

Honour Killing: A Curse to Human Dignity



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Abstract

Honour crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce — even from an abusive husband — or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that “dishonors” her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.

Keywords: Honour crimes, International, Equality and Fraternity, usually murder

Introduction

“Honour killing” is an age old social evil whose frequency has escalated in the recent past. Khap Panchayats, which are a system of social administration in rural areas since ancient times, are being blamed for these long series of killings. While these Panchayats (assembly) had some role in setting the community disputes, these exclusively male bodies, dominated by village eliteS have been asserting the values of past, gone by era and stand in the way of the values of Indian Constitution, the values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

Human Rights Watch defines “honor killings” as follows: Honour crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce—even from an abusive husband—or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that “dishonours” her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.

An honour killing is the murder of a (female) family or clan member by one or more fellow (mostly male) family members, where the murderers believe the victim to have brought dishonour upon the family, clan, or community.

This perceived dishonor is normally the result of

1. utilizing dress codes unacceptable to the family
2. wanting out of an arranged marriage or choosing to marry by own choice,
3. engaging in certain sexual acts or
4. engaging in relations with the same sex.

These killings result from the perception that defense of honor justifies killing a person whose behavior dishonors their clan or family. These crimes are prevalent in orthodox, regional and socially backward groups in many countries across the world, mainly of muslim origin.

Global Plight

In Pakistan honor killings are known locally as karo-kari. Amnesty International’s report noted “the failure of the authorities to prevent these killings by investigating and punishing the perpetrators.” In 2002 alone, over 382 people, about 245 women and 137 men, became victims of honor killings in the Sindh province of Pakistan. Over the course of six years, over 4,000 women have fallen victim to this practice in Pakistan from 1999-2004. More recently the average annual number of honor killings for the whole nation ran up to more than 10,000 per year. “Frequently, women murdered in “honour” killings are recorded as having committed suicide or died in accidents.

Every year in the UK, a dozen women are victims of honor killings, occurring almost exclusively to date within Asian and Middle Eastern

families, and often cases are unresolved due to the unwillingness of family, relatives and communities to testify. Jordan, considered one of the most liberal countries in the Middle East still witnesses instances of honor killings. In Jordan there is minimal gender discrimination and women are permitted to vote, but men receive reduced sentences for killing their wives or female family members if they have brought dishonor to their family. Families often have sons who are considered minors, under the age of 18, to commit the honor killings. An article in the Spring 2009 edition of *Middle East Quarterly* argues that the United States is far behind Europe in acknowledging that honor killings are a special form of domestic violence, requiring special training and special programs to protect the young women and girls most likely to be the victim of such. The article suggests that the fear of being labeled "culturally insensitive" prevents US government officials and the media from both identifying and accurately reporting these incidents as "honor killings" when they occur.

Position in India

People are sometimes murdered in Northern India (mainly in the Indian state of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Bihar for marrying without their family's acceptance, in some cases for marrying outside their caste (Jat or Rajput) or religion. Among Rajputs, marriages with other caste male/female instigates killings of the married couple and family. This is unique form honor killing related to the militant culture of ethnic Rajputs, who, despite the forces of modernization and the pressures of decolonization, subscribe to medieval views concerning the "preservation" of perceived "purity" of their lineage.

In Punjab also there are many honor killing incidents. In Haryana, for example, a couple of such incidents still occur every year Bhagalpur in the northern Indian state of Bihar has also been notorious for honor killings. Recent cases include a 16-year-old girl, Imrana, from Bhojpur who was set on fire inside her house in a case of what the police called 'moral vigilantism'. The victim had screamed for help for about 20 minutes before neighbours arrived, only to find her still smoldering. She was admitted to a local hospital, where she later succumbed to her injuries. In another case in May 2008, Jayvirsingh Bhadodiya shot his daughter Vandana Bhadodiya and struck her in the head with an axe. In June 2010 some incidents were reported even from Delhi.

