



Honour Killings: A Global Concern

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ABSTRACT

The main thrust of this paper is to explore the problem of Honour Killings as a global issue and concern. It has become an epidemic all over the world whether the country is developed, developing or underdeveloped; whether the people belong to Islam, Hindu or Christian religious groups; and whether the families involved belong to upper, middle or lower classes of society. Broadminded researchers, academicians, common public and political leaders unanimously condemn any type of honour killing by saying that there is no honour in killings. The study is based on secondary sources of data. The data is analyzed from a critical perspective.

The main objectives of this study are – to know where the honour killings are practiced; to understand the reasons behind these killings; to explore whether development of the society, religion and caste has any relation with these killings; and finally to suggest some measures to control if not to eradicate these honour killings.

The study clearly indicates that honour killing is a global problem. It is more in practice where the traditional patriarchal family system is prevalent irrespective of religion, development and caste. In order to control honour killings there is a need to amend and enact certain laws by the concerned governments and implement them very stringently.

KEYWORDS

Honour Killing, Patriarchal family, Development, Violence against Women

INTRODUCTION

Honour killing is the “unlawful killing of a woman for her actual or perceived morally or mentally unclean and impure behaviour” (Hassan 1995). An honour killing is the killing of a member of a family or social group by other members of the family or community, due to the belief of the perpetrators that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family or community. Honour killings are not just limited to girls or women only but are extended to men also.

Goldstein (2002) has noted that honour killings were encouraged in ancient Rome, where male family members who did not take actions against the female adulterers in their family were actively persecuted. In the modern era, the term was first used by a Dutch scholar of Turkish society, Ane Nanta in 1978. Nanta sought a term that could be used to distinguish “honour killings” from “blood feuds”.

Human Rights Watch defines “honour killings” as “Acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female 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:

Refusing to enter into an arranged marriage; being a victim of a sexual assault/rape; seeking a divorce – even from an abusive husband; for allegedly committing adultery; mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that ‘dishonours’ her family; dressing in a manner unacceptable to the family or community; wanting to terminate a marriage; desiring to marry by her own choice, especially if to a member of a social group deemed inappropriate; engaging in heterosexual acts outside marriage/ extra marital relations; engaging in homosexual acts; engaging in other communities or adopting some of the customs or the religion of an outside group; bridging social divides; etc

and females in cultures that practice it. Sociologists have called this Turkey's first publicized gay ‘honour killing’. He was the victim of the country's first gay honour killing. In Brazil non-heterosexual children either boys or girls can be killed if disclosed. Men can also be the victims of honour killing by members of the family of a woman with whom they are perceived to have an inappropriate relationship.

The cultural features which lead to honor killings are complex. Honor killings involve violence and fear as a tool of maintaining control. Honor killings are argued to have their origin among nomadic peoples and herdsmen: such populations carry all their valuables with them and risk having them stolen, and do not have proper recourse to law. As a result, inspiring fear, using aggression, and cultivating a reputation for violent revenge in order to protect property are preferred to other behaviors. In societies where there is a weak rule of law, people must build fierce reputations.

In many cultures where honor is of central value, men are sources, or active generators /agents of that honor, while the only effect that women can have on honor is to destroy it. Once the honor is destroyed by the woman, there is a need for immediate revenge to restore it, in order for the family to avoid losing face in the community. As Amnesty International statement notes: The regime of honour is unforgiving: women on whom suspicion has fallen are not given an opportunity to defend themselves, and family members have no socially acceptable alternative but to remove the stain on their honour by attacking the woman.

The main thrust of this paper is to explore the problem of Honour Killings as a global issue and concern. The study is based on secondary sources of data. The data is analyzed from a critical perspective. The main objectives of this study are – to know where honour killings are practiced; to understand the reasons behind these killings; to explore whether development of the society has any relation with these killings; and finally to suggest some measures at least to control if not to eradicate these honour killings.

