The Legacy of Blood and Glory: Unearthing the Social Panorama of Honor Killings

Abstract

Context: The concept of honor killing is very interesting yet complex to explore. Such killings are out rightly condemned by the society, yet supported by the family. Such unique characteristics and increasingly alarmingly rates of honor killings calls for attention in this area.

Aims: The objectives of the present study were to explore honor killings from the perspective of social identity (SI) theory. In addition, it also aims to investigate into the development and alternatives to honor killing.

Settings and Design: In order to fulfill the objectives of the study, a village from the state of Haryana was selected for the study. A qualitative study was designed.

Subjects and Methods: A sample of 3 participants residing in the village were taken as sample. Purposive sampling was done. A semi structured interview schedule based on components of SI theory (SIT) was devised. Statistical Analysis Used: Thematic analysis was done. Results: Three themes were generated from the data which were social comparison, positive distinctiveness, and attachment to SI.

Conclusions: Psychological insights into the process of honor killings can be of prime importance as it can provide new pathways into the understanding and prevention of such killings. However, honor killings is a highly complex phenomenon, hence cannot be understood by SIT alone, therefore there are still unexplored areas of honor killings which still need to be investigated.

Keywords: Haryana, honor killings, social identity theory

Introduction

Honor killing is the homicide of the female member of a family by the family members of the girl, due to the belief of that the deceased had brought dishonor upon the family or community.[1] There are reports of cases of honor killings in almost all parts of India but the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Western Uttar Pradesh are the regions where these incidents occur more frequently.[2]

The term social identity (SI) approach, or SI perspective, is suggested for describing the joint contributions of both SI theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory. Tajfel has defined SIT as part of individual's self-concept which is derived from affiliation to a group and the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership.[3] There are 3 mental processes involves in evaluating others as “us” or “them” (i.e., “in-group” and “out-group”). These take place in a particular order. The first is categorization, followed by social identification, followed by social comparison. Additionally, a key assumption in SIT is that individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness.[3]

Operationalization of social identity theory

After an understanding of the phenomenon was developed, it was seen that honor killings in Jaat community were very often a result of marriage between forbidden relations. It was gathered that marriages in the Jaat community are based on certain rules of association. Tajfel’s SIT was taken as a theoretical basis for the study. Furthermore, it was also seen that no honor killings had taken place in the village under consideration therefore just the participants’ perspectives and opinions on honor killings from a SIT lens was studied. As a result, SIT was employed and the situation of intravillage marriage was taken as a background against development of the
study. As it is central to SIT, in groups and out groups with respect to situation of intravillage marriage were identified. The in-group was identified as people who oppose intravillage marriages and out group was people who support such marriages. Once in-group and out-group was identified, further aspects of SIT were taken into the study which were social comparison, positive distinctiveness, attachment to SI, depersonalization.

Previous literature looks at honor killings from legal and political perspective and fail to take a psychosocial perspective.[4-6]

Rationale

Honor killings are a contemporary phenomenon which is haunting the Indian society in the age of growth and advancement. Despite various laws against such killings under Indian Penal Code, yet such killings are not being contained. This calls for attention into the psychology of the people who rationalize such acts. An emic perspective is essential if we want to understand honor killings at its root. Most previous researches relied on content analysis of cases of honor killings. An insight into the perspective of the members of that community would be of utmost help in tackling such problems.

Objectives

• To explore honor killings from the perspective of SIT, thereby looking at honor killings from an in-group perspective
• To investigate into the development and alternatives to honor killing.

Subjects and Methods

Sample

To answer the research questions, 3 participants (2 males and 1 female; aged 46, 48 and 35; low Socioeconomic status [SES]) [Table 1] from the village of Buana Lakhu, Haryana, were taken as sample. Purposive sampling was done and it was ensured that the participants were willing to take part in the study. Consent form to participate in the study was signed by the participants. Appropriate social demographics were included.

Tool

A self-constructed, semi-structured interview schedule in English based on SIT was designed. Initially the first draft of the interview schedule consisted of 2 parts. First part was the demographics and second part consisted of general questions about marriage and its process to build the stage for more personal questions on specifies concepts of SIT, i.e., definition of out-group, in-group accessibility, positive distinctiveness, social comparison, attachment to SI, and depersonalization. Second draft of interview schedule was made after conduction of a pilot study. Third draft of the interview schedule was made after translating the second draft, which was in English, to Hindi. The third draft was modified along the lines of the local dialect which is Haryanvi.

