



Le Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques

CRIMES D'HONNEUR ET MARIAGES FORCÉS : VIOLENCE ENVERS LES FEMMES ET LES ENFANTS

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C'est dans le but de combattre la violence envers les femmes que le Centre communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques (CCFSA) a vu le jour à Montréal, il y a maintenant 33 ans. Nous offrons des services et du soutien aux femmes sud-asiatiques et à leur famille et nous défendons leurs droits et intérêts. Notre analyse de la violence envers les femmes est basée sur la pratique et soumise à la compréhension que nous avons de la patriarchie, système qui existe depuis des millénaires et qui dicte une dominance masculine. Bien qu'une amélioration marquée de l'égalité des genres se soit répandue à l'échelle mondiale, la patriarchie subsiste ; son omniprésence et son caractère insidieux empêchent ses victimes, hommes ou femmes, de se rendre compte de l'inégalité et de l'oppression qu'elle engendre.

Les institutions et systèmes patriarcaux sont transculturels mais comportent des variations spécifiques. Nous croyons fermement que l'attention récemment portée aux « crimes d'honneur » et aux « mariages forcés » au Canada et dans certaines régions du monde occidental est inappropriée, dangereuse et raciste. Les « crimes d'honneur » et les « mariages forcés » ne sont ni plus ni moins que des formes de « violence envers les femmes », et, selon l'âge des victimes, de « violence envers les enfants ».

Il ne s'agit pas ici de prendre une position défensive. Essentialiser cette violence en admettant qu'elle soit spécifique à certaines communautés, à certains groupes ethniques, religieux ou autres est néfaste et **nie l'existence de la lutte constante à travers le monde pour mettre fin à la violence envers les femmes**. Nous devons identifier et reconnaître les dynamiques de la patriarchie qui créent et justifient les prérogatives autorisant les hommes à user de violence et de menaces afin d'exercer leur suprématie au détriment des femmes. Toute autre approche est dangereuse **puisque'elle sous-entend que les femmes et les enfants des communautés non-minoritaires sont à l'abri, alors qu'elles ne le sont pas**. Aborder le sujet de la violence est difficile pour les femmes et enfants qui en sont victimes. Le potentiel de stigmatisation raciste qui retombe sur une communauté rend les choses encore plus difficiles.

Essentialiser ces crimes relève à la fois du racisme et de l'ignorance. Les hommes qui tuent leur ex-épouse et leurs enfants afin de préserver leur masculinité n'est pas le fait exclusif de certaines communautés. Les preuves tragiques de ces crimes se retrouvent au Québec et ailleurs. La patriarchie n'existe pas seulement dans les communautés sud-asiatiques, moyen-orientales et religieuses. Faisant partie d'un réseau d'organismes qui documentent la violence envers les femmes de manière transculturelle, nous savons que **cette croyance est erronée et fautive**. Nous n'avons pas besoin de nouvelles lois. Nous en avons déjà assez. Seulement, il s'avère qu'elles demeurent inefficaces pour mettre fin à la violence envers les femmes et les enfants. Il faut cesser de pointer du doigt des communautés bien précisées en les accusant de « crimes d'honneur » et de « mariages forcés ». Il est temps de s'attaquer à la patriarchie qui autorise les hommes à faire violence aux femmes et aux enfants.

Il existe aujourd'hui une 'industrie' de « crimes d'honneur » et de « mariages forcés ». Mettre l'attention sur des spécificités culturelles relève de motifs politiques et est dangereux, erroné, raciste, et totalement inadéquat. **Nous avons la ferme conviction que tous les efforts et les fonds doivent soutenir la lutte contre la violence envers les femmes et les enfants et ce, sans avoir recours à quelque essentialisation que ce soit.** Toute autre tentative n'aide en rien les victimes de l'incessante violence patriarcale.

Qu',9en pensez-vous?

What do you think?

- Let us know your thoughts about the bulletin.
- Que pensez-vous de notre journal?
- We encourage you to send in your stories and articles for upcoming newsletters in any language by the 25th of every month to:
- adisun3@gmail.com
- Écrivez - nous à adisun3@gmail.com

CENTRE UPDATE



Centre Hours

Monday & Thursday 9am—9pm

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday 9am—5pm

The Centre is wheelchair accessible

Le centre est accessible aux fauteuils roulants.

Membership

Have you renewed your membership this year? If not, you can do so by sending the fees to SAWCC.

