

## Honour or Dishonour?

A 19-year old woman in Afghanistan who was hideously stoned to death, the 11-year old girl in Bangladesh who had acid thrown in her face, and the 23-year old woman in Delhi who was gang-raped by six men in a bus.

These inhumane acts illustrate the extensive violence that is inflicted upon women worldwide, by those who seek to impose their backward values and traditions. One in three women worldwide have been victims of sexual or physical violence, and in times of calamity, it is especially the women who suffer most due to their subordinate position in their families and communities. Essentially, this subordinate position is reinforced in those countries that lack the rule of law and solid institutions to protect and empower these women.

Honour-based violence (HBV) is the most ancient practice of gender-based violence, and is rooted in patriarchy. For a long time, it was considered a private and cultural matter; however, now it is considered a violation of human rights. HBV is committed in a variety of forms against women throughout the world, and in the contrast to what many people presume, it is essentially not related to any particular religion or culture. It is therefore vital to refrain from stigmatization. Additionally, one must note that these attacks are not solely committed in underdeveloped countries, as the intensifying globalization process provides more opportunities for these patriarchal actors to perpetrate their crimes around the world.

In fact, the dilemma here is that these so-called 'honour-codes' are collectively sustained through covert transnational networks, which silently utilize these horrible practices. Paradoxically, these acts are committed to preserve the 'honour' of the family and community, as honour is essentially embodied in the 'worthy' behaviour and body of a woman

Worldwide, women's rights groups have advocated for gender equality, and called for government strategies to tackle this issue. Additionally, these women's activists have established transnational networks with the aim to raise awareness around gender-based violence in general, and honour-based violence in particular. Following the mobilisation of these women, the United Nations and different countries in Europe and the Middle East came on board and started to address strategies to counter this form of human rights violations.

Yet despite the efforts of many courageous women and men, 8000 women are still killed in the name of honour annually. According to scholarly research these crimes are the most under-investigated, and consequently, many perpetrators of these vile crimes walk free and are not brought to justice.

In order to raise awareness for the persecuted and oppressed women worldwide, the Think Tank Gender @Lighthouse, headed by Ms Kirsten van den Hul, in partnership with Ad Pacem, has organized a thought-provoking event on Gender & Honour Based Violence.

Dr. Nazand Begikhani, a Senior Research Fellow at Bristol University; Ms Shirin Musa, founder and director of Femmes for Freedom; and Ms Kirsten van den Hul, The Change Agent Armed with Butterflies, compose a unique combination of inspiring women, driven by justice and humanity. At the event, they empowered us to do our utmost best -each in our own capacity- to counter oppression and violence against women worldwide, in an attempt to liberate these women who are caught in the patriarchal cobweb.

Change begins in yourself, deep in your heart. Subsequently, an interconnected chain of individuals who change their mind-set towards their fellow human beings, will devise a collective societal modification of our norms & values.

***"We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented"* - Elie Wiesel**

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