Daughters are Diamonds: 'When Honour Precludes the Freedom of the Reflexive Self'[1].

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> "The Indian sees himself not merely as the father of a family, but as the founder and head of succeeding generations bearing his name in honour and wealth. He will establish a family trust, make his pilgrimage to Mecca if he is a Moslem, and put his name in large letters on the properties he has built. He becomes a pillar of society during his lifetime and a benefactor of his family at his death" (Calpin, 1949, p105 cited in Ebr.Vally, 2001, p89).

Family honour is the leading thread through the journey that this paper undertakes. The concept of family honour draws from the social identity and status awarded to families and clans, probably over generations. In order to maintain this often prestigious place in society, a number of behaviours and expectations are taught to individual members, male and female. In many instances, the maintenance of this social status is important in setting structures for future generations. On the other hand, the rigidity implied by such structures can prove to be limiting to the individual. My research focuses on how South African Indian Muslim women perceive and experience the opportunities, challenges and obstacles facing them. It also looks at the extent, if at all, to which traditionalist culture creates or influences a gap between opportunity and achievement for South African Indian Muslim women.

It is the aim of this research to explore the ways in which the reflexivity of the self is inhibited in cultures where "honour" is valued. What it tests, is the limits to freedom of choice allowed to the individual. While moral limits are expected to be set, the question here is whether there are limits that extend far beyond moral boundaries and the implications that this social structure has for the individual to develop and achieve goals. As two sides of the coin of social order, male domination and female subordination both impact on individuals regardless of gender. The construction and articulation of '*izzat*' or honour also affects men just as it affects the life decisions and choices available to women. The sociological honour code is constructed in a way that ensures that women symbolise that code, and their male members of the family are

afforded the responsibility of administrating the lives of the objects of honour, in order to maintain the family's status within the social unit, or '*kutum-qabila*'. Due to the limits of time as well as the need to portray an in-depth assessment of the accessible material, this study focuses on women. The sample consists of six South African Muslim women of Indian ancestry. It is acknowledged that both men and women are likely to be affected by rigid structures, and as such, a parallel study with regards to men will compliment this research.

The study is set against a background of honour killings in Pakistan. This is not to imply a direct comparison between the extreme case study of honour killings and the experiences of South African Indian Muslim women. It is rather to illuminate the patriarchal mindset that infringes on the rights and liberties of women in a number of ways, based on the assumption that Muslims of Indian origin whether in South Africa or Pakistan share a common cultural heritage. In the extreme case of Pakistan, women who deviate are murdered or physically disfigured. In the South African case, the women face social sanction and stigma. This decreases their chances of achieving goals. With the use of the extreme case, we are more easily able to discern the motivations, rationalisations and even resistance to the attack on individual liberties. In addition, we can illuminate the multicultural social fabric of contemporary South Africa and the residual effects that various cultures have on both the network of people and on their constructions of individual and national biography.

This research suggests that social behaviour among the Indian Muslims in South Africa locates itself in the preservation of patriarchal custom and tradition, so deeply embedded in everyday life that its undertaking is almost always mistaken for religious obligation. Cultural belief, traditionalist values and religion are interspersed and inform thoughts and actions. People who go against the prescribed behaviours are stigmatised and slandered. Hence, entrenched cultural acts obtain social endorsement from being viewed as a duty or obligation to divine command. In actual fact Islam denounces the exploitation and control of people of either sex.

Academics in the fields of legal jurisprudence and human rights continue to debate the apparent contradictions between notions of gender equality and respect for culture and tradition, especially since the formulation of the new constitution in South Africa.

Here the loss of self-reflexivity is about the loss of newfound freedoms - it rests in oppressive structures within the scope of democratic promise.

This study then essentially explores the perpetuation of gender and family stereotypes in South African Indian Muslim society and assesses the degree to which this affects people from traditionalist backgrounds. It asks thus, whether and how women are able to carve out a space for themselves within which a fully reflexive life may be lived.

> "Expectations were never really verbalized; they were just expected" (Fiona, 35).

