CRITICAL REVIEW

From Multi- to Interculturalism? Domestic Violence Faced by British South Asian Women

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the plight of South Asian women in Britain, highlighting the effects of government policies on marginalised women within the community. This is an analysis from a human welfare perspective in response to the critiques, theories and policies while containing a gendered analysis of violence. The vulnerable position of South Asian diasporic women- as per the race, class, gender, ethnicity divisions- due to rigid, 'outdated' cultural norms, limited language skills, marginalisation, and neglect from the government authorities exacerbate the severity of abuse and injustice towards women. While policies keep changing, violence towards South Asian women remains mostly unchanged.

British South Asian women, Domestic Violence, Multiculturalism, Human Rights.

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Introduction

Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent human rights abuses in the world. It is a threat to all women, and an obstacle to all our efforts for development, peace, and gender equality in all societies.

 Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary General, 2007.

An oft-heard truism in traditional feminist discourses on domestic violence[1] is that domestic abuse affects women irrespective of their class, race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. In contrast with the past, transnational feminists today have increasingly questioned and dismantled this view by highlighting how specific acts of abuse and their impacts vary with different dimensions of culture and identity (Raj and Silverman, 2002; Cline 2003; Burman and Chantler, 2005; Anitha 2008). It has been argued that negligence of such differences can make specific experiences of "minoritised" groups invisible, especially South Asian[2] (Batsleer et al., 2002; Thiara and Gill, 2012). Studies state that suicide and self harm rates among South Asian women in Britain are 3-5 times higher than among white females (Marshall& Yazdani, 1999; Husain et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2010; Wood, 2011). It is important to pause here and probe the reasons for

domestic violence against South Asian women in Britain and the responses of the UK government in addressing the issue. Within these contexts, this article tries to analyse the following: What are the main factors that contribute towards violence against women in British South Asian communities? What is the role of 'culture' in this context? How far do British government policies and immigration laws prove helpful to tackle the issue of domestic violence on South Asian women?

Domestic violence and abuse are serious problems affecting societal development and progress. Domestic violence may be displayed in various modes as domination, control and compulsion to act and think in a certain way through intimidation, pressure and threatening (Ashcraft, 2000). More recent research on the topic indicates that violence against women extends to teenage-dating couples as well, (the issue becomes concerning due to the age and the less likely chances to gain external support and legality) which underlines a serious, careful scrutiny of the problem (Burke and Owen, 2006). An extensive amount of research is done on domestic violence in general with a focus on white women (Richardson, 2002; Grady, 2002; Walby and Allen, 2004; Burton 2009; Herring, 2011). However, current works are found to include the victimized status of black and other minority women as well (Henning and Klesges, 2002; Lee et al., 2002; Emily et al., 2005; Banga and Gill, 2008; Lombard and McMillan (eds.), 2012). Weisz and Bennett (1998) and Harris et.al (2001) explain the highly commendable role played by community service groups in offering help to abused women and children while Gilbert and Sanghera (2004) elaborate on the impediments in accessing such services, foregrounding the concept of family honour and fear as psychopathological reasons that block battered women from seeking help. Tjaden and Thoeness (2000) indicate that rates of partner violence,

