

Stepping Stones SAWOs and movement building

Margaret Abraham
Professor of Sociology &
Special Advisor to the Provost for Diversity Initiatives
Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11549
Email: Margaret.Abraham@hofstra.edu
Sakhi for South Asian Women (volunteer)



Definitions of social movements

- **Social movements** are any broad social alliances of people who are connected through their shared interest in blocking or affecting social change. Social movements do not have to be formally organized. Multiple alliances may work separately for common causes and still be considered a social movement.
(http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Introduction_to_Sociology/Social_Movements)
- *social movement* as a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.
- A *social movement organization* is a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a counter movement and attempts to implement these goals. (McCarthy and Zald 1979)



Definitions of social movements*

- Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defending extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part. (source: Snow, Soule, and Kriesi)
- “sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames, and which develop the capacity to maintain sustained challenges against powerful opponents.” (Tarrow)

* Thanks to my colleague Gregory M. Maney for providing the above two definitions.



Stepping Stones – A sort of SAWOSTORY...

- **Perspective & Contextualization**
- **When & why were SAWOs established?**
- **What were the organizational Ideologies & structure of early SAWOs?**
- **What were some of the key organizational goals & strategies in the early years?**
- **What were some of the challenges & successes of the early SAWOs?**
- **What are some of the types of organizational transitions, persistence and change?**
- **Where are we today? (segue into open forum)**



Perspective & Contextualization...

(From an action researcher)*

* Margaret Abraham *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asians in the U.S.* Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick New Jersey: June 2000.

A) Movements (1970's -1980's)

- Battered women's movement in the U.S
- Women's movement in South Asia

B) Organizations

- A) Existence of SAOs prior to 1980 (Focus: cultural, social, and religious activities ties to homeland, ethnicity)

C) The US context: SA Immigration

- Prior to the mid-1970s
 - Perceived as the "model minority"
 - Highly qualified individuals
 - Culturally bound to their homeland and notions of family
 - Seeking the opportunities for professional growth & economic success
- 1980 -1990s
 - More heterogeneous - in race and class - due to *chain migration*
- 1990s onwards
 - More diverse due to presence of first and second generation



Establishing SAWOs: When & Why?

WHEN?

- **1980s: Emergence of SAWOs in the U.S..** (Creation of Manavi in 1985)
- **1990s Gradual shift from South Asian Women's Groups to South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs)* as part of a social movement**

WHY?

- **Gender and diversity of women's issues ignored in SAOs**
- **Ethnicity, class ignored in mainstream Feminist org.**
- **Emergence of specific SA cases of DV**
- **Need for advocacy, resources and service provision**
- **Need for support and organizing SA women**

* I first used the term SAWOs to indicate the gradual shift from more informal groups to some form of organizational structure and to show their role as a movement. Source: "Organizational Strategies for Social Change: Addressing the Problem of Marital Violence Among South Asians in the U.S." Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, Boston, March 1993. Prior to this author and scholar, Jyotsna Vaid had used the term South Asian women's groups (1989).



SAWOs not

an exhaustive list

1983		Sneha			
1984					
1985		Manavi			
1986		MAIFS			
1987					
1988					
1989		Sakhi	Asha	Apna Ghar	
1990		South Asian Network			
1991		Sahara	Maitri		
1992		Hamdard Center	Narika	ICLI (domestic harmony)	Saheli Austin
1993					
1994					
1995		Daya	Raksha		
1996		Saheli, Boston	Chaya		
1997		SAWERA			
1998		KIRAN			
1999					
2000					
2001		AADA			
2002		Asha, Ray of Hope			
2003					
2004		ASAFSF			
2005		Turning point			
2006		CHETNA			
2007		CHAI			

Organizational Ideologies*

DEFINITION: *Organizational ideology is a set of ideas and values that are socially constructed by the organizations that form the ideational framework -basis for its membership, org. structure, goals, and strategies.*

*Ideology (early 1990's)***

Value Oriented Ideology:

Explicit core value (Sakhi, Manavi, Maitri and SEWAA)

e.g.. Addressing Patriarchy & SAW empowerment: intersect gender, race, ethnicity, class)

Diffused ideology: *Dispersed values or set of selective values (Apna Ghar - e.g. family, service and ethnicity but not specific ideology driven)*

Unspecified ideology: *Amorphous set of values, no explicitly articulated ideology but addressed a range of issues (Sneha)*

e.g. service agency that assisted individuals in need

Common Theme

- Philosophy to address needs and support South Asian women
- Intersect ethnicity and gender
- Used the term SA rather than national specificity

* *Source:* Margaret Abraham "Ethnicity, Gender, and Marital Violence: South Asian Women's Organizations in the United States." *Gender & Society* Vol.9 No.4, August 1995; 2) "Organizational Strategies for Social Change: Addressing the Problem of Marital Violence Among South Asians in the U.S." Annual Meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, Boston, March 1993.

