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DAVID EVANS

**Social Emergence: Romance Tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* Style
Focused on Northern India and Nepal between 1993 and 2013**

Short title

Social Emergence: Romance Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet Style, Northern India and Nepal

Keywords

Romance tragedy, social emergence, human rights, India, Nepal, safe houses, media, social phenomena, globalization

Abstract

This paper presents a study of social emergence in relation to forbidden marriage and its consequences (romance tragedy) in India and Nepal. While citizenship of India incorporates the right to free choice of marital partner, ongoing violations of this right have attracted worldwide publicity since 1993. Prior to 2006, criminal aspects of romance tragedy were handled by local authorities, often with no penalty, no recourse to justice for the victims, and no retribution against offenders. Since 2006, individual cases taken to the High Court of India have seen petitions upheld, with penalties awarded against perpetrators and local police. Media awareness of romance tragedies involving young couples has seen an increased human rights movement, mostly led by women, calling for capital punishment for those murdering or persecuting couples in contentious marriages, and providing safe houses for couples.

Qualitative research methodology, focusing on philosophical value analysis, was used to examine obstacles inherent in local and national culture, and establish evidence of progress from lethal violence to positive acceptance in family and community responses to forbidden love. Data included media reports and personal communications of cases in India and Nepal, as well as relevant literature.

Value judgments, which are basic to the consideration of conflicting beliefs and cultures, and to conclusions regarding what constitutes progress, underlie the study's conclusion that effective law and order, firmly entrenched with a human rights and non-violence approach, is needed to overcome romance tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* style in India and Nepal.

Social Emergence: Romance tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* style focused on Northern India and Nepal between 1993 and 2013

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare gave us a mandate for the study of romance tragedy of forbidden marriage in his quintessential expression of the Italian renaissance legend *Giulietta e Romeo* (Moore 1950:43), saying in the prologue to the play *Romeo and Juliet*, “what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend” (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1993). The concept for the study began in 1993, when the author read of an Indian man who hanged his son in public whilst a mob and police stood by. This incident spurred the author on to study the phenomenon of romance tragedy and its social emergence from the “complex systems of individuals in interaction” (Sawyer 2009:1–16) in India and Nepal.

AIMS

The author’s ethical goal in conducting the study was to work towards proposing an appropriate balance between freedom of choice, the acceptance or rejection of advice, and family and community considerations. The study aimed to show positive axiological progression based on the interplay of significant social and personal factors—a progression in attitude to forbidden love and marriage—from violent intervention, to disownment, to negative acceptance, to reconciliation, to positive acceptance.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Qualitative research methodology was used because the study fits with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005:3) second stream of future research: "a line of value analysis within society and the world at large, relying on philosophical values acceptable to both writer and reader." Philosophical issues such as equality, universalism, and pragmatism are relevant, as is the suggestion of a "sacred" element to be acknowledged as researchers look at, and reflect on, a world they can only partially understand (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The author acknowledges spiritual issues but regards these as beyond objective scrutiny or definition. Unresolvable questions remain about the relevance of nature and nurture: questions pertinent to the study when lovers reject family-centered socialization in favor of inner compulsive drives. There are also questions of jurisdiction in relation to individual and social justice, including the basic question of whose opinion matters.

The author faced the reality problem of not being an experienced participant in order to appreciate the social issues examined. However, personal contacts from India and Nepal helped initiate a collection of real-life stories of gross personal and community tragedy related to intermarriage. These involved mainly the Hindu and Muslim religions. Using these perspectives, the study has taken up Shakespeare's challenge, "our toil shall strive to mend" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1993), and looked for grounded theory to show positive axiological progression based on the interplay of significant social and personal factors. The stories are the codes of the theory in the form of real life and mythological stories that exemplify *Romeo and Juliet* style tragedy. The concepts that emerge are causal reasons for the tragedies and the participants' responses to their situations. The categories are the stories' outcomes. The theory is the road of progress from violence to good relationships.

Factual and philosophical starting points for the study were the period in time (1993–2013), with a focus on Northern India and Nepal (factual), and choosing to accept the *Romeo and Juliet* concept as a phenomenon in its own right without further analysis (philosophical). This choice was made in accordance with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1991) claim that phenomenology is a philosophy that identifies essences of human existence and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of these from any starting point other than that of their “facticity.” Romance tragedy is presented as a two-sided phenomenon—basically instinctive but also society-oriented—which may or may not lead to tragedy depending on the social milieu. Material for the study was sourced from media reports, relevant literature, and personal communications.

