



ISSN Print: 2394-7500  
 ISSN Online: 2394-5869  
 Impact Factor (RJIF): 8.69  
 IJAR 2025; SP-11(11): 619-621  
[www.allresearchjournal.com](http://www.allresearchjournal.com)  
 Received: 09-08-2025  
 Accepted: 11-09-2025

**Dr. Rajkumar**  
 Assistant Professor,  
 Department of Political  
 Science, GFGC,  
 Doddaballapur, Bangalore,  
 Karnataka, India

## Honour killing in Karnataka: A socio-legal analysis

**Rajkumar**

DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2025.v11.i11Sa.13185>

### Abstract

Honour killing can be deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions in India, targeting or murdering of a women or girl by family members who is believed to have brought shame on the family. While these incidents are commonly associated with northern states, Karnataka has witnessed a rising prevalence southern Karnataka, particularly in the districts of Mandya, Mysuru, Hassan, and Dakshina Kannada. These inhuman and cruel crimes are firmly rooted in caste rigidity, patriarchal control, and traditional social norms, directly infringing constitutional guarantees of equality, liberty, and human dignity.

This paper interrogates the socio-cultural roots, legal principles, and systemic challenges in addressing honor killings, with particular emphasis on the disproportionate victimization of Dalits by upper castes in Karnataka

The paper also investigates for a multi-pronged approach encompassing legislative reform, fast-track courts, community sensitization, and institutional accountability to protect and safeguarding human rights.

**Keywords:** Honour killing, caste, dalits, legal framework, patriarchy, social norms

### 1. Introduction

Honour killings, often envisage as “barbaric cultural crimes,” are deliberate acts of murder of a family members particularly female members due to designed to enforce social norms related to caste, religion, and gender. In Karnataka, these killings typically occur when individuals assert autonomy in choosing marital partners, particularly in inter-caste or interfaith contexts. As per the data published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Karnataka constantly ranks among the top five states reporting honour killings <sup>[1]</sup>. These heinous crimes constitute infringement and violations of Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee equality, personal freedom, and the right to life. Honour killings exemplify driven by caste hierarchies and patriarchal dominance, wherein dominant caste communities employ violence to enforce rigid social procedures.

### 2. Issues and in the context of Karnataka

Honour killing in India have grown significantly, the study of honour killing in the Indian context is of predominate significant due its far reaching implication on people, families and communities, in the chief minister of Karnataka asserted that state government would take strict legal action against honour killing.

According to Karnataka State crime record bureau (SCRB) ‘the number of honour killing cases in 10 cases since 2011, Karnataka has been witnessing a wave of honour killings, in areas including kolar, tumkur, mandya, mysore, in 2023 seven honour killing cases’ but unfortunately numbers are severely underestimated as many cases go unreported.

As per Ministry of home affairs and NCRB, -state and UT-wise cases registered under honour killing during 2017-2021 (Sources crime in India)

S NO	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	92	29	24	25	33	18

### Statistical Overview

- **2019:** Karnataka reported 11 cases of honour killings, ranking fifth nationally <sup>[2]</sup>.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Dr. Rajkumar**  
 Assistant Professor,  
 Department of Political  
 Science, GFGC,  
 Doddaballapur, Bangalore,  
 Karnataka, India

- **2014–2020:** Over 100 cases, concentrated mainly in Mandya, Mysuru, Hassan, and coastal districts.
- **2022–2023:** At least seven cases resulting in nine deaths (six female, three male), primarily among individuals aged 17–25 <sup>[3]</sup>.

District	Cases Reported (2018–2025)	Observed Patterns
Mandya	15	Dalit victims; Vokkaliga perpetrators
Mysuru/Hassan	10	Inter-caste marriage killings
Raichur	5	Family massacres; Dalit victims
Kalaburagi	7	Teenagers and nursing student victims
Dakshina Kannada	4	Interfaith killings
Chitradurga	2	Stigma-driven killings

### 3. Documented Cases (2020–2025)

1. **Raichur Family Massacre (2020; Verdict 2025):** Five family members killed over an inter-caste relationship; three sentenced to death, nine to life imprisonment <sup>[4]</sup>.
2. **Gadag Dalit Couple Killing (2019; Verdict 2025):** Dalit couple murdered by relatives of a dominant caste partner; four sentenced to death <sup>[5]</sup>.
3. **Kalaburagi Teen & Nursing Student (2025):** Two inter-caste cases where victims were killed by fathers and relatives, highlighting community complicity.
4. **Chitradurga HIV-Positive Man (2025):** Murdered over “family honour” and property disputes, reflecting the expanding scope of honour-based violence.