Volunteers

If you are interested in helping out at the Centre, please contact Homa (Ext. 102 or homa@bellnet.ca) to coordinate a meeting!

Come to a SAWCC Executive Council MEETING!

All Executive Council (EC) meetings of SAWCC are open to all members. Members are encouraged to attend and participate in SAWCC discussions and decision-making. It's a great way to learn of new initiatives and make a tangible contribution to the organization. The next EC meeting will be on *Monday May 12th 2014*. We arrive at 6pm, share some food and the meeting starts at 6:30pm.

2014 is an election year for SAWCC!

At our Annual General meeting in June we will elect our Executive Council (EC) which will serve for two years. If you are interested in serving and want to know more about the EC, please contact Dolores Chew: dol-chew@hotmail.com

Save the date! Mark your calendars!!

South Asian Women's Community Centre AGM, pre-AGM session & elections

Saturday 14th June 2014 from 10am until 4pm

10am-12 noon – membership discussion -- focus by governments, media and social service agencies on so-called 'honour' crimes and forced marriages [see SAWCC statement on the issue in this month's *Bulletin*]. Why this is problematic; our responses, etc.

12 noon -1pm Lunch

1pm – 3pm Annual General meeting

3-4pm Executive Council elections

The AGM and morning session is something we look forward to each year – an opportunity for members staff and Executive Council to meet and hear from one another; to discuss pressing issues; to learn about all we have done and accomplished over the past year; to get feedback, comments and suggestions from all concerned. It is also a good opportunity to introduce prospective members. They would get a good sense of who we are and what we do. If you know someone who might be interested in SAWCC please invite them.

If you require childcare, please let us know at least one week in advance – how many children and their ages.

Letters about the AGM and pertinent documents are being mailed to all members by the first week in May. If you do not receive your package by the end of the second week in May, please contact SAWCC. Thank you.

The South Asian Women's Community Centre is looking to hire a summer camp counselor

Position: Counselor for Summer Camp for children aged 4-14 years

Start date: July 2, 2014

Duration: 7 weeks

Hours: 9am – 5 pm (40 hours / week)

Requirements:

- **This position is for students who were enrolled as full-time students in 2014, and will be full-time students as of August/September 2014 in CEGEP or University.**
- **Be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.**
- **Fluent in English & French**

Task and responsibilities for camp counselor

- Be responsible for the safety and well-being of 15-20 children aged 4 to 14 years old for 5 days a week across 7 weeks, between 9am – 5pm.
 - Plan, organize and animate daily indoor and outdoor activities in accordance to summer camp objectives of child empowerment
- In-door activities can include: arts and craft, story telling, activities, music and dance
- Out-door activities Visiting historical, cultural, and educational places
- Sports and recreation: Swimming, basketball, baseball and soccer and picnics in the park
- Recruit and manage volunteers and parents for indoor and outdoor activities
- Organize information sessions for children on the issues impacting them
- Work collaboratively with, and when needed, to seek support from SAWCC community workers

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training is an asset (please provide certification documents)

Please send your CV and a cover page, addressed to the Hiring committee, by May 30th 2014 by email at sawcc@bellnet.ca. For further information, please contact: (514) 528-8812

AWARDS

Nivatha Balendra -- SAWCC member, summer camp volunteer and year-end party performer, participated in the Super expo sciences Hydro- Quebec regional science fair. She won the Silver Award in the Senior Category. There were 349 projects and she was selected among 12 finalists going for the Provincial Science Fair in April 2014 in Terrebonne. She was also selected among 3 finalists for the Intel International Science and Engineering fair in Los Angeles (the world's largest pre-u science competition) in May 2014 as part of Team Canada. . In addition, she received 3 other awards as well.



GHOSTS AND GODDESSES

"I gazed across the hotel room at my mother, who was sleeping peacefully. Who was this woman? What made her wait an entire day in the rain to be blessed by a dead saint?"

