

Dangerous Silences: South Asian Immigrant Women and the Threat of Domestic Violence

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Abstract

South Asian immigrant women often experience domestic violence in silence, shaped by cultural expectations, language barriers, social stigma, fear, and difficulties of cultural assimilation. Although scholarship has examined trauma and post-traumatic healing among immigrant women subjected to violence, comparatively limited attention has been given to the role of silence as a cultural and psychological mechanism that prevents victims from seeking assistance or leaving abusive relationships. This study addresses this gap through a comparative analysis of Sejal Badani's *Trail of Broken Wings* (2015) and Uma Parameswaran's *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* (2001), focusing on the representation of domestic violence, trauma, silence, and female agency. Employing close textual and feminist analysis, the study examines how cultural expectations, familial pressures, and fear reinforce women's silence and sustain cycles of abuse. The analysis demonstrates that silence functions not merely as an absence of speech but as a form of internalized social control that constrains victims' agency and access to support. In *Trail of Broken Wings*, Ranees's prolonged silence intensifies her psychological trauma and ultimately contributes to her radical response to her abuser, while the narratives collectively expose the destructive consequences of culturally imposed silence. The study concludes that breaking silence is essential to transforming victimhood into agency and calls for greater cultural awareness, institutional support, and gender-sensitive interventions for South Asian immigrant women experiencing domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; South Asian Immigrant Women; Culture of Silence; Trauma; Female Agency

In an interview with Veena Rao in 2015 from *NRI Pulse* (an Atlanta-based newspaper), Badani shares how her relationship with her mom and two sisters served as a foundation for *Trail of Broken Wings*. Each female character narrates her fragmented experiences of being beaten and tortured by their father/husband in flashbacks. The haunting memories of being beaten and growing up watching their mother beaten remain with the daughters for the rest of their lives. Badani notes that the character Sonya is modeled after herself and her responses towards the violence that she experienced herself while growing up. In response to a question regarding her partially autobiographical depiction in *Trail of Broken Wings*, Badani replied,

“Unfortunately I was raised in a home with domestic violence so some of the emotions and struggles that the characters faced were very real to me. I am one of three sisters also and our mom is really our hero” (Badani Rao Interview).

The strength and heroism that Badani identified in her mother are important for South Asian immigrant women who fall victim to domestic violence and who are often identified and addressed by others in the South Asian immigrant community as victims. From this perspective, survivors of domestic abuse are powerless and weak, and their struggle and survival are rarely identified as heroic. Yet women who speak out about their abuse instead of remaining silent because of the shame, embarrassment, and stigma may motivate other victims to step forward.

Badani’s story can be an inspiration for the women who are still under the shade of abusive authority: “I wanted this story to be about surviving abuse, finding your true self outside the frame of violence,” Badani shares (Badani Rao Interview). Badani’s real life experiences with violence and abuse demand her story be reread to fully understand the plight of her main characters. Badani’s work is a call to all women who are struggling to break out of a strangling relationship and starting a quest to find their true selves. Badani reveals, “This was actually the story I never wanted to tell but I knew I had to” (Badani Rao Interview). Badani tells us the reason for not sharing the real story:

In terms of discovering something about myself during the process, I started my journey of healing a number of years back so the story brought up a number of emotions that I had worked through. It was gratifying to realize I had taken steps forward but also drove home how important it is to process and find healing within oneself. (Badani Rao *Interview*)

An important message of Badani's book is to find a true hero within themselves and uphold a beacon of hope. Sonya and Marin are examples of this heroism. Although they are strong characters, in their hearts they still bear the stigma, pain, and scars of their abuse. The images of strong women is a necessity for resisting inflict on them rather than posing a soft and delicate women toward the world which will just exploit them in the name of femininity and take advantage of frailty.

