Legacy of Honor and Violence: An Analysis of Factors Responsible for Honor Killings in Afghanistan, Canada, India, and Pakistan as Discussed in Selected Documentaries on Real Cases

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Abstract
The present study scrutinizes the cases of honor killings in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Canada through selected documentary films. The case focuses on the social, moral, and religious aspects that coerce some people to take the lives of their own family members in case they defy norms. The documentaries chosen as case studies provide the perspectives of both the victims and the victimizers regarding the concepts of honor, dishonor, and honor killings. People in certain societies reject progressive new thought as attempts to contaminate their perceived cultural purity. People from these communities who try to assimilate liberal ideas are often shunned, especially when the emancipation of women is concerned. Even the seemingly progressive males are very unforgiving about the female members of their families embracing the modern ways of life. The women who try to defy set traditions are branded as being rebellious and are punished to serve as a precedent for future rebellions by women and to save society from their alleged bad influence. In some patriarchal societies, women are seen as the preservers of the family’s honor, and their conduct often reflects the family’s culture, morality, and ethics. Any lapse on a woman’s part allegedly taints the family’s name, and punishment must be given to the erring party to restore the family’s honor. The case also studies the influence of society as a compelling factor in honor killings.

Keywords
honor, human rights, modesty, political sociology, sex and gender, shame, social change and modernization, social sciences, social structure, sociology, women’s studies

Introduction
Honor-related violence may be defined as a preplanned violent response to the perception that a woman has violated the family honor through her sexual inappropriateness (Faqir, 2001; Gill, 2009; Mobaj & Abdo, 2004; Sev’er & Yurdakul, 2001; van Eck, 2003). Honor killings are considered the most extreme form of honor-based abuse, which may range from social isolation, insulting, coercion, and forced marriage under the guise of maintaining honor in the family (Khan, 2018). The practice has sanction within communities where male dominance and superiority are promoted through familial, social, and economic structures (Copelon, 2003). This violence is often justified by citing that the indignity caused by the inappropriateness of women and girls forces men of the family to reinstate their honor by killing the guilty (Hussain, 2006).

Women are responsible for their honor and the honor of their families as well, and the women who disrespect honor codes are given sterner treatment when compared to their male counterparts (Baker et al., 1999). Despite all the arguments given by people engaging in honor-related violence, honor killing is not a legal punishment. The legal system does take cognizance of “defamation” as a legally punishable offense; however, the so-called “loss of honor,” which families use to justify violence or murder, does not amount to a crime in any court of law around the world. Most often, honor killings take place when a woman enters into a relationship with someone from a social class, religion, or strata that the family disapproves of. People resort to honor killing when they feel that women have embarrassed their families (Gibbs et al., 2019), by not conforming to the socially accepted norms of the community they are part of. Premarital or extramarital relations are used to validate the influence of society as a compelling factor in honor killings.
licentious conduct of women and are major reasons for honor killings in many communities (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Since women of the family are considered to be custodians of its honor, they are expected to dress modestly, not talk to men outside their family, not attract attention to themselves, marry a partner chosen by their family, and most importantly avoid sex before marriage (Taylor, 2012). Usually, the men of the family are more actively involved in honor-related violence. The age-old traditions, social conditioning, and financial dependence on men turn even the women of the family hostile against the victim, and a heinous act like honor killing is considered a fitting punishment for the indiscretion of the woman (Aplin, 2017; Rew et al., 2013; Sen, 2005). Sometimes the unwilling family succumbs to social pressure from the community to punish the woman and her paramour. At other times, the community takes a decision on a family’s behalf and punishes or executes the victims (Rana & Mishra, 2013).

While no community is completely free from violence against women, honor-related crimes are more frequently reported in communities where female emancipation is relatively a recent phenomenon. Decisions about their health, education, nourishment, marriage, reproduction, and contraception are taken by the men of the family. In some communities, even the birth of a girl is unwelcome (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2000). In these communities, honor-related violence is more rampant. Honor crimes are a specific form of violence, distinct from other widespread domestic or intimate partner violence, including the more familiar passion crime (Abu, 2011). Honor killings have been reported widely in Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, and even the United States (Amnesty International, n.d.).