Procedure

A qualitative study was undertaken. Consequently, a sample of 3 participants from the village were taken. It was ensured that they had lived in the village their entire lives or a significant part of their lives was spent in the village. Significant part would mean that major part of their lives, for example, their upbringing, their residence after marriage; should be spent in the village. Purposive sampling was done.

The interview schedule, as described above, was constructed and administered to the participants.

Analysis

Thematic analysis[7] was used as a method of analyzing the qualitative data. The analysis was done via making initial codings, subsequent themes, and subthemes. Relevance for the themes was tested by comparing the themes with the data. Consequently, the themes were explained with apposite quotes/text excerpts.

| Table 1: Depicting participant demographic variables |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Demographics                   | Participant 1          | Participant 2          | Participant 3          |
| Age                           | 46 years               | 48 years               | 35 years               |
| Gender                        | Male                   | Male                   | Female                 |
| Religion                      | Hindu                  | Hindu                  | Hindu                  |
| Educational qualification     | 10th                   | 10th                   | 8th                    |
| SES                           | Low                    | Low                    | Low                    |
| Occupation                    | Staff help at local government school | Unemployed | Tailor |
| Number of years spent in the village | 46                    | 48                     | 19                     |
| Type of marriage              | Arranged               | Arranged               | Arranged               |
| Years of marriage             | 21                     | 19                     | 19                     |
| Type of family                | Nuclear                | Nuclear                | Nuclear                |
| Number of children            | 2, boy and girl        | 2, boy and girl        | 2, boy and girl        |
| Age of children               | 16 years, 18 years respectively | 5 years, 12 years respectively | 5 years, 12 years respectively |

SES=Socioeconomic status
Results

“Natija bhi ghatia hi pavega... jo accha hoga vo faasi todega... jo sahi ka samarthan dega voh sahi hai... nyu konya kehte ki falane ka bhaga, nyu kahen ge ki lakhu buana ki ladka/ladki bhagi/bhagi... pure gaon ka naam badnaam hoga.”

“The outcome will also be bad. the righteous will hang them. the one who supports the right is righteous. onlookers won’t point out the families, rather they will say that the girl/boy from lakhu Buana has run away. the whole village will be shamed.”

“Hukka pani band kardo, samaj se ger do... agar faasi tod di toh dekhne wala kahega ki bada accha kaam kia... agar mera dil badiya hai, mai theek admi hoon toh main yu kahunga ki inko faasi todo.”

“Stop interacting with them, ostracize them. if we hang them then onlookers will say that we have done the right thing. if my heart is good, if I am a good man then I will hang them.”

Samaj ko shaanti milegi, bahar walo ko shaanti milegi, khud ko shaanti milegi... bahar wale kahenge ki unke maa-baap ne unhe faasi tod di... hamara nyu kehena hai ki kahi aur bhi aisa hoga toh voh bhi nyu hi rog katenge.uko turant faasi todo aur 5 rupees ka prashad bhi baat do... faasi tod di, bada accha kiya.

“The society will be at peace, others with also be at peace. I will be at peace. onlookers will say that their parents hung them. we want to say that if such things happen elsewhere they will hang their children. hang them immediately and distribute sweets. by hanging them a good deed has been done.”

Discussion

Presented below are themes which are central to each participant keeping in mind the different demographics of the participants.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a 46-year-old male, who belonged to low SES. He worked as a staff help at a local government school. He has had a satisfied arranged marriage of 21 years. He had one boy and one girl of marriageable age. He reported to have had friendly and frequent relations with his extended family members i.e., with his brothers and bhabis. Furthermore, he reported that he has had cordial and frequent interaction with other villagers. He also reported to have cordial relations with his parents and had strong influence and hold in his family and in the village [Tables 1 and 2].

It was seen that participant 1 showed strongest stance on killing the couple if they went ahead with intra village marriage. Also he reported to have associated positive feelings with SI, i.e., he reported he would be at peace if he kills his child on the grounds of marrying a person of same village. His identification process was typical of Tajfel’s process of identification. Participant 1 too strongly affiliated himself to in-group, i.e., people who oppose intra village marriage. He then reported to have derived positive emotions out of his SI. He also showed greatest attachment to his in-group by believing that the in-group had right ideology and out-group should be culturally ostracized. He also evaluated his SI in positive terms.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was a 48-year-old male, who belonged to low SES. He had no means of earning. He did not have a very satisfied arranged marriage, as he said that he would have frequent disagreement with his wife. He had one boy and one girl aged 5 years and 12 years, respectively. He reported to have had distant relations with his extended family members, i.e., with his brothers and bhabis. Furthermore, he reported that he has had limited interaction with other villagers. He also reported to have strained relations with his mother and had “good” influence and hold in his family and in the village [Tables 1 and 2].