The second novel that I explore is *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* by Uma Parameswaran (2001). Born, raised, and educated in India, Uma Parameswaran completed her Ph.D. in English from Michigan State University in 1972. After retiring from the University of Winnipeg as a Professor in English and scholar of South Asian Canadian Literature, she currently resides in Canada, where she continues to serve in organizations that focus on the issues and rights of women (University of Minnesota 3). Unlike Sejal Badani, Uma Parameswaran did not have real life experience with domestic violence, but was moved by real-life stories and her familiarity with the Indian culture, immigrant Indian communities, and legal procedures in Canada. Her novella, *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*, is inspired by the true stories that she read from an Indian newspaper titled *The Indian Express* (Parameswaran 9). Namita, the central character of this novel, is the victim of domestic violence but there is no proper ending rather this novel is left more like an unending journey of Namita. We see how Namita has been tortured by her in-laws specially for the dowry. Namita's husband, Tarun, was

good enough to share the reason for his family's hatred and dissatisfaction towards Namita. Later, Tarun was controlled by his parents and he was absent in the scene when Namita was forced by her Father-in-law and brother-in-law to sign for a divorce paper. They threatened her of deportation. Namita underwent a series of stages in her short-married life after she reached Canada to stay with her in-laws and husband. The in-laws successfully kept a distance between Namita and her husband Tarun and exploited her by disassociating her from the Indian Community. Namita was never taken to the temple by her in-laws or husband. The reason is evident at the end when she herself reached to Temple, she heard about Tarun's defaming Namita. Tarun wins Namita's heart and trapped her by making her believe that everything will be fine. Namita was in the shelter but she was controlled by Tarun's dictation. Namita fell under his evil spell and continuously rejected the help which could have saved her from entangling her again and again in the abusive relation. Finally, Namita was able to identify Tarun's masked face and his intention.

These two novels introduce two unique scenarios of domestic violence. Badani's *Trail of Broken Wings* deals with the brutal torture (both physical and mental) of a mother and three daughters. Uma Parameswaran's *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* is focused on the systematic, slow entrapment and abuse of Namita and her position as a helpless stranger in Canada. Namita's story is more about psychological and mental torture than it is about physical violence.

Parameswaran begins with Namita's transition from India to Canada after her marriage and her subsequent adjustment and struggle in a new country with her in-laws to highlight her helpless situation. In addition, she uses details of Indian place and culture to explain Namita and her own family's background. This background provides context for the abuse Namita experiences.

Research Objectives:

Comparing *Trail of Broken wings* and *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* with a critical insight of domestic violence, systematic patriarchy, and the “culture of silence”. To examine how the diasporic tension among the immigrant women becomes intense because of their being turning into victims and surviving through sufferings.

Research Questions:

1. How do socio-cultural factors such as immigrant's struggle to assimilate into new culture, traditional dowry practices, patriarchal authority, and the presence or absence of laws affect the form of domestic abuse in these two novels?
2. In what ways does the “culture of silence” work in these two texts as both a social expectation from South Asian Women and exploited as a tool by the abusers to isolate the victims from others?
3. How do the protagonists (Ranee and Namita) deal with the situation of becoming a survivor from a victim and how their different backgrounds and strategy to protest represent their gradual awareness of diasporic tension?
4. How do these literary representations critique on existing socio-psychological structures of domestic violence such as Margaret Abraham's internal and external barriers and Mary Ann Dutton's models of trauma recovery?

Patriarchal dominance in India is a concept rooted not only in Indian culture but also in Asian culture. One example of these deep-rooted concepts of male chivalry and the justification of their action came out when Sonya revealed to David that Brent beat them. In response to David's question, ““No one tried to stop him?””, Sonya replied, ““No one wanted to””, ““In the eyes of our community, he was perfect. In the eyes of my mother, he was right”” (Badani 240). Sonya's reply depicts women's status and expected behavior from the women in their society and culture. Sonya also indicates Ranee's acceptance of Brent's torture. Trisha reflects on women's unchanged condition as unmarried and married which is like change of masters. Before marriage it is the father who was chosen “by an act of God”, and after marriage, the husband, chosen by the father.

