



HONOUR KILLINGS AND KERALA

Mohammed Shafeer .K.P

KMCT Group of Educational Institutions. Pazhoor (P.O), Kuttippuram, Malappuram, Kerala.

Abstract

Kerala is bestowed with lush greenery and elegant flora and fauna, which gave the title 'God's on Country'. The growth of the state and the advancement in the field of science and technology enhanced the range of human resource and intellect of the people. The cent- percent literacy and the unquenchable thirst for knowledge and experience helped the people soar to the differ realms of the universe to mark their trace wherever they went. The literacy helped them to react to the problems of the society and the world. The awareness about the problems in the society and the world produced quick reactions against the reverberations in the harmonious life. This awareness helped the Keralites to wipe out the evils of caste system and feudalism from the Kerala soil. Thought the glimpses of the caste consciousness sprouts from the remote nooks and corners of Kerala and is implicit in the Kerala life, the evil is eradicated from the soil with all its manifestations. Along with the eradication of the caste system many offspring of the catastrophe were nipped in the bud. Among them is the evil of honour killing. While most of the states were is chaos with the effective involvement of the Supreme Court to curb the evil Kerala was safe with the minimum number of honour killings. Question arises at the absence or minimum number of honour killings in Kerala. So, there is growing need to investigate the reasons behind this attitude. This paper tries to analyse the reasons behind the minimum number of honour killings in Kerala state.

Keywords: Kerala, literacy, social awareness, honour killing, caste discrimination



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Paper

Kerala holds a peculiar place in the demography and the cultural heritage of the country. Kerala is bestowed with exquisite elegance flora and fauna which gained it the title of 'God's Own Country'. The divine power had created the land with all glory to make it the best place for sustenance. The land is blessed with excellent climatic conditions and flourishing vegetation and greenery. The rivers and water bodies carried lives to the nature as the veins of the mainland. The rich human and natural resources helped the people to enjoy the gift of the nature to the fullest. But the development of a land is not only depended on the gifted resources of the nature but also on the mindset of the people of the land. Development of the land is the product of both the abstract and the concrete resources of the nature. A land

cannot fulfil the thirst for development unless the concrete natural resources blended with the intellect and mindset of the people. The soil, water and climate of a land must be blended with the intellectual ability, hard work and knowledge of the people to attain development. The Kerala people or Keralites are famous for their intellectual ability and unquenchable thirst for knowledge and experience. Thus, Kerala became the pioneers in the attainment of cent percent literacy in the nation. Literacy helped Keralites to know about the problems of the world and the society. The yoking of knowledge with experience made the people to react to the problems of the society and the world. This attitude towards the impulses of the world brought about revolutionary changes in the soul and soil of the mainland.

The richness in the knowledge and experience and the awareness about the social political and economic conditions of the nation created a strong anti colonial mindset among the people. The resistance against the atrocities of the colonial powers and the urge to break the shackles of slavery are written in the golden pages of evergreen history. The anti colonial struggle gave birth to many freedom fighters who kindled the flames of freedom struggle among the common folk. The leaders not only exhorted the people to take part in the freedom movement but also guided them to the path of acquiring knowledge. Freedom, for them, was not confined to the wiping out of the imperialists from the soil. But freedom meant the liberation from the evils which the colonizers imposed on the land and the evils sprouted from within the soil from the evil minds. So freedom aimed at the wiping out of the caste system and the dirty feudalism from the land.

With attainment of freedom social reformers sprouted from the nooks and corners of the Kerala soil to purify the people from the colonization of the mind. The advent of communism and the tireless struggle of social reformers like V T Bhattathirippad, EMS Nampoothiripad, K.Kelappan, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Vakkom Abdulkader the dirty caste system and feudalism tasted its last breathe. Feudalism and caste system was eradicated from the Kerala soil with the help of legislation. The condition of the women and the discriminations based on caste, gender and creed began to diminish and a new era began to flourish in the mainland of Kerala. The lower castes who were abstained from the attainment of education and freedom of travel and expression breathed the new air of reformation. The women folk who were chained to the suffocations of the inner corners of the households shattered the shackles of confinement and enjoyed the fresh air of freedom and relaxation.

It is this background which helped the Kerala soil to be free from the social problems which affected most of the states in the country. Honour killing is such a social evil which disturbed most of the states in India. While the northern and southern states suffocated in the

fumes of the problem of honour killing, Kerala is free from the disturbances of the evil. Even the Supreme Court intruded in the issue when the authorities of the states failed to curb it. According to Human Rights Watch :

“Honor killing are acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce - even from an abusive husband- or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that woman has behaved in a way that “dishonors” her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life”.