I remember walking into my dorm room at New York University on March 15, 1985. I had just been swaying to the gloomy music of Depeche Mode at the Beacon Theater. I saw the note on the floor from a roommate and even before reading it, I felt my stomach take a dive. It read, Bhargavi, Your father is very sick. Call home. I reached for the phone before I knew what I was doing and was met with what sounded like the cry of a wounded animal. It was my mother, and I knew before she uttered a coherent word that my father had died. She kept saying, "My life is over," in Telugu, our native tongue. I commanded her to stop talking such nonsense and assured her that I was on my way home. Everything was going to be fine. In truth, I felt the same way she did at that moment, but on instinct, I had taken over the reins my father once held so tightly. I hung up the phone and crumbled. I could never have known at the time how much my father's death would serve as a catalyst for my personal growth. My father's death accelerated my independence as a woman, my discovery of my cultural roots and my reconnection with my mother, whom I had rejected. I guess in a way my mother was right when she said that her life was over. In a way it was, and a new life had begun for both of us.

The acrid white filled me with dizziness as I sleepwalked into the room where my father lay. I kept thinking he looked so real, so alive. He was just sleeping, wasn't he? As I walked closer, I saw his face. It was pulled taut on one side, and there was some dried blood near his lips. Quivering, I kissed my father on the cheek. There. Nothing. I hissed him some more. "Dad, I'm home now. It was wrong of me to move away from home and go to college. I knew it made you unhappy, but I did it anyway. Well, now I'm home. Okay? Dad? Dad, remember all those times you wanted me to kiss you good night and I ran away? And all those times I wouldn't sit on your lap because I felt funny? Well, here. See, I'm covering your face with kisses like I used to when I was a little girl. Why is nothing happening? You told me I was a princess, and princess kisses are magic, aren't they? Dad? Nana? I am so sorry."

The chain of events that followed was especially intense because no one wanted to talk about what he or she was feeling. My brother continued his studies in India, and I went back to NYU. My mother returned to working at the state mental hospital where she was a psychiatrist, but she resigned after a few months. My sister, unable to commute to the city because she didn't know how to drive, had to leave her job. It didn't help that my mother had inherited thousands of dollars in debts my father had racked up through his numerous failed business ventures. My sister defended my father as my mother bitterly denounced his deceptions. She had fully trusted my father and handed him all financial responsibilities. By telling my sister it was okay not to have a driver's license because he'd drive her everywhere, and by relieving my mother of such nuisances as balancing her checkbook, my father paved a path of dependence for both of them. At the end of that path, of course, was isolation.

Prior to my father's death, I had already had a taste of feeling trapped. I often found myself struggling to keep the peace between my siblings and my father, who would erupt in fits of violence. As the youngest, I was hit only twice in my life. I didn't understand why I was favored so much over my brother and sister, but I felt guilty about it. All three of us were pressured to become doctors. My brother and sister tried but failed to fulfill my parents' dream in this regard because their hearts were elsewhere. I exclaimed about my dislike of blood ever since I could talk. In the twelfth grade, when I announced I wanted to be a writer, they insisted I pursue broadcast journalism because "that's where the money is." I explored the option and decided I was much too shy for that field. Writing was what truly interested me.

My feelings of alienation were heightened by the fact that I wasn't allowed to date or even have male friends. My father made me account for all my time, including my social activities, which consisted of one weekly trip to the movies. My parents pressured my sister into an arranged marriage, which failed miserably, and talked about arranging one for me as well. Witnessing the horrible injustice of my sister's marriage in silence, I felt like an accomplice in burying my sister alive. I secretly vowed to run away if I was going to be forced into a marriage. Although at the time I had no idea what feminism encompassed, instinct prompted me to protect my rights: I was a

woman, not a commodity to be bartered. I resisted the notion that female offspring were burdensome because parents had to "pay off" a groom and his family with an attractive dowry.

During high school, I saw the halls of my life lined with a lot of closed doors. By the time I decided on a college, I was lusting to break free from my isolation. Before I moved out, my sister had already filed for an annulment and my father had mellowed quite a bit-evidenced by the fact that he permitted me to go to NYU. Neither of my parents was happy that I was living in the city, but something made them respect my decision. Perhaps because of the failure of my sister's marriage, they realized that ruling with an iron fist was not working.

I was nonchalant about living on my own in the big city, which my parents dubbed a "jungle." Though I appeared to be confident and quite calm about leaving home, inside I was anxious and frightened. But I wanted to dive into the sea of the city's vast opportunities, to make mistakes, to survive on my own. I turned up the music in my room and created worst-case scenarios: What if I wanted to date a white guy? What if I dropped out of college and was happy being manager of the local Burger King? What if I got pregnant? What if I got pregnant by a black guy? What if I wanted to have the baby? What if I wanted to have an abortion? What if I was a lesbian? Then what? I started to think about what my rights were not only as an individual, but as a woman. I started to forget about how my parents would react and started to think about how *I* would react. I was tired of adopting my parents' prejudices and judgments. Wanting to identify my struggle and fight my own battles steered me toward feminism. I was ready for another type of education.

