

International Pastoral Care Consultation in Hermannsburg: “Care, Context, Community”

Honour Killing in India: pain of a community **(a pastoral response)**

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Some pictures of people who do lineal jobs

Manuel scavenging work



Those who play parai (the instrument which are made by the cow's skin)



A barber who cuts and cleans the unwanted hair



The Mannerism of the so-called upper caste



Introduction

The word “Honour” carries several meanings to each individual. It is closely connected to dignity and respect. When one’s honour or dignity gets disturbed, it may lead to the extent of killing oneself or others. Honour is thus connected to and bears intense worth to the very life of every person. Today, we are familiar with Honour Killings which happen all over the world. Particularly in India, honour seems to be claimed as a socially controlled experience rather than an individual experience of self-respect and self-dignity. Especially, there seems to be an utter denial of one’s self-respect and self-dignity when honour is based on caste values. Thus, a person’s honour is challenged cruelly and fatally even by one’s own family/community members for the sake of preserving the inhuman caste system. Further, such a cruel and shameful act is claimed as ‘Honour Killing’.

Definitions of Honour

According to the Oxford Dictionary, Honour is ‘the respect from other people that a person, country, etc., gets because of high standards of behaviour and moral character’.[1] Honour means respect or prestige. Honour is also a tangible award that one is given for some accomplishment.

The above meanings generally interpret of the word ‘honour’ in a positive and healthy sense. Whereas honour, while related to the issue of Honour Killing in this study, shockingly and negatively directs to the humiliation and death of humankind. Therefore, the ethical meaning of honour needs to be looked into.

Honour Killing

Honour killing is a burning issue today. Honour killing is also called customary killing. According to Human Rights Watch, honour killings are acts of vengeance, usually a murder committed by a male family member killing a female in the family, who is held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by individuals within her family for a number of reasons. For example, refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce even from an abusive husband, or allegedly committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that dishonours her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.[2]

Honour killing is a negative aspect of society which has been practised in India over the years. It has resulted in the loss of thousands of innocent young lives. Such cases registered in India increased nine times in 2015 as compared to the previous year 2014. Most of the time, the killing is done by the relatives or family of the young couple whom they think had dishonoured them in society.[3]

If we want to understand this issue logically, Michael Kurkiala’s examples provide sufficient input to understand this issue. She writes that if a woman refuses to fulfil the rules set down by her cultural community, it is seen as her immoral behaviour and thereby she contaminates her whole family. When different strategies to make that woman comply have failed, the only other remedy is for her male relatives to kill her in order to protect the family honour. Thus, these types of murders are considered honour killings and are culturally sanctioned and designed to uphold a specific moral order.[4]

Origin of Honour Killing

Some writers state that honour killing exists all over the world; some state that honour killing belongs to some societies of South Asia and the Middle East and is deeply rooted in customs

and traditions since ancient times. Some scholars claim that the practice of honour killing took place in the *Baluch* and *Pashtun* tribe customs of Baluchistan and spread in different countries as they migrated to various parts of the countries; in Baluchistan during the British Colonial period the custom of honour killing is clearly mentioned. In Rome from ancient times, adultery and rape were seen as shameful acts in the society, and so to preserve the honour of family and society the victims are excluded from society and the women are considered inferior to men and also suffer at the hands of men.[5] International Women's Human Rights groups report that honour killing also occurs in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, India, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda and the United Kingdom. Though the act of honour killing is prevalent all over the world, in India it is mostly prevalent in states such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Bihar. Even in South India, so-called honour killing takes place.

Honour Killing in India

The most important thing is that this so-called honour killing is related to religion, caste, communities, and tradition in the society. This extreme form of crime has existed in all societies and in all the periods. The correct records of honour killing cases are not found in many countries. It is because the number of honour killing cases seems to be formally registered.

Though we have seen that Honour Killing persists all over the world, although in a different context with a different ideology, it can be seen that caste plays a vital role in performing the cruel act of Honour Killing in India. Specifically in India, Dalit people are considered as untouchables; hence, they are facing and encountering many problems in their day-to-day life. They are discriminated against, neglected, stigmatised and subjugated in all aspects of their lives. Dalit people's lives and dignity are being questioned continuously by the honour killing issue. The Dalit theologian A.P. Nirmal asserts that at the heart of the Dalit people's experience is pathos or suffering.[6].

