

Book Review

Nepal's Failed Development: Reflections on the Mission and the Maladies. Devendra Raj Panday. Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Centre, 1999, viii and 432 pp., tables, graphs, references, and index. Nepali Rupees (Rs) 350.00 paperback.

Yes, failed development indeed. There is no doubt about it. The story of this book is eerily ominous as the social Darwinian project called "development" has increasingly turned into a muted but open class war, raging all across the landscape, from urban trenches to rural fringes. What is salient about this warfare is that it breathes no fire. It sheds no blood. It does not even produce a hissing echo of battle hymns. But the war goes on, silently stalking the very segment of the population that development was designed to uplift. Yet, ironically, "development" has become a popular cause among its victims (as well as its beneficiaries). There is a messianic belief that development is the salvation to their miseries. In the historic class warfare, development, as we know it today, has therefore become the new opiate of the masses. The masses are either so intoxicated or so debilitated by this new opiate that they seem to have lost their basic instinct about class injustice to wage a battle against the very class enemy that keeps them trapped in trenches. In the meantime, for the "haves," development is an omnipotent weapon. The beauty of this weapon is that it kills two birds with one stone. By raising the mighty sword of development, the "haves" can evoke a populist rhetoric to legitimize their claim that they are launching projects to alleviate the misery of the masses, while in effect harvesting most of the fruits that development actually bears. So development has two distinct faces: for the "have-nots" it is an eloquent rhetoric that engenders hopes no matter how tantalizing these hopes are and for the "haves" it is an elegant treasure trove that serves to heighten their class control and power. This is the essence of development, the post-World War II incarnation of social Darwinism.

True, in terms of its contextual reference, Panday's book is a gut-wrenching story of how development has failed Nepal and the vast majority of its citizens. In reality, however,

the story transcends national boundaries. After all, what is happening in Nepal is by no means unique; the tragedy intersects a much wider circle of development experience and experimentation throughout the underdeveloped world. That is, remove any reference to Nepal in the book, and the story will vividly reflect the tragedy unfolding in virtually every underdeveloped country, almost like a Shakespearean tale of mischief and miseries. That's why the book is not some polemical narrative of Nepal's development maladies, dubiously crafted in Panday's creative mind. It is a real drama, slowly dripping through the nib of his fountain pen, a drama that pulsates in every vein that can feel the pain of poverty. And it is both saddening and maddening at the same time.

To set the stage for this captivating drama, Dr. Devendra Raj Panday heavily relies on a triangular format that is artfully woven in his profound experience as a prominent player within Nepal's policymaking body since its dawn of development in the 1950s, his keen observation of development trends as a citizen, and his firm grounding in development theories. It is precisely this triangular interplay of *experience*, *observation*, and *theory* that gives this book its inner soul and outer beauty. *Nepal's Failed Development* is a fairly straightforward book that not only provides a detailed profile of the country's development scenes and conditions, but also a thorough analysis of how and why development has failed. Although Panday does not necessarily plow any new ground in his analysis of development failures, he sheds refreshing insights. What he lends to the book is an authentic voice, a voice immersed in sober reflections and experience. Simply expressed, there are few scholars in Nepal who are as qualified and bold as Panday to write a book of this caliber, a book that is bound to be a classic treatise on Nepal's contemporary development. It takes enormous personal guts to bare one's professional soul, and Panday has done that honorably. It is a most timely book.

Nepal's Failed Development begins with a simple but poignant statement. Panday writes, "With the gap between rhetoric and action..., the development practices in the country may soon have consequences more hazardous than the ridicule they could invite from a Havel and a Freire for the underlying hypocrisy and ignorance.... Nepal may not be the only country suffering from such pathology. But this is no relief for the majority of the country's citizens whose state of

