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Kill a child for honor, but how heinous!

BY GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN on JANUARY 30, 2016 in ASIA TIMES NEWS & FEATURES, INDIA

India is a cauldron of conflicting content. While womanhood is revered and celebrated, a woman is often tortured, maimed and murdered.

Female foetuses are aborted and baby girls smothered out of existence soon after they are born, even as a woman carries the cross of her family's honor. Which can mean that she has little or no right to marry a man of her choice — a man who may belong to another race, community or caste. And if she dares this, she is killed by members of her own family — often the mother, the father or an uncle. The boy is not allowed to go as well. His life has to end too.



Soham Maitra (L) plays the rebel Dali boy Santu in Bikas Ranjan Mishra's *Chauranga*

A 2011 film by Avantika Hari, *Land, Gold Women*, takes a hard look at a small British Asian family in modern

Birmingham, where the daughter commits the unpardonable crime of falling in love with a white boy. Her uncle, who arrives from India, pressures the parents of the girl to view this affair as a blot on the family's honor and to get rid of her!

A recent Bollywood movie *NH 10* narrates the horrific tale of a young woman and her lover being butchered by her brother while her mother calmly prays for the resurrection of the family honor that had been sullied by the elopement of the couple. The lover, a young man, a low-caste Hindu (Hinduism is divided into four groups and several sub-groups), had "sinned" by desiring the woman from an upper caste.

A few weeks ago, debutant director, Bikas Ranjan Mishra's *Chauranga* (also from Bollywood), came as a powerful indictment of honor killing. A low-caste Dalit teenager, a pig-rearer, makes the fatal mistake of taking a fancy for a schoolgirl, whose land-owning father is an upper caste Hindu. The boy writes a love letter to the girl, and the father happens to read it, and it is Hell after that.

The boy and his slightly older brother are beaten, and one of them is bludgeoned to death. Mishra, while elaborating the bestiality of it all in his fiction feature inspired by an actual incident in central India, exposes the hypocrisy of the father, who has no qualms, whatsoever, about sleeping with the mother of the boys!

While films and the media have been highlighting and lambasting the horrendous practice of honor killing, young lovers — smitten by Cupid and despite the differences in their caste or creed — hope that their feelings will be respected, and parents or other relatives will leave them unarmed. But so often, as we have seen over the years, love lies writhing in a bloody mess.

And contrary to popular perception, honor killing in India is not confined to rural regions. They

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have also been reported from the nation's capital, New Delhi, and in a progressive state like Tamil Nadu.

Last year, a 20-year-old youth in New Delhi was crushed to death under the wheels of a car, driven by a relative of a 16-year-old girl after an affair between the two young people was discovered. The girl begged her relative to show mercy while he kept running his vehicle over the hapless youth — whose death could have only been painfully torturous.

A BBC report quoting women's advocacy groups says 20,000 women are killed for honor worldwide.

In 2010, the British police recorded 2800-plus incidents of honor crime, which included murder, mutilation and facial disfigurement. Most of these occurred among south-Asian families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The National Crime Records Bureau in India said in a report that there were 28 honors murders in India in 2014, and 1,307 suicides of girls, pushed into this after their affairs broke. And there were 1,196 deaths of girls — also in the same year — described by the police as suspicious.

But A. Kathir, executive director of an organisation Evidence in Chennai, says that in all probability, most of the suicides and suspicious deaths result from the warped notion that honor is paramount. And life can be sacrificed on the altar of this.

The India Democratic Women's Association says that a lot of "murders" perpetrated in the name of family honor tend to get brushed aside as suicide.

Parents or other relatives may force a girl or boy to hang, and the police may record this as suicide — while this may well be honor killing carried out by a family which feels cheated at the thought of its son or daughter choosing a partner outside his or her caste or religion.

Can anything be darker and gorier than murdering one's own child?

Gautaman Bhaskaran is an author, commentator and movie critic, who has worked with The Statesman in Kolkata and The Hindu in Chennai for 35 years. He now writes for the Hindustan Times, the Gulf Times and The Seoul Times.

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