Brent's exercise of patriarchal power on his wife and daughters is revealed several times. Marin's education and marriage are chosen by Brent. In response to Trisha and Sonya's inquiry of why she is marrying Raj, Marin's reply is "I don't know," "Daddy found someone for me to marry, and I'm marrying him" (Badani 35). This is a repetition of the scene that happened with Raneer when Raneer's father chooses Brent for her. Raneer reminisces, "Her father was sure he had found a good man for her. It did not occur to him to ask if she thought the same" (Badani 37). These two incidents of Father's choosing grooms for their daughters support the cultural phenomena of not having any choice of the bride's own to decide her life partner irrespective of age and education. Raneer got married at the age of eighteen while Marin got married at the age of twenty-one.

Raneer and her three daughters are glaring examples of the deeply rooted patriarchy practiced in India and restored and expanded in the United States. In an essay that appears in *Breaking the Silence* by Sandhya Nankani, Sujata Warrier identifies and raises the importance of understanding the generation of mother and other female figures in the family before discerning the daughter's character. She also emphasizes how the abuse is same in both South Asian countries and foreign countries, "What happens in South Asia is not outside the context of what happens to immigrant and second-generation South Asian women in the United States. We have to understand the global linkages that are at play here" (Warrier 91). The abuse is similar but the victim women's sufferings become more intense due to their unfamiliarity in a foreign country.

South Asian women are raised within certain norms and values by their families regarding marriage, religion, rituals, and so on. Similarly, because they live in a patriarchal society, they are taught and trained to remain silent about their sufferings not only in their conjugal lives but also before marriage. Thus, silence is considered a virtuous quality that should be nurtured by South Asian women. Neely Mahapatra, an associate professor at the University of Wyoming, quotes Abraham to emphasize the nature of silence among

South Asian immigrant women: “Abraham also reported that South Asian women have a propensity to remain silent about their intimate relationship or problems” (Mahapatra 388). This shows how South Asian women are hesitant to share problems happening in their conjugal life. One reason for the silence is cultural, as it is not encouraged to reveal what’s happening in private life. A second reason is it will disclose patriarchal oppression. Despite risking their lives in an abusive relationship, women often do not disclose their sufferings to anyone. The social pressure to remain in the relationship comes from the Indian community in United States and also within the women’s inner selves as they feel pressure to continue the relationship (Badani110). Ranee needed to separate from Brent and bore the cost of fighting the legal cases and simultaneously taking on the responsibility of three daughters. Social structure and financial pressure gradually ostracize South Asian immigrant women, who find they must keep silent and endure the pain. Margaret Abraham, a Professor of Sociology at Hofstra University, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asian Immigrants in the United States* familiarized most of the socio-cultural contexts of South Asian Countries and Communities. In the chapter titled “Marriage and Family,” Abraham describes the position and status of women within the institution of marriage and family: “South Asian Women are expected to sacrifice their individual identity to the priorities of their fathers, husbands, in-laws, children, and community” (Abraham 20). Male members of the family and the society posit a patriarchal dominance over women and girls. For the fear of stigma, shame and preserving culture and religion, the women are encouraged to give away their soul and body. This gradually deprives them of happiness and freedom and leaves them at a point of choosing between do or die situation.

