

'Honour Killing' the Menace - A case study in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract— Honour killing (in Tamil, Gowravakkolaigal) have been considered as a cultural phenomenon practiced by most of the countries. This crime rate in India is more than thousands per year. There are various reasons why family members decide to kill their daughter and son in the name of maintaining their family honour. The most obvious reason for this practice is the caste system. Historically there were many issues in India and Tamil Nadu about the inter-caste marriage. The fact that the caste hierarchy continues to be at its stiff and the people from the rural areas refuse to change their bad notion. Hence, Prevention of honour killings will definitely decrease the number of victims and objective of this case study is focused about inter-caste marriage between Dalit and other communities, and also attempt to eradicate the caste notion from people mind and to take legal action to protect the couple and lovers who ever getting inter-caste marriage.

Keywords— *Caste System, Inter caste Marriage, Family Honour, Bad Notion.*

1. Introduction

Notion of “Honour Killing” is involved in many countries and cultures where treated as family and social pride. It is global phenomena whereas Tamil Nadu (India) is identified for its rich culture and traditions across the globe. But it has been failed to realize that one cannot oppress and impose in the name of customs and traditions (caste system) [1]. The murder of a woman or man based upon their actual or perceived immoral behavior and the fear that it will reflect poorly upon the status of their family [2]. It is reprehensible that young people are being killed in the name of family honour for marrying out of their caste[3]. This is So-called “Honour” Killings have been carried out on women and men who refused to agree to arranged marriages. Hence, this descriptive study explores the custom of honour and suggestion to change the notion of the people who ever committed and committing like this social evil.

2. Historical Culture

Honour killing also known as ‘customary killing’ it is defined as the murder or forced suicide of a person by a family or group member or a hired killer upon the

suspicion or suggestion that the person has compromised his or her virtue and thus stained the family’s honour or in other words, upon the notion or insinuation that one has been involved in something immoral and thus, disgraced his or her family. Honour killing is not newly originated social problem, honour killings originate in the ancient customs that have been incorporated into many cultures. According to tribal custom the woman is the repository of her family’s honour and honour is closely related to respect and standing in society. The barbaric societies of Arab stoned and buried the girls alive who thought to have brought disgrace to family [4].

The Roman Civilization too gave the paterfamilias (father) the right to kill their unmarried sexually active daughter or adulterous wives. The honour killings have been recognized throughout the world in the many forms. The honour killing persists in civilized western world under the name of crimes of passion. Historically according to Hinduism, Sita too can be said to have survived an honour killing when she was asked to prove her pavitrata (virgin status) by entering into burning flames and come out unharmed [5]. In Tamil culture, the name of Madurai Veeran, a local deity who has a special shrine within the Meenakshi temple in Madurai. He was murdered by Thirumalai Nayakar for falling in love with a member of the royal family (upper caste) [6].

3. Tamil Nadu Reports

According to UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) statistics, approximately 5000 women fall victim to honour killings each year [7]. According to the report of the Women’s Human Rights International Group, most of these murders are committed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Bangladesh, Morocco, Turkey, Iran, Brazil, Iraq, and also in Sweden, Canada, Uganda, United States, Britain, and about 1000 happen in India [8]. The NCW study, still underway, shows that of the 326 cases of conflict surveyed so far nationwide, 72% were because the couple crossed caste barriers and only 3% were because the couple were from the same gotra. “Women are making their own choices and in a patriarchal set-up this causes problems [9]. Hence, the honour killing has become common in many parts of our Indian country particularly in Tamil Nadu.

Elango was murdered by a gang of men who opposed his falling in love with Selvalakshmi 18, a dominant caste

girl in Erode [10]. Megala 20, who loved with different caste youth Sivakumar 24, attacked and hated by her family and community in Manamadurai at Madurai (District) [11]. Kannagi (22) from the backward Vanniyar caste and her Dalit husband, Murugesan(25), harassed and killed by the girl's parents and relatives in Puthukooraipettai village near Vriddachalam in Cuddalore district [12]. Lakshmi, a middle class family of Kallars. Sivaji (dalit) husband of lakshmi was brutally murdered by her brothers in 2008, in Tiruvarur district [13]. Thevar youth Pasupathy (30) of Kamachipuram fell in love and married a Dalit girl Ilayarani (28), but allegedly killed her just a fortnight later to uphold the caste honour in Ayyanallur village, at Thanjavur district [14]. 21-year Arunadevi different caste eloped with her lover Devaraja in Nattarpatti village of Tirunelveli district [15].

