

**NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES: SECOND GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN
WOMEN'S ENDOGAMOUS MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS**

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Reflexivity.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Social Constructivist Feminism.....	11
Literature Review.....	13
Second Generation Identity Construction.....	13
Gender Norms.....	16
Dating, Modesty and the South Asian Woman.....	18
Arranged Marriages and “Love” Marriages.....	21
The Gap in Research.....	23
Life after Marriage.....	26
Socialization.....	28
Communication.....	29
Depression and Anxiety.....	31
Coping Strategies.....	32
Summary and Limitations.....	34
Implications for Social Work.....	38
Patriarchy and Community Education.....	38
Professional Support Services.....	40
Conclusion.....	43
References.....	45

ABSTRACT

South Asian women raised in the western world must negotiate between highly polarized expectations – forging an independent identity to compete in society, while simultaneously pressured to retain an eastern world cultural heritage that prescribes fixed gender roles and collectivist familial expectations. The conflict resulting from these competing identity expectations can result in emotional stress and confusion as these women struggle to belong to both communities but find themselves fitting in neither world. Current literature surrounding this area of research focuses on how South Asian women negotiate their multiple identity expectations prior to being married. There is, however, a paucity of research on what happens for these women once they are married. As marriage is highly venerated in the South Asian community and family is collectivist in nature, the cultural expectations often weigh more heavily on these women's every day lives after marriage. This paper examines how married South Asian women attempt to navigate through competing demands and expectations in their role as the daughter-in-law in the family. A focus group was conducted that consisted of three South Asian women and found that these women had all experienced identity issues around socialization, communication, depression and anxiety, as well as coping. This research highlights South Asian women's attempt in bridging eastern and western values and the impact this has on their identity construction. Finally, this paper suggests challenging patriarchal structures within the community through community education as well as professional counseling and support groups that allow South Asian women to voice their own issues and process their experiences at their own pace.

INTRODUCTION

Central to South Asian society is the importance of maintaining cultural continuity through marriage and family relationships. Consequently, South Asian immigrants hold strong convictions and expectations about their children's mate selection. For South Asian girls, mate selection greatly impacts them as "fears of cultural obliteration by 'Americanization' and exogamy have played a large role in imposing...constructions on the female gender role" (Das Gupta, 1998, p. 957). For the purpose of this paper exogamy is defined as belonging to a different ethnic group while endogamy for South Asian society is restricted to a hierarchy of who is acceptable to marry and who is not (Badrudjoja, 2006; Basran, 1993), with "Indo-Canadian families prefer[ing] their children to marry within a field of eligibles defined by their own class, religion, caste, and region" (Basran, 1993, p. 347). Thus, gender role construction begins by South Asian immigrant parents being hyper-vigilant in regulating the behaviors of their daughters as these daughters represent the purity and honor of the family name as well as their cultural lineage. After marriage, this gender role construction is monitored by the in-laws. The in-laws often take it upon themselves to resocialize their daughter-in-laws on how to behave in their family unit. This in-law relationship is powerful, burdensome, and frequently heavily restricting for married South Asian women.

With much monitoring of their behaviors, second generation South Asian women often find themselves situated in a conflict between trying to forge an independent identity from their family obligations so that they can live, socialize, and compete professionally in the western society; while simultaneously pressured to retain their

eastern cultural heritage. This culture prescribes fixed gender roles and collectivist familial expectations in order to attract a suitable marriage partner and attain the cultural goal of becoming a wife and mother and passing on the cultural heritage to the next generation. Finding the balance between these western and eastern identity expectations leaves many women shifting and negotiating their identity as appropriate to a given situation. For South Asian women specifically, their hyphenated identity of being both South Asian and Canadian is in constant flux and conflict as they are trying to accomplish multiple expressions of who they are within both cultures. Dasgupta (1998) discusses how South Asian women are often limited in engaging freely within western society independently, and are often restricted in making choices based on their free will. Instead these women must perpetuate traditions and customs that are “anachronistic” to maintain the cultural value of being a “good” Indian woman who maintains family tradition and honor above all else. Also, growing up in the western world, ideas of gender equality influence South Asian women who “have to deal with gendered oppression within their own communities” (Bhatia & Ram, 2004, p. 229) as they witness their male counterparts being venerated and adored while they are socialized to care for and cater to these men. As such, identity formation within two cultures is not an easy process of integration. It is fluid, contradictory, and according to Bhatia and Ram (2004) it is painful, complex, and a difficult process for South Asian women to navigate.

This paper will explore how second generation South Asian women in endogamous marital relationships negotiate the competing expectations of being a professionally employed women in the western world while concurrently attempting to perform and maintain the cultural role of being a daughter-in-law in the eastern world.

The role of the daughter-in-law in the Indian family is a position that is limiting and complex. Thus the daughter-in-law position in the family and the impact it has on South Asian women will be explored by using existing literature, social constructivist feminist theory, and findings from a small non-peer reviewed qualitative study that was undertaken during a research class in the Masters of Social Work program at the University of British Columbia. This information will assist in highlighting the challenges that second generation South Asian women face in finding their place not only in society as a whole but also within the framework of their daily cultural realities. Further, using a feminist lens, I will underline the implications for social work practice in working with such women.

This subject area is important to me for a number of reasons. Firstly, as woman of South Asian decent, I have experienced many challenges and uncertainty in negotiating my own identity within the Canadian and Indian framework in which I live. As such I would like to draw upon the experiences of other South Asian women to examine how they have negotiated the competing identity expectations placed upon them.

Secondly, much of the existing literature on South Asian women focuses on the experiences of immigration. There has been sparse research on the lives and realities of second generation South Asian women living in the western world and the challenges these women face living in two culturally different worlds. The research on second generation South Asian women has primarily focused on their childhood and upbringing by immigrant parents with little attention to their lives after adulthood and marriage. Thus, it is important to discover how these women adjust to the demands and

expectations that immigrant in-laws place on them once they take their place as daughter-in-law, negotiating between their individualistic pursuits and their collective obligations.

My final reason for wanting to explore this area of research comes from observing how existing services for South Asian women focus on the immigrant experience and often fail to address the needs of second generation women and the complexities they face living in both the western and eastern world.

