

Pakistan, Qandeel Baloch murder: 'Honour' killings, hypocrisy and the moral policing reserved only for women

Wednesday 20 July 2016, by [AQUEEL Maliha](#) (Date first published: 18 July 2016).

Qandeel Baloch was failed by Pakistan society at every step. The same nation that topped Google searches for pornography strangles women like her to death.

News broke on Saturday of Pakistani social media celebrity, Qandeel Baloch, being strangled by her own brother. Since then, I have spoken to many fellow Pakistani women who were inspired by her acts and took courage from her bold rejection of a society where all of us are expected to walk a tightrope of moral standards reserved solely for women.

Qandeel Baloch was a woman our society failed at every step. Her parents married her off at 17, to a man much older than her – a practice so common that Unicef estimates 21% of girls are married off before the age of 18 in Pakistan [1]. She spoke of the abuse in this marriage, saying he behaved like “an animal” towards her [2], but her family refused to support her if she decided to leave him.

In a society where often even privileged women have difficulty walking away from abusive husbands, the extraordinary courage of this working-class girl was inspirational. She left this abusive marriage, lived in a women’s refuge, and had then put herself through secondary school and college by working several jobs. She financially supported her family and had bought them the house in Multan where her brother first drugged, then strangled her because, he said: “Girls are born only to stay at home.” [See below.]

In public, Qandeel led a life that many Pakistani women lead in private. Her decision to be public and stay public, despite threats, was a bold move. In a society where many female celebrities find fame by playing coy, submissive heroines in Urdu drama serials, her social media posts were everything but. She shot to fame with her provocative pictures and videos on Facebook, gained notoriety and many thousands of followers this year when she offered to do a striptease if Pakistan beat India in a game of cricket [3]. She was a personal hero of mine. Every time someone posted a video laughing at her, I cringed. To me, she was anything but laughable. Her every act was defiant of a deeply misogynist and, ultimately, violent society.

More recently, news media outlets in the country conducted a frenzied witch-hunt after she posted pictures with cleric Mufti Abdul Qavi that led to his suspension from one of Pakistan’s religious committees. They released her birth name and details about her marriage and child, details that Qandeel had always kept private, presumably owing to security concerns. After her murder, the same cleric brazenly issued a threat on live television saying the way Qandeel’s life ended should serve as warning to anyone who tries to malign righteous people like clergymen.

This threat is not surprising in a country where nearly a thousand women are reported killed in the

name of 'honour' each year, with rights organisations estimating that a huge number still go unreported. Where there is news of such cold-blooded murder, usually at the hands of family members, there is a society that is so dehumanised to violence against women that assertions are made to mitigate the murderer's brutality, making it seem that the victim's behaviour somehow made the murder explicable, even deserved.

Victim blaming is, in fact, such a part of the narrative that even so-called liberals in the country, while condemning her murder, have – in the same breath, tweet or Facebook post – also distanced themselves from her behaviour.

Moral outrage was expressed by many towards Qandeel, but hundreds of thousands also liked her official Facebook page [4]. This is behavior typical of suppressed societies that condone such hypocrisy as a way of life and encourage a complete disconnection between the public and private lives of people. The same nation that has topped Google searches for pornography [5] strangles women like Qandeel to death.

Let us be very clear that at the core of this violence against women is a society that sanctions it. Any time we pass moral judgment on women, we are crossing the line from bystander to accessory. At the heart of killing in the name of honour is a kind of moral policing that is reserved solely for women and a pervasive, toxic misogyny that expects women to be subservient to men and the patriarchal order. Any time a woman steps "out of line" by wearing what she desires, doing what she wants or even just by saying what she thinks – people are outraged.

But the real outrage lies in the fact that a legal loophole allows perpetrators of 'honour' crimes to go free. By law, murder victims' family members can pardon the perpetrator. In 'honour' crimes, where the killer is usually a brother, father, son, husband or uncle, the woman's murder goes unpunished.

For women who are victims of these crimes, it is this lethal combination of a law that allows perpetrators to roam free and of a society that clearly sanctions this behaviour by first policing the women, then blaming the victims and ultimately staying silent on cold-blooded murder. Qandeel's father has said he will not forgive her brutal murder. Society failed her, let's hope the legal system does not.

To me, Qandeel Baloch was a trailblazer, a working-class, modern-day Pakistani feminist. She believed we must stand up for ourselves as women [6], we must stand up for each other as women, and we must stand up for justice. At the time of writing, an online petition had more than 2,000 signatures demanding justice for her [7]. But Qandeel also called herself a #OneWomanArmy, perhaps conscious a society that sanctions such violence against women may never stand up for her.

Vale, Qandeel, I wish we were all as brave as you.

