

# Pakistan: Honour killing-an overview

Sunday 10 July 2011, by [EHTISHAM Syed Akhtar](#) (Date first published: 8 July 2011).

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Of all the evils spawned by the feudal society, honor killing is arguably the most heinous.

Apologists try to equate it with “crime of passion” but crimes of passion are abrupt, unmediated, and impulsive acts of violence committed by persons who, in their own lights, have come face to face with an incident wholly repulsive and unacceptable and who technically and for the duration of the act, are insane and incapable of self-control. One well known and illustrative example is that of an Indian Naval officer, Commander Nanavati who some thirty years ago went to his apartment, found his wife and her paramour in conjugal embrace, shot both of them, went out, accosted a traffic policeman, confessed to the killing and demanded to be arrested. The policeman demurred, he could not arrest an officer, so he took over directing the traffic, sent the policeman to fetch a police inspector who arrived in due course and arrested him.

I have not been able to find as striking or so well documented example of genuine Honor killing in Pakistan as this one, though stories of enraged, out of control, husbands, fathers, and brothers abound. Murder of a “guilty” female is reported about once a month in Pakistani newspapers.

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The practice is a relic of the times when law and order was a matter of tribal code

(A recent variant is sanctioning gang rape of a woman for alleged insult to a member of a powerful family by a member of “low” family, for example the recent Mukhtaran Mai case in Pakistan) and the British on assuming control and with a view to pacifying the natives and minimizing opposition to their over lordship incorporated honor killing in their jurisprudence, even though it was repugnant to their code of justice and fair play. But they imposed very stringent conditions viz sexual activity was actually observed, the perpetrator confessed, had an otherwise upright character, had blood/marriage relation with the girl and reported to the police immediately. Under British rule it was a rare incident. The perpetrator would not be sentenced to death but there would be a long jail sentence and social sanctions as well.

But above all, the crime was deemed to have been committed against the state in contravention of law and not a simple private affair.

*Qisas* (eye for an eye) and *Diyat* (blood money) as part of Hudood laws were promulgated as

Presidential Ordinance, not requiring parliamentary assent by General Zia, the military dictator of Pakistan from 1977 to 1988, are closely related relics of pre Islamic societies, where the concept of these offences being family affairs, was accepted. Islam made these violations of law crimes against the state. Since the departure of the British and with them fear of the law and judicial procedures and especially since the dark days of Zia Ul Haq, women have been relegated to a third class status. This was in clear disregard of the tolerance and fair play taught by Islam. The intolerant theology was invented over a hundred of years after the prophet of Islam (PBUH) at the behest of Abbasid Caliphs and revived in eighteenth century by a person by the name of Abdul Wahab with whom the progenitor of the Saudi royal clan had signed a compact that the clan chief would look after the worldly affairs and Godly ones would be assigned to Wahab.

It did not get any where till the successors of the clan chief on the one hand and those of Wahab on the other got together to fight with the “infidel” British and the French against fellow Muslims the Turks. The house of Ibn e Saud utilized the fanatics as a weapon against their local rival, Shareef the ruler of Mecca who claimed descent from the prophet of Islam (current standard bearers of the family being King Abdullah of Jordan and the Agha Khan) wholly repugnant to the spirit and word of Islam. The British had promised Hejaz to Shareef but gave it instead to Saud and left the former with consolation prizes of Iraq and Jordan.

Pakistan inherited a tolerant version of Islam. I recall from my childhood that we shunned extremists and socialized with non-Muslims. Over the following several decades, as the leaders failed to come up to expectations, social services deteriorated, the ruling clique led the country down the disastrous path of wars, military rule, subservience to foreign interests, curtailment of expenditure on nation building, widening divide between the rich and the poor and finally civil war and loss of half of the country. Orthodoxy took hold of the imagination of people in the country. Bhutto pledged an egalitarian society but ended up by rejuvenating his feudal class. Zia ul Haq hammered the final nail into the coffin of liberal Pakistan.

Feudal lords have ruled Pakistan even since its inception; all levers of power, Army, Civil service, Mullahs and Press have been under their control. Army is the most effective tool of feudal society as it has the brute power and can ignore with contempt the law of the land. Other components of the evil quad (Feudals, Army, Civil service, and Mullah) willingly cooperate. Civil servants and judges supinely obey the army. (The stand taken by CJ Iftikhar Choudhury is the sole exception, but that is another discussion). Expression of opinion is prohibited and all coercive apparatus of state is used to crush opposition. Education is discouraged and whatever little is allowed, is subverted by distortion of curricula. Honor killing is a made to measure cover for them.

If Pakistan were encumbered only with the problem of fanaticism and relics of the colonial times, it would not be so bad. To compound the misery uncontrolled growth of population was allowed in the name of religion. West Pakistan (now the only Pakistan) had a population of 35 million in 1947. Now it is 170 million and growing at over three percent per year. Even if the government functioned honestly, sincerely and efficiently (which admittedly it does not) no innovation in methods of production could cope with the immense increase in the number of mouths to feed. Health, education, nutrition, physical and mental development continue to deteriorate. Human sub-species incapable of protest is being created. This further strengthens the hands of the “evil quad”

In any case, few in Pakistan have the time, inclination, means or education to think, read books, and analyze the machinations of the “evil quad”. Zia literally ignored unfavorable articles in “Dawn” and is believed to have said that the readership of the newspaper was only 40,000(45,000 on Friday) and these 40-45,000 had their interest linked with the ruling Junta.

There are no doubt valiant voices in the country and among expatriates (such as AANA, Asian

American network against Abuse and as shown by the recent mass protests and results of elections in Pakistan) but they are akin to straws in the wind. All conferences, seminars, resolutions and press notes in effect and in substance are irrelevant. They look to the west specially USA for putting pressure on Pakistani authorities to respect human rights and law. But the west is not interested in human rights in third world countries. They supported Taliban in Afghanistan where the fanatics were perpetrating the worst crimes against the Afghans.

A total structural change in society is needed. It would be tantamount to a revolution. Revolutions are historically indigenous and cannot be imported or imposed from outside.

Following is a summary of the report of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International recommendations, and the protection and empowerment of women act 2003, presented to Pakistan National Assembly, presented with a fond hope that it will stimulate some minds and goad them to initiate the struggle against the evil quad.

**by Dr. S. Akhtar Ehtisham**

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### **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan:**

Honor killings 1998 to 2002 1464 (married 659- unmarried 534)

### **Amnesty International Recommendations:**

Review criminal laws to ensure equality before law and equal protection of law to women.

Make domestic violence in all its manifestations a criminal offence.

Make sale of women and girls or giving women in marriage against financial considerations a criminal offence.

Under take wide-ranging awareness programs.

Provide gender-sensitization training to law enforcement and judicial personnel.

Ensure that human rights activists, lawyers, and women's rights activists can pursue their legitimate activities without harassment

The 2003 "Act"

Government to ensure equal participation of women in all walks of life.

Discrimination in pay on basis of gender is prohibited.

Domestic violence and honor killing be punishable in the same manner as personal injury or culpable homicide.

Every woman shall be entitled to marry a person of her choice.

At least one third of seats on Islamic Ideology Council and other government commissions be reserved for women.

Separate/independent enclosures in jail for women controlled by female police

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