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Disputing the"Domesticity" of Domestic Violence: The Society as aParticipant in Domestic Violence inKiranjit Ahluwalia's*Provoked*

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Abstract

"Domestic Violence" is the umbrella term used to refer to the variety of acts of violence perpetrated on home premises. Of these, inter-spousal violence, legally termed as "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV), is the most predominant form of crime in this category. Provoked (2007), the autobiographical account of Kiranjit Ahluwalia, delineates a classic case of IPV. Kiranjit Ahluwalia suffered brutal physical, psychological, and sexual torture for a decade (1979-89) at the hands of her neurotic husband, Deepak Ahluwalia, whom she accidentally burns to death. This paper attempts to critically address the crucial part played by a (patriarchal) society and culture—as family, friends, neighbours, etc.—in a crime that is branded as "domestic" due to the location of the crime scene. The paper identifies two chief socio-cultural factors largely responsible for the perpetuation of this social malice—first, the societal double standards maintained towards the two sexes; and second, the socially accorded sacrosanct status of the institution of marriage and family in India.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; Intimate Partner Violence; Kiranjit Ahluwalia; Violence against women; Indian society

Violence against women in India is a social malice old enough to find references in the great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Sita's abduction by the demon king, Ravana, followed by her *agnipariksha*(trial by fire) to prove her chastity, as also Draupadi's disrobing in the royal court of Hastinapurat the hands of her cousin brother-in-law, Dushsasana are classic cases of ill-treatment of women at the hands of men. The presence of such episodes in our timeless epics testifies the ancientness of this crime in the

subcontinent. Since time immemorial, women in India have suffered sexual, physical and psychological harassment at the hands of family, society and State on the triple axes of class, caste and gender. Rape, molestation, sexual abuse, female foeticide, honour killing, witch burning, the practice of Sati, dowry deaths, and domestic violence are the various forms of physical and sexual torture to which the Indian women have been subjected time and again since time immemorial.

"Domestic violence" is the umbrella term used to refer to the variety of physical, sexual and psychological torture inflicted on home premises.Going by this definition, any act of violence that is committed in the domestic space is entitled to be termed as "domestic violence". Thus, violence between spouses, dowry deaths, bride burning, child abuse, sexual harassment of women and children at the hands of the male members of the family are forms of atrocities that qualify themselves as domestic violence. The types of offences stated above indicate that it is women who are the usual victims of these forms of brutality.

However, of all forms of acts of violence committed in a family setup, inter-spousal violence or that which takes place between a couple, married or otherwise, is regarded as the chief form of domestic violence, to the extent that certain countries and organizations use the term, "domestic violence", as coterminous with inter-spousal violence. The definition of domestic violence as per the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), Colorado, USA, exemplifies this attitude:

> . . . thewillful intimidation, physical assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one *intimate partner* against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. (emphasis added)

The Oxford Dictionary defines domestic violence as "violent or aggressive behaviour within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a *spouse or partner*" (emphasis added). The Collins English Dictionary defines the term as "violence that takes place in the home, especially by one person *against their partner*" (emphasis added). However, in practice, inter-spousal violence is a sub-category of domestic violence, legally termed as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).Kiranjit Ahluwalia's autobiography, *Provoked*, presents a real-life classic case of this criminal offence.

IPV can take a variety of forms. It may involvethe physical infliction of pain or injury like beating, thrashing, kicking or an injury caused by some object or weapon;emotional or psychological abuse meted out through verbal abuse, denigration, threatening, emotional blackmailing and terrorising. Non-verbal threats, on the other hand, may include derogatory gestures, facial expressions and body postures; controlling behaviours, such as withholding money, interfering with one's freedom of movement and action, disallowing connection with

family and friends, prohibiting jobs and professional career, refusing access to social help or medical care. The cruellest form of physical abuse is, however, that which is sexual in nature and involves the use of physical force to compel one's partner to engage into a sexual intercourse against her/his will, whether or not the act is completed. Attempted as well as completed sexual intercourse with one who is unable to understand the nature of the action, incapable of avoiding participation or communicate one's unwillingness to participate due to immaturity, illness or disability are offences entitled to be grouped under the category of sexual IPV. The other name for such behaviouris "sexual sadism", medically regarded as a type of psychological disorder.

