

# *The Killing Of A Sikh Woman In Manteca Should Anger All Of Us*

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THE SACRAMENTO BEE

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Mallika Kaur  
Executive Director, Co-Founder  
Sikh Family Center



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**While we are sickened to hear about the killing of 38-year-old Manjeet Kaur in Manteca, we at the Sikh Family Center are not shocked by the publicly reported details.**

**The circumstances surrounding Kaur's struggle against alleged abuse and domestic violence check nearly all the boxes on the evidence-based Domestic Violence Danger Assessment — which is, at its simplest, a series of yes/no questions that advocates have long used to determine the risk a woman faces of being killed by an abusive intimate partner.**

**According to the Manteca Police Department, Kaur was killed on December 12, 2023. Her husband, Surinder Singh, 63, was arrested and booked. He is currently being held in the San Joaquin County Jail and has been charged with murder. Singh has been denied bail.**

**“The medical examiner determined (Kaur's) death was a homicide, however, specific details as to how she died are not being released as this is still (an) ongoing investigation,” the department said.**



**Kaur's family has said she was a victim of domestic violence, according to Indica News.**

**Kaur's case should enrage us all. We are not doing nearly enough to identify and support every high-risk domestic violence survivor and victim facing interlocking vulnerabilities.**

**Kaur was of Punjabi Sikh ancestry and had lived in California for only six months. Her family, including an adult child from a first marriage, was oceans away as she allegedly faced pernicious abuse in isolation. She was not "helpless" — an image still often promoted about victim-survivors of domestic violence, especially immigrant women. Public records show that Kaur attempted to seek various avenues of support, including the criminal justice system. The nature and tactics of the reported abuse signaled high danger for her. Eventually, she became a victim and authorities ruled her Dec. 12 death a homicide — a brutal crime not reported in mainstream local media.**



**Especially when reality seems to eerily mirror theory, domestic violence experts and advocates wish to remind the public of the empirical, painstaking work and analysis — pioneered by the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing — that went into creating the useful Danger Assessments tools. The tools have further been refined in practice by culturally specific groups, such as the Sikh Family Center, that work with survivors.**

**Factors on the Danger Assessment are not all equally weighed. Of the many elements that contribute to heightened danger, research shows that some are especially dangerous. Of these, some are more obvious to the general public (the existence of a firearm, for example), while others (such as unemployment, past non-fatal strangulation, marital rape or the absence of children) are not as intuitive.**



**Similarly, post-separation violence — defined as violence that follows and often exacerbates after the victim completes the already daunting task of separating from the abusive partner — is often dangerously underestimated.**

**Survivors and their family, friends, community and service organizations must know about the existence of these proven assessments. Police, prosecutors and defense attorneys must apply these assessments. And no one should ignore the red-flag factors that may add up to another untimely loss of human life.**

**The Sikh Family Center launched the Sikh Danger Assessment tool that we have created in Punjabi and English after working with Sikh survivors of domestic violence and their families. The Sikh Danger Assessment tool is not simply a literal translation of other tools: it retains the integrity of the original empirical assessments but updates them to reflect the community's nuances and lived realities.**



**Importantly we have responded to the fact that separate assessments for “immigrant” and “non-immigrant” women often create a false dichotomy for communities, such as Sikhs in the U.S., that identify collectively as transnational and bicultural.**

**Danger assessment checklists are just step one toward safety planning and survivor empowerment. There is no set formula. Survivors must also be offered trained, private, reliable advocates with whom they can privately discuss their concerns, priorities and strategies. Sometimes these advocates are within their own community, and sometimes they are far outside it — a choice that should be made by the survivor.**



**Kaur's untimely and unnatural death seems to reflect the lack of options for safety and empowerment for too many, especially foreign-born survivors. The Sikh Family Center was created in 2009 as a community-based effort to better triage for survivors in our community who are often underserved by or unaware of other resources. We remain the only U.S. professional organization specifically focused on gender justice in the Sikh community.**

**Survivors often face misconceptions that cultural or communal stigma, shame or honor is the leading reason for the lack of support. But this is an incomplete telling of the story. Survivors must navigate language and cultural barriers as well as legal system biases when seeking help, resulting in varied levels of discomfort when interacting with non-Sikh service providers and varied levels of success in accessing support services. Few reliable resources are available to Sikh survivors that do not stereotype survivors, flatten their experience or caricature their community.**



**The Sikh Family Center works to strengthen the Sikh community from the inside out while not neglecting stereotypes that affect Sikhs from the outside in. We are proudly culturally grounded and carry the wisdom of our ancestors and Gurus: Fear none, frighten none.**

*Mallika Kaur is an author, lawyer and organizer who focuses on gender and minority issues in the U.S. and South Asia. She teaches at UC Berkeley School of Law, including on domestic violence law. She is the co-founder and executive director of the Sikh Family Center. The author is not related to Manjeet Kaur (Kaur is a common Sikh last name, reflecting shared communal history).*