REFLEXIVITY

As a South Asian woman growing up in Canada, my world has been shaped by two competing identities. I find myself situated in a constant struggle between being “Canadian” as my birth right guarantees me, and being “Indian” as my cultural heritage and skin colour define me. As I have journeyed to make sense of who I am and where I fit in this world, I am left with the notion that despite my strong connections to both communities, I am neither Canadian nor Indian. I am a woman who is defined and shaped by one pigeon hole in which the dominant white society places me, and another pigeon hole in which Indian people categorize me. Despite where I’m placed or how I must shift my identity depending on the circumstance, neither of these identities represent me. While I have learned how to play the role and be what others expect of me, one of my challenges in life has been to find ways of forging an identity that I ascribe to freely and without constraint. For me, this identity conflict has left me feeling confused, frustrated, angry, and silenced.

While growing up, I was one of the only Indian kids at my school. In fact, I was one of the only kids who belonged to a visible minority ethnic group. I remember instantly feeling as if I didn’t belong with the rest of the children because of the colour of my skin as well as the numerous restrictions placed upon me by my parents to which my peers did not seem to have to adhere such as no dating, no drinking alcohol, no going out with friends and definitely no socializing with boys. These restrictions made me different and in an effort to compensate for this difference, I remember trying extra hard in school to prove that I was equally intelligent, if not more so, than my peers. I excelled

academically, which delighted my parents, so I could meet and exceed the mainstream bar of success. However, at the end of the day I had this deep awareness that my eastern Indian identity would never allow me to fully participate in the western world that I lived in. The ingrained concepts of family obligation, modest behavior, and my role as a woman in the Indian community would keep me constrained from fully expressing my own desires and path in life. For at the end of the day, one of my primary objectives in life, being a South Asian woman, was to marry an Indian man and start a family, passing on my family's culture, values, and heritage on towards the next generation.

Now, I am an adult according to the western world and quite successful at that. I have completed two undergraduate degrees at a prestigious academic institution. I have established myself professionally in a career that has afforded me great respect and recognition for my work ethic by my colleagues and superiors. Also, I have made the daring leap of buying my own condominium and moving away from home, despite the fact that the majority of my Indian female counterparts are shunned from doing the same by their family. A victory in my journey at challenging the South Asian female path in life! Yet despite all of the accomplishments that I have achieved in my life and the leniency my family has had in allowing me to move away from home, one thing remains constant - in my family's eyes, I am still a child. I am somebody that they are responsible for until such time that I am married and belong to someone else and his family.

While my family is proud of me for learning how to be a productive member of society and fit in with western world expectations of being independent, this independence is limited to educational pursuits and financial success. As an Indian woman, my role and behavior is still of paramount importance to my family because I

represent them and our family name. Any conduct on my part that is unbecoming of a proper Indian girl could interfere with my ability to marry an Indian man from a respectable family, especially if that family is bound by traditional notions of culture. Further, conducting myself in an appropriate manner is also vital in ensuring the maintenance of my family's good name, reputation, and status within the Indian community.

Thus, this paper is important to me on a personal level as I am an unmarried South Asian Canadian who wants to settle down and start a life with an Indian man. Despite the fact that my family is highly educated and is not pressuring me to find a partner of the same endogamous group, there is an underlying hope and message that an Indian man is their preferred partner choice for me and my life. While they would be accepting of a person outside of my ethnic origin, I know that their desire is for me to continue on in life with someone who belongs to my endogamous group. Also, I would like to find a partner within the group who implicitly understands the South Asian part of my identity without question or judgment. My family is somewhat worried about my marriage prospects; however, as despite my adhering to the proper code of conduct for an Indian girl, I seem to have left the "suitable" age of marriage. I call myself a girl because I will not truly be considered an adult in my own right until I am married with a family of my own.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the potential limitations of bias that there may be for me to study a group that I belong to, my experiences provide me with inside knowledge and an understanding of the subtle intricacies and norms of South Asian society. As opposed to an anthropologic study where an exogamous member examines and passes judgment on the group they are observing, my participation as the researcher allows for a contextualized framing of information and desists from imposing an ethnocentric lens on the research and the participants. While my experiences provide me with a greater depth in analyzing information, I do not assert that my experiences or lived reality represent the lives of all South Asian women.

Further, I do not assert that South Asian women are a homogenous group that has the same cultural, religious, and traditional backgrounds and needs. However, the broader Canadian society, more often than not, places these women together in terms of ethnic identity and in contracting out services that would be “appropriate”. Further, Agnew suggests that South Asian women seeking out service “tended to minimize the internal differences among South Asians and placed significance only on the differences between South Asians and White Canadians” (Agnew, 1998, p. 158). The women Agnew (1998) studied felt that there was an undifferentiated homogenous culture incorporated in the term South Asian, despite many different linguistic bases, religious ideologies, and places of ancestral origin. This expressed feeling of homogeneity, I would suggest, speaks to the marginalization and discrimination that South Asian women experience from mainstream society in understanding the multiple issues and

complexities of culture, tradition, race, and gender that are embedded in these women's everyday lives and experiences.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST FEMINISM

For the purpose of this research, I employ a social constructivist feminist epistemology to highlight the multiple truths and individual realities that second generation South Asian women have in navigating their roles as wife and daughter-in-law. A constructivist approach assists in highlighting the women's multiple truths based on the values, upbringing, and socialization thus exposing that these truths are arbitrary and constructed.

This construction occurs for South Asian women from the moment of childhood. They are taught what it means to be a "good" Indian girl who listens to her family, does not ask questions or challenges authority, and is dutiful in assisting her mother with daily household responsibilities preparing her for her adult role as a marriage partner. While this girl from a young age is being trained on how to be a good wife and daughter-in-law for when she is older, her brother is doted on by their mother and afforded greater leniency and fewer restrictions in his daily activities. These gender differences are ingrained in both genders and are constructed by the cultural values of their ethnic origins. Lorber (2005) suggests that these gender constructions produce a relationship in which men dominate while women are subordinate.

For the South Asian woman, this gender positioning impacts her entire life as she is readied and prepared throughout her childhood to take on her adult female role as wife

and daughter-in-law. This subordination becomes even more apparent and burdensome after the woman gets married and begins to find her place in the family schematic of her in-laws. When she becomes a daughter-in-law, her position in the family system is subordinate in the hierarchy to that of her father-in-law, husband, mother-in-law, and other sister-in-laws within the family unit. With the lower status married South Asian women hold within their marital family system, these women must find ways to negotiate their eastern cultural expectations as a daughter-in-law with their personal aspirations professionally and the demands of fitting into the western world.

