Challenges Faced in Preventing Violence against Sikh Women: Contradiction between Patriarchal Indian Culture Verses Gender Equality within Sikh Faith

Domestic Violence in Faith/Spiritual Multicultural Communities Symposium
Monday 23 October 2017,
University of South Australia Adelaide
Ms Jatinder Kaur,
Director of JK Diversity Consultants & Social Worker
Sikh Helpline Australia Board Advisor
Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469 – 1539)

- Guru Nanak Dev Ji set down important beliefs in Sikhism.
  - There is only One God
  - Equality of all, and strongly preached the equality of women
  - To help the needy and poor
  - Truthful living and contribution to humanity

- In order to spread this message Guru Ji took four long journeys in his life time, travelling throughout India and the middle east.
Gender Equality of Women

- The Sikh religion promotes gender equality and this was one of the first teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (founder of Sikhism in 1499)

We are born of woman, we are conceived in the womb of woman.
We make friendship with woman; through woman, future generations are born.
When one woman dies, we take another one, we are bound with the world through woman.
Why should we talk ill of her? From her, kings are born.
From woman, woman is born; without woman, there would be no one at all.
O Nanak, God alone can exist without a woman.
(Guru Nanak in Asa Di Vaar, pg. 473)
The Sikh Guru’s actively promoted and spoke out against social practices within Indian culture, for example: Sati (widow burning)

