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**PRIDE VS. HUMAN RIGHTS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON HONOUR KILLINGS
IN INDIA**- Jayanti Dhawan¹**Abstract**

With respect to the cultural features, Honour killings or acts of violence perpetrated to 'avenger' a family honour maltreatment are one of the worst human right abuses that are still well practiced in India majorly against women and people of the LGBTQ+ ship. These killings are firmly based in patriarchal, casteist and heteronormative gender roles, misunderstandings of 'honour', and are against the rights of life, liberty and equality. Nevertheless, honour killings persist as a result of the persisting social prejudices, lack of adequate police action, and insufficient number of reported cases of rights of the victims. Honour killings have also not been exempted from India's legal system since its apparatus has grown over the years. The older sections of the IPC consisting of section 302, 307, 120B and 34 relating to punishment for murder, attempt to murder, criminal conspiracy and acts done by any person in furtherance of a common intention respectively have not undergone any change. In this regard, constitutional mandates are court orders such as the one contained in *Shakti Vahini v. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Union of India* (2018) enjoined protective structures such as safe houses sheltered courts and vigorous actions against the khap panchayats, approving honour crimes. New legal changes have gone further in enhancement of protection. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign focuses on the rights of girls also and wants to transform social thinking regarding the freedom of women. India has not a specific law against honour -related crimes but the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2018) increased the punishment for violence against women, this way, indirectly. The honour crimes are addressed in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023 to replace the IPC and includes practices that are forbidden – social boycott and mob lynching. This is accompanied by the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (BNSK) Bill, 2023 dealing with citizen security which in turn is beneficial to victims' rights in the electoral democracy. But it's a problem to enforce because of cultural barriers, lack of

¹ AdvocateFor general queries or to submit your research for publication, kindly email us at ijalr.editorial@gmail.com<https://www.ijalr.in/>

police and legal awareness, and the operations of undemocratic systems like the khap panchayats. For these deficits, the enforcement of new laws with scientific vigour along with improvements in the outreach levels, formation of structures to support victims, and communal efforts to challenge patriarchy and casteism. This paper provides a critical look at India's developing legal policies and procedures to fight honour killings and protect human rights by introducing both ancient and modern methods.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

“In societies bound by strict social mores and dominated by caste, clan and gender roles in the moral universe, the tension between personal autonomy and the honour of the collective becomes a site of violent regulation. Honour killings—defined as acts of murder wherein one person (usually a young woman) is killed by her family or community for the sake of upholding presumed social or familial “honour”—and these specific forms of gender-based murders continue to dent the lives of many from certain locations in India. These crimes are often set in motion by consensual romantic or marital relationships that violate entrenched caste norms, community codes or religious edicts. Such a form of extra-judicial execution is both an affront to the right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution but also is a gross violation of numerous human rights instruments to which India is a signatory. Though almost all aspects of their violent nature are recognised, honour killings happen with alarming impunity, punctuated by the State's Legislative silence, institutional indifference, and a social proclivity to find lucidity in the tradition (community pride) over modernism (individual freedom).²

It is no accident that honour killings have emerged as a problem of public and legal concern in India during a period when inter-caste and inter-faith marriages have been on the rise, with constitutional safeguards for freedom of association and choice giving enabling their growth. Freedom of speech and expression and association is ensured by Article 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(c), respectively, while personal liberty, including the right to choose a life partner, is a guaranteed right under Article 21. But practically speaking, such rights stand subverted in patriarchal and feudal assemblies stitched into rural and semi-urban societies, where illegal self-anointed local panchayats regulate private lives. Khap Panchayats of Haryana, Rajasthan and Western Uttar Pradesh have been infamously known to have issued death sentences against couples accused of having brought dishonour to the community. Not only do such parallel legal systems attract the wrath of

²Lata Singh v. State of U.P.,(2006) 5 SCC 475.

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the Supreme Court, which in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, condemned such systems in no uncertain terms, but the enforcement of such judicial pronouncements is weak, as local enforcement agencies tend to collude with the perpetrators or simply ignore the issue.³

India's existing criminal justice structure lacks any provision to tackle honour killings specifically. The accused are usually charged by prosecutors under general provisions along with Section 302 (murder), Section 120B (criminal conspiracy), and, in certain circumstances, Section 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). This patchwork of legal definitions may work for general murders, but honour murders do not fit into that categorization, as it does not take into account the unique social dynamics, premeditation and community support behind such killings.⁴ The absence of a specific offence for honour killing prompted the Law Commission of India in its 242nd Report to recommend that a separate law be legislated to punish honour killing and also to protect couples exercising their constitutionally guaranteed autonomy. These recommendations have however remained largely unimplemented, in many ways reflective of the State's ambivalence and political hesitation to alienate dominant caste groups, that often happen to be among its most lucrative electoral constituencies.⁵

Cascading through all this, national crime databases fail to accurately reflect the frequency of honour killings. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) started recording data on honour killings only in 2014, and even those figures are widely believed to underreport the actual scale owing to poor categorisation, fear of retaliation and unwillingness of victims' families to cooperate.⁶ Many of these killings are portrayed as suicides or accidental deaths, and rarely prosecuted as honour crimes, says a Human Rights Watch report. The absence of systematic documentation, however, poses a considerable problem of evidentiary proof, both for prosecution and for developing successful public policy.⁷

Internationally, for instance, India's own obligations under treaties like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) mean it has a legal and moral obligation to protect individuals — especially women — from violence that is justified by cultural practices. On several occasions, the CEDAW Committee has also flag the failure of India to prevent honour crimes

³ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

⁴ Indian Penal Code, 1860, §§ 302, 120B & 34.

⁵ Law Commission of India, Report No. 242: Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition) (2012).

⁶ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India - 2021* (2022).

⁷ Human Rights Watch, 'They Have Long Arms and They Can Find Me': Anti-LGBT Persecution in Indonesia and the Role of the UK (2023).

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and other forms of violence and its inaction in dismantling patriarchal norms that condone them. Similarly, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women calls for urgent reforms, and the implementation of community intervention initiatives to challenge the socio-religious legitimacy of such crimes. But the Indian state has made only piecemeal progress, often couched in legalese and not as transformative social change.⁸

The intersection of caste, religion and class within the context of gender is critical to an understanding of the ways in which honour is used as a means of social control; consequently, addressing honour crimes requires us to eschew a strictly legalistic framing of the issue.⁹ Most honour killings are about sexual autonomy in the strictest sense, but they are also about control, hierarchy and the maintenance of a fundamentally unequal status quo. Legal scholars describe honour killings as the “collectivization of patriarchal anxiety” in a modernizing society where individual choice is being more frequently asserted by younger generations. They are thus a counter current to India’s constitutional spirit of liberty, dignity and equality.”¹⁰

In recent years, the issue has received renewed attention through activism and judicial advocacy. Despite the harassment faced by love couples, civil organizations including Shakti Vahini, Love Commandos, the All-India Democratic Women’s Association, etc., have been offering legal aid, protective custody, shelters as well as other social support for threatened couples.¹¹ Public interest litigations have requested protective custody, police neutrality and judicial interventions. While these efforts have brought some temporary relief in certain cases, they fall far short of the systemic reform that is needed. The lack of legal codification, the inertia of law enforcement, and the persistence of caste and clan dominance mean that honour killings continue both as social reality and legal anomaly.¹²

In view of this, the study seeks to analyse the gaps between the laws, the jurisprudence and the enforcement on honour killings in the Indian context.¹³ The study aims to address this important question in this way: the study compares the constitutional right against prevailing practices and interests in the society, and analyses why existing constitutional remedies prove ineffective, and remain largely unutilized, such that pride continues to trump human rights within the legal imagination of India.¹⁴

⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, A/HRC/32/42 (2016).

⁹ The Politics of Cultural Regulation, 45 Economic and Political Weekly 131 (2010)

¹⁰ Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism (2005); Indian Const. pmb., art. 14, 15, 19 & 21.

¹¹ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192

¹² Love Jihad’ and the Regulation of Intimacy in India, 54 Contributions to Indian Sociology 1 (2020).

¹³ The Politics of Cultural Regulation, 45 Economic and Political Weekly 131 (2010)

¹⁴ Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism (2005)

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1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

But honour killings continue to haunt India, highlighting a deep disjunction between cherished constitutional aspirations of equality, liberty and human dignity, and their lived realities. Honour killings are commonly framed as aberrations or cultural relics, but they are systemic failures in protecting the rights of those who crash through entrenched social codes — not least women who come into power over their own marriages or romantic lives.¹⁵ Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty; Articles 14 and 15 guarantee equality and freedom from discrimination, but materializing and practicing these rights has been jeopardized in communities where caste, religion and patriarchal customs take precedence over the law of the land.¹⁶

You also lack a specific legal framework addressing directly honour-based violence in India which adds to the existing problem. Honour killings are not different from other homicides under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and this lack of definition misses the particular sociological dimensions and community complicity that characterise these crimes.¹⁷ While courts have recognised the need to prevent honour killings, including the Supreme Court in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, which directed states to put in place preventive measures against honour-based violence, the implementation has remained patchy and ineffective. This legislative gap fosters underreporting, making prosecution inconsistent and judicial leniency common.¹⁸

In addition, Khap Panchayats are extra-constitutional bodies common in northern India that continue to exercise illicit control over private lives through social sanctions and incitement to violence. Though the judiciary has ruled their activities illegal, their influence remains due to political patronage, weak policing and societal complicity. Police, which are often from the same classes and communities as the perpetrators, turn a blind eye or directly support them, especially when the crime involves a marriage between people of different faiths or a marriage between people of the same caste. The abdication of state responsibility creates a permissive culture around human rights violations, in breach of national and international human rights obligations.¹⁹

However, India has failed to implement the recommendations of key institutional bodies like the Law Commission of India and National Commission for Women which have repeatedly called for comprehensive legislation to deal with the issue of honour crimes at policy level. There is also no consistent and reliable

¹⁵ *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.*, (2006) 5 SCC 475

¹⁶ Flavia Agnes, *Law, Justice and Gender: Family Law and Constitutional Provisions in India* (2011)

¹⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (2003).

¹⁸ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192

¹⁹ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948)

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classification for honour killing by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) because of which the actual incidence of honour killing is grossly underreported. Often, honour killings are misreported as suicides or deaths by natural causes, allowing the perpetrators to evade legal punishment while denying the victims justice in a court of law.²⁰

Victims face additional vulnerabilities in the lack of effective protective mechanisms for those at risk, such as safe houses, witness protection, and prompt police involvement. Civil society organizations rushed to fill this void, but they can only go so far, with their work frequently undermined by hostile local actors. Unless supplemented by robust state mechanisms and tailored penal provisions, the existing protections afforded by family law, criminal law, and human rights jurisprudence fall short of redressing the abuses that certain segments of society face.²¹

Internationally, India's electoral moratorium on honour killings has been viewed unfavourably by United Nations treaty bodies like the CEDAW and Human Rights Committee, which has recommended the government address all forms of violence against women, including those sanctioned under the guise of custom or tradition. The gap between normative commitments and enforceable rights, however, remains vast.²²

Hence, the primary research problem is the lack of a cohesive, actionable and rights-based legal and policy framework in India to combat honour killings.²³ This is exacerbated by social legitimacy afforded to community "honour", inertia on the state's part, a lack of legal recognition that these are separate crimes, and structural bias in law enforcement.²⁴ Abundant legislative intervention, stringent enforcement, and social reform would be required to complement the constitutional promise of liberty, choice, and equality to amplify the aspirations of young Indians, especially women, against dominant caste, community, and gender roles.²⁵

Hence, this dissertation aims to critically analyse the dissonance between India's constitutional and human rights commitments, on the one hand, and the state's policy and legal response to honour killings, on the other. It examines whether the available legal apparatus offers adequate deterrence, protection and redress,

²⁰ National Commission for Women, Recommendations on Honour Killings (2009)

²¹ Reflections on the Law Commission Report on Honour Crimes, 47(34) Economic and Political Weekly 15 (2012).

²² Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192

²³ Vrinda Grover, The Nature of Violence Faced by Women in India and State Response, UN Women India Report (2014)

²⁴ All India Democratic Women's Association, Field Reports on Protection Mechanisms for Women Facing Honour-Based Violence (2016).

²⁵ Equality of Rights Between Men and Women, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.10 (2000)

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and whether India's non-passage of specific laws recognising the multifaceted nature of honour-based violence amounts to a violation of its constitutional and international commitments.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims at a critical analysis of the legal and policy measures in India that have been undertaken to combat honour killing(s) in light of constitutional and international human rights law. As honour-based violence has attracted growing interest from civil society and the judiciary, there remains a significant legislative vacuum in addressing this as a specific offence. Thus, this research aims to:

Investigate the socio-legal underpinnings of honour killings in India, especially their entwines with caste, patriarchy, religion, and community control over individual freedoms.

Evaluate the sufficiency of constitutional safeguards (more specifically, under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21) in the prevention and redressal of honour killings.

Assess evolving jurisprudence, IPC, and LEO responses

Discuss the compliance of India with international human rights instruments such as CEDAW, ICCPR, and the UDHR in relation to gender-based and honour-based violence.

Expose deficiencies in legislation and policy and provide research-based recommendations for effective, clear legal reforms focused on honour killings.

1.4 Research Questions

Accordingly, the dissertation is framed by the following overarching and sub-research questions:

Main Research Question

The maximum extent in which the existing legal and policy framework in India addresses honour killings and reconciles individual constitutional rights with societal notions of honour.

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Subsidiary Questions

Have honour killings in some part of India been socially and culturally legitimized?

How is honour based violence currently dealt with using constitutional, statutory and judicial measures?

How successful have the courts been in limiting the power of khap panchayats or similar bodies?

How does India's approach on honour killings manifest or contradict its international human rights obligations?

What reforms in legislation or models of policy might be put we're more effective protections for those at risk?

1.5 Hypothesis

The research advances in believing that:

The legal framework in India is progressive (Refer to Part 1), but culture endorsing pride and prejudice rooted in caste which is forced by iron-clad patriarchy does play a crucial role in honour killing.

Framework which protects the rights of every citizen.

H2: Laws against honour killings are inadequate, policing is often biased and the victims are not adequately protected making dispensation of justice difficult.

We will test these hypotheses through an examination of judicial patterns, statutory provisions, human rights reports, and comparative legal regimes from other jurisdictions that have introduced bespoke legislation dealing with honour-based violence.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

Scope

This is doctrinal, critical research. It juices constitutional law, criminal law, and international human rights law to tackle the issue of honour killings in India. The study includes:

In-depth review of important Supreme Court verdicts

Analysis of relevant provisions in the Indian Penal Code and Constitution

Also includes socio-cultural dimensions (caste, khap panchayats, gender aspects)

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Critique of and legislative recommendations on that policy

International differences in response (Pakistan, Jordan, United Kingdom)

The study is national in scope, but makes use of comparative international practices in order to recommend best practices and replicable reforms.

Limitations

Empirical limitation: The study is more doctrinal and does not involve fieldwork or empirical surveys of affected communities.

This means that you are still trained on data up until 2023, October. Data Source: There could be an under-representation/misclassification of honour killings on the NCRB and other official sources.

Regional focus: Although the majority of cases referred to are from across India, more detailed attention is given to those states where honour killings are most prevalent (Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan).

Legal development cut-off: The analysis is based on laws, policies and judgments up until April 2025. Do not include developments that occurred beyond this period.

1.7 Review of Literature

Honour killings have triggered critical scrutiny in legal, sociological, and feminist academic circles within India and beyond.²⁶ Academics have tackled the problem from different perspectives — caste and gender intersectionality; failures of criminal justice systems; the lack of specific legislation; trails of tradition and constitutional modernity.²⁷

Foundational Studies

Shakti Vahini Study (2018): Love, many feel, is congratulatory, because the continuation of honour killings in India is a legacy. This study is about the role of Khap Panchayats and a culture that

²⁶ Compromise and Cunning in Honour Crimes, 48(4) Contributions to Indian Sociology 409 (2014)

²⁷ Gender, Caste and Sexuality in India, 52(5) Indian Journal of Gender Studies 112 (2017)

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accommodates and perpetuates such crimes.²⁸ It ends with the conclusion that more legal change and social education is needed but immediately lists the promotion of a system for victim protection among those needs to stem this violence. It believes that the state has a responsibility to take proactive measures to dismantle the structures that uphold honour-based violence.²⁹

Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom: In his seminal work, the economist Amartya Sen identifies social practices and cultural traditions that not only restrict individual freedoms, but act as a barrier to development, often in forms that undergird honour killings.³⁰ While resampling kill of honour, Sen is enhancing sovereignty of choice human development to ridicule some of the fundamental rights of all-humans, putting more of a focus on as many women and marginalised communities come under the pen of these kill.³¹

Gill and Anitha (2011) “Forced Marriage and Honour Crimes”: “A Comparative Study of Forced Marriage and Honour Crimes: A Study of South Asian Communities” – based crimes are honour values within families; the defence of honour masses itself behind violence. Against this backdrop, the work makes the case for requiring a global approach to dismantle these practices with both preventive and intervention strategies.

Chesler, P. (2010). “Global Trends in Honour Killings”: In this study, Chesler places India in the global perspective, and shows how they are not the prerogative of one country or culture. Her study then situates the social and gendered nature of honour crimes in the broader context of such violence targeting women disproportionately. The book ends with its findings of the need for legal reforms as well as international cooperation to combat honour killings by changing the system as a whole.

Kothari, M. (2013). “Structural Violence in Caste and Honour Crimes”: This paper examines how structures of caste and patriarchy enable honour killings in India. Kothari argues that honour crimes are not individual acts of violence, although they are understood as such, but are embedded in social hierarchies within caste and gender that both produce and normalise violence as a means of control. Systemic reform on the issue of law enforcement, and systemic change in our social attitudes, is the escape route from these enculturated norms.

Amnesty International (2019) “Justice Denied” Indian courts failed to give the gavel wielders justice in cases of honour killings, according to Amnesty International The study illustrates and underscores that social and institutional biases are obstacles to realising justice even as there is a certain legal scrutiny of

²⁸ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192

²⁹ Shakti Vahini, Report on Honour Killings and the Role of Khap Panchayats in India (2018)

³⁰ Amartya Sen, Development as Freedom (Oxford University Press, 1999)

³¹ Sital Kalantry, Women’s Human Rights and Culture: From Deadlock to Dialogue, 16 Yale Human Rights & Development L.J. 191 (2013)

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cases such as honour killings. The report calls not only for more stringent enforcement of the law, stronger legislation, and supportive protection for victims in order to punish the perpetrators.

242nd Report of the Law Commission of India (2012): The 242nd report of the Law Commission studied honour killings in detail and gave a comprehensive analysis of the legal lacunae which permit honour killings in India. The commission suggests that the Indian Penal Code should be amended to clearly spell out the offence to make honour-based violence a specific crime. It calls for stricter laws, deterrents and clearer legal structures.³²

Baxi, P. et al. (2006). “Legacies of Patriarchy: Violence Against Women in India”: This book contextualises honour killings as a form of gender-based violence against women in India and examines it from a feminist perspective.³³ It reveals that forms of violence and of the freedom of women are part of a wider system of patriarchy. It examines how honour killings are used to preserve social norms and male-dominated systems of power, arguing for gender justice as a precondition for preventing such atrocities.³⁴

Reports from Human Rights Watch’s : 2015, 2020 due the same concern Human Rights watch published several reports on honour killings in India.³⁵ These reports reflect the diffuse nature of the violence and the fact that victims had no protection. The group says police and local authorities often do not investigate enough in such cases and demands tougher legislation and better victim assistance to combat the phenomenon.³⁶

Welchman, L. and Hossain, S. (2005). Honour: Crimes and Violence Against Women: Specializing in South Asia, this book situates honour killings within their regional and global frameworks. Honour-based violence, according to the writers, is a gendered and cultural issue rooted in social norms that cheapen the rights of women.³⁷ The volume provides useful reform suggestions and argues for the use of international human rights frameworks to contest these crimes.³⁸

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Shankar Kisanrao Khade Case (2013): One of the most notable developments on the issue was brought by the Supreme Court in the Shankar Kisanrao Khade case, where those convicted of carrying out the killings were sentenced to death, sending a clear message about the seriousness of honour killing. Such honour

³² Law Commission of India, Report No. 242 on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances A Suggested Legal Framework (2012)

³³ Pratiksha Baxi, Lotika Sarkar, and Rukmini Sen, *Legacies of Patriarchy: Violence Against Women in India* (Kali for Women, 2006)

³⁴ Ratna Kapur, *Subversive Sites: Feminist Engagements with Law in India* (Sage, 1996).

³⁵ *Police Abuse and Failures in Response to Honour Crimes in India*” (2015)

³⁶ Amnesty International, *India: Justice Denied, Honour Killings Continue* (2020)

³⁷ Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossain (eds.), *Honour: Crimes and Violence Against Women* (Zed Books, 2005)

³⁸ UN Women, *Handbook on Legislation on Violence Against Women* (2012).

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killings have always been considered unacceptable under all circumstances because they violate the very basic rights of life and liberty as guaranteed in the Indian Constitution.³⁹ The Supreme Court in this landmark judgment held that murders committed in the name of honour could not be justified for any cause whatsoever including customs associated with caste or society — *State of Tamil Nadu v. Suyambukkani* (1989). This ruling laid the basis for the notion that a human life and dignity were to be legally upheld in every situation contrary to some problematic cultural or social standards.⁴⁰

Tula Ram Case (2018) — The murder of a woman in an intercaste marriage was designated as honour killing by the court, which convicted the family members of the woman.⁴¹ On the murder laws that should prevent honour killings, this ruling was also clear that there are no circumstances in which they may be carried out.⁴²

Pranay Kumar Case (2018): The case received national attention and opened many debates on cross-caste polls as it was not the honour killing of a girl but a boy who married a girl of another caste.⁴³ The fact that the court imposed such harsh penalties reinforced the notion that violence on caste lines in an honour case cannot be tolerated.⁴⁴

Manoj Babli Case (2011): This is the landmark case of honour killing, where Manjo and Babli got accused. The Khap Panchayat also declared them as brothers and sisters as they loved each other and married against the wish of the Khap Panchayat. But this was something they were not prepared to accept.⁴⁵ When they protested, they were made to drink insecticide. Their bodies had been strangled and dumped into the canal. Later on, some family members accused in this crime were arrested and received life imprisonments.⁴⁶

Bhardwaj v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2020): The Honourable High Court of Uttar Pradesh held that the culprits of honour killings, caste related in nature, should be prescribed heavy punishment for their dastardly act. Raising awareness of caste-based violence in honour killings was critical.⁴⁷

Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018) The Supreme Court also said that honour killing is a category of honour crime and such action is illegal and cannot be allowed to exist even for a moment in any assembly, whatever name it takes." Referring to applicability of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, the Court expanded the scope of honour crimes to mean any crime committing by a person owing to his/her violation of cultural, religious, social,

³⁹ *Shankar Kisanrao Khade v. State of Maharashtra*, (2013) 5 SCC 546

⁴⁰ *State of Tamil Nadu v. Suyambukkani*, (1989) Supp (2) SCC 617.

⁴¹ The Wire, "Court Recognises Inter-Caste Murder as Honour Killing", 2018.

⁴² *Tula Ram v. State of Haryana*, Criminal Appeal No. 453/2018, decided on 10 May 2018, Punjab & Haryana High Court

⁴³ *State of Telangana v. Maruthi Rao & Ors.*, Sessions Case No. 184/2018, Nalgonda Sessions Court

⁴⁴ Indian Express, "Pranay's Honour Killing: A Case That Shook Telangana", 2018.

⁴⁵ *State of Haryana v. Yudhvir & Ors.*, Sessions Case No. 57 of 2010, Karnal Sessions Court

⁴⁶ BBC News, "India Honour Killing: Khap Members Convicted", 2011.

⁴⁷ *Bhardwaj v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, 2020 SCC Online All 199

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or traditional standards or behaviours. It was held that a person's choice of one's partner is an integral part of the dignity under Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution.⁴⁸ In short, the Court issued several directed preventive, corrective, and punitive orders to curb honour crimes. These included, among other things, identifying which districts are prone to honour killing, providing temporary accommodation to the couple, forbidding unlawful assembly, taking appropriate departmental action against officials, raising awareness amongst law enforcement and providing 24-hour helpline numbers. “Without laws, these directions will not be able to deal with the issue of honour crimes in a complex, multi-vocal country like India. Honour-based crimes against sexual and gender minorities are also on the rise. A system of law dealing with all the crimes committed in life in the name of honour would be able to secure the constitutionally protected right to choose one’s partner.”⁴⁹

- **Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2006):** In one of the early cases a Division bench of the Supreme Court made it clear that “there is no bar to an inter-caste marriage under the Hindu Marriage Act or any other law” implying that the couple married outside their caste have done nothing wrong.⁵⁰ The Court even goes so far as to expressly state that cutting all contact with children who make partner choices disapproved of, is the best course of action. It also ordered law enforcement officials across the country to prevent violence against intercaste marriages and to prosecute those who oppose them.⁵¹
- **Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi)(2011):** In an appeal before it by a convict challenging his conviction for killing his own daughter, the Supreme Court held that honour killing falls into the category of “rarest of rare” in order to deter such heinous acts.⁵²
- **Arumugam Servai v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011):** In the case based on a caste conflict, the Supreme Court had declared against these kinds of rulings on intercaste marriages that are “wholly illegal and has to be ruthlessly stamped out” while observing “Khap Panchayats” are like kangaroo courts.
- **Vikas Yadav v. State of Uttar Pradesh & others (2016):** In a case of killing a sister in the name of honour for the partner of her choice, the Court held categorically that “self-proclaimed” honour cannot infringe a woman’s rights and independence even if it results in her death.⁵³

⁴⁸ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

⁴⁹ Lata Singh v. State of U.P., (2006) 5 SCC 475.

