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Upcoming Events:

Free Cultural Events! SEPTEMBER PROGRAMS at Hamline Midway Branch Library

"Dishonored"



The Women's Human Rights Film Series presented with the Advocates for Human Rights will be hold a special screening of the film "Dishonored"

In June 2002 a dispute between rival clans in rural Pakistan was judged by a local tribal council, and when Mukhtar Mai pleaded on her family's behalf, the local imam consented to her punishment of rape as honor-revenge. Her demand for justice recieved media coverage worldwide, eventually leading to changes in the Pakistani legal system.

The discussion following the film will be hosted by Mary C. Ellison, staff attorney for the Women's program at The Advocates, and Maliha Hussain, the chair of the MG Foundation, USA.

Questions that will guide our discussion aftere the viewing:

The event will happen at the Hamline Midway Branch Library, 1558 West Minehaha Avenue. Tuesday September 15 at 7 pm.

What perpetuates situations like Mukhtar Mai's and what is being done to stop them

1. Patriarchal social practices

The Patriarchy remains very strong in Pakistani culture. In urban areas where women and men are more educated, it is expressed in more sophisticated manners however in the rural parts it is still very glaring and overt. Thus the social hierarchy where the rich landlord is the most powerful can treat poor people badly without any accountability and the women can become tools of putting down another family or dishonor a family with hardly any consequences.

2. Parallel Legal Systems

Even though parallel legal systems are illegal in Pakistan, they are frequently used, mostly in the rural areas, to provide fast justice to people. "Panchayats" or "Jirgas" comprise of elite male members of the village; women or the poor are never included, which ends up being discriminatory for them. Even politicians who are big land lords in their areas, perpetuate jirgas by heading them, making it difficult for the legal system to prevail.

3. Honor Killing or Honor Revenge

This is what Mukhtar Mai was a victim of, honor revenge. Allegedly a powerful landlord claimed that her brother offended their daughter and therefore they had the right to dishonor a woman from their family. In the Pakistani legal system, murder is a punishable crime against the state, but honor killing is considered a crime against a person, which can either be forgiven or blood money can be accepted and the murderer goes free. Women's organizations are trying to get this law changed so that honor killings are also handled as murder, crime against the state.

4. The Zina Ordinance

Adultery was not a legal crime before 1979, when Zia-ul-Haq enacted the Hadood Ordinance, which is a set of several laws, the zina ordinance declared rape and adultery both to be a crime punishable by stoning to death. There are two parts to it:

- a. A woman who has been raped needs to provide 4 male, Muslim witnesses for the perpetrator to get maximum punishment. (Hadd)
- b. Circumstantial witnesses (Taseer)

The same two categories were used for adultery. Charges to adultery were abused by men, who wanted to either get rid of their wives for a second marriage or wanted to put them in their place. The rape victims hardly got convicted. Women were too afraid to report, as many rape cases that were not proven were switched to adultery and women who were actually victims of rape, were punished.

This has been considered a discriminatory law against women. Women's organizations like the National Commission on the Status of Women, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, MeherGarh, AGHS, and Aurat Foundation, have been asking the governments to repeal the Hadood Ordinance, but none of them have touched it for the fear of upsetting the religious politicians or losing the conservative vote. General Musharaf amended the law doing away the severe punishments for adultery. Now in Pakistan adultery is not charged under hadd (point (a) above) but only through taseer (pt (b)) Human Rights activists have been fighting against it for the last 25 years. Making an amendment has made it difficult to keep the momentum of the struggle to get it totally repealed. Pakistani law already had a decent section which covered rape and there was no need for a new law, which was introduced by the religious military dictator Zia ul Haq. The current demand remains to repeal this discriminatory law as it puts women in a vulnerable position.

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