rape and assault remain higher in South Asian families (37.5%) when compared to whites (24.8%). However, they indicate the need for more research to determine how much of the difference in intimate partner prevalence rates among different ethnic backgrounds can be clearly explained. South Asian women are also significantly more likely to experience relationship problems within the family than white women with rates of 32% and 19% respectively. (Cooper & Husain, 2008). Grossman and Lundy (2007) argue that the variables of poverty, immigration status, socio-cultural factors and personal history of violence contribute to violence against South Asian migrant women. However, research on the role of government policies and immigration laws in influencing the life of diasporic women -especially British South Asian women and their deprived status- remains limited. There is a marked lack of literature on the experiences of victimised South Asian women in Britain (Gill, et al., 2010). This article gains prominence in this context where South Asians represent the largest minority group in Britain today[3]. The article critiques that British Government policies are proved ineffective to keep up the liberal values of equity, justice and fairness in the case of South Asian women in the UK, who are often suppressed in the name of 'cultural relativism' and remain frequent casualties of patriarchy (Chaitali, 2012). I probe how inequalities created by culture, race, class and gender intersect with British state legislation and welfare policies, thereby strengthening patriarchal structures and aggravating violence within minority immigrant communities. Within this context, I intend to highlight the vulnerability of South Asian women with insecure immigrant status as victims of intensified forms of domestic violence and abuse. Besides the converging dimensions of gender, culture, and class, British state policies on immigration and welfare and racist responses by service providers influence immigrant women's experiences of oppression

(Batsleer et al., 2002; Donnelly et al., 2005; Anitha, 2010). South Asian women with insecure immigration status face violence as well as specific patterns of abuse, that can be attributed to the imbalance of power between the perpetrators and the victimized; an imbalance created by the immigration laws which leave them with very few viable alternatives, there by reinforcing the patriarchal structures within their communities (SBS& Women's Resource Centre, 2006; Anitha, 2008).

Patriarchy is considered by some as a major oppressive structure that renders the victims of domestic violence particularly vulnerable (Dobash and Dobash, 1980; Chaitali, 2012). Myriads of other components like gender, class, race, culture, religion, age, and familial patterns are also related to the context within which abuse is built up (Gilligan and Akhtar, 2006). Patriarchal expressions vary according to social positions and the historical uniqueness of the migration (Menjivaar, 1999). To understand the immigrant South Asian patriarchy, it is necessary to have a brief outline of the cultural frame in the subcontinent.

The role of South Asian cultural structures and beliefs in perpetrating violence against women

Patriarchy is 'a system of society or government in which men hold power and women are largely excluded from it'[4]. This ideology is a major decisive factor in mapping the gender-power relations that produce much hue and cry in cultural parleys and policy rooms (Nicolson, 2010; Fawcett, 2007; Wilcox 2012). Though some consider patriarchy as universal, its intensity depends on the region and culture within which it is practiced (Hapke, 2013). Some authors note South Asia's reputation of severe manifestations and widespread practice of patriarchy and female subjugation (Prasad, 1999; Johnson &Johnson, 2001;

Niaz, 2003). In South Asian countries, family forms a well-knit institution to impart cultural values. A traditional South Asian family unit is a joint patrilineal group with an elderly male figure as the head (Ballard, 1982; Thandi &Lloyd, 2011). Married females are expected to live with the husband's family, though natal family bonds could be retained (Kandiyoti, 1988). The character of the family design varies with religion and subcultures; monogamy remains strict in some cultures, while polygamy is permitted in some others, especially in Islam (Harriet, 2008). But due to the impact of urbanization, secularization and migration, joint family system has become a myth in the South Asian socio-cultural make-up. At the same time, repercussions of patriarchy still persist within South Asian familial structure (Kandiyoti, 1988; Harrison, 2012). Religious dogma, class and caste system, dowry, the concept of 'izzat'/honour, poverty are the major factors which invigorate patriarchy (Abraham, 2002; Dasgupta, 2007).

Although 'culture', 'faith' and holy texts are closely linked with the lives of South Asian women, some academics argue that that these could prove to be sources of oppression as well (Bachu, 1993; Thiara and Gill, 2010). For example, the Vedic Hindu ideals of 'nari puja' (women worship) gradually faded and gave way to adverse social practices like 'Sati' (self-immolation), child marriage and female feticide (Allen and Dwivedi, 1998; Moore, 2004). Islamic principles abolished female feticide since the seventeenth century, yet many primitive customs such as female genital mutilation, forced marriage and 'honor killings' were encouraged (Zaidi, Ramarajan et.al, 2009). Although cultural and religious reforms have been instituted by Indian intellectuals and British colonial officials in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, South Asia has not yet succeeded to free itself totally from the 'fetters' of dogmas, failing to correspond effectively to the

changing colour and character of modern world. As Sri Sri Ravishankar, the Spiritual Guru from India, rightly stated in the *World Parliament of Religions* speech on September 11, 2006:

> *"Religion is like the banana peel and spirituality is the banana. Today we have thrown away the banana and are holding onto the peel."*

People seem to have missed to imbibe the essence of religion and cling to the corpus of outdated doctrines.