**Observation:** Dalits are disproportionately victimized, whereas perpetrators are predominantly from dominant castes, demonstrating the intersectionality of caste, gender, and social power in honour killings.

### 4. Theoretical Perspectives

#### a) Sociological Dimension

Caste hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and community-enforced social codes perpetuate honour-based violence. Dominant caste families often sanction killings to maintain social prestige, resorting to extrajudicial mechanisms when legal remedies are perceived as insufficient.

#### b) Legal Dimension

Honour killings are prosecuted under IPC Section 302 (Murder), as no separate law specifically addresses them. Judicial precedents, including *Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh* (2011) and *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India* (2018), emphasize protection for inter-caste couples and criminalize extrajudicial panchayat diktats <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### c) Cultural Dimension

In these communities, honour is conceptualized as collective family and community prestige, subordinating women’s autonomy to societal expectations. Any perceived transgression of caste or religious norms is often met with violent enforcement.

#### d) Governance Dimension

Weak policing, underreporting, and delayed trials exacerbate vulnerability, particularly for marginalized Dalits. Law enforcement is frequently influenced by local

social hierarchies, compromising impartiality and the delivery of justice.

### 5. Incidents

- **Mandya (2018):** Dalit youth murdered for marrying a Vokkaliga woman.
- **Dakshina Kannada (2020):** Muslim youth lynched over an alleged relationship with a Hindu woman.
- **Mysuru (2022):** Woman killed for eloping against parental consent.

### 6. Caste-Based Patterns (Deccan Herald, 2023)

- **Vokkaligas:** Highest involvement, particularly in Mandya, Hassan, and Mysuru.
- **Lingayats:** Significant involvement in rural/semi-urban regions.
- **OBCs:** Certain rural groups implicated in inter-caste violence.
- **Dalits:** Primarily victims, especially men marrying women from dominant castes.
- **Muslims:** Involved in interfaith-related honour killings, particularly in coastal Karnataka.

Recent SCRB data indicate a sharp rise in fatalities: nine deaths over 15 months compared to a single death in 2021. Most victims were aged 17–25.

### 7. Analysis of Notable Cases from a Theoretical Perspective

1. **Raichur Family Massacre:** Demonstrates structural violence and collective enforcement of caste hierarchy; judicial punishment reflects state intervention to uphold constitutional morality.
2. **Gadag Dalit Couple Killing:** Highlights intersectionality—caste and gender oppression converge, with family-sanctioned patriarchal violence targeting Dalit men and women.
3. **Mandya Dalit Youth:** Illustrates enforcement of social norms, where caste and patriarchal authority override individual autonomy.
4. **Kalaburagi Teen & Nursing Student:** Reflects symbolic interactionism, where honour is linked to family prestige, and female autonomy is heavily constrained.
5. **Dakshina Kannada Interfaith Killing:** Exemplifies legal pluralism, where community and religious norms supersede formal law.

### 8. Conclusion

Honour killings in Karnataka epitomize the clash between constitutional morality and entrenched social and cultural norms. Although less prevalent than in northern India, their persistence underscores that Karnataka is not immune to caste- and religion-based violence. Effective mitigation requires a holistic strategy integrating law, policy, education, and civil society activism. Beyond punitive measures, societal transformation is essential to uphold individual rights and dismantle oppressive caste and gender hierarchies.

### Footnotes

1. NCRB, Crime in India 2019, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi.
2. Shakti Vahini v. Union of India, (2018) 7 SCC 192.

3. Law Commission of India, 242nd Report on Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances, 2012.
4. Deccan Herald, "Mandya Dalit youth killed for marrying upper-caste woman," July 2018.
5. The Hindu, "Honour killing cases in Karnataka on the rise," June 2020.
6. Lata Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh, (2011) 5 SCC 475.

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6. Articles from The Hindu, Indian Express, Deccan Herald (2018-2023).