

WHEN MARRIAGE BECOMES A MOTIVE: MARITAL HOMICIDES, CULTURAL SILENCE, AND LEGAL FAILURE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Marital and romantic entanglements have become one of the leading motives of homicide in India, with NCRB data indicating that one out of every fifteen murders arise from intimate relationships¹ This article explores the disturbing rise of lethal intimacy, using case studies such as the 2024 Telangana homicide and the Indore contract killing to demonstrate how secrecy, cultural stigma, and institutional failures converge into violence. Drawing from sociological data, judicial observations, and comparative frameworks, the article identifies three toxic forces (1) premarital concealment, (2) divorce stigma, and (3) weaponized gender expectations that turn marriage certificates into potential death warrants. Legal institutions exacerbate the crisis through evidentiary lapses, witness intimidation, and procedural delays. Furthermore, rising right-wing cultural narratives have deepened shame around divorce and love marriages, pushing couples toward repression rather than resolution. By engaging comparative reforms from Britain, Canada, and Japan, the article proposes a Marital Safety Bill, stronger witness protection, and cultural reorientation from log kya kahenge? (“what will people say?”) to hum kya kar sakte hain? (“what can we do?”). The argument is urgent: no civilization can claim greatness when its homes become abattoirs and its wedding albums double as murder exhibits.

Keywords – Marital homicide in India, Intimate partner killings, Divorce stigma and violence, Cultural shame, love marriages.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For nearly two decades of legal practice, I have watched the marital bed in India transform into an unethical, immoral Kurukshetra (battlefield). NCRB data confirms the descent: one out of every 10 murders now originate from marital relationships or romantic entanglements, making it one of the most common motives of homicide in India.² This is not merely a statistic; it is the beginning of a cancer cell in the spine of Indian society; a structure once celebrated for its sanctity for thousands of years.

II. Case Studies: When Intimacy Turns Lethal

Two cases from June 2024 illustrate this descent into lethal intimacy. In Nizamabad, Telangana, software engineer Arvind Reddy (name changed) was bludgeoned to death with a dumbbell by his wife after discovering old photographs on her phone.³ According to the FIR, she confessed: “He threatened to tell my parents... I panicked.”

In Indore, Priyanka Sharma (name changed) allegedly arranged her husband’s contract killing using cryptocurrency withdrawals, after he discovered her extramarital affair and filed for divorce.⁴ Investigators noted that she feared social disgrace more than legal consequences. These incidents are not aberrations. They echo earlier tragedies: the Najafgarh taxi driver murder exposed by WhatsApp chats,⁵ and the infamous Shraddha Walkar case, where cultural repression suffocated intimacy until it combusted into violence.⁶

III. The Legal System’s Complicity

The legal system, already strained by institutional decay, amplifies this tragedy. Digital evidence frequently disappears—Lavanya’s iPhone was “accidentally” reset before forensic analysis, a fate shared by 43% of marital homicide cases according to a Delhi High Court report.⁷ Witnesses retract under intimidation—twelve witnesses did so in the Madhya Pradesh case, echoing the Shakti Singh trial where seventy-one turned hostile.⁸

And justice moves at a glacial pace: the average marital homicide trial drags on for over five years, by which time children are displaced, evidence deteriorates, and the accused manipulate the system with impunity.⁹ This procedural stagnation is not delay; it is the travesty of justice.

IV. Forced Cultural Silence

Beneath these failures lies a darker cultural pathology. Three toxic forces converge:

1. The Premarital Lie Imperative. NFHS-5 shows that 68% of urban youth experience premarital relationships, yet 82% conceal them before arranged marriages.¹⁰ When exposed, as with Arvind's discovery, the revelation becomes an existential threat to fragile social identities.
2. The Divorce Stigma Trap. India's divorce rate remains Asia's lowest (1.1%), not due to marital bliss but because societal punishment for separation exceeds the pain of misery.¹¹ Priyanka's chilling rationale "Better a widow than a divorcee" echoes in courtrooms nationwide.
3. Weaponized Gender Expectations. Women endure "purity policing," while men are measured by control rather than compassion. A 2023 Lancet study found 63% of spousal killers cited "loss of respect" as their motive, laying bare how patriarchy itself becomes a murder weapon.¹²

V. The Right-Wing Cultural Climate

In the past decade, rising right-wing cultural narratives have worsened the crisis. An atmosphere of Hindu majoritarian pride has deepened stigma against love marriages, premarital relationships, and divorce.¹³ Within many families, influenced by such ideology, boys and girls fear disclosing their relationships. Love marriages are still branded as sin, affairs before marriage as shame, and divorce as a moral failure destined for hell.

This cultural suffocation pushes individuals into repression. Instead of seeking separation, many resort to violence as a "solution." Thus, government silence and tacit endorsement of regressive ideals indirectly fuel marital homicides.

VI. The Silence That Kills

For every Lavanya or Priyanka whose case seizes headlines, dozens vanish into bureaucratic oblivion. Police logs in Rewari record three husbands dying in "gas explosions" after threatening to expose affairs all closed as accidents.¹⁴ In Nagpur, twenty-two "husband suicides" in 2023 were later linked to psychological coercion.¹⁵ Extended families, complicit

in shielding “honor,” often enable murder yet rarely face conspiracy charges. This normalization of intimate homicide as “crime of passion” reflects collective moral failure.

As Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed in *Joseph Shine v. Union of India*: “The Constitution lives in the marital bedroom.”¹⁶ Today, it must confront the blood that stains those walls.

VII. Toward Reform

Parliament must enact a Marital Safety Bill incorporating Britain’s Domestic Homicide Reviews, Canada’s no-fault divorce protocols, and Japan’s compulsory premarital counseling.¹⁷ The judiciary should pioneer witness protection circuits modeled on India’s Witness Protection Scheme, 2018, approved by the Supreme Court in *Mahender Chawla v. Union of India*.¹⁸ Civil society must replace *log kya kahenge?* (“what will people say?”) with the healing question: *hum kya kar sakte hain?* (“what can we do?”).

VIII. Conclusion

The gavel will eventually fall on Lavanya and Priyanka. But true justice is impossible so long as Arvind’s parents preserve his bloodstained laptop, or Rakesh’s shuttered grocery store remains a grim memorial to silence. These killings are not mere personal betrayals; they are symptoms of a society that sanctifies wedding rituals while suffocating marital honesty, that worships conjugal performance while denying couples the vocabulary of truth.

When marriage certificates double as death warrants, the institution is not threatened by divorce but by our collective complicity. Courts may deliver verdicts, but only conscience can deliver transformation. For as Lavanya’s dumbbell and Priyanka’s cryptocurrency trail remind us: no civilization can claim greatness when its homes become abattoirs and its wedding albums double as murder exhibits.

Endnotes

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Note: - This article reflects the author's original research and arguments. Only standard editing tools, including grammar software, were used to improve language clarity.

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