Forced Marriage is another factor existing in South Asian communities that supports patriarchic structures. Although forced marriage affects a small number of BME women originating from Africa and the Middle East (Hester et al, 2008), research indicates that, within the UK, the issue primarily affects women originating from the Indian sub-continent (Foreign Commonwealth and Home Office 2005, p. 15). Within many British South Asian communities, parents view forced marriage as a means to stem the influence of Western culture over their daughters, or to end their daughters' associations with 'unsuitable partners' (Gangoli et al., 2006). Since marriage remains one of the few means of settlement in the UK for im/migrant communities, especially from South Asia, girls are often pushed into a marital life forcibly by extracting consent through intense duress (Shaw, 2001). Census statistics suggest that, within the UK, the median age in South Asian communities to enter into marriage depends on religious rather national or ethnic categories; with young Muslims in the age group of 16-24 are more likely to be married than their counterparts in Sikh and Hindu communities (National Statistics online, Census, 2001). In 2005, a total of 27,285 women came to the UK for the probationary period on the basis of their marriage or engagement. Among these, 11,310 were from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (Home Office 2006). However, it is difficult to obtain accurate figures of forced marriage because of the difficulties of distinguishing between coercion and consent: research among South Asian communities in the UK indicates that, while most people perceive a difference between arranged and forced marriages, they also recognize some overlap (Gangoli et al. 2006; Gill and Anitha, 2009).

Research on domestic violence point that gender inequalities underlies women's risk of experiencing domestic violence (Jewkes, 2002; World Health Organisation (WHO), 2002; Venkataramani- Kothari, 2007). In South Asia, women are expected to marry early, bear children, manage household chores and look after the family (Goel, 2005). Upon marriage, as stated above, natal relationships weaken and women face intense pressure in various forms such as familial responsibilities, pregnancy, and malaise arising from dowry which may result in post-marital violence (Barua and Kurz, 2001; Krishnan, 2005; Rocca et al., 2009). According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 40% of a representative sample of Indian women of reproductive age had experienced physical (35%), sexual (10%), or emotional (16%) violence from their husbands or parents-in-law (NFHS, 2007). The rate of marital rapes in South Asia remains difficult to determine as only a few women seem to accept that they are the victims of this form of domestic violence (Niaz, 2003). Such attitudes of 'non acceptance' of being abused happen mainly because of traditional reluctance in registering sexual grievances in the public and also due to lack of courage to question the existing pattern of gender relations (Bhatia, 2012). Lack of education, poor living conditions, unemployment, and poor governmental support amplify the condition. These statistics are relevant to understand the degree of violence experienced by British South Asian women as research suggests that British families from the Indian subcontinent incline to reproduce their class and sectarian communities, based on regional and linguistic

identities (Gangoli et al., 2009). At the same time, it is essential to note that while labour market opportunities increase women's bargaining power within the household, they may have unintended negative effects for women if work alters relationships within South Asian households and their husbands respond with increased acts of domestic violence (Anderson & Eswaran, 2009; Eswaran & Malhotra, 2011).

