

# The 'karo-kari' curse

Wide media coverage of the Shaista Almani case and spate of seminars being held have brought into prominence the need to eradicate the menace of gender discrimination and the pagan and barbaric crimes that are being perpetuated without check and restraint against women in our country into prominence. The great tragedy is that no real concerted effort has ever been made to rid our country of this evil. Although it is more common in Sindh, it is very much in vogue to different degrees and under different names all over the country.

The efforts in the past have met only with inaction and mere lip service rather than any tangible and sustained effort directed at really eradicating it. It is painful to note that even the secular and nationalist political parties, NGOs, liberal organizations and groups and even various governments displayed varying degrees of ambivalence in this regard. Laws giving protection to women exist but no effort is made to enforce them. Even the present regime in form of military dictatorship and now in its quasi-democratic form has been very high on sound and intent but extremely low on action. In spite of President Musharraf's highly trumpeted commitments made at the Convention on Human Rights as late as 2000 no administrative, legal or legislative steps have been initiated to combat these abhorrent, brutal and barbaric customs and practices. The general perception and reality is that that the situation is going from bad to worse each passing day.

It is universally well known and accepted why these evils continue to flourish especially in the rural areas and the unsavoury intricacies need not to be dwelt upon. Without going into unnecessary polemics, it will suffice to note that since the creation of Pakistan, the people at the helm of affairs inability to break or even curtail the unbridled exploitative power of the feudal, the rich and the privileged ruling elite is the root cause of these evils that exist in our society today. To make matters worse the powerful people with feudal mentality have fallen to lowest depths of depravity, greed and injustice and have made the killings in the name of their so-called honour into a lucrative business.

They now more often than not by false accusations against poor and suppressed good-looking young women demand them or other women or in lieu large sums of extortion money in exchange. These unscrupulous people are further discriminating against women by taking advantage of three parallel judicial systems, namely the law of the land, the Shariah law and the unconstitutional Jirga system. So much so that today, there are over 200,000 cases pending against women before

## Tahir Mashhadi

and status of the feudals and powerful inept ruling elite, thereby maintaining and preserving the prevalent decadent feudal system wherein which a coterie of privileged two per cent dictate and determine the fate of the 98 per cent of our population. Resolutions aimed at eradicating these curses are pending in our assemblies or have recently met shameful fates. Last November the Speaker of the National Assembly did not even allow the debate and the movers were intimidated and pressurized to withdraw it, while in Sindh Assembly the PML treasury benches in connivance with the speaker blocked debate on the subject on trivial technical grounds and false promises.

The most shameful precedent is that of the Senate, which last August adamantly refused to condemn honour killing of women. This was also done in National and Sindh Assemblies. There will never be much chance to get the necessary resolutions passed by the legislatures nor the existing laws implemented as long as the feudal, tribal chieftains and power hungry Mullas who constitute a majority of our legislators and who are invariably in government and ever lurking in the corridors of power retain the status quo. The party in power, be they an army dictator, PPP or the

is that they must, in the interest of this great humanitarian cause set aside their petty differences and unite on one platform. This is not the time nor the issue for point scoring. It is the time for concerted action.

It is to our eternal shame that such crimes against humanity are perpetuated in the name of honour in garb of tribal customs and self proclaimed sanctions of religion. They are tolerated and even encouraged by the acts, actions and policies of our mainstream political parties and even the politico-religious Islamabad loving parties. Killing in the name of honour is a disgrace to any society. True honour and Islamic teachings entail that it is incumbent on Muslim males to protect and treat womenfolk with respect, kindness and dignity. It is against Islamic teachings to insult, torture, parade them naked, in any way dishonour, degrade, and worst of all to barbarically murder women. Karo Kari and honour killing are pre-meditated and intentional murder (Qatl-i-Amd) which are condemned and forbidden in the strongest terms in the Holy Quran and all tenets of Islam. Yet the feudal and tribal class, with the active support and blessings of the Mullas and even the police and judiciary take recourse and protection of Qisas and Diyat Ordinance which has strengthened the curse while dealing with Karo Kari and honour murders.