IPV is prevalent in both heterosexual as well as homosexual relationships. Though people from both the sexes are liable to become victims of IPV, the percentage of female victimsof this form of abuse far supersedes men in any country and culture across the world. Women's physical fragility and strategic positioning in a patriarchal social order render her an easy prey to this criminal offence. Hence, this paper limits itself to the most predominant form of IPV—those with the woman as the victim—a phenomenon of which Kiranjit's case is a classic example.

Though a few of the causative factors of IPV are culture-specific, a host of general factors is identifiable across cultures. In 2012, Claudia Garcia-Moreno, Alessandra Guedes and Wendy Knerrprepared the information sheet on IPV, titled "Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women" based on research on IPV carried out in ten countries of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Europe—Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Thailand, the former state union of Serbia and Montenegro, and the United Republic of Tanzania.The research conducted on behalf of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) identified a few causative factors of IPV commonly prevalent across these ten nations. According to the report, the factors generally characterizing a male perpetrator of IPV are:

- Young age
- Low level of education
- Witnessing or experiencing violence as a child
- Harmful use of alcohol and drugs
- Personality disorders
- Acceptance of violence (feeling it is acceptable for a man to beat his partner)
- Past history of abusing partners

On the other hand, the factors that are likely to make a woman susceptible to falling prey to such violence are as below:

- Low level of education

- Exposure to violence between parents
- Sexual abuse during childhood
- Acceptance of violence
- Exposure to other forms of prior abuse

A few social and communal factors have also been identified across the nations asof catalytic significance:

- ❖ Gender-inequitable social norms (especially those that link notions of manhood to dominance and aggression)
- ❖ Poverty
- ❖ Low social and economic status of women
- ❖ Weak legal sanctions against IPV within marriage
- ❖ Lack of women's civil rights, including restrictive or inequitable divorce and marriage laws
- ❖ Weak community sanctions against IPV
- ❖ Broad social acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict
- ❖ Armed conflict and high levels of general violence in society

Apart from these, the study has also identified certain "norms and beliefs that support violence against women" across cultures:

- A man has a right to assert power over a woman and is considered socially superior
- A man has a right to physically discipline a woman for "incorrect" behaviour
- Physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict in a relationship
- Sexual intercourse is a man's right in marriage
- A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together
- There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten
- Sexual activity (including rape) is a marker of masculinity
- Girls are responsible for controlling a man's sexual urges

Interestingly, though the study jointly conducted by the WHO and the PAHO does not include India, a look at the factors stated above is enough for an Indian to know their relevance (at least a large portion of them) to the Indian context. However, the factors responsible for the predominance of this heinous crime in India for ages, I believe, can be explained with regard to two primary *socio-cultural* phenomena peculiar to this country: first, the ideological polarities involved in gendering the two sexes and the societal double standards maintained towards the two; and second, the aura of sacrosanctity associated with the institution of marriage and family. Kiranjit's case is uniquely positioned to make it a fitting instance for studying this phenomenon along these two axes. Kiranjit is the daughter-in-law of an orthodox family from Punjab settled in London. The traditional Indian customs

and conventions bind her even in England and bar her way from coming out of an abused relationship. The English law, on the other hand, fails to mete out justice to her which is only earned after a prolonged, draining battle.

The psychological conditioning techniques employed by a patriarchal culture in *constructing* the two genders begins in the cradle and ends in the grave. It not only trains an individual to emulate the normative behavioural patterns of the concerned gender but also to develop a culturally-specified attitude towards the opposite gender. Thus, a patriarchal society trains its male children to be "manly"—insensitive, unemotional and ruthless. The female child, the "second sex"[1] in a patriarchy, on the other hand, is raised to be a "woman"—meek, mild, self-effacing, an epitome of endurance and sacrifice to counterbalance the ruthless man and facilitate his supremacy. Being brought up thus, a woman is trainedto live in the cocoon of the guardianship and protection of the "stronger" man and a family. Being physically fragile and turned emotionally vulnerable by the society, she is robbed of her mental strength and stamina to stand by herself and is in constant need of emotional support.