My father took my roving out of the house pretty hard. He called me a lot and insisted I come home every weekend. I didn't mind doing so at first, but eventually- the heavy loads of studying and club-hopping cut down my visits. By the winter of my first year, I had bopped down to Astor Place Haircutters and had my long hair cut into a tomboyish crop. I had never been allowed to cut my hair because long hair is very desirable in Indian Culture. In my struggle to loosen the grip of a culture I could not comprehend at the time, I created a new persona. I was meeting people who knew nothing about me. I was in charge of telling my story, and I chose to forget all about my precollege life. This allowed me to distance myself from my family, its problems and my culture.

As a child, I was always embarrassed about the fact that I was Indian. I dreamed of having hair like the Breck girl-the *white* girl. Panic would flutter in my chest whenever a friend asked me over to her house, which wasn't often. I knew I'd have to reciprocate by extending an invitation to my house. In the event a friend was coming over, I would start brainwashing my mother and father into adapting their behavior for the occasion. "Please, please don't eat with your hands. And don't burp. Just say 'hello' and leave. Don't ask questions, and whatever you do, Dad, please don't walk around in your lunghee,. It looks like a skirt." They'd always agree and nod their heads, and then something would happen. My mother would saunter into the living room wearing a sari and eating some curry with her hand or offer us her Indian version of an American food, such as curried meatballs. My friends would just stare and say something like, "Ewww! What is that." Yes, meatballs. By then, my mother was convinced that in order to get a sufficient amount of protein in our diets, we had to start eating meat. We were doing our part to fit in to U.S pop culture-my morn donned pantsuits, my father played the stock market and we kids became Big Mac-Coke-Twinkies junkies. This did not mean we converted to Christianity, although I will admit that, in my desperation to fit in, I wouldn't have thought it such a bad idea. Whenever my friends caught a glimpse of the clay statues of Hindu gods and goddesses sitting on the bureau in my parents' bedroom, I would pretend not to hear their questions. The fact is, I didn't fully understand myself what these bizarre-looking figurines were all about, but I was too embarrassed to admit I cared at that age.

I looked in the mirror at myself with short hair and didn't recognize the person I saw. I had begun to disappear. Without my father-the object of my defiance-my rebellion turned to confusion. Shortly after my father's death, my sister and mother both called me at college. They said that they needed me at home, that it was crucial for the family to stay together. They pleaded with me to come home. Before I had even fully processed their stunning request, I answered matter-of-factly: "No. I can't drop out of school. I'm sorry." That was the end of the conversation. From that day on, I was on my own. I knew I had to put myself through college. I was shocked at them for backing me into a wall like that, for being so selfish. I understand now that they were acting out of sheer fear. We were

always taught to put familial welfare above our individual concerns. But family, which I was raised to depend on and trust, had fallen through. My father had left us all to fend for ourselves with little concern for our financial wellbeing.

After his death, through a veneer of anger and disappointment, I began to question the motives of all family members more carefully. This is not to say they were ill-intentioned, but each of us was playing with a different rule book. What was good for the family was not necessarily good for each of its members. After feeling guilty for so long about the unhappiness in my family, I finally refused to be suffocated under the weight of its seemingly endless catastrophes. The pinch of courage that had propelled me to leave home had grown considerably. With each passing day, I became stronger, more independent, and walked farther from home.

Healing was hindered by my hectic schedule, which I packed with classes, waitressing, campus work, studying and freelance music writing. I believed that strength meant forging ahead no matter what. I kept busy enough so I wouldn't have time to feel the pain. In a state of denial, I embarked on a rampage of drinking, shoplifting, staying out till all hours with other lost souls, listening to angry music and making myself unapproachable. This vexatious behavior stemmed from a variety of things: wanting to make the world pay for my father's death, a here-today-gone-tomorrow mindset, hypersensitivity to any inkling of racism, and my own insecurity. I was angry with my father not only for abandoning me, but also for promising me that he would always be around to take care of me. I felt cheated that he had been ripped away at such a young age—an age when he seemed to be relaxing his tyranny and allowing his benevolent side, which I had been privy to as a child, to blossom again.

