

**The Role of 'Honor' in Violence against South Asian Women
in the United States**

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With Contributions from
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111. Dasgupta (2007b), op. cit.
112. Ibid.
113. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) is an international human rights treaty which came into being in 1979 and came into force in 1981. Out of the 194 UN member states, 187 countries including all South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) have ratified CEDAW. The USA is among the seven countries (Iran, Palau, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, and Tonga being the other six) that still have not done so.
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121. Dhanda (2012), op. cit.
122. See, Green Dot: Ending violence one green dot at a time, <http://www.livethegreendot.com/>
123. See, Know Your Power, <http://www.know-your-power.org/prevention.html>

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Foreword

As Manavi continues on its commitment to end violence against South Asian women in our communities, we are constantly challenged to understand complicated issues that victimize women. While these are not new issues, it is important to understand them at a deeper level. With the support of the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), we are adding three new documents to the pool of Manavi's Occasional Paper series that was initiated in 2007. In the current series, complex issues of 'honor' and its intersections with domestic violence in South Asian Communities, and reproductive violence are explored in great detail along with engaging men in domestic violence work.

All the authors in this series of Occasional Papers have seriously challenged readers to think critically about relevant issues crucial in advocacy for South Asian battered women. These position papers are an important source of analyses and knowledge. More importantly, like the previous papers in this series, these are tools of intervention for advocates. We hope that the issues discussed in the current series will be useful to advocates, community activists, and service providers in understanding South Asian women who are impacted by violence in the family.

I cannot stress enough how significant it is to grasp these issues and their impact on South Asians in the United States. I believe the detailed analyses will help us understand the complex realities of South Asian women's lives and persist in our struggles to end violence against women.

Shefali Mehta
President, Board of Directors of Manavi

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53. Wikan (2008), op. cit.
54. Ibid.
55. An example of such violence is the murder of Shaukat Parvez in 1996. In 1994, Rubina Malik married Shaukat Parvez in UK in secret and against her family's wishes. When the family found out, Rubina was beaten and kept locked in her room for days. Then the family elders forced her to marry another man, who, once he found out about the situation, let her go so that she could join her husband in New York. Family members repeatedly urged Rubina to commit suicide to save the family's honor. Finally, Manzoor Qader (Rubina's uncle) and Omar Malik (Rubina's brother) traveled to New York in 1996 and shot Rubina's husband, Parvez, dead. In 2002, Qader was convicted in Blackburn, UK for murdering Shaukat Parvez. See, George, J. (2002, April 26). "Pakistani faces life sentence for killing niece's husband." *India Abroad*, p. 8.
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Executive Summary

Femicides in South Asian communities around the world, including the United States are often relegated to the category of 'honor killing.' Several recent murders of South Asian women in the U.S. have been called honor related intimate partner homicides. The concept of honor among South Asian Americans is linked to numerous intersecting issues: concern for parents and relatives in the country of origin; a frozen image of women's status in South Asia fuelled by television serials from 'back home;' stereotypical representations of docile Third World women in the Western media; the need for community support in the new homeland in terms of jobs, housing, and a sense of belongingness; a lack of understanding and trust in 'Western' interventions in domestic violence as well as sexual violence (DV and SV); immigration status of women; citizenship of children; and backlash against women's autonomy by communities that are trapped in a limbo between their old and new home-countries.

The concept of honor is a gendered notion; with men, especially from dominant groups, possessing intrinsic honor, but women possessing only shame. This gendered ideology produces inequality and hierarchy with men and women embodying honor differently. That is, women are the repositories of honor while men regulate their conduct, since they pose the greatest danger to men's honor. Additionally, the concepts of honor and shame are closely linked. In some South Asian cultures the opposite of honor (*izzat*) is the state of being without honor (*bey-izzat*). Shame (*sharm*) can then be considered a gendered equivalent *within* the concept of honor, rather than its binary opposite.

In this formulation of honor, since women possess shame on behalf of men, shameless women can throw an entire family into dishonor. An understanding of patriarchy thus helps us locate various forms of violence against women within unequal gender relations, since it is within the dynamics of gendered power that women's sexuality, behavior, and compliance are structured through material, ideological, and symbolic control. Feminists, therefore, insist that 'honor killings' should be understood as 'femicide', a misogynist killing of women and a form of sexual violence.

Crimes and killings that are considered honor related are characteristically carried out by the blood relatives of a woman. It involves some amount of planning, involvement of close relatives, community silence, impunity, and a tacit acceptance by those around the family that the action, however brutal, is justified. Most believe that it is the woman who has acted irresponsibly and that the family has no option but to cleanse the blot on their reputation, standing, or honor that her action has created. The family is deemed the ultimate victim and all sympathies lie with it. Finally, the family is expected to take some action to rectify the situation; otherwise they are considered to be irresponsible as well.

Control of women's sexuality is one of the most powerful tools of patriarchy. Thus, in most parts of the world, sexual agency and desires of a woman generate more intense repercussions in comparison to that of a man's. Patriarchal honor operates not just at the moment of choosing a partner but percolates into almost every moment of a woman's life. Ultimately, the notion that women embody men's honor is normalized and internalized in childhood by both genders. This situation is accepted as 'natural' in society.

When this notion of honor plays out in the South Asian American society, it becomes more important to be seen as honorable by one's own honor group (read: the closest linguistic-religio-

social class South Asian group) and not as much by an outsider who does not subscribe to the same honor code. Honor, then, is an entitlement among equals, the loss of which can cause humiliation or banishment from one's group. In order to maintain honor, one is expected to follow certain rules that constitute the codes of conduct for that specific *honor group*. Families would much rather flout laws and norms of the host country than fall in disgrace with their own honor groups. Thus, South Asian immigrants might utilize law enforcement agencies in the country of residence in cases of accident or civil issues, but not for 'private' matters such as domestic violence and sexual assault.

As children of immigrants grow up in the U.S., they are confronted with numerous mixed messages. Many of them learn to cope with living lives of contrast within and outside their homes. Depending on whether they are in South Asian or mainstream American contexts, they may dress, talk, or behave completely differently. Presenting disparate demeanors is not specific to South Asian youth, but in this case the chasm might be too wide for reconciliation, turning the existence of the youth nearly schizophrenic. These differences become a matter of family honor when oppositional world-views clash such as regarding dating; staying out beyond sunset; being sexually active; getting pregnant before marriage; marrying outside of caste/religion/race; or coming out with non-traditional gender and sexual preferences. In more conservative families, interacting with 'foreigners,' wearing make-up, leaving a marriage even when the husband is violent, or being perceived as having 'bad character' may also be seen as severe breach of family honor.

When a younger family member is perceived to be breaking honor codes, especially related to sexuality, a marriage may be arranged to 'solve' the problem. Her refusal to toe the line may be taken as a sign of unrepentant, inconsiderate, and irresponsible behavior, strengthening the conviction that more control is necessary to maintain her reputation in regards to marriage prospects and the family's honor. Thus, already restricted mobility and decision-making allowance of the young woman may be further curtailed, and any consideration given to her choice of a spouse may be revoked. Since honor codes further require that family matters not be brought out into the open, the individual may not be allowed to talk to friends, teachers, media, or seek help from law enforcement agencies and services. Such breach would be considered an unforgivable violation of family honor.

When surreptitious negotiations regarding restoration of honor, reputation, prestige, and/or self-esteem within the family and kinship fail, codes linked to sexual behavior may be enforced or retrieved by force or violence. For example, control of women in one's family is often established by 'punishment' meted out by blood-relatives. One of the disturbing features of 'honor' related crimes is the complicity and active participation of women in rumor mongering, tension-building, abetting, as well as in committing these crimes. Furthermore, honor groups may denounce each other for not 'defending' (read: controlling) their women enough. Even after she is married, perpetrator(s) of violence against a woman may be members of her natal family since a woman's dishonor tends to be linked to the failure of her family to teach her better behavior and to preserve her chastity and subservience.

An added complication in this situation is the possibility of securing appropriate help. Even when South Asian victims of honor retributions are ready to seek outside help, they may face difficulties in establishing their credibility. Because they locate the source of danger in the intimate partner and/or his family, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. often do not take girls and women seriously when they express the fear that their lives are at risk from their own family members. This

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13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Terman, R. L. (2010). To specify or single out: Should we use the term "Honor Killing"? *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 7 (Article 2), 1554-4419; Welchman, L., & Hossain, S. (Eds.). (2005). *'Honour': Crimes, paradigms and violence against women*. London & New York: Zed.

- ② Connect with women's organizations and shelters across the U.S. and in South Asian countries to safeguard women and girls in serious danger from family members; and
- ② Develop a network of allies in the community who can create a safety net for women who are threatened with honor related violence.

Advocacy for Community Change

- ② Develop a curriculum that questions the concept of honor as related to women's behavior and include it in the organization's outreach and education programs;
- ② Provide an alternate concept of family 'honor,' one that delineates honor as responsible, supportive, respectful, and peaceful interactions with all members of the family particularly women and girls;
- ② Create strong relationships with community elders, prominent individuals, and religious leaders to have them champion women's and girls' right to autonomy and self determination;
- ② Develop public service campaigns to promote women's and girls' rights to self determination with the youth, respected elders, and religious leaders in the community and have them model respectful relationships across generations. The Green Dot program¹²² modified to fit the South Asian communities' needs might be a good program to use;
- ② Continue to organize communities to resist violence against women and girls. Bystander intervention programs such as Know Your Power¹²³ might be modified to fit South Asian communities' cultural needs and be utilized for the purpose;
- ② Partner with youth programs to educate and train young people to identify and intervene in potential situations of honor related violence in the home; and
- ② Create a viable list of resources to be disseminated to community allies, practitioners, and advocates.

In its ultimate outcome, the combined energy of practitioners, elders, and young people in South Asian communities could be gathered to confront patriarchy, heteronormativity, forced marriage, honor related crimes, domestic violence, sexual assault, and various other oppressions. Alliances with progressive women's groups in South Asia would be instrumental in providing critical services to girls and women facing the prospect of honor related violence; grasping the fluidity of a lived culture; understanding how women exert agency in dire circumstances; dealing with patriarchy's violent backlash; and comprehending agency and structures' effects on each other. This dynamic understanding of culture, politics, and power would be the way forward in building strong transnational alliances to end honor related crimes as well as all other forms of violence against women, not only in South Asian communities in the U.S. but internationally.

risk of annihilation is real, and may be carried out suddenly by an entire family which seems reconciled to a woman's transgressions.

While femicide occurs in all cultures, the forms and weapons are different, and are generally confined to what are easily and cheaply available in society. For instance, while guns and knives are popular in the West, kerosene, acid (used for cleaning toilets), pesticides, and fire are easily available tools in South Asia. These are not culturally sanctioned tools; rather, accessible to people in their day-to-day living.

Anti-violence against women advocates need to question the crushing onus on women to protect men's honor and reject the term and notion of 'honor' itself, particularly in the contexts of women's sexuality and family. Perhaps 'honor' should be replaced by concepts and terminology that highlight gender equality, justice, and rights. This shift will also help bring violence out of the confines of the four walls of the home into the public domain such as hospitals, police stations, the Courts, and women's organizations. While laws must recognize the myriad manifestations of violence against women, any stereotyping would shut down all possibilities of a real dialogue with immigrant minorities and reduce immigrant women's access to resources and services.