The roles of the oppressor and the oppressed, therefore, begin to shape up quite early in life, almost since birth, in a patriarchal social setup. The ideological dichotomy that underlies the socio-cultural construction of the two genders contributes largely to the development of the psyche of the two sexes to the opposite polarities as the oppressor and the oppressed. The seeds of oppression remain hidden in a patriarchy's polarized ideas of masculinity and femininity. In training the two sexes to conform to their prescribed gender roles, a patriarchal society, thus, unconsciously paves the path for gender-based offences in adulthood.

Provoked(2007), the autobiographical narrative by Kiranjit Ahluwalia, graphically portrays the horrendous physical, sexual and psychological torture suffered by her at the hands of her neurotic husband, Deepak Ahluwalia. On being charmed by her story of exceptional endurance, the resilience of spirit and the miraculous triumph inthe end, Diana, the Princess of Wales, England, advised Kiran to publish her inspiring story of survival for the world to know. Hence, Kiran's account was first published under the title, *Circle of Light* (1997) in the United Kingdom, and later as *Provoked* in India. Kiran's story is not only a moving account of a simple middle-class woman's spirit of survival in the face of utmost adversities, the narrative also throwsinto reliefa set of disturbing issues and questions concerning IPV. It lays bare some of the key factors that play a pivotal role in perpetuating this social malice.

[1] The phrase used by the French feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, to describe the second-class status accorded to the female sex in patriarchal societies in her classic text on feminist theory, *The Second Sex* (1949).

Kiranjit Ahluwalia was born and brought up in the small village of ChakKalal in Punjab. Hers was a large family of nine siblings. The father passed away soon after the birth of Kiran, the youngest child, wherefore the role of the male patriarch of the family was assumed by her elder brothers. It was an orthodox Punjabi family that strictly believed in specific gender roles. The men occupied themselves with the responsibilities pertaining to the world outside whereas the women were made to live a sheltered life confined to the house, attending to familial duties and household chores. Kiran's aspiration to take up a job was dismissed by her brothers on account of its nonconformity with the "family tradition" and not quite flattering to the male ego of the family patriarchs. Rather, marriage was prioritized over her wish to pursue a career in law. She was, thus, rendered financially handicapped by her brothers before handing her over to another family. Besides, their overprotective, controlling attitude nips Kiran's self-confidence and determination in the bud so much so that she continued to lack the mental strength to take even some of the fundamental decisions regarding her life without having to consult her family. Thus, later in life, even when she contemplates attempting suicide as a means of putting an end to her miseries, she writes long letters to all her nine siblings, explaining her decision and soliciting their approval.

In order to escape the ordeal of matchmaking, Kiran escaped to her sister's in Canada, but in vain. After dodging a series of proposals, she has to finally concede to the Ahluwalias and relieve her family of her responsibility. Interestingly, the traits of Deepak's insanity were perceptible even before the two got tied in wedlock. His refusal to eat with his family as well as his reluctance to show his room to his would-be wife dropped enough hints for Kiran to surmise a lack of sanity in her prospective spouse. However, to drop a confirmed proposal and look for a new match was an obligation she was unwilling to put her family through. Finding a suitable match for an arranged marriage in India is an ordeal that both the bride and her family wish to get over with at the earliest available opportunity. Moreover, the feeling that she would once again become a "liability" to the family that is almost done with her made her keep mum and embrace her fate.

The idea of a woman being a "burden" to her maiden family is so deeply etched into the psyche of every Indian woman by the members of her maiden family itself(who, in turn, are brainwashed by the native patriarchy into such thinking) that it keeps playing in their subconscious all their life and guides every choice they make. Kiran narrates the way the idea impedes her decision to end her abusive marriage:

> I would become a burden on them again—after they had spent so much on my wedding—and that wouldn't solve anything. (81)