deprivation is matched only by the callous rapacity of the ruling class" (p. xiv). What is even more depressing to the core of the Nepali souls, Panday observes, is the indignity and scorn that they encounter throughout Asia and beyond. "When the nation suffers ignominy as a corrupt, parasitic society, the members of the privileged groups may have very little privilege left outside the borders of the country. Some individual members of the professional elite class, for example, may command some influence or status even in the international community on the basis of their personal accomplishments of one kind or another. But they cannot fail to appreciate that as a Nepali they are losing the dignity and honour they earlier had as a result of their collective behaviour as a people" (p. xiv). This is a statement that is as revealing of Nepal's debased national identity as it is painfully true. And it applies to not only the member of the elite class (although they might be the ones to sense it most deeply given their class status), but virtually to every Nepali. In fact, Nepalis don't even have to leave Nepal to be subjected to such indignities and scorn; Westerners practice this routinely right within Nepal, actually with a greater degree of frequency than outside its borders. I am myself a living testimony to this sad truth, for I have suffered its fate time and again, simply because on the Darwinian totem pole of materialism Nepal as a nation stands at the base, desperately begging for foreign alms with its palms stretched out. The unfortunate reality is that on the Darwinian scale of cross-national human relations, one's social status is directly measured against the development status of his/her nation. Plainly stated, international development has heightened the colonial practice of nationality-based prejudice and racism.

Having set the stage, Panday proceeds to expose in detail and methodically the sorry state of Nepal's material development and moral rectitude. He contends that much of the development failure is directly attributed to systemic corruption that acts like termites, slowly devouring the moral pillars of the country's social, political, and development institutions. Also included in his discourse is the absence of participatory democracy and the civil society capable of bringing some sanity to the spiral of institutional degradation. The country is completely devoid any accountability, from the top to the bottom echelons of power and authority. Nobody takes any responsibility for anything. It is hard to

fathom how entrenched Nepal's dependency is on foreign handouts for every little development project undertaken in the country. What the book reveals is that Nepal is mired in a moronic mess with little hope for a respectable recovery anytime soon. Condemned to *Sati's sarap*,¹ the country suffers from a total moral meltdown.

As a reviewer and obedient observer of Nepal's development contours, however, I wish Dr. Panday had dealt at some length with two critical issues.

First, although Panday provides a marvelous discourse on how Nepal's ruling class has increasingly eroded the foundation of its progressive development, there is not much time devoted to discussing the question of "leadership," which, to apply Barrington Moore, Jr.'s logic, is most critical to carry out policies in a manner that truly serves national interests and people's needs. Since the 1950s, the country has witnessed a parade of development models, but they have all failed to alleviate poverty and uplift the masses, precisely because there has been a conspicuous lack of enlightened political leadership. Throughout its history, Nepal has been infested with patrimonial and factional politics, a system in which every faction conspires to grab the leverage of power in order to enjoy its spoils, not to serve the country and its citizens. What Nepal's history uncannily demonstrates, in other words, is that it has been saddled with an endless cycle of political rulers, but has rarely been ruled by political leaders capable of nurturing the rule of law, fostering the civil society, and hence steering the country in the direction of progressive development.

Second, along with true, selfless leadership, Nepal needs a radical development manifesto, one based on the principle of indigenous development, specifically development carried out by the local people in compliance with local needs and local resources. What Dr. Panday has given us is not a development manifesto; it is, to repeat, a vivid and sardonic portrait of development conditions. But he could have easily written one. After all, he is fully endowed with unsurpassed experience and enormous intellectual gifts. He understands the issues and problems facing Nepal, engraved in his heart. He is a native son who, obviously, seems to have no fear about investing his social capital, nor any compunction about bucking the self-serving elite trend that has surrendered Nepal's national identity and pride to

Western schemes (in fact, the surrender is so complete that it could even surprise Frantz Fanon). To put it simply, there are, needless to say, few native scholars who are as qualified and as capable as Dr. Panday to write such a manifesto that could parallel — of course in the Nepali context — the classic *Communist Manifesto*. As he approaches the end of his long and enduring development journey, hopefully, he will write one in the near future because Nepal badly needs it. From a personal perspective, a development manifesto would indeed be a very fitting culmination of his development journey.