But in the Indian context there are many factors behind the crime of honour killing. The religious fanaticism, caste discrimination, the involvement of the ‘ghat panchayaths’, the passive, biased, corrupt authorities and the misinterpretations of the religious scriptures play a vital role in the dissemination of the evil. “Honour crime is performed with the intend of limiting the psychological and physical freedom of women”(House of Commons, 2008, page 289). The analysis of these factors and reasons behind honour killing reveals that most of the key factors are absent or minimum in the Kerala soil. The ghat panchayaths, which plays a vital role in the enactment of law and order and defining ‘honour’ in most of the rural areas in India is absent in the Kerala state. The verdict of the ghat panchayaths will be biased depending on the caste of the victim. Caste determines everything in these bodies and the higher caste men will be the sole authority in the system. There are many cases in Indian rural areas where the victims are penalised for the crime acquitting the convict. The literate Kerala people never encouraged the supremacy of the bodies like ghat panchayaths and their knowledge and experience helped them to take decisions in the crises. The eradication of the caste system and discrimination helped to keep away from the evil. Though caste consciousness lives in the minds of some traditional Keralites, the discrimination and ill-treatment based on caste are considered to be the serious crimes in the soil.

The relationship of the Kerala people with the outside world created a mind of tolerance towards the fellow religions of the world. Even in the ancient times the Arab world was attracted towards the ‘black gold’ and they engaged in trade with Keralites. The exchange of men and matters created the cultural interchange which brought about a new culture of religious tolerance in the land. With the discovery of oil in the gulf region Keralites flowed to the gulf to earn a living. Even in the modern world many Keralites are making both ends meet with the income from the gulf region. The money from the gulf countries became the

backbone of the Kerala economy. Along with the Arab dirham and dinar Arab culture flowed to soil. Though the religious harmony is not hole heartedly welcoming the intercaste and inter religious marriages but the society tolerates it and abides from the extremes of killing the member of a family. The people are not blind in dealing with matters and issues concerning caste and religion as the use of intelligence and commonsense acquired from the outside world helps them to take effective stance. Religious and language fanaticism find the soil sterile to spread its roots and foliage in the 'God's Own Country'.

The misinterpretation of the religious scriptures by the crooked minds and fraud apostles of religion encouraged gender based discrimination and forced the women folk confine to the dark inner corners of the households. For them women is the symbol of dignity and "Honour is generally seen as residing in the bodies of women". (Coomaraswamy, 2005, page 11). But the involvement of the social reformers like Sanaullah Magdi Thangal, Sree Narayana Guru and Swami Vivekanada uprooted the gender based discriminations and encouraged the women to pursue higher education and employment. Education and employment helped them to realise their value in the society and the fact that they are the victims of discrimination and many superstitions. In the contemporary Kerala society most of the families are controlled by the women folk as most of their men are working abroad. The consent of the girl for marriage and the right for divorce are enforced by legislation. The minimum age for marriage and the law against domestic violence strengthened the rights of women in the society. This situation proclaims that they will not bring any dishonour to the family, religion or caste.

Kerala is not free from the disturbances of adultery, illicit relationships, extra marital relationships and homosexuality. Though domestic violence prevail in Kerala "... honour crimes differ from domestic violence in several significant ways, and pose special problems for the criminal justice system. They are usually planned in advance and often involve fathers, uncles and brothers acting together to enforce strict code of conduct, with varying degrees of approval from other family members" (Smith, 2012, page 5). But all these are considered to be a blemish on the character of the individual rather than bringing dishonour to the religion, community, caste or family. Though the fundamentalist and communalist minority try infuriating the folk manipulating the faults of the individuals affecting the reputation and dignity of the community, religion, caste or family, the Kerala soil found all these as fragile manipulations. They are discarded by the politically aware majority as the propaganda of crooked minds trying to establish the fundamentalist, communal

agenda. Communal and caste politics has so far unsuccessfully tried to spread the ideas of narrow-mindedness in the society.

Kerala society is always vibrant in grasping the reverberations in the society and in reacting to the social issues at the earliest. The group of non-malign politicians and bureaucrats with the help of sensitive media, feminists and uncorrupted authorities have so far managed to keep away the evil of honour killing from spreading its wings in Kerala. All these factors helped Kerala to establish a different status among the fellow states of the country and it became the model for them in almost all genres of human life.

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