A daughter's wedding is too huge an investment made by an Indian family for the woman to abandon it. The "big, fat Indian weddings" that serve as an index of social prestige and

respectability for the girls' families in India is an affair towards which the family keeps saving all their life. For such a gala event to end in nothing not only incurs a huge financial loss on the part of the family but also earns tons of social disgrace in turn. Besides, the Indian patriarchies regard their women as beingsdestined to be married off and transferred to the family of her husband.The responsibility of her maintenance rests with the maiden family only until marriage when she is officially handed over to her husband and his family who are vested with the obligation to provide for her thereafter. Hence, once shunned by her husband and his family, the woman lands up in a no man's land and is overtaken by an overwhelming feeling of lack of belongingness. It is out of the fear of suffering such a pitiful state of being that women like Kiran continue with dreadful marriages. In the hard-hitting article, "The Real Murderers", renowned social scientist, MadhuKishwar remarks, "this pressure to keep the marriage going at all costs is the real killer of women rather than dowry or the lack of it". Men like Deepak are, however, free from such concerns. The patriarchal society has endowed them with the privilege of continuing to live with their family in their paternal house post-marriage and earn their living. He, therefore, need not live under the constant threat of becoming homeless or a destitute. This providesthem withthe confidence to live life on their own terms and treat their women however they please.

Motherhood, the ultimate institution thought to vindicate the "womanliness" of a woman in India, often becomes a further impediment for a woman struggling to free herself from a dysfunctional marriage. Alternatively, it serves as an effective weapon at the hands of her husband to prevent her from walking out of an abusive relationship. The study conducted by WHO and PAHO mentioned earlier testifies this fact as one of the reasons women put up with a troubledconjugal relationship. Hence, in order to prevent Kiran from filing a divorce against her husband, her mother-in-law advises her son to impregnate her, for motherhood is likely to bind her to her husband in two ways: firstly, the Indian cultures hardly bear a favourable attitude towards a single mother. Secondly, having a child would drastically curtail her prospects of a second marriage. Very few Indian men would have the heart to accept a woman with a child from another man. Motherhood, in spite of all its glory, can thus be used as an effectivemanacle to restrict the freedom of a woman in India.

Another noose that is put around the neck of an Indian woman is that of family honour. An Indian woman is entitled to embody the honour and respectability, first, of her maiden family as a daughter and a sister, and then of her affinal family as a wife and a daughter-in-law. Any "misconduct" on her part is believed to malign the reputation of her either of the two families or both in the eyes of the society. Such a social attitude becomes one of the major retarding influences in the life of a woman in India. Kiran's aspiration for higher education before marriage was sacrificed at the altar of "family honour" and

"respectability"just as she was made to conceal her bruises inflicted by her husband under layers of creams and make-up and wear a smile while facing the world in order to safeguard the "honour" of her in-laws before the world outside. In spite of enduring a hellish life at her in-laws' for adecade, Kiran is overcome by an overbearing guilt-conscience for having let her family's name being "driven through mud" when she attempts suicide and,later, accidentally kills her husband. Ironically, sons like Deepak are not bogged down with such obligations to preserve the family name. In spite of being the "rightful heir" of the family as per the norms of a patriarchal society, their deeds and actions do not seem to have a bearing on the family's reputation, thereby, adding to their freedom of will and action.

The institution of marriage, therefore, further promotes and reinforces patriarchy's double standards for the two genders. Conversely, cultures like those of India ascribes a sacrosanct status to the institution of marriage—the institution devised for systematic procreation and the foundation of a family, the elementary unit of a society—which ought to be preserved by all means.

Provoked addresses the unsettling issue of marital rape. Kiran's inhibitions and reluctance could not deter her husband from forcing her into engaging in sexual intercourse on their first night. It made the petrified Kiran urinate in bed and left her legs aching for the whole next day. Since then, sex continued to be a nightmare for Kiran:

> What kind of act was this sex, when one partner enjoys himself and the other screams in pain? When I hear people talk about sex the first night swims in front of my eyes . . . In the ten years of my married life, I never enjoyed sex. It was always painful, even after the birth of my children. It damaged me to such an extent that even today I have no sexual desires. (74)

Deepak not only forced himself on his wife whenever he pleased but also refused to use condoms and prevented Kiran from taking contraceptive pills lest she puts on weight or loses her fertility. Thus, Kiran was denied the least right over her body by her husband. At one point, Kiran dreaded sleeping beside her husband and kept awake the whole night.