Note

¹ Refers to the curse (*sarap* or *shrap* in Sanskrit) uttered by the *sati* wife of Bhim Malla, a member of the nobility during the Malla dynasty. Because Bhim Malla was sentenced to death under the most torturous circumstances, his wife cursed Nepal to be for ever subjected to corrupt and mischievous rulers before she immolated herself on her husband's burning pyre. Many, many years later, a similar *sarap* was cast by the *sati* wife of Bhimsen Thapa, generally regarded to be the first premier of Nepal. Most heinous palace plots were hatched against Bhimsen Thapa, essentially inducing him to take his own life.

References

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Nanda Shrestha

Book Review

Margaret Abraham, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asian Immigrants in the U.S.*, New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000, pp. 234, references and index included.

Speaking the Unspeakable is a most welcome addition to the literature on domestic violence. It fills a surprisingly large gap. There are few systematic sociological studies of marital or family violence among immigrant communities in the US. And while there is a larger literature documenting the incidence, antecedents, consequences, and programmatic issues of domestic violence in the US and other countries from medical, public health, social work, or legal perspectives, this literature deals very little with issues pertaining to ethnic minority or immigrant groups. And particularly noticeable is the paucity of studies on Asian populations in the US. *Speaking the Unspeakable* thus represents a groundbreaking contribution which will hopefully spark further research and writing. The volume is also of interest to scholars in Women's Studies as well as community activists involved in efforts to end violence against women.

Abraham's study is grounded in detailed interviews with 25 women who are survivors of marital violence. These women had sought the help of a South Asian women's organization and also contacted Abraham after being informed about her study and were invited by the author to participate in her study. There are nine chapters in the book and each chapter takes up a range of sociological issues underpinning domestic violence which are then elucidated with evidence garnered from the women's experiences. The interviews were conducted between 1991 and 1994.

The social and economic backgrounds of the women vary widely. Although all are first-generation immigrants, they represent the heterogeneity of the South Asian community and also illustrate that marital violence is not confined to any specific class, region, religion, or cultural group. Abraham uses the term "marital violence" rather than the broader term "domestic violence" (which encompasses violence towards other members of the family) or the more

focused term "wife abuse" which does not fully take into account the complex familial relations created by the institution of marriage in South Asian cultures. The respondents range from highly educated professionals with substantial salaries to low-income women subsisting on public assistance, showing once again that class is no delimitor of violence. The circumstances of the marriages of the women also vary, underscoring the important point that the risk of marital violence exists irrespective of whether the marriage is arranged or based on individual choice.

The first two chapters of the book lay out the aims of the study, and an exploration of the "ethno gender" theoretical perspective within which this book is framed. Abraham points to the deficiencies of most existing Western sociological theoretical approaches to violence against women. For example, the family violence perspective takes the family as its unit of analysis, viewing violence as the result of character flaws in individuals, and violent acts as a reaction to immediate stress. In contrast, the feminist perspective takes the individual women as the unit of analysis, and sees abuse as the result of women's position in the patriarchal social structure. Violence, therefore, is not a random outburst but is an integral mechanism reinforcing gender inequality. While the feminist approach has rightly pointed out the structural basis of gender violence, Abraham is also critical of its tendency to ignore the concerns of ethnic minority and immigrant women.

Abraham develops a theoretical approach that situates domestic violence in the intersection of culture and structure while emphasizing the importance of class and legal status in the immigrant context. Within these multiple intersections, she gives special emphasis to ethnicity and gender as the primary markers of differentiation that shape immigrant women's experience. She shows how the "model minority" label, widely applied in the US to all the Asian ethnic groups and to South Asians in particular, has in many ways been internalized by the communities and is used to counter the "unassimilable alien" image that had been used to exclude the Asian immigrants from mainstream America. The "model minority" image, however, Abraham argues, is problematic. It denies diversity within the group, dissociates it from other minorities, while placing constant pressure on the community to uphold the image. This includes negating issues seen

as potentially divisive or discrediting, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, domestic violence, etc. The demands of the model minority myth interact with pre-immigration South Asian historical and cultural elements (including attitudes to other races) and patriarchy. Women become the main symbol of this construction and subject to various forms of pressure to uphold the "honor" of their families and communities.