Patriarchy, domestic violence and British South Asian women

Some argue that the older form of Western patriarchy continues to die away due to increased education as well as women's autonomy and economic independence (Mintz, 1998). But severe manifestations of patriarchy and violence against women are visible among the immigrant communities, South Asians in particular (Ahmad et al, 2009; Freeman, 2010; Chaitali, 2012). The Office for National Statistics discloses that nearly 1.2 million domestic violence cases on women were reported to the Police in 2011/12 ((ONS, 2013)), although the number of victims of South Asian origin are not specified. A recent survey on British South Asian women's primary health care revealed that 56% experienced domestic abuse: 46% from their husbands and 10% from their mothers-in-law, 76% of the victims were unaware of helpline services while 83% found language inability to be a barrier to seeking help (Government Office for London, 2009). A small percentage feared deportation upon approaching helpline services. South Asian women who do leave a violent home are significantly more likely to suffer from substantial emotional and material problems than white women who quit violent relationships (Humphreys and Thiara, 2003).

The impermanent residence status of immigrant women makes them more vulnerable to unfavourable expressions of patriarchy (Goel, 2005). Along with the racial discriminations they face from wider society, they are confronted with specific difficulties due to their linguistic inabilities, economic dependence, cultural barriers and uneducated status (Rai & Thiara, 1997, Imkaan 2008). These factors block them from accessing the services and support provisions given to victimized women (Reitz, 1995; Anitha, 2008; Gill and Anitha, 2009; Ahmad et al., 2009). Apart from acculturation stress, immigrant women have to bear the burden of multiple care-giving responsibilities, looking after their homes and families, thereby trapped in the "old fashioned" economic dependency within the family (Dasgupta, 2000; Anitha 2010). The situation becomes worse when traditional gender roles are challenged once families arrive in more liberal, less traditional Western countries. This becomes a salient fact in countries like the United Kingdom, which has an large proportion of migrants from South Asian communities (Anitha, 2011). It is noteworthy that some cases of violence and honour-based crimes on South Asian women in the UK have attracted international attention.

Reported cases on domestic violence and murder are not confined to South Asian women (Crime Survey of England and Wales, 2013). However, South Asian women are at the forefront of victimization due to abuse (Dasgupta, 2000; Ahmad et al., 2009). The silent sufferings of violence and sexual degradation create serious health difficulties such as depression, suicidal tendencies, self- harm and battered woman syndrome (WHO 2000; Home Office 2001; Mazelis 2008). Children who witness violence are at high risk of developing anti-social and resentful behaviour (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008; Devaney.J, 2008). Physical and psychological assaults on mothers who experience domestic violence can produce negative and serious behavioural issues in the children who witness abuse (Stanley N, 2011; Yoo, 2012). Hence "supporting

a non-violent parent is likely to be the most effective way of promoting the child's welfare" (Her Majesty's Government, 2006). Such aids and assistance in unsafe environments help both mothers and their children to gain strength, respond effectively, and gain a clear focus to move forward.

Help lines and support offered to battered women

There are a few organizations which work towards the protection of women's rights in the UK to offer shelter and help to battered and abused women and children in the UK. *Southall Black Sisters (SBS)*, *Karma Nirvana*, *Refuge*, *Women's Aid*, and the *Black Association of Women Step Out (BAWSO)* are some of the main organizations that provide help for those who need it. In the aftermath of violent incidents, these organizations offer a range of services like protection, shelter, legal advice, stress relief and health aids, and raise awareness about domestic violence, its impact and prevention. Apart from these, the campaigns led by these organisations have made considerable impact in the Governmental policy making. In 2011, *Southall Black Sisters* successfully blocked the government proposed cuts for legal aid[5] for victimized women seeking to stay in the UK through immigration applications under the Domestic Violence Act. SBS has also intervened in the *Quila and Bibi*[6] case to amend the age related policies on immigration and marriages. *Karma Nirvana* is another national charity situated in Leeds supporting the victims of forced marriages and violence to come out of the vicious cycle of abuse. They formulate and execute training programmes where the casualties are given a platform to share their experiences, guidance and emotional support are provided and assistance rendered at emergencies. *Refuge* is a safe house in Chiswick for women and children that have survived domestic violence. This organisation provides protection campaigns in support of policies implementing policies in support of abused women and children. They give training, counselling and education to victims as to support the prevention of further violence and abuse. *Bawso* is a specialist support group for victimized minority women in Wales. They provide assistance to exploited women in terms of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, human trafficking and prostitution. *Women's Aid* is a registered charity across the UK to help women and children who experience domestic violence and sexual abuse. All these support groups provide protection to victims of domestic violence and seek to end violence against vulnerable women and children by influencing government policies and practice through campaigns, discussions, and programs to raise awareness on the topic[7].

