

## **Domestic Violence in South Asian Communities in the GTA: Critical Perspectives of Community Activists and Service Providers**

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### **Abstract**

Domestic violence can be said to exist because of the creation of what Razack terms a “violent space” (2003, p. 20). This space may be erected within marriage not only because of the patriarchal nature of a culture, but also because of the numerous ways women are marginalized by the dominant culture, and their lack of formal or informal support networks (Razack, 2003). This article complicates this understanding of violent space by highlighting the structural and institutional violence South Asian families experience as racialized immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) of Canada. This article illuminates circumstances in which the violent space of home and community become a place of shelter, acceptance and identity. The article argues for the need for incorporating a critical analysis and a response to structural and institutional violence and its impact on women while addressing domestic violence in South Asian communities in the GTA.

*Keywords:* domestic violence, South Asian women, immigrant women, racialized women, Greater Toronto Area

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Domestic violence<sup>1</sup> remains a serious social problem in Canada. Statistics Canada estimates that nearly 653,000 Canadian women have experienced some form of domestic violence (Alaggia & Maiter, 2006). Other estimates suggest that between one in ten to one in six women are abused each year, and that 60% of female homicides are a result of family violence (Agnew, 1998). Scholars, activists, and social service providers working with South Asian immigrant women suggest that despite scant statistical data documenting domestic violence in South Asian communities, it remains a pervasive and pressing issue (Chokshi, Desai & Adamali, 2009; Dasgupta, 2000).

South Asians constitute a diverse group of people who have immigrated from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim (Chokshi, Desai & Adamali, 2009). The term ‘communities’, in this article, is used to highlight the heterogeneity existing within South Asian communities. South Asians are one of the fastest-growing ethno-racial groups in Canada (Ahmad et al., 2009). Statistics Canada estimates that by the year 2017, there will be more than one million South Asians residing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) of Canada (Ahmad et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> Domestic violence in this article refers to “abuse that occurs among those who are intimate or share some form of family relationship in common living quarters. In a broader sense, however, domestic violence includes abuse by other individuals in the household and other family members, including adult children” (Butterfield, Rocha & Butterfield, 2010, p. 323).

2009). This growth in the community necessitates a critical understanding of the lives of South Asian women and the causes of domestic violence in South Asian families.

Some scholars have attributed domestic violence to patriarchal culture in South Asian families (Abraham, 1998; Agnew, 1998; Dasgupta, 2000; Goel, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002). This position has been challenged by other scholars who note that the patriarchal violence South Asian women suffer occurs in a context where they are subject to class and/or racial subordination by the dominant group (Bannerji, 1995; Chokshi, Desai & Adamali, 2009; George & Ramkissoon, 1998; Jiwani, 2005; Razack, 1994; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). According to Razack (2003), domestic violence in South Asian communities can be said to exist due to the creation of what she terms a “violent space” (p. 20). This space is created not only because of patriarchy, but because of the marginalization of South Asian women by the dominant culture, and their lack of formal or informal support networks (Razack, 2003). This article further complicates the concept of violent space by bringing forward issues of structural and institutional violence South Asian families experience that often transform violent space into a space that offers shelter to women from larger societal violence. The article argues for the need for incorporating a critical analysis and a response to these forms of violence and its impact on women while addressing domestic violence in South Asian communities in the GTA.

### **Literature Review**

Several scholars have studied domestic violence as mainly a gender based oppression grounded within the patriarchal nature of the South Asian family in general (Agnew, 1998; Dasgupta, 2000; Goel, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002). South Asian women are expected to play a subservient role in the family, and they are judged on their performance of their duty as “good wives” and “good daughters-in-law” in maintaining the unity of the family and community (Goel, 2005). Divorce is often considered unacceptable (Dasgupta, 2000); interdependence is inculcated through ritual ceremonies, and underscores the structure of the joint family and every aspect of the woman’s life (Goel, 2005). Furthermore, there may be gender, age, and status hierarchies that commingle for a South Asian woman living in an extended family environment, for she may be subordinate not only to her husband but also to her mother-in-law, and perhaps even subject to abuse from the latter (Agnew, 1998). A woman who discloses her abuse is likely to be considered a renegade from her culture, community and family, and face moral disapprobation since she has defied cultural or community norms (Goel, 2005).