The ethno-gender framework highlights how specific features of marriage and family structure in South Asia, among the immigrants, as well as among the majority community in the US have set up the structural basis for marital violence. Both South Asian and contemporary US normative cultures share a stated prioritization of "family values." In the US this has taken the form of mythologizing family issues as private (with the result that "outside" agencies cannot easily be called upon to assist in marital problems); monolithic (which deny, suppress, or denigrate varied, alternate familial forms) and harmonious (which means that inequality or dissent are seen as aberrations that are ignored as much as possible). These values are also shared by the South Asian communities. In addition, the familial orientation of marriage in South Asian cultures, where marriage is seen as a negotiated alliance between two families rather than a romantic attachment of two individuals, makes it comparatively hard for women to seek redress for marital violence under the rubric of individual rights or liberties. In theory, the familial group can provide limited support for married women in abusive situations although in practice that is often not the case. These features remain constant across the variations in marital systems in South Asian sub-cultures and the changes that have taken place in marriage systems including an increase in marriage outside the community and/or "self-chosen" spouses. Using evidence from the in-depth interviews, Abraham demonstrates how marriage is still seen as essential for South Asian women in communities worldwide. Unmarried women, including those never-married, widowed, divorced etc., face many difficulties resulting from social pressures and stigma. Women "on their own" are viewed as potentially dangerous and disruptive elements. These seemingly deep-rooted cultural and structural factors shape South Asian women's exposure to violence in their married lives and constrain the possible re-

sponses and resources available for help. The immigration experience and the pressure to uphold the model minority image intensify rather than attenuate the marital structures and the constraints surrounding violence against women.

Chapters 3 and 6 provide a sobering picture of the serious institutional barriers faced by battered immigrant women while Chapters 4 and 5 describe in detail the specific dimensions of isolation and sexual abuse within the battering relationship. As Abraham shows in these more personal narratives covered in Chapters 4 and 5, international migration, the isolation of the immigrant family and the loss of familial and community contacts intensify facets of abuse. As has been shown by several scholars, isolation is strongly related to the risk of marital violence, both as a cause of abuse, and one of its major manifestations. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 shift the focus toward strategies of resistance. Chapter 7 describes how individual women progressively fight back, resisting family violence on many different levels. Chapters 8 and 9 describe the development of organized community resistance to family violence, and the challenges and dilemmas facing South Asian women's groups. Below, I take up some of the main arguments presented in some of these chapters.

Chapter 3 begins with a historical overview of immigration laws and policies in the United States from the 1870s to the 1950s. It deals with the racist and (hetero)sexist principles underlying the rules and restriction of immigration legislation, and focuses on the more recent period and various types of immigration. Although there are remarkable differences between the earlier period, and the post-1965 period, especially for the Asian communities which were denied the right to free immigration and citizenship rights through naturalization, there are also troubling continuities. For example, in the 1920s, under the principle of "coverture," the law treated women not as legal entities in their own right, but as appendages of men. Until the 1930s women could not apply independently for any immigration procedures but had to depend on their husbands to do so for them. The law thus gave men complete power and control over their wives' residence and visa status. Later, in the 1930s and more so in the 1940s, these inequalities were somewhat redressed by allowing US-based women to file for visas for their immigrant husbands. But, the underlying principle remained unaltered: the US-based spouse had to file on behalf of the im-

migrant spouse. Even after 1965, when an annual numerical quota based on national origin was instituted and immigration was liberalized in comparison to the period 1870-1950, the laws still emphasized the requirement that the US-based spouse needed to petition on behalf of the immigrant spouse. Family reunification was stressed as the basis of entry of the "spouse." While the post-1965 legislation introduced the gender-neutral word "spouse" instead of "wife," in practice, especially for the male pattern of South Asian migration, it often amounted to the wife being sponsored.