In a landmark judgment, in March 2010, Karnal district court ordered the execution of the five perpetrators in an honour killing case, while giving a life sentence to the khap (local caste-based council) head who ordered the killings of Manoj Banwala (23) and Babli (19), two members of the same clan who eloped and married in June 2007. Despite being given police protection on court orders, they were kidnapped; their mutilated bodies were found a week later from an irrigation canal. Honor killings are rare to non-existent in South India, and the western Indian states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. There have been no honor killings in West Bengal in over 100 years,

thanks to the influence and activism of reformists like Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Vidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy

In Haryana, JUNE 2010, a couple in their 20s were found dead in the woman's home in Bhiwani District. The bodies had injury marks, indicating the victims were beaten badly. The police have arrested six member of the woman's family, including her parents, on the charge of murder. The family apparently disapproved of the relationship because the man was from a different caste.

In Delhi, JUNE 2010, A 19-year-old girl and her boyfriend were tortured for hours before being killed by electrocution in Delhi. The girl's father and uncle have been arrested and have allegedly confessed they killed the couple because the boy, a taxi driver, was not a suitable match for the girl.

Honour Killings and Human Rights

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As the "Honour Killings" include torture, mutilation, rape, forced marriage, imprisonment within the home and even murder and these crimes are intended to protect the family honour by preventing and punishing woman for allegedly violating community norms of behaviour, particularly sexual behaviour and thus violating the HUMAN RIGHT.

In the recent times the cases has been on the increase and in current scenario when the State has remained mute spectators there is a lot of fear spread among the young generation and couples who are married and some of them intending to get married that they may face the wrath of such feudal forces. Many a times the pressures are so intense that the couples resort to suicide. In the recent months cases have come to light where couples are being killed, publicly humiliated and declared as brothers and sisters. Couples have faced social ostracisation from the society. Many have been killed in cold murder after torture.

Administrative, Legislative and Judicial Reactions

In a landmark judgment in March 2010, Karnal district court ordered the execution of the five perpetrators of an honour killing, and imprisoning for life the khap (local caste-based council) head who ordered the killings of Manoj Banwala (23) and Babli (19), a man and woman of the same clan who eloped and married in June 2007. Despite having been given police protection on court orders, they were kidnapped; their mutilated bodies were found a week later in an irrigation canal.

In 1990 the National Commission for Women set up a statutory body in order to address

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the issues of honour killings among some ethnic groups in North India. This body reviewed constitutional, legal and other provisions as well as challenges women face. The NCW's activism has contributed significantly towards the reduction of honour killings in rural areas of North India. According to Pakistani activists Hina Jilani and Eman M. Ahmed, Indian women are considerably better protected against honour killings by Indian law and government than Pakistani women, and they have suggested that governments of countries affected by honor killings use Indian law as a model in order to prevent honor killings in their respective societies. In June 2010, scrutinizing the increasing number of honour killings, the Supreme Court of India issued notices to the Central Government and six states including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan to take preventive measures against the social evil.

Alarmed by the rise of honour killings, the Government planned to bring a bill in the next Session of Parliament to provide for deterrent punishment for 'honour' killings.

Conclusion

The horrific cycle of honour killings to protect the dignity of a family or a caste has now spread its tentacles to entire India. A website shows the shocking list of honour killing cases, which seem to be unending but many cases are still left unrecorded. But those accused family or community members have ever realized that they don't regain any dignity for which they have taken the wrong step. If anyone elope with someone then what forced them to do so? Isn't it the rigid family and social tradition and custom? Is killing the only way to restrict people? Who will respect a person who has killed his own kin just because the victim had taken steps forward towards love. India can not remain far behind in progress just for some of the rigid and inflexible people. This is the time to unite for Indian citizens and protest against those people, who can dishonour the humanity in the name of family honour. However, Home Minister P Chidambaram on Aug 5 has said that the government was "actively considering" a proposal to amend the existing law or enact a new one to tackle 'honour killing'. But the question here raises, honour killing is not a new incident in India, then why it has taken so long time to be discussed officially in Lok Sabha and when the expected law will be ultimately implemented in the country. But it's better late than never. Now along the new hopes, India is looking forward to accept love with honour not killing.

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