Many scholars have critiqued this cultural explanation of domestic violence. Some scholars have drawn a distinction between culture and patriarchy. They have asserted that patriarchy operates differently in different structures (Almeida & Dolan-Delvechhio, 1999; Dasgupta, 2000; Grewal, 2009; Narayan, 1997; Razack, 2003; Volpp, 2003). Narayan (1997) believes that it is nationality that gives visibility to culture and influences a selective understanding of such cultures. Volpp (2003) considers cultural explanation as outmoded, since it assumes that cultures are frozen, static and minority cultures are more sexist. Those with power appear to have no culture and make rational choices, whereas those without power behave in a culturally determined way and make irrational choices (Volpp, 2003). Smith (1994) also discusses ways in which the discourse of racial intolerance is reframed within the discourse of cultural difference. Razack (1994) asserts, “Violence [against women] in immigrant communities

is viewed as a cultural attribute rather than the product of male domination that is inextricably bound up with racism” (p. 57). According to Salazar and Cook (2002), such culturalization of violence fails to recognize the societal context of violence against women.

Additionally, scholars and activists have challenged gender based analyses rooted in a largely White, middle class feminist movement and have instead called for structural and intersectional approaches to understanding domestic violence (Bograd, 1999; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Carraway, 1991). Carraway (1991) recommends re-conceptualizing violence by suggesting that we “begin to identify the institutional and individual sources of violence against women of colour (p. 1305). Crenshaw’s (1991) work on intersectionality recognizes the “multilayered and routinized forms of domination that often converge” (p. 1245) in the lives of immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence. Along with her focus on women’s experiences of violence, Crenshaw also discusses how domestic violence could also be a consequence of discrimination against racialized men. She establishes a link between racism and patriarchy that “denies men of colour the power and privilege that dominant men enjoy.” Crenshaw challenges the legitimacy of such power and discusses its devastating impact in the form of domestic violence in families of colour (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1258).

The intersectional and multilayered analysis to domestic violence has been taken up and elaborated upon in the context of South Asian communities. Some scholars have held the view that race is the primary source of oppression a South Asian woman experiences (Bannerji, 1995). Others have adopted an intersectional approach but have emphasized the importance of race as an entry point from which to investigate other forms of oppression. In a recent overview on domestic violence in the South Asian community in Canada, Chokshi, Desai and Adamali (2009) suggested employing an integrative anti-racist framework such as that delineated by George and Ramkissoon (1998) to understand the post-immigration experiences of South Asian women.

Scholars such as Jiwani (2005), Razack (2003) and Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) hold the view that the patriarchal violence that South Asian women suffer occurs in a context where they are equally subject to class and racial subordination by the dominant group. The racism in labour market practices resulting in extreme poverty of immigrant women and families has been reiterated in the literature (Dasgupta, 2007; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007). Many South Asian women who immigrate to Canada under the family class are perceived as economically unproductive, adding to the vulnerability these women experience in Canada (Thobani, 2000). Recent changes to the family class category that grant a conditional permanent residency to spouses and partners who have been married less than two years increase the dependence of the woman on her partner (CIC, 2013). Similarly, Dasgupta (2000) and Shirwadkar (2004) discuss that South Asian women fear that as a result of criminal justice intervention, they might face the prospect of losing their economic security, and also increased institutional surveillance, the dismantling of their family and isolation from their communities.