Women are soft targets because of their perceived lower social status and higher moral responsibility in maintaining the honor and reputation of their families. Even under normal circumstances, women face structural violence resulting from disparities in a social structure which include sexism, rape, domestic violence, psychological violence, and other acts of violence. Even educated and financially secure women sometimes suffer domestic violence (Kundapur et al., 2017).

Honor killings are indicative of the secondary status of women in the concerned society. Although the conduct of women of the family reflects the honor of the entire family, they are not thought to possess any honor of their own (Palo, 2009). Moral codes of conduct are advocated and enforced to elicit desired behavior from women. Framed by men, these codes favor men and establish their dominance over women. UNFPA estimates the number of women and girls killed by either their family members or relatives across the globe for crimes pertaining to honor at 5,000 (UNFPA, 2000). However, individual studies maintain that the actual figure is closer to 20,000 per year worldwide (Kiener, 2011).

In this study, we hypothesize that honor killings are perpetrated due to the (personal/social) belief that sexual misconduct of women which brings shame and dishonor to the family can only be restored by severely punishing or killing the woman and in some cases her paramour. Such violence apparently distances the rest of the family from the act of the woman and ostensibly reinstates their respect and honor in their society. Honor killings are intended to serve as a warning against possible future transgressions and a mechanism to instill fear and maintain control over women and their sexuality. Of the many factors leading to honor killings, the extent to which female emancipation, literacy, and modern education are held responsible by the perpetrators of such violence is also examined in this case. This case also discusses how the spread of education, awareness of legal rights, and proper implementation of justice can ultimately help in mitigating honor-related violence.

**Method**

By using documentary films as case studies, we studied the reasons for honor killings in selected regions in South Asia. We limited our selections to documentary films dealing with natives of South Asian countries since we wanted to look into various possible reasons for such killings in this region. The cases were selected based on differences in location, region, religion, and educational and financial status of the victims. Of the total five documentaries selected, three deal with people who were living in their homelands (India and Pakistan) at the time of the crime, while the remaining two feature immigrants from these countries living in Canada. *India’s forbidden love: An honor killing on trial* and *Izzatnagar ki asabhya betiyan* discuss honor killings due to intercaste and same gotra marriages in India with cases that took place during the years between 2000 and 2016, while *Unveiled-The Kohistan video scandal* discusses a case from the year 2012 in Pakistan. Documentaries *Jassi Sidhu murder: Escape from justice* and *Shaﬁa family murders: House of Shaﬁa* deal with honor killings by immigrants in Canada in the years 2000 and 2009, respectively. All the documentaries contain testimonials either from the perpetrators in the form of their interviews or from the interviews of those who knew them. These films provided us a glimpse into the minds of people who were involved in honor killings. The role of social councils in ordering such killings has also been discussed through these films. Among themselves, the documentaries selected for the study bring insights into honor crime cases covering a period of 16 years, beginning with *Jassi Sidhu murder*, which marks the beginning of this period and ending in 2016 with *India’s forbidden love*.

**Honor Killings: Reasons and Perspectives**

Honor in its definition is seen to be a virtue, linked with morality, integrity of character, and altruism (Vandello & Cohen, 2004). Research on the evolution of altruistic
cooperation suggests that morality is mainly altruistic (Gintis et al., 2003; Haidt, 2007). An individual is expected to sacrifice personal freedom and desires in accordance with the specified codes of honor for the benefit of the society that he or she is a part of. Punishment for misconduct is viewed as a form of altruism that benefits the group at the expense of the individual (Nordin, 2016). As a symbolic construct, honor carries numerous connotations that vary in different regions (Sen, 2005; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). People who put great emphasis on honor ratify the reputation and social standing of an individual or his family and even community based on the sexual behavior and morality of its women (Brandon & Hafez, 2008). Dishonor may be incited due to one’s words, deeds, actions, omissions and on rare occasions, the actions of others (Castetter, 2003).