Definition of Caste

Nisha Chaudhary, when she writes about the caste system in India, denotes that the Indian caste system describes the social stratification and social restriction in the Indian subcontinent, in which social classes are defined by thousands of endogamous hereditary groups, often termed as *jatis* or caste.[7] In this connection Arvind Dass also points out that the word 'caste' is of Spanish and Portuguese origin. *Casta* means lineage or race. It is derived from the Latin word *castus*, which means pure. She also gives a definition of Nesfield on caste as "a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community." [8]

Theories of Casteism

There are different theories about the establishment of the caste system. Its origin is one of the complicated issues in sociological debates. It is not easy to describe in clear-cut terms the accurate way in which the caste system originated. In spite of controversies prevailing over the issue of the origin of the caste system, some of the scholars have propounded their own theories regarding it. These theories differ from one another. There is no similarity between these. Besides this, no one theory appropriately explains the origin of the caste system. The present study considers only the important theories which are mentioned below.

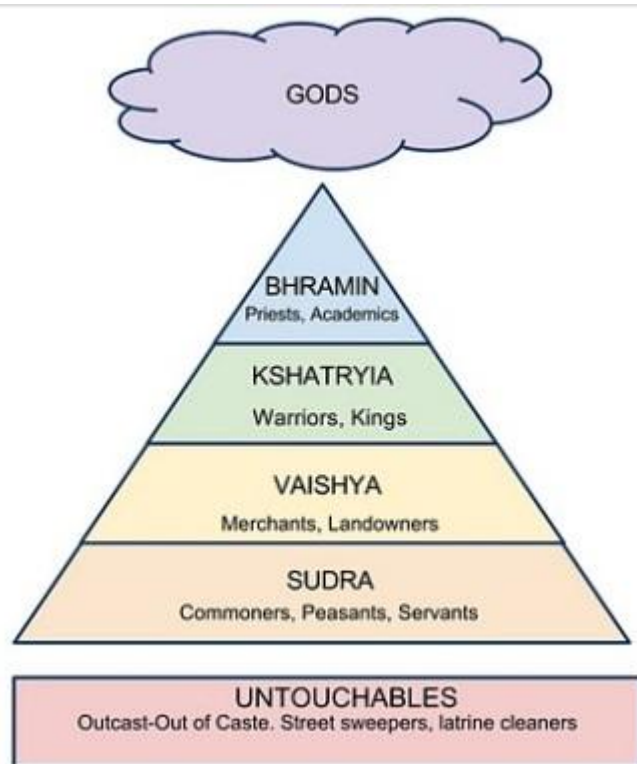
Occupational Theory

Regarding the origin of the caste system, Nesfield developed a theory known as the occupation theory. The occupation theory makes a clear-cut distinction between different occupations based upon the idea of relative purity and impurity. The logic of this theory is that the hierarchy of caste is associated with the hierarchy of occupations. In this hierarchy, the superior castes follow pure occupations, whereas inferior castes follow impure occupations.[9]

Religious Theory

The religious theories explain how the four Varnas were founded. According to the Rig Veda, the ancient Hindu book, the primal man – *purush* – destroyed himself to create a human society. The different varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmins were created from his head, the Kshatriyas from his hands, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the varnas were created. The order of creation, according to the *purushaskuta* became the order of their service, i.e. the Brahmins were assigned to serve the society in terms of teaching, advising or counselling, etc. The Kshatriyas were given the task of protecting and ruling the society. The Vaishayas were supposed to meet the material needs of the society, and the last creation, i.e. Shudras were expected to look after the other sections of the society. Below these four castes are the untouchables (Panchamas), known as Dalit. They were/are expected to do the dirtiest of jobs and are thought to be polluted and, therefore, are forced to the edge of Hindu society. Caste is also gradually entered into politics, gender and religion and started ruling over the people.

We could see such caste consciousness in Honour Killing crimes in India. Inter-caste marriages and love affairs between two different castes are viewed as great violations in the caste-conscious society. Hence honour killing crimes are happening all over the nation with the notion that honour will be destroyed by inter-caste marriages. We can observe how the caste consciousness is more important than a human life by the given case study which had happened in Tamil Nadu in recent years. This case study will definitely throw light on understanding how casteism played a crucial role in performing honour killing crimes. And how the people are so acute to preserve their caste as their family honour.



