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TRANSNATIONAL VIOLENCE: THE ISSUE OF TRANSNATIONAL ABANDONMENT

The last 15 years have clearly witnessed more changes in patterns of global communication and movement than we could have ever imagined in the eighties. Opening up of country borders to people from different regions across the world has resulted in economic, social, political and cultural exchange and creation of newer identities.

With reference to the United States, transnational migration for work, study or even travel purposes has become a common occurrence within the last decade. A larger percentage of migration to the US is by men who are employed here or come to study. They are often accompanied by their wives who are on H4/F2 or dependent visas. Essentially, on an H4/F2 visa a woman has no rights- to work/study, to practice her skills or extend herself beyond her home. When under these circumstances women face abuse and abandonment, they are often confronted with legal and political issues besides personal and social dilemmas. This form of transnational domestic violence hence takes on newer and more complicated dimensions.

The fact that today we have over 20 organizations in the United States working on the issue of violence against South Asian women serves as a direct indication of the growing South Asian population in foreign countries and their experience of domestic abuse. In the past few years, several of these South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) have confronted in their work transnational domestic violence which we term here as transnational abandonment.

Common transnational abandonment scenarios that SAWOs in the US deal with are:

- a. The "holiday brides"-This is a scenario when an immigrant man abandons his wife in the country of origin by never allowing her to immigrate or join him. So he might get married just before his departure to the foreign country, he may make visits but never process papers for his wife to immigrate, he may already have a wife or later marry another woman in the foreign country. Often he may marry, never take his wife with him, and instead send her a divorce decree from a foreign court.
- b. The second category is of the "deceptive/forcible return", which is the most common scenario we have witnessed so far. In these cases, the woman is brought to the foreign land and after a period of time taken back (under the pretext of visiting family/for a holiday) and not brought back again. She may then in many cases be served with an ex parte divorce decree from a foreign court.
- c. The third scenario is when the woman might be abandoned in the foreign country itself.

Most of the cases of Transnational Abandonment (TA) are accompanied by domestic abuse which follows a certain pattern.

Trajectory	Marriage (largely in the home country)	Abuse and Harassment (dowry demands, physical, mental, sexual)	Withdrawing of /Denial to process or extend legal papers/documents (e.g. passport, LPR, green card, marriage or birth certificate)	Abandonment (usually by taking the woman back to India)+abandonment or abduction of children/ abandonment in foreign land	Filing for divorce
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Seeking help under the given context is often not viable for the woman. Even gathering up the courage to admit that there is violence experienced at home calls for several deliberations as it's a taboo to out domestic violence (DV) into the public sphere. Often family members who in most cases are in other countries either skirt the issue or can't do much to help. Relevant government officials in both home country and the US are not aware of specific vulnerabilities of these women and/or the help that can be provided.

As SAWOs who have a clearer perspective on the issue and understand South Asian women's contexts better, we can and must put our resources together to bring this issue to light. In India a coalition of NGOs called AMAN has started addressing these concerns with the home government. AMAN India wants to expand its efforts throughout South Asia and eventually have a coalition in the United States join their efforts.

Manavi over the last 7 months collated case studies of transnational abandonment from SAWOs around the United States. We have a whopping number of 80 such case studies today! And this is only the beginning in the process of 'make enough noise' on the matter and bringing to notice the special concerns of abandoned women thereby increasing awareness and sensitivity on the part of the US government towards this population.

We appreciate your efforts in joining hands with us.

NEXT STEPS FOLLOW.