For SAWO advocates working to provide services to women at risk or victimized by honor related crimes, the most important task is to promote justice and to ensure full access to resources. The Occasional Paper includes suggestions to help SAWO advocates create programs that provide sensitive services, address systems change, and help community members intervene in honor related violence against South Asian girls and women. Alliances with progressive women's groups in South Asia would be instrumental in providing critical services to girls and women facing the prospect of honor related violence.

1**Introduction**

A Georgia man was appearing in court on charges he killed his own daughter for disgracing his family. ... The 25-year-old victim, Sandeela Kanwal, was wed in Pakistan in an arranged marriage. ... According to police, there was "friction between father and victim" in the weeks leading up to the killing. ... Police said Rashid [father/perpetrator] was so angered that his daughter planned to divorce her husband that he killed her after a heated argument at the family home... Kanwal's body was discovered in the doorway of a bedroom, cold to the touch, officials said. ... A police report said that there were possible "ligature marks" indicting strangulation on the victim and noted that an iron and cord had been found near her body. Rashid was taken to the Clayton County jail where he reportedly confessed to strangling Kanwal.¹

Very soon after this murder in 2008, the South Asian community in the United States woke up in 2009 to a headline in *The New York Times*, "Upstate Man Charged with Beheading His Estranged Wife." The story read,

A man who founded a Muslim American television station to help fight Muslim stereotypes is to appear on Wednesday in a suburban Buffalo court on charges that he decapitated his wife last week. ... On Feb. 6, Ms. Hassan [victim] filed for divorce and obtained an order of protection against Mr. Hassan, Chief Benz said. ... The gruesome death of Ms. Hassan prompted outrage from Muslim leaders after suggestions that it had been some kind of "honor killing" based on religious or cultural beliefs.²

In the past few decades various countries in South Asia have witnessed a spate of murders of women that have been labeled 'honor crimes' or 'honor killings.' At times femicides in South Asian communities around the world, including the United States are also relegated to the category of 'honor killing.' Despite how the media popularly categorizes these crimes, why are such murders of women are called 'honor killings?' For anti-violence against women advocates the critical question is, in what ways are 'honor killings' distinct from 'routine' murders of women? How could we classify some killings of women as 'honor' related and others as 'intimate partner violence?'

This murder was just as much an honor related crime as the thousands of shooting, stabbing, and strangling murders of women by their intimate partners in America, particularly when women attempt to leave their intimate relationships.

Women's rights groups that work in South Asian communities are aware that certain abusive acts in the family are deployed to retrieve family honor. Most activists are equally aware that messy boundaries exist between the categories of honor related violence and routine intimate violence against women. The problem becomes even more complicated due to the specific and sometimes obscure understandings of the term 'honor' in different South Asian communities. Furthermore, it is difficult to translate these myriad complex meanings of honor to 'outsiders,' people who are not familiar with South Asian cultures but have esoteric understandings of 'honor killing.' How various

2**Recommendations**

For SAWO advocates working to provide services to women at risk or victimized by honor related crimes, the most important task is to promote justice and to ensure full access to resources. Below are some suggestions to help SAWO advocates create programs that provide sensitive services, address systems change, and help community members intervene in honor related violence against South Asian girls and women.

Advocacy for Systems Change

- ⊗ Analyze and engage continuously with the diverse ways in which patriarchy manifests itself in South Asian immigrant and diasporic communities;
- ⊗ Critically explore the concept of honor, its variants, and its impact on violence against South Asian women;
- ⊗ Interrogate ideas of honor and its uses and abuses by not only the communities but by systems practitioners;
- ⊗ Challenge the use of culture bound traditions of honor as an excuse for violence against women by practitioners;
- ⊗ Place a South Asian woman's choices or lack thereof within the contexts of her community, needs, and emotional losses;
- ⊗ Inform and educate practitioners in various systems to modify their policies and practices to take into account South Asian girl's and women's risks of honor related violence;
- ⊗ Develop primary and secondary prevention strategies around violence, particularly sexual violence, and nest them in an ecological model; and
- ⊗ Work closely with all practitioners to ensure South Asian women's access to safety and justice.

Individual Advocacy

- ⊗ Centralize women's needs in all advocacy efforts;
- ⊗ Engage all members and generations in the community in cross dialogues and discussions around honor and violence and its impact on the individual lives;
- ⊗ Listen and understand women's stories of risks of honor related violence and fully incorporate the complexities of South Asian women's realities in advocacy;
- ⊗ Understand women's and girls' assessments of risks of violence in their families and accept the sources of those risks;
- ⊗ Develop a strong safety plan protocol that takes into account risks from extended family members in country and out of country;

Involving boys and men in prevention programs would also be important, not only because they could be witnesses to crimes but also potential supporters. Furthermore, boys and men are also at risk of honor related crimes. This is especially true of those who do not conform to hegemonic masculinities, such as gay and transgender people. Therefore, women must also be prepared to support young men who are vulnerable to victimization.

The stories, anecdotes from women's lives, and analysis provide the framework for SAWOs to develop strategies to change the contours of violence against women and patriarchal notions of honor. Other agencies and South Asian advocates working in varied systems can also use the material to provide culturally and linguistically specific advocacy for the women.

practitioners including advocates, mental health counselors, and attorneys comprehend the issue of honor is also extremely important, as these understandings impact South Asian survivors' well being. Disregarding the existence or trivialization of 'family honor,' an apologist acceptance of it under the guise of cultural sensitivity and cultural essentialism, or the complete rejection of South Asian cultures as barbaric have deep implications for battered women's fragile access to law enforcement and legal resources in the United States.

Do Occasional Papers Help Advocacy?

When Manavi began in 1985 it was the first such organization to contend with the issue of violence against South Asian women. The early years were a struggle for the founders who drew their inspiration from the women who reached out to find solutions for the problem of intimate violence they were experiencing at home. Existing South Asian organizations were more interested in promoting "cultural concerns" and attempting to secure a place for them in the United States.

Each Occasional Paper unpacks one complicated concept and provides SAWO advocates with foundational

Issues that challenged these concerns, including recognition as model minority were not popular within the nascent South Asian community. National, state, and local domestic and sexual violence organizations could not fathom the culturally and linguistically specific needs of South Asian women and were of limited assistance during those early years. Years of theoretical work on patriarchy and feminism(s), close collaborations with women's organizations in South Asia, and the rising movements of immigrant women of color in the U.S. provided the sustenance necessary for the work Manavi had undertaken. Manavi committed to ending all forms of violence against women and girls.

In many ways, Manavi laid the foundation of the work of other South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs) in the U.S. SAWOs have collectively changed the national stance of South Asian communities on the issue of violence against women. Together with other "mainstream" organizations, Manavi has been able to highlight the need for culturally and linguistically specific services as well as understanding of the specificities of context within systems such as criminal, civil, child welfare, and health. While the journey has not been easy, the struggles to end violence against women continue to occur on many fronts.

As SAWOs have emerged and grown across the nation, other challenges have emerged. Questions around service provision, advocacy, philosophy and ideology, collaboration with systems, explanations of "cultural codes and practices" both within the community as well as outside have created anxieties and struggles. Consequently, it became necessary to systematically analyze these conceptual issues that arose in advocacy work to grasp them comprehensively and utilize them with confidence. Each Occasional Paper unpacks one complicated concept and provides SAWO advocates with foundational analysis of related issues.

Through the Occasional Paper series, Manavi seeks to do exactly that. Each Occasional Paper unpacks one complicated concept and provides SAWO advocates with foundational analysis of related issues. It is expected that such understandings would help advocates base their programs on solid reasoning and tailor make them to fit their communities' needs. In discussing honor,

patriarchy, women, and violence, the current paper seeks to assist advocates and other practitioners by:

- ② Laying a basic historical foundation for the analysis of patriarchy and the slippery contexts of honor;
- ② Connecting honor to violence against women in South Asia and by extension to the immigrant community in the U.S.;
- ② Analyzing the myriad reasons for the current focus on honor;
- ② Discussing the specificities and interplay of honor and violence against women within the South Asian American contexts;
- ② Elaborating the correlates of honor and culture and its uses and abuses within the community and systems; and
- ② Developing specific strategies to address violence against women, honor, and culture when it is used either by the South Asian community or in the various systems as a justification for bad behavior.

We hope that by understanding the historical underpinnings of the concept of honor and its current variations and manifestations as well as some of the recommendations, SAWO advocates will be able to develop a strategic plan within their specific communities to address the issue of honor related violence against women.

The constant dilemma of advocating *for* the community and advocating *to* the community makes the process complex and tricky. In a globalized world, when families may be voluntarily or involuntarily split across continents, the disparate legal situations regarding marriage, domestic violence, or women's rights further complicate advocacy interventions.¹¹⁹ Our efforts must include individual empowerment, research that is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, increased funding for anti-violence work, integrated referrals, network of shelters, multi-agency risk assessment, and transnational collaborations among women's organizations. Debjani Roy's detailed work on building strategies from the individual to broader structural interventions in the context of forced marriage also serves as a template that can be used in intervention in honor related family violence.¹²⁰

Since community plays an important role in South Asian women's lives, it is important to ask who constitutes a woman's community. The South Asian community is neither monolithic nor homogenous. Yet, advocates working in SAWOs make an effort to involve religious or community elders to further their causes. While this may be a strategic step to involve opinion-makers in the community, we need to realize that the religious leaders and elders are also gatekeepers who could grant or deny access, particularly to women. Religious leaders also have the power to consolidate patriarchal opinions in the community.

Working with people who shape the practices of patriarchal honor in the community, even unintentionally, would lead to disempowering women's agency and would strengthen the stereotype of South Asians as backward and barbaric individuals. For men in influential positions, we must recognize that power consolidates honor, and honor consolidates power. In fact, many of the powerful men in South Asian communities are the elders and religious and/or community leaders. We must also remember that batterers and perpetrators of honor related violence have more facile and legitimate access to resources in their own communities as well as that of the U.S. state and market. Thus as advocates, we need to be critical of our choices of community partners.