In her career, if a woman becomes successful and reaches authority positions at work, Lorber (2005) argues that such women are believed to be masculine and “honorary men”. Their assertiveness and drive influences identity as on one hand they are deemed a successful career person in the public arena while simultaneously subservient in the private arena of the family. Lorber (2005) states that “married women may earn as much or even more than their husbands, but to be a good woman, they need to physically and emotionally care for family members.” While this is true for most western women, the South Asian wife’s responsibility extends not only to her husband and children, but also to her husband’s parents, extended family members, and the collective community.

A social constructivist feminist approach validates that the experiences of these women are real and asserts that their truths and stories shape their worlds. The identity confusion South Asian women face in their every day lives shifts with every person and situation they encounter. They must find ways of meeting the ongoing demands of western and eastern world expectations and responsibilities. Their identities are often shifting and multiple, frequently causing emotional stress and confusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review is separated into themes that emerged from existing research on the experiences of second generation South Asian women. These themes include second generation identity construction, gender norms, dating modesty, and arranged marriages or love marriages. Further, this literature review highlights the large gap in research that exists in examining second generation South Asian women's lives after they have achieved their cultural gender goal of getting married.

SECOND GENERATION IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Identity construction in the second generation South Asian community is a complex and confusing process as eastern familial and cultural expectations compete with western societal values thus positioning South Asians in an ongoing struggle of trying to fit into two very different worlds. This is particularly true when both worlds deliver conflicting and contradictory messages regarding what is acceptable and valued.

Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004) illustrate how western philosophies of independence and individualism contrast with “the interdependent self, evident in Eastern cultures, where individuals view themselves as actors belonging to and influenced by an all encompassing group...[which is] valued as being more important than the individual” (p. 215). While free will and self-determination is honored in the western world, these concepts interfere and impinge on the importance of belonging to and giving one's self to the greater good of the eastern collective community. Thus, South Asian women find

themselves “continuously pressured to weigh and evaluate and accept or reject the claims that the two cultures (Indian and Canadian) place on them without much leniency given from their Indian component” (Kundu & Adams, 2005, p. 251). These women are molded by the collectivist expectations they acquire at home from their family and also by their ethnic community group. Simultaneously they learn from school and the broader mainstream society that it is important to become their own person and find their own way in life as this is the Canadian vision of a successful citizen. These contradictory messages cause confusion, uncertainty and pressure to try and appease and blend into both worlds.

Simplistically it maybe easy for an outside observer to suggest that this group just pick an identity and stick with it; however, identity is molded and shaped by not only the outside world, but also by the circumstances in which people grow up. For South Asians born in Canada, the question of identity cannot be ignored as their skin colour prohibits them from simply being Canadian. Badruddoja (2006) describes how growing up she would continually be asked “where are you from?” (p. 3). This question constantly reminds South Asian women that they are “instantly othered” (Rajiva, 2006, p. 179) as they are not truly Canadian but a hyphenated version of a Canadian. Badruddoja purports that “the question becomes exclusionary and racist: [as] the purpose is to remind the person being asked that s/he neither belongs here, nor fits in” (Badruddoja, 2006, p. 3). These women, because of skin colour, do not meld into the Anglo-ethnocentric western world that being Canadian implies. Instead, these South Asian women are labeled as Indo-Canadian thus only partly belonging to the country that they have resided in for their entire lives. Rajiva (2006) informs that “loving hockey and winter” is not enough

because there is an “awareness of difference as a second skin that has shaped your entire life” and keeps South Asians having an “othered identity” (p. 170) that stays with them no matter how Canadian they may try to become.

Immigrant parents further complicate the identity construction process for their Canadian born children by encouraging their children to take advantage of the educational and career opportunities that western society accords them while also discouraging them from leaving behind their ethnic birthright – the Indian part of their hyphenated identity. Basran (1993) discusses how these parents “in their concern about their children’s socialization, education, marriages and careers...are torn between their own cultural background and the Canadian culture as to how to raise [their] children” (p. 347). The conflict that immigrant parents experience is transmitted to their children who are trying to create a balance between their competing identities. Further, when parents are struggling to find their way between two cultural worlds, it could be anticipated that South Asians born in Canada would experience even more difficulty in navigating harmoniously between these dual identities.

Although immigrant parents, according to Aycan and Kanungo (1998), prefer the acculturation process of integration into Canadian society, Salam (2004) suggests that conforming to contemporary ideology only pertains to public aspirations of education and career while private home life demands a different set of norms and expectations (South Asian Immigrants section, para. 2). That is, children of these immigrants are encouraged to compete, succeed and integrate professionally in the western world while at the same time maintaining the closed and collective nature that the eastern world demands on their home and family life (Srinivasan, 2001). Thus, identity becomes a “dialogical process

that is shaped by multiple, contradictory, asymmetrical, and often shifting cultural voices of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality” (Bhatia & Ram, 2004, p. 228).

GENDER NORMS

Historically, India has been a center of strict gender roles and responsibilities that reflect an androcentric ideology where “the wife occupies a subordinate and subservient role relative to the husband; the wife’s status in the husband’s family is marginal until she bears children; and financial decisions are made by men” (Suppal, Roopnarain, Buesig, & Bennett, 1996, p. 30). Thus, the Indian woman has had to conform to strict gender roles of domestication and appeasement to the patriarchal superior position that men hold within the family as decision makers, financial breadwinners, and authority figures in the home. Indian women have to spend their entire life upholding these values as they infer respect, filial devotion, and true Indian femininity. Any actions on their part that deviates from the gender norms and expectations brings shame to not only the Indian woman’s husband and his family, but also tarnishes the image and reputation of the woman’s family of origin. Her parents would be seen as failing in their duty to have raised a daughter who is suitable and appropriate in being a wife in the Indian family system. Therefore, with the threat of having her parents’ shamed and humiliated, the Indian woman generally accepted her role and position within her husband’s family with little dispute.

