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RESEARCH PAPER

Preventing Honour Crimes in India: Constitutional Rights, Criminal Laws and Legislative Reforms

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Abstract
Honour crimes in India grow out of a clash between personal choice and the control of family, caste or community. India has no single central law that defines honour killing as an offence of its own. Courts therefore use general provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 along with procedure and evidence rules and special laws such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The Supreme Court has filled part of this gap. It has held that adults have a right to choose a partner under Article 21 and in Shakti Vahini v Union of India it ordered police and district officers to take preventive, remedial and punitive steps. Some States have begun to act as well. The Governor of Rajasthan returned the state's 2019 Bill on January 28, 2026. Karnataka passed Act No. 26 of 2026 in April 2026 and its Section 1(2) leaves the start date to a Gazette notification. This paper studies how Indian law deals with honour crimes today. It argues that the main weakness is timing. Criminal law mostly acts after a killing while early threats, social boycotts and police inaction go unchecked. The paper lists eight gaps in the present legal system and offers twelve reforms. It also sets out a model central law with three levels of offences. The paper concludes that a clear central statute backed by trained police, safe houses, witness protection and public accountability can turn constitutional promises into real and lasting safety for couples.

1. Introduction

Honour crimes are a hard test for a country that promises freedom and equality to every person. In India a man or woman who picks a partner against the wishes of the family or caste can face threats, social pressure or even death. The people behind such acts often say they are protecting the honour of the family or the community.[1] Behind this one claim sit many deeper problems. These include caste discrimination, male control over women and the duty of the State to keep its citizens safe.

India does not yet have one central law that defines and punishes honour killing. When such a killing happens, prosecutors use general offences like murder, hurt, wrongful restraint, unlawful

[1] Constitution of India, art 21.

assembly and criminal intimidation.[2] The Supreme Court of India has stepped in to protect the right of adults to choose a life partner. It has also listed the steps that the State must take against unlawful interference by communities.[3]

States have moved at different speeds. In January 2026 the Governor of Rajasthan sent back a state bill on interference with marriage so that it could be looked at again. In April 2026 Karnataka passed its own Act on the subject. That Act will start only when the State Government notifies a date in the Official Gazette.[4]

This paper asks two questions. First, how does Indian law now deal with honour killings and honour-related harm through constitutional rights, criminal law, procedure, evidence and court decisions? Second, what changes in law and institutions are needed to stop honour crimes before violence begins and how should a full model law be built?[5] Every part of this paper links back to one theme, which is prevention.

1.1 Meaning and Scope of Honour Killing

In everyday legal and social use, honour killing means the killing of a person by family members, relatives, community members or people acting for them. The aim is to protect or win back the supposed honour of a family, caste, clan or community. It usually happens when a person makes a choice about marriage, relationships or sexuality that goes against what the family or community expects.

Honour-related harm takes many forms. A woman may be killed for marrying outside her caste. A couple may be murdered for an interfaith marriage. A person may be attacked for marrying against the wishes of parents. A woman may be killed for refusing an arranged marriage. Couples who marry within the same *gotra* or break some other community rule may also be targeted. In each of these cases the harm comes from the choice of a partner.[6]

1.2 Absence of a Statutory Definition and Core Features

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 has no definition of honour killing. No central statute has one either. The Law Commission of India looked at this gap in its 242nd Report in 2012. It noted that honour-related harm is wider than murder. It often includes threats, intimidation, social boycotts, unlawful assemblies and attacks on the freedom to marry.[7]

Five features usually mark an honour crime. These are (1) a claimed breach of family, caste or community norms; (2) a person using personal choice in marriage or relationships; (3) an effort to punish, scare or control that person; (4) violence, threats, pressure or other unlawful interference; and (5) a stated reason tied to family or group honour. Courts also separate honour crimes from ordinary family quarrels. So the motive and the full facts matter.[8]

[2] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 101.
[3] *Shakti Vahini v Union of India* (2018) 7 SCC 192, 216.
[4] Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (Eva Nammava Eva Nammava) Act 2026 (Karnataka Act 26 of 2026), s 1(2).
[5] Law Commission of India, *Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework* (Report No 242, August 2012) 1 <https://lawcommissionofindia.nic.in>.
[6] *Lata Singh v State of Uttar Pradesh* (2006) 5 SCC 475, 480.
[7] Law Commission of India (n 5) 12.
[8] *Bhagwan Dass v State (NCT of Delhi)* (2011) 6 SCC 396, 400.

