

## Concept of Honour Killing: A study of Manjul Bajaj's *Come, Before Evening Falls*

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During the last few years extensive reports have appeared in Newspapers and Television channels all over the country about the brutal killing of young boys and girls in the name of 'Honour Killings'. The practice of murdering young boys and girls, who fall in love or tie nuptial bonds, against the wishes of their family has been rampant in several parts of India in general but North India in particular. The socio-economic dominant castes are usually accountable for these unlawful, callous acts against inter-caste relationships. "In the name of preserving 'social order' and saving the 'honour' of the community, caste or family, all kinds of justifications are pressed into service" (Singh 1).

The history of Human evolution is a witness that women have been mortified and treated viciously since the rise of city states-about BC3600-3100. Women have been viewed worldwide as an incarnation of sin, adversity, dishonor and indignity.

During the Roman period issues of honour, shame and sexual purity were of key concern. Several statesmen, Philosophers, thinkers and literary writers of repute such as, Cicero, Seneca, Tacitus, Horace and Juvenal are on record to have discussed these issues. Seneca considered the lack of feminine chastity as the prime sin of his time, Juvenal recommended wives be restricted in the house in order to be kept chaste and in Cicero stated that sexual contravention of a woman brought disgrace to the entire family and ancestry.

In many European countries women were burnt to death for committing adultery, unmarried pregnant British women were confined to lunatic asylums. Even the great William Shakespeare has discussed this issue of 'honour Killing' in one of his gruesome plays, *Titus Andronicus*, where, "The hero's daughter Lavinia has been raped and mutilated, and Andronicus is contemplating her "honour" killing. Titus: Die, die, Lavinia's and thy shame with thee, And with thy shame thy father's sorrows die" (The Tribune 13).

S.D.Lang considered honour killing as the, "most commonly a premeditated murder of a girl or woman, committed by her brother, father... in the name of restoring the family's social reputation" (55). The hypothesis is that fidelity and marriage is not a issue between husband and wife, but relates to the family, and that a woman's betrayal reflect on the honour of the whole family.

The idea of honour is of a primary significance in communal societies because the ignominious behavior of a woman can bring shame, dishonor and reflects upon the other members of the community. Infact, in the words of Farzana Bari, a lecturer at the Qaid al Azzam University in Islamabad:

Honour for men is connected with women's behavior because they are seen as the property of the family- and of the community... They are not independent human beings. Men also think of women as an extension of themselves. When women violate these standards, this is a direct blow to the man's sense of identity" (qtd in The Tribune 13).

Even Aristotle, the great philosopher, considered women as subordinate by social necessity and inferior to man both physically and mentally. But he did not approve of beating or killing the woman for adultery.

Honour Killing is a ghastly uncalled and undesired act for the brutal murder of the female for violating sexual norms set up in a patriarchal society. In the twenty-first century under the impact of globalization, modernization postmodernisation in the postcolonial India, the age old conventional rural social setup is on the verge of collapse. An easy access to internet and television has resulted in the increased proximity between young boys and girls and illicit relationships are on the rise. According to a noted sociologist, D.R. Chaudhry, “ So long as these relations remain under wraps, there is no problem. However, when it takes the form of marriage, this is taken as a violation of social mores which invites barbic edicts” (The Tribune 13).

Khap panchayats performed positive role during the ancient and mediaeval periods such as promotion of education, settling the community disputes, donation of lands for the opening of schools, curbing lavish display of wealth during marriages to name a few.

At the same time, these Khaps over the centuries have not approved inter caste or class marriages. These marriages were and are considered immoral, deserving rigorous reprimand, and developed a culture of intolerance. Fear of being ostracized force the parents of these errand boys and girls to be a part in the ‘jacobean’ murder, which is considered as a heavenly duty and the executioners feel proud in displaying their cruelty.

Suppression, cruelty, and commodification of women have been a world-wide phenomenon, since times immemorial. The most dominant weapon that men exert over women is the idea of ‘Honour’. Women, prior to her marriage, as a daughter and a sister, represents the ‘Honour’ of her father and brother. After her marriage, as a wife, she represents the honour of her husband and as a mother, she symbolizes the honour of her sons. According to Hussain, “When it comes to the demand of sacrifice, no religion, no sect, no group is different from another. The concept of women as symbol of honour makes them into mere signs in which the actual flesh and blood woman disappears” (qtd in Jafri 32).

*Come, Before Evening Falls*, by Manjul Bajaj portrays a deep insight into the sociological and cultural practices in rural Haryana. The novel is a critique on the Jat family of Ch. Hukam Singh residing in a village, Kala Saand in Rohtak district governed by strict marriage rules and diktats of the khap panchayat.

The present paper is an attempt to depict an agonizing portrayal of two young lovers ,Jugni and Rakha , who fail to unite and marry fearing reprisal from their families. The novel is a heart rending love story set against the Kangaroo courts or Khap panchayat diktats and politics.

The novel is a poignant tale of a love affair between Rakha, a gurukul educated young man and Jugni, niece of Ch. Hukam Singh . The story is set in the year 1909 in Rohtak Division of the erstwhile Punjab Province and modern day Haryana. Rakha goes to a village Kala Saand on a teaching assignment as a teacher. He is greeted by a well known Zamindar/Landlord of the village, Ch. Hukam Singh. As a custom, he is given a warm welcome and soon becomes the blue eyed boy of the entire village. Displaying his academic acumen he is able to create a niche for him in the heart of Hukam Singh’s family. Dr K.K Sunalini rightly observed, “ Though the narrative has past historical reference, it has the stark and brutal choices that confront young people as they try and find a way between the impulse of love and the dictates of duty to their families, remain largely unchanged”( n.p.).