This pattern of complete loyalty and structural familial obligation has begun to change as urban India has started to reflect diversity in gender role beliefs (Suppal et al.,

1996). Dutta (2000) describes how as women in India are participating in the labor market in greater numbers, they have begun to receive more economic power resulting in greater decision making abilities within the family system. While their status is far from egalitarian in India, the financial contribution that these women are beginning to make in the family unit provides them with empowerment and greater autonomy within their husband's family and home environment.

While this shift in the positioning and power for women has commenced in India, South Asian immigrants living abroad struggle to hold onto archaic patterns of patriarchy embedded in the framework of cultural norms and obligations.

They see "themselves as perpetuating and maintaining South Asian cultural values based upon idealized memories of an Indian sub-continent drawn from their communities' memories of migration. These memories play an important role in maintaining this cultural reality at the family level, including in relation to the role of women. Women are deemed to be the embodiment and manifestation of their parents' cultural heritage and also of the South Asian communities' cultural memories and expectations" (Lindridge et al., 2004, p. 220).

Thus while India's gender norms appear to be transforming to allow women greater freedom and independence, South Asian immigrants living abroad struggle to maintain and preserve gender role identities based on what they witnessed during their lifetimes growing up in Indian society. They then pass on their gender ideas to their children and they expect their children to conform to these norms without question.

While both second generation South Asian males and females are encouraged and expected to maintain endogamy (Salam, 2003) and be connected to the South Asian community, South Asian women have the added responsibility of transmitting their ethnic culture and identity forward to subsequent generations (Das Gupta, 1998; Kundu & Adams, 2005; Lindridge et al., 2004; Farha, 2004). This pressure of preserving and transmitting cultural continuity surfaces for South Asian women in the gender expectations and norms they are taught from a young age by their parents. Das Gupta (1998) argues that “as the keepers of South Asian culture and heritage...the roles of second-generation daughters are therefore monitored more strictly than those of sons” (p. 957). This monitoring impacts the freedoms and leniency that sons enjoy and daughters are denied.

DATING, MODESTY, AND THE SOUTH ASIAN WOMAN

Marriage in the South Asian community is highly venerated and celebrated. Farha (2004) describes how South Asian children are not considered adults until they wed as marriage provides them with status in the community; therefore, until South Asian daughters are married, their virtue must be maintained in order to ensure a prosperous marital match. This virtue is measured in modest behavior, calm and demure voice and mannerisms, obedience and respect, and most undeniably the importance of virginity. Farha (2004) further articulates that “‘good’ South Asian girls do not date or engage in pre-marital [sexual] relations...[as] South Asian ‘goodness’ is associated with morality” (p. 5). Female sexual modesty means that daughters must refrain from having

relationships with the opposite sex as “sexual activity is unacceptable and a potential disaster for the parents’ position in the ethnic community” (Salam, 2004, South Asian Immigrants section para 4). Thus parents ensure that “prescribed cultural-social behaviors... [are] enhanced and perpetuate culturally idealized perceptions of female modesty and humility” (Lindridge et al., 2004, p. 220). Consequently, unmarried South Asian women have great restrictions imposed upon them by their parents, and their actions are highly scrutinized by an ever watchful eye until they claim their rightful role as wife and mother (Salam, 2004). She is watched by not only her parents, but also by other community members who are quick to point out any indiscretions that might occur. Thus, the South Asian daughter is defined by the role she not only plays as a “good” Indian girl, but also the role she is waiting to take on as wife and daughter-in-law in her husband’s family system.

“The woman is socialized early in childhood into the role of wife, mother, and householder...[she] is not a person in her own right, her identity is defined by her parents when she is young, and then when she becomes an adult her husband and his family redefine her identity” (Kundu & Adams, 2005, p. 251).

Therefore, the identity of a South Asian woman is never hers to explore and create for herself. When she is young, her identity is constructed by her parents as she belongs to them. This identity construction unfolds by the training she receives from them on how to be the perfect Indian wife. Then, when she is married and thus becomes an adult, her identity is remolded by her husband, his family, and their expectations of how she should live and conduct herself in their family unit.

Despite the extreme pressure South Asian women face in maintaining a modest image, this is not to say that second generation South Asian women do not date and engage in premarital sexual relations. Many of these women just simply refrain from informing their parents that they are involved in intimate relationships (Salam, 2003). These women are caught in a conflict between denying their “South Asianness” so they can belong with their mainstream peer culture (Rajiva, 2006) and deferring to the cultural insistency that “the family is greater than the individual and that even adult children are subject to the authority of their parents” (Salam, 2004, South Asian Immigrants section, para 3). This authority by their parents directly corresponds to chastity and prohibition from sexual encounters and dating. Also, even if they are not participating in “unfit” behavior, the mere implication from a community member suggesting that the South Asian daughter is engaging in activities with the opposite sex could bring shame and dishonor to her parents family name and impact her future marriage prospects in the community.

Thus, second generation South Asian women must struggle to follow rigid and unyielding norms while their male counterparts, more often than not, enjoy leniency and the freedom to date and explore sexual partnerships (Basran, 1993; Bhatia and Ram, 2004; Das Gupta, 1998; Salam, 2004; Salam, 2003; Srinivasan, 2001). Basran (1993) attributes this double standard to “a strong patriarchal heritage that continues to affect relationships between parents and children despite their participation in many aspects of Canadian society” (p. 347).

ARRANGED MARRIAGES OR “LOVE MARRIAGES”

Marriage is a central focus for South Asian families and is a topic of considerable controversy between the generations. Griffin (2007) discusses how it is common for South Asian parents to argue to their children that “in arranged marriages romance develops within the marriage, while in non-arranged, western-style marriages, romance occurs beforehand and divorce rates are therefore high” (p. 4). While in western society divorce may occur more often due to its social acceptability, South Asian parents insist that marriages last when love grows overtime rather than starting at the beginning of a relationship. South Asian immigrant parents insist that they have their children’s best interest in heart and are wiser in making a partner selection for their offspring. Many parents try and suggest marriage partners for their children saying that this also allows the parents to check out the boy’s family and ensure that he and his family would be a good fit for the daughter and her family. For in the South Asian culture, when a person gets married, they are not just marrying an individual, they are also marrying a person’s family.

