



A brief guide to
Honour Based Violence

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Nothing to do with Sikhs? Taking responsibility for inequality.

When a baby girl is born within the Sikh community, it is often the child's mother and aunties who are the first to say, "never mind, maybe next time". Within Punjabi culture, girls are often brought up as inferior to boys and are sometimes treated like commodities. Many girls are emotionally or physically forced into marriage. Ultimately, some girls have appalling crimes committed against them. Some are killed.

The Metropolitan Police Sikh Association (MPSA) Community Engagement Team (CET) strives to prevent crimes against women and to bring offenders to justice. There are many organisations and individuals that raise awareness and provide support to those women at risk of violence.

The MPSA seeks to enhance cohesion in the fight for equality. We encourage others to join us.

Females continue to be murdered because there is a perception that they have brought dishonour to the family and/or community. These murders must stop.

I am aware that we face many difficulties. One of them is that many within our community do not wish to take responsibility for this problem. Beyond mere acquiescence lies acceptance and even authority for these crimes to be committed. I urge Sikhs to come forward and challenge injustice faced by women. It is necessary that the Sikh civilisation challenges the elements of Punjabi culture that oppose egalitarian values. But community action alone is not sufficient, inaction of various public bodies, including the police, needs to be challenged.

Political correctness, ignorance and institutionalised racism are not tolerated by the MPSA. Positive action is required by public bodies to prevent these crimes. The authorities must bring all offenders to justice, regardless if perpetrators remain abroad. The MPSA will challenge any reluctance by the authorities to deliver justice.

Please contact the MPSA or one of our partners listed on page 24 if:

- You feel that you are at risk of violence
- You have information about a violent or 'honour' related crime
- You would like to help us
- You are already involved in championing women's rights

The MPSA may well have been the first Sikh organisation, that is not all female, to publicly condemn crimes against women. Others have since joined us. I urge other organisations and individuals to stand up and take responsibility for the discrimination and violence against women.

(Mukhtiar Singh is the MPSA Chairperson; he is also the Head of the MPSA's CET. He is a Detective Inspector of 18 years service, having worked within the homicide command, and is the author of 'Honour' killing reports to the Association of Chief Police Officers).

Violence against Women



Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.'

(UN Secretary General Kofi Annan)

Violence against women (VAW) is not a new phenomenon, nor is it specific to any one part of the world. As the UN declaration (1993) states, "it is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men...it is the essential and ultimate social mechanism by which women are forced into subordination position." Violence against women is rooted in the assumption that women are the property of men. This attitude is prevalent across the globe, and is reinforced both by customary practices and, in certain countries, by the legal system itself. And yet, while the global community has increasingly begun to recognise the importance of women's rights and the need to alleviate the injustices they face, gender-based violence has paradoxically been on the rise in South Asian communities. Women in these communities are the most vulnerable to violations of their rights to life, liberty and security of person.

By analysing the lists of women murdered in the UK over the last ten years in the name of 'honour', it becomes clear that some men, and even some women, feel entitled to kill those women they see as having disempowered men by defying male authority..

So-called 'honour' killings, just like rape, are a form of terrorism that functions to define gender lines, to express and further define male dominance, and to render all women chronically and profoundly unsafe. Gill (2007) argues that 'honour' is used as distorted rationale for violence against women, including their murder, in much of the world. She states that a pattern of family 'honour killings' is evident in Latin American and Mediterranean societies, amongst communities in the Middle East and parts of South Asia, and in various communities originating within the Indian sub-continent, including the Sikh community in the UK. She suggests that the "pattern of 'honour' crimes does not seem to be confined to any particularly type of society, or to any consistent stratum or religion" (8). The use of 'honour' in these contexts is focused both on the control of female behaviour and on the shame that the loss of such control brings to the woman's family, within the context of larger community enforcement. The traditional concept of 'honour killings' is rooted in the perception that women are the property of male members of the family, and so it is the 'honour' of these men that is affected if women - their 'goods' - violate cultural codes or social norms, or if they are defiled.

