAWOs have taken a major step in attaining recognition to the existence of the problem and emphasizing the need for the community to address it.

By participating in mainstream cultural activities of the South Asian community and holding cultural functions, Sakhi, Apna Ghar, Sewaa, Maitri, and Manavi have attempted to increase their visibility within the community. They are reaching out to victims who may be unaware of the existence of such organizations. Sakhi conducted workshops at a mosque in Flushing and at Islamic centers in Westchester and Long Island. Sewaa invited speakers on domestic violence among South Asians for various cultural functions. Most important, by increasing the visibility of their organizations, these SAWOs have demonstrated the existence of the problem of violence against women in the South Asian community in the United States. Although nearly all these SAWOs, especially the value-oriented, ideology-based organizations, have experienced negative reaction from the community, this has been gradually changing. There has been an increasing trend to accept these organizations and, in some cases, to provide some community support through donations and to allow them to do outreach at religious institutions, cultural functions, and through media coverage in mainstream South Asian magazines. The growing awareness of the problem of marital violence, through the articulation by SAWOs, has resulted in increasing numbers of South Asian abused women approaching them, an increased pool of volunteers, and more funding from within the community and from external funding agencies. Gradually, these SAWOs have shifted marital violence from a private problem to a public issue.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic minority women frequently derive their identification from both ethnicity and gender and hence may seek a space that can address the complex issues that arise from such a position. Drawing from the analysis of these SAWOs and my research on collective experiences of South Asian women who have been victims of marital violence, I argue that these SAWOs create and maintain this space for South Asian women. Although helping South Asian women at the individual level, they also organize South Asian women and empower them. By articulating the various problems experienced by South Asian women, they socially reconstruct grievances into demands and seek to change the existing dominant cultural and patriarchal structure that oppresses minority immigrant women.

SAWOs provide victims of marital violence with various forms of psychological, social, legal, and economic support. They empower South Asian women by moving them from silence to speech. Most important, they raise community and public awareness of the problem of marital violence within the South Asian community. They focus on the need to address the intersection of ethnicity and gender, both within community and society at large, when dealing with the issue of marital violence. The visible role that SAWOs have come to play within the community and in the larger society in addressing the problem of marital violence

can be demonstrated by the media coverage they receive, especially in community newspapers. They have been interviewed on television and radio. From 1990 to 1992, there have been 50 articles on Apna Ghar and 25 articles on Sakhi. Manavi, Sewaa, and Maitri have also received media coverage.

These SAWOs address the mechanisms of patriarchal control, issues of women's self-esteem as victims of marital violence, and the need for cultural sensitization in methods of intervention and policy formulation. Through their various strategies, they provide the impetus for social change at the level of the individual, community, and the larger society.

By addressing the problem of marital violence in the United States, these SAWOs shed light on the rarely recognized phenomenon of domestic violence among South Asians. They demonstrate that in spite of the commonality of the basic problem of violence against women, it is important to understand that women should not be defined as a homogeneous category. As Maria Mies (1986, 6-14) states, there are divisions among women. These divisions can be found not only between different sets of women separated along national, class, race, or ethnic lines but also within sets of women who belong to the same category. Within the women's movement, it is important to understand that women have common experiences living under patriarchy, but each woman also brings a set of cultural, social, economic, and political experiences that differentiate her from other women. The creation of space for inclusion of differentiation within commonality is what will generate the most effective social movement to end domestic violence against women.

By engaging in dialogue *within* the South Asian community and *between* South Asians and the larger movement in the United States, SAWOs contribute to the South Asian community and increase the political efficacy of the larger movement in the struggle against the violence perpetrated on women.

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