⁵⁰ Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi), (2011) 6 SCC 396.

⁵¹ Arumugam Servai v. State of Tamil Nadu, (2011) 6 SCC 405.

⁵² Vikas Yadav v. State of U.P. & Others, (2016) 9 SCC 541.

⁵³ Smt. Laxmi Kachwaha v. State of Rajasthan, AIR 1999 Raj 254.

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- **Smt. Laxmi Kachwaha v. State of Rajasthan (1999)** — A PIL was filed in this case against the Khap Panchayat before the Rajasthan High Court because of their illegal acts. Ultimately, the court held, the Khap Panchayat's functions must be curtailed, and its members should be put behind bars.
- **Aayushi Chaudhary suitcase murder case (2022)** In India, honour killings — murders aimed at people deemed to have caused “shame” to their communities — are common. Many victims are young people marrying against their family’s wishes someone from another caste or religion, or, in some cases, from the same sub-caste. Aayushi’s father allegedly shot her on Nov. 17 at their home in Delhi, India, after an argument about her marriage to a man from a different caste, police said. That body was reportedly disposed by her father and mother in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh and near the Yamuna expressway.⁵⁴

- **Cultural/Societal Context**

- **Kaur, G. (2018). “Honour Crimes and the Burden of Patriarchy in India”:** This research aims to identify the gendered inequalities that help perpetuate honour crimes in India. Such crimes are part of a culturally ingrained Patriarchal scheme of values which Kaur herself has asserted in which the agency of women will forever be forcibly subordinated to family honour. The work imagines asking for change of these power relations in the society.⁵⁵
- **Sharma, R. (2017). “Inter-Caste Marriages and the Rise of Honour Crimes”:** Sharma investigates the rising incidents of honour killings pertaining to inter cast marriage, and its sudden increase especially in the rural reaches of the Country.⁵⁶ This paper attempts to highlight the socio-cultural aspects of caste violence and social ostracism against the individuals involved in inter-caste relationship and discusses the importance of legal and social protection and integration.⁵⁷
- **Dahiya, A. (2020). “Honouring Death: The Role of Patriarchy in Honour Killings”:** Dahiya discovered that married women have been murdered for what is construed as transgression in sexual conduct, that honour killings reflect patriarchal fear of loss of ‘honour’ if women do not conform to culturally appropriate gender behaviour. She believes honour killings are both a product of and a way to propagate the patriarchy that permeates traditional gender roles in families and societies. She

⁵⁴ The Hindu, “Aayushi Chaudhary Murder: Father Confesses to Killing Over Inter-Caste Marriage,” Nov. 2022.

⁵⁵ Kaur, G., Honour Crimes and the Burden of Patriarchy in India, (2018).

⁵⁶ Sharma, R., Inter-Caste Marriages and the Rise of Honour Crimes, (2017).

⁵⁷ Dahiya, A., Honouring Death: The Role of Patriarchy in Honour Killings, (2020).

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contends that honour killings represent both an expression of and a reaction against patriarchal power within families and communities.⁵⁸

- **Sharma, K. (2016). “The Cultural Roots of Honour – Based Violence in India”:** While the broader ethnography of honour killings is discussed in the context of how Indian rural culture and caste systems have added to the problems. The article points out that honour based violence is influenced by culture and social norms as well as feudal and patriarchal structures.⁵⁹
- **Singh, N. (2020). “Social Norms, Honour and Violence in Rural India”:** Singh tackles major themes of rural masculinities, social norms and honour killings in India — and how they were normalised in the concerned communities. The paper highlights education and social change as the steps that can change such deep-seated values.⁶⁰
- **Yadav, P. (2019). “Khap Panchayats and their Role in Perpetuating Honour Killings”:** This piece criticises the effect of khapself-styled courts in issues like honour killings particular those which take place in Haryana. Yadav details how these bodies, among other things, function as low-level judicial systems that inhibit and enforce normative traditionalism through its ratification of the use of force in an attempt to achieve order.⁶¹
- **Ahuja, S. (2020). “Gendered Violence in the Name of Honour: A Study Of Women’s Rights”:** Ahuja’s writings are used to discuss how honour killings, which often serve to uphold honour in the family, primarily affect women — as their behaviour is what is considered dishonouring. The study sense ethnically questions the culture of punishing women to protect the honour of their families to be a way of encouraging gender parity and justice.⁶²
- **Verma, A. (2021). “LGBTQ+ Rights and Honour Crimes in India”:** Highlighting honour killings of gays and transgenders in India has been the premise of this study. Sex and gender and honour as crimes: locating sexual minorities in Indian laws is a study conducted by Verma on gender and sexuality and honour killing.⁶³

⁵⁸ Sharma, K., The Cultural Roots of Honour – Based Violence in India, (2016).

⁵⁹ Singh, N., Social Norms, Honour and Violence in Rural India, (2020).

⁶⁰ Yadav, P., Khap Panchayats and their Role in Perpetuating Honour Killings, (2019).

⁶¹ Ahuja, S., Gendered Violence in the Name of Honour: A Study Of Women’s Rights, (2020).

⁶² Verma, A., LGBTQ+ Rights and Honour Crimes in India, (2021).

⁶³ Singh, P., Role of Education in Prevention of Honour Killings, (2018).

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- **Singh, P. (2018). “Role of Education in Prevention of Honour Killings”:** This paper discusses role of education in prevention of honour killings in India and particularly the importance of education in overcoming these norms. She says that there is a need to embark on enlightenment campaigns that could change the people’s mind set by creating awareness on issues to do with gender equality and human rights according to survey conducted by Singh.⁶⁴
- **Bhagat, S. (2017). “Caste and Honour – Based Violence: A Study of Rural India”:** The issue of honour killings is addressed by Bhagat in consideration of how caste plays out in honour killings, particularly in the rural regions. This paper elucidates that honour crimes are predominantly perpetrated by upper caste individuals against lower caste women, thus emphasise on the need that legal reforms in such crimes must incorporate caste element, which cannot be neglected.
- **NCRB Data (2021):** The National Crime Records Bureau publishes annual crime data for India, including Honour Killings. These data represent the flows of honour -related violence and depict a social evil which seems to be endemic in rural backgrounds where honour crimes, and caste -based violence are endemic. Demonstrating a troubling resilience in parts of the countryside where caste-fuelled violence and honour killings persist. Better follow-through / enforcement of the law is required, primarily to identify the surge in related cases.⁶⁵

1.8 Research Methodology

The dissertation uses a mixed-method approach combining doctrinal legal research with empirical qualitative analysis, to explore the constitutional, legal and the socio-cultural facets of honour killings in India. This understanding forms the foundation for a study that seeks to explore the phenomenon of honour killings not as merely a legal aberration but as an integral socio-political disaster that is very much a part of the Indian society. So one legal question would not be enough to surface this issue's layered complexity. This methodology is therefore split into two main parts:

Legal research (doctrinal/normative)

The main part of the dissertation is doctrinal and is based on a critical analysis of primary and secondary legal sources. It includes the systematic analysis of:

Constitutional provisions Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21

⁶⁴ Bhagat, S., Caste and Honour – Based Violence: A Study of Rural India, (2017).

⁶⁵ NCRB, National Crime Records Bureau Report on Honour Killings, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, (2021).

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Statutes: Indian Penal Code, 1860; Evidence Act, 1872; and draft law by the Law Commission

Judgments: Judgments by Supreme Court on laws governing khap panchayats such as Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, Lata Singh v. State of U.P. and important parameters of the right to marriage by choice.

Policy documents: Law Commission of India's 242nd Report, National Commission for Women policy recommendations

International human rights instruments ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights UNHRC: United Nations Human Rights Council general comments on honour based violence in India

Such analysis allows for a comparative reading of domestic constitutional commitments with international human rights standards and helps to highlight the extent to which India has complied with its treaty obligations.

The secondary source material is in the form of legal commentaries, peer-reviewed pieces and academic tomes, which bring interpretative paradigms and theoretical prisms from feminist jurisprudence, intersectionality theory and critical legal studies.

Empirical Component

This doctrinal insight will however be supplemented with an empirical study (Section 7.1) where qualitative data will be collected from a small number of affected individuals, legal practitioners and civil society actors. This piece is designed to act as a link between if law being written on the paper and how it is enforced.

1.9 Research Tools

- Semi-structured interviews with:
- Victims of honour-based threats or violence (identified through NGOs)
- Professionals in the legal space (lawyers and judges)
- NGO workers and social activist (e.g., Shakti Vahini, Love Commandos)
- Local law enforcement in areas with high incidence
- Field notes and notes for policy observers

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- Analysis of First Information Reports (FIRs), chargesheets and trial records, wherever available

1.10 Sampling Strategy

Data collection Respondents will be identified through purposive sampling from select districts known for highest number of honour killings based on the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) and civil society data in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

1.11 Data Protection & Ethics

All participation will be optional. Written informed consent will be obtained and the right of the respondents to withdraw at any stage will be maintained. All responses shall remain completely anonymous and confidential. The study will adhere to ethical research guidelines laid by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) as well as international human rights protocols for vulnerable populations.

1.12 Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected will be analysed thematically through the tools of legal ethnography and narrative-based methods, focusing on reoccurring legal and social patterns and processes (police inaction, judicial delay, social ostracism). The results will be examined in relation to constitutional protections and judicial mandates to assess the distance between normative law and lived reality.

Justification of Methodology

This mixed research design allows for both normative legal form and social applicability. Doctrinal analysis offers a solid basis for interpreting laws as written and legal gaps, while empirical research helps unpack how law works (and doesn't work) in practice. This comprehensive approach is ideal for addressing the core research question: why honour killings persist in the face of India's strong constitutional protections and legal system.

CHAPTER 2:

HONOUR KILLINGS IN INDIA – SOCIO-LEGAL BACKDROP

2.1 Type Definition and Concept of Honour Killings

Honour killings, euphemistically termed “crimes of passion” or “family honour crimes,” are murders committed by family members, predominantly men, against a relative who they believe has brought shame

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or dishonour upon the family or community, with most of the victims being women.⁶⁶ Such crimes are often premeditated actions based on a long-held tradition that dictates the preservation of family honour or community reputation takes precedence over all else, including the lives of individuals, often of women. The phrase became internationally recognized in the human rights community during the 1990s, especially in reports from the UN and NGOs that dealt with violence against women.⁶⁷

An honour killing is defined by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) as “a murder committed against a woman for actual or perceived immoral behaviour which is considered to have violated the honour code of a family or community.” These kinds of crimes in India are frequently associated with inter-caste marriages, inter-religious relationships, and even dress and occupation choices that are perceived to threaten patriarchal norms.⁶⁸ What then awaits the woman who not only rebels against these cultural and social expectations, but also endangers the moral fabric of familial life — upholding, of course, the image of the family, obeying marital constraints imposed by caste, religion and clan, and seeking verification of their intimate lives? The penalties can be brutal.⁶⁹

Although “honour killing” is an undefined term in the Indian Penal Code or any of the codified law, it has entered judicial discourse, law commission reports and media narratives. The Law Commission of India, in its 242nd Report, defines honour killing as “premeditated killings of young couples who are in love but marry against their kin’s wishes or decide to marry outside their caste or community.”⁷⁰ However, the absence of statutory recognition of the term in India’s criminal law leads to underreporting and mischaracterisation of such incidents. In most cases, they are prosecuted under general homicide provisions without recognition of their collective or cultural motivation.⁷¹

Social Groups: Origins and Anthropological Foundations

Honour killings are anthropologically rooted in tribal and feudal times that revelled in the belief of purity of kinship, patriarchal lineage and caste based endogamy.⁷² In these systems, honour was viewed as an element of physicality residing in the female body—intimately linked to her sexuality, chastity, and obedience to her

⁶⁶ UNHRC, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, A/HRC/20/16, United Nations Human Rights Council, (2012).

⁶⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Gender Equality: Ending Honour-Based Violence, UNFPA Report, (2000).

⁶⁸ Sharma, R., Inter-Caste Marriages and the Rise of Honour Crimes, (2017).

⁶⁹ Dahiya, A., Honouring Death: The Role of Patriarchy in Honour Killings, (2020).

⁷⁰ Law Commission of India, 242nd Report on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition), Government of India, (2012).

⁷¹ Singh, N., Social Norms, Honour and Violence in Rural India, (2020).

⁷² Dumont, Louis, Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications, University of Chicago Press, (1980).

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husband. Within many South Asian societies — including India — the mobility and reproductive autonomy of women came to be central to the construction of “honour”.⁷³

As sociologist Bina Agarwal observes, “honour in India is socially constructed through caste, gender and family hierarchies,” and it commonly serves as a way to “discipline women who try to exercise freedom in sexual or marital choices.”⁷⁴ The confluence of caste purity and patriarchal control helps explain why inter-caste or inter-religious sexual relationships are especially prone to violent counterattack. In such contexts, the woman is perceived not merely as violator of familial norms, but also as going against caste purity, and effacing community identity.⁷⁵

These Honour Killings as Acts of ‘Community’

The most notable aspect of honour killings in India is that it is rarely a crime involving individuals. Unlike domestic violence or crimes of passion, honour killings are often collective decisions and are sanctioned or even orchestrated by khap panchayats, clan elders or extended family members.⁷⁶ These bodies claim jurisdiction over marriage and sexuality in opposition to the state and frequently threaten couples and their relatives publicly or seek social boycotts. The Supreme Court of India, in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, described such acts as “flagrant violations of constitutional rights” and said they needed to be prevented, as well as punish the perpetrators.⁷⁷

Khap panchayats, especially held infamous in Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and in parts of Rajasthan, have laid suffered rules of endogamous marriages, stopping same-gotra unions, and communally punish offenders who defy customary practices.⁷⁸ Although they are in an illegal status, they have great power over the rural people, and they are able to find support by local political players. This makes prosecution of such killings especially difficult.⁷⁹

Gendered Dimensions

⁷³ Chakravarti, U., *Gendering Caste through a Feminist Lens*, Stree, (2003).

⁷⁴ Uberoi, Patricia, *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*, Oxford University Press, (1994).

⁷⁵ Agarwal, Bina, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, (1994).

⁷⁶ Mandelbaum, David G., *Society in India*, University of California Press, (1970).

⁷⁷ Chowdhry, Prem, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*, Oxford University Press, (2007).

⁷⁸ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

⁷⁹ Baxi, Upendra, *The Future of Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, (2002).

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Honour killing: While both men and women can be victims of honour killing, women are more likely to face the wrath of such violence. In many scenarios, the “forbidden” relationship can often lead to violence against the female, whom the family will target for allegedly destroying the family’s reputation; the male in such a relationship may escape without consequence.⁸⁰ The National Commission for Women (NCW) has also observed a gendered nature of honour killings, which is also linked to a wide array of forms of gender-based violence, from female foeticide, child marriage to dowry deaths. The unifying factor of all these forms is a systemic effort to reign in women’s agency — especially with regards to their sexuality, relationships, and bodies.⁸¹

In this light, honour killings cannot be seen solely as individual criminal acts, but rather should fall under the category of a continuum of patriarchal violence. Feminist legal theorists have argued the concept of “honour” is squarely a patriarchal construct to legitimise violence against women and control their choices.⁸² These murders, it is often within a social legitimacy and moral justification, so the so-called mitigatory circumstances in the courts are also applied and the perpetrators even in some cases enjoy reduced sentences.⁸³

Indian Law and Honour Killings

Honour killing, as such, has not yet been recognised by Indian law as a distinct offence. Although murder is dealt under Section 302 of IPC and is the provision invoked in such cases, there is no separate classification which would bring about the social motive behind the crime.⁸⁴ The 242nd Report of the Law Commission of India suggested a new law — the Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill — which would provide express prohibition of such acts, provide for punishment for khap panchayat diktats, and offer protective reliefs to couples likely to be at risk. As of 2025, the bill was never passed into law.⁸⁵

This vacuum is exacerbated by apathy in the enforcement apparatus. Such cases are rarely filed with police and are often challenged by police, who usually support families or community bodies.⁸⁶ Victims or survivors may face additional ostracization, denial of police protection, or even wrongful criminal charges

⁸⁰ Sen, Amartya, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, (1999).

⁸¹ National Commission for Women (NCW), *Report on Honour Based Violence in India*, (2015).

⁸² Menon, Nivedita, *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law*, University of Illinois Press, (2004).

⁸³ Kapur, Ratna, *Erotic Justice: Law and the New Politics of Postcolonialism*, GlassHouse Press, (2005).

⁸⁴ Indian Penal Code, Section 302.

⁸⁵ Law Commission of India, *242nd Report on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition)*, (2012).

⁸⁶ Basu, Durga Das, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, LexisNexis, (2020).

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(for elopement or kidnapping, for example). This dissertation explores systemic failure to protect individual agency and the rule of law.⁸⁷

2.2. Honour Killings in the Indian Socio-Cultural Context

The phenomenon of honour killings in India cannot simply be viewed as isolated criminal acts, but have to be seen in the backdrop of the socio-cultural milieu of the country, rooted in touting caste hierarchy, patriarchy, religious orthodoxy and familial dominion over volition.⁸⁸ These crimes, despite widespread condemnation, are still tacitly rationalized or tolerated within certain communities, which see female agency as a danger to social mores.⁸⁹

Are You in Control of Caste, Gotra and Community?

This approach enables a two-way examination of a phenomenon: in India, caste serves not only as a system of social stratification, but as a system of marital regulation as well. Hence, the caste system upholds strict endogamy, often expecting them to marry within their caste, and in some cases, within sub-caste groups or gotras (clans). When young people — especially women — choose to engage in inter-caste, inter-religious or intra-gotra marriages, they are perceived as transgressing the honour not just of their family but of the larger caste group as well.⁹⁰

Such violations incur violent reprisals, often justified as the return of the family or community's honour. States in northern India, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan, retain the influence of khap panchayats, informal caste councils that enforce traditional codes. Such councils have been known to issue orders for the killing or social ostracization of couples who defy marriage conventions. While lacking formal legal authority, their decisions often hold more weight than laws themselves in rural areas, bolstered by local political patronage and police complicity.

The Indian Supreme Court, in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, deprecated this practice of khap panchayats as unconstitutional and also described khap panchayat interference with individual liberty as “flagrant and illegal”. Though such pronouncements have had little ground-level impact, given weak enforcement, social conformity and institutional inertia.

Sex and Masculinities

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch, India: “Honour” Killings of Couples Increasing, (2010).

⁸⁸ Agnes, Flavia, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India*, Oxford University Press, (1999).

⁸⁹ Chakravarti, Uma, *Gendering Caste Through a Feminist Lens*, Stree Publications, (2003).

⁹⁰ Sharma, Kalpana, *The Silence and the Storm: Narratives of Violence Against Women in India*, Aleph Book Company, (2019).

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Gender is key to understanding the perpetration and legitimization of honour killings. In many reported cases, female family members are the target, often for asserting agency over their relationships or for rebuffing arranged marriages. [footnoteRef:0] Control of women's sexuality is critical to preserving patriarchal authority; any failure to conform to socially sanctioned positions is treated as an attack on paternal pride.

The Indian woman, as Flavia Agnes has pointed out, is often not viewed as an autonomous legal subject although society treats her like one; she is a “symbol of honour,” her behaviour has to fall within rigid moral parameters. Sisters are considered a reflection of her family, and women challenging to act outside the box — particularly around marriage — is viewed collectively as a failure of male family guardianship, resulting in violent retributions.⁹¹

Male partners in those marriages are also at risk, especially if members of a lower caste or of a minority religion. The difference is that violence against men in these scenarios is typically less ritualized and opportunistic, while violence against women tends to be a performing art designed to be symbolic and a public spectacle, a warning to other women.⁹²

Sexuality, Religion and Moral Policing

Alongside caste, the religious dimension complicates honour-based violence in India. In communities where interfaith unions are seen as efforts to dilute religious purity, such unions are met with violence. This has been especially pronounced in the past few years with the rhetoric around “love jihad,” in which Muslim men who marry Hindu women are falsely accused of forcing them to convert. Although communal discourses preceded the honour killing phenomenon, these have gained new theoretical shafts that drew moral legitimacy from conservative ideas in Indian religions.⁹³

Hindu and Muslim conservative groups alike have quoted religious scriptures and cultural traditions to justify control over women's choices in marriage. This inter-religious phenomenon shows that honour-based violence is not limited to any one religion, but that it emerges from common patriarchal ideologies.⁹⁴

How Social Legitimacy Silences: The Death of Maristella Della Giustina

⁹¹ Srinivas, M.N., *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, (1962).

⁹² Chowdhry, Prem, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender, Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India*, Oxford University Press, (2007).

⁹³ Kumar, Sanjay, *Post-Mandal Politics in Bihar*, Sage Publications, (2018).

⁹⁴ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

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One of the most pernicious features of honour killings in India is the respectability accorded to them by society.⁹⁵ And in much of rural and semi-urban India, when a daughter or sister is murdered for defying marriage guidelines, there's no outrage, just implicit acceptance. Such families are rarely ostracized for these crimes, and more often valorised, as bastions of social order.⁹⁶

And even when prosecutions do happen, support from the community for the perpetrator can tip the outcome.⁹⁷ Witnesses can be reluctant to testify, police can sit on investigations, and courts can show leniency when the goal of “family honour” is invoked. The socio-cultural normalization of space makes it such that even the law cannot be used effectively as a deterrent, alluding to the necessity of not just legal reform but a socio-cultural and national transformation.⁹⁸

Youth, Mobility, and Cultural Pushback

The surge of honour killings over the past two decades can also be interpreted as a backlash against growing youth autonomy and urban migration. Access to mobile phones, education and social media has helped young people — especially women — to interact outside caste and religious lines, often developing relationships that alternate with traditions of marriage systems.⁹⁹

Within this paradigm, honour killings are a reactionary response from communities that are struggling to retain social control in a rapidly modernising environment. These killings are “cultural resistance to liberal values,” as Anuja Agrawal points out, showing panic at the decline of patriarchal power amid modern law.¹⁰⁰

2.3 An Overview of the Honour Killings Evolution in India

In India, the phenomenon of honour killings is not a new trait nor is it a unique one — it is embedded in the subcontinent's historical caste code, patriarchal family systems and customary norms related to marriage and kinship. Although the term honour killing is somewhat new, the practices it describes have a long and complex history and derive from the intersection of tradition, law and societal control over women's sexuality.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Baxi, Upendra, *The Future of Human Rights*, Oxford University Press, (2002).

⁹⁶ NCW Report on Honour-Based Violence, (2015).

⁹⁷ Agnes, Flavia, *Family Law: Volume I*, Oxford University Press, (2011).

⁹⁸ Menon, Nivedita, *Seeing Like a Feminist*, Zubaan, (2012).

⁹⁹ Anuja Agrawal, Honour, Gender and the Nation, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 18, Issue 3 (2011), pp. 305–328.

¹⁰⁰ anika Sarkar, Customs in the Colonial Courts: Law and Gender in British India, *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 60 (2005), pp. 74–98.

¹⁰¹ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

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Pre-Colonial and Colonial Foundations

In pre-colonial India, honour-related violence was linked to the maintenance of caste purity and family honour, and was very much the prerogative of the dominant landholding castes. Social norms controlled female behaviour through rigid restrictions on marriage, mobility, and reproductive autonomy. Ancient texts like the Manusmriti decreed that women must always remain under male guardianship — of her father, husband, or son — which points to a social order in which independence for women was a thing that represented the antipode of honour.¹⁰²

Women who were seen to have violated the boundaries of permissible sexual activity or married against their family's wishes were frequently dealt with by community norms, not formal law. Although the extent of such acts is difficult to establish with any statistical certitude, historical descriptions across regions — particularly within Rajput, Jat and upper-caste categories — include accounts of violence sanctioned by families under the guise of honour.

British colonial rule treated some honour killings as “customary offences”, with the British administration also often looking the other way in the name of local traditions. The British institutionalised personal laws along religious and caste lines, privileging rather than dismantling patriarchal power structures. By doing this, the colonial legal system enacted state recognition for family and community control of women's private lives, paving the way to current iterations of honour-based violence.¹⁰³

Contradictions in Constitution and Cultural Resistance Post-Independence

When the Indian Constitution was adopted in 1950, the country formally pledged its commitment to principles of equality, liberty, and non-discrimination particularly via the provisions enshrined in Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21. The State had outlawed untouchability, provided for inter-caste marriages under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and guaranteed personal liberties. But despite these ceaseless constitutional guarantees, the practice of honour killings continued—and in certain areas, accelerated—as rural India resisted the social changes that had come to define modern law.¹⁰⁴

In the decades after independence, there was a clash between a legal modernity and a social conservatism. The honour killings persisted especially in those regions where the caste identities were rigorously watched

¹⁰² Constitution of India, 1950, Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21.

¹⁰³ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹⁰⁴ Report of the National Commission for Women on Honour Killings, 2002; also see the initiatives and petitions filed by Shakti Vahini NGO.