While grounding her analysis within an intersectionalities perspective, Razack (2003) elaborates further on the linkages between patriarchy, other oppressions and how they result in domestic violence. According to her, these multilayered forms of violence are sustained through the creation of a “violent space”. When a “violent space” is created in a marriage, men can use it to silence women and coerce their bodies while remaining unaccountable. The “violent space” is

generated by multiple and intersecting forms of structural and institutional oppressions, such as racist and sexist immigration policies; the criminal justice system; the economic marginalization of women; and patriarchal cultural norms (Razack, 2003). Zaman (2010) discusses xenophobia towards racialized immigrants in Canada, providing evidence of the socio-economic-political and legal vulnerabilities of immigrants, especially women in Canada.

This form of analysis is very useful because it enables the examination of multiple factors that interface with systems of domination to create the conditions for violence to occur (Razack, 2003). Therefore, this article utilizes Razack's theoretical framework and the concept of "violent space" to interpret findings of the research on domestic violence within South Asian communities in the GTA. In doing so, this paper aims to advance knowledge on the issue as a way of shifting the perspective from pathologizing South Asian culture towards a more critically informed perspective on factors contributing to domestic violence in the Communities in the GTA.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Orientation**

This research used a critical ethnography approach to qualitative inquiry to re-present the otherwise silenced perspectives of South Asian community activists, lawyers, agency directors, and practitioners who work with South Asian women in the GTA. According to Harrington (2005), critical ethnography is undertaken to write about an issue crucial to people's lives (p. 295). "The critical ethnographer penetrates the borders and breaks through the confines in defense of the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach...It begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness and injustice within a particular lived domain" (Madison, 2005, p.5). Based on the negative media coverage of domestic violence in South Asian communities there was an urgent need felt by South Asian activists and practitioners to speak out on the issue.

This political aim is supported by our theoretical use of Critical Race Feminism (Mohanty, 1991; Narayan, 1997; Razack et al, 2010), Anti-colonialism (Dei, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001) and Anti-oppression (Mullaly, 2010) to think about issues of domestic violence within South Asian communities. Critical race feminists consider race as an integral part of everyday social interaction. Viewed from this perspective, patriarchy does not refer to the power of men over women but to all social relations where any one person or group is subjugated to the interests of another against their will (Razack et al, 2010). In addition, we see 'colonial' not simply as anything foreign, but anything that is "imposed" or "dominating" (Dei, 2000; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). An Anti-colonial framework interrogates dominating power relations structured along lines of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, language, disability and sexuality (Dei, 2000). An Anti-oppression framework recognizes multiple, intersecting and interlocking forms of oppressions experienced by groups and communities and recognizes that oppression does not occur between the dominant and the subordinate, but occurs also within subordinate groups (Mullaly, 2010). The varied forms of oppressions are experienced in and through social relations, discursive practices and social structures (Mullaly, 2010).

Informed by these stances, in our study, participants were selected purposively and through snow ball sampling (Creswell, 2007). Only those participants who had either direct or indirect service experience working with South Asian women around domestic violence were

selected for the study. Altogether, 14 participants with diverse practice experience were selected. At the time of the interviews, the participants held the following positions in their organizations: two were community activists who had also held the position of Executive Director (ED), two were community lawyers, six were EDs of social service agencies, one was a Program Director, and four were social work practitioners. The participants represented various South Asian countries as well as various languages and regions within the same country. All participants except one were women. The majority of participants had been involved in the field from 5 years to up to 20 years. The interviews focused on gleaning the practitioners' perspectives on and understanding of: the major factors leading to domestic violence in the post immigration phase; barriers women experience in accessing services; and, their recommendations for addressing the issues. In this paper we only present the findings related to the first two areas.

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed after obtaining participants' consent. Issues of confidentiality were discussed and the participants were given the option to select a pseudonym. All participants preferred to use their real names instead of pseudonym as a gesture of "speaking out" on a much debated, controversial issue in the GTA. The transcribed data were read and initially, all data segments relevant to the purpose of this research were assigned code labels. Different code labels that discussed different aspects of the same issue were then grouped together under major themes for analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2007).