Sangeetha 18, Naikar girl had fallen in love with a Dalit boy, Balachandar in Pullakkadupatti village of Dindigul district. Thankalakshmi in J-Mettur village of Dindigul district. The girl, who belonged to the Kallar, had eloped with Vinoth Kumar. A Dalit Daniel Selvakumar (29), the Dalit Christian married a non-Dalit girl, Sathura, in 2008 [16]. A 21-year-old pregnant woman was allegedly murdered by her family members for having married a boy outside her community. Another gruesome killing, Gomathy, 17 year old was allegedly murdered by her two brothers for falling in love with a Dalit boy at Om Sakthi nagar in Seevalaperi village in Ramanathapuram District (Tamil Nadu) [17]. In 2012, the wave of honour killings caused after the inter-caste marriage of Dharmapuri couple, Divya-Ilavarasan, has claimed the lives of 17 people in the State, this report based from the executive director of Evidence, a Madurai-based NGO [18]. Sasikala, upper caste girl, had married Dalit Kottaisamy of Ponnaiyapuram secretly in a temple near Sathirakudi on October 11 against the wishes of her parents in Vilathur at Paramakudi Taluk [19]. Sriram, a resident of Madurai had fallen in love with Sonia, hailing from Srivaikundam in Thoothukudi [20]. But there is no data available to indicate the extent of the problem, primarily because cases are registered as murder under the IPC without charges to indicate that it may be an honour killing. If the case involves a Dalit and a non-Dalit, it is registered under the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities, Act 1989.

4. A miracle and leading way

Honour killings have been reported highly in northern regions of India, mainly in the Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, as a result of people marrying without their family's acceptance, and sometimes for marrying outside their caste or religion. In some other parts of India, notably West Bengal, honour killings ceased about a century ago, largely due to the activism and influence of reformists such as Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Vidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy [21]. It is miracle

when we hearing the news that allowed the inter-caste marriage by the village panchayats (Khap Panchayats) were primarily called upon by the wealthy and upper caste people who desired to consolidate their power and position way back in 14th century India. Amending an age-old norm, a khap phanchayat here has allowed inter-caste marriages. This historic decision was taken by a five-member committee of the Satrol khap panchayat in Narnid village at Hisar district (Haryana state) here on Sunday. The panchayat also allowed inter-caste marriages within 42 villages under its jurisdiction, which, till now, was banned. The decision was taken in the wake of the declining male-female sex ratio in the State and the changing social fabric. The current norms in marriage were some 600-700 years old and now, times have changed. Nowadays, interaction between men and women has increased and it is not possible to keep them away from each other and Love affairs are very common to everybody [22].

5. Reforms suggested

The honour crime also violates Article 14, 15 (1) & (3), 19, 21 and 39 (f) of the Constitution of India. Even today there is no legal definition of honour crime in India. In the Indian Penal Code, penalties for such crime find ground in sections 299-304, 307, 308, 120A and B, 107-116, 34 and 35 [23]. However, this huge number of penal provisions has proved inefficient to deal with this social evil. The criminals more often get away with murder, torture and violation of laws. And they continue to commit such social evil with liberty. Hence, the culprits must be punishing through special Act.

- 1) All Khap Panchayats (Village Panchayats) in India must be accepted the inter-caste marriage like Satrol khap panchayat in Narnid village at Hisar district (Haryana).
- 2) People must be educated as to the scientific logic behind the concept of 'Gotra' (hierarchy) and its irrelevance to the inter-caste marriage in the 21st century.
- 3) Even a simple threat by a family member to the couple against their wish marriage should be considered potential danger to their lives and the couple should be given police protection.
- 4) The punishment for such heinous crimes should be a deterrent for people who to attempt such crimes and the life imprisonment (non-bailable) should be awarded for such a ferocious crime [24].
- 5) Effective police investigation is needed to probe such cases, most of which must come under the 'criminal' category.
- 6) Firm and immediate action must be taken against the offenders whenever such incidents occur [25].
- 7) We need a specific law criminalizing this evil practice.

- 8) Central and State governments should come up with efficient mechanism to sincerely implement the directions issued in Lata Singh vs. State of UP (2006) and Armugam Servai vs. State of Tamil Nadu (2011) [26].
- 9) Indian Parliament is required to enact a new legislation at the earliest for curbing the malpractices of and the very existence of unconstitutional khap panchayats [27].
- 10) Anyone convicted under such law, irrespective of the quantum of punishment, should be debarred from contesting any election (even at any local authority) for minimum 10 years.
- 11) The administration should come up with various help lines numbers and special cell where such couples can approach for protection.
- 12) Fast track courts should be constituted for handling cases of honour killings.
- 13) Amendment in the Special Marriage Act should be done to reduce the period of registration of marriage from one month to one day.
- 14) In order to eradicate this social evil, it is vital to understand what holds this ancient set of laws together with set of modern and formal institutions like Panchayati Raj, Judiciary, Police and the larger State.
- 15) Central and State government should take necessary action to setup a department to organise counseling programmes for the village communities to effectively control honour related crimes in every police station and Taluk office.
- 16) Above all, the Two people (in any caste) fall in love should be given the freedom and encourage them.
- 17) Each of us should follow E.V. Ramasamy (thanthai Periyar) way that inter-caste marriage system.

6. Conclusion

Honour killing are encounter in many societies in the world. Tamil society has regressed to the Dark Ages. It is very distressing to note that in the times when the people chatting via 3G technology. It indicates that all societies should act together to curb honour killings. Criminal laws should require that honour killers should be punished severely [29]. Cultural systems should be discouraged, and individual rights should be prioritized. Hence the Law is only an instrument and it must be effectively used. And this effective use depends as much on a supportive judiciary as on the social will to change. We need an active social reform movement, if accompanied by legal reform, properly enforced, can transform society and notion of the people mind.

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