In 1986, US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) concerns regarding "marriage fraud" or marriages falsified in order to gain immigration rights led to the institution of a two-year "condition" on "green cards" (immigrant status) issued on the basis of marriage. While previously green cards were valid until the holder applied for US citizenship, now they are conditionally valid for two years, after which the spouse has to petition for the conditional status to be removed by showing that the marriage is still ongoing and genuine. The introduction of this step intensifies the control exercised by the sponsoring spouse, and adds to the significant institutional hurdles faced by the victim of marital violence. Additional hurdles were also placed by the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, which made most legal immigrants ineligible for almost all forms of public assistance, and moreover negatively evaluated their use of public assistance in applications for US citizenship. Women fleeing abuse who need temporary assistance in order to get back on their feet have severely limited options. These various types of immigration legislation have had a profound impact on the risk, experience, and responses to domestic violence among immigrant women in the US. As Abraham points out, patriarchal social relations are not attenuated by migration, but undergo constant renegotiation as men and women build their lives in a new society.

And, although Abraham does not enter into a discussion of globalization and the impact the 1990s have had on the pattern of migration from India, it is relevant to point out here that other types of visa-related impediments continue to emerge for battered women. Many of the women, following the rise of the global computer-related industries and greater short-term international migration of South Asians into the United States, commonly accompany their husbands. How-

ever, these immigrants entering the US on H-1B visas (one of the most common visa categories used by workers in the high-tech industries) have severely constrained options when seeking relief from abuse. Spouses of workers on this visa receive a type of visa that categorizes them as "dependents," which debars them from working or seeking public assistance, and moreover renders them ineligible for most of the provisions of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994.

The picture that emerges clearly shows that US public policy, reflected in immigration and state assistance rules and restrictions, stringently restrict the options available to victims of familial abuse. Faced with everyday forms of institutionalized sexism and the absence of institutional support and understanding of non-Euro American cultures, many Asian women find themselves trapped in abusive marital relationships. If they leave the marriage, their legal status as immigrants is placed in severe jeopardy and they are likely to face deportation. If they, and their children need temporary public assistance, it is extremely difficult for them to access it, and such an application could jeopardize their immigration petitions.

The experiences of Abraham's respondents delineate the typical chronology of immigrant women's difficult passage to independent status. Beginning with the restrictive contours of pre-marital family life in India; marriage to a US-resident man is followed by her migration to the US; marital difficulties are followed by increasingly severe violence; leading to her resistance and then ultimate flight. A subsequent struggle ensues to maintain her legal immigrant status, obtain visa extensions, and simultaneously to prove that her marriage was entered into "in good faith" and yet is being dissolved due to severe difficulties. She must prove to a culturally unaware INS that departing the US after terminating her marriage would pose substantial hardship to herself given the cultural prejudices against divorced women in South Asia, even though she wishes to end the marriage that has brought her to the US. In addition to these problems, she must face the struggle to provide for herself and dependent children.

Changes in legislation in response to lobbying from women's groups in the 1990s produced some avenues for women who are seeking remedies for domestic violence,

including some provisions for immigrant women. The Immigration Act of 1990 and further amendments in 1994 known as the VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) provisions, removed some of the most onerous obstacles faced by battered immigrant spouses. Among other provisions, it allowed for abused women to "self-petition" for permanent resident status instead of depending on an abusive spouse. Other changes to the VAWA (in 2000) created a new "U visa" category, that is designed for non-citizen crime victims who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse flowing from criminal activity and who will cooperate with government officials investigating or prosecuting the criminal activity. The criminal activity includes, but is not limited to, domestic violence, domestic worker abuse, workplace rape, and trafficking. Women's organizations and immigrant rights groups are now engaged in preparing application guidelines for the H-1 type of visa, and scrutinizing the application process to ascertain that relief is actually available to victims without prejudice to their visa status.