Das Gupta (1998) suggests that the arranged marriage has been transformed for families living outside of India in that children often are able to agree or disagree to a prospective match introduced to them by their parents. They may even be allowed to spend a short period of time dating the partner they were introduced to, under the watchful eye of the family. This new formation of arranged marriage is the South Asian immigrant parents’ way of accommodating their children’s desires of having some

autonomy in their mate selection, thus indicating slow cultural change within the community.

Many South Asian boys and girls despite their parents' approbation do engage in dating relationships prior to marriage but keep this relationship hidden from their family. Thus, for children who already have dating partners, many parents have no knowledge of the dating habits of their children. Basran (1993) describes how professionally employed parents are generally more lenient than their non-professional counterparts in allowing their children to date and find their own marriage partner, but still prefer that endogamy and chaste behavior, especially for the girl, remains in tact.

For the South Asian children who were already secretly involved in a dating relationship, Salam's (2003) findings indicate that many of these second generation South Asians tend to select their own marital partner as they choose to adopt the western "expectations about love and marriage and the independence of the marital dyad" (Findings section, para 5). This potential marriage partner would only be introduced to the South Asian parents if and when the child decided to marry the person they were dating. For if the parents were aware of their child's dating relationship prior to the child deciding they wanted to get married to their dating partner, their parents would insist that marriage occur immediately as having a child who is dating could tarnish the family image; however, Salam (2003) cautions that the acceptance of this partner would occur with heavy pressure to ensure that the partner belongs to the same endogamous group. If a child presents a potential marriage partner to their parent who does not meet the necessary ethnic requirements from even within the South Asian community, more often than not this partner is rejected and the child faces making a choice between continuing

on in the relationship and forgoing contact with their family, or leaving this partner and continuing on in being a part of their parents lives. Occasionally parents yield to their children's exogamous choice and modify their own position in order to continue being part of their child's life.

Regardless of how marriage partners are selected, Das Gupta (1998) reminds that "no matter how wide the differences in values may seem at any point, the immigrants can hardly reject their children's realities. Neither can the second generation afford to renounce their parents' values completely." (pp. 970-971) Thus both South Asian parents and children must learn to accommodate and compromise to each other's wishes.

THE GAP IN RESEARCH

The majority of literature on second generation South Asian women has focused on the negotiation of identity expectations between western society and traditional eastern cultural ideas and beliefs. This negotiation extends throughout these women's lives and is markedly conflictual when these women engage in activities such as dating, premarital sexual relations, and the selection of marital partnerships. The question of what happens for these women after they have achieved their ultimate cultural gender goal of getting married and becoming a daughter-in-law has not been fully explored in the literature.

There is sparse literature contextualizing how South Asian women negotiate their identities after marriage. According to Grahame (2006), married South Asian women in Trinidad with education, careers, and an income, are able to have more power in the in-

law relationship dynamic and are often able to live outside the extended family dwelling and create their own nuclear family. This separate living arrangement, although seemingly a small victory, is huge in the South Asian community as families tend to prefer the living arrangement of a collective family all living together and sharing economic resources. Rana, Kagan, Lewis, and Rout (1998) show how married South Asian women in Britain negotiate competing demands between work and gender role expectations as mothers. Rana et al. (1998) highlight that there is a real issue facing these women in having to adjust to their new role after marriage. The daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship can be a complex arrangement in which “newly married Asian women have to conform to yet another set of cultural expectations and pressures about how to fulfill their [newly] prescribed roles” as daughter-in-laws” (Rana et al., 1998, p 222). The South Asian women’s childhood gender role socialization is frequently no longer considered adequate by the in-laws. These women must face the new burden and challenge of being re-socialized as their husband’s family takes it upon themselves to retrain their daughter-in-law on how to be a good wife to the standards and expectations of this new family.

Current research highlights the conflicts that second generation South Asian women face growing up with incompatible identities and competing expectations while they try and attain the ultimate goal of getting married. The literature further discusses the virtue of marriage and the importance of family and how these impede upon the freedom and will of South Asian women. However, given the paucity of research in what happens to South Asian women once they get married and become daughter-in-laws,

more research needs to be done in exploring the identity negotiation for these women after marriage.

In the following section, data was generated from a small non-peer reviewed qualitative study. This data will be used as an attempt to address the gap in the literature surrounding what happens to South Asian women and their identities once they have “accomplished” their goal in life of getting married. This qualitative study was done in part for a research course that I completed at the University of British Columbia and asked the question - how do married South Asian Canadian women balance their individual goals with the cultural expectations associated with the role of daughter-in-law?

LIFE AFTER MARRIAGE

For this small non-peer reviewed qualitative study, convenience sampling was used to select participants for a focus group. This method was ideal as the participants came from a distinct visible minority group and were a specialized subset of this group. My recruitment was through posting advertisement posters in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia (UBC) as well as through the Bachelor of Social Work and Masters of Social Work email list serve at UBC. I only required a small sample size as my research was qualitative in nature and thus I did not do any further recruitment outside of this venue.

The women who participated in the focus group consisted of three university educated, professionally employed second generation South Asian women who were married to South Asian men for no longer than five years and did not have children. I chose to select women who had been married for no more than five years and who did not have children as a way to focus my research on the negotiating expectations and roles that occur shortly after marriage. Children add a more complex dimension and added responsibilities for women; thus, women with children were not included. Further, the criterion of the women to be professionally educated and employed was important as it lends to western world expectations and identity challenges in negotiating roles between the western and eastern world. Finally, it was important to study women who had selected partners of South Asian ancestry as these women and their partners have a higher sense of cultural importance and thus endogamy provides the eastern expectation identity roles that were important to examine.

A focus group was convened for the purpose of this study. Three South Asian women participated in this group, Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita. For the purpose of this paper, the women's names were changed to protect their identity. All three women were professionally employed social workers working full time. Also, all of the women had married South Asian men within their endogamous group. That is, Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita were members of the Sikh religion and had families that had immigrated from the same region in India – Punjab. Their husbands were also Sikh with parents who had moved to Canada from Punjab, India.

For purposes of data collection, the topic areas covered included the perceived cultural expectations the women believed were placed on them prior to marriage. After marriage topics included how these expectations were manifested – were they similar to their expectations, were they highly different? Were the cultural expectations similar or in conflict with the personal and individual pursuits the women had for themselves professionally and within the broader Canadian society? Finally I spent time focusing on how these women had negotiated their roles, expectations, and sense of dual identity being both Canadian as well as Indian.

