

RESEARCH ARTICLE



**HONOUR KILLING: A DISHONOUR TO HUMANITY
A STUDY OF JITENDER RISHI PARMAR'S *SOME SILENT STEPS: TO ATTAIN
FULFILMENT IN LOVE***

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**ABSTRACT**

Even after so many years of Independence, where we claim ourselves to be a democratic country, people have no right to do an inter-caste marriage. Women have no right to marry a man of her choice and can be murdered for rejecting a forced marriage. Even the independent woman has no right to do a love marriage. Usually, the couples are allotted social boycotts and even murder of the couples. And when such incidents come into light, men become desperate to think should we boast ourselves to live in a country that is proud of its scientific discoveries and technological advancements. Strict cultural norms regulate who can marry whom. This decision is usually left to families. Those who tried to violate the social norms by doing inter-caste marriage had to face the consequence in terms of violence, social boycott, family boycott and death (izzat or honour killing) as this violation is considered as act which have brought dishonor upon the family or group. This honour killing is the ancient tribal phenomena that have entered in some cultural norms of the society. The novel *Some Silent Steps* also shows this inhuman side of a person who kills his own family member in the name of sham honour. This paper concentrates on how these false prejudices, cultural rules, social norms affect an individual's life, dreams and desires. If someone dare to interrupt the cultural rules or social norms then it not only brings shame to their families but exclusion from society as well. Beliefs that honour killing is justified are still prevalent in society, but this brutal act of honour killing is actually killing the honour of humanity.

Keyword: Honour, violence, caste, social

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INTRODUCTION

After sixty six years of Independence, we are still not independent in reality. One has no right to decide his or her life course. We are surrounded with so many social evils. Caste system is one of them. In our country, people usually resent the idea of inter-caste marriages. And if it happens, people do not hesitate, even to kill those couples. Some men think that if a woman is empowered to do what she wants, their own role is diminished because now they have nothing to control.

Focus of the Paper

The present paper will make a study of Jitender Rishi Parmar's novel *Some Silent Steps: To attain fulfilment in Love*. In his very first novel, he gives voice to such mind boggling issues like Inter-caste marriages, Honour-Killing and discrimination against AIDS patients. The paper will concentrate on this evil practice of honour killing, which is widely prevalent in northern states like Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab. What is the definition honour killing and how class and community decides a person's destiny and how this evil practice shatters someone's dreams and ambitions? Is this practice prevalent only in India or in other parts of the world also? What are the misconceptions about this practice and what can be the solutions to terminate this crime? These are the questions that this paper seeks to find an answer to.

About the Writer

Jitender Rishi Parmar is a PhD scholar who presently teaches at Hindu College, Sonapat. With a keen interest in creative writing, he has graduated and post graduated in English Literature. *Some Silent Steps* is his debut novel where he has put his heart out. The novel, set in DSD College, Gurgaon, is the study of a few youngsters who instead of following the trodden path of life, choose the pathless travelled by. The novel presents an insightful story of love, longing and fulfillment of their commitment towards each other. The novel is written in the backdrop of caste and class consciousness and prevalence of evil practice of honour killing in the society.

Plot

We live in such a society where a woman is treated as a "Goddess", but still this so called "Goddess" has no right to marry willingly. Our Hindu

society has been divided on the basis of caste system and religion for centuries. It is so ingrained in people's mind that even after sixty six years of Independence our nation has failed to come out of this social menace. Caste is such a kind of leprosy in Indian society, especially in Northern states such as Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan that it is almost next to impossible to think of a marriage between a higher caste and a lower caste. And this results in the maximum number of honor killing cases in India from these four states.