The analysis of findings opened up a Pandora's box of rich material that colours my study in a number of ways: the way in which women are socialized to subordinate positions as well as their internalised notions of '*izzat'* or honour, and what is relevant for the family and generations to come ('*khandaan*') as well as the household-community sphere ('*kutum qabila')* in terms of their different roles and the expectations that may be allotted to them. Further, I explore the concept of '*sabr*' or patience as a socialization agent and also as a form of social control, as opposed to its intended goal of spiritual upliftment and development of the individual who enjoins the tenets of patience and good moral living.

The study is structured around the biographical narratives of six women from the Indian Muslim community in Johannesburg. Each of these women, regardless of their ages or levels of education, proved to be a philosopher in her own right. Mira[2] (27) is a progressive, career-oriented woman who faces the task of reconciling her parents' wishes of marrying someone of their choice with her own more liberal conception of life; one which has, until now, been fully supported by her parents. Fiona (35), Fiza (42), Sima (44) and Salma (46) are all married with children. Zara (59) has never been married, but has spent her life rearing both her siblings and their children.

> "… (T)he interpersonal context revealed in women's personal narratives suggests how women's lives are shaped through and evolve within relationships with others. Feminists have long noted the special reliance of women upon the resources of networks of family and kin, and the important role women play in nurturing and maintaining such networks. Indeed, this reliance may well be a function of women's relative powerlessness" (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p20).

Andrea Rugh reminds us that "exaggeration is not foreign to these narratives", and that the stories are "presented as the women see themselves, woven through with their corrections, additions and omissions of time past, and cast in the mould of their developed themes…" (Atiya, 1993, p ix). So then, what we seek is not 'the truth', as "this is but one of the many truths that reside in the drama of human events. Each woman is aware of how critical it is to present oneself to the world effectively. Not only she herself gains from this kind of glorified presentation, but so do all the others – parents, husbands, children, relatives – that make up the extended self and suffer the consequences or reap the rewards of one another's accomplishments" (Atiya, 1993, p ix). In a social setting comprised of customs that make a woman the custodian of a communal honour, no doubt the pressure to glorify this presentation is deeply ingrained.

> "As she grows up, a girl is assigned child-care (and household) responsibilities and is made aware that her sex is a potential source of shame and dishonor. She is constantly told that she is inferior to her brothers and that 'you are a woman and you are going to someone else's house where you had better know how to behave' (Zainab Kabir, 1981/5)" (Callaway and Creevey, 1994, p34).

Zara (59) defines the concept of household honour or what she refers to as '*ghar jo izzat*', as follows:

> "It means respect. (He) didn't want anyone to say anything against the family and especially against him, so he was strict…. He used to say (about regulating the behaviour of the daughter-in-law in the family): *ijjat pachhi; pehla ijjat. maru chuna keh nu ai pachhi chuna keh di ai. I don't want that.'* [First (my/our) honour, then (their) honour. (Because) people will say that first she's (my/our) daughter-in-law, then they will say that she's (their) daughter.]"
> (Zara, 59, Unmarried).

In addition to her upbringing, age at marriage, class status of family and each woman's present role within her family affects the nature and range of decision-making allowed to her. For example, married at nineteen, Salma (46) gives insight into her situation:

> "I got engaged in November and married in January. It was the end of my young days. I only agreed (because) my grandfather gave my mother hell about keeping a daughter in the house and maybe entertaining my ideas of studying"(Salma, 46).

About her mother she reveals:

> "As far as she was concerned, housework was more important for females… to her studying wasn't important; to her, 'izzat' was more important, you know. She made it very difficult for me to study for my matric finals"
> (Salma, 46).

Women in more affluent households may not be required to work so as to compliment the family income. Financial dependence removes an essential source of power and opportunity in making decisions. Fiona (35) reflects with regret on her past:

> "And the one thing that *I* will always feel terribly guilty about is that I deprived my child of the parental love he needed at that first stage of life, and that care and stimulation that he should have had. He was neglected… kind of like children in an orphanage who have no real stimulation and support. He was left to lie in the carry cot. And I was cooking and running around and doing things for my mother-in-law"
> (Fiona, 35, Limited).