The cultural beliefs and traditions of a region play a decisive role in the freedom given to its women and men. Intermixing of girls and boys is a sensitive issue in many communities. Sexual conduct, especially of women in such communities, is constantly under the scanner with respect to their assigned sexual and familial roles dictated by ideology; hence adultery, premarital relationships, rape, or falling in love may violate family honor (Commission on Human Rights, 1999). The philosophy of avoiding shame and protecting honor guides the people in their conduct and retaining their unique identities (A. Ahmed, 2003). In case of any lapse or overstepping of these boundaries, a woman transgressor is supposed to have brought misfortune upon her and receives a sterner punishment, while the males are considered to be the victims of the circumstances and are let off comparatively easy (Ewing, 2008; Husseini, 2011). The code of modesty followed in these regions is derived from the notion that women can contaminate or defile the honor of men through their immoral conduct (Antoun, 1968). The nature and degree of punishment that a woman may be given for an alleged honor crime, differs in different regions according to the status of the family she is part of (Dobash & Dobash, 2000). Murder is considered to be the most suitable way to redeem the family honor (Taylor, 2012). The sexual behavior of women is readily associated with the symbolic capital of a family (Bourdieu, 1977). Although a woman is not considered in sole control of her honor (Palo, 2009), a violation of a woman’s modesty unequivocally directs everyone’s wrath solely on her. If someone stains the family’s honor, the men of the family are expected to respond in an aggressive and violent manner to avoid disgrace (Brown, 2016).

**Case Studies**

The documentary films selected for our study, namely, *Unveiled-The Kohistan video scandal* (B. Ahmed, 2016), *India’s forbidden love: An honor killing on trial* (Subramaniam, 2018), *Izzatnagar ki asabhya betiyan* (Sawhney, 2012), *Shafia family murders: House of Shafia* (Rumak & Houlihan, 2012), and *Jassi Sidhu murder: Escape from justice* (McKeown, 2012), discuss cases of punishments and honor killings in families from Pakistan, India, Canada, and Afghanistan. Adherence to stern disciplinary codes of life emerges as the main reason for these crimes.

The documentary *Unveiled-The Kohistan video scandal*, directed by Brishkay Ahmed, discusses the case of four girls in Kohistan (Pakistan) who were killed for their failure to adhere to *purdah* (veil). These girls were seen in a minute-long video made during a marriage ceremony. The girls were sitting together in a corner, with their heads and most of their faces covered. In another part of the same room, two boys were seen singing a song and one of them was dancing while the girls clapped to the tune. When the video got leaked a year later, a Jirga council passed the decision of killing the girls and the boys along with the boys’ families because the family of the girls had been allegedly dishonored due to the video. According to the documentary, the families of the girls tortured them by pouring boiling water and burning coal over them. They kept the girls confined and eventually killed them in front of witnesses.

The documentary *The House of Shafia* directed by O.J. Rumak and R. Houlihan discusses how Shafia, his wife Tooba, and son Hamed killed Zainab, 19, Sahar, 17, Geeti 13, and their stepmother Rona Amir, 50, by drowning them in the Rideau Canal in their family car. The family had migrated to Canada from Afghanistan. The girls were educated in Dubai and Canada. They were living in Canada, but Shafia wanted them to wear *hijab* and marry according to his wishes. The girls, on the contrary, chose to make boyfriends and embrace Western attire. The enraged parents killed them along with their stepmother.

