



Through this social media campaign Maitri is starting a dialogue with men in our community to identify and eliminate the root cause of gender based violence and partner violence. [#EngagingMenAndBoys](#)

Thank you **Manish Jain** for joining us in this meaningful discussion.

Q. Please tell us something about your background, your origins in South Asia, life-experiences and your thoughts with regard to gender-based conflict?

A: I was raised in Mumbai, which is a cosmopolitan and diverse city in India. My upbringing enabled me to interact with people of different faiths, languages and religions and most importantly observe their cultural and religious practices in close quarters. As far as I can remember, I was always service-minded and took great interest in community activities and policy advocacy. Talking about policy, my observation is that only people who have political and social power are in a position to bring about change in society. At a familial level, it is the head of the family who would take that place.

Here, I would like to highlight the role of men to be an advocate for gender equality and promote healthy intimate partner relationships. First and foremost, duty of all men is to recognize and acknowledge their societal power. By this I mean that men should first recognize that society offers them inherent privileges and so it becomes their responsibility to uplift others in the equation.

Q. Please elaborate on ways men can use their social privileges to improve intimate partner relationships

A: To answer this question, let's look at issues that are commonly observed in South Asian families like family clashes during the marriage ceremony itself, conflicts arising due to external families or interpersonal conflicts when not handled maturely. Let me give you an example- even now it is commonly observed that if a man gets a job elsewhere and is required to move, his wife would have to sacrifice her aspirations. This puts her in a catch 22 kind of situation and also takes away her liberty to make decisions for herself. Now whether this is avoidable? Maybe not; However, a little support goes a long way in building good understanding between couples especially when confronted with making tough decisions. When men act stereotypical and insist on conventional gender roles, it results in bitter feelings finally culminating in escalation of conflicts; eventually losing all sense of civility. Healthy communication and understanding between couples is especially important when life throws a curveball at you, it is like a foundation to tackle rough-situations. I would say, couples should be open to the idea of seeking professional help if needed.

Q. What are the aspects of our culture that we have imported into immigrant community spaces?

A: This is a very tricky aspect, while we are blessed to have all the South Asian experiences in the US, we sometimes forget that certain practices were carried out because it was suitable for life and times in a different country. For instance, holidays, while we might celebrate Diwali in the

US, technically it is not a holiday in the US and so the arrangements for the same might add to the stress that comes smack in the middle of a workday. Second, let's consider the size of the house, while we are used to house help back home, we definitely cannot afford it in the US as frequently. It becomes inevitable for everyone to pitch-in and share the load which may not be very acceptable to some men and the entire burden falls squarely on women's shoulders. The idea here is not to say that festivals should not be celebrated but to be conscious that timelines in a western country are very different from any South Asian country. The point I am trying to make is that trivial issues lead to big conflicts that might spiral out of control. More than ever there is a need to exercise empathy and move away from stereotypical roles.

When it comes to more serious aspects like dowry system, female feticide etc. Unfortunately, many SA community members have imported those aspects as well, which is detrimental to building happy families.

Q. How has technology and economic changes impacted relationships in the last 10-12 years?

A: In some ways, technological advancement has made it easy for people to keep in touch or even initiate a relationship. However, the flip side of it is that it could sometimes lead to too much intrusion in the relationship leaving one of the parties feeling smothered due to lack of personal space. Moreover, technology also leads to isolation, if one person in the equation fails to exercise control and a regular camaraderie between the couple takes a backseat. Also let's not forget about technological abuse, stalking etc. Today, technology allows us to keep track of people, record people secretly which when misused can be a very invisible form of abuse. As technology evolves so do abusers who catch on to misuse and loopholes in an otherwise useful IT system.

To sum up, I would like to say that the South Asian family system in itself cannot be blamed for all the untoward occurrences in our community, but the lack of empathy and adapting to changing times is the real issue. An abuse does not even qualify as abuse from a South Asian perspective, and that's the issue.

About the author:

Manish Jain is an active community member in the area of Brentwood, California and is one of the founders of United Indian Association. Apart from conducting activities for the community, the work of the organization also involves collaborating with school systems, law enforcement and other government agencies with the intent to take part in the systems of the country, the SA community has adopted as immigrants.