Ironically enough, it is Kiran, and not Deepak, who felt ashamed before her in-laws for her husband's unrestrained sexual behaviour that found an outlet in his wife whenever he pleased. The bipolar view of human sexuality held by a patriarchal society,which perceives men as sexually active beings and expects its women to be sedateand passive,empowers men like Deepak to treat their women as sex toys while women like Kiran are culturally conditioned to feel guilty for succumbing to the advances made by their husbands. In fact, in the year 1992, when Kiran's case of murdering her husband was being trialled at the court of London, the Indian legal systemstill held that a man is entitled to rape a woman provided she

is married to him, for once married, the woman becomes her man's property (Legal Aid Handbook of Domestic Violence, 1992).

One of the primary reasons for Deepak's ill-treatment of Kiran was his unfound suspicion that Kiran was having an extramarital affair and that she was conspiring against him in association with his family whom he always distrusted. Consequently, Kiran was made to snap all ties with her friends and family. As an act of revenge, Deepak made all efforts to scare Kiran to death and push her into a state of chronic anxiety. One of the incidents in the text may be cited here as an instance. Once in the middle of a heated argument, Kiran threatened Deepak of going to the police. But the moment she crossed the threshold of the house, Deepak plunged in front of her and said, "If you go, I'll break this milk bottle and plunge it in your stomach" (105). Frightened, as she attempted to withdraw, he thundered, "I'll cut your legs in half if you dare to come back inside" (105). Kiran narrates the benumbing effect of the fear so induced in her:

> I couldn't sleep for fear, couldn't eat for fear, fear when my brothers and sisters phoned, fear of Deepak's return from work, fear of weekends—fear, fear, fear, it paralyzes you beyond belief. (110)

It robbed Kiran of her last iota of strength to rebel and fight back her demonic husband.

If Kiran's helplessness is understandable in the face of such hostile circumstances, one naturally wonders about the prospect of support she was likely to receive from the people around. Deepak's brutal treatment of Kiran was an open secret and could not have escaped the notice of those acquainted with the couple. Apart from her in-laws and maiden family, Paul, Puppi (Gurjit), Jyoti, Rashmi, her landlady, Kiran's friends, Sulekha and Chandrika, her teacher at the typing class, her boss at her workplace, the psychiatrist she consulted—all bore eye-witnesses to her dreadful plight. Yet, Kiran was left to fight her own battle by people who considered it a mere matter of "domestic" disharmony. The part played by Kiran's mother-in-law in the whole affair was restricted to shouting at her son and joining hands with him against Kiran from time to time. When Deepak chipped off Kiran's front tooth with his fist and as a reflex action she bit off his ears, her sympathies were all with her son's bleeding ears, the reprimandbeing in Kiran's share. But when Kiran contemplated committing suicide or filing a divorce, she tried holding her back with the excuse of the disgrace that such an act will bring to her family and ruin the prospects of the marriage of her other children. Strangely, it is not the insanity and the continuous abusive behaviour of her son but the filing of a divorce or the commitment of suicide of the daughter-in-law that was thought to bring social disgrace to the Ahluwalias.

Apart from being a silent spectator and, at times, a partner in Deepak's crime, Kiran's mother-in-law fared no better as a mother-in-law when compared to Deepak as a husband.

She was an equally jealous and dominating mother-in-law who never shied away from inflicting her share of physical torture on Kiran. Whenever Deepak would bar Kiran from engaging in the execution of household chores, it was Kiran who had to bear the brunt of her mother-in-law's anger and accusations. Her language is as foul as her son's: "She's your sweetmeat, isn't she? Put her in your mouth, put her in your pocket and take her everywhere" (93). She was equally indifferent, if not complacent, towards her son's extramarital affairs. After the death of Deepak, when Kiran's case was trialled in court, Deepak's mother denied the charge of Deepak ever being violent towards Kiran and even her presence during any of their rows. She even refuted the charge of Deepak's extramarital affairs and conveniently shifts the blame on Kiran for being "difficult" with Deepak and prevented the children from meeting their "convicted" mother in prison.