The documentary *Izzatnagar ki asabhya betian*, directed by N. S. Sawhney, is about Manoj and Babli, a couple from Karora village in rural Haryana (India), belonging to the same *gotra* (clan). Manoj and Babli fell in love, eloped, and got married. The *khap* council annulled the marriage and imposed a social boycott on Manoj’s family at the request of Babli’s family. A case was filed against Manoj for kidnapping Babli. Despite police protection by the court, they were kidnapped by the disgruntled family of the girl. Manoj was strangulated, Babli was poisoned, and their bodies were dumped into *Barwala* link canal after tying them in gunny bags. In another case shown in the documentary *Izzatnagar*, a couple was declared siblings after two and a half years of marriage by the *khap*, and the woman was asked to leave the village after it became known that the girl belonged to a majority clan. The father of the boy was publicly humiliated by stuffing a shoe in his mouth for being party to the crime. Their property was auctioned to warn the entire community.

The caste divide in India is the focus of the documentary film *India’s forbidden love* directed by Sadhana Subramaniam. The film follows the story of Shankar, a *Dalit* (lower caste), and Kausalya, a *Thevar* (upper caste) girl in *Pollachi*, Tamil Nadu, India. Kausalya and Shankar fell in love while studying at an engineering college and got married despite
opposition from Kausalya’s family. Despite attempts to convince her to leave Shankar and threats to their lives, Kausalya did not return to her family, nor did they flee the state. In 2016, a gang of men hacked the couple on a busy street. Shankar died on the way to the hospital. Kausalya barely survived.

The documentary *Escape from justice*, directed by B. McKeown, highlights the notions of social and public disgrace which Jassi’s mother and uncle felt when she married Mithu, an auto-rickshaw driver from Punjab, while on a trip to India. Jassi attempted to sponsor Mithu’s immigration to Canada so that they could live together. Her rich and influential family wanted her to marry an older man from an affluent family. When they came to know about Mithu, they confined her. Jassi sneaked to India and the couple started living together. Jassi and Mithu were waylaid one night. Jassi was kidnapped. Her body was dumped in a ditch with her throat slit. Jassi’s mother and uncle allegedly orchestrated the murder with the help of local acquaintances.

**Perspectives on Honor Killings: Reasons for Honor-Related Violence**

**Purdah (Veil)**

In the documentary *Unveiled*, a member of Jirga emphasizes that it is upon a man to protect his and his family’s honor, and killing the person who has brought dishonor to the family is the most appreciable way to do so. In the communities following the purdah system (veil), women are expected to safeguard themselves from the gaze of unrelated men (Castetter, 2003). Their adherence to purdah determines the family honor (Feldner, 2000). According to the Jirga members, the girls in the video had disgraced their families by exposing their faces. They were singing and clapping with unrelated men, which is an unpardonable offense. Another local elder, appearing in the documentary, mentions that their day-to-day conduct is governed by their traditional value system. Relationships between unmarried boys and girls are termed illicit. He accepts that such incidents do occur at times, but if they come across such a thing, it is customary to kill the people involved. These measures, as per their belief, have preserved their identity and customs which otherwise might have fallen apart. Maulana Javed, the leader of Jirga who had allegedly issued the fatwa for the killing of the girls, vehemently denies his role in the decision for killings. He however maintains that the boys had dishonored the girls by showing them in the video, and such a thing is forbidden as well as punishable. Such notions are more strictly adhered to in the tribal regions of the country. In such communities, the failure of male members to punish the guilty brings dishonor to the family as well as the whole tribe (Warraich, 2005). Both men and women must protect the family honor though in different ways. A woman is supposed to protect honor through her modesty while men do so by their masculinity. In case a woman behaves in a manner that is considered immodest or inappropriate, the men in the family assert their masculinity by killing the woman and thus redeem themselves (Jafri, 2008).

**Influence of Society**

As mentioned in the documentary, the killing of the five girls in Kohistan (Pakistan) was the result of societal pressure experienced by many families in the region. The investigating team appointed by the Supreme Court to investigate this case came across stories of honor killing in almost every household. According to *Aurat* Foundation, a women’s rights organization based in Islamabad, Pakistan, countless women have been murdered, raped, sold or exchanged in marriage, or paraded naked on the orders of local *jirgas* (Bandial, 2016). Dr. Farzana Bari, a social activist, mentions that she was grieved but not shocked to hear the story as such things are very common in Kohistan. Afzal Kohistani, the brother of the boys involved in the controversy, says that it is common in the region for young boys and girls to get killed for reasons pertaining to rigid notions of honor. Afzal was murdered in March 2019 for going against the local tribal tradition and campaigning for the protection of his brothers and the girls.