The loose term ‘honour killing’ applies to killing of both males

The origin of honor killings and the control of women are evidenced throughout history in the culture and tradition of many regions. The Roman law of 'pater familias' gave complete control to the men of the family over both their children and wives. Under these laws, the lives of children and wives were at the discretion of the men in their family. Ancient Roman law also justified honor killings by stating that women found guilty of adultery could be killed by their husbands. Among the Ching dynasty in China, fathers and husbands had the right to kill females deemed to have dishonoured them.

The employment of physical and verbal aggression, in order to maintain masculine privilege and preserve the status quo of gender relations, has historically been an effective apparatus of men used to subjugate and oppress their female counterparts. As Fadia Faqir articulates, "The use of violence to maintain privilege is not a neoteric phenomenon, rather it is historically entrenched, and has turned gradually into 'the systemic and global destruction of women, with the institutionalization of patriarchy over the centuries'" (Faqir, 2001).

The report of the Special Rapporteur concerning cultural practices in the family that are violent towards women indicated that honour killings had been reported in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Yemen; other Mediterranean and Persian Gulf countries; Western and European countries such as France, Germany, U.K., Canada, USA; and Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, etc. According to Widney Brown, advocacy director for Human Rights Watch, the practice of honour killing goes across cultures and across religions.

Middle East:

There are cases of honour killing in many countries of Middle East. Such as Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, Yemen. Etc.

In Saudi Arabia a girl was killed by her father for chatting to man on Face Book.

In Istanbul one honour killing every week and over 1000 during 2003 to 2008 and in 2009 a gruesome honour killing of a two year old boy who was born out of wedlock was reported.

In Turkey, a girl was killed after her family heard a song and thought she has a boyfriend and in 2010 a 16 year old girl was buried alive by relatives for befriending boys in Southeast Turkey. A Turkish physics student who represented his country at an international gay conference in the US in 2008 was shot in Istanbul.

In Lebanon, many honour killing are arranged to look like accidents, but the figure is believed to be 40 to 50 per year.

In Palestinian Authority, using a clause in the Jordanian penal code is still in effect in the West Bank. It exempts men from punishment for killing a female relative if she has brought dishonor to the family. According to UNICEF, in 2000 two thirds of all killings in the Palestinian territory were honour killings.

In Iraq city of Basra alone in 2006 to 2007, for violation of "Islamic teachings" as many as 133 women were killed, and 47 for honour killings. Amnesty International says that armed groups, not government, kill politically active women and those who did not follow a strict dress code as well as women who are perceived as Human rights defenders.

Jordan, which is considered as one of the most liberal countries in the Middle East, still has instances of honour killings. For instance, a gay Jordanian man was shot and wounded by his own brother on the grounds of homosexuality which brings dishonor. Interestingly, here families often get sons under the age of 18 (legally minors) to commit honour killings because the Juvenile law allows convicted minors to serve time in a detention centre and be released with a clean criminal record at the age of eighteen. Even within the Mid-

dle East, honour killing is not restricted to Muslims. In Yemen, a Jewish father killed his daughter after a rebuke from the rabbi for her extra-marital pregnancy, and in Palestine, in 2005; Faten Habash was beaten to death with an iron bar, wielded by her Christian father because she wanted to marry her Muslim boyfriend.

Europe:

Albania, Cyprus, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland are the countries where honour killings are practiced. But majority of such happenings are of immigrants.

In Berlin, Muslim women have been killed by family members for bringing dishonor. One Muslim woman was killed by her brother for not staying with the husband she was forced to marry and of 'living like a German'. Here majority of the honour killing are of immigrants.

In Sweden Kurdish women were killed by family members for having relations with outside religion.

In United Kingdom, every year at least a dozen women are victims of honour killings almost exclusively within Asian and Middle East families. UK's Iranian and Kurdish women's Rights organization is reported that about two thirds are Muslims, yet they can also be Hindus and Sikhs. One Sikh woman was killed by her father because he disapproved of her being 'too westernized' and also disapproved of the fact that she was dating a non-Sikh man.

In Italy, a man stabbed his brother nineteen times because his gayness was a dishonor to the family.