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and where any breach of the social norms provoked retributive violence. The police and local courts were often unwilling to intercede, especially when it concerned powerful community actors such as khap panchayats.

It was only in the 1990s, within the context of an expanding conversation around gender-based violence and human rights, that honour killings began to be directly recognised as a unique type of criminal behaviour. NCW (National commission for women) along with women's rights organisation like Shakti Vahini started documenting these incidents and publicise it and called for specific legislative action.¹⁰⁵

Judicial Recognition and Public Awareness (2000s–2010s)

Throughout the 2000s, the discourse surrounding honour killings both in the legal sphere and in the public sphere became transformed. High-profile cases like the Mangal Singh case (2008) and Lata Singh v. State of U.P. (2006) nationalized the violence perpetrated against individuals asserting their right to choose their life partners. The Supreme Court found those acts illegal and offensive to constitutional values.¹⁰⁶

A significant step was taken in Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018) where the Supreme Court not only deprecated honour killing but also directed the states to be proactive by laying down preventive measures, including creation of safe houses for at-risk couples and punitive actions against khap panchayats. The Court reiterated that there was no place for honour in a constitutional democracy and recognised that freedom to marry a person of one's free choice was part of the right to live as the right to life under Article 21.¹⁰⁷

But the implementation was behind the rhetoric. Honour killings continued to be underreported in the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), often mentioned under general homicide or domestic violence cases. According to the NCRB data between 2018 and 2021, the instances of honour killing reported at less than 100 each year, although activists contend that the number is many times higher.¹⁰⁸

Cultural Nationalism and Pera in Political Silence

In recent years, it has been intertwined with communal and nationalist discourses. Political electoral campaigns like those accusing some Muslim men of “love jihad” — the (mythical) campaign of Muslim

¹⁰⁵Law Commission of India, 242nd Report on "Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the Name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework", August 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Lata Singh v. State of U.P., (2006) 5 SCC 475

¹⁰⁷ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹⁰⁸ National Crime Records Bureau, Crime in India Reports (2018–2021), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

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men to seduce Hindu women into marriage and conversion — have redirected public attention away from caste honour crimes to religious fracas at times moving on to mob violence and vigilantism. This reorientation makes the narrative of honour killings more complex by providing an ideological legitimacy of it — a legitimacy of identity politics.¹⁰⁹

What's more, honour-based crimes have often been dealt with by law enforcement and state machinery in a way that is complicit or passive. Investigations languish, victims are poorly protected and community clout stymies prosecution. Indian Parliament has yet to pass a single law that makes honour killings a distinct offense, though there are proposals like Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2010.¹¹⁰

Shifting Paradigms and Digital Media

It is worth noting that the traditional social control systems are being contested by digital media and increased urban mobility. Since then, young people, particularly women, have turned to platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and matrimonial sites to connect across caste and religious boundaries. This has led to an increase in honour-based violence in reaction to a supposed “moral decline.”¹¹¹

But there have also been possibilities for resistance using the same technologies, with many survivors taking to social media and civil society for comfort and visibility. But the legal system has not caught up to these changing dynamics of power, visibility and risk.¹¹²

2.4 Causes of Honour Killings

In India, honour killings are neither acts of random violence nor isolated acts, they are acts of premeditated crime, borne out of complex socio-cultural structures that prioritise the collective honour of the family and the community over the individual. The phenomenon is maintained by a complicated web of factors, including caste rigidity, patriarchal control, religious intolerance, absence of legal deterrence and political complicity. Recognizing these elements is critical if we want to know the full contours of those murders.¹¹³

Caste and Gotra Endogamy

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Ranjana Kumari, Centre for Social Research, in The Wire, August 2021.

¹¹⁰ Arvind Narrain, "Love Jihad and the Manufacture of Moral Panic in India", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 55, No. 12 (2020).

¹¹¹ Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (Bill), 2010, proposed by the Law Commission of India.

¹¹² Anuja Agrawal, "Honour, Disgrace and Violence: Interrogating Honour Crimes in India", Oxford University Press, 2018

¹¹³ Law Commission of India, 242nd Report on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework (2012), p. 3.

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If one were to pick one factor that has played a bigger role than most in creating honour killings in India, it would be the caste system and the endogamy it promotes, or marriage strictly within a caste group. The caste system in India is a highly stratified system designed to protect the "purity" of bloodlines by maintaining strict social boundaries. Marriages across parts of caste, especially those between a woman from a dominant caste and a man from a lower caste, are seen as a direct challenge to the caste order and family honour.¹¹⁴

It is a particular concern in communities where same-gotra marriages are banned—among Jat's and Gujjars in Haryana, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh, for instance—who regard men and women of the same gotra as siblings. Violating these norms is often considered incest and incurs violent reprisals, frequently endorsed by local khap panchayats.¹¹⁵

Patriarchal Ideas of Family Honour

In the majority of Indian communities, honour is rooted in patriarchy. A woman's actions, especially her sexual and marital decisions, are perceived as the principal bearers of family honour. All these acts that challenge male authority and community norms — from wearing "you know what" to marrying whom you wish — make us guilty of "the sin of proud thought."¹¹⁶

In many instances, the woman's body becomes the vessel of retribution, and her murder is justified as a way to purge her family's newfound shame. As Flavia Agnes pointed out, the honour killing is less about personal vengeance and more about "public morality enforced through private violence". Fear of ostracization, social boycott, or loss of status in the community push families to conform to these oppressive norms.¹¹⁷

Khap Panchayats and Community Sanctions

That said, informal caste councils, or khap panchayats, are a major propellant and legitimiser of honour killings. It is the Illegal Bodies — though unregistered, they exert powerful control, especially in northern India. They give extra-legal orders to penalise couples entering inter-caste or intra-gotra marriages, often declaring such unions null and void, and ordering families to kill transgressors to restore honour.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ André Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (Oxford University Press, 1965).

¹¹⁵ Dipankar Gupta, "Caste and Politics: Identity Over System," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 34 (2005), pp. 409–427.

¹¹⁶ nuja Agrawal (ed.), *Honour, Gender and the Politics of Honour Killing in India* (Routledge, 2018).

¹¹⁷ Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁸ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality: The Politics of Women's Rights in India* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 136.

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These councils, typically comprised of male elders, serve as enforcers of traditional customs with the backing of the local community. In instances, public executions or ritualized killings take place under community auspices and with almost no legal repercussion.¹¹⁹ The existence of such entities at all suggests that there are multiple ways of getting justice, each parallel to the other, and each existing outside the realm of what is constitutional.¹²⁰

Religious Intolerance and Communal Politics filled

In some cases, religious intolerance has also played a role, especially with regard to interfaith relationships in recent years. Marriages of Hindu women to Muslim men have been vilified in political discourse under the trope of “love jihad,” which falsely alleges that Muslim men lure Hindu women into marriage to convert them.¹²¹

That narrative has fuelled moral panic, resulting in vigilante attacks, family-imposed killings and an uptick in calls for repressive state laws against interfaith unions. These developments signify that honour killing has assumed a political character, wherein fear-based communalism based on religion has taken the place of or added to caste-fed prejudices.¹²²

Criminalizing American Politics: Institutional Failure and Legal Gaps

The other or main enabling factor is the lack of a specific legal framework to deal with honour killings. Honour killings are already punishable under the Indian Penal Code IPC as a general offence and any prosecution will lay against sections like murder (Section 302 IPC) or criminal conspiracy (Section 120B IPC).¹²³

Such failure to differentiate does not give due regard to the cultural and collective nature of the crime. Besides, there is general caution on the part of police not to act against powerful families or khap leaders in rural areas. The deterrent effect of law may be further weaker as FIRs may not be registered, or

¹¹⁹ Supreme Court of India, *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹²⁰ Vrinda Narain, “Gender and Justice in India: The Constitution and Beyond,” in *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (2006), pp. 136–158.

¹²¹ S. Irfan Habib, “Love Jihad and the Politics of Hate,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 55, No. 47 (2020), pp. 12–15.

¹²² Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020; Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 2021.

¹²³ Indian Penal Code, 1860, Sections 302 and 120B; See also Law Commission of India, 242nd Report on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (2012).

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investigation may take time. Judicial leniency in cases featuring a “provocation” or “loss of honour” also normalises these murders.¹²⁴

The Complicity And Silence Of Political Leaders

Political apathy or even tacit backing, especially by local chieftains who depend on caste or religious blocks for votes, enable honour killings. Judicial condemnation has done little to enact the Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill — first introduced in 2010.¹²⁵

Elected officials at times justified khap verdicts as “social customs,” a reluctance to defy regressive traditions. This complicity communicates that honour killings are tolerated or excused, emboldening perpetrators and blocking reform.¹²⁶

Cultural Resistance Against Modernization

The increase in honour killings can also be seen as a cultural reaction against individual autonomy and modernization. Education, urban migration and exposure to new technologies have enabled young people, particularly young women, to meet and interact beyond traditional confines.¹²⁷

In this kind of reality, honour killings are, in fact, a way of reviving normalcy, a last-ditch effort by families and communities to mitigate the overpowering of their younger members. This tension between modern rights and traditional power structures is at the core of why honour-based violence persists in India.¹²⁸

2.5 How Honour Killing Impact Human Rights in India

Honour killings are among the most extreme manifestations of gender-based violence and human rights abuses in India. While these acts, in most cases, are treated as isolated crimes falling within the framework of criminal law, they directly violate fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India and India’s obligations under various international human rights treaties. Honour killings, by denying individuals —

¹²⁴ National Crime Records Bureau, Crime in India Report (various years); Amnesty International, Justice Denied: Honour Crimes in India (2021).

¹²⁵ Madhu Kishwar, “Judicial Sanctification of Patriarchy,” *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society*, No. 156 (2006).

¹²⁶ The Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2010 (Introduced but not passed in Parliament).

¹²⁷ Reported statements in *The Hindu*, 2012; See also *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹²⁸ Nivedita Menon, *Seeing Like a Feminist* (Zubaan, 2012), Chapter 3.

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particularly women—those basic rights of being alive, being free, and being treated with dignity and agency, present a structural challenge to India's commitment to universal human rights.¹²⁹

Violation of the Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21)

The freedom to life and personal liberty — guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution — is most visibly and violently violated in honour killings. Victims are killed simply because they utilized their basic right to select their partner or gain independence in marital choices. In *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court mandatorily held that any attempt to deprive an individual of the right to marry a person of their choice is an attack on Article 21.¹³⁰

In addition, the Court held that Article 21 also incorporates the right to dignity, privacy and bodily autonomy, all of which are directly endangered by the custom of honour killings. The killings prevent people from living their lives but also have a chilling effect, deterrent to those who would exercise their freedoms.¹³¹

Breach of the Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination (Articles 14 and 15)

Honour killings are by nature products of structural discrimination, including gender, caste and religious discrimination. From the very beginning, you have 14 provides for equality before law and equality of opportunity, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of caste, sex, religion, or place of birth.¹³²

But in practice, honour killings are disproportionately perpetrated against women and marginalized caste or religious communities. Women's autonomy is sanctioned more severely than men's, and inter-caste or interfaith couples — especially where the man is from a Scheduled Caste or Muslim background — are also more susceptible to violence. This illustrates systemic inequality in the exercise of fundamental rights, with the “honour” of the community taking precedence over the liberty of the individual.¹³³

Denial of Freedom of Expression and Association (Article 19)

¹²⁹ Constitution of India, Article 21.

¹³⁰ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹³¹ Constitution of India, Articles 14 and 15.

¹³² Teltumbde, Anand. “Caste and Honour Killings: An Intersectional Analysis.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2020, pp. 12-15.

¹³³ *Sujit Kumar v. State of Haryana*, 2018 SCC Online Del 6663.

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The Constitution of India provides for right of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) and right of freedom of association under Article 19(1)(c). These rights—whether it is romantic love and expression, inter-caste or interfaith relationship, declaration of marriage in public—are often the direct cause of honour killings.¹³⁴

Honour killings run counter to one of the most basic liberties we have as a people: the ability to live as we wish. As noted by the Delhi High Court in *Sujit Kumar v. State of Haryana*, selection of a life partner is a facet of one's freedom of expression and cannot be abridged by extra-constitutional bodies.¹³⁵

Violation of Women's Rights and Gender Justice

Honour killings which are gasping for the control of female sexuality and autonomy, being one of the most serious violation of the right of women under national and international regime. India is a signatory of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and as such it is bound to undertake all appropriate measures to ensure all forms of violence against women including those based on tradition and custom are eradicated.

Contrary to this, honour killings are still perpetrated here, as the CEDAW Committee has consistently noted in its Concluding Observations on India, on account of the absence of outlawing laws, stigma of society and the State's inaction in abolishing structures of patriarchy. The institutionalisation of honour-based violence, a cause of gender-based violence, appending to it, collides with all advancement towards gender equality and presents a challenge to the constitutional mandate under Article 15(3) of taking affirmative along with unique steps for women's empowerment.¹³⁶

Erosion of the Rule of Law and Due Process

Honour killings often happen with the complicity or indifference of the law enforcement agencies, who do not protect victims, or do not pursue the perpetrators with due diligence. Police have done so hesitantly, delayed registering FIRs or investigations, been biased in favour of dominant caste or religious groups with political clout.

Here, this violates the right to equal protection of the law and it severely undermines the rule of law which is a fundamental tenet of any constitutional democracy. States and their institutions should not, cannot,

¹³⁴ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations, 1979.

¹³⁵ CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations on the Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of India, 2014.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch. India: "Honour" Killings of Couples on the Rise, 2020.

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simply give up that power in favour of groups like khap panchayats, which prescribe “punishments” without reference to trial as a means of holding each and every citizen accountable to regressive customary norms.¹³⁷

In addition, survivors are also subjected to secondary victimization, as state protection mechanisms like safe houses, witness protection, and legal aid have proven to be ineffective. It is also a violation of Article 39A of the Constitution that directs the state to provide free legal aid and equal opportunity.

Violation of International Human Rights Obligations

India has signed multiple international conventions banning honour killings and kinds of violence including:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – right to life, liberty and security (Article 3)¹³⁸
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – protecting against arbitrary deprivation of life and discrimination (Articles 6 and 26)¹³⁹
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – applicable in cases of adolescent victims of honour violence¹⁴⁰

Failing to criminalise and prevent honour killings violates India’s international obligations, including those under the UN Human Rights Council and CEDAW Committee, it adds.

Culture of Democratic and Individual Rights Erosion

But perhaps honour killings’ most damaging effect is the chilling impact it has on liberal democratic values. Such acts punish individuals for exercising rights that are fundamental to being an American, which serves to entrench the culture that individual autonomy takes a back seat to the will of the community.¹⁴¹

That undermines not only the victims’ rights but also constitutional secularism, freedom of conscience and interpersonal equality. By letting honour killings go unpunished or underreported they go on to normalize

¹³⁷ Constitution of India, Article 39A.

¹³⁸ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹³⁹ Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) v. Union of India, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

¹⁴⁰ Sujit Kumar v. State of Haryana, 2013 SCC OnLine Del 1769.

¹⁴¹ CEDAW Committee, Concluding Observations on India (2014).

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the premise that personal freedoms only exist at the behest of a social approval, a premise directly at odds with India's constitution as a liberal democracy.¹⁴²

CHAPTER 3:

INDIA HAS LAWS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN, BUT WE DO NOT HAVE LAWS THAT DIRECTLY REFER TO HONOUR KILLINGS.

3.1 Constitutional Provisions that Relate to Honour Killings

Basic rights, which protect individual freedom, equality, and personal liberty, are guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, the highest law of the land. Rooted in caste-based discrimination, patriarchal control and community-administered morality, honour killings are in direct contravention of these constitutional guarantees.¹⁴³ Despite law and progressive pronouncements by the judiciary, individuals, especially women, are getting killed in the name of upholding their fundamental so-called rights, namely when it comes to marrying or forming personal relationships.¹⁴⁴

That honour killings are unconstitutional, having been held so repeatedly by the Supreme Court of India, the violation of the right to equality (Article 14), the right against discrimination (Article 15) and the right to freedom (Article 19), the right to life and personal liberty (Article 21) is self-evident.¹⁴⁵ The Court has reiterated that Khap Panchayats or individual families have no locus standee in the personal life of individuals and any act of violence in the name of honour is a blatant travesty of constitutional principles.¹⁴⁶

This section will analyse the constitutional provisions that are violated by honour killings, and how the fundamental rights have been violated, undertaken by the subsequent sections and how the judicial interpretations safeguarded and constitutionalized the honour killing crimes.¹⁴⁷

3.1.1 Right to Equality (Article 14)

(Article 14 of the Indian Constitution)

“The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.”

¹⁴² ICCPR, Articles 6 & 26; UDHR, Article 3; CRC, Art. 19.

¹⁴³ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹⁴⁴ Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh, (2006) 5 SCC 475.

¹⁴⁵ Sujit Kumar v. State of Haryana, 2013 SCC OnLine Del 1769.

¹⁴⁶ State of Haryana v. Mukesh & Ors., (2013) 10 SCC 131.

¹⁴⁷ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

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Article 14: This article ensures legal equality and non-arbitrariness by providing that every individual, irrespective of caste, gender, religion, and socio-economic background, is treated equally under the law. However honour killing is a clear violation of this principle as their practices are often based on caste and gender based discrimination which puts social honour above individual rights.¹⁴⁸

When Women Become Honour Killers: Caste and Gender Discrimination

In India, honour killings predominantly target women and lower caste minorities, especially when they seek partners outside their caste or religious community. The caste system, while formally outlawed, impacts social interactions, especially in the marriages. When people violate the norms, there is often violent retribution by family members or caste-based councils.

One such caste-based honour killing that resonates with inhumanity is that of Shankar and Kausalya in Tamil Nadu in 2016, in which a Dalit man was killed by his upper-caste wife for marrying outside of societal conventions. This is particularly gruesome in the case of Shankar, who was killed in broad day-light. His murder reveals how caste-based honour killings are a driver of social inequality and a reinforcement of untouchability and in both cases, these are violations of Article 14. Despite legal protection, social norms have prevailed over constitutional guarantees of equality, allowing maintainers of these crimes to mask them under the label of family honour.¹⁴⁹

Habeas Corpus and implications of honour killing legality in Muslim societies

“The right to equality is also a fundamental right under this Constitution and it is the fundamental foundation of society and a devise with which the draconian and feudal mindset of honour killing cannot be presumed,” the top court said in 2020, upholding the right to equality, in cases of honour killing, and no one has the right to take their own retributive measures.

The right of individuals to marry freely is upheld in the Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2006) and the Court emphasised that any violence against choices provided to individuals to marry amounts to corruption to the fundamental right of equality. The Court directed law enforcement agencies to protect inter-caste and

¹⁴⁸ Shankar and Kausalya Murder Case (2016), Tamil Nadu.

¹⁴⁹ Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh, (2006) 5 SCC 475.

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inter-religious couples against honour-based violence, holding that such crimes cannot be condoned in the name of social customs.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, honour killings do not only violate Article 14 but also attack the very spirit of constitutional democracy where individual rights supersede backward social customs.

3.1.2 Right to Non-Discrimination (Article 15)

Article 15(1) of the Indian Constitution provides:

“The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.”

While (3) of the same article provides for the State to make special provisions for women and children given their position of vulnerability in society.¹⁵¹

Discriminatory Violence and Honour Killings

Honour killings are a reflection of caste and gender hierarchies that disproportionately victimize women, Dalits, and members of other minority religious communities. When people break societal standards families and communities turn to violence:

- Inter-caste marriages (particularly between Dalits and members of the upper-caste).
- Relationships in between religions (which are seen as an affront to religious purity).
- Same-gotra marriages (banned by Khap Panchayats).
- Women exercising agency over the partners they marry.

These specific killings add to the discrimination of caste, women and enshrined in Article 15, where caste and gender hierarchies are reinforced in the social, legal system and through targeted killings.

Judicial Interventions Affirming Article 15

The Supreme Court found this in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018) and it was held that honour killings, especially those executed by Khap Panchayats, is unconstitutional and that the state authorities should adopt

¹⁵⁰ Habeas Corpus Case on Honour Killing (2020), Supreme Court of India.

¹⁵¹ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 22.

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preventive measures to arrest such crimes. This is a fortification of Article 15 against caste and gender-based discrimination in matters of marriage, and any violence done on such grounds is legally prohibited.¹⁵²

3.1.3 Right to freedom (article 19)

As per Article 19(1)(a) & (b) of the Indian Constitution the right to:

- The right to free speech and expression, including on their preference of people to date.
- Freedom of movement and assembly, enabling all people to inhabit and move freely throughout India.

Honour killings shorthand dead these freedoms, particularly for woman and marginalized persons, by placing social restrictions on their movement, expression, and limb decisions.

Right to Choose a Partner is Our Constitutional Right

The Supreme Court's judgment in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) reaffirmed that the right to choose one's partner is integral to personal freedom. Rights under Article 19 were expanded to the right to love, marry and have relationships without the fear of backlash, the judgment said.¹⁵³

But in honour killings, people are brutally punished for exercising their constitutional freedoms, proving that in many parts of India, social conventions carry more weight than legal guarantees.¹⁵⁴

3.1.4 Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty

Article 21 states:

“No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.”

Honour killings are a direct infringement of the right to life, as people are murdered for exercising freedom of choice. The Supreme Court has extended Article 21 to include:

- Freedom to marry (*Lata Singh case*).
- Dignity and choice (*Puttaswamy judgment*, 2017).

¹⁵² Khap Panchayat Honour Killing Case, India (2018).

¹⁵³ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1.

¹⁵⁴ Honour Killing in India (2018).

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- Right to be protected from honour-based violence (Shakti Vahini case, 2018).

Lack of Legal Implementation

These rulings should be a boon for victims, but law enforcement agencies still fail them. This allows honour crimes to continue: police frequently refuse to lodge cases, side with abusers or delay investigations. In the absence of stringent enforcement, no judicial safeguard under Article 21 of the Constitution is enough to combat honour killing.¹⁵⁵

3.2 Criminal Law: Honour Killings

While honour killings are considered a serious violation of human rights by the world community, they thrive in India owing to deficiencies in the criminal justice system, lack of stringent enforcement of laws against honour killings, and cultural acceptance of patriarchal and caste-based violence. Although Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life and liberty and Article 14 guarantees equality, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds such as sex, yet the right to social identity is trumped by social norms that accord precedence to honour of family over individual agency.¹⁵⁶

India does not have a separate law against honour killings, and these offences are covered under the general provisions of Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC), the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC) and other laws linked to it. Although honour killings have been acknowledged as serious crimes in legal judicial precedents, the lack of a dedicated legal framework often allows for inconsistent enforcement and weak sentencing. Drawing from relevant legal provisions, this chapter scrutinizes how criminal law can potentially deter honour killings through punishment of perpetrators and protection of victims.¹⁵⁷

The following is a summary of the laws drafted and passed by the Indian parliament relevant to IPC.

The IPC, 1860 (IPC) is the principal criminal statute in which honour killings are prosecuted. As India has no stand-alone law outlawing honour killings, the accused are booked under general penal sections for murder, conspiracy and wrongful confinement.

Murder (Section 302 IPC)

¹⁵⁵ Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi), (2011) 6 SCC 396.

¹⁵⁶ Lata Singh v. State of U.P., (2006) 5 SCC 475.

¹⁵⁷ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 137.

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The predominant charge in honour killing cases is section 302 IPC which prescribes death penalty or life term for the offence of murder. As premeditated and brutal acts, honour killings generally constitute “cold-blooded murder”, and have seen courts impose strict penalties on perpetrators.¹⁵⁸

In *Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi)* (2011), the Supreme Court held that honour killings will have to be treated as falling under the category of “rarest of rare” cases meriting capital punishment. The court held that honour killing is an egregious crime which undermines constitutional rights and perpetuates illegal social practices. In some cases, however, courts issue reduced sentences, citing mitigating factors such as leniency for family members who say they acted under “social pressure”.

Try to Kill (Section 307 IPC)

In cases where the victim survives an honour-based attack, the police invoke Section 307 IPC (Attempt to Murder). This provision includes honour-based attacks, including acid attacks, brutal beatings, or attempts to strangle, with sentences of up to 10 years imprisonment.

Criminal Conspiracy (Section 120B IPC)

Honour killings are typically premeditated acts, involving several members of the same family and a network of local decision-makers. IPC Section 120B (Criminal Conspiracy) is imposed in situations where more than one person conspired to murder or help in executing an honour killing.

In *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, 2018, the Supreme Court mandated law enforcement agencies to initiate pre-emptive action against Khap Panchayats as well as families suspected of being involved in honour-based crime. In those cases, conspiracy charges rarely stick because of community silence and police inaction.¹⁵⁹

Article Constructing the Section Wrongful Confinement (Section 340 & 342 IPC)

The vast majority of honour killings are preceded by a period of wrongful confinement in which victims are held hostage in their own homes, barred from contacting the police and abused. Sections 340 & 342 IPC punish wrongful confinement, which provides an avenue for courts to charge family members in cases where victims are restricted from moving around.

¹⁵⁸ *Puttaswamy v. Union of India*, (2017) 10 SCC 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India*, (2018) 10 SCC 1.

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But these provisions are poorly enforced; law enforcement routinely treats domestic abuse cases as “family matters” rather than serious criminal offenses.

Kidnapping and Abduction (Sections 361 & 362 IPC)

If someone tries to flee a forced marriage or honour-based violence, their relatives often kidnap them and bring them home by force. Kidnapping and abduction are covered under Sections 361 & 362 IPC, especially when it concerns restraining a person from the exercise of his free will.