Apart from the mother-in-law, the rest of the family members on both sides are no less guilty of irresponsibility and callousness. In the first place, Deepak's family hid the history of his having suffered from epilepsy in the past at the time of marriage. Deepak's uncle, Ranjit, disclosed the history of his mental disorder only when it was too late. In India, such medical histories about the prospective bride or groom are usually kept under wrapsby relatives during matchmaking lest the match is undone. The society delights in the random pairing of marriageable women and men and then conveniently wash their hands off the matter with the disclaimer, "the family should not interfere in quarrels between husband and wife" (124). People like Kiran remain at the receiving end of the consequences of such thoughtless matchmaking by the members of the immediate and extended family. The reluctance to interfere in matters of conjugal disharmony seems to stem from the assumption that in the absence of any external assistance, the couple would have no choice but to put up with one another, thereby ensuring the preservation of the institution of marriage. Thus, in spite of the fact that Kiran was repeatedly thrashed and abused by Deepak at several relatives' with the relatives as witnesses, she was consistently dissuaded by her family from filing a divorce and impelled to return to her husband and try harder to sustain the marriage.

In India, a girl child's upbringing is largely geared towards marriage which is perceived as an inevitable reality in the life of every Indian woman. A failed marriage, therefore, comes to haunt her psyche with an overwhelming sense of failure and hopelessness. She has failed in the project towards which her life has been directed since childhood and in which her family invested a fortune.Kiran too wasovertaken overby such anintensefeeling of guilt and failure that a failed marriage is likely to charge an Indian woman with: "I had failed in life too—as a wife and a daughter-in-law. The word failure was printed across my brain" (112). However, for men like Deepak, the conjugal relationship constitute just one of the myriad aspects of their life, one amongst the several social roles they play. Hence, there remains

much to their life to look forward to and indulge in even after a failed marriage. Their identity as social beings are not solely founded on their marital relationships, nor do they get completely consumed by their familial relations. A failed marriage would, therefore, still leave them with several other roles to play and identities to live with. Unlike women like Kiran, a failed marriage does not pronounce them as doomed and worthless.

The humiliation and social disgrace earned by a divorced woman is to be equally shared by her maiden family. It is to avoid this biting sense of ignominy that a woman's maiden family insists and pressurizes their daughter(s) to put up with all forms of injustices at her in-laws to keep the marriage from falling apart. During the ten years of her marriage, Kiran had the opportunity of visiting her family in India just once. At home, she showed her badly injured leg to her brothers and pleaded divorce before her husband kills her. A series of threatening and negotiation followed between Deepak and her brothers only to boil down to the decision, "give him another chance" (125),followed by the suggestion that they should go to Delhi for a holiday to mend their relationship. After a few days, her brothers sent her back to London on the pretext of her father-in-law's illness. Kiran vents out her frustration thus:

> I had done everything to my family's advice: taken a job, got a house, had children. When I had shown them how unhappy I was—quietly, not screaming and ranting in public like Deepak—they hadn't listened. (53)

Rather her family had tried every possible means to keep her chained to the relationship—paid the money due to Deepak, not called Kiran while Deepak was not home, sent them on a holiday, prevented her from going to the court—lest they are burdened with the responsibility of a divorced sister and the associated shareof social disgrace.

When Kiran tried to seek help from her acquaintances, everybody chose to stay out of the matter they deemed "domestic" and private to the couple. On one of the occasions when Kiran told her landlady about the quarrels that she and Deepak had over babysitting on the landlady's behalf, she got angry with Kiran and snapped all ties with her. Similarly, Kiran's friend, Sulekha, distanced herself from Kiran following a threat from Deepak. When Kiran attempted suicide and was attended by a psychiatrist in the hospital, the doctor concluded after listening to her account:

> … it appears to be purely a family problem. She may have an immature personality and find it difficult to fit in with her husband and his family and seems happily married. (130)

Such a lack of co-operation and ruthless indifference from everyquarter drove Kiran to the conclusion, "[n]o one would sort out my problems. No one would suggest that I should leave him." (193)

Once all her efforts to avail support from the people around fail, Kiran is pushed to the extremes of desperation whenshefinally tries to gain some agency. Being unable to fight her husband face-to-face, she thought of injuring his legs while he is asleep so that he can no longer chase her around the house trying to harm or kill her. Hence, she attempted to set fire to his legs when the latter is asleep, an action which ultimately results in the death of Deepak Ahluwalia.