### **Major Findings**

The main findings that emerged from the interviews can be grouped under three main themes: the culturalization of domestic violence; the criminalization of South Asian men; and the multiple societal oppressions leading to domestic violence in the post-immigration phase.

#### **The 'Culturalization of Domestic Violence' and the Criminalization Of South Asian Men**

Most participants were frustrated by society's perception of domestic violence occurring in South Asian communities in the GTA as an outcome of violent cultural practices. Uzma, Zahra, Andalee, and Farrah opposed the labeling of violent culture based on the prevalence of domestic violence in the communities. Zarah points to the prevalence of domestic violence across varied cultures and religions, emphasizing that the phenomenon is not unique to just south Asian communities: "Violence against women is a universal, global issue. It's not just a South Asian issue, it's from around the world. It's across-religion and across-class."

Farrah moved the discussion away from culture and situated it within patriarchy. For her, "It's a global insidious culture where patriarchal violence against women is seen as a norm... it's almost seen as a part of life. This is a war on women; it is being made out to be a problem that just we have and nobody else has it."

While taking this stance about the universal nature of the phenomenon, the participants clarified that they did not mean to condone its prevalence within the communities. They wanted the issue to be associated with patriarchy as opposed to blaming a specific culture. In separating

patriarchy from culture the participants were trying to shift the current perception of domestic violence from a cultural issue to a social issue.

The participants also pointed out the varying connotations and usage of the term culture in the local context. According to Uzma, culture is used only in certain context and carries a negative undertone. She said, “What I find really peculiar is that when we are talking about racialized woman we can mention culture there, but more as a racialized lens than anything else; culture is problematized here.”

Andalee added to Uzma’s comment that the term is used to discriminate against and judge South Asian culture while using the dominant culture as the norm. “Different cultures express themselves differently. And in this country we just tend to equate difference with inferiority. And, I guess that’s the whole racism, colonialism thing. You’re different, therefore, you must be lesser than me.”

Participants also spoke about various societal stereotypes associated with South Asian communities they encounter on a daily basis. In their opinion, these negative representations influence the dominant society’s perspective and response to the violence that South Asian women encounter. According to Farrah, “It’s how the South Asian society is perceived by service providers, by feminist community, by social activists. It’s very much like – ‘crazy people are going to beat the crap out of their daughters and they are going to kill them’. And we don’t do that here.”

Participants shared that in the post 9-11 world there was a trend to construct South Asian men from certain countries and religious backgrounds as a threat to society. “As soon as a South Asian woman says she is experiencing violence, it feeds into the War on Terror; it feeds into these wars that are happening against Pakistan; it feeds into this idea that brown men are barbarians – this orientalist view of who brown men are, and they fix this hypothesis of an oppressed South Asian woman and...an oppressive South Asian man.”(Farrah)

*In this post-911 world, men, particularly South Asian men, experience racialization differently. Either they are terrorists or now they are definitely Sri Lankan rebels – right? There were certainly members of Sikh community that were under a lot of scrutiny – because people just couldn’t differentiate the turbans. And, unfortunately, their response was like we don’t look like them. (Andalee)*

According to the participants, all of these above constructions influence the way South Asian women are perceived by service providers. Uzma said:

*If you are South Asian by definition your experience has to be one of marginality or of oppression, of tradition, all of that construction of ethnicity.... If you’re Muslim, then of course, definitely, your countries needed to be invaded, so that you can be liberated. We are docile, oppressed, submissive, suppressed by tradition, by custom, by religion, etc.*

Uzma expanded the concept of violence to include various forms of structural and institutional violence racialized and Muslim women face in the local context.

*As a Muslim woman, I find it really peculiar that people have “Take Back the Night” marches, etc. where they talk about individual violence, but they never talk about violence against Muslim mothers or black mothers who have to worry about their sons and husbands who may be arrested, deported, and thrown into jail without due process because of anti-terrorism legislation. It is political. You are living in a foreign country where you’re delegitimized, your cultural values are pathologized, particularly of certain people more so than others... Right now, Muslims seem to be in the frontline.*

These perspectives from participants highlight ways in which domestic violence in South Asian communities has been constructed locally. These negative constructions are grounded in larger structural and institutional forces and seem to influence the response of the local dominant society towards South Asian women.