Strategies to address violence against women in the name of 'honour'

1. Obtain a genuine commitment to action from all levels of society (i.e., from the state, public support agencies, the community and the individual), which is required in order to develop preventative and interventional structures designed to end all forms of violence against women.
2. Ensure that all agencies situate this problem within the wider framework of violence against women (VAW). This is important, because it will then offer an insight into the structural manifestations of such brutal forms of VAW. In recent years the approach to response and intervention has been incoherent, and the understanding of the contexts and consequences of this violence by the criminal justice system has been inconsistent. This is a serious form of discrimination, and a violation of women's rights, and should not be tolerated under any circumstances.
3. Guarantee greater acceptance of the testimony of a victim who reports that she has been threatened with an 'honour' killing by her family. This requires understanding how women relate to their experiences, how they respond to violence, where they go for help, what happens when they ask for help, and how effective that help is.

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4. Confirm that effective legislation, both national and international, exists to punish all forms of crime committed in the name of 'honour', including forced marriage, and guarantees that all reports of violence and/or abuse will be taken seriously, investigated robustly and acted upon promptly, even when family or community leaders attempt to justify these crimes (Gill, 2004).

(Dr. Aisha Gill is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Roehampton University. She is currently the Chair of Newham Asian Women's Project, a management committee member of Imkaan (a second-tier national VAW charity), member of Liberty's Project Advisory Group and 'End Violence Against Women' group (EVAW). Gill is also author of several journal articles on violence against women in Black and Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BMER) communities in the UK).



The Sikh Religion's perspective on women



Sikhcentralism - v - Punjabicentralism

It is apparent to those with any knowledge of Punjab's history and culture that there are fundamental differences between Sikh teachings and some of the less enlightened social practices on the sub continent. This is particularly noticeable in attitudes to the status of women in society, and I will deal with them separately.

Background

Around the time of the birth of the Sikh Guru; Nanak in 1469AD, in Punjab, India as in other parts of the sub continent, it was customary to discriminate against women, (regardless of caste). This discrimination was far greater than that experienced by some women in 21st Century Western Society. In 15th Century Indian society, female infanticide was all too common. Dowry was a massive burden on the bride's parents and murdering daughters, if dowry could not be amassed was common practice. Sati, the voluntary/involuntary burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband was encouraged by society. The status of women was low; references would be made to women as 'having her brain in her ankles'. Women were not eligible for any social positions, and declared to be intrinsically impure and unfit, therefore ineligible to listen to sacred texts and religious sermons.

Guru Nanak's condemnation of discrimination against women

Guru Nanak directly challenged the existing discrimination. He did this by liberating all women, declaring equality between men and women for the first time in Indian Society. His teachings were against rituals or customs that discriminated against women. He did not consider women in any way impure and/or evil, and his teachings reinforced this. He recorded many bold compositions in praise of women:

"Of woman are we born, of woman conceived; to woman engaged, to woman married. Women are befriended, by woman is the civilisation continued. When woman dies, woman is sought for. It is by woman that the entire social order is maintained. Then why call her evil of whom great men are born?"
(Asa ki Var, Guru Granth Sahib).

To ensure equal status for women, the Guru made no distinction between the sexes in matters of initiation, instruction or participation in congregation. The Sikh Guru's forbade female infanticide in their code of conduct for Sikhs, prohibiting Sikhs from having any contact or relationship with those who indulge in this practise:

"With the slayers of daughters. Whosoever has social contact; him do I curse!"

And again,

"Whosoever takes food from the slayers of daughters, Shall die unabsolved" (Guru Gobind Singh, Rehat nameh, pp.385. Cunningham, J.D. History of the Sikhs. 1st Publ: 1849).

The Sikh Religion's perspective on women *continued*

Long before Lord William Bentick declared Sati illegal (Madras Regulation 1 of 1829 Bengal), the 3rd Sikh Guru made a seminal pronouncement by annulling the draconic requirement of the cremation of the living wife on her husbands funeral pyre. He also encouraged widow re-marriage:

*"A virtuous wife is not one who burns
Herself alive with her dead husband.
She, indeed, would be a sati who dies through
Shock of separation. But, says Nanak, a
True Sati is she who bears the shock of
Separation with courage and lives her natural
Span of life in a disciplined, dignified and virtuous
manner."* (Guru Granth Sahib, pp. 787)

Long before today's move to equality, Sikhism postulated equality between the sexes and the promotion of an egalitarian society. The Sikh Guru's abolished the need for dowries, and over 400 years ago appointed and ordained a large number of women preachers, and that at least one woman was ordained and appointed as a Sikh bishop; Mathura Devi.