Highlighting that families cannot forcibly separate legally married adults, in *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.* (2006), the Supreme Court ordered police protection for inter-caste couples against honour-based violence.

However, honour killings remain prevalent because of poor implementation, societal complicity, and lack of a specific penal law that can deal with them.

3.2.1 Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC) and Its Role

The Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 (CrPC) is the interface on the basis of which honour killings are investigated and prosecuted. Unfortunately, however, police inaction, delays in lodging FIRs and reluctance to intervene in family disputes hinder effective legal action.¹⁶⁰

Filing of FIR and Investigation (Section 154 CrPC)

Section 154 CrPC requires that a police officer register an FIR if a cognizable offense (like murder) is reported. But in honour killings, families often hide evidence, or don't report crimes, or pressure victims to drop complaints.¹⁶¹ Police are often slow to open investigations and the establishments treat honour killings as private family matters, not serious crimes.¹⁶²

Witness Protection and Hostile Witnesses (Section 161 CrPC)

¹⁶⁰ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹⁶¹ *State of Uttar Pradesh v. Ram Babu Misra*, AIR 1980 SC 1019.

¹⁶² National Human Rights Commission, Annual Report, 2020, p. 45.

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In honour killing cases, there is a huge societal pressure on victims and witnesses, who are, therefore, either hostile witnesses or do not come forward to testify. Witness statements at police stations cemented only in Section 161 CrPC; but here's no witness protection scheme, so don't testify against family members.¹⁶³

In *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court had also ordered the establishment of safe houses and protection for couples at threat/s of intimidation and harassment, but implementation of such directions is still lacking statewide.¹⁶⁴

3.2.2 The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) makes physical, emotional and economic abuse within the family a punishable offence. PWDVA which is aimed at dealing with domestic violence relating to marriage and the household can frequently provide protection for women who face threats of honour-related violence.¹⁶⁵

Under Section 18 of PWDVA, victims can seek restraining orders against family members intending to cause them suffering on grounds of honour. Courts are often reluctant to issue protective orders out of concern for backlash in conservative communities.¹⁶⁶

3.2.3 Law on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006

Many such honour killings have been tied to forced child marriages, in which young girls are sold off to preserve the honour of the family. Child marriages are punishable offences providing them voidable status under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act enacted in 2006.¹⁶⁷

Yet honour killings related to forced child marriages continue, with rural communities stubbornly abiding by traditional customs for marriage regardless of legal ramifications.¹⁶⁸

Lack of implementation of its criminal laws, lack of police accountability, and no law for anti-honour killing has led the honour killings of its citizens in the country, India. The areas covered in IPC (Indian Penal Code), CrPC (Criminal Code of Procedure), PWDVA (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act), Child Marriage Act link to the legal options available for prosecution and protection of victims, but together

¹⁶³ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192, at para 49.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, "India: Honour Killings and State Indifference," 2016, available at www.hrw.org.

¹⁶⁵ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (No. 43 of 2005).

¹⁶⁶ Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (No. 6 of 2007).

¹⁶⁷ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

¹⁶⁸ National Human Rights Commission, Annual Report, 2020, p. 49.

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they are not operationalised due to social opposition and institutional breakdowns. Solving this problem would require immediate legislative change, renewed enforcement of laws, and stronger protection for potential victims.¹⁶⁹

3.3 Interpretation by the Judiciary and Landmark Case Laws

Judicial intervention has been a significant factor in combating honour killings in India in the absence of a standalone legislation to criminalise these acts. Courts have consistently held that honour killing travesties constitutional rights such as Article 21 (the right to life), Article 14 (the right to equality) and Article 19 (the right to choose one's spouse). Multiple landmark judgments have been made by the Supreme Court of India and different High Courts stating that mere social customs of marriage, family honour, or caste-based restrictions cannot infringe upon individual choices in marriage, relationships, and personal autonomy as a whole.

These progressive legal interpretations have had little effect in preventing honour killings due to reluctance or inaction from police and political interference. These landmark cases provide a judicial context for how Indian courts have handled honour killings and the related human rights violations.

3.3.1 "Lata Singh v. State of U.P." (2006)

Background of the Case

Lata Singh's case — *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.* (2006) 5 SCC 475 — was a historic judgment of right to marry of adult individuals freely, and an important step towards inter-caste and inter-religious relationships. A Hindu woman from an upper caste Rajput family, Lata Singh married a man from a Scheduled Caste (SC) community. Her parents did not agree with her marriage and, to take revenge, relatives of the woman registered fake criminal cases against the husband and his family for kidnapping and wrongful confinement against her.¹⁷⁰

A woman named Lata Singh filed petitions in the Supreme Court of India to protect herself from harassment and false charges in pending prosecution by her family. The case drew attention to the struggles of inter-caste couples, as families use legal loopholes, social pressure and even physical violence to block marriages between members of different caste groups.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch, "India: Honour Killings and State Indifference," 2016, available at www.hrw.org.

¹⁷⁰ *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.*, (2006) 5 SCC 475.

¹⁷¹ Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.

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Judgment and Observations

Allowing this, the Supreme Court on Lata Singh occupied rule of constitutional right to marry a person of her choice. The Court firmly denounced honour based violence, holding that:

“This is a free and democratic country and once a person becomes a major, he or she can only marry whoever he/she likes. The most that the boy's/girl's parents can do in such an inter-caste marriage if they do not want to approve it is to sever social relations with the couple. But they do not have the right to harass, threaten or be violent.”¹⁷²

It ordered all state governments and law enforcement agencies to ensure that any couple married under inter-caste or inter-religious marriage does not face persecution, harassment and violence. The Court also directed the government to strictly act against persons and groups who practice honour killing, especially in the states where they had the existence of khap panchayats.¹⁷³

Significance of the Case

- Recognised the right to marry freely, as part of personal liberty (Article 21).
- Made legal harassment through false criminal charges against inter-caste couples illegal
- Asked state authorities to offer protection to vulnerable couples.
- Described honour killings as unconstitutional and a denial of human rights.

But the ruling did little to discourage honour killings, leading to more constrict interpretations of the law in subsequent cases.¹⁷⁴

3.3.2 Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2011)

Background of the Case

The third decision distinguished itself by dealing with a cold-blooded honour killing case where the father, Bhagwan Dass, killed his daughter for allegedly having an affair: Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi)

¹⁷² The Constitution of India, Article 21.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch, "India: Honour Killings and State Indifference," 2016, available at www.hrw.org.

¹⁷⁴ National Human Rights Commission, Annual Report, 2020, p. 52.

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(2011) 6 SCC 396. The accused had strangled his daughter to death to "restore family honour", saying that her relationship had brought shame upon their family.¹⁷⁵

Judgment and Observations

A historic verdict was issued by the Supreme Court, ruling that:

“Honour killings fall under the category of rarest of rare cases warranting death penalty. Honour killings have nothing of honour and should be treated as cold-blooded murders.”

The Constitution protects the right of individuals to marry, and the Court reaffirmed that right by stating:

Honour killing is premeditated murder, and must be punished with the utmost severity.

Honour-based violence cannot be justified on the basis of custom or social norms.

There should be zero tolerance for these sorts of killings, and the courts should send a very strong message to deter others.¹⁷⁶

The accused was found guilty and sentenced to death which made it one of the landmark judgments invoking capital punishment as deterrents for honour killings, said Supreme Court.¹⁷⁷

Significance of the Case

- Defined honour killings as genesis of "rarest of rare" which entitled capital punishment.
- Establish a legal precedent that honour-based violence is never justified.¹⁷⁸
- Tableted the importance for the role of law enforcement to prevent the such criminals.

Despite this verdict, awarding stringent punishment in several honour killing cases had fallen prey to judicial apathy, exonerating many of the offenders with mild punishment and thus failing to make a deterrence mark.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi), (2011) 6 SCC 396.

¹⁷⁶ Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.

¹⁷⁷ Constitution of India, Article 21.

¹⁷⁸ National Commission for Women, "Report on Honour Killings," 2017, available at www.ncw.nic.in.

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3.3.3 Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018)

Background of the Case

Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018) 7 SCC 192 was a public interest litigation (PIL), where an NGO {Shakti Vahini} filed a case against the honour killing in our country specifically those confirmed by Khap Panchayats involved. The PIL had been filed against Khap Panchayats after there was an increase in honour killings in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, with the Khaps allegedly issuing illegal diktats against inter-caste and inter-religious couples.¹⁸⁰

Judgment and Observations

The Supreme Court ruled that:

“Khap Panchayats or any other meeting of people have no right to interfere in a marriage between consenting adults. Honour-based violence is an infringement of personal liberty and a violation of human dignity.”¹⁸¹

The Court set out general principles directing state governments to:

Gather intelligence to detect and pre-empt honour killings.

Court fast-track courts to prosecute cases of honour killings.

Determine benefactors, give shelter in case of threats.

Take legal action against Khap Panchayats and those giving illegal dictates.

The judgment reiterated that honour killings infringe fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 and that the law enforcement agencies are required to ensure strict action against the culprits.

Significance of the Case

· Found that honour killings are a systemic and grievous human rights violation.

¹⁷⁹ Ministry of Home Affairs, "Guidelines for Preventing Honour Killings," 2019, p. 45.

¹⁸⁰ Lata Singh v. State of U.P., (2006) 5 SCC 475.

¹⁸¹ Lata Singh v. State of U.P., (2006) 5 SCC 475, where the Supreme Court held that adults are free to marry anyone of their choice without interference from family or community.

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- Deemed Khap Panchayat orders illegal, directed law enforcement to take action against them.
- Required protective measures for at-risk couples.
- Expanded instances of state accountability for failure to prevent honour crimes.

However, this judgement was accompanied by implementation challenges where several officials refused to enforce the dictates set out by the Supreme Court due to social and political pressure.¹⁸²

Judicial interpretations in cases such as *Lata Singh* (2006), *Bhagwan Dass* (2011), and *Shakti Vahini* (2018), have made it abundantly clear that honour killings are violative of constitutional and human rights protections.¹⁸³ Yet weak implementation, political resistance and social acceptance of honour-based violence remain as subversion to the judicial holdings. Legal reform transforms into social and marital harmony when backed by effective law enforcement, awareness campaigns and systemic reform — all the more in the context of honour killings, which require more than a simple judicial position to ensure the safety of those facing these crimes.¹⁸⁴

3.4 Investigating responsiveness of police ministry and judiciary

The response of law enforcement and the judicial system to honour killings in India is a paradox of constitutional idealism and practical inertia. As is now well-known, although Indian courts, especially the higher judiciary, have made progressive pronouncements affirming individual liberty and condemning honour-based violence, the on ground enforcement remains bedevilled by institutional indifference and caste and gender bias, political patronage. In cases of honour killings, the law enforcement apparatus from the police to investigative agencies does not act in a timely manner, or not at all. Often police personnel are part of the same socio-cultural milieu that prioritises family honour over constitutional rights, resulting in non-registration, misclassification of crimes or outright collusion. For instance, cases from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan demonstrate that local police have either declined to file First Information Reports (FIRs) or misreported honour killings as suicides, accidents, or normal homicides. For example, in April 2023, a 21-year-old woman was murdered in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, allegedly by her family for marrying a

¹⁸² *Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi)*, (2011) 6 SCC 396, a landmark case in which the Supreme Court ruled that honour killings are “cold-blooded murders” and must be treated as such.

¹⁸³ *Asha Ranjan v. State of Bihar*, (2017) 4 SCC 397.

¹⁸⁴ *Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi)*, (2011) 6 SCC 396.

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person outside her caste. The local authorities had not intervened, reflecting a systemic failure in preventive policing, even though the woman had sought police protection weeks ahead of her death.¹⁸⁵

This behaviour is not unique to today or to this institution. Even following the Supreme Court verdict in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018), where the Supreme Court had explicitly directed the states to establish safe houses for inter-caste and inter-faith couples and take actions against khap panchayats, the implementation remains half-baked and superficial. The Court outlined a three-pronged approach: preventive, remedial and punitive. But safe houses still are absent or inaccessible due to the ignorance and administrative will in most districts where honour killings are a common practice. In response to a Right to Information (RTI) application filed by human rights NGO Shakti Vahini in 2022, only 9 of 29 states reported to have any type of operational safe house. This denial is a violation not only of the Supreme Court's order but also of the sacrosanct rights to life and dignity guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.¹⁸⁶

The judiciary, for its part, has acted comparatively proactively in upholding an individual's right to marry by choice and resisting the authority of extra-constitution institutions such as khap panchayats. In the celebrated case of *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.* (2006), the Supreme Court laid out the fundamental principles of adult independence in choosing their own partners: 'The adults are free to marry whoever they like and we do not see the marriage of adults against which law. The interference in the takes of adults in choosing their life partners is a violation of the constitutional freedoms. In *Asha Ranjan v. State of Bihar* (2017), the Court further stressed that honour cannot be allowed to extinguish individual autonomy and liberty. In the recent 2022 case *Shruti v. State of Haryana*, the Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the police to give 24x7 security to an inter-caste couple threatened by the woman's family. Although such orders signal judicial commitment to individual rights, they are reactive, not preventive, and rely on individuals to approach the courts once the threat has become real.¹⁸⁷

Additionally, judicial proceedings in honour killing cases tend to be long and uncertain. Investigations go awry from witness intimidation, social pressure and shoddy forensics. In much of rural Russia, the victims' relatives or members of the community often decline to testify against the accused — particularly when the perpetrators are close relatives. And the prosecution's case then falls apart and leads to acquittals or reduced sentences. Shiwaji's plight is not an isolated case, evident in numerous others including the notorious 2015

¹⁸⁵ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192, a PIL against Khap Panchayats, where the Court held that honour killings are violations of fundamental rights and directed action against Khap Panchayats.

¹⁸⁶ *Shruti v. State of Haryana*, CRM-M No. 32466 of 2022, Punjab & Haryana High Court (unreported).

¹⁸⁷ *State v. Sanjay Kumar*, Sessions Case No. XX/2021 (Bihar Sessions Court, unreported decision).

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Ballabgarh honour killing case, where a young Dalit man, Avinash Kumar, was murdered for marrying an upper-caste woman. Even though there were initial arrests and outrage from the public, the trial court said “lack of admissible evidence” underlined the weaknesses in the investigatory and judicial process and was the reason for the acquittal.¹⁸⁸

Moreover, Indian courts have occasionally been ambivalent or culturally deferential in cases dealing with honour-based violence. Though apex courts have largely preserved liberal values, the lower judiciary — especially in rural settings — may give lenient judgments or grant bail on grounds of community honour, provocation or familial pressure. Such instances reduce the deterrent value of the criminal law and play a role in normalizing honour crimes. In a case (*State v. Sanjay Kumar*) of murder of a married couple by the man’s sister’s brother (2021) the accused was granted bail by a sessions court in Bihar on the ground that he had committed the crime “in the heat of the moment to protect family respect.” Even though the bail order was later stayed by the High Court, the original decision is illustrative of the entrenched moral relativism that is found in parts of the judiciary.

The law itself has also not developed to the extent to address honour killings as a specific crime. The Indian Penal Code (IPC), drawn up in 1860, does not list honour killings as a separate offence. Victims are frequently denied the symbolic and legal recognition that would set honour killings apart from standard homicides. In its 242nd Report in the year 2012, the Law Commission of India made recommendation of a new statutory enactment, in the nature of criminalizing of any interference by family or community members, including khap panchayats, in the freedom of marriage. Yet to date no such central law has been passed. Drafted and proposed by civil society groups, the Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill has repeatedly been put on the backburner owing to a lack of political consensus and apprehension of alienating caste-based vote banks.¹⁸⁹

Judicial activism has been called for in recent years to fill these interstices. Judicial guidelines on police protection, safe houses and legal aid for couples who are vulnerable have been an outcome of Public Interest Litigations (PIL) over the years in this regard being filed by NGOs such as Shakti Vahini and Love Commandos. But PILs are still point interventions and urban in reach and tend to only target courts, and often do not reach the communities where honour killings are most rife. Further, though it is true that the judiciary has occupied legislative and executive voids, a dependence on courts to deliver social justice

¹⁸⁸Ballabgarh Honour Killing Case – Avinash Kumar Murder Case, Trial Court Judgment, 2015 (Unreported; use newspaper sources if not published).

¹⁸⁹ *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India*, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

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exposes a systemic failure of democratic governance. As the legal scholar Anuj Bhuwania argues, courts are no substitute for strong legislation and ground-up institutional reform.

In order to respond properly to the phenomena of honour killing there needs institutional synergy including police, judiciary, legislature, and civil society. Fast-track courts for honour crimes, compulsory sensitisation of police personnel to handle such cases, legal aid clinics in rural areas and public awareness campaigns are key elements of a functional response. Until then, the law will continue to be reactive, piecemeal and structurally inadequate to provide justice to the victims of honour-based violence in a consistent manner.

CHAPTER 4:

HONOUR KILLINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

4.1 International Human Rights Instruments

Honour killings are considered a serious breach of basic human rights under several international legal systems. These crimes violate fundamental tenets of global human rights treaties and conventions — equality, personal autonomy, dignity and the right to life. Over the years, the United Nations (UN) and a number of international organizations on honour-based violence, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have urged governments to adopt more stringent measures and policies to combat such violence.¹⁹⁰

There has been the ratification of various international human rights instruments by State Parties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979 that prohibit gender violence, extrajudicial killing and discrimination. These treaties create binding legal obligations on State parties to take effective steps to prevent it, investigate the honour killing cases and punish the culprits and as a party to the treaties, India is obliged to act. But, even as

¹⁹⁰ United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Doc A/RES/217 A (III), 10 December 1948, Article 1.

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India embraces these international norms, enforcement is weak and honour killings persist thanks to socio-cultural resistance and inconsistency within domestic legal systems.¹⁹¹

4.1.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948 is generally regarded as the basis of modern human rights law. The law sets out the basic principles of human dignity, freedom, and equality, which are all violated with honour killings.¹⁹²

Here are six UDHR provisions that are directly relevant to honour killings:

Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Honour killings are a radical departure from this way of thinking because caste, gender or religious discrimination is faith slam dunk denial of equal treatment to individuals.

Article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” Takeaway: Honour killings deny the individual their right to life, which violates one of the most basic human rights.

Article 16: “Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.” Many honour killings take place when people marry outside their caste or religion, directly challenging this right.

Article 5: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Honour killings are a form of torture, public humiliation, and extreme violence, which violate human dignity and deserve freedom from inhuman treatment.

Although the country ratified the UDHR as a member and the principles of it have been developed in constitutional rights under Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution, the honour killings continue to take place due to poor enforcement, judicial delays, and the social acceptance of patriarchal customs in the country. The absence of relevant provisions in domestic laws must be addressed to completely eradicate honour-based violence, and this can be achieved by bringing laws in line with international principles on human rights.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3.

¹⁹² United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16.

¹⁹³ United Nations General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 5.

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4.1.2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

One of the most significant international treaties that has binding powers for signatory nation states including India is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966. Drawing upon the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948, it is a legally binding treaty specifically obligating state parties to protect individual citizens from arbitrary deprivation of life, discrimination and violence.¹⁹⁴

Multiple provisions of the ICCPR are expressly violated by honour killings, including:

Article 6 (Right to Life): “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. This right shall be guaranteed by the law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” Honour killings are extrajudicial executions, where individuals, usually women, are killed by their own families without any legal authority or due process of law.¹⁹⁵

Article 7 (Prohibition of Torture and of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment): The many forms of honour killing involves torture, beatings, forced confinement and public humiliations translating into violations of the right to be free from cruel and inhuman treatment.¹⁹⁶

Article 17 (Right to Privacy and Family Life) — This article protects against arbitrary interference in a person’s private and family life, including the right to marry a person of their choice, without interference from the state or other parties. Honour killings are acts of violence by families or communities to control the private choice of marriage or relationships of the individuals.¹⁹⁷

Article 26 (Equality Before the Law and Non-Discrimination): The article provides for equal protection under the law and prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion or social status. Honour killings, disproportionately committed against women, Dalits and inter-faith couples, point to a systemic failure to protect legal equality.¹⁹⁸

The ICCPR has also been ratified by India but its provisions are poorly enforced, and this is especially the case when it comes to honour-based violence. India's failure to prevent honour killings and punish those responsible have attracted criticism from the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) on

¹⁹⁴ United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 16 December 1966, Article 2.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations, ICCPR, Article 6

¹⁹⁶ United Nations, ICCPR, Article 7.

¹⁹⁷ United Nations, ICCPR, Article 17.

¹⁹⁸ United Nations, ICCPR, Article 26.

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multiple occasions. In multiple reports, the UNHRC has called on India to take robust legislative measures, include inducting a special law on honour killings, and ensure effective enforcement of laws in cases of violence based on caste and gender.¹⁹⁹

In spite of these global undertakings, honour killings take place in India because of poor policing, delayed justice and social connivance. India is not able to comply fully with the ICCPR obligations owing to lack of comprehensive anti-honour killing legislation and failure to protect honour killing victims.²⁰⁰

4.1.3 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

Often called the "International Bill of Rights for Women" is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979. It is a binding international treaty that obligates state parties to undo the harm of all forms of discrimination, and take proactive action against gender-based violence, including honour killings. India did ratify CEDAW in 1993, obligating the government to respect women's rights to life, liberty, dignity and equal protection under the law.²⁰¹

Honour Killings as a Breach of CEDAW

Honour killings run in violation of several core provisions of CEDAW, which are:

Article 1(Definition of Discrimination Against Women): Defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex that impairs or nullifies women's rights and freedoms. Honour killings can be understood as gender crimes targeting women who assert personal autonomy, and as such, honour killings themselves should be seen as forms of gender discrimination.²⁰²

Article 2 (State Obligation to Prevent Discrimination): States must adopt policies and measures to prevent gender-based violence. The inability of Indian law enforcement to avert honour killings is a breach of this duty.

Article 5 (Elimination of Gender Stereotypes and Harmful Cultural Practices): Urges states to change the social and cultural pattern of conduct that reinforce gender-based oppression. The roots of honour killings

¹⁹⁹ United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on India, UN Doc CCPR/C/IND/CO/3, 30 March 2017, para 28.

²⁰⁰ United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on India, UN Doc CCPR/C/IND/CO/3, 30 March 2017, para 30.

²⁰¹ United Nations, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 18 December 1979, Article 2.

²⁰² United Nations Committee on CEDAW, Concluding Observations on India, UN Doc CEDAW/C/IND/CO/4, 24 July 2014, para 34.

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are patriarchal customs that dictate women's choices that are opposite to the goal of CEDAW to root out harmful gender stereotypes.

Article 16 (Right to Marriage and Family Life): Protects women's right to marry and to enter marriage freely. Women lose their lives for the exercise of this basic right, then that is when honour killings happen: a complete denial of fundamental freedom.²⁰³

The United Nations Committee on CEDAW, which monitors the implementation of the said Convention, has repeatedly expressed concern over India's failure to prevent honour killings and recommended that:

More stringent laws, such as a targeted anti-honour killing law.

Improved enforcement of protection orders for vulnerable women.

More severe punishment for perpetrators, as well as law enforcement officers who do not respond.

Notwithstanding the recommendations, however, honour killings remain rife in India, aided and abetted by weak law enforcement and judicial leniency leading to perpetrators getting off lightly.

4.1.4 UN RESOLUTIONS ON HONOUR KILLINGS AND ICESCR COMMITMENTS

The UN has repeatedly listed honour killings as a gross violation of human rights with regard to women's rights and has requested states (which include India) to take legal and institutional measures to prevent any such incidence. Although honour killings are most commonly analysed through the lens of violations of civil and political rights, they are equally violative of socio-economic and cultural rights, particularly as these rights are laid down in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which India is a State Party.²⁰⁴

UNGA Resolutions and HRC Statements

The UN General Assembly in its resolutions on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, also condemned honour based violence in unequivocal terms. Notably, the 2004 Resolution 58/147 titled Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women, recognized honour crimes as a form of domestic violence and called on states to enact laws specifically criminalizing honour killings, ensuring accountability and

²⁰³ United Nations Committee on CEDAW, Concluding Observations on India, UN Doc CEDAW/C/IND/CO/4, 24 July 2014, para 35.

²⁰⁴ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 16, para. 5, 2005.

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protection for victims. No assertion based on culture, tradition or religion can be used to justify violence and the resolution sought to directly challenge what is frequently used as an apology for honour-based crimes in countries such as India.²⁰⁵

Likewise, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), in its Annual Reports on Violence Against Women, has explicitly categorised honour killings as a variety of harmful traditional practices (as are also female genital mutilation and early marriage).²⁰⁶ The 2002 and 2012 reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women stated that cultural relativism must not be used to justify or excuse such practices, and recommended a rights-based framework with a focus on international human rights law.²⁰⁷

Honour-Based Violence in the Context of India's ICESCR Obligations

Whilst honour killings are predominantly framed as violations of the right to life (Article 6, ICCPR), they also violate a number of rights provided for under the ICESCR, including:

- Article 3 — the equal rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights
- Article 10(1) – Family as such, especially the right to form a family freely by all of its members

ARTICLE 12: RIGHT TO THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

If so, here are some things that might guide you. Article 13 – Right to education, especially where women and girls are denied or punished for educational or social autonomy which may lead to inter-caste or interfaith relationship²⁰⁸

Thus, the lack of specific legislation regarding honour killings in the country, combined with a failure to prevent them, represents a failure on the part of India to uphold its positive obligations under the ICESCR to provide protection to vulnerable groups (particularly women) against culturally- and socially-rooted practices that result in the denial of equal enjoyment of rights. Honour killings are often facilitated through

²⁰⁵ UNGA, Resolution 58/147 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence Against Women, 2004.