While the numbers of community-specific charitable help lines for battered South Asian women remain considerably low due to lack of adequate funding[8] from the State, the numbers of those that seek help are also relatively low (Anitha, 2010). A combination of contextual and vulnerable factors multiplies the obstacles (Patel and Siddiqui, 2010). The sense of '*izzat*'[9] or shame plays an important role in the power dynamics of cultural rules (Izzidien, 2008). In South Asian culture, the subordination and control of female constitutes 'honour', while a failure to do so is considered to put shame onto the community. This is held as a justification for the 'honour killing' of women who break 'the rules'. Research says that most women shun from utilizing the help line facilities due to the fear of losing their '*izzat*' or honour in the community (Imam, 1999; Gill, 2003; Izzidien, 2008). Embarrassment and a perceived lack of confidentiality also blocks them from discussing their problems with others and seeking help (Batsleer, 2002, Gill and Anitha, 2009). The recent decision by Ealing Council to

withdraw the funding to SBS on grounds of 'cohesion' and 'equality' was challenged and succeeded with continuous appeals, campaigns and support from the benefitted and other specialist support groups (SBS, 2012). At this juncture, it is important to look into the contribution of government policies rooted in a desire to nurture multiculturalism, cohesion and interculturalism in addressing the issue.

Multiculturalism, Cohesion and Interculturalism: How the UK government could curb domestic violence

Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been the dominant social policy formula to manage relations between the state and minority communities in the UK (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992). However, some have seen the idea of multiculturalism as a failure to distinguish between valid cultural demands or fundamental human rights, including the right to not to be subjected to discrimination and racism (Malik, 2007; Patel and Siddiqui, 2010). A significant change in the multicultural policy framework was sparked by the 9/11 attacks, when the UK government attempted to promote a 'cohesion' agenda by encouraging the creation of 'faith communities' (Cantle, 2009). Interculturalism is a current policy approach where new opportunities are constructed across cultures to nurture intercultural action- plans and activities by reducing the tendency of segregation between communities (Cantle, 2012). While multiculturalism fails to move beyond a celebration of difference, interculturalism can be seen as the encouragement to understand other's cultures, sharing them and finding a common base at which human welfare can thrive (NewStart Magazine, 2006). Still, the relationship between international human rights law and multi/intercultural accommodation within countries remains undeniably problematic (Gill, 2006). The reconciliation human rights and cultural diversity through intercultural dialogue should

emphasise women's rights if it is to open a rich and transformative dialogue (Gill and Mitra-Kahn, 2010). A thorough study of the gendered impact of these policies is important to examine to what extent governmental actions are positive to women, in voicing the silenced vulnerable women from ethnic minority communities in the UK. Multiculturalism faces criticism for its failure to grasp the dynamic character of culture. South Asian diasporic identities are often viewed as static, possessive and homogeneous rather than having a fluid and heterogeneous nature. Identities, ethnic or otherwise, are not freely chosen, (Worsley, 1984, p.246) rather, as McLaren (1997) asserts, identity choices are structured by class, ethnic and gender stratification, objective constraints and historical determinations. Even though 'cohesion' policies claim to grant equal recognition for all (including minority groups), it provides the breeding ground for racists to demand more 'rights for whites' (Patel and Siddiqui, 2010). As George Orwell observed satirically in his famous allegorical and dystopian novel Animal Farm, "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 2002, p. 114).

