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# **Research Chronicler**

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**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Author	Title of the Paper	Page No.
1	Prof. Mahmoud Qudah	The Role of L2 Proficiency in the Word Association Behavior of Jordanian EFL Learners	1
2	Dr. Archana Durgesh Ms. Ekta Sawhney	Love Conquers All: <i>Train to Pakistan</i>	12
3	Mr. Chaitanya Mahamuni Dr. KTV Reddy Ms. Nishan Patnaik	Study of Meta-Materials as an Emerging Technology in Microwave and Millimeterwave Wireless Communication	20
4	Dr. Archana Durgesh Ms. Shobhna Singh	A Tribute to Khushwant Singh's <i>Love: Delhi</i>	26
5	Mrs. Deepti Mujumdar Ms. Shaguftaa Seher Rehmaan	Treatment of Women Characters in Vijay Tendulkar's <i>Encounter in Umbugland</i> and <i>Kamala</i>	31
6	Mr. Chaitanya Mahamuni Dr. KTV Reddy Ms. Nishan Patnaik	Energy Efficient Performance in Wireless Sensor Networks: A Literature Survey	39
7	Dr. Rupal S. Patel	<i>Death in Venice</i> : A Modernist Work of Art	45
8	Dr. Archana Durgesh Dr. Pooja Singh	Is There Honor In Honor Killings? An insight	53
9	Smriti Chowdhuri	Kamala Das in Search of her Grandmother's Land: An Eco-Feminist Study of Kamala Das's Poetry	59

<b>10</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh, Dr. Pooja Singh & Nigar Alam	Sex as an Elemental Passion in ' <i>The Company of Women</i> '	<b>64</b>
<b>11</b>	Shomik Saha Kalpak De	Tourism Potential in Dooars Region: An analysis and the way ahead	<b>70</b>
<b>12</b>	सुधीर कुमार डॉ० स्नेहलता शिवहरे	अन्तर्राष्ट्रीय सद्भावना तथा शिक्षा	<b>77</b>
<b>Short Stories</b>			
<b>13</b>	Relations	Dr. Archana Durgesh	<b>84</b>
<b>14</b>	A Mother's Promise	Dr. Archana Durgesh	<b>86</b>
<b>Poems</b>			
<b>15</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh	Prayers for My Dear One	<b>90</b>
<b>16</b>	Dr. Archana Durgesh	ME & YOU	<b>90</b>

**Is There Honor In Honor Killings? An insight**

Dr. Archana Durgesh &amp; Dr. Pooja Singh

*BBD NITM, Lucknow, (U.P.) India***Abstract**

Since long time, honor and manliness have been inextricably tied together. In many cases, they were synonymous. Honor lost was manhood lost. Because honor was such a central aspect of a man's masculine identity, men would go to great lengths to win honor and prevent its loss. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce—even from an abusive husband—or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that "dishonors" her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life. Men can also be the victims of honor killings by members of the family of a woman with whom they are perceived to have an inappropriate relationship. The loose term "honor killing" applies to killing of both men and women in cultures that practice it. There are innumerable cases of honor killing in which men and women have lost their lives. What will one do with honor status money property and family name if life of beloved child faces death sentence passed by their own parents. Yes parents because mothers even don't spare the lives they have once been blessed with; life is God's gift none has the right to kill or harass their children just in order to keep their false ego. This paper, therefore, will try to provide an insight in understanding the magnitude of this problem and its impact on changing society.

**Key Words:** Honor Killing, sexual assault, harass

Across cultures and time, honor and manliness have been inextricably tied together. In many cases, they were synonymous. Honor lost was manhood lost. Because honor was such a central aspect of a man's masculine identity, men would go to great lengths to win honor and prevent its loss. Anthropologist Frank Henderson Stewart makes the case that honor comes in two types: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal honor is defined as the "right to respect among an exclusive society of equals." Horizontal honor = mutual respect. But don't let the term "mutual respect" fool you. We're not talking about the sort of watered-down "respect-me-simply-because-I'm-a-human-being" kind of respect that pervades our modern culture. For horizontal honor to mean anything, it must be contingent upon certain

unyielding standards in order to maintain honor within the group.