Honour Killing

Honour Killing, as the name indicates, is killing in the name of honour. It can be defined as the death pronounced by family or society members to a man or woman for marrying against their parent's wish, marrying outside one's caste or within similar gotra etc., in order to preserve their respective social status and honour of the family. In most of the honour killings, the verdict is given by the "Caste Panchayats" or "Khap Panchayats", comprising members of a specific caste. These panchayats are the encouraging force behind these killings. These panchayats people are upholder of traditional social norms; they create a law of their own. Khap panchayats allot severe punishment to such couple who marry in 'Sagotra' or outside their gotras. Sometimes, the couples are pressurized to become siblings even after their marriages. And, the government never takes any action against such atrocities. Jitendra Rishi Parmar, a budding writer, in his very first novel, depicts a love story of college students with a backdrop of this heinous crime

Honour killing is a mind boggling issue of the contemporary time. Although, this action is not constrained to a particular geographical being, but the number of events relating to this practice is maximum in India. Many such incidents have occurred in Haryana, Western Uttar Pradesh and the rural belt of Delhi. The number of love marriages might have enhanced in metropolitan cities but the reality remains different in the villages. The north Indian famous folk tales of Laila-Majnu, Sohni-Mahiwal, Heer-Ranjha, Sassi-Punnu and Shirin-Farhad, are all stories which commemorate romantic love and are embraced as highly ideal for lovers down the centuries. They also composed as a renowned cinematic theme and have been

repeatedly produced over the years since the silent era. Such alliances have no family, caste or community approval. They are basically self-made or depend on individual preference that is not socially sanctioned and hence punished. All of these tales meet with a tragic doom. As Katherine Hansen says:

The only place for romantic love (or such unequal self-made alliances, we may say) is beyond society's boundaries-in the barren wilderness, or in heaven. The profundity of society's opposition to the violation compassed by love emerges most forcefully in the tragic endings of many of these narratives. Society exacts its revenge on errant members not only by confining and exiling them, but ultimately by killing them. (Hansen.149.)

Some Silent Steps

In the novel *Some Silent Steps: To Attain Fulfilment in Love*, characters seem to be inspired by these tales. The novel talks about a beautiful story, weaves around college life, love-affairs and how caste, class and community come in between their fulfillment of love. The author presents a vivid picture of how the lovers defy all social norms in order to fulfill their commitments towards their respective partners. Caste, still persists as one of the governing factors in the lives of many people in our country. According to the sociologists, the major cause of these honour killings is the obduracy of caste system. That's why the fear of depriving their caste status through which they attain many advantages makes them execute this heinous crime. The other obvious reason is that the psychology of people has not changed yet, and they cannot approve those marriages that take place in the same gotra or outside one's caste. In the present novel of study, Vikrant is a Rajput boy, who is in love with Aparna, a bania girl. When Vikrant's mother comes to know of his love interest she says,

Vicky, just think about our relatives. What shall I say to my sisters and brothers? They will never approve an inter-caste marriage. Don't forget, we are Rajputs. Our ancestors have sacrificed their lives just to protect the family's honour and dignity. And you are bent on spoiling it. (Parmar.215.)

Similarly, Ritika, when asked by Vikrant about her relationship with Ambuj, says, that her family is both caste and class conscious. In her family, girls have no right to choose their life partners. She expresses her helplessness regarding a change in society. She says,

You can't change the whole society and the mentality of people. If we'll try to violate its fake codes and oppressive norms, they will kill us as the stake in the name of honour killing. Even our family would not feel regret over their heinous act. In such situation, then, what can we expect from our corrupt and fractured government? (Parmar.185.)

In some countries such as Jordan, Morocco and Syria, "honour crimes" are legally sanctioned and to safeguard, the family honour is considered as a mitigating factor.

A theme that runs through the entire novel is the ideology of honour, which arises as a gendered belief producing inequality and hierarchy. Both men and women manifest notions of honour, but differently. The woman is the repository and the man is the regulator of this honour. That's why, the major threat to the ideology of honour comes from the woman. One of the repeated phrase is: The honour of every family is connected to its girl. This concept of honour is explained by sociologist Veena Das' "as operating at the expense of human sentiments and values. According to her, it demands a sacrifice of the natural ties created by biology, and kinship morality stresses their transcendence." (Das.198.)

In the novel, Khushwant mama gives vent to his anger by saying,

What you thought, huh! We are all assholes or we are impotent? he roared "You bastards, you played with my sister, insulted her. Now I will see you all". He came close to them 'And you, our tainted blood', he said and stamped a slap across Jyoti's face with such intensity that she fell down. 'you whore, you strumpet...you must have drowned yourself in a handful of water before spitting mud on our family's face'. (Parmar.243.)

