

*South Asian Insider, April 18, 2006*

**SWAMAAN SE JIYO:**

**Ending the Violence and Empowering Women**

**Part III**

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“Why doesn’t she just leave him?” “Why did she stay so long with him?” “She seems so smart – how could she let this happen?” These are some of the common questions that people ask when faced with a survivor of domestic violence. In order to fully understand why women stay in marriages or “relationships” with controlling and abusive men, it is important to remember that domestic violence is not a one time event, but is the result of a calculated and deliberate pattern of behavior that is used to gain or maintain control over a woman. Women in the south asian community, like other immigrant women, have unique cultural obstacles to overcome since male authority and control are accepted by many to be the norm. Despite a formal education, many south asian women are socially conditioned by their mothers, grandmothers, and aunts since childhood that they must learn to endure a man’s “temper” if they are to be deemed a “good wife”. It is very difficult for south asian women to recognize the situation as it gets worse, and slowly they find themselves in what appears to be inescapable.

Many women and their families do not even realize for many years that the man’s behavior they dismissed as being “a man” or “hot-tempered” was actually a series of different tactics used to isolate the woman from her family and friends and to create a dependency of the woman on the man. Once isolation and dependency are in place, the abuser can exercise complete control over the victim. By gaining control over the woman, the abuser makes it extremely difficult for a woman to leave the situation, especially if there are children involved. Thus, the woman is caught in a whirlwind of emotions, fear, and insecurity.

The two most significant tactics used by an abuser to create dependency are the control of the woman’s finances and using emotional tactics to eliminate her self-confidence and self-determination.

In many reported cases where financial or economic abuse was present, the abusers had actively sought out women who had very poor educational backgrounds or who came from poor families, thereby restricting any future financial independence. In cases where a woman did have a reasonable education and income earning capacity, the abuser used a deliberate strategy to slowly gain control and limit the woman’s ability to earn or spend money. For example, what appears to be a “traditional” request that the woman not work but stay at home and care for the family may

actually turn out to be part of the overall plan to cut off a woman's ability to earn a living on her own, thereby limiting her if she thinks of leaving the situation later.

Other examples of financial or economic abuse include demanding the woman to turn over her paycheck, make it difficult for her to maintain a job, or account for every penny she spends. Some women have been forced to commit illegal activities for money such as sell drugs, shoplift, or even engage in illicit sex.

Unfortunately, financial dependency combined with threats, control, and isolation results in many women with limited finances being forced to choose between staying in an abusive situation or being poor and homeless. If there are children, many women try to convince themselves that even though their situation is terrible, at least the children have shelter and food. What many do not realize until much later is that despite their efforts to protect and provide for their children, children raised in a violent household suffer psychological and emotional damage. Worse, more than 80% of children raised in a domestic violence situation have a likelihood of exhibiting violent behavior as adults.

The other type of dependency that the abuser creates in a domestic violence situation is emotional dependency through various tactics. Emotional dependency on the abuser by the woman results in the woman having immense feelings of insecurity over lifestyle changes such as divorce and single parenting, self-dependence, and a possible lack of financial/ emotional support from her family and society. As discussed earlier, many south asian women are socially conditioned to be "good" wives and mothers, regardless of a bad situation. If they want to leave an abusive situation, many fear that their families will abandon them or they will lose their social status.

To create the emotional dependency, the abuser uses tactics such as insulting or humiliating the woman, making her feel bad about herself, calling her names, making her think she's crazy or unstable, playing mind games, or making her feel guilty about her children or family members. At other times, the abuser begs the woman's forgiveness, promises to make amends with family members, and convinces her that it is "us" against "them". The result is a strange sort of attachment that occurs between the abuser and the victim. The woman unconsciously chooses to overlook or even deny the abuse, and tries to focus on the good times to convince herself that he will change. This results in a constant fear and dread of the next potential outburst, while restraining the woman from leaving.

Organizations such as the Asian Women's Alliance for Kinship & Equality understand the pain and suffering endured by these women. These organizations offer counseling services, financial support, and seminars to help survivors of domestic violence empower themselves and move forward on the road to recovery. The key to remember is that it does not matter how long a woman was in an abusive situation, or why she stayed in the situation so long. The important aspect is that it

is never too late for a woman's life to be given a second chance at happiness and freedom from fear.

The next article will focus on the laws concerning domestic violence and information as to where survivors of domestic violence can receive assistance.

If you or someone you know is in an abusive situation, the following organizations may be contacted for immediate help: National Domestic Violence Hotline (800) 799-SAFE; Asian Women's Alliance for Kinship & Equality (845) 368-2011.

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