Shortly after I was nabbed for shoplifting (I received only a warning), I began to realize that my anger was really self-directed. I started to let my buzzed hair grow long again. It suddenly clicked that I had cut my hair to defy the cultural preference for long hair in India—to strip away my Indian identity—and not because I really liked the way I looked with short hair. When I arrived in the U.S. at the age of five, I almost immediately began a campaign to change my hair. I begged my mother to make my pin-straight hair curly. She reluctantly complied by slopping on the Dippity-Do. She laughed when I ended up looking like Shirley Temple with a wicked tan. Now, we laugh together at the incident. She is so happy that, at last, I no longer want to be the Breck girl.

A major impetus in my healing was the class "Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism," in which I was enrolled at the time of my father's death. Originally, I took the class because I felt I could never honestly and properly respond when someone asked me what Hinduism is all about. Religion was never forced on me, although bits of divine mythology crept into my daily life. "Do you know why the goddesses are shown sitting on lotuses?" my mother might say. "No, Mom." "Because the lotus is a symbol of purity." I didn't understand the meanings of her stories because I had no context for them.

Seeing her children devour cheeseburgers, my mother would always demand to know, "Are you Indian or American?" None of us could ever answer. I had hidden my fear behind a veil of arrogance. Now, I wanted to know. I finally discovered that pinning down this beast of a cultural identity whirling inside of me was a key part of my struggle.

Although I was not yet openly communicating with my mother, I started to flash back to times when she would start off her "when I was growing up" stories and I would tune her out with a quick nod. I began to realize that although we seemed worlds apart, filaments joined our warrior souls. Indian or American? I was becoming strong enough to handle the answer, and more important, to fight to hold on to and take pride in all that made me so different.

At the time of my father's death, our class was smack in the middle of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (*The Song of God or Celestial Song*), a Hindu scripture that addresses death, reincarnation and loyalty to family. I read and reread the small book. I cannot say I fully grasped the text at the time, but I found the answers to some of my questions. Explains the divine Sri Krishna to Arjuna, who was resisting going to war because he couldn't bear to kill family and friends in the process, "The truly wise mourn neither for the living nor for the dead. There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future where we shall cease to be.... That which is nonexistent can never come into being, and that which is, can never cease to be." The *Bhagavad-gita* soothed me

with its tranquil simplicity. I finally managed to smile, and by the end of that year I had begun on a labyrinthine path to solace.

Minoring in religion and delving into religious philosophy, I started to take pride in my Indian heritage during my final years in college. However, I never truly embraced the idea of being Hindu, perhaps because I also found truth in Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, mysticism and Taoism. Rather than labeling this a state of confusion, I now choose to see it as being in a state of quest. In order to understand the soul, I had to locate it first, and mine was floating like a broken jigsaw puzzle in an ocean. I still hadn't determined what being an Indian American woman was all about. I was disjointed, loose, homeless. At the time, I couldn't even entertain the thought of worship, because it involved a degree of submission. After my father's death, I had just gotten a grasp of my life-or so I thought and started seeing myself as an individual. I was wary of prematurely melting into the masses.

It wasn't until I journeyed back to India with my mother in 1991 that I really began to understand who I was and whence I sprang, culturally and religiously. Gradually, our relationship had become more fluid and natural. By the time I graduated we had learned to talk as peers-as women with common struggles. We shared stories about our disappointments, our victories and our unfulfilled dreams. It was the first time since elementary school that I showed my mother my writing. This trip, which was my mother's idea, revealed to me the palette of colors with which I am painting.

Traveling all over India, I was bombarded with images of goddesses, the stomach-turning plight of the poor, and the rich mythology of my people. I devoured it all ravenously, and my mother kept my plate piled high. I stared into the eyes of Parvati, the fierce goddess of courage after whom I was named, and felt an inextinguishable connection.

Who was this woman who through numerous incarnations slayed demon after demon. Who was this woman who was as ravishing and gentle as she was brutal. "Parvati is the goddess of courage, creation and destruction; she is whom I named you after," explained my mother for the *n*th time. But this time it was different. This time I was really listening.