### **The Role of Multiple Societal Oppressions Contributing to Domestic Violence in the Post-Immigration Phase**

The participants identified the role of various societal oppressions such as labour market disadvantage and racism in shaping the experiences of South Asian women as immigrants in this country.

*Domestic violence within the community has to be seen as partially as an issue of patriarchy and power, but part of it is has to be seen in terms of immigrant experience. The family units that had never known violence before suddenly become violent, or experience violence here; not because the husband and wife are by definition in a conflictual relationship, but because of socioeconomic conditions of immigrants. (Kripa)*

This view was supported by Baldev, Afroza, Sunder, Vivien, Farishta, Soma and Angie. For Uzma, the challenges South Asians encounter have roots in Canada’s history of immigration. Hence, within such a context the position of South Asian women is relegated to the margins. Uzma said,

*Brown women have shown up much later because of the Exclusion Act...We were never meant to come as communities....Only our men were supposed to be brought here as cheap labor. This society sees communities of colour in a particular way... Women of colour are structurally located in such a way that they are marginal to the white society, they are even marginal to the feminist movement.*

Zahra highlighted the vulnerability of immigrant women within the current immigration policy that creates a number of barriers for South Asian women to leave a violent situation. According to her,

*Until last 10 years, all of the [South Asians] who were coming as independent class were usually men. And then the people who they sponsored, their wife, came as their dependent. So, they already set up a power dynamic just within this classification; the principal independent applicant is given all the information; everything is funneled*

*through him. So there's power there and anywhere there is someone with more power than someone else, there's room for abuse.*

Based on their work with women, Amra, Vivien and Andalee provided insights on how South Asian women ultimately receive the brunt of the stress of poverty and racism their families experience as racialized immigrants in this country.

*I came across women whose husbands are engineers but are driving cabs. Men who have never mentioned things such as "You are not an intelligent woman" start demeaning their wives, calling [them] names... Some of my women said, "They are not getting jobs; they are frustrated. Whatever they experience outside, they come back to us and take out on us.[They] show more anger at home;[they are] angry at children, don't talk to them properly; don't communicate; don't share anything. If we say, 'Can you tell what happened? They say, 'What will you do? You can't do anything. If you can do, I wouldn't be in this situation.*

Andalee also sketched an image of the impact of racism in South Asian children and men and its impact on family relations:

*A kid goes to school and it could be a school that is predominantly children of colour, taught by predominantly white teachers. The teachers struggle trying to be culturally competent... [the children] are made to feel that who they are and what their experiences are, a) are not valid and b) are not legitimate ...who you are, your smelly food and your oily hair and you dress funny and all of that makes them feel less included. They come home and their mother is dressed in traditional clothes, and she doesn't speak English well and she is not computer-savvy which means mom sucks. The husband goes out looking for work and as a man of colour in this country he gets racialized wherever he goes... Suddenly, he is a man of colour. This just trickles down and women are at the bottom and they bear the brunt of all of it.*

Amra also spoke about social isolation of low income, racialized families who are unable to take advantage of living with and learning from diverse cultures. In her opinion,

*If you go to schools, there is no diversity there because of the high concentration of just one or two communities in the neighborhood. She said, I mentioned this to a MP [Member of Parliament] when she came to our program. She kept saying, "Canada is diverse," and I had to say, "I don't think so. People here are forced to interact with only their own communities. Where is diversity here?"*

Deepa agreed with Amra and attributed such ghettoization to be a part of the structural strategy of segregating the racialized from the mainstream communities.