The existence of horizontal honor is premised on three elements:

- A code of honor: A code of honor lays out the standards that must be reached in order for a person to receive respect within a group. These rules outline what it takes to obtain honor (or respect), and how it may be lost. That last stipulation is paramount: honor that cannot be lost is not honor. Codes of honor often lay out very high standards for the group, but despite their difficulty, codes of honor are always viewed as minimum standards for inclusion. If you can't meet

them, then you're seen as deficient, even despicable, and are thus shamed.

- An honor group: An honor group consists of individuals who understand and have committed to live the code of honor. That everyone in the group has done this is understood by all other members of the group. Because honor depends on respect, an honor group must be a society of equals. Honor is based on the judgments of other members in the group, therefore the opinion of those members must matter to you, and they won't if you don't see them as your equals. Respect is a two-way street. While you might respect someone above you in the social pecking order, it's hard to respect someone you think is beneath you. Honor groups must also be exclusive. If everyone and anyone can be part of the group, regardless of whether they live by the code or not, then honor becomes meaningless. Egalitarianism and honor cannot coexist. Finally, the honor group needs to be tight-knit and intimate. A society governed by mutual respect requires everyone in the society to know each other and interact face-to-face. Honor cannot exist in a society where anonymity dominates.
- Shame: A person who fails to live up to the group's code loses his honor — his right to the respect of the other honor group members as equals. A healthy feeling of shame, or the recognition that a person has failed to live up to the honor group's code is necessary for honor to exist. When individuals stop caring whether they've lost their right to respect in the group (i.e. living without

shame), honor loses its power to compel and check individuals' behavior.

Horizontal honor is an all-or-nothing game. You either have the respect of your peers or you don't. Bringing dishonor upon you by failing to meet the minimum standards of the group (or showing disdain or indifference for those standards) means exclusion from the group, as well as shame. Thus, in a tribe/team/group/gang, horizontal honor serves as a dividing line between us and them, between the honorable and the despicable.

#### ❖ Vertical Honor

Vertical honor, on the other hand, isn't about mutual respect, but is rather about giving praise and esteem to those "who are superior, whether by virtue of their abilities, their rank, their services to the community, their sex, their kinship, their office, or anything else." (Stewart p. 59) Vertical honor, by its nature, is hierarchical and competitive. Vertical honor goes to the man who not only lives the code of honor, but excels at doing so. So, vertical honor = praise, esteem, admiration.

In *What Is Honor?* Alexander Welsh makes the case that for vertical honor to exist; horizontal honor must first be present. Without a baseline of mutual respect among equal peers (horizontal honor) winning praise and esteem (vertical honor) means very little.

#### **Honor = Reputation**

So "honor" as our forebears understood it consisted of two parts: respect from the honor group (horizontal honor) and praise from the honor group (vertical honor). Implicit in this bipartite notion of honor is that it depends on the opinion of others. You can have a sense of your own honor, but that isn't enough — others must recognize your honor for it to exist. Or as

anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers put it, "Honor" is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride." Thus, honor is a reputation worthy of respect and admiration.

Human Rights Watch defines "honor killings" as follows, "Honor killings are acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family." A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce—even from an abusive husband—or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that "dishonors" her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.

Men can also be the victims of honor killings by members of the family of a woman with whom they are perceived to have an inappropriate relationship. The loose term "honor killing" applies to killing of both men and women in cultures that practice it.

DELHI, January 6, 2014 — as the world celebrates 100 years of women suffrage, Indian women continue to fight for things that matter. What still eludes women is the power and opportunity to participate in the public realm by loosening the fetters of tradition that bind them in the private domain. In the course of history, women's voices have been silenced in the public arena.

They have been silenced thanks to the very definition of Women, that to which they are inescapably linked: their sexuality, their

femininity and their body. These are historically used to situate women in the private realm. Women's voices have entered the political realm to protest the structural oppression they experience as women because of their association with the private. But alas that entry into the public realm is still in abysmally low numbers.

Young girls can't be what they can't see, an absence of female role models in government, enhances the idea that politics is a "man's world" and eliminates politics as a possible career choice for young women. The responsibility lies on open minded leaders of both the sexes who must mentor, nurture and create pathways for younger women. It's high time for more women to sit at the high table and perhaps change its shape! As Hillary Clinton rightly puts it — "When women participate in politics, it ripples out to the entire society.... Women are the world's most underused resource".