The Sikh stance is a remarkable phenomenon in the history of world-religions and marks a new insight into the innate capacities of women in relation to the highest spheres of human activity.

"It was Guru Nanak who, for the first time, in the history of India, and for the first time in the history of the world, perceived that there can be no enduring democratic culture unless grounded in unreserved recognition of the full equality of woman and man." (pp.77. Singh, Kapur. *Guru Nanak's Life and Thought*, GNDU, 1991)



The Punjabi Culture - on women

As we have observed the Sikh Religious stance on this issue is unique, however, there is a conflict between the high values of this Religion and what is actually practised by some Punjabi Sikhs. The conflict here is one of Sikh theory challenging demeaning social practices. In the Punjab, female infanticide is still sadly a real problem. There are recorded figures which illustrate a disparity in male/female birth rates, with the Punjab having a strangely and irregular higher male than female birth-ratio. Modern techniques are sometimes used to abort female foetuses, a new form of female infanticide. Baser social practices find new ways of circumventing more enlightened thinking. Laws against dowries have been enacted but are usually not enforced by Indian Governments, father's and father's-in-law still occasionally murder daughters if dowry is lacking. As for Sati; *"Such is the pull and thrill of the mystique of sati.... that the practise has staged a nostalgic comeback here and there, after the British left India in 1947"* (pp.46, Me Judice, Singh, Kapur. CSJS, 2003).

Regardless of the high ideals of the Sikh Guru's, individuals choose when it suits them to digress from these values reverting back to their ancient Punjabi past, (which existed for thousands of years prior to the advent of Sikhism). Daughter-in-laws often suffer at the hands of mother-in-laws.

In Punjab, like other parts of India, news headlines of women being killed in suspicious circumstances are quite common.

What also must be borne in mind by observers and practitioners is that each person, is a Sikh by religion and Punjabi by culture, and has this dual role.

Invariably, as in the context here, these can severely clash. Religion and religious values can be discarded by choice; Punjabi/Indian culture can often be more ingrained.

Most Semitic religions are able to divorce women within the constraints of their faith. Sikhism emphasises the sanctity of marriage, but a marriage can be annulled through a country's legal system. The failure of a marriage is more difficult to accept than in modern western society, and there can be greater repercussions in attitudes to bitterness and shame. Occasionally these can assume unacceptable forms of behaviour.

What the Sikh Religion and Punjabi culture have in common is abhorrence of female genital mutilation; however, there is a massive gulf separating the teachings of the Sikh religion versus the Punjabi/Indian culture in attitudes to:

- Female infanticide
- Female only abortions
- Sati
- Dowry
- So-called 'honour' killings.

The Punjabi Culture - on women *continued*

Again, Punjabi's and Sikh's are both very honourable, proud and strong-minded families who are generally law abiding and a credit to society.

Occasionally however baser passions condemned by religious teaching sometimes come to the fore, bringing disgrace not only to those concerned, but also to the society to which those responsible belong.

(Palbinder Singh is the General Secretary of the Metropolitan Police Sikh Association, and Head of the Frequently Asked Questions Team. Dr. Indarjit Singh OBE. JP. is the Director of Network of Sikh Organisations and editor of the Sikh Messenger. The MPSA is affiliated to the NSO, and Palbinder Singh sits on its executive as a co-opted member representing the MPSA).



Sikh Women's Alliance



Our founder Guru Nanak Dev Ji gave us Sikh women full equality and got rid of customs such as purdah (veil), sati (widow burning on husband's funeral pyre) and spoke against the practice of female infanticide (killing of girl babies). However, it is sad to see how in the 21st century, religion and cultural values are being used to oppress women and old traditions are being revived which effectively devalue a woman or girl child to second class status. Many Sikh women lead parallel lives – one at school or work under western values, and the other a traditional life at home behind closed doors. Fortunately most of the Sikh community are liberal minded individuals but there are some still stuck in a time warp embedded in redundant rituals and confused cultural ideology. Frequently it is women themselves who oppress other women expected to abdicate their own individuality and conform to the husband's family values and norms.