He categorized himself as an in-group member and took firm stance on opposition of intravillage marriage. He maintained in group favoritism by believing in ideology of his group, however he showed neutrality towards the out group. He said that intra village marriage is wrong, yet it can be accepted under certain situations. This can be attributed to the notion that he did not have a satisfied

| Social demographics                  | Participant 1 | Participant 2                  | Participant 3                             |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Satisfaction with marriage           | High          | Frequent disagreements         | Adequate satisfaction at present-had disagreements |
|                                      |               | with wife                      | with husband initially                    |
| Interaction with children            | Frequent, friendly | Frequent       | Frequent, friendly                |
| Interaction with extended family members | Frequent, jovial | Distant       | Frequent, friendly                |
| Interactions with parents, if alive  | Frequent, cordial | Strained relations | Frequent, friendly                |
| Influence in family                  | Good          | Good                          | Good                                      |
| Influence in village                 | Good          | Good                          | Good                                      |
| Interaction with villagers           | Frequent      | Occasional                    | Frequent                                  |

Table 2: Depicting social demographic variables
arranged marriage and also he had limited interactions with the villagers and had low involvement in activities of the village, therefore he did not internalize the village’s norms.

**Participant 3**

Participant 3 was a 35-year-old female, who belonged to low SES. She was a tailor and supported her family through her income. She had had adequately satisfied arranged marriage at present, however she said that she and her husband would have frequent disagreement initially. She had one boy and one girl aged 5 years and 12 years, respectively. She had friendly relations with her extended family members, i.e., with her dewar/jeth and dewrani/jethani. Furthermore, she reported that she had frequent interaction with other villagers. She also reported to have positive and cordial relations with her mother and had “good” influence and hold in her family and in the village [Tables 1 and 2]. It is to be noted that participant 2 and participant 3 are a couple and hence their views on opposition of intravillage marriage can possibly be mutual. She categorized himself as an in-group member and took firm stance on opposition of intravillage marriage. She maintained in group favouritism by believing in values of her group, by stating that “mere hisab se toh aisi shaadi galat h” and “aisi shaadi kisi ko pasand ni hi.” However, she did not show out group derogation. She also spoke of “ma baap ki bezati hogi” (parents will be put to shame). This suggests that being a mother has strong influence in her thoughts and hence her opinions on honor killings.

**Theme 1: Social Comparison**

In the present study, people who oppose intra village marriages will compare themselves with out-group, i.e., people who support such marriages along various dimensions such as ideology and values.

This consisted of following subthemes [Figure 1].

- In group favoritism: All the participants have said that intravillage marriages are wrong and hence it is righteous to oppose such evil. They have also reported that since this is an atrocious crime hence killing the couple only makes sense as it would be liked by the society. Following excerpt provides evidence of the same:

  “...jo acha hoga vo toh fasi todega, sahi ka jo samarthan dega vo sahi h.samajh mei rehne ke liye samajh ka samarthan dena padega nhi toh bhai chara ni banega.agar gao milte h toh yeh galat h.aise shaadi toh sabko hi galat lagti h.”

(The one who is righteous will kill the couple, people who support right are right.in order to live in the society we will have to act in favor of society otherwise the brotherhood of the village will get corrupted.if girl and boy are from same village then its wrong.nobody likes such kinds of marriages).

Out-group derogation: All participants have shown neutrality toward out-group by attributing their support for intravillage marriage to disturbed sex ratio in Haryana as there are no girls in Haryana to wed, hence it is difficult for boys to marry. Therefore findings are in consistence with available literature that self-categorization may not always lead to out-group derogation.

Following excerpt finds evidence for aforesaid.

“...jin logo ke vichar aise h ki theek h jo hogya, unhe dikat ni h.shaadi apne samajh mei mushkil kaam h, agar ladka serviceman h ya padha likha h toh shaadi ho jaegi, nahi toh shaadi bhi ni hoti.”

(It is okay for people who have casual attitude towards marriage to accept such marriages.it is difficult to get married in today's society, only those who are employed can get married, otherwise it is difficult to get married).