While these provisions are welcome, Abraham rightly points out the outstanding lacunae in the VAWA provisions as they apply to immigrant women. Specifically, the restrictions and the complexity of the rules and regulations mean that only those women who have access to sufficient legal and financial resources can successfully file the petitions and maintain their legal status. Poor or working class women, who have limited command of English and limited resources, remain at a considerable disadvantage in a policy climate that assumes widespread immigration and welfare fraud.

Chapter 6 shows how barriers both internal to the South Asian communities and families and external to them ultimately work to entrap women in abusive relationships. Internal barriers include the family, the parents, the husband's family, friends, and the community. Examples of external barriers include the police, courts, and health care providers. Abraham emphasizes that marital violence in the South Asian context is not confined to the husband-wife dyad. The structure of South Asian families, and the power relations between the genders and generations means that the mother-in-law and the sister(s)-in-law derive their familial power from the subordination of the daughter-in-law, and often participate in the abuse. Fathers- and brother(s)-in law

might join with the husband in battering the wife. Even if not active abusers, the husband's family usually does nothing to prevent the abuse or restrain the abuser. The fact of migration frequently means that the social checks of community accountability that might have provided some safeguards for married women in South Asia are diminished. Due to unfamiliarity with language and society, and the isolation often enforced by the batterer, help from friends or others cannot be easily sought. And then, too, when a woman finally communicates with friends, concrete assistance is rarely available for a variety of reasons ranging from the fear of involvement in a "private" family matter to a lack of awareness of the options available for redress.

Religious institutions play a central role in the South Asian communities. However, religious leaders are also often not forthcoming with assistance to the battered woman. Despite the variations and on-going changes in South Asian cultures and family structures, immigrant religious community leaders in particular construct a conservative and patriarchal image of women's role in marriage and the family. Women seeking redress for abuse are treated as if they pose a threat to community solidarity, ethnic identity and religious purity. Intervention, if it happens at all, does not involve male batterers being confronted with any of the injunctions common to most religions that enjoin respectful treatment of women but simply an offering of pastoral support for the couple on the basis of religious affiliation. This situation of course is not specific to South Asian immigrant communities, but is broadly present in cultures and conditions globally.

Barriers external to the family can exist in the very institutions intending to be the main resources for assisting battered women, such as the police, courts, and health care providers. Police systems received much criticism nationwide in the 1980s for their handling of domestic violence matters and have since received training from women's organizations. As a result, many positive changes have been implemented in policies and procedures. However, there still appears to be a long road ahead before the police systems can better understand the complexities posed by ethnicity, class, minority status and immigrant status for abused women seeking help. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds fearing or experiencing negative responses

from police, become very reluctant to seek help. Women may fear negative responses from the police due to the unfamiliar culture, inability to communicate their situation effectively, immigration legalities, or limitations in English proficiency. Class and race differences add to the fear of seeking police assistance, as arrest rates vary substantially on a race and class basis. While Abraham does not discuss this, another significant barrier to immigrant women seeking police assistance is that while they want the abuse to stop, the dilemmas of being an immigrant are such that they do not necessarily want their batterer to be arrested or sent to jail. South Asian immigrant women's experience with the court systems are also marked by similar barriers, including unfamiliarity with the system on the women's part, and cultural and situational unfamiliarity regarding the women on the part of the court systems and officials. Moreover, as South Asian women are often reluctant to fully pursue cases against their abusive spouses by pressing charges and testifying in detail, prosecutors form the incorrect opinion that it is a waste of time to prosecute batterers.

Although medical practitioners are frequently the first professionals that battered women come in contact with (due to their injuries), Abraham discusses how cultural unfamiliarity on both sides, and fear of negative judgment on the part of the women, prevent their fully seeking assistance from the health care system. Moreover, studies have shown that medical personnel reveal some underlying biases in the kinds of victims they are more likely to assist: women who are seen as "genuine" victims, who had no "discrediting attitudes," and who are perceived as actively trying to leave their batterer — all of which are difficult criteria for South Asian women to meet. When seeking mental health care, particularly, South Asian women often find themselves in the situation of instructing their care provider in their cultures and backgrounds, rather than receiving culturally competent care. As one respondent notes, "it is not just the husband, it is everything that adds up and becomes a wall that we really have to struggle to climb over" (p. 131). All the institutions that are supposed to assist a woman seeking help have significant barriers that, taken together, present almost insurmountable obstacles to the woman in need of these services.