But Rakha had nefarious plan. He appeared to have arrived in the village with an agenda. Right from the beginning , he eyed Jugni and decided to marry her. Initially , Jugni ignored Rakha’s advances but couldn’t control her feelings. They , on one pretext or the other start meeting frequently and their affair develops not before it is suspected by Kamala a village

potter's daughter employed by Jugni's chachi, both as a spy to keep an eye on Rakha and to also to help the family in household chores.

Finally Jugni's arranged marriage is fixed. Rakha seeing his plan going astray forces Jugni to elope with him, "Far away, to a place beyond gotra rules, the diktats of the Khap" (Bajaj 143). He could not bear the thought of Jugni getting married to somebody else. But Jugni, fearing her family's reputation and prestige refuses to go with Rakha fully aware that, "Her Tau would never be able to lift his face in the community. ... His neice, a runaway before her wedding day. The grief would kill him sooner than any disease could get him" (Bajaj 206). His love for Rakha meant disgrace, dishonor and death. Moreover her uncle's remarks always haunted her:

A family's honour was everything. A family was like a tree; its honour was not to be violated like this. Honour was the main trunk, if you struck at it, everything else- the branches, the leaves, the flowers, the fruit- they just fell, collapsing a dead heap around it. A tree is more than the sum of its parts. (Bajaj 199)

She was also aware of the fact that, "girls, who fell in love became corpses hanging from trees." (Bajaj 105). She rejects Rakha's proposal knowing fully that love is not an option, her beloved uncle/Tau, whose unspoken favourite she has always been will die if he ever learns of this betrayal of family's honour. Her brothers, her grandmother who brought her up and her family's age old reputation in the village will be lost for ever. She would also end up a corpse hanging from a tree.

She is reminded of the brutal murder of Sheilo, a village girl, who had decided to elope with her paramour on the eve of her marriage. She remembered that:

Men with lathis, kerosene lanterns flame torches. Sent by khap panchayat. Shouting; slapping sounds. Tears. Blood. Then a single scream that pierced the night '*Maa manne bachha le!*' *Mother, save me!* Before everything fell into a deadly silence. It was not sheilo's voice. It was the voice of a bird being strangulated, an animal being slaughtered, a star being plucked out of the sky... Erring daughters were worse than dead. They were simply obliterated. As if they had never existed. Not a whimper, not a stain. Not a memory, not a trace was allowed to remain. (Bajaj 105-106)

The novelist highlights a very pious and significant practice of widow remarriage quite rampant in rural Haryana. Jugni's 'chachi' lost her husband and she was married to Jugni's 'Tau', a widower. "It makes no sense for a widower and a widow to live separately under the same roof," she'd told the village cronies who had come in to gossip. "We are not like Rajputs, burning up their daughters-in-law on funeral pyres or like brahimins, who shave their heads and send them off to Kashi to fend for themselves, God only knows! Call them upper castes, hah!" (Bajaj 15).

This act of the Jats certainly celebrates the glory of ancient vedic culture and highlights the progressive approach of this community in, "supporting widow remarriage through the Jat custom of karsewa, which allowed a widow to take the protection of another male of her own choosing from her husband's family, after her husband died" (Bajaj 170).

Eventually, Rakha's hidden illicit relations with Jugni's chachi are discovered after her Tau's death. Rakha and Chachi tie the nuptial knot despite protest from the other members of the family. This enrages the family members and Rakha and chachi meet their tragic end. But before dying, Rakha accuses Jugni for creating all this mess and ruining his life. Jugni considers herself responsible for Rakha's death. The truth was that, "She could never erase Rakha from her memory ... She knew that the love that Rakha and she had felt for each other was something larger than themselves, something infinitely older, stronger and more indestructible than the brief

drama of their time together” (Bajaj237) .It was for the sake of her family pride and honour, she sacrificed her love. Little realizing:

In hinterland Haryana, falling in love can get you killed.In those parts, Khap Panchayats are the Law. And wise old men, hookah in hand ,are its keepers.anyone who dares go against them can be battered pulp,have their face blackened and asked to leave the village.and those are the lucky ones. (TOI n.p.)

Despite appeals from certain sections of intelligentsia and society there is a rise in these ghastly acts. Every now and then, such killings take place. Finally, the Apex court had to intervene and passed an order recently:

Deprecating the caste system in the country, the supreme court on Tuesday declared illegal”khap panchayats” which often decree or encourage “honour killings” or other institutionalized atrocities against boys and girls of different castes and religions who wish to get married or have married.(The Hindu)

This menace can be tackled and sorted out, if the intellectuals, social, political thinkers and writers dare to contradict it. Honour killing is undoubtedly a barbaric and shameful act reminiscent of feudal mindset. There is a pressing call for the society to build a vibrant counter culture and creation of a more compassionate society.

At last, Manjul Bajaj has dared to reflect that a woman’s way is really different from that of a man’s, whereas violence is latter’s way of life, resilience is former’s. Jugni through her sacrifice, angst and misfortune is able to keep alive the conviction that life matters and must be conserved for its own sake.

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