2. Constitutional Framework Governing Honour Crimes

Honour crimes are not simple crimes or private family quarrels. They hit directly at the fundamental rights in Part III of the Constitution of India. These rights include dignity, equality, freedom of movement and personal liberty.[9] The table below shows the main articles and how each one helps in the fight against honour crimes.

Constitutional Provision	Role in Addressing Honour Crimes
Article 14	Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws against arbitrary action and violence.
Article 15(1)	Prohibits discrimination by the State on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
Article 19(1)(a)	Protects freedom of speech and expression, including the expression of personal choices in life and marriage.
Article 19(1)(d) and (e)	Protects freedom of movement across India and the right to live and settle in any part of India.
Article 21	Protects life, personal liberty, dignity, privacy and individual autonomy, including the choice of a partner.
Article 25	Protects freedom of conscience and religion, subject to constitutional limits and public order.

2.1 Article 21 and the Right to Choose a Partner

Article 21 is the heart of constitutional protection against honour crimes. Choosing a life partner is a basic part of personal liberty and autonomy. Parents, caste groups and community bodies have no legal right to decide whom a consenting adult may marry.[10]

2.2 Equality, Freedom of Choice and Constitutional Morality

Articles 14 and 15(1) support this right. Honour violence often comes from caste hierarchy and male control over women. The State has a duty to protect people from unlawful violence and from unfair interference with their rights.[11]

Article 19(1)(a), (d) and (e) protect personal freedom in daily life. An adult who is in danger because of a marriage or relationship choice must be free to say what they want and move to a safe place. They must also be free to live in any part of India without force.[12]

One rule is central here. Social morality cannot override constitutional morality. A family or community cannot defend violence by saying that a person broke custom, caste rules or local habits.[13]

[9] Constitution of India, art 14.
[10] *Shafin Jahan v Asokan KM* (2018) 16 SCC 368, 388.
[11] Constitution of India, art 15(1).
[12] Constitution of India, art 19(1)(a).
[13] *Shakti Vahini* (n 3) 218.

3. Statutory Provisions Applicable to Honour Crimes

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 came into force on July 1, 2024 and replaced the Indian Penal Code, 1860. There is still no single central honour-crimes Act. So prosecutions go forward under general offences such as homicide, hurt, restraint, kidnapping, unlawful assembly, conspiracy, abetment and intimidation.[14]

3.1 Core Offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023

The main provisions are Section 100 (culpable homicide), Section 101 (murder), Section 103 (punishment for murder, which is death or imprisonment for life with fine), Section 105 (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and Section 109 (attempt to murder).[15]

Other offences often arise before, during or after an attack. These include voluntarily causing hurt (Section 115) or grievous hurt (Section 117), wrongful restraint (Section 126) or wrongful confinement (Section 127), kidnapping (Section 137) and kidnapping or abducting in order to murder (Section 140). They also include unlawful assembly (Section 189), liability of members of an unlawful assembly for an offence done to reach a common object (Section 190), rioting (Section 191), abetment (Section 45 onwards), criminal conspiracy (Section 61), criminal intimidation (Section 351) and causing disappearance of evidence or giving false information to shield an offender (Section 238).[16]

Five provisions matter most in honour-crime cases. First, under Section 101 a person who intentionally kills someone over a marriage choice can be guilty of murder. Protecting family honour is no defence. Second, Section 103(1) provides death or life imprisonment with fine for murder. Third, under Section 190 members of an unlawful assembly can be held liable when a murder is done to reach a shared unlawful object. This is subject to the limits in the law. Fourth, Section 61 applies when family members, relatives or community leaders plan a killing together. Fifth, Section 351 applies to threats against inter-caste or inter-religious couples before any physical attack takes place.[17]

3.2 Group Murders under Section 103(2) of the BNS

Section 103(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 deals with murder by a group of five or more persons acting together on grounds such as race, caste or community, sex, place of birth, language, personal belief or a similar ground. Each member of the group can face death or imprisonment for life with fine.[18]