For practical, strategic, and intrinsic reasons, it is the voices and leadership of women that need to be strengthened. While women are also co-opted by patriarchy, their lived realities make them more amenable to addressing honor related crimes. Working with younger women in the community could be an effective strategy, as they would be most likely to face the problem of honor

For practical, strategic, and intrinsic reasons, it is the voices and leadership of women that need to be strengthened. While women are also co-opted by patriarchy, their lived realities make them more amenable to addressing honor related crimes.

crimes and could teach us ways to preserve cultural heritage without adhering to the disempowering segments of South Asian traditions. In the UK, keeping an eye on absenteeism of young girls in schools through the State's Forced Marriage Unit, especially around vacation time, has had significant positive outcome.¹²¹ In Sri and Raja's study, the highest and most valuable information about impending forced marriages came from peer groups. Thus, young people could be the most vigilant observers and help prevent such violations of human rights. Creating awareness about honor related crimes among young people in South Asian communities through social media could also help bypass the gatekeepers. Empowering the youth could be the most efficient approach to deal with honor related crimes against women.

and three UN reports that specifically focus on violence against women, crimes of honor, and religious and cultural beliefs have also emphasized the fact that culture or traditions cannot discriminate or come in the way of women realizing their rights.¹¹⁴

A UN General Assembly draft resolution of October 2004 explicitly condemns crimes of honor. Unfortunately, none of the South Asian countries and the U.S. has signed this draft resolution. Currently, a specific UN convention to deal with violence against women is in the making. In Europe, such a Convention has already been introduced.¹¹⁵ Feminists and anti-violence against women advocates must strengthen their efforts internationally to pass the UN convention, so that all forms of violence against women are recognized without demonizing any culture or religion. Interventions must recognize that so called honor related violence is a specific form of domestic violence. It is likely that existing laws in the U.S. on domestic violence or sexual assault can accommodate crimes in the name of honor and passion. There is much to learn from the experience of working on laws and State interventions related to forced marriages and honor related crimes in other countries.¹¹⁶ While laws must recognize the myriad manifestations of violence against women, any stereotyping would shut down all possibilities of a real dialogue with immigrant minorities and reduce immigrant women's access to resources and services.

Organizing in the community to prepare it to champion women's human rights is the first step in protecting girls and women from violence, including honor related crimes.

The importance of a community's involvement in all violence against women cannot be overstressed. Sri and Raja make the point that even after they have made the initial complaint, survivors of forced marriages are 'lost' after a while, as they tend to not keep in touch with service providing agencies.¹¹⁷ One can only guess the reasons: giving in to the marriage; feeling the loss of family support acutely; not finding justice through the legal system; being violated, terrorized, or abandoned by their spouses and families; being killed outside the U.S., and so on. It is therefore imperative to provide a victim of forced marriage with support within the community. A prepared community can provide support and practical assistance for a victim of forced marriage and stop both honor related crimes against women and forced marriage.

Thus, organizing in the community to prepare it to champion women's human rights is the first step in protecting girls and women from violence, including honor related crimes. Culture is not static, but is shaped by contemporary forces. It cannot be forced to remain regressive where attitudes toward women's rights are concerned. We need to confront structures of domination in our societies and create a democratic space that is wide enough to encompass public and private spheres. Gender equality is a prerequisite for such democratization inside and outside the home. Women's social, political, reproductive, and sexual rights are integral parts of this equality.

Shamita Das Dasgupta urges for multiple strategies in anti-domestic violence advocacy in South Asian communities.¹¹⁸ She outlines the importance of individual case-work, institutional advocacy, community mobilization, and transnational advocacy to make changes in policy, so that benefits accrue to all women, even to those who cannot access our services directly. She stresses that it is not adequate to mobilize South Asians alone, but to make the majority aware of the specificities of the community's needs.

2

Understanding 'Honor'

The fact that patriarchal honor exists is known to most people. Also, the fact that it is connected to violence against women is not disputed, especially by those who work to end abuse of women and girls in society. It is not my intention here to state the obvious; rather, to explore the concept and practices of honor and why it operates within South Asian families and communities. Thus, in this paper I trace the study of the concept of honor, as well as the reasons for the current focus on the issue. I underscore the complexity related to nomenclature and how honor is understood in different cultures at different times.

In many societies, control of women's sexuality is one of the most powerful tools of patriarchy. In most parts of the world, sexual agency and desires of a woman generate more intense repercussions in comparison to that of a man's. Patriarchal honor operates not just at the moment of choosing a partner but percolates into almost every moment of a woman's life. Ultimately, the notion that women embody men's honor is normalized and internalized in childhood by both genders. This situation is accepted as 'natural' in society.

The concept of honor among South Asians in the U.S. is linked to numerous intersecting issues: concern for parents and relatives in the country of origin; a frozen image of women's status in South Asia fuelled by television serials from 'back home'; stereotypical representations of docile Third World women in the Western media; the need for community support in the new homeland in terms of jobs, housing, and a sense of belongingness; a lack of understanding and trust in 'Western' interventions in domestic violence as well as sexual violence (DV and SV); immigration status of women; citizenship of children; and backlash against women's autonomy by communities that are trapped in a limbo between their old and new home-countries.³

One way to question the crushing onus on women to protect men's honor is to reject the term and notion of 'honor' itself, particularly in the contexts of women's sexuality and family.

While I acknowledge the strong link between domestic violence and honor in South Asian communities, I am aware of the dangers of linking all violence against South Asian women to culture and ethnicity. I believe that we need to understand the phenomenon of honor, address the problems and deal with ensuing issues by empowering those who are most affected. In this paper, I suggest ways to confront honor related crimes and attitudes without falling into the trap of racial profiling or criminalizing certain cultures and religions.

My intention is not to catalog the prevalence or incidence of crimes purportedly related to 'honor.' Rather, I am interested in initiating a conversation on patriarchal honor among domestic violence advocates and practitioners, especially with those who work in South Asian communities. Thus, I have referred selectively to available research material and news reports to strengthen the position of South Asian advocates in acknowledging the complex debates around honor and its impacts. I also contend that we need complex strategies to deal with honor related violence. The

purpose of this paper is not to document the presence of honor related issues in domestic violence but to help construct arguments to grapple with patriarchy and its intersections with other systems of domination that South Asian women have to face in the U.S.

Intersectionality of gender, race, class, and nation are not distinctive social hierarchies but mutually construct each other, making it imperative for gender to be theorized in the context of power relations embedded in social identities.

South Asian women's lives are complicated by various factors such as race, ethnicity, class, and immigration status. Intersectionality of gender, race, class, and nation are not distinctive social hierarchies but mutually construct each other, making it imperative for gender to be theorized in the context of power relations embedded in social identities.⁴ In light of this notion, the idealized belief of the traditional family as a model of equality with the strong caring for the weak and each member contributing and benefitting according to his/her capacity and needs

must be questioned. The normalization of hierarchy in the public domain masks the socially constructed arrangements of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and class as being 'natural' and socialization in the family is the primary contributor to this process.⁵ Pervasive violence, whether against women within the private domain or against subordinated groups in the public domain, is naturalized and the actual or implicit use of force to maintain unequal power relations is justified by using family as the unit to frame issues of first and second class citizenship.

Patricia Collins states that in the West, a White person is perceived as the intellectually developed adult and people of color as underdeveloped, recalcitrant children who need to be controlled by any means necessary. Similarly, non-Western societies are considered to be retrogressive and outlandish, particularly in comparison to Anglo-European cultures. It is thus *expected* that these communities engage in bizarre and brutal behaviors such as honor killings. In the same vein, Uma Narayan argues that even though family violence is prevalent in the U.S., the mainstream labels Asians and South Asians as prone to barbaric forms of domestic violence.⁶ This gross condemnation of an entire 'culture' is not only incorrect, but has serious implications for the rights of South Asian women as well as men.

Thinking Critically About Honor

Certain images stay with us forever because they have been repeatedly thrown at us by the print, audio-visual, or virtual media. In this era and time an idea or terminology can go 'viral' within weeks, if not days and minutes via social networking sites such as blogs, Twitter, Face Book, and You Tube. During this phase of rapid neo-liberal globalization, the focus on the concept of honor has undergone tumultuous change, locally and globally. Stereotypes of crimes in the name of honor in their Islamic or Eastern connotation and their gross labeling as a cultural phenomenon are the results of this information explosion. The fact that 'honor killing' has now become a 'local' word in many parts of South Asia, familiar even to non-English speakers, is an example of this 'network society'.⁷

societies' constructs of women's sexuality and men's honor then create fertile grounds for patriarchal control over women. When minority women's rights are scrutinized and monitored by internal honor codes as well as by voyeuristic media that normalizes mainstream cultures, minority women suffer doubly – under the suspicion and intolerance of the majority as well as that of their own community. Women's freedom and rights are forced to be exchanged in favor of safety and security.

The Way Forward

It is often not possible for South Asian women to speak of domestic violence openly because trusted family members inflict it. Women are taught since childhood to protect family honor and to do nothing that might harm family reputation. Even fatally injured women protect their husbands in their dying declarations. We have to begin by questioning the belief system in which a woman is expected to protect the same family that tortures and/or kills her.

One way of questioning the crushing onus on women to protect men's honor is to reject the term and notion of 'honor' itself, particularly in the contexts of women's sexuality and family. Perhaps 'honor' should be replaced by concepts and terminology that highlight gender equality, justice, and rights. For example, if a woman is raped, her *human rights and dignity* were violated, not her or her family's *honor*. This change in perspective would enable one to see violence against women as a public issue and not a private one and thus, not to be relegated to the privacy of the family. This shift will also help bring violence out of the confines of the four walls of the home into the public domain such as the hospital, the police station, the courts, and women's organizations.

Violence creates terror. For instance, when a girl is raped in her school or college, it often results in the immediate termination of education of many other girls. The consequences of the rape are borne not only by the victim but also by other girls. When a woman is sexually assaulted while walking home, all women's mobility is restricted. When perpetrators commit crimes with impunity, it deters all women from appealing to the law enforcement and inculcates a violent masculinity in growing male children. For all women to feel safe and free of the fear of violence, change needs to occur inside as well as outside the home.

Additionally, advocacy for women facing domestic violence needs to be strengthened. Even though women as well as men are capable of perpetrating violence against intimate partners, the physical, material, and social consequences of the act are far greater for women than for men. A woman who has used violence against her intimate partner lives under the threat of being thrown out of her home; of losing custody of her children; of losing social status; not being able to marry again; being disinherited and disowned by her father, brothers, husband, or sons; and even being killed by the family. As long as assets and resources belong to men in society, women will continue to remain more vulnerable to violence than men.

An ancillary action could be to advocate for ratification of the CEDAW¹¹³ and its optional protocol. CEDAW spells out state obligations of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights as well as making non-state actors such as the family, caste, tribe, and community answerable to related violations. The state is also expected to act with due diligence when dealing with rights violations in terms of preventing, investigating, prosecuting, and punishing the perpetrator as well as compensating the victim. The CEDAW, its expert committee, various UN Special Rapporteurs,

8

Justice for South Asian Women

The fact that South Asian women find it difficult to access institutional services is not only due to their own lack of familiarity with the structures of the land, but also the lack of cultural competency of service providers.¹⁰⁶ Most mainstream institutions are not well versed in the cultural specificities, nuances, or the special needs of South Asian women. On the one hand service providers may disregard the differences, and on the other, they may take an apologist stance by assuming 'certain' cultural practices are innate to South Asian societies. The end result is further violation of women's rights by reducing their access to justice when faced with harassment, discrimination, and violence. Consequently, women may try to cope with years of violence by engaging in physical and emotional self-harm or by retaliating when situations become life-threatening for themselves and/or their children.¹⁰⁷

If a South Asian woman reports her husband's violence to the law enforcement, she may face silent and even vocal disapproval of her community. When she seeks assistance from the police or judiciary, community members believe she has aired dirty laundry in public and the community has been maligned; an act the 'model minority'¹⁰⁸ group cannot tolerate. Consequently, battered and sexually assaulted women may be stranded without community support and experience tremendous loneliness as they have to move out of their homes and community spaces into shelters where living conditions and expectations are unfamiliar. They may not be taken seriously in court as defense attorneys may argue that they are not credible and trap them in language confusion due to their lack of fluency in English. Court interpreters may not convey what the woman says in precise and impactful terms. Used to yielding to authority, women themselves may often behave submissively and express deference to the judge or lawyers until it is too late to assert their rights. The culturally imbibed code of conduct, such as not making eye contact with people who are considered social 'superiors' such as judges and attorneys may make women look shifty and unreliable in court.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, many women may have escaped brutal regimes in their own countries or have had unpleasant encounters with the police or legal systems there. Their mistrust of law enforcement agencies is strengthened when they feel unheard in the United States, a country they had believed will give them justice. The importance of South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs)¹¹⁰ to advocate for victimized women to these state institutions and collaborate with transnational organizations cannot be stressed enough.