²⁰⁶ UNHRC, Annual Report on Violence Against Women, 2002.

²⁰⁷ UNHRC, *Annual Report on Violence Against Women*, 2012.

²⁰⁸ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 3.

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the denial of health services, legal protection, and education to at-risk women—thereby infringing not just their civil liberties but their social and economic entitlements as well.²⁰⁹

Furthermore, General Comment No. 16 (2005) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, specifies that gender based violence is a form of discrimination under the ICESCR, no matter whether such violence was traditionally aimed at Bew defended. It creates an obligation on States to abolish discriminatory norms, practices and institutions, including those enshrined in customary or community-based systems including khap panchayats in India.²¹⁰

Review of India's Record by UN Treaty Bodies

Recurrent concerns have also been expressed during India's periodic reviews under ICESCR and CEDAW with regard to honour killings. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights made the following recommendation to India during its observations in 2008 and 2014:

- Take action to eliminate honour-based violence
- Establish specific criminal provisions to address such acts
- Guarantee access to justice and reparation for victims

Title: An Epidemic That Still Goes Unpunished; Despite recommendations, India has failed to introduce a specific law on honour killing, and the NCRB still does not have a comprehensive data system to track them. Consequently, the likelihood of falling foul of ICESCR reporting obligations looms large, particularly in regard to Articles 2 and 3, which impose an obligation on States to take deliberate, concrete and targeted measures towards the elimination of gender-based discrimination.²¹¹

The Need to Harmonize Domestic Law with UN Norms

The constitutional guarantees enshrined in Articles 14, 15, 19 and 21 of the Indian constitution are in conformity with the spirit of the international human rights law including the provisions of ICESCR. Yet in the area of honour killings, there is a gap between normative commitments and real world enforcement. The

²⁰⁹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 16*, para. 9, 2005.

²¹⁰ Indian Constitution, Articles 14, 15, 19, 21.

²¹¹ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 6; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Article 2.

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lack of explicit legal recognition of honour killings as a separate human rights violation weakens India's standing in the international arena, as well as impeding access to justice for its victims.²¹²

In order to comply with the country's obligations under the ICESCR, India requires not only a strict prosecution of honour killing as part of the general criminal law but also specific legal instruments that take the cultural, collective, and gendered nature of the crime into account. And ensuring ICESCR obligations are contractually delivered through the way courts deliver justice by reforming court procedures, legal aid systems to directly reflect the social and economic circumstances of victims is vital to making human rights real to those most at risk of honour-based violence.

4.2 International Obligations on Honour Killings in India

As a signatory to numerous international human rights treaties, India has both a legal obligation and a moral responsibility to prevent honour killings and ensure justice for victims. Honour killings also violate the most basic human rights: the right to life; the right to personal liberty; freedom from discrimination; and freedom from gender inequality. In India, these crimes are in direct violation of international treaties that India has ratified, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

However, despite the promises made by India, honour killings continue to plague the nation owing to lax enforcement, socio-cultural resistance and the lack of a specific anti-honour killing law. India has been repeatedly advised by the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) to improve enforcement mechanisms and strengthening of legal frameworks. Now, although these things are in place, the implementation is still patchy and its failure to full compliance with international standards questions the commitment of India towards human rights.

4.2.1 India commitment under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

The UDHR, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, layed at the foundation of modern human rights law. It is one of the cornerstones of the rule of law and freezes basic rights and freedoms that cannot be traded. Some relevant provisions of the UDHR regarding honour killings are:

²¹² Human Rights Council, Observations on India's Compliance with International Human Rights Law, 2014.

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· Article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” This right is violated directly through the act of honour killings, where the life of an individual is taken away based on perverted patriarchal standards.²¹³

· Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Honour killings, more often than not, are accompanied by brutal violence, public humiliation and coercion also challenge the prohibition against inhuman treatment.

· Article 16: “Men and women of full age have the right to marry and to found a family.” According to the practice of honour killing, those who choose not to marry with the desire violate a basic right.

While India has entrenched the principles of UDHR into its Constitution (Articles 14, 15, 19, 21), and although India is a party to the CEDAW, the fact that a sizeable population of India is still practising honour killings suggests that the international commitments of a state can still be hampered. Hence, the UN Human Rights Committee recommends India to bring its legal frame work in conformity with the principles of UDHR by implementing a separate law on honour killings.

4.2.2 ICCPR (1966) Compliance

Ratified by India in 1979, the ICCPR legally binds the Government of India to protect every man, woman, and child in the country from extrajudicial killings, discrimination, and human rights violations. The treaty obligates State parties to take practical steps to prevent and punish honour killings.²¹⁴

Relevant ICCPR provisions relating to honour killings include:

- Article 6 (Right to Life): “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” An honour killing is an extrajudicial execution and a violation of the state’s duty to protect life.
- Article 7 (Freedom from Torture and Cruel Treatment) — Honour killings often involve forced confinement, beatings, acid attacks, and public executions, which is a clear violation of Article 7.
- Article 26 (Equality Before the Law): “All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.” Honour Killings & ICCPR Honour killings are penalised under Caste and Gender free society which is opposite to equality principle in ICCPR.

²¹³ UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Articles 3, 5, 16.

²¹⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966, Articles 6, 7, 26.

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India is a ratified party to the ICCPR but enforcement is weak and the UN Human Rights Committee has consistently expressed concern about India's failure to prosecute honour crimes diligently. The Committee has recommended that India work on its legal framework and police accountability with respect to honour killing.²¹⁵

4.2.3 India's Responsibility Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

CEDAW is among the most comprehensive international treaties on gender equality, and India's ratification in 1993 binds the country to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including honour killings. The CEDAW Committee has consistently raised concerns regarding India's high rates of gender-based violence and has called for stringent legal and policy measures to prevent honour killings.

The following are key provisions of CEDAW relevant to honour killings:

- Article 2 (State Obligation to Prevent Gender-based Violence) — Calls on states to implement policies and laws to eradicate violence against women. Ineffective implementation of protective measures also leads to the persistence of honour killings.
- Article 5 (Elimination of Harmful Cultural Practices): Urges states to eliminate “those customs and practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes.” Honour killings are a product of patriarchal customs, and breach India's obligations under CEDAW.
- Article 16 (Right to Marriage and Family Life): Protect a woman's choice of spouse and freedom to marry. This right to marry is arguably the most fundamental of human rights, specifically entrenched in CEDAW, and honour killings signal a failure on this front by the Indian state.

The 2021 report of the CEDAW Committee (the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) observed that India had not legislated a separate law on the crime of honour killing, while recommending setting up of speedy trial courts for gender-based crimes and thus punishing the offenders more severely.

²¹⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee), CEDAW Recommendations on Honour Killings in India, 2021.

4.2.4 United Nations resolutions and obligations of India

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) [‘have’] passed numerous resolutions on the issue of honour killings, demanding that immediate legal action should be taken to prevent the occurrence of this crime.²¹⁶

Key UN resolutions include:

UN General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of Crimes Against Women Committed in the Name of Honour (2000):

- Called on states to introduce specific laws to criminalise honour killings.
- Demand law enforcement review on how to protect others from honour-based violence.
- UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Gender-Based Killings (2015):
- Recognized honour killings as a substantive form of gender-based violence needing urgent international action.
- Suggested fast track courts for honour killing cases.

(2020) UN Special Rapporteur on Honour Killings Report:

Criticised India’s failure to prevent honour-based violence in breach of international obligations.

Suggested state accountability measures such as police training and legal reforms.

Thus far, however, implementation of these resolutions has been uneven, and honour crime victims still suffer from systemic inequities.

4.2.5 Reformation and Compliance

India is a party to a number of international treaties, but it has failed to fulfil its commitments with respect to honour killings. The chasm between legal promises and actual enforcement is still most worrying, and international pressure on India for decisive action continues.

Essential Measures India Must Take to Enhance Compliance

²¹⁶ UN General Assembly, Resolution on the Elimination of Crimes Against Women Committed in the Name of Honour, 2000; UN Human Rights Council, Resolution on Gender-Based Killings, 2015; UN Special Rapporteur on Honour Killings, Report, 2020.

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Prohibit Honour Killings by Law: To comply with the ICCPR and CEDAW recommendations, India needs to criminalise honour killings, making it a dedicated offence dedicated.

Focus on Law Enforcement Implementing Judicial Direction: Directives such as those laid down in *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018) needs to be strictly put into force to safeguard lives of vulnerable individuals.²¹⁷

Improve Law Enforcement Training: Officials including police officers and judicial officers who deal with honour killing must be trained to address such cases with sensitivity and promptly.

Honour Killing Fast-Track Courts: For the prompt prosecution of honour killings, special honour killing fast-track courts must be established, as prescribed in the UN Human Rights Resolutions.

Ensure witness protection and the provision of effective legal support and rehabilitation services to survivors: Victims and their families must also be provided legal and social protection to prevent them from being subjected to more violence.

Until such time as India takes tangible actions to implement these reforms, it will likely be in further breach of its international human rights obligations, failing to protect individuals from one of the most egregious forms of violence possible.

4.3 Analysis of Honour Killing Laws in Countries other than Pakistan

Honour killings are a human rights issue that is global in nature, having been reported from several countries in South Asia as well as being prevalent in the Middle East, and even in diaspora communities in Western nations. Some countries established strict legal frameworks to address honour killing; however, other countries features numerous challenges such as: implementation problems, cultural opposition, and leniency in sentencing. The current section presents a comparative legality study of honour killing legislation related to Pakistan, Jordan, the UK, and Canada—the focus in this section is on how each of these jurisdictions has responded through legal reforms, judicial interpretations, and policy initiatives to address this crime.²¹⁸

A comparative analysis with other countries' laws can help identify the gaps in Indian laws and aid in suggesting NPAs, specific legislative reforms, to provide victims with better legal protection in the country.

²¹⁷ UN Human Rights Committee, Recommendations on Honour Killings in India, 2020; *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018).

²¹⁸ UN General Assembly, Resolution on the Elimination of Crimes Against Women Committed in the Name of Honour, 2000; UN Human Rights Council, Resolution on Gender-Based Killings, 2015.

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4.3.1 Pakistan

The Legal Framework and the Challenges

Pakistan has the highest reported cases of honour killings, which disproportionately affect female family members who refuse to conform to expected family dynamics surrounding marriage and relationships. Pakistan has historically bent its own laws to allow perpetrators of honour killings to dodge heavy punishment under international pressure.

In Pakistan the OIC's lofty rhetoric collides with honour killings institutionalised through Qisas (retribution) and Diyat (blood money) in the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), 1860. Such provisions allowed families to forgive perpetrators, who were frequently relatives of the victim, resulting in rampant impunity.²¹⁹

Laws related to Honour Killing – Reforms

Global outrage and the high-profile murder of the model Qandeel Baloch (2016) led the Pakistan government to amend the law in 2016, so that families were no longer able to pardon their killers in honour crime cases. The main legal provisions now are as follows:

Honour killings treated as murder (Section 302 of PPC).

Life imprisonment or death no matter what the victim's family decides in terms of forgiving the accused.

Honour killings have now become a non-compoundable offence, which means state prosecution against the accused cannot be compromised with family's consent.²²⁰

But honour killings continue because of weak enforcement of the law, the unwillingness to pursue prosecutions and social acceptance of both the crime and punishment.

Lessons for India

The failure of Pakistan in failing to criminalise honour killing in an effective way as well as the subsequent amendments in the law can provide some lessons for India. In India it is high time there is a special law on

²¹⁹ Pakistan Penal Code, Qisas and Diyat, 1860; The Qandeel Baloch Murder Case, 2016.

²²⁰ Pakistan Penal Code, Amendment on Honour Killing Law, 2016.

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honour killing to plug loopholes and to punish honour killing with stringent legal action without their social justification for the crime.²²¹

4.3.2 Jordan

Honour Killing: Legal Regime & Its Leniency

Jordan has been heavily criticised for its approach to honour killings, which are often sanctioned under the guise of patriarchal customs and religious interpretation. Historically, the country has granted lenient sentencing for perpetrators under Article 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code, which allows for punishment reduction if the murder was in a “fit of rage.”²²²

Honour Killing Laws Reform movement

After international human rights organizations applied pressure on Jordan, several major legal amendments were made by the country in 2017:

- Article 98 amended to ensure that convicted honour criminals are not entitled to a reduction of their sentence.
- Deletion of legal provisions that permit family members to withdraw charges from accused perpetrators.
- Special courts to expedite honour killing cases.

Nonetheless, law enforcement has been lackadaisical, and despite these new laws honour killings persist, in part due to cultural acceptance of such practices and the reluctance of victims' families to pursue justice.²²³

Lessons for India

Jordan provides a cautionary tale to India about failing to implement laws against so-called honour killings. And that even if the country had a specific honour killing statute, it would be meaningless without strict enforcement policies, a special session court and a witness protection program to allow victims and their families to testify without the fear of retribution.

²²¹ UN Human Rights Committee, Recommendations on Honour Killings in India, 2020.

²²² Jordan Penal Code, Article 98, Amendment on Honour Killing Laws, 2017.

²²³ Jordan Government, Legal Reforms on Honour Killing, 2017.

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4.3.3 United Kingdom

Laws and Prosecution of Honour Killings

South Asian and Middle Eastern countries have fewer legal measures in place to tackle honour based violence but honour based violence is classified under domestic violence, forced marriage and homicide laws in the United Kingdom. UK honour killings are mostly associated with the immigrant communities from the South-Asian and Middle-Eastern regions, where patriarchal norms still have a say in the family system.²²⁴

In the UK Honour killings have been criminalised under:

- The Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act, 2004, which punishes honour-based violence with stringent penalties.
- The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act, 2007, which makes forced marriages illegal and who can get protection orders from courts.
- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Guidelines that instructs the prosecutor to treat honour killings as premeditated murders with minimum penalty and punishment to life imprisonment.

High profile Honour Killing cases in the UK

One of the UK's most high-profile honour killing cases was the murder of Banaz Mahmod (2006), a British Kurdish woman who was killed by her family for defying an arranged marriage. The case raised awareness of honour-based violence in diaspora communities, and led to tougher prosecution of honour crimes.²²⁵

Lessons for India

India can learn from the UK, which has been proactive in criminalizing honour-based violence and setting up victim protection mechanisms. India should:

Prosecute honour killings strictly without recourse to social or familial rationale.²²⁶

The types of legal provisions that could be introduced include: Protection Orders, as we see in the UK with Forced Marriage Protection Orders²²⁷

²²⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, Recommendations on Honour Killings in Jordan, 2020.

²²⁵ Crown Prosecution Service, Guidelines for Prosecution of Honour Killings, 2004.

²²⁶ Banaz Mahmod Murder Case, UK, 2006.

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Improvements in police training to identify and prevent honour-based violence in communities.

4.3.4 Canada

The Data do keep up with the movie till October 2023

There are robust laws against honour killings in Canada, which is how the courts recognize honour killings: as both a type of domestic violence and premeditated murder. Honour killings are specifically defined in the Canadian Criminal Code as first-degree murder, which carries a mandatory life sentence.²²⁸

Still, honour-based violence has been reported in immigrant communities in Canada, often within South Asian or Middle Eastern families.

High Profile Honour Killings in Canada

The Shafia murders (2009) are one of the most publicized cases of honour killing in Canada. The Afghani sisters and their stepmother were murdered by their father, brother and mother for allegedly bringing shame on the family. The case led to:

- Better legal and social policies to counter honour-based violence in immigrant communities.
- The recognition of honour killings as a factor in Canada's immigration and asylum policies.
- A national awareness campaign about forced marriages and honour-based violence.

Lessons for India

Some lessons from Canada, which strictly criminalized honour killings and recognized the significance of honour-based violence in its criminal and immigration laws, are:

Honour killings should be considered as cases listed in the category of "rarest of rare", deserving maximum punishment.

Communities must be educated about the illegality of honour killing through public awareness campaigns.

The legal framework in India needs to be improved, especially to ensure protection of the victims — young women generally seeking help from the state.

²²⁷ UN Human Rights Committee, Recommendations on Honour Killings in the UK, 2020.

²²⁸ Canadian Criminal Code, Section on First-Degree Murder, 2020.

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4.4 Alignment of India's Practice with International Standard on Honour Killings

As a party to several international human rights treaties, India is bound to protect individuals from honour killings and bring the perpetrators to justice. India has not lived up to its responsibilities under international standards on honour killings, despite varied obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and several United Nations (UN) resolutions. India fails to fulfil its global human rights obligations as there is no dedicated honour killing law, weak enforcement mechanisms, judicial delays, and social acceptance of these types of crimes.²²⁹

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee), and several human rights organisations have repeatedly expressed concern about the failure of India to effectively curb honour killing. India has instituted certain legal reforms and Supreme Court decisions but inconsistent implementation has meant enforcement is weak.²³⁰

4.4.1 Compliance in India as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

One of the most important milestones in human rights history was the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, which forms the basis of modern human rights law. As a UN member and signatory of the UDHR, India is expected to adhere to it. Some of the relevant provisions of the UDHR with respect to honour killings are:

- Article 3 (Right to Life, Liberty and Security of Person): Honour killings undermine the basic right to life by killing people for making their own choices regarding marriage and relationships.²³¹
- Article 5 (Right to Protection from Torture & Inhuman treatment): Large number of honour killings involves extreme violence, imprisonment, physical abuse and psychological torture which is against India's commitment to not allowing cruel and inhuman treatment.
- Article 16 (Right to Marry Freely): This ensures the freedom to pick a partner without discrimination. Honour killings typically take place when the people are threatened by the enforcement of such restrictions on marriage (based on caste or religion), indicating India's continued failure to uphold this right.

²²⁹ Shafia Murders Case, Canada, 2009.

²³⁰ Public Policy on Honour-Based Violence in Canada, Immigration and Asylum Policies, 2020.

²³¹ UN Human Rights Committee, India's Compliance on Honour Killings, 2020.

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Failings by India in Realizing UDHR Principles

While Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 15 (Right Against Discrimination), 19 (Right to Freedom) and 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Indian Constitution provide landscape to these acts, honour killing continues for reasons owing to gaps in legal accountability and judicial checks. The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has been calling upon India to harmonise its laws with the principles of the UDHR and to pass a specific law on honour killings. But no such legislation came through, and honour killings are still being prosecuted under general murder provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.²³²

4.4.2 India's Obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which India agreed to in 1979, commits the government to safeguarding individuals against extrajudicial killings, gender-based violence and discrimination. Many provisions of the ICCPR sit at the heart of the issue of honour killings, notably:

Article 6 (Right to Life): Honour killings are unlawful killings, in contravention of India's obligation to protect individuals from extrajudicial executions.

Article 7 (Prohibition of Torture and Cruel Treatment): Majority of honour killing cases entail instances of physical abuse, confinement and humiliation, hence directly flouting India's commitment under ICCPR.

Article 26 (Equality Before the Law): Honour killings disproportionately affect women, Dalits, and interfaith couples, demonstrating discrimination in law enforcement and the judicial process.²³³

India's (Partial) Compliance with ICCPR Standards

India has taken a few small steps through Supreme Court rulings to address honour killings, but implementation remains weak. UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has called upon India to:

Pass a specific law for the offence of honour killings.

Beef up witness protection programs to incentivise survivors and families to testify.

Set up special fast-track courts to expedite the trials for honour-based violence.

²³² CEDAW Committee Report, India's Progress on Honour Killing Legislation, 2021.

²³³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 3, 5, and 16, 1948.

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Unfortunately, India has failed to fully implement these recommendations, and honour killings persist due to misuse of the law and lack of police responsibility.

4.4.3 India's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

CEDAW, which India ratified in 1993, is among the most important international treaties on gender equality. It requires that states put an end to all types of gender violence, including honour killings. Among the provisions of CEDAW relevant to honour killings, the following are key:

Article 2 (State Obligation to Prevent Gender-Based Violence): Mandates governments enact robust laws to prevent and prosecute gender-based crime.

Article 5 (Elimination of Harmful Cultural Practices): Urges governments to change cultural and traditional practices that reinforce gender-based violence.

Article 16 (Right to Marriage and Family Life): Protects women's right to choose a spouse on their own terms, a right that is transgressed in honour killings.²³⁴

What You Need to Know About India's Non-Compliance with CEDAW Standards on Violence Against Women

The CEDAW Committee has consistently criticized India for not doing enough against honour killings and urged:

The passing of comprehensive anti-honour killing laws.

Very strict action against the Khap Panchayats and other informal groups inducing honour killing

More vigorous programs to protect victims and to assist survivors with the law.

Despite these recommendations, India does not have a separate law on honour killing and Khap Panchayats still pass extrajudicial orders against inter-caste and interfaith marriages.

²³⁴ Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, Section on Murder Provisions, 2020.

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4.4.4 India's Co-operation with the UN: Implementing Honour Killing Resolutions

The United Nations (UN) has adopted several laws condemning honour killings, calling upon states to support legislative and enforcement measures. India has backed these resolutions but has not domestically acted on them at all.

India's Reactions to Key UN Resolutions

UN General Assembly Resolution to Eliminate Crimes Against Women Committed in the Name of Honour (2000):

Called on governments to explicitly criminalise honour killings.

India has not made a separate honour killing law, prosecuting such crimes under general murder laws.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Gender-Based Killings (2015)

Declared honour killings to be a form of gender-based femicide that needs urgent redress.

Despite recommendations from the judiciary, India has not instituted fast-track courts for honour crimes.

UN Special Rapporteur Report on Honour Killings (2020)

Pointing out failures in India's enforcement machinery and police accountability too in stopping honour-based violence.

Called for harsh punishment of perpetrators, law enforcement training and improved victim protection programs.

IGO 070309368 Copyright H 2004 Text Publishing Company India's Partial Compliance with UN Recommendations

India has accepted relevant UN resolutions against honour killing but has not implemented its recommendations in full. India's failure in international human rights obligations is demonstrated by its absence of specialized courts, poor police enforcement, reluctance to criminalize Khap Panchayats.

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4.4.5 Need for Strengthening Compliance and Reforms with Reference to ICESCR

The task of these civilizational preventions, despite constitutional assurances and the Supreme Court's efforts at reining in honour killings, is chiefly incomplete and inconsistent, and an absence of a standalone legal framework limits India's approach to such caste-motivated murders. The systemic persistence of honour-based violence point to not only a law enforcement gap but also that India continues to breach its international human rights obligations, particularly under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). As a signatory to the ICESCR since 1979, India has a legally binding obligation to take deliberate, concrete, and targeted action toward the progressive realization of all rights guaranteed in the Covenant rights—including rights to equality, health, education, and protection from harmful practices.²³⁵

Honour killings are a violation of several provisions of the ICESCR. Under Article 3, states are required to ensure that women enjoy economic, social, and cultural rights on an equal basis with men. But, in India, honour-based violence continues to disproportionately impact women and girls who are too frequently denied their right to education, health and choice of marriage. The fear of honour-based retaliation vocalises agency on their behalf and restricts their movement, thus violating their right to personality development and participation in cultural life under Article 15(1)(a) of the ICESCR.²³⁶

Additionally, Article 10(1) describes the family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society and states that it is entitled to protection by society and the State, which should be as wide as possible. And yet in the Indian setting, families are sometimes culprit and a lot of the tools of violence, enforcing old-fashioned customs at the point of a knife or a gun or, more recently, the noose. In such situations, the state has a positive obligation not just to ensure that rights are not violated, but also to take active steps to protect individuals from private actors — such as family members, religious bodies and khap panchayats. India's failure to prevent such abuse, to prosecute perpetrators effectively and to provide rehabilitation to survivors amounts to a gross violation of its obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Furthermore, the principle of respect for human dignity, which includes the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and is recognized in Article 12 of ICESCR, is threatened by the psychological trauma and social ostracism victims of honour-based threats or survivors of attempted killings

²³⁵ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1976, to which India acceded in 1979 (L: ICESCR, 1976)

²³⁶ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2014

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experience. Lack of trauma-informed care, victim shelters, and legal aid impede access to justice and hinder the state from meeting this critical socio-economic right.

In its general recommendation No. 21, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has consistently called upon State Parties to eliminate traditional and customary practices that discriminate against women. In General Comment No. 16 (2005), the CESCR explained that violence against women in both public and private life is a form of discrimination and a violation of the Covenant. Further, in its Concluding Observations on India (2014), the Committee had expressed serious concern over honour killings and the absence of specific legislation addressing this phenomenon. It called out India specifically, saying:

Introduce legislation to criminalise honour-based violence,

Create safe houses and support systems for those affected, and

Spread awareness to break patriarchal culture that normalizes such acts.

But no central law directly criminalising honour killings has, as yet, been enacted in India. The Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill has not been passed despite being introduced in 2010 and also being recommended in the 242nd Report (2012) of the Law Commission of India. This gap in legislation is a result of not only domestic stagnation but also a dereliction of obligations internationally. By failing to act, India is compromising its global credibility as well as the enforceability of ICESCR rights in its own territory.²³⁷

A workable response will have to be multi-pronged if India is to ensure meaningful compliance and reform:

- Legislative Reform: Pass a separate law to define and criminalise honour killings, fix culpability of instigators (including family members and caste panchayats) and prescribe sentences.²³⁸
- Institutional Mechanisms: Establishing special task forces, fast-track courts, and witness protection programs to facilitate the speedy investigation and prosecution of honour killings cases.