**Rigid Adherence to Religion and Customs**

Shafia and Tooba, who were recorded secretly in their car by Police, talk about their daughters having committed treason against their customs and religion through their modern and rebellious behavior. In numerous recordings, Shafia can be heard cursing his three daughters and first wife and glorifying his act of behaving in an appropriate manner by killing them. Shafia in one of his intercepted rants declares that his girls had betrayed Islam, their religion, their creed, and tradition through their immoral behavior. The murderers valued their honor more than life and strongly believed that the girls received a punishment they deserved.

Honor killings in Canada have often been reported among immigrant communities who rigidly adhere to their native cultural practices (Department of Justice, 2016). The perpetrators try to justify their acts of homicide in the name of their honor as the female victims embraced the values different from their native culture, and they were either going to or had already brought dishonor to their families (Muhammad, 2010). In the Shafia case, the victims’ decision to renounce traditional values in favor of acquired Western ways of life was the main reason for their deaths. Honor killings in this case took place due to refusal on the part of Shafia and Tooba to embrace the ideals of gender equality and individual freedom enshrined in the constitution of Canada.
Same gotra Marriages

In India, Khap councils not only summon social boycotts and impose fines but also play a role in instigating murders or forcing people to commit suicide (Gupta & Seth, 2007; Sangwan, 2010). A village elder in the documentary Izzatnagar states that they can accept an interreligion marriage but cannot allow a marriage in the same village or clan. Every woman in the village should either be considered a sister or daughter. The people who do not respect this system and get married for love are punished as individuals belonging to the same gotra are considered one family and marital relations between them are tantamount to incest.

Khap system in Haryana (India) forbids a couple from getting married if their mothers or their grandmothers belonged to the same gotra (clan). They quote that it is also prohibited according to the Indian Vedic texts (Deswal, 2013). Apart from this, marriages in the same village, outside the caste, and marriages between a man from a minority clan and a girl from the majority clan, irrespective of the region where the woman comes from, are prohibited. As shown in the documentary, stern actions are initiated by khap councils against people who do not comply with these restrictions.

Fear of Being Ostracized

A woman in the documentary film mentions that khap councils do not let the families spare their children or allow them to live the way they want to. In the Manoj Babli case, khap assembly imposed a socioeconomic ban on the family of Manoj for protesting against the killing. In the other instance, they auctioned the property of the family after the revelation that the girl belonged to the majority clan. Under the threat of ex-communication, people often give in to the decisions taken by the khap.

In the documentary, India’s Forbidden love, Kaushalya’s brother Gautham recalls that after she eloped with Shankar, their relatives taunted them for inaction and insulted them for having spared their lives. Her mother talks about accusations from her relatives and people from her neighborhood of letting her daughter run away with a lower caste boy. She mentions that people even suggested that they should commit suicide rather than living with this shame. Kaushalya’s brother alludes to the fact that they killed Shankar and tried to kill Kaushalya to regain respect and acceptability among their people. This case is one of the numerous instances where family members have confessed to having been pushed to commit honor killings by their social circle (Kusha, 2009).