In Chapter 7, Abraham tackles the myth that battered

women are complicit in their abuse by tolerating the situation for long periods of time and not leaving the batterer. While the earlier chapters described the tremendous structural and institutional barriers that entrap women in abusive relationships, this chapter describes the everyday steps women often take to resist abuse. These include attempting to get help and trying to stop the abuse through less confrontational strategies. The acts are frequently multiple, overlapping, or cross-cutting, shaped by access to resources, class, and culture. Abraham's typology of acts of resistance include: personal (talking, promising, placating and avoiding, hiding, passive or aggressive defense, contemplating and resisting suicide; physically resisting the abuser, acquiring financial control); using informal sources of help (friends, family, in-laws, neighbors, shelters); using formal sources of help (police, social service agencies, lawyers). These steps taken by South Asian women to resist their abusers challenge stereotypes of passivity and submissiveness. These acts of resistance sometimes appear to be motivated toward immediate gains, but they can all be seen as ultimately enabling the recovery of a sense of self and of empowerment. Leaving the relationship is seen as a solution only of last resort. Factors influencing a woman's decision to leave versus staying in the marriage include perceptions of available support from community and family, presence of children, financial resources, legal status and fear of deportation.

Abraham notes that in the early 1980s, women suffering abuse mostly did not come forward to seek help, largely due to perceived lack of support systems, not due to "passivity." While Abraham does not discuss this, it is worth noting that the relatively small numbers seeking help was not because abuse did not occur in the mythical "good old days," but because of the lack of reporting. In the late 1980's and 1990's, as South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWO) formed to meet the deeply felt need to provide services for women facing abuse, the numbers of women seeking help has skyrocketed.

In the last two chapters of the book Abraham delineates the formation and strategies of various SAWO in the US, and describes the complex issues of ethnicity, immigration status, class, gender, and community that they must negotiate in carrying out their activities and alliances. Their emergence marks the transition of domestic violence for the

South Asian from the realm of private struggles to public, collective, and systematic, resistance against abuse.

The formation of SAWO in the US is seen against the backdrop of the women's movements in Europe and North America countries and in the Indian subcontinent. The Euro American women's movement struggled for societal, structural, and institutional change that would define marital violence as unacceptable and criminal behavior (an important social problem), not as a private family matter (an individual difficulty). The Indian women's movement also, at that time, was examining and questioning the various forms of oppression suffered by women, ranging from rape, marital violence, female infanticide to dowry burnings. The Euro American women's movement focused on the situation of ethnic majority women. The Indian subcontinent movement focused on women's situations in the local context. South Asian women who had migrated overseas therefore were outside the scope of both these movements. To meet their needs, the 1980s witnessed the formation of several SAWO in major urban areas of the US where there were large concentrations of South Asian immigrants. Although South Asian organizations already existed in these communities, they were largely cultural, religious, or ethnic associations, and women's issues and problems were ignored or discouraged as divisive. The roots of the formation and organization of US-based SAWO in the 1980s and 1990s lie in these intersections, as they were marginalized on the one hand by the male-dominated leadership of the South Asian community in general, and Euro American middle-class feminism that ignored issues of ethnic minority/immigrant women on the other.