The data was analyzed by transcribing the focus group and reviewing the transcripts for repeating ideas, similarities, and differences in Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita's stories. Emergent themes surfaced from the data that included: socialization, communication, depression and anxiety, and coping strategies. A discussion of each theme follows. While all three women shared personal stories regarding the difficulties they had in negotiating their role as a daughter-in-law in the South Asian family, only one

of the women felt that she had suffered verbal and emotional abuse at the hands of her in-laws.

SOCIALIZATION

All three women discussed how their upbringing had directly influenced the way they interacted in society as well as in their marital relationships. These women strongly felt that they had received dual and contradictory messages while growing up. The first message was to be educated, independent, employed women who were financially self-reliant and also were able to speak their mind and stand up for their beliefs. The second message was to be a “good” Indian girl who behaved in a manner that always represented the family in a sober, dignified way. For the women, a good Indian girl was someone who was passive, quiet, domestically inclined, and did not “rock the boat”. Jasmine stated “there were messages everywhere if you watched Indian movies or listened to songs, it was there. Through dialogue with others...you know what’s expected and you know its perfection”.

While these messages had been ingrained in the women from a very young age, the conflict of the messages became more amplified after they were married. Ramona remarked on how “it’s a game... they make the rules and we play along”. The women spoke of how once they were married they had to be retrained on how to behave by their husband’s mother and conform to a new set of rules and expectations on how to behave properly.

Jasmine: It was our mother-in-law's role to socialize us. It's our mom's role to socialize us. Like I mean we're always so fucking socialized... Why are you trying to socialize us to death? I need a consultant before I speak.

All three women felt as though their socialization was a never ending process that constantly impinged on what they could say or do. Anita remarked "My dad's like you don't need to prove that you're our daughter, you need to prove that you're their daughter" when discussing how she should behave with her in-laws. Jasmine commented on how "you're representing your in-laws let alone your own family" to help explain why it was so important for the in-laws to make sure the daughter-in-laws behaved in a manner best suited to the family's status and standing in the community.

COMMUNICATION

While growing up, all three women were encouraged to speak their mind, be outspoken, and stand up for their beliefs by their parents. This helped the women integrate into mainstream society and establish themselves professionally. After marriage, however, the women spoke of the extreme lack of communication that occurred within their husband's family system. As a daughter-in-law, the women were expected to maintain the peace, stay quiet, and do whatever was expected of them from their in-laws without question. Jasmine discussed how "on one hand they say it's good to voice your opinions, but at the same time making sure we don't say anything". Ramona stated "we feel so much pressure because you want to say it the way it is, but then you want to keep

it calm in the water” and not be considered a trouble maker or someone who is going to cause problems within the family unit.

This silencing of these women’s voices within the family system had a direct impact on the relationship between the women and their husbands. All three women spoke of the importance of having their husband’s support while engaging with his family; however, two of the three women found that if their husband was too vocal with his parents on their behalf, this would backfire and increase tensions in the daughter-in-law relationship as his parents would state that their son is being influenced by his wife. Ramona exemplified this by saying “I totally feel that if my husband intervenes that I’m going to be blamed”. Thus, a husband supporting his wife could mean that the woman would have to endure a higher degree of tension and stress in her position as the daughter-in-law in the family. Ramona’s comments highlight the power of patriarchal systems wherein men are excluded from blame and instead women are held accountable.

One of the three women, Anita, explained that she was worried that her husband was also being torn between being loyal to his parents and supporting his wife. Thus, her solution in protecting her husband from this conflict was to keep silent and avoid saying anything to her husband about the things that were happening between his parents and her. This was heightened by her own parents’ messages to her not to cause problems. Anita stated that her “dad told me when I got married, whatever you do, don’t ever bad mouth your mother-in-law”. This caused major internal conflict for Anita as she wanted her husband to be her best friend and not keep secrets, conforming to western expectations instead of having to hide her feelings from the man whom she considered to be her life partner. To deal with this internal conflict, Anita found her self trying extra

hard to impress her in-laws and go above and beyond in meeting their expectations saying “I do voice a lot of things to my in laws for brownie points”. Consequently her actions in continuously trying to impress her in-laws helped to reinforce the eastern gender role of what it means to be a good daughter-in-law as her focus in the marriage became about always trying to make her in-laws proud of her as well as working on appeasing her husband’s family.

Thus, all three women felt that their ability to voice their real feelings and be free from the constant barrage of expectations and enforced rules was directly related to the lack of communication in not only their husband’s family but also more heavily by their role within the family system as a daughter-in-law who was not supposed to voice opinions that differed from her husband’s family.

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

During the focus group, all three women talked about having feelings of frustration, anxiety, depression, stress, and a loss of identity. This caused them to feel isolated and alone with no support and a lack of ability to break free from these constant cultural constraints. Jasmine expressed this by stating “I’ve lost my identity in a sense. I’m married now and I have to be this different person. I think I have post traumatic stress!” Upon hearing these comments, Ramona came to a realization about her mental state saying “I’m depressed. Oh my god! That’s what it is. I’m really depressed”. This sparked Anita to explain that “there is just so much anxiety” and the anxiety never seems to end. All three remarked on how this focus group was the first time that they were able

to stop and process everything they had been experiencing since they had been married and the actual impact all of these cultural expectations has had on their mental well being. Further they expressed anger and frustration at how their white female counterparts seemingly had more fun, freedom, and less demands on their lives in their roles as wives without the constant concern about their in-laws.

Despite their lack of ability for these women to freely communicate their feelings, none of these women sought formal or professional support. Two of the three women did speak minimally to other married South Asian friends regarding their emotional state and problems that arose as a result of their role as the daughter-in-law of the family. However, they felt limited in what they were able to discuss with their friends as it was still important for them to keep problems within the family unit. This was highlighted in Anita's frustrated response of "what are people going to think?" A common phrase that all of the women had heard numerous times when they were growing up; a phrase that reminded the women to monitor their behavior according to the proper eastern cultural dictates of the South Asian community. As such, keeping silent about the situation was the easiest course of action in dealing with all of the emotions that these women faced on a daily basis. These emotions impacted the women internally and contributed to what all three of the women vocalized as emotional distress.