Group rights have been emphasised as a central parameter to straightening problems related to particular communities, most notably Muslims (Murphy, 2012). Multicultural theorists disagree to a great extend on the issue of minority group rights (Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2000). The drawback of focusing on group rights is that the "minorities within the minority" (Eisenberg, Spinner- Halev, 2002) remain disadvantaged and vulnerable.

Shachar writes:

"Multicultural accommodation presents a problem… when pro-identity group policies aimed at leveling the playing field between minority communities and the wider society unwittingly allow systematic maltreatment of individuals within the

accommodated group—an impact which in certain cases is so severe that it can nullify these individuals' citizenship rights. Under such conditions, well-meaning accommodation by the state may leave members of minority groups vulnerable to severe injustice within the group, and may, in effect, work to reinforce some of the most hierarchical elements of a culture."
(Shachar 2001, pp.2-3).

Kymlicka (1995) discusses two kinds of group rights: i) minority rights that voice the interests of minority groups and ii) minority rights that control and prescribe order for their own members. Kymlicka fails to mention within-group distinctions relevant to the public as well as private sphere, such as gender and class. This issue becomes denser in the case of religion, gender and sexuality where confusion exists about which rules should be passed on in line with publicly shared values. The controversial practices of forced arranged marriage or clitoridectomy are examples of this (Fish, 1997; Anthias, 2002; Kymlicka, 2007). Multiculturalism claims support for the survival and preservation of diasporic ethnic cultures and traditions. However, certain elements of ethnic cultures can prove harmful or disadvantageous for women, and some observe the glorification of these under the flag of multiculturalism to damage women's rights (Okin, 1999, Anthias, 2002).

The clash between multiculturalism and women's rights has been clearly put forward by the American political scientist Susan Moller Okin in her essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" (Okin, 1999). In this work, Okin (1999) states that the monolithic advocation of the group rights of each diasporic culture by liberal multiculturalists degenerated women's conditions within patriarchal diasporic cultures settled in Western nation states. Okin's critics point out that she falls into the trap of generalizing all diasporic communities as crude and regressive by concentrating

on extreme cases of the subordination of women (Cohen et al., 1999). In his *Liberalism's Sacred Cow*, Bhabha warns Okin about the danger of creating a monolithic discourse of the cultural stereotype based merely on cultural defence cases (Bhabha, 1999). Okin speaks for a liberal multiculturalism by reducing 'woman' as an abstraction, without appreciating the diversity of her roles in different stages of life, thereby establishing the hegemony of liberalism which sets parameters for non liberalist cultures (Parekh, 1999). Avigail Eisenberg explains the reasons for the apparent incompatibility between cultural autonomy and gender equality (Eisenberg, 2003).

"One of the main explanations for [the] deprived state is found in the cultural traditions and practices that shape women's lives and define their status within their communities. Second, even though sexism is ubiquitous, gender inequality in marginalized groups often provides a thin edge of a thick wedge that leaves vulnerable claims to cultural autonomy for minority groups. Together, these two factors give rise to a conundrum whereby measures aimed at promoting cultural autonomy are viewed as hostile to the achievement of gender equality, while measures aimed at promoting gender equality are viewed as threats to cultural autonomy."
(Eisenberg, 2003, p.41).

Equality and justice to cultural diasporic groups should be granted in such a way as to ensure the well-being of less powerful and weaker members within the group. Often it is the older, male-dominated voice that sounds loud to represent the interests of the groups. Yet multicultural policies should be directed towards giving adequate representation to women as well, reinforcing gender equality without harming their interests.