This rule can apply when an honour killing takes the form of group violence driven by caste or community. Even so, it must be read with Sections 101, 103(1) and 190. Prosecutors must also prove the group action and the ground. The rule does not replace a law that deals with threats, unlawful assemblies, boycotts and pressure before a killing happens.[19]

[14] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 100.
[15] ibid ss 100–101, 103, 105, 109.
[16] ibid ss 61, 115, 117, 126–127, 137, 140, 189–191, 238, 351.
[17] ibid ss 61, 101, 103(1), 190, 351.
[18] ibid s 103(2).
[19] ibid ss 101, 103(1)–(2), 190.

3.3 Procedure, Evidence and Allied Protective Statutes

Several provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 are relevant. Section 173 covers information in cognizable cases. Section 175 gives the police power to investigate cognizable cases. Section 193 covers the police report at the end of an investigation. Section 346 provides for day-to-day inquiry and trial. Quick registration of complaints, proper investigation, careful collection of evidence and steady trials are all vital for prevention and justice.[20]

The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 also helps. Under Section 8 courts can look at motive, preparation and conduct. This can help prove a plan among family members. Past threats, messages, call records and electronic evidence can also be used, subject to the rules on digital records.[21]

Two other laws matter in some cases. First, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 applies when an honour crime involves caste-based violence against a member of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. It covers intentional insult or intimidation in public view under Section 3(1)(r) and caste-based abuse in public view under Section 3(1)(s). It also provides higher punishment under Sections 3(2)(v) and 3(2)(va) when the legal elements are proved. The Act provides for Special Courts and witness protection too. An inter-caste marriage alone does not prove an offence under this Act unless its specific elements are shown. Second, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is not an honour-killing law. Still, it can give early relief in domestic settings through protection orders, residence orders and monetary relief under Sections 3, 18, 19, 20 and 22.[22]

4. Judicial Evolution and Preventive Safeguards

There is no uniform central statute on honour crimes. In that gap the Supreme Court of India and the High Courts have built the main protections for consenting adults. They have also set duties for the police and local authorities.[23]

4.1 Foundational Supreme Court Rulings

In *Lata Singh v State of Uttar Pradesh* (2006) an adult woman married a man from another caste against the wishes of her family. Her family turned hostile and criminal cases followed. The Supreme Court held that inter-caste marriage is not illegal and that an adult has the right to choose a spouse. It said that family disapproval cannot justify violence and that the police must protect couples who are under threat.[24]

In *Arumugam Servai v State of Tamil Nadu* (2011) the Supreme Court condemned *khap panchayats* and similar bodies that enforce caste rules or social punishments. It held that they cannot take the law into their own hands or issue violent orders. It also said that the authorities must act strictly against such offenders.[25]

[20] Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, ss 173, 175, 193, 346.
[21] Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023, s 8.
[22] Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, s 3(2)(v).
[23] *Lata Singh* (n 6) 483.
[24] ibid 483–84.
[25] *Arumugam Servai v State of Tamil Nadu* (2011) 6 SCC 405, 410–11.

In *Bhagwan Dass v State (NCT of Delhi)* (2011) a father killed his daughter because he did not approve of her relationship. The Supreme Court called honour killings barbaric. It ruled that family honour is no defence to murder and said that courts must treat these crimes with full seriousness.[26]

4.2 Shakti Vahini and Related Autonomy Rulings

The leading preventive ruling is *Shakti Vahini v Union of India* (2018). The Supreme Court held that two consenting adults have the right to marry without the consent of their families, castes or clans. It observed that the human rights of a daughter, son, brother or sister are not mortgaged to the so-called honour of a family, clan or group.[27]

The Court ordered three kinds of steps. The first kind was preventive. The States had to identify districts, sub-divisions and villages where honour crimes or *khap panchayat* interference had been reported. The police had to watch over couples who faced threats. Every district had to have a special cell led by the Superintendent of Police with the District Social Welfare Officer and the District Adi-Dravidar Welfare Officer. A 24-hour helpline was also required. The second kind was remedial. It included immediate protection, safe houses, quick police action and action against unlawful assemblies. The third kind was punitive. It included disciplinary action against officials who fail to act despite prior knowledge and criminal prosecution of the offenders. It also required fast-track or designated courts with day-to-day trials that aim to finish within six months of the court taking cognizance.[28]