Unfortunately, when a woman resists battering with force or if the abusive partner or his family call the police and charge her falsely with domestic violence offences, she may be arrested and served with a restraining order.¹¹¹ Such an action further disenfranchises a battered woman because she may lose custody of her children, be sent to prison, or face deportation. For women caught in such desperate situations, the onus of saving family honor is even more critical and it is not surprising therefore, that many of them attempt suicide to escape violence.¹¹²

The argument that South Asian women's difficulties are due to "conflict of cultures" further victimizes them. It alienates the women at once from their own community as well as mainstream society, including the law enforcement system. When ghettoization of minority cultures occurs, men's control over women's sexuality and reproduction intensifies. Mainstream and minority

Recent writings in South Asian Muslim communities highlights that the major focus of the entire world has been on the overt manifestations of honor in the form of crimes and murders.⁸ Scholars from Pakistan, challenging the notion of honor as merely a cultural or religious phenomenon have argued that honor is a product of geo-politics, militarization, and financial feuds within and between families. The semi-public gang-rape of Mukhtaran Bibi in Pakistan is a gruesome example of how caste hierarchy, kinship, and family honor intersect with the dispensability of women's rights, as well as the use of their sexualities to trade favors or to take revenge.⁹

A Brief History of Honor

Honor, as a sense of personal integrity or inner voice did not become a widespread notion before the mid 18th Century.¹⁰ The concept of honor might have acquired an abstract connotation in Western societies now, but in other parts of the world it still is considered a personal or group possession, expressed in terms such as "their honor" or "a family's honor."¹¹ The general tendency to view honor as an external trait has existed for centuries, even in Europe, where honor has remained mainly a public phenomenon – the worth of a person in someone else's eyes.¹² Social recognition was considered more important than an individual's sense of self, or *being* honorable. Honor, as it still exists in many parts of the world, is based on creating the 'Other.' It is not based on intrinsic values of a person but on reputation and is often revengeful and masculinist.

The notion of honor is an entitlement among equals, the loss of which can cause humiliation or banishment from one's group.¹³ In order to maintain honor, one is expected to follow certain rules that constitute the codes of conduct for that specific *honor group*, which is defined as, "a set of people who follow the same code of honor and who recognize each other as doing so" (p. 54).¹⁴ For example, some groups of people who lack 'legitimacy' of birth, engage in stigmatized professions such as prostitution, or are guilty of "disgraceful misdeeds such as theft or breach of faith" (p. 38) are rendered '*ehrlös und rechtlos*' (honorless and rightless), and are precluded from inheritance, judicial, and other basic civil-political rights.¹⁵ This observation carries a sinister connotation for immigrants, especially Muslims in the West, who are generally considered 'backward and dangerous' subjects. The 'Othering' of LGBTQ individuals by heterosexual people can also be seen as the effort of a hegemonic honor group attempting to de-legitimize another group through signs, signals, norms, codes, and sexual mores.

The codes of honor enjoin families and communities to maintain an impenetrable silence about honor related crimes, particularly if group honor is perceived to be in peril.

Defining 'Honor'

Even though honor has been researched in the past few centuries by anthropologists, philosophers, writers, and lawyers, there is no single or simple definition available. Furthermore the debate around the term and notion continues unresolved.¹⁶ Feminists, having applied the lens of power to honor, have pointed out problems related to the terminology, meaning, usage, and its patriarchal, racist, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant connotations. In general, codes of behavior symbolize and project honor and integrity of particular groups.¹⁷ Such concerns have led feminists either to discard the term altogether or complicate its meaning by placing it within quotes.¹⁸ Thus,

the term 'honor' is contentious, especially in the context of crimes, as it legitimizes violence against women by relegating such crimes to certain cultures. In South Asian contexts as well as within the immigrant communities, the term is further complicated by caste and religious overtones.¹⁹

The difficulty in translating hundreds of culture and context specific words denoting honor into English and other European languages subjects the term to multiple and often inaccurate interpretations and analyses. For instance, in some cultures visible body parts such as the face or nose may be used to denote honor; and when they are used negatively (e.g., blackened face; lost face; disfigured face; cut nose; etc.) they denote dishonor. Loss of honor could also be expressed by making covered body parts visible, such as stripping someone nude in public. This public display of what is considered private or veiled can render honor to be lost irretrievably. The codes of honor enjoin families and communities to maintain an impenetrable silence about honor related crimes, particularly if group honor is perceived to be in peril.²⁰ Since the *public* discussion of a rights violation, rather than the violation itself is perceived as dishonoring a family or group, women's organizations and law enforcement agencies intervening in situations of domestic violence are considered to cause loss of family honor.

Feminist focus on the concept of honor reveals it to be a gendered notion, with men, especially from dominant groups, possessing intrinsic honor, but women possessing only shame. This gendered ideology produces inequality and hierarchy with men and women embodying honor

differently. That is, women are the repositories of honor while men regulate their conduct, since they pose the greatest danger to men's honor.²¹ In fact, the ideology of honor is largely built upon the literary tradition and customary belief that the male provides the seed and the female is merely the fertile earth.

A single transgression by a woman is considered to have besmirched the entire extended family and clan, negatively affecting the marital prospects of other children, especially the daughters'.

The concepts of honor and shame are closely linked. In some South Asian cultures the opposite of honor (*izzat*) is the state of being without honor (*be-izzat*). Shame (*sharm*) can then be considered a gendered equivalent *within* the concept of honor, rather than its binary opposite.²² Similarly, 'men of honor' and 'chaste women' are linked terms, but not totally equivalent.²³ "Manliness and shame are complementary qualities in relation to honor; women thus must possess shame if the manliness of the men is not to be dishonored" (p. 21).²⁴

Since women possess shame on behalf of men, shameless women can throw an entire family into dishonor. "[T]o avoid being shamed, women must know how to behave with propriety, as prescribed in the code of honor" (p. 61).²⁵ Thus, while a man's own behavior may be exempt from scrutiny, any departure from the norms of chastity and modesty by any woman of his extended family can make him a target of scorn and abuse. Dishonor is a public phenomenon like shame that "becomes real only when it is disclosed because it is in the eye of the beholder" (p. 61).²⁶

The discomfort among feminists and women's rights activists with the terms 'honor' or 'crimes of honor' stems from the fact that these terms eulogize the crime, making it more acceptable than other forms of violence against women. The implication that women embody the honor of men renders violence against them justifiable. Besides, masking the killings and abuse, the

children in Pakistan and Afghanistan have been killed by drone attacks or during the 'war on terror' by the U.S., what has consistently been reported in the media is the image of the backwardness and barbarism of the local populace, especially men. Ironically, the strongest support and role-model for Malala by her own admission is her father. Clearly, the role of media in shaping and promoting hegemonic ideologies is critical to examine in understanding violence against women.

In this context, we need to heed to Aisha Gill's cautions about two major dangers: (1) Universalizing Western feminist ideas of morality; and (2) Tolerating human rights violations for the sake of multiculturalism. Feminists in different parts of Europe have made similar observations.¹⁰² Feminists have argued in favor of positions that are both anti-patriarchal and anti-racist¹⁰³ demanding greater voice for minority communities¹⁰⁴ and with interventions that do not negate women's agency by treating them only as victims who are incapable of resistance.¹⁰⁵ The persistent resistance by someone as young as Malala Yousafzai in the face of brutal Taliban opposition to girls' education is a sterling example of this irrepressible agency.

among feminists, allies, and networks of progressive social groups inside and outside South Asian societies.⁹²

Whether or not honor related crimes are part of a culture is a difficult question to answer. Out of the 185 homicides that they studied, Dabby and her colleagues mention only one murder that the media had clearly identified as 'honor killing.'⁹³ In 2004, a Turkish man had murdered his wife in the New York and had attempted to murder his eldest daughter because his brother had been sexually abusing them. Although he did not confront the brother, he killed one woman and attempted to annihilate the other, as he considered them defiled. He had also tried to kill a younger daughter because she had undergone gynecological examination, perhaps in the process of gathering medical evidence of sexual abuse. He had also considered her defiled. Obviously, this man's murderous actions arise from a cultural belief that women embody honor, and that men intrinsically possess honor *and* women. The sexual abuse of 'his' women and internal medical examination of 'his' younger daughter had breached this honor, which by his logic could only be restored by their deaths.

In another incident reported in the Dabby et al. study, a South Asian man stabbed and beheaded his wife in the state of New York, because after years of enduring abuse she was about to leave him. News media as well as some American feminists marked this murder as 'honor killing,' drawing similarities between the man and a terrorist.⁹⁴ This murder was just as much an honor related crime as the thousands of shooting, stabbing, and strangling murders of women by their intimate partners in America, particularly when women attempt to leave their intimate relationships.⁹⁵ Yet these murders are labeled as 'domestic violence' and not 'honor crimes.' While femicide occurs in all cultures, the forms and weapons are different, and are generally confined to what are easily and cheaply available in society. For instance, while guns and knives are popular in the West, kerosene, acid (used for cleaning toilets), pesticides, and fire are easily available tools in South Asia. These are not culturally sanctioned tools; rather, accessible to people in their day-to-day living.