INDIA

Reported romance tragedies in this study frequently came from rural Northern India, especially the state of Haryana. Most examples involved patrilineal families and communities, who executed terrifying penalties for breaking accepted rules. Prem Chowdhry (2007), in her treatise *Contentious Marriages and Eloping Couples*, emphasizes the importance of village exogamy and caste endogamy in Northern Indian villages, where land ownership and inheritance rules are of paramount importance. Status and inheritance rights remain a prime consideration in the evolution of the rules of marriage. The *Hindu Succession Act* of 1956, first amended in 2004 (Indian Lawyer 2004) to give females equal property rights, emphasizes that inheritance, especially of land, is paramount in choice of marital partner in the parts of rural India under consideration. Caste endogamy requires marriage within the same caste (e.g., a Brahmin should marry a Brahmin). Village exogamy is more difficult to understand. It is like the Western brother-sister relationship applying to all peer

group associates. School fellows and work associates from the same locality are considered consanguineous. Therefore, marriage amongst them is forbidden. The partner must be sought from a different village.

Khap Panchayats

Khap Panchayats are the traditional village leaders linking a “brotherhood” of villages that work together in times of difficulty, such as disputes with neighboring communities. They have a great bond with their land and will fight for it. Village society and social practices, including inheritance, have evolved to fit in with this type of society. The “Khaps” are facing social change and have responded to the challenge to their authority in many instances with severe penalties (personal communication Dilawar Chetsingh). They continue to hand down “edicts” related to marriage to ensure that traditional practices continue.

Divorce or die

Annulment of marriage is usually acceptable to elders and village people. All may be forgiven if the lovers renounce their commitment to each other and “toe the line” in the future. Gudiya and Mahesh Singh were faced with a “divorce or die” edict from their village Panchayat. The couple refused to bow to their wishes. Consequently, they were hacked to death and their body parts were burnt in a drain near the village (The Telegraph 2007). A similar death sentence was given in the case of Amreen and Lokesh in June 2009, reported by BBC News (2009) as India’s *Romeo and Juliet* tragedy. This was an inter-religious marriage in which the couple chose suicide rather than separation.

Expulsion from the village

In the case of Ravinder Gehlawat and Shilpa Kadiyan in July 2009, Ravinder's entire clan was told to leave their native village of Dhrana because their son had married 20-year-old Shilpa of Siwah village near Panipat. He was accused of violating a 500 year-old custom that the Panchayat felt was sacrosanct: "there can be no matrimony between the sects of Gehlawat and Kadiyan as they have a 'brotherhood' akin to consanguinity" (The Indian Express 2012). The Gehlawat family was given an ultimatum to leave the village within 72 hours. A penalty of Rs 21,000 was imposed on any villager who dared talk to them or help them.

Forced divorce and forced remarriage

In June 2000, the Khap Panchayat of village Jondhi determined the marriage between Darshana, from the Gehlot got, and Ashish, from the Dagar got, be annulled because it was against the rule of exogamy that prohibited intermarriage between members of these two got (The Indian Express 2012b). Darshana had to revert her status from that of a married woman to a daughter. Her father-in-law would become her father and be responsible for finding her a new husband. Her son had to remain with her ex-husband Ashish, whose entire family had one week to leave the village.

New restrictive rules for young women

In November 2010, Associated Press reported what appears to be an unsustainable edict—the banning of mobile phones for young women in the village of Lank. The village council decided unmarried boys could use mobile phones, but only under parental supervision. The Lank village council feared that young men and women were secretly calling one another to arrange to elope. The local women's rights group criticized the measure as backward and

unfair (The Guardian 2012).

Federal laws and government

Caste endogamy petition upheld

The rule of caste endogamy is illustrated here by a recent Supreme Court Judgment in the Case of Lata Singh (and Bramha Nand Gupta), in which federal law in regard to inter-caste marriage states that there is no bar to an inter-caste marriage under the Hindu *Marriage Act* or any other law (Kanoon 2012). However, as illustrated in the above stories and the police inaction described later in this section, the law remains in need of full implementation in accordance with the new democratic constitution of 1950 (Kanoon 2012).