Other decisions back up personal autonomy. In *Shafin Jahan v Asokan KM* (2018) an adult woman had converted to Islam and married. The Supreme Court restored the marriage. It held that choice of partner and faith belongs to individual liberty under Article 21 and that neither parents nor courts can override the choice of a competent adult. In *KS Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017) a nine-judge bench recognized privacy under Article 21. This includes intimate choices and the freedom to make personal decisions. In *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India* (2018) the Court read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code for consenting adults and affirmed dignity, equality and intimate autonomy. In *Asha Ranjan v State of Bihar* (2017) the Court held that individual liberty cannot be placed below social or political power.[29]

4.3 Recent High Court and Supreme Court Decisions (2025)

In *Ibrahimsab v State of Karnataka* (September 25, 2025) the Kalaburagi Bench of the Karnataka High Court heard appeals that arose from an honour killing. The court noted that India had no specific law on honour killings at that time. It described honour killings as cultural crimes and pointed out how hard it is to prove the role of each person in a group attack.[30]

In the *Kannagi and Murugesan* case (April 28, 2025) the victims were killed in Tamil Nadu in an inter-caste honour killing by several accused persons. The Supreme Court dismissed the appeals of nine convicts and upheld the life sentences that the Madras High Court had confirmed. It also

[26] *Bhagwan Dass* (n 8) 400–01.
[27] *Shakti Vahini* (n 3) 216.
[28] ibid 225–28.
[29] *KS Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017) 10 SCC 1, 264.
[30] *Ibrahimsab v State of Karnataka* (Kar HC, 25 September 2025) <https://indiankanoon.org>.

dealt with appeals involving two police officers. The case shows strict punishment for group violence and close attention to the conduct of officials.[31]

The table below sums up the main cases and the rule that each one adds to the law against honour crimes.

Case	Year	Core Legal Principle
Lata Singh v State of Uttar Pradesh	2006	Adults may marry whom they choose. Family opposition cannot justify violence and police must protect couples.
Arumugam Servai v State of Tamil Nadu	2011	Condemns khap panchayat interference and unlawful punishments. The State must act strictly.
Bhagwan Dass v State (NCT of Delhi)	2011	Honour is no excuse for murder. Courts must treat honour killings with full severity.
KS Puttaswamy v Union of India	2017	Privacy under Article 21 protects personal autonomy and intimate choices.
Asha Ranjan v State of Bihar	2017	Individual liberty is not below social or political pressure.
Shakti Vahini v Union of India	2018	Consenting adults need no approval from family or group. Sets preventive, remedial and punitive steps.
Shafin Jahan v Asokan KM	2018	The choice of spouse and faith belongs to the competent adult under Article 21.
Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India	2018	Affirms dignity, equality and intimate autonomy for consenting adults.
Ibrahimsab v State of Karnataka	2025	Treats honour killing as a distinct social problem and notes the hurdles of proof in group violence.
Kannagi and Murugesan Case	2025	Upholds convictions in an inter-caste honour killing and deals with police accountability.

5. Legislative Developments and Comparative Perspectives

5.1 Law Commission 242nd Report (2012), Government Response (2015) and Advisory (2018)

The Law Commission's 242nd Report (2012) was titled *Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework*. It concluded that general homicide law could punish a killing but did not do enough to stop unlawful interference by caste groups or assemblies. It proposed a dedicated law. The law would stop unlawful interference with marriage and punish assemblies that meet to condemn marriages. It would also punish threats and force against couples and let district authorities act early. It would protect the freedom to marry and make participants in unlawful assemblies liable. The Commission did not create a new class of murder under Section 300 of the Indian Penal Code. It chose to focus on unlawful assemblies and interference before any killing.[32]

[31] *Kannagi and Murugesan case* (SC, 28 April 2025) <https://indiankanoon.org>.
[32] Law Commission of India (n 5) 28–35.