COPING STRATEGIES

Two of the three women found informal support by talking to married friends about issues that arose out of their role of being the daughter-in-law in their married

family. The freedom to fully voice their feelings and seek out solutions and support was impacted by the collectivist culture's practice of keeping family problems within the family unit. Further, they felt that it was very difficult and unfair to speak to their family of origin (parents and siblings) about issues that they had to deal with as these women did not want to worry their family. Ramona expresses this by stating "I used to tell my parents everything but what can they do, they just get really sad for me and worry. I can't keep doing that to them". Instead Jasmine recommended to "ignore it" while Ramona agreed saying "just keep your mouth shut". Anita's approach was to "just lie" and "pick your battles".

Other solutions recommended by these women was to make sure that the South Asian wife had the support of her husband, set boundaries with the in-laws, and definitely live in their own residence away from the in-law family home. A final coping strategy for these women was to keep the different parts of their lives separate and switch to the person they needed to be given the situation they were in. This was highlighted in Jasmine's words as she remarked upon how she was just performing a part "this is a different life; it's a total different life. It's like you're playing; you're an actor. You're two different people" and it always changes depending on where you are, who your are with, and what people expect of you.

One piece of advice all three women wanted to give unmarried South Asian women was to make sure that the woman knew the family they were getting married into. For single women who had yet to find a partner, these women advocated that women should try to find a partner whose family was educated as this may lend the daughter-in-law more freedom in her daily activities. Ramona additionally insisted that finding a

partner whose family was less traditional was vital because despite belonging to the same endogamous group, she felt that she was “in a culture shock” and did not know how to fully manage the barrage of expectations her partner’s family placed upon her.

All three women stated that there was an enormous lack of services for women such as themselves and expressed interest in having support groups stating that the focus group really allowed them to sort through the complex issues they faced on a daily basis. Further, they remarked on how the focus group had provided an opportunity to discover different techniques that other women were using to maintain their “sanity”. They also felt that a public forum to educate the South Asian community would be greatly beneficial to discuss issues of abuse daughter-in-laws receive in the community, out of date gender role expectations, balancing western and eastern values, as well as generation gap problems.

SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

The focus group findings directly highlight many of the findings in the literature. One of the main findings was the dichotomy of being socialized to achieve professionally by western standards while simultaneously being pressured to conform to a rigid set of rules and expectations by not only their own family but also by the family into which they married. This resulted in the women learning to switch identities to suit their situation as well as constantly proving to their in-laws that they were behaving properly and to the standard of their in-laws. For these three women, the standards directly related to the socialization of the women playing the domestic role. If they played their domestic

role properly, they were highly venerated by their in-laws. However, these women described how it was a never ending struggle to maintain and surpass the ever rising bar that was set for them by their in-laws. Anita highlighted this ever rising bar by describing how she would please her in-laws one moment and then she would have to out perform herself in her duties the next moment to get their praise again. Thus Anita found herself continuously trying to achieve “brownie points” from her in-laws to make them happy with her.

While this small study does support much of the literature regarding South Asian women, it goes further in exploring an area that has been largely absent. The focus group began to explore how these women were constantly shifting their identities to fit different situations. They found themselves constantly trying to adjust their words and actions to please their in-laws and prove that they were worthy wives for their husbands. Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita all felt silenced in their ability to talk about their experiences or how they felt with their husbands. They all felt restricted in what they could and couldn't do within the family system. Also, they felt overwhelming emotions that they had to suppress as they had no place to process what they were going through. Thus, for all three women symptoms of depression and anxiety emerged. This was combined with a lack of ability to communicate their feelings and experiences, and limited knowledge of how to cope.

As such South Asian servicing organizations need to begin addressing the issues that these daughter-in-laws are facing within their marital family unit. The role of the daughter-in-law should be deconstructed and support services such as counseling and community education and advocacy should be encouraged to assist married South Asian

women break free from traditional role expectations and find a voice within their community. For as all three women pointed out in the focus group, there are no services to deal with the internalized feelings of never being good enough at being an Indian daughter-in-law.

The limitations of this study were that only three women were interviewed, all of which were employed social workers who participated in a time limited focus group. A larger sample could provide a greater number of themes that may not have been addressed with this group of women. Also, as these women were all social workers, they all had an understanding of issues such as depression and anxiety, and coping, and were aware of and able to concretely verbalize their internalization and experiences. Finally, all three women wanted to talk longer than the ninety minute allotted time frame. If they had been given the opportunity to speak to each question and share their individual stories with no time constraints, there could have been a greater depth of information. While all three women felt inept in successfully negotiating their multiple identities, they all displayed resiliency, adaptability, and determination in navigating the conflictual numerous roles and expectations to which they were subject.

Areas for future research should examine the role of the mother-in-law as this group of women has also not been widely studied within the South Asian community and thus could provide an excellent balance to the voices of South Asian daughter-in-laws. Further, deconstructing the mother-in-law role will presumably highlight similarities that this group of women has experienced to that of their daughter-in-laws. By finding the similarities or common ground that women experience in South Asian families can desist

from the women competing against each other and allow for mutual aid in breaking patriarchal gender constructions within the community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

PATRIARCHY AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

It is important to expose the engrained gender ideas in both men and women in the South Asian culture. This can be accomplished by examining existing attitudes people have and to find ways to change patriarchal gender ideas. Bhanot and Senn (2007) found in researching South Asian university students that “lower levels of acculturation are related to more restrictive and conservative beliefs about the roles of men and women” (p. 25) and thus related to “higher acceptance” of the subordinate role of women in the community. Bhanot and Senn (2007) used this study to determine how gender roles can be affected by acculturation. Their findings indicated that as South Asian people integrated more within mainstream society, friends helped to change attitudes and beliefs about gender roles. Further, education and men associating more with women as student peers helped to decrease strict gender role ideas. This was important as previously genders in the South Asian community were strictly segregated thus making it easier to maintain gender role attitudes. They further argue that “from a prevention perspective... efforts should be focused on changing traditional gender role attitudes in South Asian men” (Bhanot & Senn, 2007, p. 31). The researchers suggest that this can be accomplished through educational interventions that speak about gender equality. Community education is an important part of transforming traditional gender role ideas between men and women.