*The way communities are set up in GTA is very flawed... Encouraging one colour, one kind, one creed to stay together and allocating them spaces in a way that would ghettoize them...This is subtle systemic racism by virtue of which people of colour have been kept outside the bound of Caucasian spaces.*

Participants discussed how such ghettoization of racial groups in the GTA is reinforced through various labels such as Little India or Little Pakistan, ostensibly to demonstrate diversity and multiculturalism, in reality, as participants say, the communities live in isolation with minimum services from the mainstream society. For the participants, most racialized immigrants forced into survival jobs do not earn enough, compelling both partners to work. In Andalee's opinion, this scenario leads to unprecedented dynamics at the family level.

*Men are just emasculated when they come here. Part of the emasculation is the fact that it's easier for women to find menial jobs. There are a lot more options for a cleaning lady or factory lady jobs than for men. [the man's] ego takes a beating when she becomes a bread-earner. That's really a different family construct than what they all grew up with. (Andalee)*

Deepa discussed the differential impact of this unanticipated reality on both, a South Asian man and a woman. She elaborates that,

*She [the woman] is now balancing this life which she is not prepared for.... and at the same time, this person [the man] who was socialized in a way where he is supposed to be the provider, now needs to share the responsibility with someone. He can't make sense of it and obviously there will be clash, what we call as violence in the family, because both of them don't have the tools to deal with life which is presented to them after coming to Canada*

The family dynamics get further complicated as families attempt to address the realities of their lives here.

*My clients tell me, "He wants me to behave in a Canadian way when I'm going out and earning money, but at home he doesn't want me to behave as a Canadian. Whenever I ask him to help me around with the household chores, he says, 'Inside the house, I want it to be as the way we were. (Deepa)*

Afroza agreed with this and added that in situations where extended family members lived with the family, they too had similar expectations. While some participants critiqued this compartmentalization as the manifestation of patriarchy, others provided an insight into the reason why women continue to remain in this situation. For Zahra, this is rooted in their experiences of "dehumanization" and for Uzma it comes from;

*Being completely, emotionally and psychologically beaten down. When you are an immigrant here – no family, no supports, plus the one person who is familiar to you is now turning abusive – you are going to put up with him as long as you can, not because you are submissive, not because your traditions teach you that or your religion says something, but because it makes perfect sense.*

The preceding discussion highlights the social marginalization of South Asian families and its impact on family dynamics. Under the circumstances, women are left with the choice of either continuing to live with or leave the family. Knowing that their structural vulnerabilities

will be further intensified on account of their marginal location within the Canadian society the women often choose to stay with their partners.

### Discussion

The participants of this study resisted the culturalization of domestic violence and the problematizing of South Asian culture in the context of domestic violence. Participants' response of differentiating between patriarchy and culture supports Almeida and Dolan-Delvecchio (1999) and Dasgupta's (2000) perspectives. In their opinion, instead of confusing patriarchy with culture there is need to look at ways in which patriarchy operates in different cultures. For example, practices such as dowry, female infanticide, and forced use of veil are patriarchal customs exercised on women (Almeida and Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999, p. 667).

Similar to the opinion of many scholars the participants of this study take a stance against the varied practices and meanings given to the term culture in the local context. Such an articulation challenges mainstream practices of associating culture with race and ethnicity (Grewal, 2009; Razack, 2003; Volpp, 2003). Volpp points out that, "irrational" behaviour by members of the mainstream community is treated as psychological, whereas the same behavior by members of a racialized community is treated as cultural (Volpp, 2003, p. 395).

The findings also illuminate the ways in which the discourse of culture is used to inferiorize, other and marginalize racialized communities in the local context. In doing so, the findings further bolster the arguments provided by Razack (2003) and Smith (1994) regarding the implied racism in the arguments on difference in culture. According to Preston-Shoot (1995), the differences are deconstructed in terms of a reference point. What is South Asian culture different *from* or who are South Asians different *from*? In their opinion, underlying this construction of difference is an implicit comparison of South Asians with the members of the dominant culture.

