

Honour killing – an excuse to kill  
Shafia trial - Is it an eye-opener  
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Is the Shafia case an eye-opener? Not really. There have been numerous similar cases before and they continue to occur in different parts of the world. Lessons are learnt and soon forgotten. A special report

The day the Shafias were sentenced for 25 years without parole, the same day a woman was killed in Afghanistan for giving birth to a second girl child. She was killed by her husband who had warned her not to give him another daughter. He wanted a son and had threatened her with dire consequences.

The woman had told her friends and relatives about the threat but it seems, no one took any action. Either out of apathy or because it is sort of an accepted norm in Afghanistan that the male member of a family can get away with killing his wife or women in his household as they are his property.

While there are reported cases, there may be thousands of unreported ones as a result that today there are thousands of missing girls and women on this earth. The girl to boy ratio is tilted like the Eiffel Tower. In the case of the Shafias, every public comment and opinion in the media has criticized the Canadian government for giving him citizenship and the visa to immigrate to Canada. In fact, it is a blessing in disguise that he chose Canada over a Muslim country to make his new home as it is here that his actions will not go unpunished.

Probably, had he chosen any other country or decided to stay put in Dubai or Afghanistan, he would have gotten away with the multiple murders. Jail officials, police officers or any other person of authority can easily be bribed in Afghanistan and he could have gotten away with any number of murders he committed. While killing the four female members of his family, he perhaps was not thinking of the consequences and had forgotten that he was now living in Canada and was accountable for his actions. No wonder, Mr Shafia, his wife and son were so clumsy in their actions that it did not take the Kingston police long to trap the three and gather enough evidence to prosecute them.

No religion condones violence and certainly not killing people let alone your own family members. Yet, so called honour killings continue not only in the Muslim community but also in Hindu and Sikh communities. In India, women are killed for marrying outside their caste or even for bringing “shame” to the family by either eloping with a boy, caste no matter or for giving birth to a girl etc.

South Asian women in Canada too have not remained immune to the practice of being killed for “honour”. Every once in a while there are stories of South Asian women being sacrificed at the altar of family honour. The case of Jassi from Maple Ridge who was killed in India by her own mother and uncle, still remains untried. All Jassi’s fault was that she had fallen in love with a poor man in India and refused to marry a man, forty years her senior which was chosen by her uncle and mother. It was only recently that the two accused made their appearance in court, almost a decade later.

In 2010, Tejinder Kaur Dhanoa of Surrey was killed by her husband and in 2011 Ravinder Kaur Bhangu, 24, who worked as an administrative assistant at the weekly newspaper 'Sach Di Awaaz' again in Surrey, BC was killed by her husband in broad daylight and in front of a number of eye witnesses. Then Farah Khan, who was just five years old was killed because her father suspected her mother of infidelity. Another victim of honour killing was Amandeep Dhillon who was killed by her father-in-law as she had wanted a divorce from his son.

Such cases abound not only in Canada, India or Afghanistan but other parts of the world too.

In 2006, 20-year old Banaz Mahmood, whose Iraqi Kurdish family fled to Britain in 1998, was strangled to death with a bootlace by her father and her uncle after a two-hour ordeal of torture and sexual abuse, and her body was stuffed into a suitcase.

Again, the same year Rahan Arshad beat his wife and three children to death with a bat, because she was having an affair.

In another horrifying case, 25-year old Samaira Nazir, a promising young businesswoman, was murdered by her male family members for becoming engaged to a man of whom they did not approve. One article about "honor" killings appearing in the German daily Deutsche Welle mentioned the murder of Heshu Yones, as well as that of 26-year old Fatime Sahindal, a Turkish woman who was murdered by her father in Sweden in 2002 because he wanted her to marry a man from Turkey, rather than her Swedish boyfriend.

In 2007, Paul Cheema, killed his Surrey school principal wife Shemina Hirji, before committing suicide and after realizing that there is no escape from the law despite numerous denials. Again in 2007, the murder of Muslim teen Aqsa Parvez at the hands of her father and brother prompted members of Punjabi Community Health Services in Brampton, Ont., to plot new strategies for family conflicts fuelled by ‘dishonour.’ “We sat down together with our clinical counsellors and we asked them, ‘What if Aqsa Parvez had come [here]? Would we have been in a position to save her?’ ” said Baldev Mutta, the organization’s CEO.

When such cases occur, there is a hue and cry raised in the community and then silence. Forums are held, lectures given in temples and mosques by the priests and nothing really happens till another similar incident takes place. In an attempt to stop such killings, education is the key and every child in similar households should be taught to respect not only women but each member of the house hold and respect life in general. A mother needs to play an important role in

decision making for the children. If bearing is a woman's responsibility, so should be rearing and providing direction. In the Shafia case, it is clear that the son Hamid was given an important role in the decision of the lives of his sisters to the extent that he who had control whether his sisters should live or not. And his role in their killing is a major one. Tooba Yahya may be an unwanted accomplice but had no say when her overbearing husband was talking. Yet, her role cannot be ignored as she was in the capacity to seek help for her daughters. But as per the norms of her community, she remained a mute spectator who dare not oppose her husband yet let her daughters die. A sad scenario yet it will take years maybe a generation before it can be completely stopped. For centuries, honour is an excuse used to commit violence against women. Any community where violence against the fairer sex is acceptable, such killings will continue.