Honour Killing Case Study

Muthukumar's sister Mohana (name changed), and his mother were very depressed regarding Muthukumar's murder, which had happened in the year 2014. They explained how he was killed in the name of honour by the so-called upper caste people when he was 23 years old. They also explained that the village where they resided had people with high caste consciousness. Mohana said that her brother Muthukumar was a M.Sc., B.Ed. graduated person, who was very responsible in the family as well as in the society. This family belong to a Dalit background. Muthukumar had a love affair with the girl Uma (name changed) who belonged to the upper caste. Muthukumar's father is no more; he passed away in the year 2015 a year after Muthukumar was murdered. His sister said that Muthukumar had a friend named Suresh, who belonged to the so-called upper caste, and he was also a relative of Uma. Muthukumar's mother expressed that Muthukumar usually returned from the college by 5.30 pm every day. But on the day of his murder, he did not return at the usual time. Hence his mother became worried and called him through his mobile phone. He said that he was going to Uma's house for her birthday along with Suresh. Then his mother found that there was no news from him. So she became afraid and conveyed this to his father. The family started searching for him in his friends' houses. Then, they have received a call from Suresh at midnight, and he asked them to come to a particular place without informing anyone. The whole family in panic, they went to the place and met Suresh and asked about Muthukumar. Then they came to know that their son's body was floating in the well which was situated near Uma's house.

She also expressed the pain that her son was accused by the relative of Uma that he came to steal a hen in their house. When they caught him, he escaped and slipped into the well and drowned. Muthukumar's mother and sister with tears expressed that he was not such a kind of person. They also put forth the question of how a well-educated person could steal a hen and how a person would go to the next village to steal for the worthless hens. They said that it was Uma's family members who had killed him and thrown him into the well. They also confirmed

that it was a caste-based honour killing because Muthukumar's mother said that he already told that he was stigmatised and discriminated in the college by the so-called upper caste students. Hence, they both strongly affirmed that it was a caste based murder. Both his mother and his sister were worried that because of their poor financial status, they could not proceed with this case legally.

Analysis

Education is a powerful source that could liberate the people from this social evil. But in this case we could see that even education did not help to stop the evil of casteism. In every educational institution, casteism plays a vital role in discriminating students from each other. The very worst and pathetic example is the tragic suicide of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit boy who was a Ph.D. student in the Hyderabad Central University who hanged himself due to discrimination from the institution.

Caste as a base of Honour Killing: An Analysis

From this case study, we can understand how deeply the caste consciousness is rooted in all the aspects of the people in the society. It is really a pathetic thing to see that the murderers who have committed the 'honour' killings affirm without any guilt that they killed the persons in order to do justice to their caste and to the community that they belonged to. They also have a thought that the blood which was shed by the victims has brought honour to their family as well as to their community. And they also put forth the question of how they could sacrifice their caste, which was considered as more than a life, just for the sake of love. Such a corrupted mindset of people still supports such honour crimes in Indian society even in this 21st century. It is noted that every year 1,000 women are being killed in the name of honour by their own family members, and 7,000 women are forced to commit suicide due to the torture given by their family members. Many Dalit men and women were killed, and non-Dalit women were also killed due to their marriage with Dalit men. Totally the lives of the Dalit men and women are under threat. Though there are movements and NGOs addressing the problems of Dalit people, still they are encountering caste-based discrimination in their everyday life. The hope for their future is still uncertain and doubtful.

Biblical understanding of 'Killing'

Here Kieran says that God wants people to respect the sanctity of life.[10] We find our moral guidance in Scripture. We are to value human life. The Lord hates "hands that shed innocent blood." [11] God holds us all responsible for respecting and protecting the lives of others. "From each man I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man." [12] A central pillar in the biblical teaching is the sixth commandment. "You shall not murder" (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17). Kline argues that when one takes away human life, this is an offence against God because humankind is created in God's image.

The New Testament depicts Jesus explaining that murder, as well as other sins, comes from the heart. The New Testament acknowledges the just and proper role of civil government in maintaining justice and punishing evildoers, even to the point of bearing the sword. One criminal on the cross contrasts his death as due punishment with Jesus' death as an innocent man. When Jesus appeared before Pilate, both Pilate and the crowd recognised the principles of bloodguilt. There is no indication in the New Testament that it is unjust, immoral, or inappropriate for secular civil governments to execute those guilty of shedding innocent blood.

A church can be

Church: A Community of Lovers

Jesus made love an overriding characteristic that will distinguish believers as His disciples: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). The unfortunate truth is that love is misunderstood today. Love is an attribute of God’s divine character and grace. When two are in love, they are initiated into one of the greatest riches of God’s grace, blessings, bestowed to humankind. When they truly love, they participate in one of God’s greatest joys, mesmerizing and beautiful. Then they have a glimpse of what God has called humans to enjoy and be enriched with. Unfortunately, love is the greatest misused word in our culture. People say they love someone, and they end up killing them. This is a sign of a lack of understanding. We need to reclaim the original meaning of love emanated from God. Love is the quality of God. God gave humanity to enjoy a tiny bit of God’s character when two are in love. That is why love is the greatest event in human life that God gave to humanity, associated with redemption or salvation. It is beautiful; it is special; it is relaxing; it is joyful and peaceful. Poets and writers have tried for centuries to capture and express love. It is love that God made between a man and a woman drawn towards each other for a marital relationship; to have a glimpse of heaven where it originated. Church as the foretaste of the glory of God must work towards the praxis of forming a community of lovers, practising responsible love towards one another and respecting the love of others. Therefore, a new theology of love will help the Church to work against honour killing.