Labeling a murder as 'honor crime' merely because of the religion, ethnic background, or method of killing only intensifies racialization of minorities. It perpetuates the myth that women from certain societies or religions are particularly 'imperiled'⁹⁶ due to the innate backwardness of their cultures. Therefore, they need to be rescued from their male counterparts by Western intervention. In the words of Gayatri Spivak, "White men [are] saving brown women from brown men."⁹⁷ This 'rescuing' may take even the form of military invasion, war, imperialism, protracted occupation, or market invasion. This is all the truer of Muslim stereotypes, and even more so post-9/11, whereby policing of Muslim men in the name of gender equality and pre-empting terrorism has co-occurred.⁹⁸

In her 2006 article, Aisha Gill examined British media's misrepresentation of ethnic minorities in reports on domestic violence or so-called honor based violence, and argued that a better understanding of the relationship between culture and morality is essential for the construction of a nuanced human rights framework.⁹⁹ The events following the brutal attack on Malala Yousafzai¹⁰⁰ by the Pakistani Taliban are telling in this respect. While the prompt response in terms of medical intervention to save her life or her incredible bravery have never been disputed, many have expressed uneasiness at the way in which she was selectively picked up by the Western press to promote, while it callously disregarded two of her schoolmates who were also attacked at the same time.¹⁰¹ This uneasiness stems from the fact that even though thousands of school-going

violence gets associated "with the 'uniqueness' of Asian cultures, with irrational communities and aberrant and archaic patriarchal practices refusing to modernize" (p. 9).²⁷ Feminists have contested the gender neutrality implied by the terms "honor related crimes" and "crimes of passion," and have categorized both as variations of femicide, where cultural values that uphold male control mitigate the murder of women.²⁸

An understanding of patriarchy thus helps us locate various forms of violence against women within unequal gender relations, since it is within the dynamics of gendered power that women's sexuality, behavior, and compliance are structured through material, ideological, and symbolic control. Feminists, therefore, insist that 'honor killings' should be understood as 'femicide,' a misogynist killing of women and a form of sexual violence.²⁹ In her book *Aysan Sev'er* rightly renames honor killing of women as "patriarchal murder."³⁰

The discussions and debates around the usage of the term 'honor' continue unabated. For example in Pakistan, feminist groups such as Shirkat Gah have used the slogan, "There is no honor in killing" and the term 'dishonorable' to denounce the perpetrators, thus attempting to destabilize the prevalent understanding of honor and attributing a positive meaning to the concept.³¹ Women's groups in the U.K. have also attempted to reclaim the term by proclaiming, "There is no honor in domestic violence, only shame."³²

Crimes in the Name of Honor

Even though South Asia is not a homogenous region, crimes in the name of honor have been reported in most countries in the location: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and also in Sri Lanka and Nepal. Bhutan has a low crime rate as such; thus honor related crimes are not known there as yet. There is no data of honor related killings in the Maldives, even though instances of legal judgment to flog teenagers after rape have been recorded.³³

The issue of honor killings among South Asians is better documented in Canada than in the United States.³⁴ In the U.S., it is difficult to obtain exact data on the rationale and explanations behind femicides. Nevertheless, it is critical to consider the connections between violence against women and honor in its ultimate expression – death. As immigrants, many South Asians as well as those from the South Asian diaspora harbor values and practices prevalent in countries of origin. This is especially true when it comes to gender and its manifestations on expected behaviors of women and girls.

Post-1965 liberalization of immigration policies brought highly qualified individuals from the upper strata of South Asian societies to the U.S. These early immigrants were determined to “make it” in the new country. Many became highly successful quickly as were their children. After the first group settled down in their adopted land, they began sponsored their extended family members who were less technically skilled and not as successful, leading to a more bimodal distribution of socio-economic status within the community. The diasporic populations,³⁵ whose ancestors had migrated under the British Colonial rule, also hold fast to certain cultural practices related to South Asia. These groups pose varied concerns for SAWO advocates as they adhere to “traditional” practices in different ways. Patriarchal norms and traditions vary in these groups according to the length of stay, location, immigration status, class, caste, and religious affiliation to name a few. Understanding the intersections of all the variables and the ways in which patriarchal values manifest is essential if we have to understand how honor and violence against women play out in the South Asian American contexts.³⁶

Cultural commonalities such as influence of the Hindu caste system, rising Islamist ideologies, backlash against women’s agency, patriarchal notions of women’s purity, and gendered power relations in the private and public domains are present in most parts of South Asia. Just as numerous religions co-exist, so do social hierarchies. Women’s relationships with each other, as well as household power relations depend upon each woman’s standing with the men of the household; furthermore, these end up being exaggerated in the marital home. In the family, conflicts are usually resolved through negotiations rather than confrontations, and as far as possible without any interference from ‘outsiders.’ In the U.S., as family, marriage, gender, sexuality, and immigration intersect, a complex web of domination-subjugation is created for South Asian women, the majority of whom are dependent on their spouses for legal status, at least in the first few years after migration.³⁷ Furthermore, a single transgression by a woman is considered to have besmirched the entire extended family and clan, negatively affecting the marital prospects of other children, especially the daughters’.

Honor and Culture

While one cannot deny that honor related crimes do occur in some cultures more than they do in others, intimate partner violence is rampant in all communities in the United States. On closer scrutiny we can conclude that the majority of crimes against women, including those of ‘passion,’ occur when masculinity is threatened. For example, refusing to adhere to traditional gender roles in the home, refusing sexual relations, choosing another partner, leaving one’s partner by moving out or divorcing, or making private violence public, can trigger severe violence against women in almost every community. The mere absence of a colluding natal family or community cannot be the only distinguishing factor that separates crimes against women into ‘honor related’ and ‘routine’ intimate partner violence. The culture of violent masculinity exists in all patriarchal societies but its manifestations are peculiar to specific communities.

Cultural norms vary in groups. For instance, while public display of affection between men and women, including between husband and wife is disapproved of in many parts of South Asia, same-sex physical closeness such as holding hands and draping an arm around shoulders is considered normal. These codes of conduct are quite the opposite in many parts of the U.S. Cultural nuances must be understood and respected before effective interventions for honor related violence can be designed for South Asian communities. By consigning certain types of violence to certain communities without deeper analysis of how power and control play out in different patriarchal contexts would only lead to racialization and condemnation of immigrant groups. Stigmatizing labels would result in alienating communities and pushing women in those communities into a corner. Unless we confront patriarchy and its intersections with other systems of domination, we cannot effectively confront gender-based violence in any society.

Furthermore, the political economy of crimes against women in the name of honor cannot be ignored. Female relatives may be killed for property, profit, and/or to cover up other crimes with the accusation of inappropriate sexual conduct.⁸⁸ Even in traditional societies where women’s sexual transgressions could be considered punishable by law and custom, or where women’s unacceptable sexual conduct may be stigmatized and linked to men’s honor, crimes against women may be overlooked, forgiven, or condoned. In a word, not all transgressions end in ‘honor related crimes.’ Thus when the media whips up frenzy around ‘honor crimes’ and links these to specific cultures, the consequences may be quite unexpected. While such publicity demonizes a particular culture, it increases awareness of the criminal nature of these actions. This “increasing awareness of rights and women’s assertiveness may create a backlash in which ‘honor killings’ may actually increase” (p. 7).⁸⁹

Thus, what may seem like a cultural phenomenon could represent the cyclical interactions⁹⁰ and tensions among patriarchal structures, political systems, traditions, modernization, and women’s agency. Therefore those resisting honor crimes within societies in which codes of honor operate, often face the risk of being accused of siding with former colonial powers and in turn, might be subjected to violence from their communities.⁹¹ In order to effectively respond to crimes relegated to honor, it is imperative that we analyze historical backgrounds and build partnerships

home such as a daughter eloping or returning from a violent marriage. Even though the more powerful might not care very much about the opinions of others, they would still be vulnerable to gossip, reduced chances of finding eligible spouses for other children, and a lowering of cultural and moral status in the community. The overall expectation of providing economic support for the family lies heavily on those who are financially better off. Thus, those family members who come to the U.S. feel obliged to care for those who are left behind or those who come later, even if in a patronizing and condescending manner.

Crimes and killings that are considered honor related are characteristically carried out by the blood relatives of a woman. It involves some amount of planning, involvement of close relatives, community silence, impunity, and a tacit acceptance by those around the family that the action, however brutal, is justified.³⁸ That is, most believe that it is the woman who has acted irresponsibly and that the family has no option but to cleanse the blot on their reputation, standing, or honor that her action has created. The family is deemed the ultimate victim and all sympathies lie with it. Finally, the family is expected to take some action to rectify the situation; otherwise they are considered to be irresponsible as well. Mere association with a transgressing person and/or her family contaminates others, justifying a general boycott of the family unless it disassociates from the transgressor by banishing (read: figurative death) or actually killing her. Since honor is a collectively owned and public trait, each person of the honor group must not only protect his honor, but also that of his kith and kin.³⁹

Upon preliminary analysis, the reasoning behind committing a crime to reclaim honor may seem incomprehensible and quixotic to Westerners. However, we must recognize that across cultures, most crimes against women are based on some kind of 'rationale,' however inexplicable they may be to outsiders. For example, a 'crime of passion,' a common concept in the West is instigated when the perpetrator, often an intimate partner is affronted by his wife or female partner's conduct, generally adultery. While blood relatives might not get directly involved in punishing the transgressing woman, the intimate perpetrator acts from a sense of lost honor/promise. Thus, even though the significant difference between 'crimes of passion' and 'crimes in the name of honor' is the relationship of the perpetrator/s to the victim, the gendered nature of crimes of passion cannot be ignored. Furthermore, men are more likely to kill their opposite sex partners 'out of passion' than women in similar situations do.

It is the social context that distinguishes a 'crime of passion' from a 'crime of honor.' In the individualistic social structure of the West, children leave the family during their teen years and migrate out, resulting in the family's gradual decrease of control over them. Choice of their partners therefore, may be met with censure or disapproval but may not result in severe repercussion such as torture or killing. Similarly, the involvement of the extended family in everyday life of the couple is marginal when individuals live as a dyad or a nuclear family. With families branching out and not remaining joint, even at an emotional or cultural level, the build-up phase before a crime does not involve the in-law, parents, brothers, or kinship in the way it frequently plays out in South Asian families. This remains true even after migration to Western countries where they might still nurture an extended family psychologically and technologically (e.g., over the telephone and Internet), as well as in reality (e.g., frequent visits, sponsoring parents and siblings for immigration).

The first generation of immigrants usually harbor the dream of 'returning home' and thus conform to some of the idealized notions of what life is/was like in the home country. They often like their families back home to believe that they and their children still subscribe to the values and sensibilities they grew up with. Parents are careful to ensure that no criticism of 'Westernization' is leveled by relatives at their West-born children.

Sharing details of the American dream (e.g., home, car, household luxury goods, etc.) to project happiness is also complemented by bestowing gifts, invitations, and airline-tickets to family members for a visit to the U.S. These displays of prosperity in the new country make extended family members not only envious, but also fill them with aspirations of achieving similar well being

for their own children. The fulfillment of such desires is usually sought through arranging marriages of the second generation children with eligible spouses 'back home,' an arrangement that realizes the obligation of sharing one's good fortune with kinfolk, especially through visa and green card sponsorship. It also ensures that the family values, traditions, and cultures of the immigrants are preserved for subsequent generations.