The court upheld Lata Singh's petition for protection from her brothers after she married Bramha Nand Gupta of her own free will. It also directed that criminal proceedings "shall be instituted forthwith by the concerned authorities against the petitioner's brothers and others involved in accordance with law" (Kanoon 2012). Although Gupta was from a different caste, Lata Singh, under federal law, had every right to choose whom she married because she was a "major" at the time of her marriage. Her brothers had victimized members of Gupta's family, beating them up and throwing them out of their house, along with their belongings; held Gupta prisoner and tortured him by withholding food and water for almost one week; destroyed Gupta's crops and taken forcible possession of his field and a shop he owned; and lodged a false police report alleging that Gupta and his relatives had kidnapped their sister. This latter action resulted in the arrest and jailing of Gupta's sisters and one of their husbands. Lata Singh also alleged that her brothers were threatening to kill Gupta and his relatives, and kidnap and kill her also. The judgment comments clearly indicate the need for

legal change, stating:

This case reveals a shocking state of affairs. There is no dispute that the petitioner is a major and was at all relevant times a major. Hence, she is free to marry anyone she likes or live with anyone she likes. Hence, we cannot see what offence was committed by the petitioner, her husband or her husband's relatives. We are of the opinion that no offence was committed by any of the accused and the whole criminal case in question is an abuse of the process of the Court as well as of the administrative machinery at the instance of the petitioner's brothers who were only furious because the petitioner married outside her caste ... The nation is passing through a crucial transitional period in our history, and this Court cannot remain silent in matters of great public concern, such as the present one.

The caste system is a curse on the nation and the sooner it is destroyed the better. In fact, it is dividing the nation at a time when we have to be united to face the challenges before the nation. Hence, inter-caste marriages are in fact in the national interest as they will result in destroying the caste system. ... This is a free and democratic country, and once a person becomes a major he or she can marry whosoever he/she likes. If the parents of the boy or girl do not approve of such inter-caste or inter-religious marriage, the maximum they can do is that they can cut off social relations with the son or the daughter... (Kanoon 2012).

This case highlights the anger of the victimizers, which is likely to be multifactorial, especially if the eloping female has ignored the authority of the responsible male head of the family, bringing public shame to the family and questions about inheritance of property. It also highlights the length of time taken for the judgment and the damage done in the interim. The incident and its continuing consequences began in the year 2000. The writ petition of Lata Singh (and Bramha Nand Gupta) for protection was submitted in 2002. The judgment in

favor of the petition was not given until 2006. While there may be no available recourse for action in other instances, this example provides some hope of the law working as it should, albeit very slowly. However, there was no hope of family reconciliation in this case.

Capital punishment awarded and commuted

Although human rights organizations may urge that the death penalty be abolished, the High Court in India recommends capital punishment for the “rarest of rare” category of intolerable murder, which now includes honor killings (The Indian Express 2012a). However, implementation of a capital punishment sentence for honor killing seems unlikely. While the first judgment of this kind happened in 2010 (Pragoti 2012), with more in 2011 and 2012 (CBC News 2012), the 2010 capital punishment sentence for the “community honor” murder of Manoj and Babli in Haryana (The Hindu 2012) has been commuted to life imprisonment. The murder of Manoj and Babli, who were considered siblings because both belonged to the Banwala gotra, a Jat community, has become a prime case for public scrutiny. According to *The Dharmashastra*, any union between Manoj and Babli would be invalid and incestuous, despite them not being directly related. As a result of this ruling, Babli was forced to consume poison whilst four other family members strangled her husband with a rope in front of her. The brutality of the double murder shocked the court, resulting in the original capital punishment sentence. The fact that this ruling has been overturned leads to the expectation that other capital punishment sentences of this kind will be commuted as appeals are brought to court, with the likelihood that new judges will be more sympathetic to traditional values and actions.

Political complacency and law reform

There is relative silence from the major political parties in relation to the Manoj-Babli case, reflecting the importance parties attach to caste support and *gotra* (clan) *politics*. However, questions are being raised in Parliament as to whether a new law for perpetrators of honor killings is necessary or whether perpetrators can be charged under laws related to murder (The Indian Express 2012c).

Local police protection

In spite of an increasing number of couples obtaining police protection, the protection itself is precarious. It may be impossible for the police to prevent kidnapping of, and violence toward, an eloping couple. However, the case of Mumtaz Khan and Mohsin Khan (Tribune News Service 2012) is interesting for its counseling component and the awarding of protection by the police. Acting on Mumtaz and Mohsin's petition, the Punjab and Haryana High Court provided security cover to the couple. Mumtaz was apprehending threats from her family for marrying Mohsin against their wishes. Around 40 youngsters and family, including Mumtaz Khan's father, were present in court. The court asked the father and daughter to talk it out in the judge's chamber.