Beginning in 1985, and over the next 15-20 years, every major urban area in the US has witnessed the formation of at least one SAWO. Among the oldest and best known is Manavi (NJ), the first to address specifically domestic violence. While the total number of SAWO in the US and the countries of South Asia is too numerous to list here, a complete and frequently updated list is found online at the web site of SAWNET (South Asian Women's Network): <http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/sawweb/sawnet/>

These organizations have emerged in response to needs deeply felt and perceived especially by women in these communities. Their ideological underpinnings and

value structures, as described by Abraham fall into three categories: value-oriented, diffused, and unspecified. Value-oriented ideology has a clearly defined set of core values that drive the organizations' structure, goals and activities. SAWO with explicitly feminist ideologies (e.g. Sakhi, Manavi, Maitri and Service and Education for Women Against Abuse or SEWAA) fit this category. Their focus is working for the empowerment of women, promoting all forms of social change that eliminate inequality, and that take cultural characteristics into account. Diffused ideology groups (e.g. Apna Ghar of Chicago) have more dispersed values; the struggle against patriarchy is not an overarching goal of the group, but redressing women's inequalities in economic and familial institutions is the focus. That is, the goals are to promote women's rights and dignity, while providing services that make the family stronger as a viable institution, in recognition of the fact that life is extremely difficult for divorced women in South Asian communities. Unspecified ideology groups (e.g. Sneha in its early days) have amorphous values. Such groups see their main activity as practice-oriented, i.e. service provision for women in crisis. The focus of this group is as much on the community as it is on the individual women in distress, and their activities include educational outreach, activities for senior citizens, and addressing racism and sexism in mainstream society. Membership in most groups is voluntary, and membership profiles reflect the local community in language and socioeconomic status. In recent years there is increasing participation of second-generation women in these groups.

Despite these organizational differences, the broad goals that all the various SAWO hold in common include organizing South Asian women, ending domestic violence, and community education. For the more value-oriented groups, resisting domestic violence was a very pressing issue, but it was an entry point from which to bring women together irrespective of class, linguistic or religious backgrounds and raise their political awareness and participation. Making an effort to end domestic violence was seen as among the most pressing needs of the women of this community, and was attempted at the macro or institutional level (legislative lobbying, working with police and legal structures) and at the micro or individual level with services offered to individual women in need (typically through hot-

lines).

In the last chapter, Abraham discusses the issues involved in organizing to end violence against women. SAWO are in the forefront of the struggle to redress inequalities and injustices in the South Asian communities overseas. However, their paths and histories have not been without internal tensions and struggles during their process of mobilization and organization, as reflected in the often bitter internal dissension and ultimate breakup of the New York-based Sakhi into a domestic violence response group and Workers Awaaz, that focuses on gender and class abuse faced by domestic workers. Due to practical constraints, Margaret Abraham points out, the organization's structure and activities may not be fully in accordance with the organizational philosophy. Abraham argues that the radical social vision must be balanced by a pragmatic feminism as all organizations need funds to sustain their activities and that all these dilemmas should not be approached from a standpoint of ideological purity alone, but should unite transformational politics with pragmatic feminism. There are no simple solutions to the monumental task of social transformation.

While, as the above discussion suggests, I consider *Speaking the Unspeakable* to be a very important work, I do have some reservations as well. Abraham is curiously silent on the subjective construction of gender relations and masculinities in the South Asian communities. On a theoretical level there is little explanation, other than patriarchy, offered for marital violence. While patriarchal structures are associated with violence against women as a mechanism of repression, there is no light cast upon social, political, or cultural changes that are associated with increased, decreased, or changed forms of violence against women. While the major impetus to naming gender-based violence as a societal problem and the main thrust of the struggle to end violence against women has come from the feminist and women's movements worldwide, Abraham provides little insight into historical or contemporary approaches from other social groups. Just as men have been called "the missing half" in recent approaches to Gender and Development, which argue that sustainable societal change cannot occur without involving men along with women, approaches to family or marital violence also must take some cognizance of masculinity in envisioning solutions. Relatedly,

Abraham's entire discussion of marital violence is set in a heterosexual universe. This may be partly driven by the fact that all of Abraham's respondents were married women survivors of marital abuse. However, given the contested and varying nature of sexuality and construction of sexual identity in South Asia and the expression of great anxiety about these issues in diasporic communities, Abraham's discussion could have provided some brief overview of the relation of these issues with marital violence. Some mention of the embeddedness of marital or spousal violence within broader familial or societal gender-based violence would have rounded out her work.

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