The transition from a victim to a survivor is slippery, as taking action might risk the lives of women. Mary Ann Dutton points towards the inner strength and will power of the women in choosing either to stay with the batterer or to leave him (79). But certain surrounding circumstances make the choice difficult. One of them is

the risk of living with the batterer under the same roof until the rescue mission or help reaches out to her. Because any sign of a rebellious step by the abuse done enrages the abuser to hit with renewed anger and force. Then the abused woman suffers for showing her audacity to revolt. For example, Raneer wanted to end the arbitrariness of Brent's abuse from a mother's perspective. What she could not do in her entire life changed when her longing to see Sonya succeed finally drove her to slowly poison Brent. Additionally, the first time Raneer got an opportunity to escape she took revenge on Brent (Badani 268). This novel makes us see not only the battered woman but also the impact of the violence on children, especially on the daughters and granddaughter. *Trail of Broken Wings* is an example of how silence will not mitigate the problem rather trigger it. Throughout the novel, even progressive and educated women like Marin and Sonya talk about violence secretly as if it's a social taboo. Rather than speaking up, Marin and Sonya are silent out of shame and embarrassment which demonstrates society's negativity towards victims or survivors of domestic violence and the fear of social ostracization associated with it.

The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice provides an example of the very powerful role that the dowry plays in cultures that use it as a foundation for family and power structures. Although dowry is technically illegal in India, if the new bride does not bring a dowry, relatives and friends of the groom will criticize the bride's family because of the neglect of a long-practiced marriage ritual. In Namita's case, this expectation was used against her by a family that saw her and her dowry as a means to improve their own situation. This situation finally led to them abusing Namita, with Tarun's knowledge, because her dowry was unpaid.

Dowry is considered a prestige issue for the groom's family and "is used as a symbol of the groom's prestige, for ostentatious display to other families of his family's patriarchal ability to command such as wealth from the bride's family, or as a mechanism for the embourgeoisement of the groom's family" (Abraham 32). As one of

the practices of traditional patriarchal dominance over women, the groom's family demands gifts from the bride's family such as money, property, gold, or furniture. Although dowry is not a religious tradition, it is a century-old practice, that has led to a system that supports men as superior and women as inferior to a degree that daughters are liabilities to the family and sons are not. For example, in *Trail of Broken Wings* Trisha reflects on the girls born in India and how the idea of dowry is associated with girls: "Girls, however, present a liability. Dowries must be saved for each daughter born. A payment to the boy's family for accepting their daughter in marriage" (Badani 96). Thus, in many South Asian cultures, daughters who grow up and remain unmarried are a matter of worry and shame for the family no matter how educated or attractive. Margaret Abraham, in *Speaking the Unspeakable: Martial Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States* introduces the legal stance for the continuing practice of requiring a dowry: "Although the dowry has been illegal in India since the dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, it has been redefined as voluntary gifts to the bride from her family at her marriage" (32). Abraham also describes the dowry system as "a vicious circle" (33). In this author's experience, laws are confined to the courtroom in South Asia and legal charges against families for engaging in dowry 'gifts' are rare.

In Parameswaran's *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* Namita's father is against offering or giving dowry but Bina ma said it is good to talk openly about their expectation. Bina ma seems to be very practical in that social context where they live. She perhaps understood that no dowry equaled no marriage. (Parameswaran 37)

The system of dowry in South Asian countries is not written into law. Its purpose is to allow parents to offer their daughters property and assets. Ultimately, however, husbands and their families have exploited the system to deprive women of their deserved share.

In *Trail of Broken Wings*, Sonya's return home after getting the news of Brent's admission into the hospital, revived their past life in a flashback, where from Trisha's narrative point of view the tradition of

bearing silence has been represented as glorious for the women in South Asian culture. Trisha reflects,

It is our conditioning, what is expected of a good Indian woman. We learned from a young age not to share our heartbreak, or despairs. It may cause others to view you with a negative eye, think less of you. (Badani 18)

This shows how women need to present themselves as traditional good women conforming to the expectation set by the society.