The tendency to enhance one’s own group to enhance one’s own SI is valid for the collectivist groups and people.[9] Therefore, in-group favoritism is a method to enhance SI which is applicable for only collectivist culture. Since Indian culture is a collectivist culture,[9] this statement holds true for Indian context which has been demonstrated by the present findings.

It can be said that since no threat from out group has been perceived by the in-group, they do not experience out group derogation. This finding has been in accordance with above defined literature.

**Theme 2: Positive distinctiveness**

In present findings, it has been seen that the participants, which are the in group, report they have better values and ideology than out-groups.

It consisted of following subthemes [Figure 2].

- In group seen as doing the “right” thing: All participants reported that they feel that their values and upbringing are better than people who support such marriages
- Disregard towards out group: Participants reported that out group or people who support such marriages should be culturally ostracized and disowned from the village. Hence, they are deriving meaning and attachment to their SI by evaluating themselves to be positively different from the out group.

Following excerpt validates above defined theme:

“...Agar pasi todeh dhi dehke vale bolenge ki bade acha kaam kiya h, jo log aisi shaadi ka samarthan karte h unka hukk-apani band kar do, samajh se ger do, humare vichar ache h kyuki hum aisi shaadi kasamarthan nhi kate.aise shaadi sabko galat lagti, koi muh pe bol deta h aur koi ni bolta.”

(If we kill the couple, then others will say we have a good deed, people who support such marriages should be culturally ostracized and should be disowned from the
village, our ideology is good because we don’t support such marriages. nobody likes such marriages.

From above responses, it can be seen that the participants support ideology of their in-group and believe they are positively better than the out group as the out-group supports such marriages. Therefore, this theme is in accordance with the process of positive distinctiveness and hence SIT.

**Theme 3: Attachment to social identity**

Attachment to SI is also an essential component of SI[10]

This consisted of the following subthemes [Figure 3].

- Positive emotions associated with SI: One of the participants reported that he will associate positive emotions such as peace to self, family, and society; out of SI
- Negative emotions associated out of SI: Other 2 participants reported that they will feel sadness, pain and anxiety after delivering the consequences to their children. It will be like “jaise aek bimari lag gyi ho” (like infestation of a disease)
- Prescriptive reality: Perspective reality is a result of when the actions of an individual who is higher in the strata become the norm of the society. In present findings, disowning of the couple, physical ostracization and delivering death sentence to the couple is seen as actions for prescriptive reality.

Following excerpt provides evidence for support of the theme:

“...shanti milegi, samajh ko shanti milegi, bahar walo ko shanti milegi, khudko shanti milegi.hum toh dusro ko boleenge ki tum bhi fasi tod do apne bachoko agar vo ina ghatiya kaam kre toh...acha toh ni lagega, tension banti rahegi, aise faisle SE aatama khush ni rahegi, yeh majburi mei liya hua faisla h.ma baap toh dukhi h bache ko dorr karke, dard toh h kyuki bache bhi gye aur izat bhi gyi, gussa bhi h aur dukh bhi.”

![Figure 1: Depicting theme 1 - Social comparison](image1)

![Figure 2: Depicting theme 2 - Positive distinctiveness](image2)
(I will feel peaceful, there will be peace to self, family and society. I will feel good, I will be tensed, sad, such decisions are taken in helplessness. No parent will feel good after disowning their child, there will be sadness and pain as there will be loss of honor and of children).

Conclusions

It was concluded that there was reasonable match between process of identification as defined by Tajfel (1981) and process of identification as described by the participants. The authors further add that present study can provide a pathway toward exploration of this phenomenon from a psychological perspective and further help in management of this endemic. The present study had certain limitations. The researcher’s position in this context is of importance. The researcher acknowledges that her biases, preconceptions and affiliation to the village under study can influence her results and interpretation of the data. The researcher tried to maintain as much objectivity as possible by reading various articles and news about honor killings and also by having informal talks with the members of the village. Furthermore, as this study is from a psychological perspective, it does not take a stand on who or what is right or wrong, it simply tried to explain a social phenomenon, i.e., honor killing from an existing theory of intergroup relations which is SIT. Furthermore, the sample size of the study was small. Present study only looks into the perspective of in group and not the out group. As honor killings is a highly complex phenomenon, there are still unexplored areas which still need to be investigated.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent forms. In the form the patients have given their consent for their images and other clinical information to be reported in the journal. The patients understand that their names and initials will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal their identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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