Even in today's enlightened equality times, baby boys are preferred by many Sikh families and the celebrations at the birth of son's is evidence of that trend. It is distressing to hear regular news of girl babies being aborted and dumped in Punjab, and the evidence that the girl ratio is going down to 70 compared to 100 boys. This is the same land where at one time in history, the Sikh warriors fought for the women's honour and protected them. Guru Gobind Singh, our tenth Guru had proclaimed that 'whosoever takes food from the slayers of daughters, shall die unabsolved'.

Violence against Women

Today's Sikh weddings are not all sparkle and dazzle; there is a darker side to the lavish wedding. With second/third generation families becoming more prosperous over the last two decades, every family is trying to outdo each other in a great race for a wealthy status. Sociologists are worried that spending astronomical sums on weddings fuels social evils like female infanticide, marriage breakdowns, suicides and murders.

Rituals such as Lohri, Rakhri, Karva Chauth Varat, expensive wedding gifts, including Dowry etc - effectively elevate men to a higher status and women to a subservient level, thus the community seeing girls as a burden. Due to clash of expectations, financial problems, alcohol misuse, drug abuse and mental illnesses, one in four marriages is breaking down, leading to ensuing family feuds where it is easy to get rid of the woman, than lose the house and the children

Sikh Women's Alliance U.K.

Sikh Women's Alliance was officially launched in October 2003 as a non-religious non-political voluntary group with the aim of empowering, inspiring and educating Sikh women to join the mainstream of society. Since then, we have organised three major Conferences and numerous events and also given 'Sikh Woman of Substance' awards to prominent Sikh women. We work in partnership with like-minded organisations that are supporting Sikh women to become School Governors, Councillors, Magistrates, Judges, Members of Parliament, Business Directors, and Media personalities in top-level professions.

Sikh Women's Alliance

Police Responsibilities

We thank the Metropolitan Police Sikh Association for their support and appreciate the difficult work the Police have to undertake helping Sikh women whilst balancing the community's sensitivities. Although there are some women who for several reasons will be unable to support a prosecution and the legal processes but wish to see a change in their partners behaviour, the Police need to be aware that these women will eventually get to the end of their tether and at some stage they will want the police to take assertive action. They will also need the security and welfare of the children protected as well as the end of the partner's abuse.

Government's Responsibilities

What the Sikhs need from the Government is to be recognised as a distinct group and religiously monitored, so that public authorities are aware of the problems and needs of the Sikh women and services are provided for this group of people with their distinct identity and appearance. Sikh Women's Alliance would prefer to see a U.K. wide major Sikh culturally sensitive project being set up where women are trained in counselling skills so that they can provide empathy and mediation support to couples and families, so that marriages and lives can be saved.

Gurdwara Responsibilities

Gurdwara's have a duty to ensure that gender equality is upheld in these great institutions of Sikh faith in accordance with the Sikh Guru's proclamations. However, they are afraid to speak out and many of them actively collude in the devaluing of females, as most of their income derives from people celebrating births of boys. The majority of the Gurdwara's are run by management committees consisting of patriarchal men-folk not willing to train or mentor women who are under-represented in their congregations. These Gurdwara's need to start actively defending their women congregation and enforce the Guru's teachings - on Equality.

Sikh Women's Alliance salutes the courage of Sikh men and women who face discrimination whilst seeking justice. We should all join hands and oppose all those who directly or indirectly discriminate against women and imprison them in rituals and traditions that treat them as the inferior gender.

(Mrs Balvinder Kaur Saund is the Chairperson of the SWA. She is also a J.P. She has been awarded an honorary degree at the University of East London in 2007 for her services to society. She is the inaugural winner of the Shri Mata Gujari Award).



“our organisation recognises similarities and understands differences of each belief and value system; whether one agrees, or disagrees with certain aspects of that system; cultural intelligence leads to a greater tolerance, acceptance, respect, better communication and understanding ...”