Local police inaction

In the case of the village Jondhi incident referred to earlier, the police stood by silently during the public announcement of severe penalties to the affected families (Tribune News Service 2012), while in another case, when mob violence led to the lynching of Ved Pal (The Times of India 2011a) as he went looking for his bride, the police again stood by, unable to exert their authority whether they wished to or not. Ved Pal had trusted court protection. Thinking

that right was on his side, and accompanied by police, he felt he would have sufficient support, but his trust was misplaced (The Times of India 2011a).

Social dynamics

Community

Village elders are committed to maintaining community honor and opposing threats to the established way of life in terms of religious affiliation, ownership of land, power, and authority, thus preserving the public image. Democracy has brought new government laws to India, which threaten local authority. It has raised awareness that change is coming. The villages in which honor killings continue have social support for their injunctions. Social backlash, viewed as a threat to village honor, may lead to an increase in restrictive punishments. In 2008, for example, Sunita and Jasbir, both of the same local community and therefore forbidden to become lovers or to marry each other, were murdered. Their bodies, half-stripped, were laid out on the dirt next to Sunita's father's house in Balla village as a warning to others who might try to emulate their "immoral act" and as a sign that the family's honor had been restored (Reuters 2008). The village of Balla, just two hours' drive from India's capital New Delhi, was united behind this act. A farmer said, "We have removed the blot. We would not have had a face to show if we had not done this. It was the act of real men." Sunita's mother Roshni is reported to have said, "Nobody would drink water in our house. ... My daughter's action made us aliens in our own land. But we have managed to redeem our honor." At the small police post in Balla, a constable admitted the case was unlikely to reach prosecution, with the village putting enormous pressure on the police, and especially on Jasbir's family, to quietly drop the case (Reuters 2008).

Family

Questions of social status are highly important for the family and the breaking of rules leads to public shame, with the added fear of social ostracism. Even as cases are investigated, there can be real doubt as to who actually performed the murder. In the case of Sunita and Jasbir, Sunita's father, Om Prakash, confessed to murdering his pregnant daughter and her boyfriend. An uncle and two cousins were among four others arrested. In Balla, many people believed the father had confessed merely to underline that he supported his daughter's killing, to satisfy honor, and to protect the real culprits among his family or village members (Reuters 2008). Deception and betrayal by family members is seen when an eloping couple is told that everything is all right at home. When the couple return, they may be murdered. Either both families or only one family may be involved in the public denouncement and killing.

Personal

Choosing death rather than renouncing their relationship shows the power of lovers' emotional involvement. Whilst safe houses are being established for runaway couples (The Times of India 2011b), from which they will have to re-emerge eventually and find a new life, one must feel deep sympathy for those who have nowhere to go. Even after leaving home, there remains a desire to return to the family to receive their blessing. Individuals in good standing within the family may expect that it will all work out. This is perhaps one of the most disturbing central themes of this study; that young people can neither trust their own families nor rely on the authorities for help (The Times of India 2006; 2010). It is a theme reported from Australia and elsewhere. Families continue to send young women overseas to meet other family members and face a forced marriage. In the U.K., this has led to the formation of the "Love Commandos," who attempt to rescue such women (BBC News 2012).

While this continues, the well-known Hindustani legends depicting romance tragedies remain highly relevant, being played out every day in real life.

HINDUSTANI LEGENDS

There are many love legends within Hindustani folklore. Four popular romance tragedies in the Punjabi tradition of India and Pakistan are “Heer Ranjha,” “Mirza Sahiba,” “Sohni Mahiwal,” and “Sassi Punnun” (Punjabi World 2007). Another, “Anarkali” (Tourist Development Corporation of Punjab 2008), is possibly a true legendary story from the lineage of Mughal Emperors. In cosmopolitan Australia, it is possible to find people who have not heard of Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet*, but if you ask an immigrant Indian taxi driver about “Heer Ranjha,” “Mirza Sahiba,” “Sohni Mahiwal,” or “Sassi Punnun,” their response is usually immediate. They will smile and ask how you know about these Punjabi romance tragedies. The legends have a special place in a country of arranged marriages, where love may flower after marriage but it is sometimes said that “love is a dream not to be experienced in this life” (Personal communication 2012).

Heer Ranjha

The Romance of “Heer Ranjha,” written in 1766 by Waris Shah (Encyclopaedia of the Sikhs 2010), is believed to be based on the true account of two 16th century lovers. It is also said that Waris Shah sublimated his own unrequited love for a girl (Bhag Bhari) in writing the romance.