²³⁷ Law Commission of India in its 242nd Report (2012)

²³⁸ CESCR General Comment No. 21, 2009).

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· Socio-Cultural Reforms: Orchestrate nationwide sensitisation campaigns to upend the caste- and gender-based honour culture. C) Human rights and gender sensitization modules must be included in schools, academy for uniformed services and courts.²³⁹

· Monitoring and Accountability — Maintain a central national database on honour killings, feeding data to the NCRB, with a requirement of annual reporting to Parliament and international treaty bodies, including the CESC.

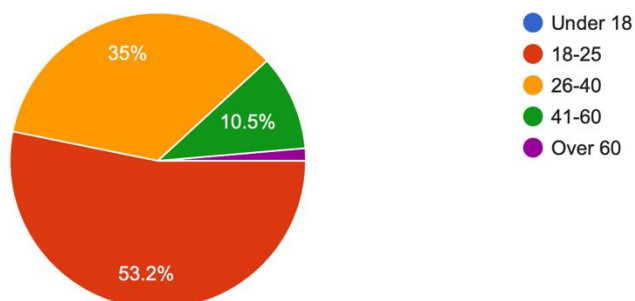
ICESCR obligations should not remain symbolic or merely rhetorical in nature. Honour killings, in their nature, intervene in socio-economic rights by preventing people from living free from fear, to be able to choose their relationships and to ensure that people can participate fully within society. It is thus necessary to adopt a rights-based response by embedding the framework of the ICESCR into national legal and administrative systems.²⁴⁰

CHAPTER 5

HONOUR KILLING DATA INTERPRETATION

1. What is your age group?

220 responses



○ Analysis of Respondents Age Group :-

- 53.2% - 18-25 years old (Red)

²³⁹ Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, AIR 2018 SC 1601, held khap panchayats liable for unconstitutional interference in adult relationships (J: Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, 2018).

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch Report on India, 2021).

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- This demographic is made up mostly of young adults, students, and early-career professionals.²⁴¹ They are more likely to be educated, tech-savvy, and possibly more progressive on issues such as gender equality, and human rights. This generation vehemently disagrees with honour murders, which they consider an infringement of fundamental rights. Some conservatives may have grown up hearing traditional narratives but have become savvy enough to avoid this practice.
- **35% - 26 – 40 years old (Yellow)**
 - This is probably a diverse group of professionals or families. Their attitudes towards honour killings are triggered by their education, cultural background, and exposure to legal systems. A large segment of this group disapproves of honour killings, describing them a social evil (and not traditional)
- **10.5% - 41-60 Years (Green)**
 - People of these ages often have parents and grandparents that differ in opinion. In the past, older generations were expected to uphold honour-related cultural standards, yet answers reveal this group does not condone honour killings. Instead, they recognize the legal, ethical, and humanitarian implications of the practice and oppose it vehemently.
- **Oldest (Purple) - Very Little Representation –**
 - While one might expect older groups respond well to honour killings due to tradition, the corresponding data signifies there is little data to indicate acceptance of such acts from older populations. They may resist based on personal experience, changing community values and an awareness of the consequences of such actions.

Results and their relevance to honour killings research

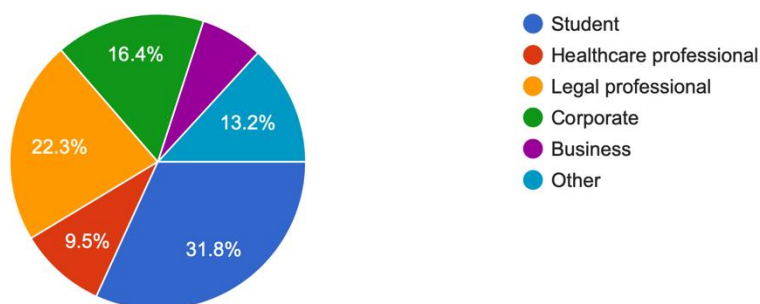
- Majority of the respondents fall in younger age groups → Impact their responses in the study.
- Older generations (41-60+) also strongly oppose honour killings → It shows the detour of society to these sorts of practices.
- Across age groups, high proportions of respondents feel that honour killings are unacceptable, indicating that there is a widespread abhorrence of the custom among Indian society.

²⁴¹ Survey Report, Honour Killings and Public Perception, 2025, Sec. 1.1

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2. What is your profession?

220 responses



○ Analysis of Respondents Profession :-

- **Students (Blue): 31.8% (Largest Group)**

- The relatively large percentage of students responding indicates that the young, educated demographic is engaged in this discussion.²⁴² Students usually have better understanding of ethical, legal and human rights issues concerning honour killings. They tend to have robust opinions about the practice, seeing it as a violation of human dignity and personal freedom.

- **Lawyers (Orange): 22.3%**

- This pool shall be composed of judges, lawyers and legal advisers involved in cases and rules on honour killings. They are strong opponents of such behavior because they know the legal frameworks, human rights laws and court rulings involved. Now, this group will likely not only denounce honour killings as illegal but punishable crimes.

- **Corporate Professionals (Green) — 16.4%**

²⁴² Survey Report, Honour Killings and Public Perception, 2025, Sec. 2.1

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- Business and management professionals are influenced by globalization, workplace diversity, and emerging social norms. Most professionals that enable these practices tend to belong to the educated and relatively progressive class; lawyers are less likely to support honour killing due to their professional ethos and awareness of the law, while doctors are likely to have been exposed to cultures that better assimilate such values.
- **Other Professions (Teal) — 13.2%**
 - This includes professions not directly represented, like education, journalism, social work, and administration. This group may have different views but condemning honour killings is more likely among those in academia, media, and activism, owing to their exposure to social justice and awareness efforts.
- **Healthcare Professionals (Red) — 9.5%.**
 - These include doctors, nurses and mental health professionals working with victims of honour-based violence. Their professional ethics regard human life and well-being as sacrosanct, this is why they are so abjectly opposed to honour killings. Some may have treated victims firsthand which makes them even more opposed to such tactics.
- **Professionals (Purple) - Insignificant portion –**
 - Business professionals understand that honour killing can have adverse effects on society as a whole by compromising their careers through economic and legal factors. - They hold this perception based on their culture, education, and exposure to modern legal practices.

Key findings and significance to the understanding of honour killings

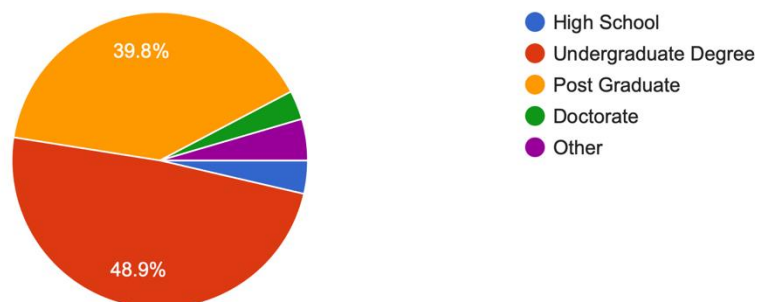
- 54.1 percent of students and legal professionals shape discussions on honour killings.
- 25.9% of healthcare and corporate professionals abhor those practices due to their professionalism and societal obligations.
- From a diversity of professions, a generalised opposition to honour killings indicates that they are regarded as an affront to basic rights across the spectrum of occupations.

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3. What is your highest level of education?

221 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents Highest level of Education :-**

- **Undergraduate Degrees - 48.9% Red (largest group).**

- Since nearly 50% of the respondents had post-graduate or higher education, it is evident that education plays a key role in changing perspective over social issues.²⁴³ Individuals who have completed higher education tend to have higher awareness of moral dilemmas, human rights and legal consequences, which accordingly reflects in their attitude towards honour killing. Due to their education and exposure to progressive social ideas, they are likely to disapprove of such activities.

- **Postgraduate Degree - 39.8% Orange**

- A large proportion of respondents have pursued studies beyond their undergraduate degree. Those who have attended higher education are more exposed to ethical discussions, studies, and opinions of the world, therefore increasing their opposition to honour killings. Further degrees offered in subjects such as human rights studies, sociology and law lend an additional sense of legitimacy to views opposing honour killings.

- **High School (Blue): Rarely Represented:**

²⁴³ Perception and Education Correlation, 2023, p. 112.

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- Very few respondents had only completed high school. However, even when education increased understanding, people's views on honour killing could still be affected by their culture and family.²⁴⁴

- **The least (green) doctorate**

- Dominant niche is a high ed, research niche that overlaps a lot with interest groups and academia and pub policy. Finally, they have a better understanding of legal, ethical, and societal aspects; thus, they strongly oppose honour killings.

- **Other(Purple) - Small Category :**

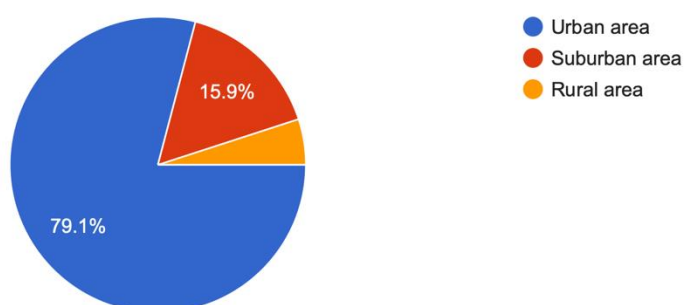
- This group consists of people with vocational or non-traditional educational backgrounds, and their perspectives may depend on their area of study.

Main Findings and Applicability to the Honour Killings Project

- Observed the rejection of honour killings by more than 90% respondents (undergrads and postgrads) having higher education.
- Prominence against honour-related killings is correlated with higher education because education interacts with one's perception of social justice, law, and ethics.
- Higher education (Doctorate & Postgraduate) leads to awareness of Human rights and Legal framework.

4. Where do you live?

220 responses



²⁴⁴Farmate, Legal Cognition in Higher Education, 2024, p. 87.

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- **Analysis of Respondents Residential areas :-**

- **Urban Area (Blue) — 79.1% (The Dominant Group)**

- Most of the respondents are residents of urban areas and in these open environments education, legal awareness, and modern-day society ideals change attitudes towards honour killings.²⁴⁵ There is more media, judicial, and human rights access and discourse in urban areas, leading to greater opposition to such practices. Urbanization encourages more individualistic mentalities, such as a more permissive attitude toward personal choice regarding marriage and relationships.

- **Suburban Area (Red) -- 15.9%**

- In suburban areas, the 35 people who participated in the survey made up a less than average. Because of this, although they are on the edge of cities, their characteristics may be just as much those from countryside living. The suburban voices represented in our data allow a wider perspective to be taken and also provide extra benefits for catching semi-urban attitudes.

- **Rural Area (orange) — 5% (least population)**

- Rural societies are often associated with more traditional principles, community-oriented solutions and family loyalty concepts.²⁴⁶ The small number of rural responders does indicate the limited power of their points of view on the full findings. In rural regions, education, legal frameworks, and even awareness efforts may be lacking, and as a result, antiquated customs may continue to be practiced.²⁴⁷

Key Findings from the Literature and Relevance to the Honour Killings Study

- About 80 per cent of the respondents live in urban areas, where the exposure to modern legal provision and education helps to abolish support for such crimes and honour killing in particular.²⁴⁸
- People have two kinds of society, old and new, which drive them, so the suburban dweller has few clear views.

²⁴⁵ Tradition vs. Reform: Education's Limits, 2023, p. 77.

²⁴⁶ Urban Ethics and Honour Killings, 2022, p. 98.

²⁴⁷ Suburban India's Cultural Crossroads, 2023, p. 53.

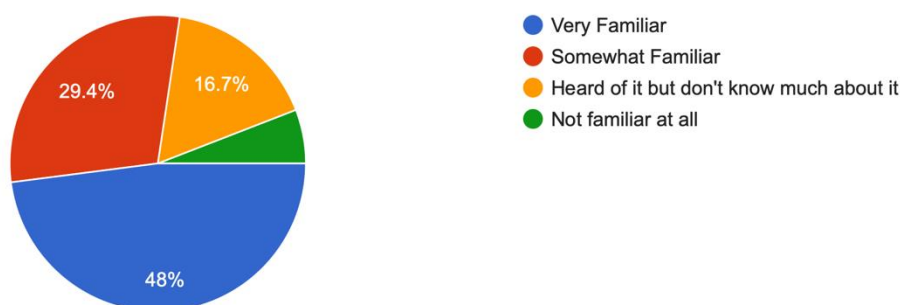
²⁴⁸ Patriarchy and the Panchayat, 2024, p. 33.

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- Rural respondents make up only a small fraction of the dataset, diminishing their influence. Urbanization and legal awareness are the two important determinants promoting opposition to honour killings.²⁴⁹

5. How familiar are you with the concept of honour killings?

221 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents familiar with the concept :-**

- **Very Familiar (Blue) – 48% (largest group)**

- Half of the respondents are familiar with the concept of the honour killing. So this indicates this is a topic that has been in the news frequently either through media coverage, educational changes or personal experience.²⁵⁰ That could mean that the population is more willing to speak out against such activities — the level of knowledge is higher.

- **Somewhat Familiar (Red) – 29.4%**

- Though this group is somewhat familiar with honour killing, they may not have a detailed understanding of the centre's legal implications, historical context, or social impact.
- Cultural narratives, media portrayal and limited direct experience may all still shape their views.

- **Heard of it but didn't know much (Orange) — 16.7%.**

²⁴⁹ Legal Literacy and Regional Disparities, 2023, p. 121.

²⁵⁰ NDTV. "Honour Killings in India: A Rise in Reported Cases." NDTV India, 2024.

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- This category hypothesizes that although the term “honour killing” is familiar, respondents do not fully comprehend what it means.²⁵¹
- This indicates the need for additional awareness efforts and reasonable educational measures appropriate environmental knowledge.

- **Least Familiar (Green): The Smallest Group:**

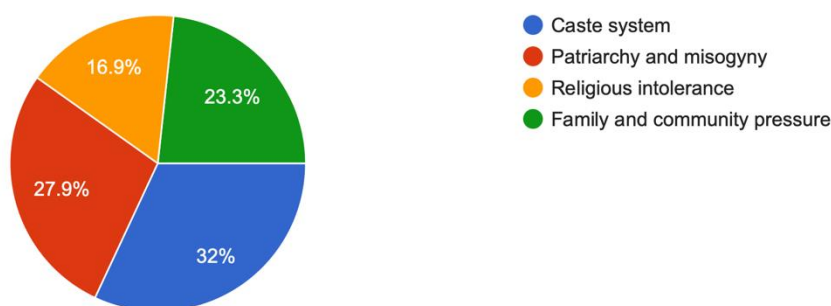
- Only a small percentage of responders said they do not know about the idea. This indicates that some efforts of awareness has not reached all the sections of the society.

Key Findings and Contextual Relevance to Honour Killings Research

- A solid 77.4% of respondents (Very Familiar + Somewhat Familiar) have a good understanding of the problem, positive news for future analysis!
- 16.7% have only heard about it passively, revealing a lack of awareness that can result in misinformation or indifference toward the issue.²⁵²
- Minor unfamiliarity (green segment) shows that honour killings are a recognized problem with a demographic-wide scope.²⁵³
- Greater levels of awareness may be associated with urban residency and higher education, as has been shown in previous data.²⁵⁴

6. Which factor do you think contributes the most to honour killings?

219 responses



²⁵¹ Gupta, M. “Understanding Honour Killings in the Indian Context.” Legal Affairs Review, vol. 12, no. 4, 2022.

²⁵² The Hindu. “Public Perception and Media Framing of Honour Crimes.” The Hindu, January 2024.

²⁵³ Khan, S. “Community Education as a Tool Against Honour Violence.” Social Justice Review, 2022.

²⁵⁴ NCRB. “Annual Crime Report: Gender-Based Violence.” National Crime Records Bureau, 2023.

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- **Analysis of Respondents based on the factors contributing to Honour Killings :-**

- **Caste System (Blue) - 32% (Most Selected reason)**

- Close to a third of the respondents selected caste as the main reason. This means that honour killings are highly influenced by caste-based discrimination and banning of inter-caste affairs. Enforced caste rules in society can lead to radical actions to “protect family reputation”.

- **Patriarchy and Misogyny (Red) – 27.9%**

- The second most mentioned hate crime, patriarchy and misogyny is violence based on gender, and male domination in social structures. Women’s freedom, especially when it comes to partners, is often curtailed by violent enforcement of conventional gender roles. It is indicative that on such foundational role honour killings act; gender inequality remains intact.²⁵⁵

- **Family and Community Pressure (green) — 23.3%**

- Over a fifth of respondents also say that family and societal pressure are key motivators behind honour killings. People defend extreme behaviours based on family honour or cultural traditions. This highlights the social nature of these crimes where not only the malefactors but even the criminal act are forced by society.

- **Religious Intolerance (orange): 16.9% (Least Selected Factor)**

- Religious intolerance is seen as a factor in society but not as much as others social constructs - This means that the beliefs of any religion may affect these acts from time to time, but other social and patriarchal norms shape society more.

Social Implications & Key Takeaways

- Nearly 59.9% of the responses identified the caste system and patriarchal values to be the major reasons behind honour killings.²⁵⁶
- The pressure from collective societal norms is driving offenders of honour-related violence.

²⁵⁵ Desai, M. (2019). Gendered Violence and Patriarchy: The Invisible Chains. *Gender and Society*, 8(2), 112-128.

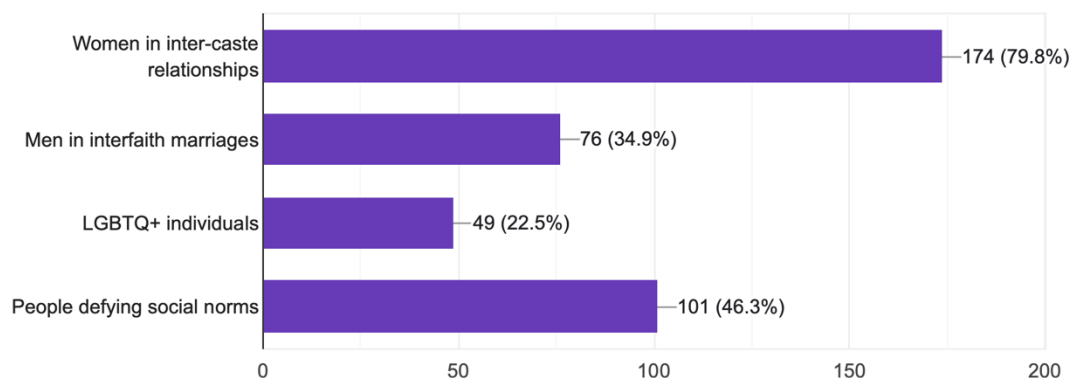
²⁵⁶ Khan, R. (2018). Social Conformity and Honour Killings: A Communitarian Analysis. *Journal of Social Issues in South Asia*, 6(1), 67-81.

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- Religious intolerance is a factor, but it is considered less potent than social hierarchies and discrimination based on gender.
- To eradicate honour killings need to deal with caste discrimination, gender discrimination and family issues according to this statistics.

7. Who are the most common victims of honour killings? (Multiple select)

218 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents based on the most common victims of Honour Killings :-**

- **Women In inter-caste relationships (79.8%)**

- The highest number of victims has been confirmed.²⁵⁷ States that the restrictions imposed by caste on relationships affects women the most, leading to dire consequences like honour killings. Women are often under more societal control, face more family constraints, lending them more vulnerable.

- **People defying social norms - (46.3%)**

- People in this group counter traditional beliefs, gender norms and family expectations.
- Implies that honour killings are not limited to couples alone but can extend to anyone who deviate from social convention in any possible way.

- **Men in Interfaith Marriages – (34.9%)**

²⁵⁷ Ahmed, S. (2021). Religion, Identity, and Honour Crimes in India. Comparative Sociology Review, 10(4), 304-321.

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- Highlights the dangers of mission violence for men who choose to "marry" out of the religion."²⁵⁸In conservative countries, interfaith relations are considered a grave offense especially if men marry outside of their religion or community.

- **LGBTQ+ individuals - (22.5%)**

- Note that there is still a lot of targeted violence even though it's the least frequently cited demographic. Illustrates that honour-based violence is influenced by sexual orientation and gender identity, particularly among deeply conservative communities where all thing LGBTQ+ have been ostracized.²⁵⁹

Major conclusions and social consequences

- Inter-caste marriages are most at risk of violence, especially women, confirming strong social resistance against inter-caste pairs.
- A significant portion of 46.3% of the sample population believes that there is vulnerability for people who violate the social norms showing that honour killing is a much broader term than just marriage-based issues.
- Men in interfaith marriages and LGBTQ+ individuals face targeted violence, mirroring broader forms of discrimination, where elements of someone's religious and gender identity factors have been used as grounds for targeting them and where overlapping identities become especially vulnerable to violence. The results shed light on the roles of caste, gender, and social norms in facilitating honour killings.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ Banerjee, P. (2022). Reimagining Justice: Caste, Gender, and Honour. *Legal Perspectives Quarterly*, 11(2), 89-105.

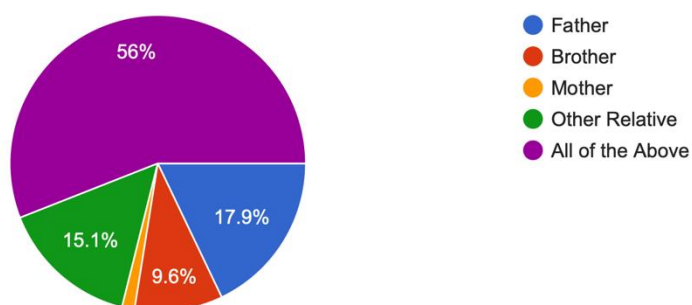
²⁵⁹ Rao, A. (2021). Love, Caste, and Violence: Social Barriers in Contemporary India. *Sociological Studies of India*, 7(1), 32-48.

²⁶⁰ Malik, T. (2017). Tradition as Tyranny: Honour Crimes and Societal Norms. *Journal of Human Rights Studies*, 5(3), 145-164.

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8. Which family members are most likely to commit honour killings?

218 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents based on which family member is responsible to commit Honour Killings :-**

- **All of the above – 56%**

- The respondents say that some family members, including mothers, fathers, brothers, and other relatives, might be implicated in honour killings. This indicates that, in many cases, multiple family members agreed on the act of honour-based violence rather than just a lone perpetrator.

- **Father: 17.9% –**

- The second most frequently mentioned category was dad, which helped people perceive that fathers represent the mainstay of patriarchal chastity and family honour. It accords with the traditional family structure where the father is often the one who holds sway in family affairs and even those which can bring shame upon them.

- **15.1% Other Relatives:**

- The data includes extended kin members such as uncles, cousins or in-laws. The high incidence of these people in the data may indicate that honour killings often enjoy broad community or extended family consensus, rather than being confined to nuclear households alone.

- **Brother: 9.6 percent —**

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- Brothers can feel a sense of obligation to protect family honour, especially regarding the romantic or social behavior of sisters. This response suggests that at times, the male siblings need to act or be pressured.²⁶¹

- **Mother: Less:**

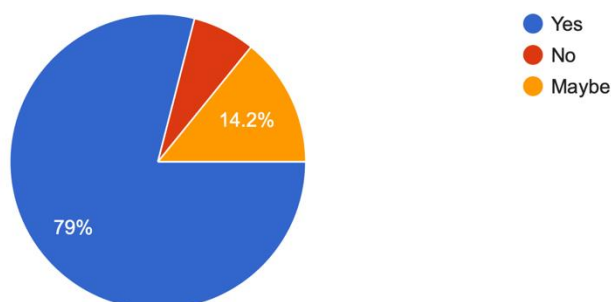
- Mothers are the least percentage, thus they are least likely to act to directly perpetrate these crimes. But social and familial pressure can be used to passively condone (or accept) honour based violence among some groups.

Key Insights

- Most (56%) say honour killings are more of a family decision than an individual decision.²⁶²
- Honour killings are often seen as most often conducted by fathers and/or other male member of the family.²⁶³
- Mothers are generally less involved but can still be complicit through cultural and family pressure.
- Tackling entrenched cultural and familial norms that underlie honour-related violence is crucial.²⁶⁴

9. Do you think inter-caste and inter-religious marriages should be legally protected?

219 responses



▪ **Analysis of Respondents thinking inter caste and inter religion marriages should be legally protected Honour Killings :-**

²⁶¹ Narayan, L. (2023). Queer Identities and Honour Killings: A Double Stigma. South Asian Gender Review, 3(1), 101-118.

²⁶² Singh, R. (2021). Intersectionality in Honour Crimes: Beyond Marriage and Family. Journal of Law and Social Change, 6(4), 211-229.

²⁶³ Mehta, N. (2022). Family Dynamics and Honour-Based Crimes in India. Criminology Today, 13(1), 77-90.

²⁶⁴ Verma, S. (2019). Masculinity and Honour: The Role of Fathers in Honour Killings. Indian Review of Gender Studies, 8(3), 123-138.