Additionally, the findings make an important contribution in bringing forward the stereotypes and negative representation of South Asian communities, its women and men in the context of the issue of domestic violence. The findings suggest how such stereotypes have served the political function of marginalizing the communities in the local context. The findings add to the existing body of literature the very critical dimension of the criminalization of South Asian men in the post 9/11 context and its impact on women. This draws a parallel to the criminalization of Black men in United States (Crenshaw, 1991). In doing this, the findings have brought light on structural and institutional violence and its impact on South Asian women experiencing domestic violence.

The findings also support the vast body of knowledge on intersectionality perspectives on domestic violence (Bograd, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; Carraway, 1991). The findings support the existing knowledge on the ways in which South Asian women are impacted by multiple oppressions such as labour market racism resulting in meager family income, social isolation, and unfair treatment through immigration policies that create an interlocking system of oppression they find difficulty in coming out from (Dasgupta, 2007, Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007; Thobani, 2000).

Participants' perspectives on the social isolation of racialized communities in the GTA corroborates with Abraham's (1998) assertion about women's less access to and participation in the formal institutions of the society in United States. Deepa's comment that racialized groups are kept "outside the bounds" resonates with Razack's (2007) argument that "spaces are organized to sustain unequal social relations...with the help of the legal system in making and maintaining a white settler society" (p. 74). Abraham discusses the negative impact of isolation on women experiencing violence.

The findings also resonate with examples of how these varied oppressions interact with patriarchal culture to create what Razack (2003) calls "violent space" within marriage-which women are not able to escape from. However, the findings add a new dimension to this concept; the structural and institutional violence that South Asian men encounter, that also contribute to the "violent space" within marriage. Fear of such violence on men deters women from seeking support and in turn such acts of bearing silence further legitimize violence against women. However, our findings also point out that despite all its violent nature, this space also offers a sense of identity, acceptance and shelter to women from the larger structural oppressions. In doing so, the notion of violent space is complicated further and made more fluid by participants in their portrayal of home and community as a shelter from the larger societal violence.

The foregoing discussion offers a number of implications for social work practice. The discussion demonstrates the need for re-conceptualizing domestic violence within South Asian communities as a social and political issue, grounded in patriarchy as well as structural and institutional violence that South Asian women and men experience on a daily basis in the GTA. Traditional approaches to domestic violence focusing on patriarchy alone cannot be effective in responding to the issue. In order to address the issue effectively there is a need to undertake an anti-oppression approach that creates space for work at the local and structural level (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). This means that there is a need to address all forms of violence manifested through patriarchy as well as structural and institutional oppressions South Asian women and men experience on a daily basis that creates the "violent space" within their marriage. There is a need for envisioning a grass-roots, holistic approach, grounded in the strengths of the communities and directed at addressing structural and institutional barriers experienced by community members (for a fuller discussion of this approach, see George & Rashidi, forthcoming). Work may also have to be done with women and the larger community around addressing patriarchal cultural practices. Additionally, work may have to be done with men to explore the varied impacts of racism, structural and institutional violence on their marriage and exploring ways of resisting these oppressions. Above all, addressing this issue requires a commitment from the dominant group to strike the deep seated roots of racism from its core and uprooting its ugly manifestations at structural and institutional apparatuses.

### **Conclusion**

This article presents domestic violence perspectives on the structural and institutional violence experienced by South Asian families in the GTA that creates a "violent space" within marriage. This marginalization further impacts women as they are confronted not just with patriarchy but with multiple forms of institutional and societal violence that play a critical role in their decisions with respect to addressing the gender based violence of patriarchy in their life.

The article shifts the discussion of domestic violence from purely a cultural realm to that of the larger society and necessitates responding to various forms of societal violence as an indispensable aspect of addressing domestic violence in the case of South Asian women in the GTA. The article also asks for a change in perspective about the South Asian community not merely as a site of oppression but also as a site of protection from societal violence and as a site of strength. This re-presentation resists cultural pathologizing and instead offers an opportunity to view the issue from a fresh perspective.

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