Maliha Aqueel

* The Guardian. Monday 18 July 2016 21.30 BST Last modified on Tuesday 19 July 2016 16.14 BST: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/18/honour-killings-hypocrisy-and-moral-policing-reserved-only-for-women>

Drugged Qandeel before strangling her to death, says brother

MULTAN: Internet sensation Qandeel Baloch's brother, who was arrested late Saturday, has confessed to drugging and then strangling her "for honour".

Muhammad Waseem said he is "not embarrassed" to have killed her.

"Yes of course, I strangled her," Wasim told reporters at a defiant press conference, organised by police, early Sunday.

"She was on the ground floor while our parents were asleep on the roof top," he continued. "It was around 10.45 pm when I gave her a tablet... and then killed her."

Qandeel, believed to be in her twenties and whose real name was Fauzia Azeem, rose to fame for her provocative Facebook posts that saw her praised by some for breaking social taboos but condemned by conservatives.

Wasim said he acted alone.

"Whatever was the case, it (his sister's behaviour) was completely intolerable," he said. After the videos with Mufti Abdul Qavi had gone viral on social media, I planned to murder her and was only waiting for the best moment."

She was killed on Friday night at her family's home near Multan. Wasim went on the run and was arrested late Saturday in neighbouring Muzaffargarh district.

He added, "I am a drug addict but I was in my senses when I murdered her and I accept it with pride. Now everybody will remember me with honour that I have provided relief to my parents and brothers who were suffering for the last two decades because of her."

"Girls are born only to stay at home and to bring honour to the family by following family traditions but Qandeel had never done that," Waseem said.

"My friends used to send me videos and pictures on my mobile and everyone in the mobile market was sharing pictures and videos of her with me. Murdering her was better than committing suicide so I went with the former plan."

CPO Multan said samples were taken from Qandeel's body which will be sent to Lahore to determine if she was drugged or not.

Rumours of Qandeel's parents being taken in remand are false, he added, saying the model's mobile phone was recovered and will be used to help in the investigations.

Qandeel Baloch laid to rest

Qandeel was buried in her home town in DG Khan on Sunday.

Her funeral prayers were offered Shah Sadar Din village, around 130 kilometers from Multan. She was buried in her family graveyard.

Hundreds attended her funeral prayers, including locals as well as social rights activists from all over south Punjab.

Qandeel's parents were afraid that they might be killed by their sons as well, and were provided security, police sources told *The Express Tribune*.

Relatives and residents offer funeral prayers for Qandeel Baloch in Shah Sadar Din village, around 130 kilometers from Multan on July 17, 2016. PHOTO: AFP

As per her father's wishes, Qandeel's body was shifted to DG Khan from Multan on Sunday morning at 6am.

According to the post-mortem report conducted by a panel of three doctors at Nishtar Hospital in Multan, she was murdered between 9 and 10pm late Friday evening.

Her death was reported to rescue 1122 on Saturday morning in around 11am. Her body was shifted to Nishtar Hospital in Multan around 2pm Saturday afternoon and it remained there for more than 14 hours as her parents were coming to receive it after autopsy.

"Wasim, 30, killed her last night following an argument," her parents confirmed after her death. Her parents arrived at the Nishtar Hospital and collected her body on Sunday morning. Her body was then transferred to Dera Ghazi Khan for the funeral.

Qandeel's father Azeem said his daughter was brave and he would not forget or forgive her brutal murder.

Regarding security measures, the CPO said police had not received a written request from the model to provide her security.

Death threats

Following the Mufti Qavi 'scandal', the internet sensation had claimed she was receiving death threats and had officially sought security.

However, following "no response" from the interior ministry on her application for getting personal security, she planned to settle down abroad after Eidul Fitr.

Revealing Qandeel's real identity put her life at risk

"I know I will not be provided security and I am not feeling secured here so have decided to move abroad with my parents after Eidul Fitr," Qandeel had told *The Express Tribune*.

* News Desk / Owais Qarni / AFP Published: July 17, 2016:

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1143481/drugged-qandeel-strangling-death-brother/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/pakistan/>

[2] <http://images.dawn.com/news/1175807>

[3] https://web.facebook.com/OfficialQandeelBaloch/videos/794340887377332/?_rdr

[4] https://web.facebook.com/OfficialQandeelBaloch/?fref=nf&pnref=story&_rdr

[5] <http://tribune.com.pk/story/823696/pakistan-tops-list-of-most-porn-searching-countries-google/>

[6] https://web.facebook.com/OfficialQandeelBaloch/photos/a.381098535368238.1073741830.339947236150035/882646491880104/?type=3&permPage=1&_rdr

[7] <https://progpak.wordpress.com/2016/07/16/no-country-for-bold-women/>