Multiculturalism is accused of an unhealthy promotion of cultural differences that risks distraction from various core problems of injustice like racial and

gender discrimination, where the bottom-line subjects remain marginalised and unheard (Gill and Mitra-Kahn, 2010). At this juncture, the significance of the enlacement of gender and identity politics in a culturally diverse democracy comes to the fore. Floya Anthias redevises 'difference' as to think in terms of imaginings around boundaries and positionality referring to "hierarchical" difference (Anthias 2002). The issue of multiculturalism and feminism must be located in the context of racism and other forms of exclusion faced by diasporic ethnic groups as well as the position of women within them (Thiara and Gill, 2010). This should be viewed as an issue beyond patriarchy and ethnicity as women from all ethnic groups may also become participants in exploiting other women, especially in the case of female members of diaspora (Bachu, 1996). One cannot ignore the some important shifts that appeared in the practice of multiculturalism as a result of the struggles led by black feminists of which the approval of the Forced Marriage Bill is the most important along with the acknowledgement of the then Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien that multiculturalism could not be an excuse for moral blindness. However, the changes in the State's race relations approach seems incompatible to minority women, including South Asians (Patel and Siddiqui, 2010). On one side, the State appears to curb gender-based violence, although it makes use of the same issue to tighten immigration policies (Patel, 2010). Similarly, the adoption of a 'faith-based' approach seems to reinforce unequal gender and power relations within minority communities such as South Asians (Patel and Siddiqui, 2010, Gill and Mitra- Kahn, 2010). A recent survey by Southall Black Sisters on 'Cohesion and Integration' suggests that black and minority women reject the emphasis on 'faith-based organisations' and 'religious leaders' as key instruments in the reconstruction of local communities. They explicitly expressed that this had perpetuated more discrimination and insecurity for vulnerable members in the communities. The cohesion strategy underlines the 'clash of cultures' causing many women to reject it. They continuously negotiate their identity in ways meaningful to them and they are aware that human rights and justice are universal principles (SBS CFG Report, 2010).

Multiculturalism or Interculturalism are not the causes of domestic violence in Britain. Nevertheless policies fail to recognise cultural differences within the immigrant communities and falsely adopt a non-interference stance towards minority lifestyles. This has increased the minority women's chances of becoming marginalised, abused and tortured (Macey, 2001). Research conducted by Bilques Gores on domestic violence in South Asian communities in Bradford, a South Asian domestic violence worker concluded that:

"Britain wants to be seen as accepting minority communities…But who benefits? It's the men- white men colluding with black men…Community leaders are always ready to give their views with one distorted dimension or another which reinforces the control that they want to have over women anyway. This is multicultural politics!"
(Gores, 1999).

In a personal interview with the author, Ted Cantle, the Chairman of Institute of Community Cohesion states:

"Interculturalism is much less forgiving of 'cultural relativism' that downplays any sort of universal sense of justice and rights for women by the idea of cultural sensitivity. Women's education, forced marriage and all of the other problems that women experience from domestic violence as well as rapes have been allowed to continue under multicultural policies".
(Cantle, personal interview on 24/10/2013).

Cantle's observation highlights the inadequacy of British State policies in tackling domestic violence and ensuring a safe life for minority women. While democracy demands respect for minorities, multiculturalism often demands respect for (any and all) cultural traditions, which can include forced arranged marriages, domestic violence and even female genital mutilation (Beckett and Macey, 2001).