** Note: These organizational ideologies shifted over time.



Organizational Structure

- **INDIVIDUAL ORGS.** No org. chapters/branches
- **OFFICIAL STATUS:** Nonprofit status - 501(c)
- **MEMBERSHIP:** Primarily dedicated voluntary membership, organizations included only women as members, although some orgs. included both men and women
- **BOARD:** Operational (visionary + hands on)
- **FOUNDERS:** Active role in org.
- **FUNDING:** individuals, grants, almost no state funding for most orgs, goodwill!
- **ORG. NAMES:** Primarily North Indian



Organizational Structure (cont...)

- Predominantly non-hierarchical & characterized by a less formalized structure with volunteers as main resource (value oriented ideology – usually no state funding)
- More formally structured, state funding (diffused ideology)
- Nebulous structure evolved from the selective services provided at a given time & limited active membership (unspecified ideology)
- Connection between the direction of the growth of membership and who the founding members were



Organizational Goals & Strategies

1) Organizing South Asian women

- 1) mobilize and organize: (SAW experience as women & as ethnic minority women)
- 2) solidarity and empowerment
- 3) Coalition building

2) Ending domestic violence

- 1) Macro: Advocacy and legislation
- 2) Micro: Service provision, support groups, counseling, legal services, housing/referrals (Between 1985 and 1993 these SAWOs recorded approximately 1,071 abused South Asian women who approached them)

3) Community education

- 1) Religious leaders
- 2) Community groups: workshops, leafleting, parades, public forums, cultural events
- 3) Strategic use of media and public events



Early SAWOs: Challenges*

- 1) **Organizational Orientation:** service & consciousness raising
- 2) **Organizational Tactics:** negotiation & confrontation
- 3) **Voice and Representation:** language & representation
acknowledgement-recognition front-stage/back stage
- 4) **Accountability:** individual & collective accountability
- 5) **Funding:** public & private
- 6) **Alliances:** conviction & pragmatism

OTHER: Staffing, issue focus, addressing class and sexuality, diversifying

* Source: Margaret Abraham *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence Among South Asians in the U.S.* Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick New Jersey: June 2000.



Early SAWO's successes

- Challenge myth of model minority
- Media attention to the issue of DV
- Brought “SA women question” to the fore
- Shift of DV from private to public issue
- SA women empowerment and agency
- Intersected ethnicity and gender
- Made transnational links
- Linked immigration issues and DV
- Some documentation of issues of DV and Violence against women (VAW)



Transitions: Persistence & Change

- Shifts in structure: more formalized, routinization
- SA mainstreaming with ethnic edge
- Increased focus on service
- Increased state and corporate funding
- Increased institutionalized links
- Enhanced community outreach
- Increased second generation SAW participation
- Continued linkages to importance of immigration issues
- Enhanced use of media
- Increased participation in conference forums
- Increased reflection and action on participation of men
- Increased attention to importance of transnational context



Institutional Capacity Building: Where are we today?

Some areas to address:

- Board development & training
- Staff development and training
- Defining community/ies
- Reexamining mission statements, organizational ideology structure, goals and strategies
- Organization and issues saliency, co-optation
- Organizational scope
- Transnational connections
- Broadening/narrowing/intersecting of issues
- Assessing sources of funding - Competition/partnerships?
- Development of strategic plan (short term-long term)...(service, advocacy, policy)



Things SAWOs do as part of a social movement to end violence against women & more...

acknowledge problem Support set goals advocacy
Strategize address issues Reflect Outreach
Awareness Critique Mobilize organize
Action research Construct lobby, Inform
Agency Consolidate Solidarity influence policy
Expand Struggle challenge Empower
Connect Celebrate Fundraise collective
build institutional capacity influence legislation, service
engage in transnational work

and much more...



As part of a social movement and SAWOs ...

*always keep in mind the importance of
the way we think
the way we act
and when and why
we do the things we do!*

Thank You