Caste System

The caste system is another major factor responsible for honor killings in India (Mahajan, 2020). It defines the extent and hierarchy of interaction among castes. Even after seven decades of independence and a number of government initiatives for alleviating caste barriers, people have been slow in accepting the Dalits and so-called lower castes as their equals. This in turn reflects the influence of rootedness in caste differences on the stance of people in maintaining the social gap between the castes and following a socially acceptable code of conduct. Kaushalya mentions that when they were attacked, one of the attackers said that a lower-caste man like Shankar cannot fall in love. This comment highlights an important issue at the heart of the divide and enmity between upper and lower castes. People belonging to lower castes have for long been poor and generally work as laborers in the homes and fields of upper-caste landlords. They have always been subservient to the higher castes. Any change in this scenario is not taken positively by the upper-caste people. Most of the land holdings in villages lie with upper-caste families. The marriage of an upper-caste girl with a landless lower-caste boy challenges property relations and caste hierarchies. The girl, who has already asserted her right to marry a person of her choice, may assert her right to her share in ancestral property, which is now safeguarded by the constitutional law of India. The fear of social ranks being obliterated and property getting transferred to people belonging to lower caste makes the resistance to such relationships more violent and widespread (Halder & Jaishankar, 2017).

In documentary India’s forbidden love, Kaushalya’s brother talks about how Kaushalya’s lack of awareness of caste led to her downfall. He says that Kaushalya ceased to exist for them the day she married a lower caste boy. Marrying outside the caste is treated as the loss of honor by people who believe in caste system. They consider the elimination of family members opting for marriages beneath their caste as the only honorable way out (Chowdhry, 2004). Intercaste marriages do not always end in honor killings; however, such couples are often ostracized by their communities. According to National crime records Bureau, 6% of attacks on Dalits as a result of intercaste marriages in India take place in the state of Tamil Nadu, and in 2016 alone, 1,291 such cases were reported in the state (Ravishankar, 2017). Kaushalya’s account in the documentary expresses her disillusionment with the caste system that killed her husband. The documentary provides the perspectives of both Kaushalya and her parents about the perception of caste in their community. Kaushalya mentions that when she married a man from a lower caste, her parents felt that their caste was polluted. Therefore, they decided to punish her as well.

The documentary records the resentment of people against intercaste marriages, as they opine that such marriages attempt at breaking social hierarchies and may bring about chaos in their lives. Intercaste marriages threaten the system that favors the higher castes. The inclusion of a so-called lower-caste individual among their ranks is completely unacceptable to them. Hence, they propagate and promote a negative image of intercaste couples to maintain the status quo.
Financial Status

Apart from the caste system in India, social status is another significant factor in fixing marriages (Jacobson, 2004). Marriages between people belonging to different social statuses are generally avoided. If a couple marries against the wishes of parents, rejecting the notions of status and equality, the family takes it as humiliation and loss of family name in their social circles. Jassi’s cousin reveals in the documentary that Jassi’s mother called her a disgrace to the family for having eloped and married an auto-rickshaw driver. The mother felt that Jassi had defamed the family by marrying a man below their status. Jassi’s mother told her cousin that they will not let her remain married to a poor man. She added that death was waiting for Jassi in India. Her uncle shows no grief on her death whenever he appears in the documentary. Her mother does not feature in the film, but the accounts of Jassi’s cousin confirm the extent of her disappointment with Jassi and her determination to make things right.

Education of Women

Education is hailed as the harbinger of progress. But even today, people oppose girls’ education out of fear that education would make them aware of their rights as women and as humans, and this might lead to free-thinking and insubordination (Torgan, 2016). When a girl asserts her right to live her life on her own terms, her behavior is considered to have been influenced by her education. In the documentary Indian’s forbidden love, Kausalya’s grandmother and brother also blame Kausalya’s education for her disrespect of the caste system. Her mother rues that she went against everyone in the family to educate Kausalya, but she betrayed her by marrying a person from a lower caste.

In The House of Shafia, Shafia, the father, exposed his girls to modern education but expected them to follow the customs of Afghanistan without question. He could not stand his daughters talking to boys in school. Hamed, as the eldest male sibling, concurred with his father’s opinions despite receiving progressive education as did his younger brother. The youngest sister also reported back to the parents. Shafia’s outlook was very conservative. He wanted the women of his family to live by his rules and felt that his daughters had humiliated him by exposing themselves under the influence of Canadian education. Zainab had once left home. On many occasions, Sahar had expressed her desire to be put in foster care. Geeti was rebellious too. All this was unbearable to Shafia. The youngest Shafia girl survived because she conformed to the prescribed rules of their home. Education widened the horizons of Zainab, Sahar, and Geeti and pitted them against their native value system.