West:

In 2007, Dr. Amin Mohammad and Dr. Sujay Patel of Memorial University, Canada, investigated how the practice of honour killings has been brought to Canada. Their report explained that when people come and settle in Canada, they can bring their traditions and forcefully follow them. In some cultures, people feel some boundaries are never to be crossed, and if someone would violate these practices or go against it, then killing is justified to them. The report noted that in different cultures, they can get away without being punished – the courts actually sanction them under religious contexts. The report also stated that the people who commit these crimes are usually mentally ill and that the mental health aspect is often ignored by Western observers because of a lack of understanding of the insufficiently developed state of mental healthcare in developing countries in which honour killings are prevalent. In Canada a Muslim man was accused of killing his three daughters and one of his wives since they brought dishonor to the family. One of his daughters married her boyfriend.

United States of America is far behind Europe in acknowledging that honour 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 victims of such practices. The article suggests that the fear of being labeled "culturally insensitive" often prevents government officials in the US and the media from identifying and accurately reporting these incidents as honour killings, when they occur. Failing to accurately describe the problem makes it more difficult to develop public policies to address it. It is noted by Sociologists that honour killings do not necessarily have to do with religion, but rather the cultures in different regions.

Asia:

In Pakistan, under the Kari-karo tradition honour killings are practiced. There are many fake honour killings reported from Pakistan. The Kari-karo tradition in certain areas of Pakistan - the system of compensation to the man who has lost his honour provides opportunities to make money or to conceal other crimes. Some have even spoken about an "honour killing industry". There are several cases reported about men who have

killed other men for reasons not connected with honour issues and who subsequently killed a woman of their own family as an alleged Kari in order to frame the initial murder as an honour killing. It has been argued that the "honour killing industry" turns the honour code on its head and indicates its degeneration.

In Bangladesh, the progressive women's association, which assists attack victims, tracked 3,560 women who were hospitalized after being attacked at home with fire, gasoline or acid between 1994 and 1999. According to another report, in Bangladesh some 2,200 women are disfigured every year in acid attacks by jealous or estranged men.

In India, honour killings have been reported in northern regions mainly in the Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, as a result of people marrying without their family's acceptance, and sometimes for marrying outside their caste, class, religion or marrying within Gotra or a cross cousin. In contrast honour killings were rare to non-existent in south India and the western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. But in recent times this epidemic is fast reaching south India as well as Gujarat and Maharashtra. In West Bengal and Kerala honour killings ceased about a century ago, largely due to the activism and influence of social reformers.

Among Rajputs, marriages with members of other castes can provoke the killing of the married couple and immediate family members. This form of honour killing is attributed to Rajput culture and traditional views on the perceived 'purity' of a lineage.

In Punjab, the number of honour killings is also very large attributing to Sikh culture and traditional values. Many of these murders are ordered by an informal judicial system of caste Panchayat, which is a self-proclaimed body consisting of village elders, from which women are excluded. A Christian couple, who recently married of their own will and converted to Islam, was gunned down by family members in South Punjab in yet another case of honour killing. The incident took place in a Christian colony in Kalore Kot, a small town in Bhaker district (Published in The Express Tribune, October 21st, 2012).

Haryana and Uttarakhand are also notoriously known for incidents of honour killings mainly happen in the upper caste groups such as Rajputs and Jaats.

Bhagalpur in the northern Indian states of Bihar has also been notorious for honour killings. In the name of 'moral vigilantism' girls are set on fire or axed to death or murdered.

The tradition of honour killing was first viewed in its most horrible form during the Partition of the country in between the years 1947 and 1950, when many women were forcefully killed so that family honour could be preserved. During Partition, there were a lot of forced marriages which were causing women from India to marry men from Pakistan and vice-versa. And then there was a search to hunt down these women who were forced to marry a person from another country and another religion and when they returned home they were killed so that the family honour could be preserved and they were not declared social outcasts from their region. At that time, the influence of religion and social control was much greater and hence there were at least a couple of honour killings a day, if not more. The Partition years can be seen to be the beginning of the tradition of honour killings on a large scale. But it has also been seen recently that even the metropolitan cities like Delhi and Tamil Nadu are not safe from this crime because honour killings are reported from both these metros.