Kiran's hard-earned relief from Deepak's beastly treatment was duly compensated by the violence of law which immediately substituted for the former.Kiran was refused bail twice on grounds not known to her. In the series of interrogations that followed, the more Kiran tried to contextualize her action by referring to Deepak's ten years of brutal torture, the more she was brought back to the happenings of the night of the mishap where there was no "immediate provocation" from her sleeping husband. Hence, Kiran was accused of a well-contrived murder. Her initial reply on being inquired whether she knew the reason for her arrest, "[b]ecause I tried to kill my husband", and her later statement, "I didn't put too much fire" came to be interpreted as her "confession" and almost sealed the case against her. Moreover, in his forty-five-minute statement given to the police in the hospital, Deepak gave a completely distorted version of the incidents of the day of the accident and falsely accused Kiran of attempting to murder him.

In her first trial held at the Lewes Crown Court in December 1989, Kiran was so petrified that she exercised her "right to silence" and chose to keep mum. In spite of the numerous evidence provided of Deepak's abusive treatment of Kiran, the judge concluded that none of them was of the "highest severity". The jury found Kiran guilty by a majority of ten to two and she was given a life sentence.

However, the chief factor that delayed justice for Kiran was that the British legal system could not accommodate "criminals" like Kiran on grounds of "diminished responsibility" which, put simply, means that the criminal went mad or lost control over all her senses during the commission of the murder. Besides, the English Law did not recognise "provocation" other than an immediate one. Things begin to turn in favour of Kiran only when John Ashley, the Labour Party MP for Stroke-on-Trent South, introduced a Ten Minute Bill in the House of Commons, proposing to amend the law on provocation.

It was only after the introduction of the Bill, thatRohit, the lawyer appointed by the Southall Black Sisters (SBS) group fighting the case on behalf of Kiran,could draw up a strong case of "provocation" and "diminished responsibility",in association withthe psychiatrists,during Kiran's second appeal granted on September 12, 1991. While pronouncing the final verdict on the case, the Chief Justice, Lord Taylor, extended the definition of provocation to include "cumulative provocation", a new term coined and

included in the terminology of the British legal system meaning "a sudden and temporary loss of self-control". The coinage of this new term implied that a time lag between the provocation and its reaction should not deprive the defendant of the opportunity to argue her/his case on grounds of provocation. This was the most remarkable achievement of the case of Kiranjit Ahluwalia that made it a classic case in the history of the British system of law.

However, though justice was finally meted out to Kiran, albeit much delayed, the fact that needs to be noted in this regard is that the legal allegation against Kiran got reduced from "murder"only to "manslaughter", and that too on the ground of "diminished responsibility", an act done in a feat of temporary insanity. Her history of enduring horrendous physical and emotional violence for over a decade failed to serve as a fitting justification in the eyes of the Law for her attempt to liberate herself from the clutches of a demonic husband. Insanityalone, proved through a series of medical reports, could ultimately acquit her of the charge of murder.

Thus, Kiranjit Ahluwalia's case exemplifies the crucial part played by the society in an incidence of domestic violence. In spite of the site of the violence perpetrated being the domestic space of a house, one must not forget that the "domestic" is an integral part of the social space for the chief component of the domestic space, the family, is the foundational unit of the society. Kiran's account betrays the ample opportunities that a society has—in the form of a family, friends, relations, neighbours and the Law—to mediate in a case of domestic violence and bring the culprit to justice and save the victim. However, being caught up in its own mire of preconceived gender norms,coupled with aninviolable status accorded to the institution of marriage and family, the Indian societies only labour hard to block all avenues out of an abusive relationship for a woman and, thereby, perpetuate the malpractice. If a culture trains its women to make happy homes after marriage, it should tutor its men in similar ideologies. If marriage as an institution deserves to be sustained by a culture, the latter ought to ensure that it fosters harmonious living and is founded on the principles of human rights for both the partners.

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