National action has been slow. In a Lok Sabha reply on August 6, 2015 the Ministry of Law and Justice said that it had asked State Governments and Union Territories for comments on the 242nd Report. It said that a policy decision on central legislation would follow talks with stakeholders. After *Shakti Vahini* the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory on May 31, 2018. It asked States and Union Territories to follow the preventive, remedial and punitive directions of the Court. These included special cells, helplines, identification of areas and protection for couples.[33]

5.2 Rajasthan Bill (2019–2026) and Karnataka Act No. 26 of 2026

Rajasthan brought the Rajasthan Prohibition of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances in the Name of Honour and Tradition Bill, 2019. It proposed up to seven years of prison for criminal intimidation. For simple hurt it proposed three to five years with fine. For grievous hurt it proposed a minimum of ten years and up to life imprisonment. Where death was caused in the name of honour it proposed death or imprisonment for the rest of natural life with fine. On January 28, 2026 the Governor of Rajasthan returned the Bill. The Governor pointed out that it still referred to the repealed Indian Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure. The Governor also noted that murder is already punishable under Section 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.[34]

In 2026 Karnataka passed a major state law called the Karnataka Freedom of Choice in Marriage and Prevention and Prohibition of Crimes in the Name of Honour and Tradition (Eva Nammava Eva Nammava) Act, 2026 (Karnataka Act No. 26 of 2026). It followed fresh public and official attention to honour violence, including the killing of Manya Patil in December 2025. The Governor gave assent on April 9, 2026 and the Act was published in the Karnataka Gazette on April 10, 2026. Under Section 1(2) the Act comes into force on a date that the State Government fixes by notification in the Official Gazette. This paper does not assume a start date.[35]

The key provisions of the Karnataka Act are as follows. Section 3 protects the freedom to marry. Section 5 bars acts done in the name of caste, custom, tradition or honour. Section 6 bars assemblies of five or more persons that meet to condemn a marriage on grounds of caste, tribe, community, tradition or family opposition. Section 8 deals with killing in the name of honour and sets a minimum punishment of five years. It works alongside the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita including Section 103. Section 11 covers criminal intimidation. Section 14 covers abetment, attempt and conspiracy. Section 15 makes the offences cognizable and non-bailable. Section 17 provides protection and safe houses and Section 17(3) places a six-hour response duty on the police. Section 20 provides for action against officials who wilfully neglect their duties. Section 22 requires the identification of areas that saw honour crimes in the previous five years. Section 24 creates district bodies called *Eva Nammava Vedike* to help with marriages and counselling. Section 25 provides for special fast-track courts.[36]

Section 5 deserves special notice because it reaches harm that is not physical. It covers social and economic boycotts, ostracism and forced eviction. It covers threats and intimidation and forced dissolution of marriage. It covers illegal confinement or house arrest and the seizure of

[33] Ministry of Home Affairs, 'Advisory on Honour Crimes' (31 May 2018) <https://www.mha.gov.in>.
[34] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 103(1).
[35] Karnataka Act 2026 (n 4) ss 1(2), 3, 5–6, 8, 11, 14–15, 17, 20, 22, 24–25.
[36] Karnataka Act 2026 (n 4) ss 5, 8, 17(3), 20, 24–25.

phones or other communication devices. It covers interference with employment or property. It also covers sexual violence and forced abortion along with psychological harassment and defamation. This is the kind of early pressure that general criminal law often misses.

5.3 Comparative Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Other countries have tried different ways to deal with honour-related harm. In the United Kingdom honour-based abuse is handled through existing criminal offences backed by risk checks, specialist policing and victim protection. In Pakistan reforms limited the power of the family to forgive or settle murder cases so that relatives cannot shield the killer. In Jordan and Turkey the law has tried to stop honour or custom from being used as an excuse or an easy reason for a lighter sentence.[37]

The lesson from Pakistan is clear for India. When the family of the victim takes part in the crime or later forgives the accused, private forgiveness can let the offender escape real punishment. Indian law should keep the prosecution in the hands of the State. It should not let settlements by the family or the community defeat justice in serious honour-crime cases.[38]

6. Structural Gaps, Reforms and Model Framework

6.1 Eight Major Gaps in the Current Framework

Eight practical gaps limit how well Indian law prevents honour crimes and responds to them.