The challenges, coming about in runaway marriages and elopements, lead to straight violence committed by the girl's family members on the couple generally and specifically, on the girl. In the novel, when Jyoti's family comes to know about her secret marriage with Nitin, they tortured her to such an extent, that she becomes hospitalized. And in the end, the couple was killed by Khushwant mama. It is a false belief that honour killing only includes the killing of woman. Men are equally victims of this evil practice, especially, when it affects the status of a particular caste and community. These killings are based on the belief that a woman is considered as a property of her family. If she declines to accept her father, husband or brother, her family's "honour" is thought to be discredited and the woman must be killed by a male relative to revive the family's status in community. The most important question that the novel addresses is who gave them this right to end somebody's life so mercilessly? When Nitin and Jyoti get murdered, Vikrant asked the insensitive public, he says,

Just look. 'What crime they have done committed, just loving each other? If to love is a crime, then hang yourself first. When would you stop discriminating between your own people? When? ... Countless couples have been sacrificed in the name of family honour. Now make a pickle of that preserved honour'. (Parmar.243-244.)

He further says,

Just look, how honourable job this monster has done, he said pointedly. 'He killed this innocent lad, even his real niece, and not a streak of remorse is visible on his face. Now his honour, his reputation has increased. Salute him, touch his feet ... he is the Preserver of family repute'. Vikrant clapped for him. 'Now their blood is untainted because they have murdered their offspring. What a great people they are? They must be awarded a bravery award for such a heinous act. You don't deserve to be called human', he shouted, 'You don't deserve'. (Parmar.244.)

In this inhuman society, the only sentence for inter-cast marriages is death. And those couples who survived, they have to spend all their life in a

sort of exile. They have to adopt the way of seclusion. In the novel, Ambuj and Ritika, abandons every relation for the sake of their mutual love towards each other and don't have any regret over their decision. As she says,

One conventional option was there of submission – to murder my own self and live as other dictates. But I chose the other way round. If I was supposed to assassinate my individual being, at least one attempt of prevention needed to be taken. (Parmar.255.)

There are some misconceptions associated with honour killings, the first and foremost is that this practice is limited to the rural areas. But the truth is that it is spread over a large geographical area. Even the metropolitan cities like New Delhi and Tamil Nadu are not abided by this crime. Another misconception is that it has religious roots. Only the state can convey legal sentences, but never an individual vigilante. So, it becomes clear that there are no religious roots for this heinous crime.

The novel deals with a thought provoking issue and poses a question in front of society and desirous of having an answer from society. The author writes,

Those motionless bodies were before their eyes questioning them, would their sacrifice be as meaningless as hundreds of others? Would never this society get rid of caste and class consciousness? How many more Ritika, Jyoti and Nitin have to get themselves murdered by their own family members to change the perspective of the people? Would only the principal of hatred reign supreme in the society, corrupting the soul of humanity? This brutal act of honour killing is actually killing the honour of humanity. But where is the time to feel this agony in your heart? Nobody tends to suffer the anguish of youth unless it falls upon them. (Parmar.244-245.)

DISCUSSION

The writer leaves us pondering over the issue, and trying to find out for appropriate ways to stop this heinous crime. To run away from a problem is not a solution. Some strong laws are

needed to deal with this problem. Now the question arises what can be done to prevent such a thing from happening? The first and foremost thing, the thinking of people has to change. I, personally, feel that those people who commit this type of crime are psychologically unfit and need medical treatment. In this regard, parents should accept their children's wishes regarding marriage because it is they who have to spend their life with their partners and if they are unhappy, their life will turn into a hell. Secondly, the government should implement stricter laws to handle such killings, because this crime cannot be forgiven. Humans have no right to write down death punishment of naïve fellow humans. One more reason of honour killing is lack of education. Education opens us to many vistas of experiences, we gain wisdom and knowledge. It teaches us to differentiate between right and wrong. So, lack of literacy rate is also responsible for this heinous crime. We should try to reduce illiteracy among people. The use of word honour for such a disgraceful act; and there is nothing honourable about this practice, and in fact, they are nothing but savage and ignoble acts of murder committed by cruel feudal minded persons.

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