Heer Saleti was an extremely beautiful woman, born into a wealthy Jatt family. Ranjha also was a Jatt. Unlike his older brothers who had to toil in the fields, Ranjha was his father’s favorite son. He was allowed to lead a life of ease, playing the flute. After a quarrel with his

brothers, Ranjha left home. He arrived in Heer's village and fell deeply in love with her at first sight. Heer offered Ranjha a job as caretaker of her father's cattle. Mesmerized by the way Ranjha played his flute, Heer eventually fell in love with him. They met each other secretly for many years until Heer's jealous uncle Kaido and her parents Chuchak and Malki caught them. To save her family's honor, Heer's family and the local priest forced her to marry a man who lived in a distant village. The heart-broken Ranjha decided to become a Jogi, piercing his ears and renouncing the material world. Reciting the name of the Lord, 'Alakh Niranjan', he travelled around the Punjab, eventually finding Heer. The two escaped and returned to Heer's village where her parents agreed to their marriage. However, on the wedding day, Heer's jealous uncle Kaido arranged for one of his servants to lace some Laddu (a sweet) that Ranjha had sent to Heer with a deadly poison. Such was his jealousy that he would rather have her die than see her happily married to Ranjha. When told what Kaido had done, Ranjha rushed to save Heer but was too late. Heer breathed her last just as he arrived. Brokenhearted a second time, Ranjha finished the poisoned Laddu and lay down to die beside Heer.

Mirza Sahiban

The "Mirza Sahiban" story is believed to have started during the Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan's era, when a child was born in the clan of Kharral Jatts in the region of Danabad, Nanakana Sahib. The child, popularly known as "Mirza Jatt", was to become the "greatest legendary character among the race of his people known as Jatts" (Ayesha Word Press 2006).

Mirza and Sahiban were cousins who fell in love. When about to be forcibly wed by her parents, Sahiban sent a taunting message to Mirza, saying, "You must come and decorate Sahiban's hand with the marriage henna. This is the time you have to protect your self-respect

and love, keep your promises, and sacrifice your life for truth” (Ayesha Word Press 2006). Mirza, who was a young full-blooded man and a famed archer, made Sahiban sit on his horse and rode away with her, followed by Sahiban’s brothers. As Mirza lay under a tree to rest, Sahiban’s brothers, their swords drawn, caught up to the lovers. Sahiban, who was a virtuous and beautiful soul, did not desire any bloodshed. She did not want her hands drenched in blood instead of henna. She thought Mirza could not miss his target and if he shot his arrows her brothers would surely die. Before waking Mirza, Sahiban broke his arrows and put his quiver away in the tree. She presumed that on seeing her, her brothers would forgive Mirza and accept him. Instead, the brothers killed Mirza. Sahiban, distraught, took a sword and killed herself (Ayesha Word Press 2006).

It is reported that people living in villages surrounding Sahiban’s hometown forbid their women to visit Mirza and Sahiban’s mausoleum, fearing they might follow in those lovers’ footsteps. A number of eloping incidents have occurred near the mausoleum. In one instance, the daughter of the mausoleum’s caretaker eloped with her friend. On hearing the news, the caretaker died. His grave is situated near the mausoleum (Daily Times 2006).

Sohni Mahiwal

“Sohni Mahiwal” (Folk Tales of Pakistan 2007) Cequin, is the most famous work of poet Fazal Shah Sayyad (1827-1890) from Lahore. This *Quissa* (non-religious traditional Persian style prose narrative) tells the story of Sohni’s anguish (Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature 1988). The Tomb of Sohni is in Shahdapur City, Sindh. According to the legend, the bodies of Sohni and Mahiwal were recovered from the river Indus near Shahdapur and buried there.

Sohni was the daughter of a potter named Tula, who lived in Punjab near the banks of the Chenab River. As soon as the Surahis (water pitchers) came off the wheels, she would draw

floral designs on them and transform them into artistic masterpieces. Izzat Baig, a rich trader from Balakh Bukhara, came to Hindustan on business. When he saw the beautiful Sohni he was completely enchanted. He would buy water pitchers and mugs every day to get a glimpse of her. Sohni lost her heart to Izzat Baig and started building love castles in her dreams. Izzat Baig sent his companions away and, calling himself “Mahiwal”, took a job as a servant in Tula’s house. When people started spreading rumors about Sohni and Mahiwal’s love, Sohni’s parents arranged her marriage to another potter without her consent. Suddenly, a barat (marriage party) arrived at her house. Sohni was helpless. Her parents bundled her off in the doli (marriage cart) but they could not pack off her love.