1. **Absence of a uniform central law.** India has no single central statute on honour crimes. So protections and rules can differ from State to State.[39]
2. **Weak recognition of the category.** When honour killings are treated only as general murder or culpable homicide, it becomes harder to track patterns and collect reliable figures. It also becomes harder to design targeted prevention.[40]
3. **Focus on punishment instead of prevention.** General criminal law usually works after a crime has happened. Honour crimes often follow a clear path. A relationship across caste or religion leads to family and community opposition. This leads to threats and pressure and then to an unlawful assembly or boycott. At the end comes violence or murder.[41]
4. **Uneven follow-up of court directions.** Court orders need regular monitoring, public reports, independent audits and officer accountability. Without these they do not work evenly.[42]
5. **Police bias or inaction.** Some officers refuse to take complaints. Some tell hostile relatives where a couple is hiding. Some pressure couples to go back to their families or treat adult marriages as family disputes. Others fail to act on real threats.[43]

[37] MP Jain, *Indian Constitutional Law* (8th edn, 2018) 1120.
[38] Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, s 175.
[39] Law Commission of India (n 5) 30.
[40] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, ss 100–101.
[41] *Shakti Vahini* (n 3) 225.
[42] ibid 227.
[43] *Lata Singh* (n 6) 484.

6. **Economic and social pressure.** Boycotts, eviction, loss of work or property and denial of access to the community can harm couples even without a single blow.[44]
7. **Difficulty in proving group roles and conspiracy.** Investigators must prove the role of each person, the common object, the abetment or the conspiracy. This is hard when early threats and meetings are not properly recorded.[45]
8. **Weak witness protection.** Witnesses from the same family or community often face threats and social pressure. Some are offered deals to withdraw or change their statements.[46]

6.2 Twelve Practical Reforms to Strengthen the Law

Closing these gaps needs stronger criminal rules together with practical duties for institutions. The twelve reforms below all aim at one result, which is to stop harm before it grows.

1. **Enact a central law.** Parliament should pass a dedicated national statute. It should build on the 242nd Law Commission Report and on the useful features of Karnataka's 2026 Act. It should cover murder, attempted murder, assault, threats, forced separation, confinement, boycotts, unlawful assemblies, forced or dissolved marriages and other pressure against marriage choice.[47]
2. **Introduce a clear statutory definition.** The definition should cover acts, omissions, threats, force, intimidation, violence, confinement and social or economic boycotts. It should cover any interference that aims to protect or restore the supposed honour of a family, caste, clan or group over marriage, relationships or choice of partner. It should reach groups as well as individuals. It should not be limited to inter-caste marriage.
3. **Criminalize unlawful interference with marriage.** The law should punish threats, intimidation, force, confinement, community orders and harassment that aim to stop consenting adults from marrying. It should not turn ordinary disagreement or a peaceful family talk into a crime.
4. **Ban unlawful community assemblies.** Targeted provisions should ban assemblies that meet to give orders against consenting adults or to encourage violence or force. They should not criminalize lawful and peaceful gatherings.
5. **Require police protection.** Police should have a legal duty to register complaints from threatened couples and make an immediate risk check. They should give protection where a threat is credible and keep the location of the couple secret. They should stop interference by family or groups. Officers who wilfully neglect these duties should face disciplinary action. A fast response rule such as the six-hour standard in Section 17(3) of the Karnataka Act can be used.[48]
6. **Strengthen safe houses.** Every district should run funded safe houses that offer a temporary stay, police security, legal aid, medical care, counselling, help with jobs or reha-

[44] Karnataka Act 2026 (n 4) s 5.
[45] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, ss 61, 190.
[46] *Shakti Vahini* (n 3) 228.
[47] Law Commission of India (n 5) 45.
[48] Karnataka Act 2026 (n 4) s 17(3).

bilitation and privacy. They should not work like detention centres or limit the freedom of adults.