Third Guru Amardas Ji written the hymn:

```punjabi
ਸਤੀਆ ਏਹਿ ਨ ਅਪਿਆਤੀ ਨੇ ਭਜਿਆ ਲਹਿ ਸਹੀਤੁਤਾ॥

Do not call them 'satee', who burn themselves along with their husbands' corpses.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਤੀਆ ਜਾਣੀਅਹਨਾਹਨ੍ਹਿ ਹਜ਼ਹਿ ਹਰੀੇ ਚੋਟ ਮਰੰਹਨ੍ਹਿ॥੧॥

O Nanak, they alone are known as 'satee', who die from the shock of separation. ||1|| (Ang 787)```
Fourth Guru Ramdas Ji spoke out against the Indian practice of ‘dowry’, as per hymn:

Give me the Lord as my wedding gown, and the Lord as my glory, to accomplish my works.

Through devotional worship to the Lord, this ceremony is made blissful and beautiful; the Guru, the True Guru, has given this gift.

Across the continents, and throughout the Universe, the Lord's Glory is pervading. This gift is not diminished by being diffused among all.

Any other dowry, which the self-willed manmukhs offer for show, is only false egotism and a worthless display.

O my father, please give me the Name of the Lord God as my wedding gift and dowry.
Against dowry system

- Dowry issues exist in many traditional cultures.
- Bride’s family expected to give gold, money, cattle, jewellery, house appliances, car’s, house to groom’s family.
- The bride is expected to be obedient and comply with In-laws and husband expectations.
Against female infanticide

The Sikh Guru’s spoke out against female infanticide and the Sikh Code of Conduct prohibits the association of person who has committed this offence.

“Meenaas, Masandhs, those with haircuts and those who kill their daughters; If a Sikh associates with them, he will not be united with the Lord and will suffer at the time of death”. [Rehatnama – Sikh Code of Conduct]
Role of Women in Sikhism

- Sikh women are given equal status within the Religion to perform: Religious duties, prayers and preach the Sikh faith.
- Women led and fought in battles and held positions of ‘leadership’ – After the death of 10th Sikh Guru, his wife led the Sikh Nation,
- During British Raj – Maharani Jinda (youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) actively fought against British colonial rule and was imprisoned and her son (only heir) was taken from her and send England
- Women can become ‘priests’ and conduct ceremonies within Gurdwara (except baptism ceremony)
- Women play vital role in Langar ‘free kitchen’
- Women can remarry (after becoming widow/divorce)
 Violence against Women in India

- In India – women are treated as liability and low social status: daughter, wife, mother, sister (no status of their own)
- According to a India survey: 39% of men and women in think that it is sometimes or always justifiable for a man to beat his wife.
- Violence against women in India is epidemic– 50% of women have experienced physical and sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner
- National Crime Records Bureau (2015) total of 327,394 cases of crime against women reported – 47% of the cases was protection of women from Domestic Violence
Indian Patriarchal cultural norms

- Indian Sikh wife is treated like “property” and has no Rights leading to husband control within marriage
- Indian Sikh women are taught from young age to show respect to elders and be subservient, not have opinion or seek own needs to be met
- If issues arise Sikh women are told to “accept” abuse from husband and that this is her “karma” (and that it is her fault she can’t make husband/In–laws happy)
- Indian women “forced” to have abortion if it’s a girl despite the Sikh Religion outlawing and State legislation prohibiting this practice
Bend it like Beckham – Young Sikh Girl

Bend it like Beckham – gender stereotypes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqdAluSLB9o
Prevalence of DV Indian – Sikh community

Between 2009 – 2017, 12 Indian victims of family violence who were killed by their husband/father

- Dec 2009 – Manpreet Kaur (Sydney) – SIKH
- May 2012 – Preetika Sharma (Melbourne)
- June 2012 – Anita Phillip (Melbourne)
- June 2012 – Nidhi Sharma (Melbourne)
- Oct 2012 – Sargun Ragi (Melbourne) – SIKH
- Aug 2013 – Sandeep Thind (Sydney) – SIKH
- Dec 2013 – Parwinder Kaur (Sydney) – SIKH
- Dec 2014 – Deepshikka Godara Beniwal (Melbourne)
- Jan 2015 – Nikita Chawla (Melbourne)
- March 2016 – Manjinder Kaur & Sukhwinder Kaur (Gordonvale, North Qld) – SIKH
- March 2017 – Harjit Kaur (Glenwood, Sydney NSW) – SIKH
On 7 June 2012, Chamanjot Singh was sentenced by Justice Peter McClellan for Manslaughter for killing his wife Manpreet Kaur, 29 years old. Mr Singh was given only a six (6) year jail sentence, instead of life sentence in the NSW Supreme Court. Mr Singh admitted to killing his wife by strangling her and then cutting her throat (22 times) with a box cutter in the bedroom of their Westmead home in December 2009.

He claimed that he was not guilty of murder because his wife had provoked him by verbally abusing him (and that she was going to leave him). He told the jury: “I lost it, I had no control of my body or mind”. The jury accepted his plea to the lesser charge of manslaughter and found that he had lost self control as a result of his wife’s statements. During the trial, the Jury heard that there had been series of domestic violence incidents in the lead up to the killing, with friends and relatives observing the victim (Manpreet kaur) with bruises and cuts on her face. Family members of the deceased Manpreet Kaur were outraged that the court accepted the lesser charge of manslaughter for Chamanjot Singh and that the court did not provide any proof that Manpreet provoked the attack and they did not get justice for their sister’s death. ABC news footage 2012

Provocation defence –
This section was repealed and replaced by the Crimes Amendment (Provocation) Act 2014 (NSW) Act No 13 (Assented on 20 May 2014 and commenced on 13 June 2014).

In 2012, Mr Avjit Singh stabbed and killed his wife Sargun Raji and then poured oil over himself and died in house fire.

She had Intervention Order against him and was seeking help from 4 different DV services and Police.

30 October 2015: Coroner Ian Gray released his findings and identified that Victoria Police had failed in their duty of care in recognising the pattern of violence and threats that Sargun was experiencing from her husband.


ABC 7.30 report footage
Parwinder Kaur, 32, died in December 2013 after suffering burns to more than 85 per cent of her body. Parwinder Kaur was fatally burnt outside her home in Rouse Hill. She had called police saying “My husband nearly killed me”. Neighbours heard her screaming, seeing her run out of the house as “ball of fire”, her husband Mr Kulwinder Singh was seen running after her patting, she died the following morning after suffering burns to 85% of her body.

An inquest into her death on 27 November 2015 was suspended on with Deputy State Coroner Sharon Freund saying she is satisfied a "known person" had committed an indictable offence.

16 March 2016: double murder tragedy involving two Punjabi Sikh women: Manjinder Kaur and her mother Sukhwinder Kaur living in Gordonvale (North Qld). Mr Balwinder Ghuman is accused of stabbing his wife and mother in-law. He was drunk at the time and also stabbed his father in law. His 17 year old daughter was witness to the tragedy [as reported on SBS radio].
On 8 March 2017 – Mrs Harjit Kaur adult son found her dead body in the family home in Glenwood (western suburbs of Sydney)
Police have charged her husband Jagdish Singh for murder.
It is believed she had been long term victim of domestic violence and had been living in garage and was trying to separate.
Sikh Helpline Australia

- National Charitable organisation to meet the needs of growing Indian–Sikh community across Australia (100,000)
- When the double murder tragedy occurred in March 2016 I travelled to Gordonvale and provided community counselling in Punjabi to the Sikh community at Sikh Gurdwara
- We lobbied Queensland Government & Minister Shannon Fentiman for funding to enable SHA to deliver community DV education with Sikh community and Professional development workshop in Cairns region.
SHA DV community workshops in Gordonvale & Cairns – May & June 2016
Preventing violence against Sikh Women

- In 2016–17– delivered numerous Domestic violence workshops to build capacity for Professionals to understand cultural complexities of DFV with migrant/refugee communities across Australia.
- Sikh Helpline Australia has organised community education workshops in Punjabi and delivered at Sikh Gurdwaras in: Cairns, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide
- Supporting Indian Sikh DV Victims in counselling, DVO application, court support and prepare Social work report for Immigration Department
- Advocacy – prepare detailed submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria about Indian Sikh women and DV and meeting Ministers to highlight issues facing migrant/refugee women and need for culturally responsive services
Gender Equality

Man is born from a woman; within woman, man is conceived; to a woman he is engaged and married. Man is friends with woman; through woman, the future generations exist. When his woman passes away, he seeks another woman; to a woman a man is bound. So why call her bad? From her, kings are born. From a woman, woman is born; without woman there would be no one at all (Guru Granth Sahib Ji, 473).
QUESTION & ANSWERS

Contact info:
Jatinder Kaur, Mental Health Social Worker
Mob: 0422887579
E: jkaur@jkdiversityconsultants.com.au

Sikh Helpline Australia
Mob: 0401 401 040
E: info@sikhhelpline.com.au
W: www.sikhhelpline.com.au