As I stretched across the bed in a dank hotel room in Nasik, where my mother had taken me to be blessed by the spirit of the saint Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, I remembered my first battle. Two sixth-graders pushed me down, snatched my Scotch-plaid lunch pail and books and threw them all over the street. Sobbing, I met my mother after a few blocks. She said she had gotten caught up watching General Hospital and had practically run to the school when she noticed what time it was. After a sweet treat, I hid any outward signs of injury. Inwardly, I felt that I had been attacked because I was dark and ugly-. I guess my mother knew the effects such an incident could have on a child; she refused to keep quiet. The next day, she asked me to point out the two boys who had attacked me. I did, and she approached them. They ran in different directions. My mother ran after one, part of her sari trailing behind her in the wind, and caught him by the collar. She again asked me if this was one of the bullies. I nodded. Finger wagging in his face, she said with utter lucidity, "If you touch my daughter again, I'll kill you." I knew- my mother wasn't capable of actually killing anyone, but at that moment, even I believed her. So much for Indian passivity. I was so proud to be her daughter. That day, my mother was as cool as Bugs Bunny (whom I idolized and mimicked as a child). Today, I know she was much cooler than that cartoon rabbit. She was a woman warrior in the image of Parvati. She was my defender and my life force. In those ten seconds, she gave me a taste of courage. She showed me what a woman was capable of doing-standing up for herself and for what she believed to be just. Remembering this, I began to understand my connection to Parvati and to my mother.

I gazed across the hotel room at my mother, who was sleeping peacefully. Who was this woman? What made her wait an entire day in the rain to be blessed by a dead saint? What made her smile so broadly when our turn had finally arrived and we were shuffled past the white marble statue of Sai Baba of Shirdi? A disciple took the blanket my mother held out and draped it around Sai Baba's shoulders. He handed back the blanket and took our offering of flowers. And we were on our way. Outside, my mother gave me the blanket almost ecstatically and told me to take care of it. I promised her I would. Watching her, I realized a little more clearly what I had been striving for these past few years. I wanted something to believe in. I wanted the faith my mother had in God, in doing good deeds,

and most important, the ability to believe in herself and her independence. I had been rejecting her because I perceived her as weak, helpless and trapped. On the contrary, my mother is a woman who made many sacrifices in order to become a doctor. She encountered discrimination and sexism in her predominantly male field. Some of her superiors gave her an especially heavy workload so she could "prove" her abilities. My mother held steadfastly to her dreams.

I started asking her a lot of questions about her childhood, and what I learned amazed me. My mother was a fiercely independent woman who got married to my father because of duty, not because she was spineless. She was sad to leave her successful medical practice and start from scratch in America. She cried when she had to temporarily leave behind my brother and sister, eleven and twelve. Deep down in her soul, she knew the idea that there was something wrong with an unmarried woman was false. She was never thrilled with the idea of getting married herself because she felt it would interfere with her career plans. I believe the seeds of feminism were sown by her mother, as my mother was taught to persevere, excel, respect herself and demand equality not only between nationalities but also between the sexes. So, my mother's decision to honor some of her parents' wishes was a sign not of weakness, but of incredible courage and strength. She was going to stand by her husband and children even if that meant leaving her own dreams unfulfilled.

Almost seven years after my father died, I realized how much my mother and I were running from similar cultural expectations. We learned not to blame ourselves and somehow found our own answers. My mother realized that old beliefs had to change with the times after my sister's disastrous arranged marriage. Naturally, it is still somewhat difficult for her to accept certain things, such as the fact that at the age of twenty eight, I'm still not married. She is all too familiar with the echoes of lost realms, and she encourages me to pursue my hopes. I didn't want to be a doctor, and I wasn't going to major in broadcast journalism because "that's where the money is." I just wanted to be a writer. She grew to tolerate my decision because she recognized the spark in my eyes.

It's the same spark that was in her eyes when as an adolescent she announced that she wanted to be an artist. Her father growled, and she soon set her sights on medicine, an equally unusual career choice for a woman in her day. She knows now that my career choice is my decision. Whom my sister married should have been solely her decision. And it should have been my mother's decision when she married my father back in 1949, a year after India gained its independence.

My mother doesn't blame her parents. She knows that her individual strength was never discouraged, but rather misdirected. Her mother and father were devout Gandhians and fought to free the Indian people from British subjugation. She beams when she tells how her mother was pregnant with her when she was incarcerated for a peaceful protest against British rule. She stands proudly next to her mother, the warrior. And I stand proudly next to my mother, the warrior. Our mutual enemies of sexism and racism may have been different in appearance, but our sights were always fixed on freedom.