**Rohtak (Haryana):** The year 2013 witnessed a series of honor killings which took place in Haryana. Call it a co-incidence or lack of education, whatever the reason may be Haryana definitely became the state with the highest number of honor killings this year. Some of the cases were nerve rattling. The amount of torture the victimized couple had to go through in some of the cases has shook up people badly. Here is such a case which became an example of inhumane behavior of a father towards his own blood. Dharmendra Barak, 23, was brutally assaulted and then beheaded. His only fault was that he had fallen in love with a girl of the same 'gotra'. The incident took place in September when Nidhi, 20, and Dharmendra Barak, a resident Gharnavati village in Kalanaur, Rohtak district, decided to elope and get married. Without measuring the consequences the couple



took this extreme step and fled to Delhi. However, Nidhi's family who was not in a favor of this alliance, somehow managed to contact her and convinced her that if she returns home, nobody will harm them and they will be allowed to get married peacefully. Lured by this assurance, Nidhi and Dharmendra returned to their village. But they did not know that ill-fate awaited them. The couple was brutally beaten up before the whole village, police said. Dharmendra's hands and legs were broken and then he was beheaded. His headless body was thrown outside his house. Once Nidhi died, her body was taken for cremation by her family. Meanwhile, the villagers who had witnessed the brutality, informed the police about the incident. The police reached the spot and found Nidhi's body on the pyre. The cremation was stopped there and then Nidhi's half-burnt body was seized by the police and sent for post-mortem. Once the case turned out to be of honour killing, Nidhi's father Ravinder, mother Reeta, and uncle Narinder were arrested. However, one of Nidhi's uncle and a driver escaped arrest. Nidhi's family never approved of this alliance as both Dharmendra and Nidhi hailed from the same 'gotra'. If 2 people belong to the same 'gotra' they are believed to be brothers and sisters. Also, Nidhi's family owned a flourishing business of dog breeding while Dharmendra's family earned its living by farming. According to Nidhi's family, this match was not at all possible and as a consequence they decided to end the root cause of their problem.

A 40-year-old man was brutally murdered by three persons of his village in a case of suspected honour killing in Bhiwani district of Haryana. Two of the three accused — Praveen and his cousin Suprasidh — were arrested on Sunday. The third, Praveen's father Jagat Singh, is missing. During preliminary interrogation,

the accused reportedly confessed to the crime. They told the police that Jai Bhagwan, the victim, had eloped with Praveen's sister two years ago and they were on the lookout for him since then. Jai Bhagwan had been living and working in a village in Tamil Nadu. He returned to his village of Talu on Thursday and was murdered on Saturday. The police found parts of Jai Bhagwan's body from the village fields. "We have got the post-mortem examination conducted and handed over the body to the deceased's family members. They cremated him last evening. Jagat Singh is the only accused remaining to be arrested. He shall be nabbed soon," Sub-Inspector Om Prakash said. Jai Bhagwan's brother Anil reportedly witnessed the murder. According to Anil, Praveen, Jagat Singh and Suprasidh spotted Jai Bhagwan going towards the fields. "All three were carrying swords. I was at a distance. The moment they spotted him, they charged. I tried to help but could not do much as they charged at me as well," Anil said. The police said Jai Bhagwan was unmarried and had an affair with Jagat Singh's daughter. Both were from the same Jaat community. "When Jagat Singh and his family got to know of the affair, they threatened Jai Bhagwan with dire consequences. About two years ago, Jai Bhagwan eloped with Jagat Singh's daughter and started living in Tamil Nadu. The accused, Praveen and Suprasidh, mentioned in their interrogation that they killed Jai Bhagwan because he violated same-gotra norms and eloped with their sister. The girl is yet to be located," said Om Prakash, the investigating officer in the case.

**BHOPAL:** In a suspected case of honour killing, the body of a couple was recovered from a well in Myana town of Guna district on Monday. Hands of both the bodies were tied together. Police said that the bodies of Bunty, 22,

and Bhagwati, 22, both residents of Myana town were recovered from a well. Investigating officer in the case, sub-inspector Abid Khan said, "The bodies were fished out at around 5 pm and have been sent to district hospital for post-mortem which would be conducted on December 10". "We are investigating on all aspects and things would be clearer after postmortem reports," Khan said. "As one hand of the boy was found tied up with one of the girl's hands it is raising suspicion, but at the same time it could also be interpreted as an attempt to die together," Khan added. So, as of now it would be premature to conclude anything, it could either be honor killing or suicide, he said.