Conclusion

Many women from ethnic minority communities, including South Asian, are deprived of complete protection from the State as equal citizens as they are invisible (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). Although domestic violence occurs across all ethnic groups, cultural differences impact on access to services and effective intervention. Service providers therefore need to be aware that women of South Asian origin may have specific issues that need to be considered (Government Office for London (GOL), 2009). The aid given by cultural specific social service organisations in Britain to assist women who have fallen prey to domestic violence are praiseworthy. But lack of funds as well as the limited number of service groups and access impede the pace of effective measures. The parameters of race, class, gender, culture, ethnicity and law explicitly lie intertwined with this topic. British multiculturalist discourses prioritise race and ethnicity while gender inequalitites remain insufficiently considered. In this light, violence against women should be taken as a human rights issue than a cultural affair (Mirza, 2007). The conflicts between multicultural recognition and individual's rights could be reduced by providing adequate representation to South Asian immigrant women in public discussions and policies rather than bracketing them by their reduction as a homogeneous class or ethnic group. Education and awareness programmes should be organized to make these women aware of available legal procedures, their rights to self-empowerment them and to ensure a life of safety, security and dignity. An urgent reform of the law in the UK is needed in order to accommodate sufficiently the needs of immigrant women who are the victims of domestic abuse. This should entail an amendment of the evidence requirements within the Domestic Violence Rule so that the nature of violence in all forms and the obstacles to disclosure of violence that South Asian women face can be addressed effectively. The existing legislation on the aid that can be rendered to immigrant women, (including South Asian) with insecure immigration status remains open to interpretation by the local authorities (Anitha, 2011). This weakens the existing state policy on the welfare entitlement of women with insecure immigration status by leaving them vulnerable to the discretion of service providers (Collins, 2000; Raj and Silverman, 2002; Anitha 2011). In order to tackle domestic violence against South Asian women effectively, an elaborate conceptual framework that can engage with the complex configurations of state legislation and welfare policies should be designed. Furthermore, researchers should analyse how such policies intersect with the categories of race, class, gender and ethnicity. An effective legislation based on human rights should be designed to develop a more equitable and culturally neutral stance where women's rights are ensured over patriarchy and anti-social cultural practices. However, a long-term solution to the problem requires challenging the very structures of inequality that constitute individual acts of abuse. An inclusive environment should be regenerated where the finest human qualities and full potential of human life can be expressed throughout the civil society. A civil society should never be *"like standing water [that] breeds reptiles of the mind" (Blake, 1793).*

Footnotes

[1] Domestic violence usually refers to any kind of verbal, psychological or physical violence directed by a man against a woman in an intimate and legal relationship. Here, the focus is on the victimized South Asian women in Britain. The Home Office defines domestic violence as: *Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality* (Home Office, 2005).

[2] In this article, the term 'South Asian' is used to refer women who have migrated to the UK from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). However, it should be noted that 'South Asian' itself is highly heterogeneous and here, the term is used to denote aspects of cultural ideology, rituals and practices common to im/migrant communities originating from the region along with their shared political history and diasporic experiences.

[3] According to 2011 census, South Asians (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) form the largest ethnic minority group in the UK. (See http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Population).

[4] See: http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/patriarchy. See also (Lerner, 1986; Walby, 1986, 1990; Rana, Kagan and Lewis, 1998; Heywood, 2003).

[5] See: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmpublic/legalaid/110719/pm/110719s01.htm

[6] See: http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2009/3189.html

[7] *Southall Black Sisters* provides a range of advice and support services to enable South Asian and African-Caribbean women in the issues of domestic violence, forced marriages, honour killings and their intersection with criminal justice, asylum and immigration, health and poverty. *Karma Nirvana* focuses solely on supporting the victims of honour crimes and forced marriages, especially women who experience language and cultural barriers. *Refuge* supports women and children who are the victims of domestic violence by providing refuges, independent advocacy, community outreach and work with families to effect change. They organise lobbying and campaigns to educate the general public aiming to prevent domestic violence by creating awareness and information to plan a safe escape. *Women's Aid* provides Home Office approved specialist domestic and sexual violence training helping to keep women and children safe. They also offer a number of Continuing Professional Development Courses to add more helping hands to tackle domestic and sexual violence. *Bawso* gives generic and specialist servicesincluding temporary accommodation in Wales for those suffering from domestic abuse and all forms of violence; including Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Honour based violence, human trafficking and prostitution.

[8] See: http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/mar/03/refuge-chief-warns-charity-close, http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jan/31/domestic-violence-victims-risk-cuts

See also https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85548/violence-against-women.pdf (accessed on 16/06/2014).

[9] The complex set of cultural rules that a South Asian individual has to follow in order to keep the family's honour and position within the community.

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