All along, I think my mother was unknowingly preparing me to fight for, explore and relish the freedoms that she was denied as a young woman who was quite ahead of her time. My mother raised me as her mother raised her-without a label for the progressive philosophy she lived. I have the advantage of viewing a "map" of feminism revealing where women have been, how far we have come and where we are going. I can link arms with other women and join feminist organizations that were not available to my mother. When my rights are violated, I can seek the support of sisters who will understand and give me strength when I feel weak. I have plenty of women to lean on.

Four years ago I became a vegetarian again. I am constantly- pestering my mother for recipes of my favorite Indian dishes. Eating the food of my native land sits well with me. My body seems to digest more efficiently, and I have more energy. Interwoven with the recipes, my mother occasionally throws in a myth describing a battle fought by one of the Hindu goddesses. I find these goddesses-multihanded warriors who are loving, beautiful, revered and feared-inspirational. I marvel at the thought that at one time women embodied such power. I know that our fight is perpetual and that like the demons in Indian mythology, our oppressors are serpentine, slippery, faceless. Preparation for the battle is as crucial as the battle itself. There is no doubt in my mind that my mother prepared me well.

Following her example, I could not be anything but a feminist, which, to me, means that I must do everything in my power to work with other women to abolish gender inequality.

My mother has dealt with her own conflicts, especially balancing her need for solitude with raising a family. A day before my father died, she expressed to him her desire to once again be alone as she had been before they married. She craved her freedom. As painful as it was for her to say and for him to hear, she stayed true to herself. Maybe it was the permission my father was waiting to hear to release him from this life. My mother is alone now, and she is rediscovering the fiery spirit that had been caged for decades—the goddess that had been silenced by a ghost. The woman who wanted to paint is finally painting. She is free to travel and garden. She is free to live. I thank her for kindling my spirit to seek out those freedoms.

My mother and I silently acknowledge that my father's death marked the beginning of our lives independent of family. As Hinduism asserts, death is not an ending, but a beginning. Currently, I am living the farthest I have ever lived from my mother, yet I feel the strongest, closest bond with her. Eager to live and learn, we are teaching each other about our individual cultures and perspectives. We don't always agree, but we listen. Oddly enough, the cultural void that blew us apart is the same entity that reunited us. Every time I hear another story, I understand a little more about the choices she made. Increasingly, I see that we are much more alike than different. As a surgeon who delivered babies, my mother spent much of her time handing out birth control and pregnancy prevention information to women in poverty-stricken areas of India. She had a thirst to educate other women, as I do. When I moved to Los Angeles, I became a counselor for a rape and battering hotline run by the L. A. Commission on Assaults Against Women. My mother and I discussed how important it is to answer the desire to connect with our sisters—to take action, participate and educate. I know now that before we are Indian we are women—we are mother and daughter. That is our paramount bond, and all else strengthens that union. Finally, I can say that I am proud to be a woman, a warrior, myself.

By Bhargavi C. Mandava—*Essay taken from Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*

Membership Renewal

Don't forget to renew your SAWCC membership for the upcoming year if you have not done so already.

Please fill out the form below and send it in with the renewal fees.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

APRIL 2014 – MARCH 2015

Name:

Address:

Tel. No.:

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Amount paid:

(Membership fees: \$7.00 for unemployed people; \$15.00 for employed people; \$100.00 for life-membership)

Signature:

Centre Communautaire des femmes sud-asiatiques

South Asian Women's Community Centre
1035, rue Rachel est, 3ième étage.
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Phone: 514-528-8812
Fax: 514-528-0896
E-mail: sawcc@bellnet.ca







33 years of sisterhood, strength, struggle and success 1981-2014

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May 6—Staff meeting
May 12- Executive Council Meeting at 6 00 PM
May 13- Jewellery Making (10:30am- 12:00 pm)
May 20- Services available at CLSC (10:30am- 12:00 pm)
May 27- Recycling and the environment(10:30am- 12:00 pm)
May 30- Potluck and Arts and Crafts activity (12:30 pm-2:30pm)

6 Mai—La réunion du personnel
12 Mai- Réunion du conseil administratif à 18h00
13 Mai— Fabrication de bijoux (10h30—12h)
20 Mai— Les services disponible à CLSC (10h30—12h)
27 Mai— Le recyclage et l'environnement CLSC (10h30—12h)
30 Mai—Potluck et une activité sur l'artisanal (12h30—14h30)

May 2014

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	 6	7	8	9	10
11	 12	 13	14	15	16	17
18	19	 20	21	22	23	24
25	26	 27	28	29	 30	31