There are various reasons why people or family members decide to kill the daughters in the name of preserving their family honour. The most obvious reasons for this practice to continue in many countries in general and in India in particular, albeit, at a much faster and almost daily basis, are - the

rigidity of caste/Gotra/clan/tribe; the fear of losing their caste status and community status; the fear of stigmatization; the craze for protecting 'purity' of lineage; people refuse to change their attitude to marriage; the mentality of people has not changed; there is no fear of law or formal governance; the cultural practices in the family; demonstrating male chauvinism; blindly following traditional values; patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilineal family structures; misconceptions of repute, respect, honour, status etc

Legal Codes:

Countries where the law is interpreted to allow men to kill female relatives in a premeditated effort as well as for crimes of passion include - Jordan, Latin American countries (Brazil and Colombia), Syria etc. Countries that allow husbands to kill only their wives for committing adultery include - Morocco, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt etc. There is support and positive sanction for honour killings from responsible dignitaries or authorities like President (Chechen), Supreme court advocate (Norwegian), Politician (Baluchistan), Minister for tourism and Prime Minister's adviser on Women's affairs (Pakistan) has to resign after the clerics accused her of bringing shame to the nation by Para-jumping with a male and hugging him after landing.

In 1990 the National Commission for Women set up a statutory body in order to address 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. Their activism has contributed significantly towards the reduction of honour killings in rural areas of North India.

But in recent times the cases are on the rise and in the current scenario when the State has remained mute spectator, 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 suicides. In the recent times cases have come to light where couples are being killed, publicly humiliated and declared as brothers and sisters and in such extreme case on the basis of suspicion, one of the just delivered mothers was asked to breast feed a man with whom they believed she had illicit relation. Many have been killed in cold blooded murder after torture. The victims have approached the law enforcement agencies and still faced trauma and humiliation. The law enforcement agencies continue to be mute spectators while doing lip service work and have been mostly confined to intervention after an incident has happened.

According to the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, the cultural practices in the family are responsible for the violence against women.

Measures:

The following are some of the measures that can improve the epidemic situation of honour killings across the globe:

The Prime Minister/ President should make a statement on honour killings and the need to curb them; the Central Government should issue clear instructions to State Governments and Law enforcement authorities to prevent honour killings by taking proactive steps and also for the protection of such couples; a National Plan of Action in this regard is a must; there is a need to chalk out a plan for preventive steps needed to curb such crimes; various helpline numbers and special cells should be there where such couples can approach the administration for protection; fast tract courts should be constituted for cases of honour killings; all those countries who have been obliged and committed to protect its citizens from such violence under the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women should be reminded of their responsibility; as this practice is against the spirit of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, people should be oriented and educated towards the importance of Human Rights, Civil Rights,

importance of preserving human life, freedom of choice etc in order to at least reduce the killings; the caste associations should come forward to protect the couples rather than adding fuel to the fire; a strong supportive system, be it family, relatives, caste group, community, police, law enforcement authorities, state/central government, politicians, Panchayat, can become an effective instrument to combat the violence against women in general and honour killings in particular; under the constitutional provisions the perpetrators should be booked and punished

Conclusions:

The so-called "honour" crime is deeply rooted in a global culture of discrimination against women and where women are perceived and treated as objects and commodities, not human beings entitled to dignity and rights equal to those of men. And large sections of society share traditional conceptions of family honor and approve of "honor" killings to preserve that honor. The Right to life of women should not be conditional on their obeying social norms and traditions, which are mostly discriminatory in nature and biased towards women. The unholy alliance between the killers who take pride in what they have done, the leaders (Khap Panchayat, community heads, caste heads etc) who condone the acts and protect the killers and the law enforcement authority who are for one reason or another connive the cover-up, works against the women. And this nexus should be broken into pieces with strict and stringent implementation of various Acts and enactments which come under different Sections of International and National Penal codes in order to combat this global epidemic that is honour killings.

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