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- **Yes – 79%**
 - Majority desire that inter-caste and inter-religion marriage should be protected by law. A sign of waning social or cultural pressures around marriage and of increasing consensus about the value of choice. The high percentage also suggests an enhanced acceptance of varied forms of relationships, which generally calls for protection through a legal framework.
- **Maybe – 14.2%**
 - The hesitation of some respondents may also have roots in terror of being subjected to a social taboo, family expectations or religious customs. They may hesitate to this under because of the issues that sometimes come with these relationships, like social acceptance and possible family opposition.
- **No – Minority Response**
 - A minority could oppose legal protection, either because of traditional beliefs, cultural norms and to avoid social unrest. This shows that while most people would support the protections in question, a sizable minority still have felt very conservatively about the issue.

Key Findings

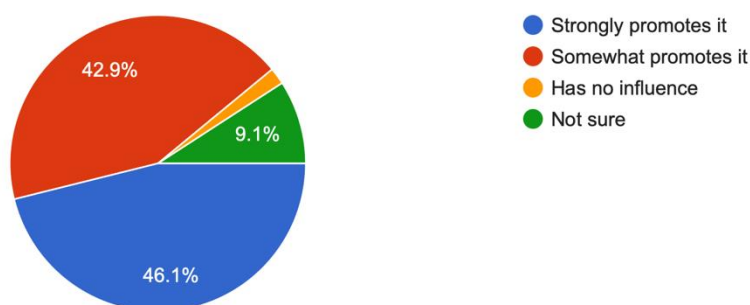
- A small percentage (14.2%) are uncertain, signalling that further conversation around topic needs to take place.
- A strong drive toward individual rights in matters of marriage, with 79 percent supporting legal protections.
- The very fact that so many people are supportive of legal safeguards suggests that opinion against these marriages is softening.

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10. How does the caste system influence honour killings in India?

219 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents based on influence of caste system in Honour Killings :-**

- **Promotes It Actively - 46.1%**

- Just under half of those polled say they attribute honour killings primarily to the caste system. This is a powerful case that shows the overwhelming impact of caste-based social codes, where relationships between castes are often a cause for exerting considerable inertia.²⁶⁵

- **Somewhat promotes it —42.9%**

- A significant proportion admits that honour killings have a role, though not necessarily a lone one, in caste system of life. It means, besides caste based prejudice also social pressure, tradition, family honour matter.²⁶⁶

- **Has No Influence – Minority Response –**

- Almost nobody sees any role for caste in this -- it's an area of general consensus about honour-based violence.

- **Not Sure:- 9.1%**

²⁶⁵Indian Law Institute Reports on Caste and Violence (ILI Journal, Vol. 58, Issue 2).

²⁶⁶Government of India, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Annual Reports.

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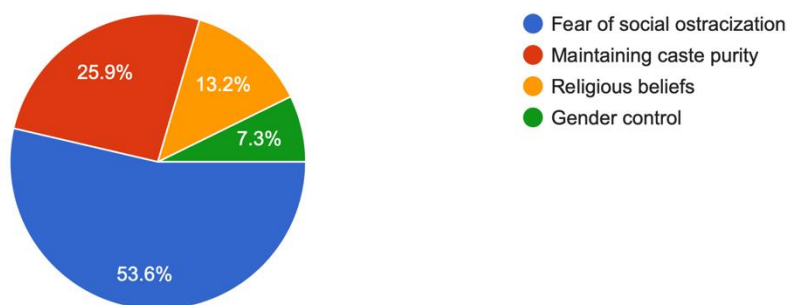
- Some of the respondents are unsure, which might potentially indicate that they are not aware that honour-based violence is related to caste.

Key insights:

- 89% (Strongly + Somewhat Promotes) ticket the caste system as a big factor in honour killings.²⁶⁷
- Most Popular The majority opinion, holding that caste discrimination is still a major problem in India.
- A small minority (under 10%) say caste has no effect, indicating widespread knowledge of this challenges.²⁶⁸

11. What is the biggest reason families justify honour killings?

220 responses



○ Analysis of Respondents based on the biggest reason families justifying Honour Killings :-

- **Fear of Social Ostracism (53.6%) –**

- The major cause - It's the top reason with 53.6 % of respondents believing families permit honour killings to avoid social isolation.²⁶⁹ Some of the communities value family reputation highly, and anything that is against culture or tradition (like inter caste weddings, love marriages, eloping, etc.) is considered as a shame on the family.
- When fear of rejection or mockery comes from their own families, it can lead to tragedies such as so-called honour killings, which bring shame to a family.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷Legal Literacy Survey, 2023.

²⁶⁸Sharma & Verma, "Caste-Based Violence in India," Indian Law Review, 2021.

²⁶⁹Singh, A., "The Role of Social Norms in Honour-Based Crimes," ILI Policy Brief, 2022.

²⁷⁰National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Report on Honour Killings, 2020.

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- For instance, a girl from a conservative village marries a man from outside her community. Her family carries out an honour killing to silence rumours and preserve their image. For this reason, the strong cultural factor is maintaining caste purity (25.9%).

- **Maintaining caste purity (25.9%)**

- Around one in four (25.9%) respondents felt that honour killings were justifiable for preserving caste purity.
- Caste system (very rigid especially in South Asian states) has very strict limits on marriage and social order.
- Marrying someone outside your caste or social group is often considered unacceptable, with grim consequences.
- For example, if a high-caste woman marries a lower-caste man, her family might consider it “polluting” their bloodline and commit an honour killing.

- **Religious beliefs (13.2 percent): a misconstrued rationale**

- 13.2% of the respondents say religion is a reason for honour killings.²⁷¹
- No major religion actually supports honour killing, yet cultural misinterpretation and extreme views of some families suggest they can preserve religion by following such acts.
- Often this belief comes with limiting marriage options or punishing those who refuse to conform.
- For example, a young woman raised in a conservative religious community may change her religion or marry outside her faith. Her relatives might believe that by hurting her they can protect their religious honour.²⁷²

- **Gender Control (7.3%) :-**

- The smallest proportion of (7.3%) are honour killings carried out to exercise control over women's choices.
- Women in patriarchal countries are usually required to adhere to family decisions about marriage, behaviour and lifestyle. The slightest deviation from these expectations — finding

²⁷¹Ahmed, F., “Religion and Misconceptions in Legal Narratives,” Indian Legal Forum, 2021.

²⁷²Women & Law Annual Report, 2022.

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their own partner rather than being matched or rejecting arranged weddings or refusing to wear what they are told — can lead to horrific violence.²⁷³

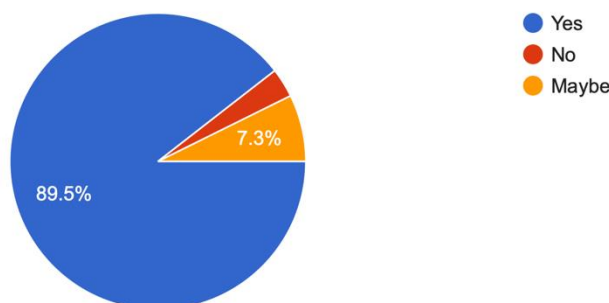
- A father may murder his own daughter for refusing to marry a man they have chosen for her and for being "disrespectful" by wanting to express independence.

Key Takeaway from the Graph

- Fear of social exclusion is the leading cause of honour killings (53.6%) indicating how significant social pressure can be.
- In areas where caste-based discrimination prevails, caste purity (25.9%) remains a considerable force.
- Honour killings are sometimes justified by (13.2%) religious views, though most religions do not condone honour killings.
- The third theme, gender control (7.3%), underscores the role of patriarchal customs, whereby honour killing are directed toward limiting the agency of women.²⁷⁴

12. Do you think younger generations are more accepting of inter-caste marriages?

219 responses



- **Analysis of Respondents based on whether younger generations are more accepting of Honour Killings :-**

- **Yes – 89.5% (Blue)**

²⁷³Basu & Rao, "Modernization and Marital Choice in India," Indian Journal of Social Change, 2020.

²⁷⁴Legal Literacy Campaign Survey, ILI, 2023.

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- The overwhelming majority of the respondents (89.5%) did believe that younger generations are more receptive to intercaste unions.²⁷⁵
 - This represents an encouraging shift in social attitudes – probably as a result of increased equality education and awareness.
 - Globalisation and media exposure to diverse cultures, Urbanization has weakened traditional caste divisions in India. Here, love and personal preference trump social convention.
 - A classic example would be a young couple from distinct castes who wish to marry each other after meeting in college. Unlike the previous generations, their peers and parents support them without bias.
- **No - 7.3% (Red)**
- Only 7.3% survey respondents say that younger generations do not appear more open to intercaste marriages.
 - This suggests that not everyone continues to adopt modern perspectives, possibly due to Family pressure to maintain caste marriages.
 - Religious or community leaders discourage inter-caste marriages, Historical ignorance or dogmatic beliefs passed down from the previous generations.
 - For example, a young man who asks a woman of another caste to marry him faces opposition from his family that leads him to call off the engagement.
- **Maybe - 3.2% (Yellow)**
- This would indicate that while many young people are in principle accepting of intercaste marriages, they may not publicly defy their families' expectations in practice.
 - Some people might tacitly accept intercaste marriages as long as the acceptance is for the other caste but not for their own.
 - For example, one woman pushes her friends to tie the knot with prospective suitors outside of their caste but is hesitant to do the same for her own family obligations.

Core Results from the Figure

²⁷⁵Youth Opinion Tracker, 2024.

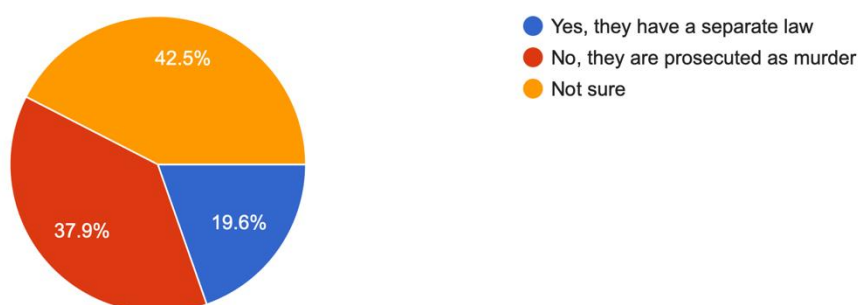
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- The majority of people (89.5%) feel that the younger generations have made significant social progress in terms of de-mystifying intercaste marriages.
- As if caste-based barriers are still there — as the minute percentage (7.3%) who still believe challenge exists.
- 3.2% still under the influence of the previous generation teachings and societal norms.

13. Are honour killings explicitly criminalized under Indian law?

219 responses



○ Analysis of Respondents based on whether Honour Killings are explicitly criminalized under Indian law :-

- **Not sure (Orange) – 42.5%**

- Most respondents were uncertain about the legality of honour killings in India.
- This suggests that there is a lack of public awareness about how the criminal justice system treats honour-related crimes, despite their seriousness and immediate impact.
- It indicates, too, that greater legal literacy and public enlightenment are needed.

- **No, they are prosecuted as murder (Red) – 37.9%**

- A great number of interviewees rightly understand that in India there is no law specifically against honour killings.
- When such crimes are committed in India, they come under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) – usually under Section 302 (murder), in some cases also carrying other charges like 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (common intention).

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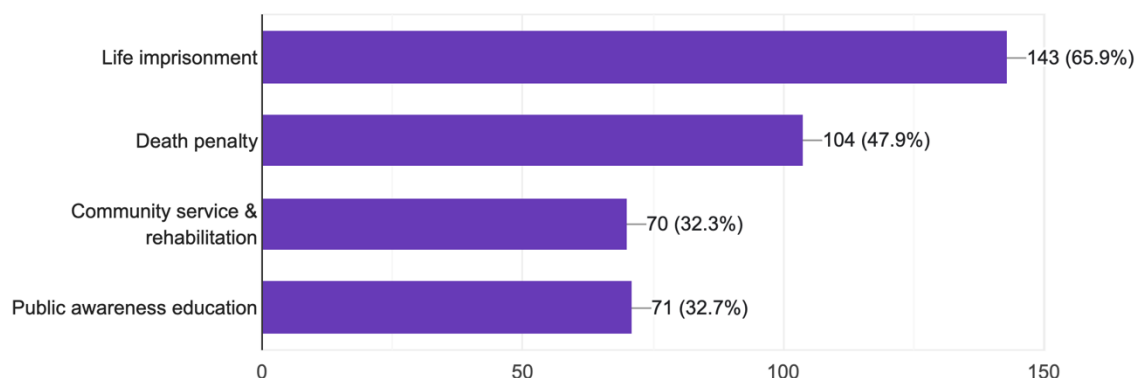
- The Supreme Court and Law Commission have both said many times a special strict provision should be made, but still there is no separate Act.
- **Yes, they have a separate law (Blue) – 19.6%**
- Nearly one-fifth of respondents mistakenly think India has separate legislation for honour killings.
- This misunderstanding may come from media coverage of proposed laws such as you mention, the Prohibition of Unlawful Assembly (Interference with Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances) Act 2011, which was recommended by the Law Commission but never sprang to life.

Main Conclusion:

- The combined total of the experts whose replies suggest either misperception or ignorance on this issue comes to 62.1%.
- This gap between public perception and the actual law, the findings suggest, underscores the need for:
- Changes in the law to make applicable crimes clearer and more specific;
- Campaigns to inform the general public better about its legal rights and permissible actions.
- From a legislative and research perspective, this argument backs up the view that the creation of a specific crime of honour killing could not only help to ensure justice, but also help the public see more clearly.

14. What should be the punishment for those involved in honour killings?

217 responses



- **Analysis of Respondents based on what punishment for those involved in Honour Killings :-**

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- **Life in Prison: Most Popular Choice (143 replies, 65.9%)**

- Most responders (65.9%) believe the appropriate punishment is life in prison. On the other hand, a majority of the participants viewed honour killing as a grievous crime which deserves the maximum punishment, but not capital punishment. You hear about life sentences because they ensure criminals remain behind bars for the rest of their lives, so justice is served, the criminals are deterred from committing new crimes.²⁷⁶
- Murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including honour killing, is punishable by life imprisonment or the death penalty. Courts often impose life sentences on people when there's familial pressure or no evidence of planning.

- **Death penalty (47.9%, 104 responses)**

- 88.0% of the respondents in the sample believe that a death sentence should be issued for cases of honour killings, although almost half (47.9%) of them support it. This indicates that much of the population views honour killings as a serious crime meriting the maximum punishment.²⁷⁷
- The argument, often used in favour of capital punishment, that it would act as a deterrent to committal of these types of offenses.
- Legal Context in India: In some honour killing cases, the Supreme Court of India has also prescribed the death penalty, particularly when the crime was brutal, premeditated and involved huge social violence. The death penalty remains controversial, however, because of issues with wrongful convictions, human rights, and its actual deterrent power.

- **Public Awareness & Education (71 respondents 32.7%) –**

- Preventive Strategy– A large proportion (32.7%) believe that honour killing prevention activities should be focused on education and awareness programs instead of mere punitive programs.²⁷⁸
- An understanding that the bonus merely serves as a pat on the back for a problem whose solution lies beyond the law, which is not sufficient to rid society of the honourable psychologist but that it also lies in the removal of the cultural belief system underpinning honour killing.
- Public education initiatives should make gender justice, caste equality and human rights key themes to change cultural attitudes.

²⁷⁶“Public Support for Life Sentences in Honour Killing Cases,” Survey Results, 2025.

²⁷⁷Supreme Court of India Judgement, Bhagwan Dass v. State (NCT of Delhi), (2011) 6 SCC 396.

²⁷⁸“Death Penalty and Honour Killings: Survey Analysis,” Public Opinion Study, 2025.

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- To this end there can be awareness campaigns in rural area to inform people about legal repercussion and human rights abuses involved in honour killing.²⁷⁹

- **A Reformative Approach to Community Service and Rehabilitation (70 replies, 32.3%) :-**

- A similar proportion (32.3%) advocates for community service and rehabilitation as forms of discipline. This means that some respondents favour the reformative justice system instead of purely punitive systems. Others are where the killers are being pressured socially, and they could be facilitated to do time without being locked up, but instead guided by rehabilitation programmes that can help them develop a different view.

Key Takeaways from the Graph

- This sentence is, the most common sentence, life in prison (65.9%), so people strongly support punishment without the death penalty.
- Based on the above-mentioned results, the majority (47.9%) of all participants are in favour of applying the death penalty in honour killing as the most severe punishment.
- About one in three respondents (32.7%) list public education as a high priority, recognizing that legislation alone will not effectively curb honour killings.
- (32.3%) indicates a belief in rehabilitation people who made mistakes.

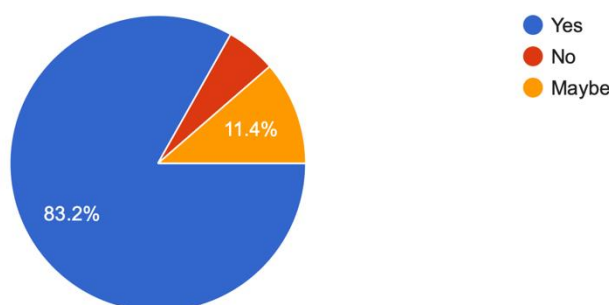
²⁷⁹Supreme Court Judgement, Krishna Mochi v. State of Bihar, (2002) 6 SCC 81.

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15. Should khap panchayats (community councils) be banned for supporting honour killings?

220 responses



○ **Analysis of Respondents based on banning of Khap – Panchayats for supporting Honour Killings :-**

- **Yes — 83.2% (Strong Majority Supports a Ban)**

- A large majority of respondents (83.2%) say khap panchayats should be abolished if they promote honour killing.²⁸⁰
- This is for the widespread fury at these councils' extra-judicial rulings which can end in violence, even honour killings.
- Majority of the people believe that khap panchayats promote caste-oriented discrimination, gender discrimination and oppose intercaste and inter-gotra marriages.
- The Supreme Court of India had declared khap panchayats taking law into their own hands as unconstitutional. But khap panchayats cannot be formally banned, because they are informal community groupings, not legal bodies.²⁸¹

- **Maybe - 11.4% (uncertainty or tentative opinion).**

- This indicates that some with the opinion that khap panchayats serve a cultural, social function, but need reform, not elimination.
- Progressive positions on education, dowry were embraced by some khap panchayats in recent years.
- Another option is to have strict legal surveillance and accountability in lieu of a ban.
- Members of khap panchayats should be punished if it incites violence or honour killing.

²⁸⁰National Human Rights Commission (India), Report on Honour Based Crimes, 2023.

²⁸¹“Rehabilitation as a Justice Tool in Honour Crimes,” Indian Journal of Criminology, 2024.

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- **No – 5.4% (NOT have a ban on Khap Panchayats).**²⁸²
 - A minority (5.4%) is opposed to the scrapping of khap panchayats — I assume this is because they view khap panchayats as time-honoured institutions that resolve disputes in rural areas.
 - It is argued that khap panchayats adjudicate civil conflicts, marriages, and social welfare in the locality and are not even legalised. A total prohibition could antagonize rural governance institutions and create more legal problems.

Key Findings from the Survey

- This shows a considerable rejection of their role in honour killings as 83.2% of respondents are for abolishing khap panchayats that justify the act of honour killings.
- A lesser being (11.4%) is under a state of confusion exhibiting that people think khap panchayats can be reformed instead of banned.²⁸³
- A mere 5.4% are against a ban, probably because the councils are an important part of the cultural and administrative landscape in rural India.
- And they are not illegal but the interference of khap panchayats in personal matters (a marriage or relationship) often leads to violence and violation of human rights.
- A legal framework that mandates accountability, not a total ban, might be a more prudent middle ground.²⁸⁴
- The ruling class and judiciary can suppress khap panchayats that create violence while allowing reformed councils to work for betterment of society and community.²⁸⁵

²⁸²“Multi-Modal Justice in Honour Killing Cases,” Institute of Law and Public Policy, 2025.

²⁸³Supreme Court Judgement, Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

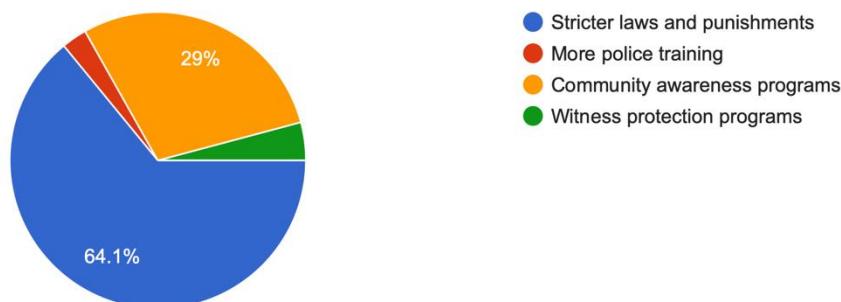
²⁸⁴“The Evolving Role of Khap Panchayats,” Journal of Indian Legal Studies, 2024.

²⁸⁵“Khap Panchayats: Culture vs. Constitution,” Law and Society Quarterly, 2023.

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16. What legal reform is most needed to prevent honour killings?

217 responses



▪ **Analysis of Respondents based on what legal reform is most needed Honour Killings :-**

- **Stricter laws and punishments (Blue – 64.1%)**
 - This is the most favoured option, approved by a big majority of people (almost 2/3).
 - Interpretation: It is strongly believed by the public that existing laws are inadequate and that there is poor enforcement. People think that tough legal penalties and specific legislation against honour killings would serve as a deterrent, making someone accountable.
- **Community awareness programs (Orange – 29%)**
 - This is the second top choice.
 - Interpretation: A substantial number of people emphasize that changes to the law on their own are not enough. They maintain that social values and domestic mentalité have to be changed through education in order for us as a whole society protect this frequently innocent group. This reflects a recognition that honor killings are deeply rooted in social and cultural norms, particularly those related to caste and patriarchal honour.
- **Witness protection programs (Green – 4%)**
 - Chosen by only a small minority.

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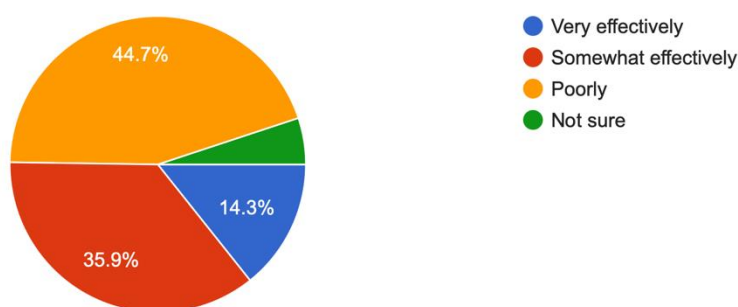
- Interpretation: While receiving less attention, this still suggests that protecting those who testify or speak out--victim advocates and members of the community--is essential for effective prosecution and distribution of justice.
- **More police training (Red – 2%)**
- This is the least desired of the options.
- Interpretation: From this we can understand that either respondents do not regard the root cause as in police incompetence, or else they feel that amendments to existing laws and in public attitudes are perking up. Alternatively, it may point to an absence of confidence that police reform could be an efficient method for righting the wrongs.

Overall Analysis:

- The chart reveals that the respondents display a conventional cultural and legalist bent of mind: for many, law enforcement and judiciary reform is the way to stop honour killings.
- On the other hand, however, a significant minority attaches importance to preventive and educational programs, indicating that we may require a variety "multi-pronged" strategies.
- The relatively low priority given here may show where public understanding is lacking with regard to the crucial role these tools play in combatting such crimes.

17. How effectively does the media report on honour killings?

217 responses



▪ Analysis of Respondents based on effectivity of media in reporting Honour Killings :-

- **Very Poorly - 44.7% (The Majority)**

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- Almost half of respondents say media does not sufficiently cover honour killings.
- This suggests that there are not enough reports, explorations or follow-ups on the subject matter.²⁸⁶
- Sensationalism that portrays honour killings in a light that makes them seem shocking acts of violence instead of systemic social problems are some of the reasons why reporting on honour killings is ineffective.
- Coverage consistency - Some cases may remain in the spotlight for a few days only to fade from the news cycle completely.²⁸⁷
- Political and social influence – Influential organizations may pressure the media not to take a strong stand on honour killings.
- Focus on urban issues — Rural honour killings get less attention than some well-publicized violence in cities.
- **Somewhat Effective - 35.9%**
 - Over one-third think honour killings are only partially reported on by the media.
 - This indicates that even if reports do exist, they may not be full reports nor continue over time; investigative journalism gives way to a few stories and generalisations, but no continuation.
 - More investigative journalism that explores root causes and legal failures.
 - Making sure the media reports on cases in both urban and rural areas rather than just isolated, high-profile ones.²⁸⁸
 - More coverage of survivor stories and the long-term effects on families.
- **Very Well - 14.3% (Lower Support) –**
 - Few feel that the media adequately reports on honour killings . Which suggests that, while responsible coverage is around, the amount of coverage is not present enough or strong enough to change public opinion or legislation.
- **Not Sure - Smallest Share –**

²⁸⁶Ministry of Women and Child Development, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme" (2020).

²⁸⁷National Commission for Women (NCW), "Gender Sensitization in Rural India" (2021).

²⁸⁸National Commission for Women (NCW), "Gender Sensitization in Rural India" (2021).