When children refuse to conform to traditional norms and mores by becoming 'Westernized,' their actions are considered selfish and careless. Such behavior challenges the reasons for parental migration, which mainly was to secure a better life for themselves, their children, and the family back home but not to integrate with the new country's unfamiliar cultures. One of the potent accusations parents still level against their disobedient children is of 'Americanization,' behaviors amounting to cultural betrayal. In the best of circumstances, acculturation is considered a necessary evil fraught with reluctance, suspicion, and anxiety.⁴⁰ Feelings of their own cultural and/or religious supremacy and contempt for the 'ways of the West,' therefore result in monitoring the mobility, behaviors, and interactions of children, especially daughters. Sons are generally allowed more freedom and latitude of movement, as they are required to make a living, and could even be allowed to date.⁴¹ However, marrying outside one's community may not be a desirable option even for sons, unless the bride agrees to fit into the existing family set-up. But for girls whose sexual purity, whether real and perceived, is of utmost importance,⁴² dating and interacting with men outside the community group is more offensive and not tolerated.⁴³

suddenly – from clothes and language to gay pride marches. He just froze. He had to become a taxi driver in the U.S., in spite of being a skilled mechanic; and he wouldn't let his wife go out for a job even though financially things were difficult. It was a matter of masculine pride for him. He wanted to help newer immigrants from his home-area and gave them his earnings even when his family was in dire straits. He felt good about being useful to others. When he started taking loans and losing money, his wife protested, pointing out how even later immigrants who drove taxis had bought homes, taxi permits, or lived in less shabby apartments. She insisted on going out to work for the sake of their young children. She is very bright and confident. He would feel dishonored by her having to work in order to run the home, and started venting all his frustrations on his wife. They fight a lot, and I suspect there is occasional domestic violence there as well. (Focus group participant # 6)

When asked who they would consult when there were problems in the family, women said,

Usually family matters are resolved within the home. People may call the police when road accidents happen, but never for family matters. At the most, they may involve someone from the community, or may be a mullah, but no outsider (bahirer manoosh). Involving an outsider in family issues is a matter of shame and loss of honor for the man. (Focus group participant # 6)

Women were reluctant to call the police, or even speak to friends about domestic violence because public discussion of their situation would dishonor their husbands.

One day my husband's friends' wives saw the bruises on my face. We were at a dinner in one of his colleague's homes. They confronted their husbands to question my husband. They also said that I should call the police. I didn't dare, even when he would beat me and make me stand outside the house, barefoot and without warm clothes, for hours at night in the winter. He knew that I couldn't go anywhere without a coat or shoes. He would let me inside only when I begged, after which he would bring me in and beat me once more, until I fainted.

His friends then secretly gave me a cell phone. One day when he slashed me with a kitchen knife and chased me around the apartment complex at night, I rang up the police. He will never forgive me for what I have done to his honor. (Focus group participant # 1)

The threat of further violence and even death haunted the women even after they had the courage to leave their relationships and homes:

He has threatened to kill me wherever I go. I'm afraid he'll find me, but I also feel good to be out of the situation I was in for so long. He never expected that I would seek help from anyone. He used to call me stupid and tell me that no one would believe me or help me. (Focus group participant # 1)

The women revealed that the members of their families needed each other for counsel, money, support to settle down in a new country, finding a spouse for their children, and so on. They had felt that their family members' advice, for better or worse, was preferable to being left in the dark in a strange and foreign land.

Giving and receiving of support, both emotional and financial, is considered an essential family obligation. Those who are more educated or rich are expected to give more; in turn, they get the privilege of arbitrating and making decisions in family and community matters. On the other hand, they may also need support from those 'below' them if something were to go wrong in the

I didn't want to tell my parents because they would be troubled back home in India. I would pretend to be very happy whenever we visited them every two or three years. They had no idea at all. Then one day when I was with them, I told them everything and cried. They just held me and made me sleep between them the whole night. I felt like I was their baby once more. (Focus group participant # 2)

I might have told my parents if I had been living in India. But it was embarrassing to tell them that I was in this condition in the U.S. Everyone would have been shocked. When I finally told my parents they asked me why I hadn't told them earlier. I didn't know that attitudes had changed back home. I was so relieved. (Focus group participant # 4)

While parents 'try to do the best' for their children and believe that a marriage with an eligible groom is the best option for their daughter, such a decision is fraught with maintaining their daughter's respectability and their own honor.

Because I had studied in the U.S. and showed an inclination to stay here for long, my parents found a husband who worked here through family contacts. Little did we know that he was so cruel. When I think back, I wonder how I became a dependent wife after having studied so much. My visa became completely dependent on his whims. From being a happy-go-lucky and extremely confident student, I became a jobless, scared wife. Why did I let that happen to myself? (Focus group participant # 5)

My parents' reactions to my decision of marrying my boyfriend were quite revealing. I was friendly with him since our college days. When I got a scholarship to study in the U.S., and he too got a fellowship to come to Canada, my parents asked me what would happen to marriage. I told them that I was interested in marrying my friend. My mother immediately agreed and wanted the wedding to take place before we left the country. My father was not so keen – he felt that my boyfriend was not of the same economic standard as us, and that I could find more eligible men after I had completed my higher education. He wanted me to wait. My mother's approval was based out of the fear that we might start cohabiting here without marriage, or that people around would disapprove of me leaving for abroad on my own. In her mind, marriage was a good option, even if it was with someone who was a struggling student and came from a poorer background. This way everyone would be satisfied. I don't know if she would have approved of the match so heartily if I had stayed back home. (Focus group participant # 6)

One participant of the focus group made an interesting observation about how migration affects people's attitudes and how some cope with it better than others:

My parents are more liberal back in Bangladesh than my cousin brother who lives here. My parents are educated and they moved gradually from a village to small town and then to Dhaka. They became teachers – my father teaches in a college and my mother in a high school. The change was not so rapid, so they adjusted gradually, and moved from giving less to more freedom with each daughter. My elder sister was not allowed to participate in a school dance because someone said it was against Islam, but years later, they cheered me when I danced in school. They actually sent me to a classical dance school because they saw I had talent. My father started arbitrating more positively for my cousin sisters' rights whenever his less-educated relatives from the village came to him for counsel and financial help. My older cousins used to say 'How come he lets you do things that he disapproved for us some years ago?' My parents also let me marry a boy of my choice and settle down in the U.S.

My cousin brother, however, came here straight from the village on a lottery visa. He had never even lived in a big town in Bangladesh. In the U.S., he was confronted with too many difficult issues too

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Do South Asians Need Honor Groups?

When people migrate outside their village, town, or country they tend to stay with the familiar. For example, early research with immigrant communities indicates that South Asians adhere to their traditional religion, values, food, marriage ideals, and child rearing practices.⁴⁴ For immigrants in a new country, close contact with people of one's own kind becomes instrumental to finding apartments, jobs, schools, community centers, phone-cards for international calls, thrift stores, and a network of friends from similar backgrounds. Ethnic grocery stores become places for exchanging information, gossip, and sending messages or gift parcels to loved ones in the country of origin. People help each other out in gathering discount coupons, going to the social security office, learning to drive and the use of public transportation, and loaning money during the first few difficult months. Taxi drivers from the community become valuable resources for ferrying new immigrants across cities. Sometimes they are also involved in maintaining vigilance over youth and track runaways, including adult couples who elope.

Being accepted by the people who are already settled in the U.S. and becoming part of a familiar community are top agenda items when new immigrants arrive. Conforming to the norms of the established community as well as influencing them with the norms one brings freshly from the home country is thus an on-going process in the formation of new honor groups.

Among immigrants, food and traditions, South Asia specific places of worship, caste purity and boundaries, vegetarianism, *halal* meat-eating strictures, and the fear of children marrying outside the approved community determine who the weekend guests will be. Frequently, the etiquette of 'foreigners' is an enigma to new immigrants. They are confounded by questions such as: how does one fathom 'their' sense of privacy; which interaction would be construed as intrusion; should one spontaneously share food with one's neighbors; could one visit a neighbor or colleague unannounced; can one's children be sent over to a neighbor's, or their children invited over; could one talk to or touch someone else's child? Routine cultural practices of the 'Western' people are often not clear to South Asian immigrants. For example, it would be rude to not talk to, smile at, shower praise upon, or share food with a child in South Asia. But these innocuous actions would be considered unacceptable without permission from and supervision by a child's parents in North America.⁴⁵ Additionally, in post 9-11 America, uneasiness or suspicion from 'mainstream people' could evoke distress and self-exclusion in South Asians. Similar anguish among Black men of feeling judged and unwanted when interacting with White women or children has also been reported.⁴⁶

A conversation starter for many South Asians is to locate the person by their religion, marriage, children, and caste status. Thus immigrants are often not sure how and what to talk to those who are outside this information/location zone. Noisy and often politically incorrect conversations that are acceptable in South Asian circles may not be considered sophisticated or acceptable in ethnically mixed groups. Consequently, deliberate segregation from 'Others' seems to be a safer option in terms of comfort as well as a protection from being 'contaminated' by Western 'outlandish' ways of child rearing, public display of romance, same-sex preference, etc.

Honor and Violence against Women

In their study of domestic violence related homicides between 2000 and 2005 in Asian communities, Chic Dabby and her colleagues found that 57 percent of the total of 160 victims was female intimate partners, both past and present, of the male perpetrators.⁴⁷ Conversely, 107 out of 160 perpetrators (67 percent) were male intimate partners, past or present, of the murdered women. There were three contract killings carried out on the behest of a husband, fiancé, and father-in-law of the female victims among these murders. One 'honor killing' was carried out by a husband who also attempted to kill two of his daughters.⁴⁸ The majority of women (67 percent) were killed at home. Leaving, threatening to leave, getting or asking for a divorce, getting another partner, or 'plain and simple' domestic violence were the reasons for these fatalities with shooting and stabbing accounting for most (62 percent) murders. Thus, the home, considered a safe haven is clearly not so for women. The most terrible kinds of violence including rape, assault, and homicides are committed there. Yet, it is in this place that women are confined under the excuse of protection.

We now know that domestic violence often occurs against an individual who is vulnerable or dependent on another within the home, such as children, women, the elderly, physically or mentally challenged, and the indigent. Most acts of violence are committed by those who wield power and control over their victims. Usually perpetrators can get away with impunity because victims cannot resist or question the abuser. Often a perpetrator is confident that the violence will not be reported, and even if it is, few would dare intervene, as domestic violence is considered normal and a private matter. Honor codes of silence make it almost impossible for women to seek redress unless the situation is life-threatening. Among women, the reaction to violence is frequently directed 'inward,' that is, they may punish themselves by refusing to eat and/or becoming suicidal. They may vent their anger and frustrations on someone who is even more vulnerable such as a young son or daughter, particularly if s/he has a psychosocial disability or displays non-conformist behavior. In their study of homicides, Dabby and her colleagues discovered that most battered women who killed their violent husbands and sometimes their children, also attempted to commit suicide. In a few cases women engaged in violence as a reaction to constant exploitation and abuse.⁴⁹ This underscores the fact that a battered woman's reactive violence against her intimate partner must be understood in the context of her experiences of abuse.⁵⁰ A gender-neutral approach to domestic violence must be reconsidered, as it would only lead to further victimization and criminalization of battered women.

Violence also occurs when a particular group or person is subjected to routine discrimination in society, such as the minorities and the marginalized, subordinated, or stigmatized. The practice of divide and rule is evoked to justify violence under the pretext that the minority and marginalized dishonored the family or community by their transgressions, even if inadvertent, or by just being 'not like the majority.'