Rani Bilkhu Cultural Insight – 2006

Cultural Insight (UK) Ltd works to develop greater cultural & religious awareness, through training and consultancy; Cultural Intelligence, giving a better understanding and recognition of cultural similarities and a unique understanding of the cultural differences in all organisations & sectors including corporate, statutory or voluntary.

Working with Cultural Insight (UK) Ltd helps you to attract, recruit and retain a productive, motivated, effective and diverse workforce in the modern employment market and therefore helps raise understanding of different cultural backgrounds in the workforce in order to maintain morale and positive work environment for your staff therefore increasing productivity and an organisational success. Each community; Sikh, Hindu or Muslim have varying challenges, protocols and needs, Cultural Insight empowers delegates with key issues/skills in order to deal with each community effectively. Whereby front line staff can take Cultural Sensitivity into account but not hinder their professional judgement in any given situation.



Cultural Insight delivers training in; Asians and Disability, Positive Engagement, Asians and Mental Health, Asians and Legislation and bespoke. Cultural Insight has developed a unique course 'Violence in Honour Killings' with the aid of The Metropolitan Police.

The world as we know it moving and changing at a pace that is alarming, challenging and invigorating and as Globalisation occurs, old and familiar certainties are being lost and new questions and challenges are arising constantly.

This proved particularly challenging for second- and third-generation members of women from the Asian communities who found it difficult to find a place that acknowledged or rewarded their new, often hybrid, senses of identity and alienation often ensued Cultural influence and mixture has etched itself into the fabric of a women's life in Britain today. The impulse to indulge curiosity embrace the new, are tempered by the fear of losing touch, control, respect and honour and respect by the first generation the vain desire to 'control women' is the one of the most apparent, topical and underlying fact of these so called 'honour Killing'.

One in four Asian women are more likely to self harm and commit suicide according to statistics, abuse both psychological and physical occurs not only from males; husbands/fathers/brothers but also from females; mother-in-laws/sister-in-laws and the extended family or clan.



The Sikh Human Rights Group was formed nearly 25 years ago as a result of Human Rights Violations in Panjab, India. It was decided in 2005 that the group will take on a new project of addressing the issues of gender inequalities in light of growing concerns over the decline of the birth of baby girls in Panjab and the consequences of this.

The sex ratio gap is widening. In order to curb infant mortality rates, deaths in labour, deaths of expectant mothers as a result of quack medical advice, high rates of baby girls being left abandoned and unclaimed, dowry deaths, suicide, depression, polygamy, child marriages, and other such injustices against the female that start from before her birth. SHRG work to raise awareness that such issues are taking place even today. Support should be made available to those that are encouraged and pressurised to have sons.

SHRG tackles gender inequality - specifically, foeticide and infanticide. Foeticide is the term used to describe the action of killing of the female foetus; infanticide is the killing of the baby girl after birth. The problem is widespread in India and as a result is mirrored in the foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada and other places where first and second generation Indians reside.



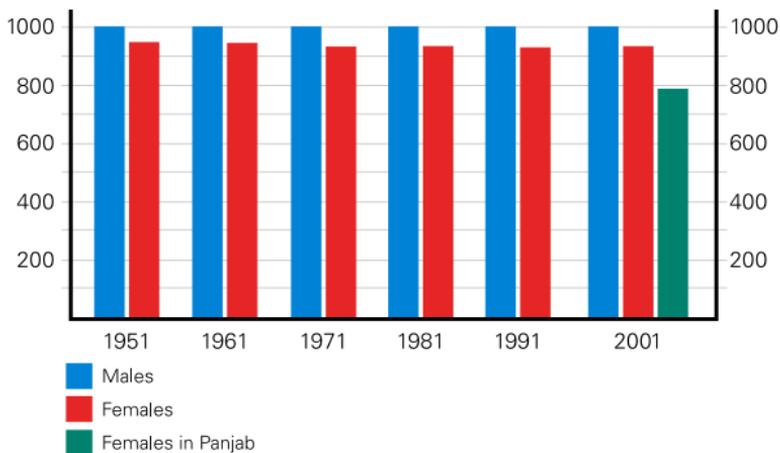
This particular project will address foeticide, infanticide and gender inequalities under the wider umbrella of violence against women. The focus will remain within the Sikh community with research into other nationalities for background research purposes.