Marriage for Love

A P Jayachandran, the defense counsel for Kausalya’s parents, states that people in Kallar Thewar caste (the caste in which Kausalya was born) normally kill a girl at birth. Contrary to this practice, he says, her parents let her live and even sent her to an engineering institute. His argument reveals the underlying sentiment that a girl should be thankful even for her existence. She should live her life and marry in accordance to her parents’ wishes, become a dutiful wife, and follow her husband’s commands later. In Kausalya’s case, her parents wanted her to marry a politician, but she decided to marry a boy from a low caste for love. Jassi rejected a rich man to marry a man of her choice. Her family was a part of a closed Sikh community in Canada who still held on to their native value system. Jassi was brought up in Canada and her outlook was modern, but her family pressured her to marry a man they had chosen for her. The Shafia girls desired freedom guaranteed by Canadian law which conflicted with the ultra-conservative atmosphere of their home. Zainab’s decision to marry her Pakistani boyfriend despite her parents’ opposition and her divorce within 24 hours of her marriage was a shock to Shafia and Tooba. Sahar was in love with a Mexican boy and wanted to marry him. She intended to take Geeti with her after marriage. In all these cases, the decision of girls to marry for love led to honor killing.

Summing Up

The main factor that emerges as a contributor to honor-related violence after the study of these documentaries is the fear of losing traditional identity and beliefs. The notions of traditional identity and appropriate behavior like wearing veil, hijab, and segregation of sexes have strong roots in the citizens of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The societal pressure through tribal justice systems like jirgas makes their verdicts irrevocable, and families carry out the punishment meted out by them. This is witnessed in the documentary Unveiled.

In The House of Shafia, in addition to Shafia’s love for his identity, which emerges from his cultural roots in Afghanistan, we are faced with similar beliefs in his sons. Shafia did not study much, which explains his strict adherence to the codes of Afghan culture. The elder son Hamed was born in Afghanistan and imbibed similar values. Even his education in UAE and Canada did not stop him from acting as a traditional patriarch in the absence of his father. Interestingly, the youngest son of the family followed in the footsteps of Hamed despite being born and raised outside Afghanistan.
The traditional Afghan culture did not give many rights to Rona who had to allow Shafia to marry a second time because she was infertile. Her status was that of a servant in the household. She was killed because the discovery of her relationship with Shafia could lead to the family’s deportation. Zainab wanted to marry a Pakistani boy and Sahar had a non-Muslim boyfriend. Geeti had once complained to school authorities about her family but retracted it later. Wearing hijab did not appeal to her. The girls’ rebellion was taken by parents as treason against their religion and custom.

**Caste and Gotra-Based Issues**

Documentaries *Unveiled* and *Izzatnagar* capture the role of religious fundamentalism and community councils in deciding how individuals must live their life. *India’s forbidden love* and *Escape from justice* talk about the notions of caste superiority and financial well-being which expect that the individual must sacrifice their rights and happiness for the family’s honor and reputation. *Escape from justice* and *The house of Shafia* talk about the cultural clash faced by immigrants due to exposure to a wider worldview. Education that promotes a sense of independence and free-thinking among women is understood as a betrayal of traditional values by their families.

**Gaps in the Legal System**

It must be noted that no constitution in the world advocates, justifies, or sanctions honor-related violence. Constitutional law promotes equality and human rights for everyone irrespective of their age, gender, religion, race, ethnicity, education, or financial background. Honor killing is nothing but homicide, and the perpetrators of this crime are supposed to be unequivocally charged with homicide. The ground realities, however, make a fair trial impossible in case of honor killings, and often the offenders are able to evade legal punishment. Honor killings are difficult to prove in the legal courts, and as a result, the culprits are able to circumvent justice due to a lack of conclusive evidence.