Honor, Sexuality, and Violence

In her book, *In Honor of Fadime*, Unni Wikan traces European history back to when pre-marital pregnancies did not result in the murder of the mother but in the abandonment of the child.⁵¹ She notes that the protectionist focus on punishing the man⁵² who has shown sexual interest in someone else's wife by challenging him to duels has now shifted to punishing transgressing women.⁵³ Even today, not all transgressing women are killed; instead, a metaphorical death may be

may not divorce them legally. In a foreign land, abandonment acquires an even more sinister character as the legal residency status of an immigrant woman may be jeopardized by her husband's desertion. In such situations, it is not only the family or the community, but the entire State apparatus that de-legitimizes the existence of an abandoned woman. Such transnational abandonment is accompanied on the one hand by the deeper shame of having to return to the home country in penury and disgrace, and on the other, in constant fear of being deported or arrested if she is rendered undocumented. Moreover, a woman is often unaware of her exact legal status, especially since its manipulation is an important element in the abuse perpetrated against her in a foreign country.

If I had been back in India, I might have returned to my parents' home a long time ago. But it's too shameful to return from here. What face will I or my parents show to their neighbors and friends? People expect you to be happily married when you're here, and we also pretend to be that way when we visit. It would be a shock for everyone to know that I have been thrown out by my husband. I must live here, whatever be the cost. (Focus group participant # 3)

Discussing the extreme control husbands have exerted over them (e.g., taking charge of the wife's passport; not allowing to her drive or leave the house; letting her speak to her parents on the phone under strict supervision, etc.), the women in the focus group remarked:

He would threaten to send me back to India. Once he abandoned me there. Because I did not have proper papers with me, it took many weeks, many visits to the American Consulate and a lot of stress and expense for my father before I was able to return. After that I became cautious. (Focus group participant # 4)

After years of putting up with violence, I rang up Manavi. They were very helpful and assured me of all support. They asked me if it was safe enough to stay on with my husband or not file for divorce until I got my green card, which was due in a few months. I spent that period with the knowledge that I would soon be free. I left as soon as I got my permanent status. (Focus group participant # 3)

I didn't know that he had withdrawn my petition for permanent residence. I was shocked when I found this out after I had left him. He sexually abused me from the start of our marriage, but I was too ashamed to tell anyone of the sexual acts he would ask me to perform. Finally I decided to leave because I could take it no more.

I had to leave before I got my green card because I could not bear the torture any more. I work at a sales counter now even though I have a post graduate professional degree. The money is very little, but it is worth more than the life I've had with him, I breathe freely. I sleep at night without being afraid all the time. (Focus group participant # 5)

Participants who had suffered severe violence stated that they had worried about letting the parents know of the abuse they were experiencing. The fear of not being believed, not wanting to cause anxiety, hoping that everything would work out satisfactorily with the husband, and the prospect of losing face and honor with siblings and family were some of the reasons behind their (in)actions. They also worried that parents would advise them to return to the home country – something that none of them wanted to do. Staying in the U.S. was non-negotiable because it was seen as a right for themselves as well as the children, a convenience with the possibility of a better life, an issue of pride and honor, and because of the uncertainty of how to make a living if they are forced to return.

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In Women's Own Words

The connection between domestic violence and honor in South Asian communities has been adequately identified by South Asian women's groups. Manavi's handbook for interventionists clearly makes this link and stresses the fact that it may not be fully understood by outsiders because lived experiences of being in a culture are necessary to grasp its nuances.⁸⁴ Religious beliefs such as karma, marriage being a multi-life commitment, or the ways in which family plays a central role in almost every aspect of a person's life often remains inscrutable to outsiders. Furthermore, being socialized in the nuances of a particular culture determines whether self-assertiveness, individualism, modesty, respect for authority, obedience to the wishes of elders, and resistance to 'outsider' intervention are practiced in one's family.⁸⁵

South Asian cultures extol individual sacrifice for the good of the collective (e.g., family, kinship, or caste), as individuals are made responsible for collective honor. Those who put themselves or their personal desires ahead of others' interests are, therefore, considered to be self-centered and irresponsible. This judgment is exacerbated when women disclose their problems to outsiders; when youngsters refuse to marry brides/grooms chosen from approved sub-castes; or when they act in a way that may be perceived to discredit the family in the eyes of others. The anger at being rejected, affronted, and let down provides justification for backlash violence, typically labeled by outsiders as 'honor related' violence.

Conversations with survivors of domestic violence and graduate students from South Asian communities in New Jersey⁸⁶ revealed the extent to which South Asian women, either on derivative visas or forcibly made undocumented, face humiliation at the hands of their husbands and affinal families in the U.S. In the focus group discussions, participants disclosed the unspeakable violence and control they had experienced at home.

For years I didn't even remember what my own name was. He only called me bitch and bloody bitch. 'Bitch, bring me this,' 'Kutiya [bitch], lick my boots,' is all I heard for years. Everyone would appreciate the food I cooked for the big dinners he gave, but he would publicly criticize my cooking and insist that it was bad. Every time he kicked me in the stomach I would start bleeding. I used to hide sanitary napkins to take care of this repeated bleeding because every time I needed him to buy me some, I had to lick his feet and beg. He would then decide whether or not to get me a packet. I used to pretend that I got my periods every three weeks in order to have spare napkins handy. (Focus group participant # 1)

I was without a cell phone, TV, or car keys. He would lock the door from the outside every time he went out. He would keep my warm clothes hidden so that I couldn't leave home. This went on for many years. (Focus group participant # 2)

Immigration is one of the most pressing concerns of all survivors of violence, and a weapon that perpetrators use against them. Urjasi Rudra and Shamita Das Dasgupta have elaborated the intrinsic connections between domestic violence and immigration status.⁸⁷ In their study, they found that immigrant husbands routinely abandon their wives in their countries of origin, where the women continue to live as married and at the mercy of their deserting husbands, who may or

ordered by exiling or banishing some physically, or by erasing their existence from the families' memories. During my field-work, I observed that when a woman marries against her family members' wishes, they may declare a boycott by stating, "She is dead to us." The patriarch may forbid all family members to have any contact whatsoever with her. Any clandestine or open communication with the banished woman may result in censure of the recalcitrant individual, whereas failure to recognize the seriousness of the threat of exile may lead to physical or murderous attacks on the transgressing woman.⁵⁴ Ironically, because they locate the source of danger in the intimate partner and/or *his* family, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. often do not take girls and women seriously when they express the fear that their lives are at risk from their own family members. This risk of annihilation is real, and may be carried out suddenly by an entire family which seems reconciled to a woman's transgressions.⁵⁵

Ultimately, when surreptitious negotiations regarding restoration of honor, reputation, prestige, and/or self-esteem within the family and kinship fail, codes linked to sexual behavior may be enforced or retrieved by force or violence. For example, control of women in one's family is often established by 'punishment' meted out by blood-relatives. In fact, honor groups may denounce each other for not 'defending' (read: controlling) their women enough.⁵⁶ Even after she is married, perpetrator(s) of violence against a woman may be members of her natal family since a woman's dishonor tends to be linked to the failure of her family to teach her better behavior and to preserve her chastity and subservience.⁵⁷ It is possible to reclaim honor lost by a wife because she is replaceable, but honor is irreversibly lost when a blood-related woman (e.g., sister, daughter, niece, mother, etc.) transgresses.⁵⁸ Thus, bloodshed is essential and inevitable to erase the blemish of blood-family dishonor.⁵⁹ This explains why honor related crimes are most often committed by a woman's kinship rather than her husband or intimate partner.⁶⁰ Once the decision to murder the woman or her partner has been made, underage men may be goaded to undertake the task or be assigned the 'responsibility' of cleansing the family's reputation.⁶¹ By getting a minor brother or cousin to murder a sister he has loved until then, the family simultaneously attempts to avoid harsh punishments by the law.⁶²

Even in the absence of severe violence, women learn to remain within normative boundaries, due to their socialization.⁶³ Honor normalizes cultural violence making "direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong" (p. 115).⁶⁴ Such violence is considerably rooted in women's reproductive and sexual functions; thus, in most societies, these are closely linked to her 'character,' a term used synonymously with chastity, subservience, and traditional feminine virtues within a patriarchal, heterosexual context.⁶⁵ Such normalized violence, whether inter-personal, intra-personal, or collective is justified through religious, cultural, legal, medico-psychiatric, and other institutional and community sanctions against people's dressing, behavior, sexual orientation, and/or gender identities that do not fit into hetero-normative boundaries.⁶⁶ These can result in overt violence, shaming, guilt, or the constant threat of being subjected to discrimination, abuse, rejection, humiliation, suicide, or homicidal attacks.⁶⁷

Not all men are perpetrators, nor are all women victims. All women do not resist patriarchy; some even become its agents, especially in the implementation of family and caste honor. One of the disturbing features of 'honor' related crimes is the complicity and active participation of women in rumor mongering, tension-building, abetting, as well as in committing these crimes.⁶⁸ The connivance of women in honor related crimes against other women has been amply documented, provoking us to look beyond the fixed binary of male oppressor/female victim dichotomy. The

fact that Dalit⁶⁹ men and non-hegemonic masculinities (e.g., gays, transgender, and 'effeminate' men) are targeted in the name of honor leads us to re-examine the gendered nature of 'honor' crimes.

Even when overt physical violence is not perpetrated, women participate in controlling, monitoring, and punishing deviance or exercise of choice by younger women of the household, especially daughters and daughters-in-law, and sometimes even grown up sons or husbands.⁷⁰ Women are also known to be mean to subordinated women and men (e.g., domestic helps, farmhands, colleagues, etc.); especially of lower class and caste.⁷¹ Feminists have to grapple with women's aggression in their analyses, such as the rise of right wing women all over the world, including South Asia and the U.S., and the violent politics and actions of women during riots, conflicts, wars, terrorism, and insurgency.

even further. Now her desertion of her husband can precipitate loss of honor not only of her natal family, but also her husband's family, making a violent crime or killing a distinct possibility.

Selecting a groom of the family elders' choice from 'back home' kills many birds with one stone: hide misdemeanors of the unmanageable young woman; ensure she is married at the 'right' age; stop her from becoming too Westernized; end inter-caste, inter-religious, and/or inter-race romantic encounters; conceal transgender orientation, same-sex relationships, or physical and mental illness from neighbors and prospective spouses; carry out the arrangement of marriage the family elders may have committed to; do someone a favor by 'giving them access to a good life' in the U.S.; keep ties alive with the kinship; and retain honorable status within the South Asian community. Sacrificing the aspirations and human rights of a young woman is justified as requirement for 'the greater good.'

Traditionally, explicit consent is not considered of primary importance during the first or subsequent sexual acts within marriage. Many women tell stories of being forced the first time they had sex.

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As established structures and individual agency get into conflict and both are reconstituted to adapt to the changing circumstances in a new land, the implosion of backlash violence surfaces. This is often comprehensible to the public as 'crime in the name of honor.' While strong elements of patriarchal honor are fused in these gruesome crimes, they also intersect with other lived realities, and are the end results of growing masculinist insecurities related to women's sexuality, loss of control over younger family members, and a sense of emasculation in a foreign land. The need to control women not only resonates with men 'back home,' it also resonates with macho men of mainstream American society with similar desires. Although mainstream cultures view the South Asian community as backward and traditional, the basic set of values between the two societies regarding family values are uncannily similar.