Mahiwal renounced the world and started living like a fakir (hermit) in a small hut across the river. The earth of Sohni’s land was like a dargah (shrine) for him. He had forgotten his land, his people, and his world. Taking refuge in the darkness of the night when the world was asleep, Sohni would go to the riverside and Mahiwal would swim across the river to meet her. He would regularly roast a fish and bring it for her. It is said that once, due to a high tide, he could not catch a fish, so he cut a piece of his thigh and roasted it. Seeing the bandage on his thigh, Sohni opened it, saw the wound, and cried. Sohni started swimming across the river with the help of an earthen pitcher because Mahiwal was so badly wounded he could not swim.

Rumors of their romantic rendezvous spread. One day, Sohni’s sister-in-law followed her and saw the hiding place where Sohni kept her pitcher. The next day, her sister-in-law removed the hard baked pitcher and replaced it with an unbaked one. When Sohni tried to cross the river with the help of the pitcher, it dissolved and Sohni drowned. Mahiwal saw Sohni drowning. He tried to save her but also died in the river. Sohni’s courage, applauded in song by the women of Punjab, includes the words, “Sohni was drowned but her soul still

swims in water.”

Sassi Punnun

There is evidence of Punnun’s existence in the ruins of Punnun Fort near Turbat, believed to be between 6,000 and 8,000 years old. Much of the fort, a towering structure, has disintegrated. The story is preserved by the Sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752) (Pakistan Today 2011). Countless folk songs sung by women narrate the love tale of Sassi and Punnun.

Sassi was the daughter of the King of Bhambour (Historic love stories 2011). At birth, astrologers predicted she was a curse for the royal family’s prestige and the Queen ordered the child be put in a wooden box and thrown in the river Indus. A washerman of the Bhambour village found the wooden box with the child inside. Having no child of his own and believing the child was a blessing from God, he took her home. As Sassi grew ... stories of her beauty reached Punnun, the handsome young Prince of Makran. He became desperate to meet her. He travelled to Bhambour and sent his clothes to Sassi’s father for washing so he could catch a glimpse of her. They fell in love at first sight. Sassi’s father was dispirited, hoping that Sassi would marry a washerman. However, Sassi’s father asked Punnun to prove he was worthy of Sassi by passing the test as a washerman. Punnun agreed to prove his love but tore the clothes and failed the agreement. Before returning the clothes, he hid gold coins in the pockets, hoping this would keep the villagers quiet. His trick succeeded and Sassi’s father agreed to the marriage.

Punnun’s father and brothers were against the marriage. His brothers threatened him but he refused to relent. Pretending to enjoy the marriage celebrations, they enticed him to drink different types of wines. When he was intoxicated, they carried him on a camel to Makram.

The next morning, when Sassi realized she had been cheated, she became mad with the grief of separation and ran barefoot towards Makram, crossing miles of hazardous desert and calling Punnun's name. Sassi became thirsty and asked a shepherd for some water, which he gave her, but seeing her incredible beauty, he tried to force himself on her. Sassi ran away and prayed to God to hide her. God listened to her prayers and she found herself lost in a valley of mountains. There, she died.

When Punnun woke and found himself in Makram, he began running back to Bhambour, calling "Sassi! Sassi!" He met the shepherd who told him the whole story. Punnun also prayed and died. He was buried in the same mountain valley as Sassi. The legendary grave still exists in that valley.

Anarkali

The gravestone on the Tomb for Anarkali bears the inscription, "Could I behold the face of my beloved once more, I would thank God until the day of resurrection" (University of Alberta 2012). The legend has it that the Great Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556–1605) and his wife, Mariam-uz-Zamani, had a son, Prince Saleem (later Emperor Jahangir), who was sent away to the army to learn the discipline required to rule the empire (About.com Asian History 2012). The day of his return was one of great celebration. Akbar's harem decided to hold a great Mujra (dance performance), led by a beautiful girl named Nadeera, daughter of Noor Khan Argun. She was of exceptional beauty, "like a blossoming flower," and a favorite of the Emperor, who called her Anarkali (blossoming pomegranate).