When it comes to a theology that negates Honour Killing, it definitely will be the life-affirming theology. It should consider building a just society: The whole Church is on a mission: to build a new heaven and new earth – a new society. By this, one understands a society wherein justice, peace, joy, and fellowship reign, and it calls everyone to respond to the generous openness of all. The search for a more just society is one in which values, particularly freedom, equality, responsibility, and openness for the integral liberation of human beings.

A Community Counselling: A pastoral response

Methods for community counselling in the context of honour killings in India can be multifaceted and may include the following approaches:

Crisis Intervention:

Immediate support is needed for victims and their families. Crisis intervention involves providing emotional support, safety planning, and connecting victims to relevant authorities and resources, such as legal aid or shelters.

Awareness Campaigns:

Public awareness is crucial to challenge the culture of honour killings. Community counsellors can conduct awareness campaigns through media, workshops, and community gatherings to educate people about the consequences of honour killings and the importance of individual rights and choices.

Legal Support:

Community counsellors should be knowledgeable about existing laws and legal resources related to honour killings. They can help victims access legal aid and provide guidance on filing complaints and seeking protection orders.

Cultural Sensitivity:

Understanding the cultural and social dynamics that contribute to honour killings is vital. Counsellors should be culturally sensitive and work within the community's cultural context to be effective.

Family Mediation:

Engaging with families involved in potential honour killings is essential. Community counsellors can facilitate dialogue and mediation between family members to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence.

Support Groups:

Support groups can be created for survivors of honour-based violence and their families. These groups offer a safe space for individuals to share their experiences, seek emotional support, and develop strategies for coping and healing.

Education and Empowerment:

Promoting education and economic empowerment for individuals, particularly women, can help reduce the vulnerability to honour killings. Community counsellors can guide them in accessing educational opportunities and job training.

Youth Outreach:

Engaging with young people is crucial in changing attitudes towards honour killings. Schools, colleges, and community organizations can be platforms for counsellors to conduct workshops and awareness programs aimed at the youth.

Collaboration with NGOs and Government Agencies:

Community counsellors can collaborate with NGOs and government agencies working on women's rights, domestic violence, and human rights issues to provide comprehensive support to victims and advocate for policy changes.

Counselling and Mental Health Support:

Victims of honour killings often experience trauma and psychological distress. Community counsellors should provide counselling and mental health services to help survivors and their families cope with the emotional aftermath.

It's important to note that tackling the issue of honour killings in India requires a multi-pronged approach that involves not only counselling but also legal reforms, societal awareness, and a commitment to changing deeply ingrained cultural norms. Community counselling plays a significant role in this broader effort to eradicate honour killings and promote a more just and equal society.

[1] Oxford Dictionary, 2009, 695-696.

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honor_killing.htm (03 Aug 2018).

[3] Suraj Sharma, "Honour Killing – A Customary Killing" (Published in *IJARIT*, Vol.3, Issue 4, 2017), 547.

[4] Mikael Kurkiala, 'Interpreting Honour Killings: The Story of Fadime Shindal (1975-2002) in the Swedish Press' in *Anthropology Today*, 19/1 (February, 2003): 6-7.

[5] Umm Rashid, *Honour Crimes and Muslims*

<http://www.islamicawakening.com/print.php?articleID=1330&>(7 Aug 2018).

[6] Elizabeth S. Balasundaram, ed., *Dalits Speaking Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 29.

[7] Nisha Chaudhary, *Caste, Class and Social Inequality* (New Delhi: Murari Lal & Sons, 2010), 21.

[8] Arvind Dass, Sita Deulkar, *Caste and Social Reality, History Revisited* (New Delhi: Dominant publishers, 2005), 100-101.

[9] C. N. Shanker Rao, *Sociology Of Indian Society* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Ltd, 2004), 82.

[10] Kieran A. Beville, 'The Commandments in Contemporary Culture' (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 64.

[11] Pro. 6:17.

[12] Gen. 9:5.