A method that can be used to bring about community education and action is the use of performance. By using Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Sajnani & Nadeau (2006) found that they were able to show how issues in the South Asian community are a collective problem related to structural racism visible minorities experience within Canadian society as well as gender oppression that is experienced in the cultural dynamic. They raised issues through workshops that exposed the common problems South Asian women were experiencing within the community. The audience was actively engaged in the performance and facilitators were able to help people connect issues of race and gender into the intersecting dynamics experienced by people. While this may not directly stop the gender oppression and racism that South Asian women experience within their ethnic community and Canadian society, it helped to "conceptualize our community performances as part of a longer term community organizing strategy" (Sajnani & Nadeau, 2006, p. 52). By keeping issues that are a collective problem in the public arena and allowing for ongoing discussions, the taboo and shame around women voicing the oppression they face within the community can begin to be intruded and eliminated.

Understanding the paradigm of patriarchy that many second generation South Asian women experience is vital for social workers while working with this ethnic group as it sheds light on the realities and lived experiences these women face on a daily basis. Patriarchy is embedded deeply in the collectivist culture of the South Asian community and lends to strict gender roles and expectations voiced by Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita. While it is vital to be aware of patriarchy, it is also paramount that social workers allow South Asian women to voice their own stories and experiences. For as there were many

similarities between Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita's stories, there were also differences in how patriarchy surfaced in their lives. Thus, it is important that social workers not make assumptions on which cultural practices may lead to depression, anxiety, and stress. Workers should encourage women to uncover their own truths and realities when attempting to challenge the patriarchal structures in which they live.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

In many South Asian families, people live in a joint family system and often women in this family unit experience emotional stress “not only from the desire of the male to control and dominate his spouse, but also from the desire of other women to reinforce their own authority within the home” (Agnew, 1998, p. 171). A new bride in the family will have to find her place within the home next to a sister-in-law and a mother-in-law. This hierarchy makes it difficult for women to challenge gender roles collectively as the women in the family are also competing for status.

Traditionally a women would have support from her brothers and fathers should her new family cause her emotional harm; however, as immigrants in a new country, “economic hardship may encourage the natal family to turn their backs...on sisters and daughters, because they are unable to provide for them” (Agnew, 1998, p. 171). Also, as described by the women in the focus group, second generation South Asian women often avoid telling their natal family problems they are experiencing to protect them from worrying.

One of the major deterrents for South Asian women to speak about issues in their marital dynamic is that South Asian cultures highly regard family honor and try to avoid shaming the family at all costs. Thus, many South Asian women refrain from seeking internal supports through their network of extended family members because of the eastern cultural value of saving face and keeping private issues hidden. The importance of outwardly appearing as though there are no problems in the family can lead women to find external professional support services.

For the women who participated in the focus group, the group was a great experience for them as they were able to process the feelings they had been experiencing in their roles as daughters-in-law. They recommended that a useful formal professional service for South Asian women would be support groups that allow women to discuss issues that are important to them. Support groups would also allow for building connections with other women experiencing similar situations and thus encourage mutual aid in resolving issues within the collective family system. Pande (2002) describes how when South Asian women come together as a collective and slowly open up and discuss the issues they are facing within their marriage, they can form a close bond. This bonding allows for mutual aid as the women do not feel alone. Thus, having support groups for South Asian women would be useful in breaking the silence of what they face in their daily lives. By allowing South Asian women to discuss issues that are important to them critical consciousness raising can take place thus allowing these women to administer some control over their lives and realize their strength in numbers.

A major issue encountered by South Asian service providers is that women may take a longer time to open up and fully disclose why they are seeking services. This may

be due to feelings of being unsure of whom to trust, feelings of being disloyal to the family system and culture, and being afraid of the consequences that may occur as a result of women breaking the silence. This is problematic as community-based organizations often employ brief intervention strategies. Thus South Asian women may be unable to get the long-term service that is required to allow for them to fully engage in the service process.

In working with South Asian women, Agnew (1998) argues that it takes time for women to speak about issues they face within the community as culturally “they may believe that difficulties should be resolved privately without seeking the help of outsiders, which could bring shame to the family and cause a loss of face” (Agnew, 1998, p. 166). Further these women, more often than not, prefer to talk to other South Asian women professionals in as much as having a similar racial background can eliminate the fear of being misunderstood or having to be cautious about explaining or defending cultural beliefs about the family, gender roles, and identities. Thus it is vital that when South Asian women do access service, they be given the time to build trust with service providers and process their experiences at their own pace.

CONCLUSION

The identity negotiation of second generation South Asian women who are involved in endogamous relationships is a unique and challenging area of research that should be more closely examined in future studies. As described in this paper, their identities are continuously shifting, contradictory, and they frequently experience emotional stress as they navigate between the western and eastern worlds. These women face being “too American by South Asian standards and too South Asian by white American standards...part of two worlds, but belong to neither” (Doshi, 1996, p. 209).

More often than not, South Asian women’s voices are silenced and cultural gender norms and expectations limit these women from accessing services. Those that do seek out support are often faced with responding to cultural stereotypes of domestic violence and powerlessness in belonging to a “backward” and patriarchal ethnic community. While many of the cultural practices women experience are patriarchal in nature, South Asian women need to be given the space to name their oppression and come to their own realization of how patriarchy impacts their lives.

Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita all echoed the importance of having counseling services and support groups for married South Asian women stating that these resources would be invaluable for the community at addressing issues such as the role of women in the family, abuse, and generation gap issues. Thus, as second generation South Asian women begin accessing services through support groups and counseling, it is important that social workers working with these women understand their historical and political backgrounds. South Asian servicing agencies must recognize that each woman’s

experience is unique in how patriarchy impacts them. Servicing agencies must attempt to support South Asian women uncover the multiple layers of oppression they encounter.

Finally, Jasmine, Ramona, and Anita all called for community education in breaking the silence of private family issues that maintain gender oppression. Through community forums or through events such as the Theatre of the Oppressed, private issues can become public collective spaces that call for change. Further, Pyles & Postmus (2004) highlight the importance of the women being able to name their issues, having their voices heard, addressing the needs they voice, and confronting the structural and political policies that women must navigate. Further, all women serving agencies must go back to the days of early feminism and re-commit to advocacy and systemic social change. Only then can the structural barriers South Asian women experience be broken down and equality and justice be achieved.

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