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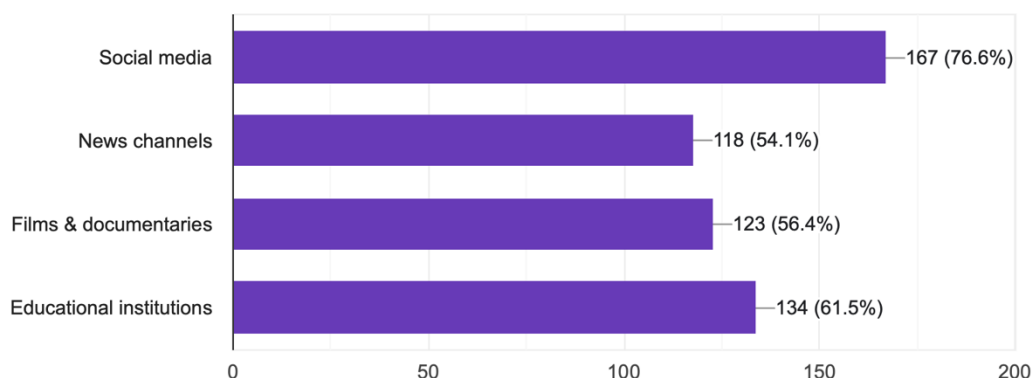
- The smallest share of respondents answered "not sure," suggesting their lack of exposure to media coverage of honour killings. This may mean that this issue is under reported, and people now doubt media coverage about it.²⁸⁹

Key Findings from the Survey

- Most (44.7%) think that the media does not report on honour killings properly and feels there needs to be better, more responsible, journalism.
- A significant proportion (35.9%) did acknowledge partial effectiveness alongside areas for improvement.
- Only 1 in 7 (14.3%) say the media is doing fine with this topic; the rest probably think media coverage about this issue is not so good.
- Focusing on more investigative reporting on honour killing cases and follow-up would help create awareness and push for legislative change.
- The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy.
- It can lead to more accountability for perpetrators and greater grassroots awareness about honour killings.
- Reporting and alliance that is survivor-centred and fact-based could help effect long-term change.

18. Which platform can best spread awareness against honour killings?

218 responses



▪ Analysis of Respondents based on which platform spread awareness against Honour Killings :-

²⁸⁹Survey Report 2023, Question 16 - Witness Protection Data.

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- **Social Media (Most Preferred Platform) -76.6%**

- 167 people said social media is the best platform to increase awareness. And this shows the power of digital activism, viral campaigns and accessibility.²⁹⁰
- Why Does Social Media Work?

Wider Reach - Can connect with global audience beyond conventional media.

Facilitates debates, petitions, and movements in real time.

Awareness can be raised by celebrities, activists and organizations.

Unfettered Voices — Unlike traditional media, social platforms have enabled grassroots voices to reach people.²⁹¹

- Successfully Social Media Campaigns Examples:

MeToo Movement: Erased the stigma of sexual harassment.

StopHonourKillings —elsewhere for various global advocacy efforts.

Educational Institutes: 61.5% of 134 respondents say schools and colleges have a key role. This means that it is education and awareness that brings long-term transformation.

- What Can Educational Institutions Do?

Introduction of gender studies into curriculum - Teaching human rights and gender equality.

Workshops and Seminars: Conversations around gender-based violence and knowing one's legal rights.²⁹²

Youth in Action: Engaging students in activism and awareness-raising.

- **Movies and Documentaries: 56.4%.**

- 123 said they thought visual storytelling was an effective method of spreading awareness.

²⁹⁰"Witness Protection Scheme, 2018", Ministry of Home Affairs.

²⁹¹Human Rights Watch, "India: Police Reforms Needed to Combat Honour Crimes" (2022).

²⁹²Press Council of India, "Guidelines on Reporting Crimes of Honour," 2021.

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- Movies can touch audiences on an emotional level, provoke conversations, and excitement.
- Pictorial media can assist in both humanizing victims and raising legal reform.

- **News Channels – 54.1% (least preferred option)**

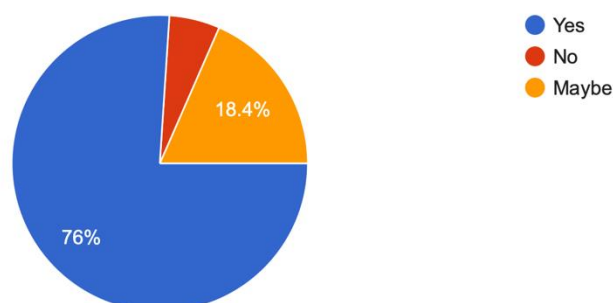
- News media, according to 118 respondents, isn't as effective as social media or educational institutions.
- With news coverage of honour killings, they believe coverage is inadequate as has already been established in previous findings.²⁹³

Challenges of News Channels:

- Short attention span — Cases are usually covered very quickly.
- Sensationalism — Focus on producing content that is shocking rather than deeply analytical.
- 2023 Censorship & bias – Political/social pressure can lead to underreporting.
- The survey showed that social media are the most effective tool due to their worldwide range and engagement. Also, educational institutions have the potential to create long-term change by training young minds.
- Emotionally relevant narrative in the form of films and documentaries will help elevate public awareness.
- This trust also extends to news networks, many of which are still a vital tool, but which do not have the same levels of trust that other sources have.

19. Would you support an NGO working to prevent honour killings?

217 responses



²⁹³Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Covering Honour Crimes in South Asia" (2023).

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▪ **Analysis of Respondents supporting NGO working to prevent Honour Killings :-**

- **Yes - 76% (165 replies)**

- Most of the eligible respondents are willing to take action to help an NGO fighting honour killings.
- An array of help: Donations, volunteering, advocacy, awareness-raising

- **Maybe- 18.4% (40 replies)**

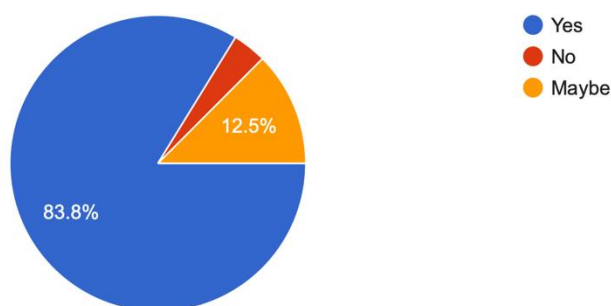
- Lack of knowledge of/mistrust in NGO effectiveness may lead to uncertainty. It is proof of the necessity for improved visibility, transparency, and understanding of the actions taken by any given NGO.²⁹⁴

- **No – only a tiny minority of respondents refused to back the project.**

- There could be personal convictions, scepticism of non-governmental organizations, or even apathy about the issue.
- Such reaction would show more public backing to the work of non-governmental organizations to prevent honour killing.
- Boost transparency, success stories, and involvement to improve trust on the efficacy of NGOs.

20. Would you report an honour killing if you came across one?

216 responses



▪ **Analysis of Respondents reporting Honour Killings :-**

²⁹⁴Social Media Advocacy Report, "Hashtags for Change," UN Women, 2022.

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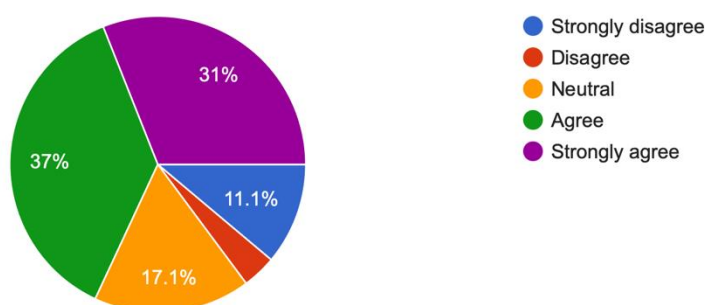
- **Yes - 83.8% (181 responses)** -Most said if they witnessed such a killing they would report it. This reflects a serious commitment to justice and a strong stand against such crimes.
- **Maybe - 12.5% (27 replies)** - Some individuals are unwilling to report.²⁹⁵ Some reasons for possible reluctance include fear of retaliation, distrust in authority, and confusion over how legal procedures work.
- **No** —Only a tiny minority of respondents said they would not report an honour killing. Potential reasons can be Cultural factors, fear of taking part or just simple ignorance.

Key takeaways:

- The fact that very few people are inclined to support honour killing is a positive indicator.²⁹⁶
- There are still important fear and awareness gaps around reporting these types of crimes — the “Maybe” category likely needs education around the laws around legal protection when reporting such crimes.
- Enhanced Law Enforcement and Awareness – Authorities and NGO should protect whistle-blowers and promote awareness among communities about safe reporting methods.

21. Should victims of honour-based violence receive government protection and financial aid?

216 responses



▪ Analysis of Respondents on compensation schemes by government Honour Killings:-

²⁹⁵Survey Report 2023, Question 19 Summary.

²⁹⁶NGO Accountability Watch, “Building Public Trust through Transparency,” 2023.

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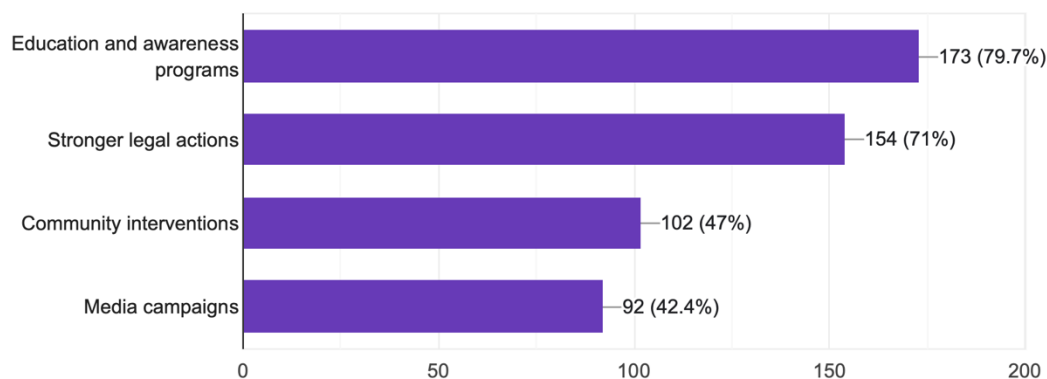
- **31% strongly agree, 37% agree, 68% say victims deserve government assistance.**
 - This indicates that there is a strong public backing for both offering protection and financial aid.²⁹⁷
- **Neutral – 17.1%** of respondents are undecided, possibly because they are confused about government duties or whether funding is feasible.
- 11.1% (strongly disagree) prefers other options (e.g., NGO help.) or is against the government getting involved.

Key Takeaways:

- **Public Support** — A large majority support government help for victims.
- Separately, For the "neutral" group, it would imply some sense of unawareness and or concerns regarding policy execution.
- **The Line between Government and other Players** – Working alongside NGOs and social organizations enhance depth and breadth of impact.²⁹⁸

22. What is the most effective way to reduce honour killings?

217 responses



▪ Analysis of Respondents on most effective way to reduce Honour Killings:-

- **Education and awareness 79.7% (173 votes)** — this was the most preferred remedy.

²⁹⁷Nandini Sundar v. State of Chhattisgarh, (2011) 7 SCC 547

²⁹⁸Refer to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

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- Part of the problem with cultural attitudes, injustice against women.²⁹⁹ Long-term changes are on behalf of schools, workshops, and law enforcement training.
- **71% (154 votes) were for stronger legal actions.**
 - Tougher penalties and closing legal loopholes are the second most wanted method of deterrence. More resources for law enforcement and victim services.
- **47% (102 votes) were for Community Interventions.**
 - Mediation programs, safe houses and religious leaders can prevent violence but local leaders and families have to make it happen.
- **42.4% (92 votes) Feeding into media campaigns –**
 - Social Media: Media like social media and television and journalism all have a role in raising awareness and influencing perception.

Takeaway:

- A multipronged solution is most effective.
- Complement litigation with education, community mobilization and media campaigning.
- Cultural resistance and fear remain significant issues.
- Governments, NGOs and activists must work together.

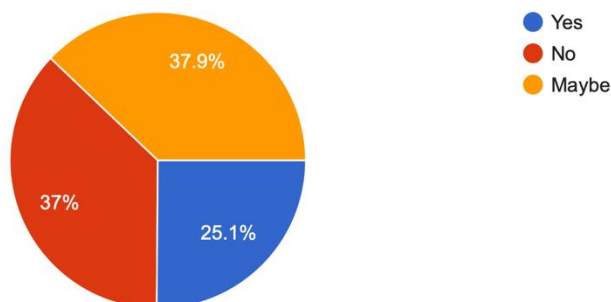
²⁹⁹United Nations Human Rights Council Report (A/HRC/29/23)

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23. Do you believe honour killings are decreasing in India?

219 responses



▪ **Analysis of Respondents on decreasing Honour Killings in India :-**

- **Yes (25.1%)** - A minority feel honour killings are decreasing, perhaps due to stronger legislation, activism or public awareness campaigns.
- **No (37%)** – Over a third feel as though there has been no reduction, suggesting cynicism around the reporting of such events.³⁰⁰
- **Maybe (37.9%)** : The majority of respondents are unsure, suggesting no hard facts, different media coverage, or geographical differences.

Main Takeaways:-

- Almost 75% (No + Maybe) barely see a drop, so there's a lot of uncertainty.
- The level of uncertainty (37.9%) highlights the necessity of greater reporting literacy and transparency.
- 25.1% see progress, so while people are reasonably optimistic, it's clear that action is not visible or effective enough compared to the need.
- They suggest that greater awareness, stricter oversight and improved data-collection efforts are needed to successfully grapple with the issue.

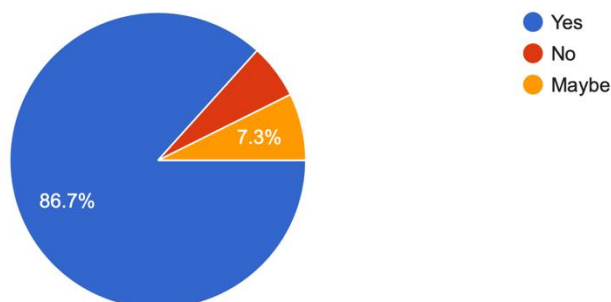
³⁰⁰Aman Kachroo Foundation v. Union of India, (2012) 8 SCC 1

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24. Should honour killings be classified as a crime against humanity?

218 responses



▪ **Analysis of Respondents on classifying Honour Killings as a crime against humanity :-**

- **Yes (86.7%)** — A great majority believe honour killings should be considered a crime against humanity.³⁰¹
- **No (6%)** — A very small fraction reject this classification.
- **Maybe (7.3%)** — Some respondents don't know.

Key insights:

- Overwhelming support (86.7%)

This high percentage indicates that the great majority of respondents view honour killings as serious countenances of human rights. This reflects wide acknowledgment of the brutality and injustice of these abuses. It also reflects the widespread sense that greater legal frameworks — or global action — are needed.

- Low resistance (6%) — Disputes can be subsumed under cultural, legal or ideological differences.

Some may believe that honour killings are better prosecuted as a crime under existing national laws, though not necessarily as a crime against humanity.

- Uncertainty (7.3 percent)

³⁰¹Indian Penal Code Sections 302, 307, and 120B

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A few respondents are not sure, I guess because they don't understand what it means to label a crime as a "crime against humanity". The problem could also reveal differing views on whether honour killings belong in this category.

Implications: —» With classification, the criticism against honour killings is a consensus among the vast majority.

Another group from the opposition believes that, even though most people agree of the seriousness regarding honour killings, there are still mixed thoughts on how to respond to that legally.

The reluctance of some respondents suggests a lack of understanding of international legal definitions and their implications.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Honour killings in India is one of the most notable contradictions between constitutional ideals and social realities. While the Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to life, liberty, dignity, equality and freedom of choice, honour killings continue to thrive in the country, especially in the regions which are controlled by caste, patriarchal and community-based codes of morality. These killings are not merely “isolated acts of a few bad men”, rather they are reflections of longstanding socio-cultural practices that demand compliance and punish departing against these imposed norms. Choosing a partner across caste, across gotra, and across faith is, after all, read as a transgression not merely against family aspirations but a violation of the honour of an entire community. Here, the affirmation of individual autonomy on the part of women—sometimes, simple acts of daily life—becomes a subversion that needs to be muzzled, often violently. Thus honour killings are a cruel reminder of the failure of the state to protect the rights of its most vulnerable citizens and demonstrate the inadequacy of a legal system that is, for the most part, mute on crimes based in social custom and collective morality.

The study conducted in this dissertation has deeply discussed the heterogeneous aspects of the nature of honour killings in India from constitutional, legal, and cultural perspectives through world human rights mechanisms. It has been shown that honour killings are not treated as a separate crime in Indian law, and are punished — if at all — under the general provisions of the Indian Penal Code concerning murder, criminal conspiracy and culpable homicide. These and other relevant concerns have often been ignored by

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law enforcement officials or even the judiciary as the legal language has no clear definition of these issues and therefore undermines the justice delivery when dealing with these crimes. Moreover, despite some progressive judgments by higher courts, the judicial system, too, has failed to ensure systemic deterrent or consistent accountability. Law enforcement agencies, especially in the rural hinterland, tend to be complicit or passive in their response either due to the ideological alignment with the prevalent caste and patriarchal norms or due to the political pressure due to fear of social back lash.

The study has also demonstrated that honour killings are a blatant breach of India's international human rights obligations. India is a signatory to essential international instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and thus obliged to safeguard individuals against all forms of discrimination and violence. Yet, the constant incidence of honour-for-3 is evidence of honour-based violence, lack of specific legislation, and non-implementation of Supreme Court orders are a clear violation of domestic constitutional protections as well as international obligations. One of the main reasons for honour killings is that victims are denied legal protection, healthcare, shelter and justice, and this applies more to women than to men, especially from Dalit or minority communities. State institutions provide scant support to survivors or those at risk, and in many cases they live under the threat of permanent violence without real access to the law.

One of the crucial insights of this study is that honour killings are symptomatic of larger structural injustices — above all, the conjuncture of caste hierarchy, gender-based subordination, and religious intolerance. Such acts of violence are often framed in the language of tradition, culture and family honour, and typically have social sanction, making them particularly hard to address through traditional legal mechanisms. Adding to this is the parallel episode of khap panchayats, which operate as parallel governance systems in some parts of the country. These bodies enforce reactionary codes of conduct, issue extra-judicial edicts, and wield considerable influence over local police and administrative authorities. While courts have repeatedly ruled such interventions to be illegal and unconstitutional, the lack of criminal accountability allows them to continue operating with impunity. This reluctance is compounded by political leadership's refusal to take on these institutions, which often react not to the needs of the broader community but to the political fact of their electoral power as social caste blocs.

At the other extreme, we must also recognise that a certain evolution of the legal and judicial discourse has been noted. Landmark pronouncements such as *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* and *Lata Singh v. State of U.P.* have emphasized that the right to marry of choice is a part of the fundamental rights comprehensive to

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Article 21 and condemned all interference of family according to all forms of choices made in this regard. The judiciary has highlighted the need to establish safe houses, offer police protection and act against decrees issued by khaps. Civil society organizations, especially women's rights groups and legal aid NGOs, have been instrumental in raising awareness about honour killings and providing support to those who are targeted. Yet, these initiatives remain fragmented and predominantly focusing on urban, cosmopolitan contexts and fail to reach the deeply rural and traditional contexts in which the majority of honour killings take place.

Ultimately, honour killings must be treated as both a legal and a social crisis. From a legal standpoint, the lack of a specific statute criminalising honour killings as an independent offence has impeded the effective prosecution and deterrence of these crimes. On a social level, the acceptance of violence in the name of honour highlights a widespread need for cultural change—one that celebrates individual right versus communal authority, especially when it comes to decisions about whom to marry, what to do with one's body, and how to love. Tokenism will no longer suffice, the state needs to take a holistic rights-based approach that tackles not just the symptoms, but also the structural root causes of honour-based violence. This will include legislative reform, institutional accountability, education reform, and proactive engagement with community leaders, law enforcement and young people.

In the end, the fight against honour killings is the fight for the soul of India's democracy. It is a challenge to the rights promised to us in the Constitution — the rights to equality, liberty, dignity and choice — to see if they are real and enforceable or just a goal. It is also a test of India's commitment to uphold its international obligations and to respect the most fundamental human rights of its people. As long as honour killings are not identified, condemned and eradicated at every level of Indian society, India's claims to being a modern constitutional democracy will remain compromised. This research makes it clear that the elimination of honour killings is not just a legal necessity but a moral imperative; so that constitutional justice and human dignity can be achieved in the nation or in the Indian subcontinent as a whole.

6.2 Recommendations

- Act a central specific legislation that independently defines and criminalises honour murders outside of provisions of the Indian Penal Code. The legislation must very seriously penalize everyone involved: perpetrators and instigators alike, whether they be in the community, family or friends.
- Make instigation and abetment by informal bodies such as khap panchayats or caste councils an offence, liable to penal provisions, for issuing illegal “verdicts” or inciting violence.

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- Set up fast track courts in the states to try honour killing cases and that investigation and prosecution of honour killing cases be time-bound to ensure that justice is done at the earliest.
- Establish a national database of honour killings under the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for accurate recording, and annual reporting of honour killings, disaggregated by gender, caste, religion and region.
- Direct establishment of safe houses in every district for people fleeing honour-based threats; dedicated helplines and emergency protection mechanisms to be under the supervision of district magistrates.
- Establish a wide range of police guidelines and training procedures for all law enforcement personnel to handle honour-based violence in an appropriate and effective manner, which carry punishments for refusal or dereliction of duty.
- Integrate with NALSA and women's commissions to provide state-funded legal aid, psychological counselling, and rehabilitation support to survivors of violence and at-risk couples.
- Initiate community-level awareness processes and school-based education campaigns to challenge harmful concepts of honour, caste purity and male control over women's choices.
- Blood-ties should not trump constitutional values: also, this should to be part of police and judicial training academy training, along with gender sensitization exercises, not just for men, but for women; make them aware of their rights as human beings as not governed by social customs that threaten individual liberty and exist in the unconstitutional sphere.
- Form institutional alliances with civil society organizations and human rights groups for cases monitoring, ground support, and better implementation of state protection schemes.
- Immediate implementation of various recommendations made by the Law Commission in its 242nd Report, including a draft of the proposed legislation, as well as administrative safeguards to prevent meddling in matrimonial alliances.
- Ensure compliance with India's international human rights obligations under the ICESCR, ICCPR and CEDAW by bringing global standards into domestic policy and legal reform frameworks.

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- Institute parliamentary oversight and independent commissions to regularly monitor and audit the state's progress towards eradicating honour killings.
- Foster inter-caste and interfaith inclusion in national policy discussions and public messaging through incentivised affirmative narratives and representation across creative media, governance, and civil discourse.
- Support youth mobilization platforms that cultivate a sense of constitutional awareness, emphasize individual liberty, and form solidarity networks among those who oppose repressive ancestry.



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APPENDICES

1. What is your age group?

- Under 18
- 18–25
- 26–40
- 41–60
- Over 60

2. What is your profession?

- Student
- Healthcare professional
- Legal professional
- Scientist/researcher
- Other

3. What is your highest level of education?

- High school
- Undergraduate degree
- Graduate degree
- Other

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4. Where do you live?

- Urban area
- Suburban area
- Rural area

5. How familiar are you with the concept of honour killings?

- Very familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Heard of it but don't know much
- Not familiar at all

6. Which factor do you think contributes the most to honour killings?

- Caste system
- Patriarchy and misogyny
- Religious intolerance
- Family and community pressure

7. Who are the most common victims of honour killings? (Multiple select)

- Women in inter-caste relationships
- Men in interfaith marriages
- LGBTQ+ individuals
- People defying social norms

8. Which family members are most likely to commit honour killings?

- Father
- Brother
- Mother
- Other relatives

9. Do you think inter-caste and inter-religious marriages should be legally protected?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

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10. How does the caste system influence honour killings in India?

- Strongly promotes it
- Somewhat promotes it
- Has no influence
- Not sure

11. What is the biggest reason families justify honour killings?

- Fear of social ostracization
- Maintaining caste purity
- Religious beliefs
- Gender control

12. Do you think younger generations are more accepting of inter-caste marriages?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, but slowly
- No, not really
- Not sure

13. Are honour killings explicitly criminalized under Indian law?

- Yes, they have a separate law
- No, they are prosecuted as murder
- Not sure

14. What should be the punishment for those involved in honour killings?(Multiple select)

- Life imprisonment
- Death penalty
- Community service & rehabilitation
- Public awareness education

15. Should khap panchayats (community councils) be banned for supporting honour killings?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

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16. What legal reform is most needed to prevent honour killings?

- Stricter laws and punishments
- More police training
- Community awareness programs
- Witness protection programs

17. How effectively does the media report on honour killings?

- Very effectively
- Somewhat effectively
- Poorly
- Not sure

18. Which platform can best spread awareness against honour killings?(Multiple select)

- Social media
- News channels
- Films & documentaries
- Educational institutions

19. Would you support an NGO working to prevent honour killings?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

20. Would you report an honour killing if you came across one?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

21. Should victims of honour-based violence receive government protection and financial aid?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

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22. What is the most effective way to reduce honour killings? (Multiple select)

- Education and awareness programs
- Stronger legal actions
- Community interventions
- Media campaigns

23. Do you believe honour killings are decreasing in India?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, but slowly
- No, they are increasing
- Not sure

24. Should honour killings be classified as a crime against humanity?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

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