

Karo kari ^{4/9/04}

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Human Rights Nation

To be born a woman in backward and down trodden areas is to have a destiny of servitude, in the best of cases of second class citizenship or deaf and dumb driven cattle. In the rural areas, women's economic participation is greater but is always un-rewarded and their life is much more harder than their urban counterparts.

They are obliged to work in the fields besides their husbands and are also required to perform traditional household chores. They cook the food, fetch the water from distant place, collect the firewood, wash clothes and milk the cow. They bring up their children and comfort their men at night. Their life, in short is a routine of drudgery and deprivation.

Famous British explorer-scholar Sir Richard F. Burton commented in his book *Sindh and the races that inhabit the valley of the Indus*, "the country is known for killing in the name of ghairat. Even poor langha (a local musician) cut the belly of a land lord and wrenched out his guts, and a Baloch tribesman murdered the number of the ruling Talpur Clan."

The villagers are uncultured, illiterate and rustic. They care for only three things: "Zar, Zan and Zameen" i.e. wealth, woman, and land. Ghairat is precious and romance and life cheap for the self-appointed guardians of honour. Pernicious, wicked and inhuman practice of karo-kari (honour killing), ("If a woman having illicit relations with a male, according to custom of karo kari, her punishment is death."), is prevailing not only in slum areas but also in most advanced cities of Pakistan. Saima Sarwar was killed in the HRCPC office in Lahore not by hired mercenaries, but by her own kin and kith. Her crime was that she sought divorce from her husband.

Divorce is a legitimate right of women. Islam gives exclusive right to the women to seek divorces thor-

ough filing a separation suit in the court and proving it sound. But in the country, civil as well as the canon law has allowed men to beat their better halves. Customs and social taboos have given a free hand to men, regardless of character, to kill women in the name of honour. In our society, divorce is a stigma.

It will degrade that family in the

In the vicinity of Larkana, two persons came to blow on minute mater. People exploited the issue and poisoned the ears of both and situation reached at the level where conflict seemed to be an inevitable. Ghulam Mustafa shah was not in position to face the grim situation and decided to leave the village so as to avert burning crisis.

Opponent party played ruse and took Quran on their hands and with their bare footed girls to reconcile. After four days, poor shah was mercilessly and relentlessly killed in front of his minor son.

There was no way out to get off capital punishment. But what noble savage did, killed his wife and labeled as Kari with poor shah. They are timid and coward, when they do not face situation; they use woman as a sacrificial goat to save their lives.

There are certain loopholes in our laws, which give immense favor to the culprits to be acquitted after brief punishment. These loopholes encourage people to commit or perpetrate such heinous crime in the name of honor killing. Unfortunately the failure of our government and judicial system to provide an effective system of justice has led to emergence of a parallel system of justice, preserved and perpetuated by tribal and feudal lords.

Necessity is the mother of invention. Karo-Kari has become a lucrative business in the village, nowadays. Chase hunters of this game always remain active and inquisitive for prey the victims. In Jacobabad, Muhammad Ali Malik returned from Saudi Arabia, after one-decade. He brought huge amount of money to purchase land in the village. After a few weeks, he was declared as a Karo by Sher tribes. Fear of death forced him to accept their illegitimate demands.

Using karo-kari it is quite easy for villagers to occupy the land of another person especially the one

who is living in urban areas. Then too it is a chronic disease in the villagers to take loans from each other and if someone had taken a loan which was beyond his capacity to pay, as such, finding no other appropriate alternative, he would kill any woman of his house by declaring her kari with whom he had borrowed money from. With the result

society. And thus, in this male chauvinist society, women are too weak and feeble. Women, who are viewed as the principle symbols of honour, are also major victims of this alternative form of justice, which draws sustenance from a setup that is heavily weighted against women.

They are punished for the crime of love by the court of people of their own communities and families, not by the court of the land. Holy prophet P.B.U.H said: None not even the father or the sovereign, can lawfully contract in the marriage of adult woman of sound mind without her permission, whether she be a virgin or not.

For the villagers, it is matter of ghairat to ask her choice. She is nothing than statue. She is deprived of all fundamental and basic values of life. Out dated rites and they are still observing rituals. Early marriages, nuptial ceremony in minor age, give and take, demanding handsome amount in dowry and hard cash.

Here religious scholars are silent to raise eyebrow against social evils, which have crippled and paralyzed the whole fabric of society. Gender relations in Pakistan rest on two basic perceptions. Women are subordinate to men, and that a man's honour lies in the actions of the women of his family.

Being a patriarchal society they are first under the control and supervision of their fathers and brothers and then under their husbands. Societal violence is a menace in Pakistan for which there are no laws and is justified by tradition like Karo Kari in Sindh and Balochistan where men and women suspected of illicit relations and killed by the intention of restoring tribal honour.

The tradition is also often abused to cover up personal vendettas, murders or to obtain the victim's property. As members of tribal society approve of the custom, witnesses do not come forward, and family members do not testify against alleged murderers.

But in a number of cases their loved ones - fathers, brothers, husbands and sons, kill innocent women for their own purposes like get rid of their wife, for property, for revenge, for defeat of enemy, for getting another woman from enemy tribe and for hiding any committed crime. They know that they are killing innocent woman.

In a village of Sindh, a man called Aslam reportedly vouched for his wife's innocence after his brother who alleged her of having an illicit liaison had attacked her. The husband took her to city for treatment when he was told that his wife would be permanently paralyzed from the waist down, he enraged, declared her as Kari and murdered. He took a woman as compensation from the supposed karo's family.

that a fine would be dictated upon the lender besides making the loan forgivable. Honour killings are not considered a crime by most people who justify their action by declaring these women of 'bad character' and placing false allegations on them. In fact, most murderers receive little or no punishment if a case is registered against them at all.

The police force and the judiciary are institutions, which are supposed to uphold fundamental rights but have failed to provide protection to the women of Pakistan. Though the human rights bodies and politicians of the country have condemned the practice time and again, but the government's inability to curb this custom has resulted in an unabated continuity of the bloodshed of innocent women. Implementation of laws is another question.

The law takes a lenient view of this crime of honour, which often leads it to be abused in the backdrop of government inaction. Even when women are seriously injured by their husbands or families, police often discourage them from registering complaints and advise them to seek reconciliation with their husbands or families as any matrimonial or family dispute would bring dishonor to them and their families if pursued.

In Karo Kari cases, when husbands appear in the police station with their blood smeared weapons declaring that they have killed their wives, police often fail to take action against them, reflecting their unwillingness to enforce law over the custom. At the same time, the lack of education and feudalism are the two main factors that are responsible for the crime.

Ms. Shaistaah belongs to a relatively progressive tribe "Aalimani", of Sindh. She entered into a completely legal and religiously correct marriage contract. But other members of both the tribes played a historic anti-Romeo and Juliet role, forcing the husband to succumb to their anti-social and illegal pressure.

Ms. Shaista Aalimani has opened a Pandora's box for the politicians and tribal chiefs alike. Her case could form a sort of Magna Carta, the Great Charter, and prove a New Code of Freedom for the suppressed women folk who have been suffering for long.

Present government has taken bold steps to frame law regarding karo-kari. Before framing law, government should constitute a committee of senior parliamentarians, religious scholars, noted advocates, and human rights activists and over and above feudals to develop a consensus before enacting the law. Enactment of law does not mean that no innocent women would be killed in the name of ghairat for there are snag hurdles in the implementation of law.



Shaista Aalimani