It is widely believed that non-Indian residents are returning to India for easily accessible sex determination testing and abortions, despite these acts being illegal in India.

Legislative history: In 1971 abortions were legalised under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in India. Indian citizens took advantage of this law by aborting their female foetuses. In 1994 the Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PNDT) was passed and it became illegal to have conduct or undergo pre-sex determination testing to assess the gender of the foetus. Hence it was made illegal for Doctors and Sonographers' to disclose the gender of the unborn child to the parents, unless for assessment of foetal abnormality.

Convictions are low throughout India, despite the government's attempts to bring about social and cultural reforms.

The last formal statistics collated through the Indian Census of 2001 reveal the sex ratio of females per 1,000 males is:



The worst affected State within India is Panjab. The last recorded statistics are of 793 females born to 1,000 males; followed closely by Haryana with a sex ratio of 830 to 1,000; Chandigarh with 845, Delhi 865 and Gujarat with 878 females per 1,000 males.

Punjab - the home to many Sikh shrines - displays the biggest problems

"From a temporal and spiritual point of view, Woman is half man's body and assists him to the door of final liberation" - Bhai Gurdass Ji, Vaar 5, Pauri 16

(Kiran Kaur, Independent Human Resources Consultant, works for the Sikh Human Rights Group on a voluntary basis and has spent the last 3 years devoted to researching gender inequality in Punjab and amongst Sikhs in particular. Regular speaker in British media, NGO seminars, briefings to Government personnel).

A glimpse of Sikh history

Speech in Lok Sabha [Indian Parliament]

November 17, 1965

Hon'ble Shri Kapur Singh MP:

"When this battle was lost [third battle of Panipat, 14th January 1761, when Marathas faced the Afgan invader, Ahmed Shah Abdali], it was one of the most unfortunate events of Indian history. About 5,000 Maratha women of the highest Brahmin caste and of princely classes fell into the hands of the Abdali. He stayed there at Panipat for many weeks and he made this specific offer that, if proper ransom could be given to rescue those women, he was prepared to let them go. Nobody came forward with ransom. And then these women were taken by the invader to Afganistan. When the Sikhs came to know of it, and although they were not well organised, they fell upon the invader at the river crossing at Goindwal of Beas river and rescued as many as 2,200 young women. The Khalsa horsemen delivered each Maratha sister safely to her home in Maharashtra, thousands of miles away. The women rode all the way on their horses while the Sikhs were content to walk alongside.

In European equivalences it means, Germans rescuing Russian women from Saracans in Paris and restoring them in Moscow.

Cunningham, in his History, calls it as "the greatest act of chivalry in the East." Perhaps, it is the greatest act of chivalry in the world's history."

Who can help?

Police in an emergency	999
Metropolitan Police Sikh Association	020 7230 0141 Sikh.Association @met.police.uk www.sikhpolice.org
National Domestic Violence Helpline	0808 200 0247
NSPCC Child Protection Helpline	0808 800 5000
Honour Network Helpline	0800 5999 247
Karma Nirvana	01332 347315
DCI Brent Hyatt	07748 704087
Asian Family Counselling Session	020 8571 3933
Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Org.	020 7920 6460
Forced Marriage Unit	020 7008 0151 020 7008 1500 fmu@fco.gov.uk
Childline	0800 1111
Southall Black Sisters	020 8571 9595
Newham Asian Womens Project	020 8472 0528
Ashiana Network (London)	020 8539 0427
Ashiana Network (Sheffield)	0114 255 5740
Henna Foundation (Cardiff)	029 2049 6920
Rights of Women	020 7251 6575
Sikh Women's Alliance	020 8599 9736 07960 987 825
Shakti Women's Aid (Edinburgh)	0131 475 2399
Roshini Women's Aid (Nottingham)	0115 988 1414
Cultural Insight UK	0870 850 5734

*Whosoever takes food from
the slayers of daughters,
Shall die unabsolved -*

Guru Gobind Singh