

The government decision to bring about legislation to end Karo kari is laudable. This centuries old practice is an unfortunate reflection on our tribal culture and it is safeguarded in a number of areas as the tribal norm against the common British law. For instance the agreements Robert Sandeman entered with the Baloch tribes of Dera Ghazi Khan and Balochistan in 1873-76 included the continuation of a number of tribal norms and privileges as the tribal values within given autonomy, Karo kari being one of them.

The investigation of a recent karo kari case in Southern Balochistan involving double murder revealed a story thus: A man in love with a girl wanted to marry her but his wife refused to give her consent. So he devised a ploy to get rid of her. One evening he invited a man from a fertilizer company who used to visit him occasionally. As the guest entered the house, the man shot him dead as well as his wife. He alleged that they were *siakari*.

According to the tehsildar investigating the case, the man faced a trial for murder but, usually happens in such cases, was acquitted on the grounds of "grave and sudden provocation" and because there was no witness supporting the innocence of the victim. Besides, his wife's family refused to allow her post-mortem, as it would be against its honor.

A close witness revealing an other case of karo kari told me: "A man

Legislation on karo kari

Human Rights

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21/7/04 *in Nation*

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wanted his father-in-law to give his daughter's (the man's wife) share of land, threatening to kill her as a *siakar* (adulterer) if this was not done. The father-in-law, who had registered a large piece of land in his daughter's name to protect himself against the land reforms, refused. A year later, the girl was killed by her husband after he accused her of *siakari* (adultery)."

Land figures as the motive behind a number of karo kari killings. Two brothers were reported to have killed their sister for the sake of the land registered in her name by their deceased father. The co-accused *siakar* in this case was a close friend of one of the brothers. The brothers alleged that this friend, a frequent visitor to the house, had developed a relationship with their sister. "One night he was sprayed with bullets along with the sister for *siakari*. Most people believe that the brothers wanted to get rid of her for the sake of land," said a man from their area.

In karo kari cases majority of victims are female. There is hardly a case in which a man is reported to have killed his son or brother for being *siakar*. Most cases relate to men killing their wives, sisters, or sisters-in-

law after accusing them of having an illicit relationship with a male.

Our societal set up is the one reason why women, mostly less educated or illiterate, become easy target. Once labelled *siakar*, they find no asylum outside and it is a disgrace to their family to allow them to live. The major factor brought into play in such killings is the perception of honor, which has more to do with male chauvinism than ethics or religion. karo kari killings flout the basic precepts of a modern and civilised society, which requires a fair trial of an accused based on just and an honest eye-witness testimony.

Karo kari cases are not always registered under Pakistan Penal Code Section 302 by police; they should be. In certain tribal areas which may not fall under the administrative control of the police, the relatives of the murdered man/woman appeal to the

deputy commissioners on the basis of tribal and family honor, to hand over the body to them without a post-mortem. In far-flung rural areas, the plea is reinforced by the excuse that there are no female doctors available to examine the female deceased.

In rare cases a plea is made for the medical examination to be held: it usually comes from the relatives of a man accused and killed for *siakari*. Such an examination can prove that the real motive for the murder was not in fact *siakari*. Influence and money often come into play in such cases, to force medical and district authorities against conducting medical examination.

A medical doctor in Jacobabad district came across a *siakari* case in which a young girl was killed by her elder brother in order to avoid repaying a loan of 10 thousands Rs. he borrowed. The man used to visit the brother to press for his money. The man asked the creditor to come over one night to get the loan back. When he arrived, he was asked to wait inside on the pretext that the money was with an uncle living in the back of the house. Instead of the money, however, he returned with a kalashnikov and killed him along with his own sister

who was also present in the house. Later, they put both the bodies close to each other to make them look guilty. The deceased's brother insisted for the post-mortem which did not confirm the charge. But the matter was hushed up for inexplicable reasons.

The reports supported the facts that in many cases in which a male victim is lured into visiting the house of the murderer, are obviously pre-meditated, and far from the 'grave and sudden provocation' that is used as an excuse for the killing.

A police officer who investigated a large number of karo kari cases admitted that quite often, examination of the injuries inflicted on the victim and the evidence provided by medical examination that no sexual offense actually had taken place. But the killer usually justifies his action on the grounds that he was emotionally carried away by the thought that a sexual offense would have taken place if he had not committed the murder. A common plea is that the deceased were known to have established an illegal relationship but had just not been caught in the act.

It is because the law is lenient with those who have murdered on the 'grave and sudden provocation', and because law enforcers are sympathetic to what they perceive as "honor killings" that this continues to be used as an excuse for cold-blooded murder. And instead of abating, the practice seems to be increasing with time – a tragic reality in this land of the pure.

Pensioners' case

THANKS to *Dawn*, a discussion has been generated on the above issue following the publication of my letter on April 29.

In view of the rising cost of living, the importance of taking steps to provide relief to widows, pensioners and elderly people cannot overemphasized. It is becoming increasingly difficult for large segments of our society to make ends meet. The problem is getting compounded because of longevity of life.

After steady and sharp drops in profits on national savings schemes, the government has introduced two schemes — Pension Benefit Account (scheme) and Behbood Registration Certificate — which ensure better profit rates. Limitations of these schemes are: (a) more than one

million rupees cannot be invested in anyone of these schemes, and (b) these cannot be availed of by all widows, pensioners and elderly people.

The pension benefit scheme can be availed of only by retirees from the federal government service or from autonomous corporations of the federal government and their units. In the case of widows, there is no age restriction. However, for Behbood registration certificates for the elderly, it is necessary that the certificate holder should be 60 years' old or above. Each of these schemes yields a profit of Rs841 per month on an investment of Rs100,000. Those who are able to make the maximum permissible investment of Rs2 million in two schemes will

earn a profit of only Rs16,820. This highlights the need for introducing more and better schemes, especially for widows, pensioners and the elderly.

It has been pointed out that if one cannot produce a pension book, one can buy Behbood certificates provided one is 60 years and above. In this connection, it may be clarified that the scheme for Behbood certificates for the elderly was introduced long after the pension benefit scheme. It may be easy now for investors to choose between the pension benefit scheme and the Behbood registration certificate scheme, but this choice was not available for a long period after the pension benefit scheme had been launched. Many of the

investors may even now like to avail of both the schemes, but they may come across the hurdles of needing a pension book or serving in projects which have been privatized.

It is suggested that we should also try and introduce a new clause in both the schemes, allowing the spouse/son/daughter of the account holder to operate these accounts. If this is not done, we may land ourselves in litigation, particularly in the case of Behbood certificates after the death or even before the death of investors.

The rule in the pension benefit scheme is that whatever investment is to be made in this scheme, subject to the limit of one million rupees, it should be made in one go. The rationale for this rule is not clear. It is

suggested that staggering of investment in this scheme should be allowed. If this rule is also being followed by some NSS centres for Behbood registration certificates, this is not correct, according to my understanding. This again highlights the need for a close examination of all rules and details of the two schemes.

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