Due to financial necessity, Sima (44) is required to involve herself in the family business alongside her husband, and over time she obtains a growing amount of freedom in the decisions regarding the lives of her children. Financial success elevates her status in the extended family and especially in the eyes of her mother-in-law. This is a contrast to the earlier stages of her married life, when she was not allowed into discussions between her husband and his mother regarding communal decisions that invariably affected her. She remembers that for the sake of respect towards her mother-in-law, she was on many occasions unable to accompany her husband to his weekly cricket matches. Instead, she was expected to remain behind in the kitchen.

In each of the married women whom I interviewed, there exists a definite sense of the crucial relationship with the figure of the mother-in-law and the impact that this person has on their respective relationships with their husbands (and often, even with their own children). For example, both Fiza (42) and Sima (44) mention that in the beginning of their married lives their husbands were expected to hand-over their entire pay-checks to their mothers and personal spending required that they request their mothers permission. Fiza (42) suffered depression throughout the first two years of her marriage because she struggled to establish a bond with her husband. She felt that she was not able to relate to her mother-in-law either, even though she spent most of her waking hours with her. Further, she attributes the learning difficulties experienced by her child to her depression. Mothers and mother-in-laws together form

a social system in their own right in maintaining the transfer of expectations and social controls.

The study also looked at the kinds of religious and cultural texts that might inform social expectation. The primary religious text referred to is the Qur'an while the cultural texts refer to a range of material which has been published in the Indian and Pakistani subcontinent. This latter form of literature is readily made available to South Africans in *madrassas* as well as in community bookshops. Religious and cultural texts often serve as socialisation material toward forming a guide for expected and accepted behaviours. While religious texts tend to justify the upholding of morality, cultural texts tend to be responsible for the contradictions and misgivings operating in everyday modern social life as we know it. This is so, because the interpretation of authentic religious texts from a cultural standpoint tends to lend a patriarchal bias which is contradictory and hence problematic. The line of difference between the two is blurred and often people tend to confuse the obligation of religion with the sentiment of tradition.

The oral tradition of superstition plays an important role in the socialisation of norms. Superstition seems to endorse and refuse a number of behaviours without being questioned and the analysis of this kind of material proves to be rather fascinating in the implications it has for social control. For example, I looked at the institution of the '*maanta*', a pact made by women in need of divine intervention with regards to being granted a fervent wish. This is a rather controversial practice in terms of Islamic belief and hence relegated to the realm of 'irrational superstition'. It compels a woman to give all sorts of charities, and further, compels her to ensure that this tradition continues down the generations through the wives of sons born in future generations. In other words, the superstition begun by the mother-in-law becomes a burden for generations of daughters-in-law to continue.

The practices that limit the autonomy in an individual's life are explained as adhering to religious obligation. The line between the religion of Islam as a way of life and traditionalist thinking that derives from the Indian culture becomes blurred and the women internalise this transposed network of ambiguity as a natural condition. She naturalises her own dependency and subordination as part of her greater link with

Faith. In so doing, she becomes the perfect candidate for perpetuating the system later on in life as a mother or mother-in-law.

The six women who form the core of the project were interviewed about more than their life circumstances. They revealed a great deal about the experiences and concepts which frame their thinking and decisions. These fall on a continuum. At the one end of the continuum are those who felt extreme pressures upon them to conform, and did conform. At the other end were those who felt these pressures in a milder form and were able to negotiate a better range of choice for themselves. There is no simple correlation as this study discovered; there are no predictable patterns in the drama of human events. A network of social factors accosts each woman (and man) along the path of life. This network consists of multiple controls and multiple opportunities that the individual has to find his/her way through. These are among numerous social features that invariably affect the continuum of differing degrees of reflexivity and autonomy allowed to the individual.

There is a general paucity of literature on the diversity of life in post-apartheid South African society and specifically on emerging Indian Muslim cultural conceptualisations of life in the new era. While this may have proven a limit to the frame of reference for this study, it also points to the need for research of this nature, with regard to the various traditionalist settings in South Africa.

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Endnotes

[1] This study is a tribute to mothers, wives, sisters and daughters the world over who persevere, adapt and thrive on life, because of and in spite of all that they have to endure.

[2] Names have been changed.