When Honor Codes are Threatened

Some youngsters may lead the double-life seamlessly such as leading an otherwise American lifestyle, yet marrying within sanctioned caste-groups, expecting parents to pay for ostentatious weddings, or performing South Asian patriarchal rituals. However others might rebel, distance themselves from their families, or reject everything that they may perceive to be South Asian and therefore, retrogressive.

However, it must be remembered that members of the second generation who are raised in the U.S, have considerably more resources at their disposal, both internal and external, than their cousins in South Asia to redress wrongs perpetrated by the family. Being citizens of the U.S., and being raised in a culture that values individualism, they are more likely to see themselves as autonomous individuals than their predecessors might do. Being able to see the contradictions between the public and the private domains, they are more likely to confront parental authority in an upfront manner.

Debjani Roy's⁸¹ and Vidya Sri's and Darakshan Raja's⁸² representation of the continuum from arranged to forced marriage is useful in understanding the rise in family authority and honor in the face of filial disobedience. Sri and Raja state that similar to honor related crime, forced marriage is also a hidden problem in South Asian communities in the U.S. and demonstrate the strong relationship between codes of honor and forced marriage. Further, like honor related crimes, forced marriage can also be measured on a continuum of control, whether sexual or nonsexual. Similar to honor related violence, it is a way of enforcing expectations of family members by a set of honor codes. Forced marriage is based on the belief that elders know what is best for the family and the young, especially females, must yield to it. By this analysis, forced marriage may also be taken as a form of honor crime.

Since reputation, whether related to sexual or non-sexual behavior, is of paramount importance in South Asian communities, tarnishing of one's reputation could alienate a woman even from her natal family, and in extreme situations may lead to physical violence or murder.

When a younger family member is perceived to be breaking honor codes, especially related to sexuality, a marriage may be arranged to 'solve' the problem. Her refusal to toe the line may be taken as a sign of unrepentant, inconsiderate and irresponsible behavior, strengthening the conviction that more control is necessary to maintain her reputation in regards to marriage prospects and the family's honor. Thus, already restricted mobility and decision-making allowance of the young woman

may be further curtailed, and any consideration given to her choice of a spouse may be revoked. Since honor codes further require that family matters not be brought out into the open, the individual may not be allowed to talk to friends, teachers, media, or seek help from law enforcement agencies and service organizations. Such breach would be considered an unforgivable violation of family honor.

The individual may then be tricked into going back to the home country, or force may be applied and the woman/girl drugged, if necessary. Subsequently, the young woman may be married off and left in the home country stripped off travel documents until her spirit is broken and she accepts her new life.⁸³ Ensuing pregnancy and transnational legal problems complicate the matter

"This Seemed Okay Back Home...!"

In the countries of origin, many South Asians take it for granted that children will follow certain types of conduct, such as accepting arranged marriage and not engaging in pre-marital romantic or sexual relations. Any young person who disobeys these codes of conduct is punished, which is considered a duty of the parents. Neighbors are expected to report on misdemeanors of local children, a sign of responsible neighborly behavior. Parents tend to berate a neighbor who lets their child 'go astray' by not reporting transgressive behavior; conversely, parents who let their child 'get out of hand' are berated by neighbors as inadequate or irresponsible parents. This mutual monitoring and policing is considered essential to maintain purity of a group, as 'one rotten apple could spoil the others.' Therefore, in order to keep all the daughters (and sons) in a locality on 'correct' moral path, it is important that neighbors keep vigilance over each other's children. This policing of girls becomes essential when it comes to marriage because if all daughters are not kept within socially approved boundaries, one cannot hope to marry one's son to a chaste daughter-in-law.⁷²

A masculine pact of similar nature to ensure good wives for all results in young men monitoring the behaviors of their sisters and girls in the neighborhood. Protecting the reputation of girls from their marked territory can become an obsession with young men leading to fights with outsiders that may escalate into gang-wars. Boys who encroach other young men's territory with 'bad' intentions (read: to have romantic relations with neighborhood girls) can be chased away with community approval, whereas a girl who has romantic/sexual relations with someone from outside the territory or even within is characterized as loose, immoral, and out of control; in short, a whore. Other girls in the neighborhood may be discouraged from interacting with her, and if her family does not correct her quickly, all members of the family may be ostracized, especially when girls in the extended family, kinship, or neighborhood reach the marriageable age. Thus, stringent policing of a girl's mobility, behavior, dress, and legitimacy of being seen in the public domain is considered necessary and natural. Failure to do so may result in censure of the family and even neighborhood. In extreme situations, the community may step in to teach the girl and her family sharp lessons for transgressing codes of conduct and honor. Such chastisement occurs because honor is considered not merely an individual but a collectively owned attribute. Not only does a single person's transgression strip other members of the group of their honor, but also one's honor cannot be fully understood in a vacuum. Honor is comprehensible only in the context of other people's presence and sanction. Further, since honor is based largely on the perception of others, one must be *seen* as unquestioningly honorable.

Thus even when families live in a foreign country, it is more important to be seen as honorable by one's own honor group and not as much by an outsider who does not subscribe to the same honor code. Families would much rather flout laws and norms of the host country than fall in disgrace with their own honor groups. Thus, immigrants might utilize law enforcement agencies in the country of residence in cases of accident or civil issues, but not for 'private' matters such as domestic violence and sexual assault. A family may interact with the police when a

daughter elopes, but it is only to track down the wayward daughter and thus, be viewed in the community as trying to restore family reputation.

Many South Asian immigrants to the U.S have been subjected to the codes of conduct discussed above. Most have had arranged marriages and many have lived in unhappy marriages without legal separation or divorce, abiding by the social prohibition on divorce. Although incidents of divorce are increasing in the countries of origin, divorce is still generally unacceptable in the cultural codes of South Asian diasporic communities. In fact, immigrants may become frozen in the codes of an earlier time when they left their countries, not realizing that divorce or separation are more prevalent than they imagine it is 'back home.'

For a woman trapped in a difficult and unhappy marital union, the social characterizations that force her to maintain the relationship are varied and may differ as she moves through the lifespan. She is considered too impatient if she wants to end her marriage in the first few years; cruel, if she wants to separate when children are young; irresponsible, if she divorces before children are married off; and thereafter, divorce is considered inessential and shameful with queries such as: "Are you going to get re-married at this age?" or "Are you going to abandon the man in his old age after he provided for you all his life?" In short, living in an incompatible marriage is not considered unusual or reason enough to end it.

In most arranged marriages, couples barely know each other except for the basic demographics and physical appearance. As parenting grows more liberal with changing times, a couple may be allowed to speak to each other a few times before they agree to the marriage. Some

When a woman marries against her family members' wishes, they may declare a boycott by stating, "She is dead to us."

parents may allow the betrothed couple to meet for a trip to the cinema or a restaurant as long as they keep within limited and curfew hours or are chaperoned. In all cases, the decision to marry is already made and unless the intended partners object vehemently after they meet, the wedding will go through. In this sense, the meeting is different from dating, as the latter is understood in the western world. The meetings are not to choose among eligible partners, but to get to know one's chosen partner before getting married. Generally, engagements are not kept pending for too long because a broken engagement would bring stigma and might impede a girl's marriage prospects. Prospective partners meeting before marriage is therefore considered a privilege for the couple and a risk for the family. In extreme cases, especially in rural areas, engagements are celebrated as part of the extended wedding rituals, and in some instances the groom and bride may meet for the first time at the wedding ceremony. On rare occasions, marriages have been held in absentia of the groom; so, essentially, a couple may meet directly as husband and wife, with the imminent purpose of carrying on with their married life and responsibilities.

Most often, marriages in South Asia continue to be consummated much before the couple gets to know each other well. Traditionally, explicit consent is not considered of primary importance during the first or subsequent sexual acts within marriage. Many women tell stories of being forced the first time they had sex.⁷³ Display of romance or affection between young married couples is considered crass and meets with families' and communities' disapproval and censure.⁷⁴ The main purpose of marriage is still considered transaction of daughters and wealth, maintaining

caste boundaries, reproducing within marriage, and performing wifely and filial duties in the new home.

"...So, Why Isn't It Okay Here?"

Most immigrants from South Asia frequently grapple with the seduction of material life in the U.S. and the forsaken, imagined spiritual life in the home country. The romance of the lost and beautiful motherland becomes larger than life when living abroad; yet immigrant families proudly share photographs depicting their prosperity in the U.S. with relatives back home. Spectacular school grades, extra-curricular activities, as well as obedient and demure behavior, especially for girls, also become essential to the flaunting of 'having made it' in the new land, while keeping traditional values intact. Sometimes teenagers are coaxed into wearing South Asian clothes on their 'home visit' trips, only to be surprised to see their cousins who live there wearing western clothes.⁷⁵

Immigrant women are the last to be integrated in the host country. The first generation women are often dependent on their husbands, being lesser educated, not having jobs, not being fluent in English, and being controlled by conservative affinal families. New immigrants are also obliged to fit in with compatriots who have arrived earlier, and may be subjected to scrutiny, condescension, and sometimes ridicule for their 'backward' behavior. But interactions with 'outsiders' is considered even more perilous. From negotiating daily chores to contacting the police for domestic violence, the process of interfacing with foreign and unfamiliar systems is fraught with feelings of inferiority, fear, and indecision.

Unni Wikan⁷⁶ explains in detail how testimonies from immigrant women may not be taken seriously by law enforcement agencies.⁷⁷ While the disbelief or trivialization of women's experiences of abuse exists in South Asia also,⁷⁸ the feeling of not being heard may become magnified when confronted by practitioners, police, judges, or translators who cannot fully grasp the cultural nuances and realities of immigrant South Asian women. The incredulity of practitioners and officials arises out of the one-size-fits-all analysis and service provision model that has been repeatedly critiqued by South Asian women's groups.⁷⁹ Cultural sensitivity, without succumbing to cultural relativism and cultural essentialism is a necessary precondition for women to be able to speak about family abuse to people outside their homes and communities.

As children of immigrants grow up in the U.S., they are confronted with numerous mixed messages. Many of them learn to cope with living lives of contrast within and outside their homes. Depending on whether they are in South Asian or mainstream American contexts, they may dress, talk, or behave completely differently. Presenting disparate demeanors is not specific to South Asian youth, but in this case the chasm might be too wide for reconciliation, turning the existence of the youth nearly schizophrenic. These differences become a matter of family honor when oppositional world-views clash such as regarding dating; staying out beyond sunset; being sexually involved; getting pregnant before marriage; marrying outside of caste/religion /race; or coming out with same-sex preference. In more conservative families, interacting with 'foreigners,' wearing make-up, leaving a marriage even when the husband is violent, or being perceived as having 'bad character' may also be seen as severe breach of family honor. Since reputation, whether related to sexual or non-sexual behavior, is of paramount importance in South Asian communities, tarnishing of one's reputation could alienate a woman even from her natal family, and in extreme situations may lead to physical violence or murder.⁸⁰