In the Manoj-Babli murders, justice was delayed. Some convicts were awarded a death sentence; however, the prime conspirator in the case was acquitted. It was in 2018, six years after the murders were committed in Kohistan, that suspects admitted to killing the girls and were arrested. Kausalya’s father was awarded a death sentence for murdering Shankar only after a long-drawn legal battle, while her mother and uncle, who according to Kausalya were equally involved in her husband’s murder, were given the benefit of doubt and acquitted. Jassi Sidhu’s uncle and mother were extradited to India in 2019, nineteen years after her murder. In the Shafia sisters’ case, however, overwhelming forensic evidence of the crime led to the eventual conviction of the murderers.

Honor killing has been practiced by a parallel system of justice in various societies for a long time without much resistance from the suffering parties. In most cases, the perpetrators of honor killings are members of the family and clan. It, therefore, becomes very difficult to collect evidence due to the silence of witnesses. The perpetrators, convinced of their righteousness, do not consider honor killings as an offense. These communities consider their decisions as their personal matter, and any interference from outside the family or elders/representatives from their clan is not permitted. The brutality of such killings is amplified by the fact that they are used as examples to prevent further disobediences. Family members of the victims become a party to crime either under pressure from the community or due to their own indignation. The victims and their families act as precedents in case of any transgressions in the future. In some cases, the dead bodies of couples were hung from trees for people to see as a warning against the same clan and intercaste marriages (Rao, 2018). With the spread of education, however, individuals are waking up to their legal and human rights and taking control of their lives. They are opening up about this injustice and even approaching courts of Law for Justice. This is the reason for an increasing investigation and discussion into honor-related violence.

**Conclusion**

While the traditions and customs were originally coined for the smooth functioning of society, rigid adherence to them gradually fixed the gender roles over the course of millennia. What initially were just guiding principles for harnessing the maximum potential of society ultimately took the form of oppressive diktats which started impinging on the rights of the individual, especially women. To curb the role of *khap* assemblies in honor killings, the Supreme Court of India in May 2018 declared that any assembly that aims at stalling a marriage between two consenting adults will be illegal (Sinha, 2018). In Pakistan, the legislation against honor killing mandates 25 years in prison for the convicted murderers. However, despite all the provisions by the law, honor crimes keep surfacing in different parts of the world. The notions of honor and its loss are etched deep in the minds of people. Even nations promising equal rights to every individual occasionally witness honor crimes. While the younger generation is in general more liberal and accepting, some of them still adhere to rigid perceptions of honor and shame in their mind. People involved in honor-related crimes seek a relaxation in punishment on the grounds that they practice a different way of life. They consider any effort to bring them to justice as an attack on their way of life. Even when they allow their women to study, the rights guaranteed to them by law are often denied to them.

The spread of education and exposure to the modern world has gradually increased awareness of human rights among individuals. The law guarantees freedom of expression and choice to individuals and safeguards their rights. However, people obsessed with the notions of honor and
shame disregard the law when it comes to their family honor. An increasing proportion of people is gradually reconciling to the values being incorporated through modern education. However, progress on this front is comparatively slow, especially among elders, in rural and semi-urban areas. Izatnagar documentary points out the startling fact that more resistance against social dictats and inhuman and illegal social practices is coming from the younger generation in rural and less developed areas. People are refusing to live their lives in the fear of persecution. They are increasingly asserting their legal rights as individuals. The law has also done its bit to punish the guilty. However, as discussed earlier, in cases of honor-related crimes, it is difficult to find witnesses and that is why justice sometimes gets delayed in the absence of incriminating evidence.

Honor-related violence thrives due to the silence of the community, lack of evidence, and delayed legal punishment. It is not easy to bring an overnight change in the ideals and notions embedded in the psyche of the individual and the collective consciousness of a community. However, with education, awareness of legal procedures and human rights, and conviction of perpetrators involved in such crimes, it is believed that a change in mindset toward honor-related crimes will be attained in due course.

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