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‘DS View’, an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write short academic essays on the Development discourse, aims to generate discussion on issues concurrent to the times we are living in. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The essay for DS View can be expository, argumentative, persuasive or analytical.

The topic of eighth DS View is **‘Honour Killings in Pakistan’** authored by Salma Yaqoob

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Honour Killings in Pakistan

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Pakistan has been in widespread attention due to rampant killings to save the honour of family. The more recent incidents have ignited the flurry of debates on this horrendous act. Zeenat Rafiq, 18, was burned, on June 8, 2016 by her mother because she married against her consent and brought shame to family. On May 31, 2016 a 19 year old school teacher was excruciated and burned to death, by the member of her family, on refusing an arranged marriage proposal. Another case of honour killing in Abbottabad, took the life of Amber, 16, on accusation of helping her friend to elope and marry of her own choice.

Every year hundred of women and girls are lynched by their family members or their lovers for the sake of honour. The statistics compiled by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan from February 2014 to February 2016 show that 1,216 cases of honour killings were registered in this period. Overwhelming, majority of women were killed by their husbands followed by siblings and parents, which shows that murderer is mostly a victim's close relative. The question that becomes pertinent here is that why women become victim of honour killing in our society? To understand this, we have to look at gender relations which are one of the organising principles of any society. The main perceptions regarding gender relations that creep in our society are that women are subordinated to men and men's honour ensues from control on her actions and body implying that men have the power to do so. Thus, maintaining family honour is the responsibility of women, and honour is the prerogative of men. It is he who possesses *zan*, *zar*, *zameen*¹. To ensure this, several restrictions are placed on women such as her mobility; she is covered in *purdah*², and allowed only limited space to connect with outside world, particularly with opposite gender.

The term 'honour' applies differently to both genders. A simple definition of honour killing is defined by Maliha Zia in a report for Aurat Foundation, 'honour killing refers to the killing or harm inflicted upon women to regain lost honour'. Knudsen (2004) asserts that honour killing is an imprecise term for murder, and defines it as a ritualised form of violence, most often, if not always, directed at female victims. What is the reason that triggers honour killing in Pakistan? To answer this question, Chesler and Bloom (2012) have identified three motivations which are widely attributed to honour killing in Pakistan, namely, illicit relationship, contamination by association, and immoral character. According to their findings, the ratio of honour killing for marrying or having a relationship outside one's own caste is low (only 4 per cent).

Family status is dependent symbolically on female virginity. The empirical knowledge on honour killings asserts that women virginity is the property of men, first to father, later a gift to her husband. This idea of women's virginity as men's property implies that woman is a commodity which a man can own, buy or sell. An extension to this argument is that the notion of women as property necessitates the role of man to protect her under any circumstances. Therefore, women's *izzat* (honour), contingent upon virginity, is protected by a network of family, and moving beyond this boundary means paying off with life. Lari (2011) points out that by exercising freedom, women challenge the social order, and ownership claims of others to her body. A slight doubt on her involvement, in premarital or extramarital relationship, leads to loss in her value, and therefore her right to life.

Patriarchal understanding of controlling women in our society is also very common. It is often argued that a man will be considered respected, only when he is able to control the sexuality

¹ Woman, gold, land

² Veil

of a woman, and dictates her behaviour. Besides all cultural and traditional factors which decide the ideal behaviour of men and women, and their conception of honour, economic motives are also palpable in honour killings which include, marrying women within a family to ensure property remains in a family,

Another theoretical proposition asserts that homicide in case of adultery is excused on the pretext that emotional response resulting in such circumstances is beyond the control of men, who are also considered victims of circumstance. This argument is parallel to the cultural construction of male identity which links masculinity with aggression. Religion also plays its role in legitimising this practice, although Islam does not explicitly encourage it. As mentioned earlier majority of honour killing crimes are committed on allegation of adultery, which is punishable by death in Shariah.

In a nutshell, the concept of honour killing is underpinned by gender classification and role assignment, obsolete traditions, economic motives, patriarchy, and religion. Lindsey (2010) has analysed gender roles in her book *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*. She says that in patriarchal societies, women are demoted to reproductive and caregiver roles, whereas, men have the responsibility to provide for family. This creates demarcation between public and private spheres, where women only belong to private sphere and men belong to public sphere. This bifurcation of public and private space for both genders is clearly visible in Pakistan. It also explains why so many women are lynched in the name of honour.

To address this sordid act of honour crimes prevalent in society, we have to move beyond policies pertaining to human rights. What needs comprehension are the invisible structures of society, responsible for women's positionality and status, such as socialised norms, discourse, and cultural practices. These invisible structures are so deeply ingrained in the minds of women that they themselves accept their subordination and circumscribe their existence to male's protectiveness. Therefore, change is required at this level of informal structures which throw the identity of a woman as an individual in back alley and make her an object worthy of possession. Women's agency need to be activated to get out of, what Marx called, false consciousness. Zakaria (2016) rightly says that awareness and grassroot level efforts are required to change the concept that family, honour, and survival are intertwined, and killing is justified because it saved the honour of the rest from tarnishing. We have to understand that woman is not a commodity, which could be bought or sold, to compensate for killing or setting of disputes, or killed because she disgraced family's honour. If the concept of honour is so context based and ephemeral, then we have to get rid of apologetic approach to this scourge. Reforms are not possible unless society does not accept social change and stressful transition.

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