**KARNAL:** In yet another suspected case of honour killing in Haryana, a 21-year-old boy was allegedly killed in a village of Karnal district by father of the girl he loved. Ravinder, a resident of Kutail village near Gharounda town, was allegedly killed since they were from different caste. Sources said that Ravinder loved a 20-year-old Muslim girl in his neighbourhood. The incident was exposed when victim's father Desraj filed a police complaint about his son being missing since December 13. A case of kidnapping had been registered under Section 365 of IPC on December 14. Sources said that during investigation, they questioned accused Adib, who confessed that he had killed Ravinder and thrown his body into Awardhan canal, after he learnt that the victim had an affair with his daughter. The youth's body has not been traced as yet and police said that efforts are on. The agitated relatives and friends of the victim damaged three houses belonging to the girl's family in Kutail, and a religious structure nearby also suffered damages. Police rushed to the place to get situation under control.

**NEW DELHI:** Honor killings have been hitting the headlines quite often and killing in order to save the "honor" of the clan is the new sought after ways khappanchayats undertake to have a stronghold over a particular community. There has been a spate of honor killings in Haryana. The low literacy rate in the area has been blamed quite often. But this gruesome case took place in the financial capital of India - Mumbai - where literacy is not an issue. The suburbs of Mumbai were shaken in the year 2006 when the case surfaced. Usually, in an honor killing, the male members take active part in putting an end to the victim's life but surprisingly, here the victim's mother took full participation in killing her daughter and cutting her into pieces. The news surfaced in the media on July 12, 2008 that the parents of an 18-year old girl were sentenced to life imprisonment by court for brutally murdering their daughter. 38-year old Mohammad Munna Sardar Khan and his wife Shenaz Khan, 35 were convicted for cutting their daughter into 11 pieces in order to wipe out the stain she had put on the family's name by marrying a Hindu man. Mehnaz Khan had fallen in love with Vidyan and Jadhav who was a Maharashtrian Hindu boy. Well aware of the fact that the two could never settle down peacefully with her family's consent, Mehnaz eloped with her lover and married him. As soon as Sardar Khan and Shehnaz Khan learnt about their daughter's marriage, they visited her Panvel residence in Mumbai and pleaded her to return home. They persuaded Mehnaz by assuring her that if she returns home they would happily accept her marriage with Vidyanand. Mehnaz fell for this and agreed to return. As soon as they reached home, without wasting much time, Sardar Khan took a towel and strangled Mehnaz. Shehnaz assisted him by sitting on Mehnza's chest making it impossible for her to move.

Mehnaz died after a few minutes of struggle. But the brutalities of the Khan couple knew no limits. Her body was dragged into the bathroom by her father and there she was cut into 11 pieces. To make the body unrecognizable, Khan peeled off the skin on Mehnaz's face and chopped off her nose. The body parts were stuffed in a gunny bag and thrown near Byculla Bridge. A few days later, the locals of the area complained of foul smell and called the police. The body parts were discovered and with help from the company-name on the bag, the police traced the murderers. During investigation, the police discovered that the bag was delivered at a store owned by Sardar Khan. The Khan couple in their defense told during the trial that there was not much evidence against them but the statement was dismissed as the gunny bag in which Mehnaz's body parts were found had initials "GN" printed on it which stood for Khan's grocery store's name Garib Nawaz. The couple was sentenced to life imprisonment for killing their daughter.

Honor crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to

have brought dishonor upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce—even from an abusive husband—or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that "dishonors" her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life. The most watched scenes of honor killing in our country are reflecting that this is a death that is awarded to a man or woman of the family for marrying against the parent's wishes, having extramarital and premarital relationships, marrying within the same *gotra* (Brahmins use *gotra* for deciding marriages) or outside.

Come what may life of a daughter or son is not above honor. What will one do with honor status money property and family name if life of beloved child faces death sentence passed by their own parents. Yes parents because mothers even don't spare the lives they have once been blessed with; life is God's gift none has the right to kill or harass their children just in order to keep their false ego.

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