Women living under oppression and violence are often resistant and indecisive about fighting against the injustice happening to them. In *Writing Imagined Diasporas: South Asian Women Reshaping North American Identity*, Joel Kuortti reinforces this reticent and compromising nature of these women. Kuortti writes, “While the phenomenon of domestic violence is widespread, in some studies of domestic violence, however, there is a notable underrepresentation of Asian women.” Kuortti quotes Krista, a character from Parameswaran’s *The Sweet Smell of Mother’s Milk-Wet Bodice* who works in the shelter for abused women,

““These Asian women, they were a secretive bunch; never wanted to let on they had ever been in a shelter, or on welfare. Something about their culture, she supposed” (SS 32) In such a climate of silence and concealment, creative expressions of challenges to gendered violence become ever more significant””. (Kuortti 102)

The annoyed tone is evident in Krista and this annoyance is based on the abused women’s sharing half of the truth with them. Because social workers sometimes don’t understand why the abused women want to go back to their husband and in-laws. Women who voluntarily serve in the shelter do not want to impose their decisions on the abused women even though they feel helpless to see them going back to the same abusive family or husband.

Christine Vogt , an eminent scholar in the field of South Asian diasporic literature and Women’s studies identifies how the women’s

assimilation problems got intensified because their husbands pressure them to assimilate in such a way as to support the husband's power over them. These women are not in a position to decide whether they would like to adopt or follow their own norms and values or follow what they encounter in their new country. (Vogt 21) Moreover, if these husbands, or even their in-laws are abusive, the women's freedom of choice is silenced and discouraged in such a way that they are unable to even explore being independent by learning the life skills necessary to escape their encaged state. (Vogt 62) For example, both *Trail of Broken Wings* and *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* show the characters' struggle to assimilate into the American culture and lifestyle. Brent and Raneer face this problem in *Trail of Broken Wings* and Namita in *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*. Assimilation problems include language barriers, religion, and culture. But the assimilation problem has different consequences for men and women. Brent gets away with hitting his wife when he struggles to assimilate in a new country. But Raneer cannot hit Brent. The power structure is also at work here. In Raneer's case, we did not see Raneer's dealing with any American-born men or women. This could explain Raneer's inability to come out of her abusive relation. If Raneer would have got any chance of socializing with women outside of Indian Community, she might choose a different way to escape from the violence similar to Namita. Raneer's husband, Brent and Namita's in-laws kept them isolated from the outer world intimidating them about the dangers and uncertainties of that world.

Contrary to that, Namita in *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* is an example of a changed persona after being freed from the confining house of her in-laws. She explores the warmth and friendliness of the people in the West. Her contemplation at the beginning of the novel when she went for a walk with Krista reveals that. (Parameswaran 16) This is the time when she tries to make a comparison between the environment of her home country and host country, which Raneer never got to explore because of Brent's dominance. Thus, the control over assimilation by husbands and fathers is not only deliberate but also generational.

In both *Trail of Broken Wings* and *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*, we encounter women who made the mistake of relying on the false promises of their abusive partners. We see Raneer and her three daughters face and maintain a lifelong silence and shield so that no one can unravel the secret behind their perfectly pretended happy life. Edward Said writes, "the essential sadness [of the exile] can never be surmounted" and that the condition of exile is one of "terminal loss" (Said 173). However, Sujata Warrier explains how this sadness or frustration cannot give the license for husbands to beat their wives:

These are all excuses. We need to always be clear about this. At the heart of domestic violence is the issue of power, the usage of power to control the person with whom you are in an intimate relationship. Domestic violence is the abuse of that power. (Warrier 90)

The husbands and other male figures want to ensure and prove their power over their wives or other women, and they blame external issues for their bad temper or abusive behavior. These novels deal with domestic violence from two different angles. Parameswaran's *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* portrays Namita, the battered woman, who is experiencing those stages of her lives that Raneer experienced on her first arrival to USA. But the difference is that Raneer endured her pain and sufferings throughout her life and Raneer did not stay with her in-laws. Both Raneer and Brent moved to USA together and there is no presence of in-laws to provoke Brent against his wife and daughters. So, Brent's violence stems from his struggle to assimilate into a new lifestyle.