Prince Saleem and Anarkali fell in love. They began seeing each other secretly. Saleem informed his father of his intention to marry Anarkali and make her the Empress. The problem was that Anarkali, despite her fame in Lahore as a dancer, was a maid. She was not

of noble blood. Akbar banned Saleem from seeing Anarkali again. Grave arguments followed and Akbar ordered Anarkali's arrest. He placed her in a jail dungeon in Lahore. The furious Saleem and one of his friends helped Anarkali escape. They hid her near the outskirts of town. Saleem organized an army from those loyal to him during his 14 years in Lahore and attacked the city. Akbar had a much larger army and quickly defeated Saleem's force. He gave his son two choices; either surrender Anarkali or face the death penalty. Prince Saleem, truly in love with Anarkali, chose the death penalty.

Anarkali, unwilling to allow Prince Saleem to die, came out of hiding and approached Akbar. She asked him if she could give up her life to save Saleem. After Akbar agreed, she asked for just one wish; to spend one night with Saleem. After her night with Saleem, Anarkali drugged him with pomegranate blossom. She said a tearful goodbye to the unconscious Saleem and left the royal palace with Akbar's guards. She was taken to the area near present-day Anarkali Bazaar in Lahore where a large ditch had been made for her. Akbar's soldiers strapped her to a wooden board and lowered it into the ditch. They enclosed the top of the ditch with a brick wall, burying Anarkali alive.

All of these legends vividly illustrate the tragedy and depth of forbidden love. It appears from recent media stories about romance tragedies in India and Nepal that the legends have a strong influence on romantic feelings and behavior today; little appears to have changed.

NEPAL—GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL

The author was privileged to visit Nepal on several occasions. Three occurrences during that time represent a path of progress. The first was the love affair between Jagadish Khadki, a dalit youth of Bishanpur district, and Parbati Raut, a girl from the upper caste in the same VDC, which culminated in marriage on December 31, 2003. This step not only hurled them

into a quagmire but also dragged some 12 dalit families into the mess, thanks to the ire of the upper caste people. This story, mirroring examples from India, was reported in the Kathmandu Post in February 2004 and taken up by The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (Manav Astitwa 2004). The girl's relatives kidnapped the couple and 200 upper caste villagers attacked the community of 80 dalit people, forcing them to leave the village. Their property was taken or destroyed.

The second story told to the author is one of forbidden romance, elopement, marriage, estrangement, and reconciliation after two years and the birth of a baby boy. The author, who met the parents, was left with the impression that the estrangement was a necessary imposition to show to family and friends how much the parents disapproved of their daughter's action, yet with underlying sympathy for her choice.

The third story comes from Nepal's national newspaper, The Kathmandu Post (2004). The reporter wrote of his amazement to be invited to an inter-caste wedding, saying, "I didn't know that even the parents have started taking it normally, and, maybe the parents need more than enough examples of successful inter-caste marriages or maybe the people should themselves move ahead to change the face of society."

DISCUSSION

The reports of real life cases, the Hindustani legends, and the stories from Nepal recounted in this paper are only a few of the many that exist. However, they illustrate the depth of commitment to personal, community, and religious "honor", and lovers' determination to be together in life and/or death despite the sanctions imposed on them (anti-caste 2013).

The case of Gudiya and Mahesh Singh illustrates the power of the Panchayat and the lovers' rebellion by choosing a brutal death over divorce, while the families of Ravinder and Shilpa also suffered at the hands of a Panchayat edict that forced them to leave the village.

The case of village Jondi also details gross punishments imposed on families who allow inappropriate marriages. While there was some sympathy expressed for Amreen and Lokesh, who chose suicide over separation, they were posthumously admonished because Muslims simply do not marry Hindus. The real life story of Lata Singh and Bramha Nand Gupta, and the legal upholding of their petition against Lata Singh’s brothers, challenges the ideology of her brothers’ guardianship. On the other hand, the lessening of the sentence for those responsible for the brutal murder of Manoj and Babli implies that the law is not yet ready to completely overturn the power of the Khap Panchayats.

Nevertheless, each of these stories represents a challenge to patriarchal guardianship passed from father to brother, and to the authority of the Khap Panchayats. Murder, suicide, and non-physical violence in the form of social disownment feature prominently in the real life stories reported in the media, emphasizing how individuals’ choices impact not only on themselves but also on their families and communities. The person concerned is entangled in family, custom, culture, religion, law, and community sanctions.

[anti-caste](#), a blog site that comments on caste, women’s oppression, communalism, and class struggle in South Asia from a Marxist perspective, gives an incomplete but highly useful list of media reports of horrific violence that has been threatened or carried out against inter-caste lovers in the years 2006May 2013.