**The Supreme Court of Pakistan has termed honour killings as murder, and yet because the police and the judiciary are taking a lenient view, discretion arbitrarily being exercised by the judiciary and use of loopholes and lacunae in the law, perpetrators of the heinous crime are getting away scot-free. The government must enact specific laws against this evil. Honour killings must be clearly defined and expressly declared premeditated murder (Qatl-i-Amd) and a non-compoundable offence. The waiver of Qisas and Diyat must by suitable amendment in law be prohibited. Effective administrative measures have to be taken concurrently.**

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has termed honour killings as murder and yet because the police and judiciary is taking a lenient view, discretion arbitrarily being exercised by the judiciary and using loopholes and lacunas in the law perpetrators of these heinous crimes are getting away scot free. The government must enact specific laws against this evil. Honour killings must be clearly defined and expressly declared premeditated murder (Qatl-i-Amd) and a non-compoundable offence. The waiver of Qisas and Diyat must by suitable amendment in law, be prohibited. Suitable administrative measures must also be taken.

It is the ill intentioned, power hungry and corrupt privileged feudal class supported by the ultraconservatives and the blatantly hypocritical fundamentalist elements that perpetuate these heinous crimes against women. This pampered and protected class have always viewed a tolerant, progressive and peaceful state enjoying modern concepts of human freedom, fundamental rights, liberal principles, spirit of justice, political pluralism, constitutionalism, egalitarianism and tolerance contrary to their traditions of bigotry, narrow mindedness, intolerance and vested self interests. The effort against these

the superior judiciary while there are over 10,000 pending before lower judiciary. Out of over 2,000 women are languishing in Karachi jail alone and only 39 have been produced before the courts. Most of them are women who married on their free will but were arrested on charges of adultery levelled against them by relatives. Eighty per cent of them are victims of abuse of Hudood laws.

The feudals, supported by the inept ruling elite, the fundamentalists and the reactionary forces continue to perpetrate cruel and inhuman sufferings on women more especially in the rural areas. Apart from the practice being against all tenets of Islam, it violates the laws of the land in force along with all norms of civilized human behavior, morality and justice. The curse of Karo Kari and honour killings are not only a great disgrace but also a black stigma for our society, our people and our nation. It is responsible for the unnecessary inhuman torture, suffering, mental anguish and the senseless loss of precious human lives.

Last year alone there were 3,748 cases of violence against women reported around the country of which 1,256 fall under honour killings. Seventy per cent of such cases are unreported, undetected and not even registered.

The military and civilian governments, which have ruled us since independence, can never be absolved of being responsible for the prevalent state of affairs. They pursued their agendas and narrow selfish vested interests by flagrantly and unashamedly patronizing, in fact, safeguarding the roles

PML as is the present case depend upon their support.

A ray of hope for the struggle against these evils is that a leader of the stature of Mr Altaf Hussain and his Muttahida Quami Movement, which must be given its due as the only political party that has declared and demonstrated its policy, resolve and commitment to launch a struggle to abolish all forms of gender discrimination, cruelty and crimes towards women such as the curse of Karo-Kari, honour killings, brutal murders, rapes, outraging the modesty of opponents' womenfolk and other such that exist in our society. He has the political clout both inside the assemblies and by his extremely devoted street power outside, to be able to achieve a measure of success and if not stop then at least retard its practice in Sindh.

The MQM has undertaken on no easy task. There are elements even within their coalition partners that overtly and covertly support this practice for their family or tribal considerations. This divergence in polity and precepts may make convergence of interests difficult but that and other challenges are precisely what they have to face and surmount. The increased interest and role of the print media has also added great weightage to the struggle. The crying need of the hour is not for rhetoric but it is for effective action. All secular, tolerant, free thinking political parties, groups, NGOs and organizations have to be brought into the loop so that a concerted and effective action can be taken. The need of the hour

vicious, inhuman and abhorrent practices needs to be coordinated and made more effective. There must be no tribal, religious, sectarian or political considerations involved while deciding about the measures to be adopted or action contemplated. It has to be long overdue legislative, administrative and law and order operation aimed at cleansing our society of this curse once for all. This requires a well formulated political plan, drive and initiative in its execution, strong nerves and a mailed fist. It entails the judicious use of both political and state power and harnessing of all resources and assets. Most of all it entails the active support, participation and united effort by all right thinking, liberal and tolerant forces in the country.

Let us use the knowledge, methodology and experience of those who have successfully combated and eradicated this evil from their societies. Let us endeavour to attain standards of inexhaustible originality and by a deep analysis of all possibilities available, evaluate the facts of reality and then choose our goals and plan to guide our actions accordingly. In order to meet any measure of success we must act. In order to be in a position to act, we must make choices and in order to make these choices we must have a clearly defined code of ethics and values. In order to do this we must have a clear sense of life and our purpose of life because the integrated sum of a nation's basic value is its sense of life. The un-Islamic, barbaric and disgraceful custom has no place in our religion, our society or our sense of life.