When Namita discovers the truth about Tarun and his family and how they cheated her, she is frantic to get back her rights. Namita became stronger when she finally returned to her in-law's house to retrieve the wooden Krishna statue. Her father-in-law tried to stop her from taking what was rightfully hers but Namita took the vacuum cleaner to protect herself from his advances (Parameswaran 76). Namita

has changed by the end of the novel when she intentionally pours hot water on Tarun and informs him that she has retrieved her statue of worship sent from India, from her in-law's house. Namita's actions signal her transformation into a woman whom the situation compelled to be rebellious and fight for her rights. Namita broke her silence at the end of the novel because of her disillusionment with Tarun's false promises of a happy married life. Namita fought back at the early stage of her abuse, which took Ranee a lifetime.

In the article, "Domestic Violence and Abuse in Intimate Relationship from Public Health Perspective," Zlatka Rakovec Felser, from the University of Maribor, Slovenia, points out one theoretical approach to domestic violence. "A feminist approach," Felser writes, "emphasizes the significance of gender inequality and contends that it is a major factor in male-female violence." (63) Felser explains that education and financial emancipation are two important tools to empower women in their relationships. They must also speak out in order to protest their unequal status.

Margaret Abraham in *Speaking the Unspeakable* illuminates what she terms Internal and External barriers to abuse. Internal barriers, according to Abraham, include the presence of in-laws and parents. Other internal barriers to domestic violence are friends, families, and the religious institution/community, who often work as mediators between husband and wife.

Internal barriers may also cause violence rather than resolve a domestic issue. Mediators may even sow the seeds of destruction out of social pressure. These internal barriers may happen to any immigrant trying to be assimilated into a new culture. For example, in Uma Parameswaran's *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*, when Namita first came to Canada, she had an intimate and harmonious relationship with her husband, Tarun. It is Namita's in-laws that creates the distance between Namita and Tarun. Tarun, a newlywed, lived in the same house with his parents and did not have a

space of his own to share with his wife. Namita's in-laws later started demanding the dowry, which they did not do when the marriage was first arranged by the consent of the two families. Tarun's parents eventually felt ashamed and offended when their relatives asked about Namita's dowry. It is for this reason that Tarun's family begins torturing Namita and creating a division in her relationship with Tarun. Abraham writes, "The absence or presence of parents and in-laws influences the dynamics of social relations within South Asian families in the United States" (Abraham 107).

Abraham argues external barriers such as police, court system, and health care providers are factors preventing abuse. However, these factors appear later, after the violence or abuse is done and has been publicized by the victims. The novels depict two scenarios where immigrant women are trapped, either by their in-laws or husbands. Namita's husband, Tarun, has been biased by what his parents told him about Namita when he is away from home. Yet, Namita serves that image of Raneef if Raneef would have revolted at an early stage of her abuse. Raneef could also be Alina, the lady in the shelter in *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice*. After being beaten several times by her husband, Alina temporarily stays in a shelter only to regain her strength and go back to her husband for another blow. Raneef and Namita both become desperate, but in different ways.

Trail of broken Wings foreshadows the probable consequences if Namita would have chosen to continue her life with Tarun, giving birth to a generation who will carry the scar and secrecy with them throughout their lives. *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-Wet Bodice* has brought up the settings and cultures of India to show how Namita has been raised and groomed in her birthplace. Conversely, *Trail of Broken Wings* did not go back and forth between Raneef's home and adopted countries, as she was much older and a mother of two daughters when she moved to the United States. Therefore, Raneef was more mature than Namita. Namita's situation was also different in that her dowry was the reason she was tortured

by her in-laws.

Sujata Warrier's *Social, Legal, and Community Challenges Facing South Asian Immigrant Women* highlights how women with higher education can become victims of domestic violence: "Clearly, domestic violence has nothing to do with professional degrees. Ph.D.'s, MD's, scientists, and corporate lawyers all find themselves in an abusive situation, as do second generation women who have grown up in the United States" (Warrier 91). A woman's position, education, and economic independence cannot resist the male ego and perceived superiority.