7. **Hold public officials accountable.** Wilful failure to perform legal duties should lead to departmental action. It should lead to criminal liability where the elements of an offence are met. Where the law allows it victims should receive compensation.
8. **Strengthen witness protection.** A dedicated system should protect the identity of witnesses and arrange safe testimony. It should relocate witnesses when needed and protect their family members. It should watch for threats until the trial ends.
9. **Maintain a central honour-crime database.** Systematic records of honour murders, attempts, threats, inter-caste violence, unlawful assemblies, boycotts, police inaction, convictions and acquittals will help to find risk areas and judge whether prevention is working.
10. **Restrict honour as a mitigating factor.** Courts should make sure that claimed family or group honour is never treated as a justification or as an automatic reason for a lighter sentence.
11. **Strengthen victim compensation and rehabilitation.** Support should cover medical costs, counselling, temporary housing, lost income, relocation costs, legal aid and recovery after boycotts.
12. **Promote constitutional literacy and awareness.** Schools, universities, police academies and local bodies should teach about Article 21, the freedom to choose a partner, the illegality of *khap* orders, equality and non-discrimination.

6.3 Model Law Structure and Graduated Offences

A central law needs a clear layout so that rights, offences, prevention and remedies fit together and do not sit apart. The first four chapters can set the base. Chapter I can cover preliminary rules and definitions. Chapter II can affirm the right to choose a marriage partner freely. Chapter III can ban honour crimes. Chapter IV can bar unlawful gatherings and community orders.[49]

The other chapters can turn these rules into daily action. Chapter V can set out criminal offences and punishments. Chapter VI can lay down preventive duties for the police. Chapter VII can cover protection of couples and safe houses. Chapter VIII can deal with the safety of witnesses. Chapter IX can provide for special courts and fast trials. Chapter X can cover victim compensation and rehabilitation. Chapter XI can set the accountability of public officials. Chapter XII can handle monitoring, reporting and rollout.[50]

Grouping offences into three levels helps the police step in early before violence gets worse. The first level covers early warning acts. These are threatening couples, confining them against their will, pressuring or scaring them, holding unlawful meetings and enforcing social or economic boycotts. The second level covers direct physical harm such as assault, grievous hurt, attempted murder, sexual violence and abduction. The third level covers cases that end in death. These are

[49] Law Commission of India (n 5) 42.
[50] Karnataka Act 2026 (n 4) ss 17, 20, 22, 24–25.

honour killing, group murder and helping or plotting a murder.[51]

6.4 Answers to the Core Research Questions

Looking at the whole framework, the general homicide rules of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita punish killings after they happen. They do not fully deal with the early threats, boycotts and community pressure that build up first. A dedicated central statute can fill this gap. It can deal with prevention, group interference, safe houses and officer duties in one place.[52]

On personal choice, Article 21 protects the right of an adult to pick a partner without the permission of parents, elders or community bodies. Khap panchayats and similar groups cannot use force or give binding orders against consenting adults. Because these crimes are collective and driven by caste or community, they call for firm sentences and not for leniency.[53]

Basic police protection is often not enough when couples face danger over a long time. Real safety needs quick risk checks, privacy and safe houses. It needs real accountability when officials fail in their duty. It also needs a clear understanding that social boycotts are part of honour coercion when they are used to block a marriage choice or personal freedom.[54]

7. Conclusion

Indian law on honour crimes has grown in three stages. At first killings and related offences were punished under general criminal laws. Next came strong constitutional protection for the choice of a partner, dignity and autonomy through rulings such as *Lata Singh*, *Shafin Jahan* and *Shakti Vahini*. Now special legislation is being tested. This includes the Law Commission's 242nd Report and Karnataka's Act No. 26 of 2026, which will begin on the date the State Government notifies.[55]

The central principle is simple. Choosing a partner cannot depend on the approval of family, caste or community. If the law waits until a murder happens, couples remain exposed to early threats, confinement and boycotts.[56]

Good reform joins the constitutional safeguards of *Shakti Vahini* with preventive and protective rules like those in Karnataka's 2026 Act. A uniform central statute should support both. Stopping threats early, protecting couples and witnesses, holding public officials accountable and supporting victims will turn constitutional rights into real protection.[57]

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[51] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, ss 61, 101, 103, 109, 115, 117, 127, 140, 189, 351.
[52] ibid ss 101, 103(1), 351.
[53] *Shakti Vahini* (n 3) 216.
[54] ibid 225–27.
[55] ibid 216.
[56] Constitution of India, art 21.
[57] Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 103(1).