Table 1: Media reports 2006May 2013. (Insert about here)

2013 JanMay	4
2012	37
2011	3
2010	5

2009	1
2008	4
2007	3
2006	2

The likely interpretation of the data in Table 1 is that media reports were infrequent until 2012. It is expected that atrocities will continue to be reported in the media, provoking continuing public protest. A watching brief is indicated but there is hope from these statistics that the incidents peaked in 2012 and will lessen in the future, perhaps as a result of stronger application of federal laws.

The Hindustani legends and the present day stories show the same phenomenon of compelling romance and social disturbance that may result from pursuing a taboo relationship. They symbolize the imperative of romantic love, where love is unobtainable due to cultural circumstances. Family interference to maintain family honor is a common theme. In the story of Heer Ranjha, the apparent disparity of social standing might have been resolved happily had it not been for Heer's jealous uncle. Mirza and Sahiban's elopement might have been successful had Sahiban not faced the dilemma of loyalties to both her lover and her brothers. Sohni and Mahiwal also died due to family interference in the form of Sohni's sister-in-law. It is not clear whether the sister-in-law was jealous or attempting to preserve the family's honor. The tragic legend of Sassi and Punnun centers on family betrayal, the lovers' unwavering dedication to each other, and death as a means of regaining lost love. Finally, a Moghul prince wanting to marry a peasant girl (Anarkali) and make her Queen simply could not be allowed, the story again ending in death through devotion.

The stories from Nepal point to the path of progress, with reconciliation and acceptance in place of violence and disownment. The work of this study was to look for, and present, a road of progress, and the Nepalese stories lead the way forward. Each time forbidden love challenges family and community traditions, a small step is taken towards change, albeit at the price of tragedy—often death.

Challenging community values

As challenges are made to family and community traditions, acknowledgment must be given to the sense of loyalty to tradition and intensity of emotion felt by responsible family heads and community leaders. The readiness for lovers to die and become martyrs rather than be separated leads to irreconcilable situations. However, the demand for better options comes from the young who, in Shakespeare's words, "will not endure" (Shakespeare 1980). In India today, there is growing general support for legal protection for eloping couples' safety, even though they may have to leave their home, family, and community. The concept of honor is evolving, with a need to retain what is good and acceptable as globalization of "rights to options" is fostered, albeit in certain circumstances at the sacrifice of "rights to roots" (Santos 2002:26).

Danger to young lovers who challenge social boundaries remains real today. Community awareness led by the rebellious young, supportive families, media reports, human rights organizations, and film makers is leading the Indian Government, through their legal system, to provide protection to impassioned lovers. Currently, the price for those without family support is social separation and the need to find a new life elsewhere. Chowdhry points to the prime role of women in social change, affirming that, "Whatever resistance there has been, it has been led by women. I think women's groups in the villages should be

encouraged” (Outlook India.com 2012).

Reconciliation and acceptance remains a goal to be achieved. Social progress related to romance tragedy in India and Nepal shows facets of the changing balance between social regulation and social emancipation. A fair and just legal system can end violence and legalize options, but it cannot eliminate ostracism or enforce family and community honor. Heroic couples who are willing to sacrifice all for the sake of love are initiating the need for change. However, effective change comes from leaders within the family or community who have the confidence of their family and social community.

Caste and its perpetuation through the observance of caste endogamy in marriage has not yet come under the scanner of public debate to be roundly condemned. The need is to understand the political economy of marriage, overlaid by cultural and ideological norms, in order to counter it effectively. Meanwhile, continued media reporting of honor killings, although problematic in its coverage, has helped to draw attention to the shocking violation of constitutional and human rights (Chowdhry 2010).

CONCLUSION—A PATH OF PROGRESS

In India, Nepal, and elsewhere, young lovers are challenging marital taboos. The imperative of love is emphasized by those who choose death rather than separation, becoming martyrs for their cause. In the time period since 1993, this study has observed wider media attention to “honor killings”, leading to public protest, the provision of safe houses, and a call for awarding capital punishment. While this call was first realized in 2010, it has not yet been carried out. There is hope that the horrific violence against inter-caste lovers, as reported on the inter-caste website, will lessen in the future.

This study provides some evidence that things are changing very slowly. If “peace” is the

enjoyment of good relationships, non-violence must be the first important step. Effectively-practiced federal law is imperative. Family estrangement remains a legal option but the path of progress, as Shakespeare might have desired, is from non-violence, to temporary separation, to reconciliation and acceptance, and then to celebration. Our responsibility is to tell the stories and spread the word.

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