Mary Ann Dutton notes that victims need to practice self-nurturance in order to control the effects of trauma. The cultural gap, however, even interferes with a women's attempts at self-nurturance. Their culture demands they think and live only for others, not for themselves. They do not have their own time and space to relax, and self-nurturance is considered a luxury. Again, Dutton clearly identifies that trauma can be lessened through self-advocacy. (Dutton 119)

It is also important that a society assures women have a safe space, a place where they can feel confident in speaking out against violence. This is significant, even when the abused one is under the process of torture. For example, Namita did not get emotional support from Menka, rather Menka commented negatively on Namita's appearance.

Dutton also notes the importance of a society being aware of violence against women. The section titled "Increasing Knowledge about Battering and its Effects," is about this issue of creating greater awareness of the issue among women. Knowledge and awareness, according to Dutton, will be a stepping-stone for women's empowerment. "Increasing the battered woman's knowledge about violence towards women in society is useful," Dutton writes, and "Understanding that the 'personal is political' provides a framework for seeing that her abusive situation is part of a widespread problem, not limited only to her" (Dutton 119). This is true in relation to the larger power dynamics the patriarchy plays in a society, especially in

South Asian countries where women's objectification in matrimonial purposes is a typical scenario. The more women know about other cases of survivors of domestic violence, the more they would know that they are not alone in their sufferings and silence. Breaking silence is important to make the community stronger and more unified.

Dutton discusses solutions which seem to correspond to Abraham's ideas. For example, Dutton believes increasing social support is one of the means of getting rid of isolation. The wide network of social interaction and communication need to be built up through conversation, which will then gradually abolish the culture of silence and secrecy surrounding domestic violence. Dutton also points to the importance of self-nurturance and knowledge of battering and its effects, along with providing economic resources, social support, and intervention strategies (with a clinical psychologist perspective). One solution Dutton proposes is that shelters and the community should come forward and assure that battered women are financially self-dependent. Ultimately, Dutton focuses on how existing trauma in battered women can be healed through these strategies, but she does not mention that the root of increased domestic violence lies in enduring and carrying it for a long time. In fact, neither Dutton nor Abraham identifies preventative measures that might stop the violence before it happens, instead focusing on the process of curing and healing after the fact. They capably analyze the post-violence situation but did not discuss how it can be stopped in the bud.

Abraham expresses concerns regarding organizational awareness and support to South Asian immigrant victim women. Because often this movement gives rise to conflict between individual and organization. Organizational policy and politics might suppress or misrepresent an individual's voice. Abraham also identifies the South Asian community's non-acknowledgement of marital violence. Abraham says, "We know that major segments of the South Asian community continue to be reluctant to acknowledge marital violence as a social problem." (179) To make a change in broader scale is not feasible but it is possible to change the individual woman's attitude

towards their own self to enable themselves to speak up whenever they need. South Asian women need to practice self-advocacy from a very early stage of their lives so that they themselves realize their value as human beings. Remaining silent about the violence they have experienced misrepresents their family life. They are outwardly happy but inwardly carry a burden, a burden of truth. Many of these women remain silent because their culture demands silence. Divorce is stigmatized, leaving few options for victims of violence. Women and their families, therefore, must pretend all is well.

As has been demonstrated, remaining silent is a cultural issue among South Asian immigrant women. Practicing and believing in their own worth as human beings is challenging for these women. Domestic violence survivors do not want to talk about their past in fear of losing their present happiness. Those who suffered and are still suffering do not want to share and in both cases, the stigma, shame, embarrassment, and fear keep chasing the victims. This dangerous silence needs to be broken with a spirit of positivity and the notion that women victims only need sympathy must change. Women are not powerless, they do have agency, but we must recognize the challenges that they face in overcoming long standing cultural barriers to their happiness

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