[Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/imaan-zainab-mazari-hazir)

July 26, 2021

**Violence, women and militarisation**

That there is an apprehension that Zahir Jaffer will be taken out of Pakistan by his influential family speaks volumes for the state of criminal justice in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, at this stage, this complete disintegration of our legal system is no longer a cause for outrage. It took the beheading of a young woman in the heart of the federal capital to awaken so many to the epidemic of violence against women in Pakistan that has been ongoing for decades now.

What ‘justice’ will a state that has itself prompted and encouraged violence against women dispense to the grieving family? Meanwhile, the Prime Minister’s Office has yet to issue any condemnation of the latest spate of violence against women across the country. To be fair to the prime minister though, his condemnation would be as hollow and meaningless as the anti-rape ordinances brought in by his government – so just as well.

Again, to be fair to the prime minister (since one is constantly abused and harassed for not being ‘fair enough’ to him), Pakistan’s problem with women long predates him. That is not to say his irresponsible, ignorant and misogynist views have not fuelled the fire that made this country an inferno for women, but only to take a few steps back to understand the root causes of the country’s hatred for women.

While there are multiple factors to consider that have now cemented the culture of violence against women and impunity for the same, the objective here is to highlight the impact of militarization, in particular, on Pakistan’s society, and how the lack of discussion and understanding of it in the mainstream has resulted in an inability to deal with some of the major causes of violence against women.

We are told that the ‘family system’ – that is constantly used to challenge equality, freedom and rights for women in this country – is under threat. That is not a problem if true, but the bitter reality is that this patriarchal, exploitative and often violent system is not under threat but in fact the source of the threat for women within the home and outside.

In her research paper titled ‘Militarisation, Nation and Gender’ (1996), Rubina Saigol writes, on the “nation-as-mother” and the family system: “The family is the basic unit of society, as well as the pillar of the state, and it is within the family that the nation can reproduce itself, its sons and future mothers. It is the family, therefore, that exercises the greatest control over female sexuality in the name of the purity of the nation.

“Women’s sexuality can find legitimate expression only in national service through the family; it is otherwise denied, controlled and hidden behind the chadar and chaardivari, the personalized boundaries placed around the woman, equivalent to the boundaries, frontiers, and borders of the state, all of which are under the protection of the son/mujahid or other male member”.

It is then no surprise that each time a woman is raped or murdered, men (and many women) feel compelled to ask if the incident took place outside the home, what she was wearing and why she left the house. A woman, as per this warped conception of state and society, requires ‘protection’ not of her life but of her ‘honour’, so when she chooses to step outside her home – which, the thinking goes, is where she belongs – then she will have to suffer the consequences.

If the incident took place within the home, there is insistence on protecting the same ‘family system’ that allows fathers to rape their daughters and brothers to kill their sisters. The only women that deserve protection are “the women of the nation”, described by Saigol in her paper as “those who praise, applaud and eulogise the young males who fight in battle”. In other words, women who step outside their role of “urging, encouraging, praising and supporting” in the background are not women of the nation. They have “loose characters”, “loose morals” and worst of all, an independent mind and a “loose tongue”.

Take a look at Pakistan’s history of women leaders and the narratives and propaganda employed against them. Let us start in 1965, when Fatima Jinnah contested the presidential election against military dictator General Ayub Khan. The madar-e-millat overstepped her bounds by standing for the restoration of democracy and therefore, she became a ‘traitor’. Of course, things went from bad to worse under dictator Ziaul Haq, who, through brute force and violence, and in the name of ‘Islamization’, attempted to entirely erase women from public life. The motive for doing so was manifestly political: his main political contender at the time was Benazir Bhutto.

Fast forward to 2020 and the Aurat Azadi March in Islamabad is attacked by religious fanatics, after weeks of airtime being given on mainstream media to members of the clergy, government officials and establishment-backed anchors to discredit, distort and trivialize the women’s march manifesto. As if the actual violence on women’s day wasn’t disturbing enough, this year’s Aurat March and all its participants had a sword hanging over their heads as their slogans were doctored and maliciously circulated to incite violence against them.

Now, as Noor Mukadam’s body has only just been buried, the nauseating politics of victim blaming continues and enrages women across the country because it reflects an inability – even in the face of such a gruesome and horrific murder – to view women beyond these warped conceptions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

And so even vis-a-vis the condemnations from men calling Noor their sister, there is palpable fury. Even if we are not your sisters, mothers, wives, we are human beings with inherent human dignity. If you cannot recognize that, then you are part of the problem and are a reflection of the fact that our ‘family system’ – at least as exists – truly has failed and needs to be dismantled.

To justify violence against women on the pretext of ‘religion’, ‘family system’, ‘national security’ cannot be tolerated any longer, and must be challenged with full force.

If there is to be ‘justice’ in any real sense, there has to be a change in the mindset, created in large part as a result of the militarisation of our society. The mindset espoused by the prime minister in that one statement – that men are not robots (and even in similar ones given prior) – itself is a threat to the women of this country, and adds insult to the collective injury inflicted upon Pakistani women.

The writer is founding partner of Mazari-Hazir Advocates & Legal Consultants.

Email: imaanmazarihazir@ gmail.com

Twitter: @ImaanZHazir