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Honour Killing Frames in Pakistan: Thematic Analysis of Pakistani English Newspaper

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Abstract

The social custom of honour killings is practised brutally in many societies world, and the situation in Pakistan is no different. This qualitative study explored the underline themes associated with such killings in four (4) editorials from 'The Dawn' newspaper published in the English language in Pakistan. The thematic analysis was completed in the light of Kardam's Dynamics of Honour Killings Model (Forensic Analysis) and Goffman's Frame Analysis (Narrative Analysis) techniques. The current investigation revealed that the issue of honour killings is socially and economically constructed; however, it is supported on wrong frames by cultural values and religious authorities, providing suspects with an accessible and sympathetic escape.

Keywords: Honour killings, The Dawn, society, thematic analysis, frame analysis.

Introduction

The deed of honour killing or shame killing is a willful massacre of the victim (mostly kin) under the belief that the individual is disgraceful for disobeying religious, societal or cultural values.¹ It is a traditional procedure throughout the globe, and Pakistan's case is no different.² Chafai stated that honour killings correlate with religious and sociocultural misinterpretation in the East. In contrast, Vatandoost believed that the immigrants exercise brutal acts of honour killings in the West because of a clash of civilisations or multiculturalism.³ Although honour killing in

the world is “now illegal almost everywhere”;⁴ however, the acts of honour killings are still a customary activity exercised in the different societies of the world.⁵

This study focuses on the thematic analysis of the editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper. This study is a micro-level analysis of newspaper editorials. The key objectives of the current study were to analyse the discourse of honour killings in the editorials of *The Dawn* newspaper, investigate the themes of the social dilemma of honour killings and explore the patterns of portraying honour killings that affect the mindset of people. The research questions are as follows: How is honour killing portrayed in the editorials of *The Dawn* newspapers? What are the themes behind the issues of honour killing? How is the media affecting the mindset of people regarding honour killings?

Honour killings can be traced back to prehistoric times.⁶ Honour killing is evident all over the globe, and the situation in Pakistan is no different. Pakistan is ranked 153rd of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, 2021;⁷ now, the situation is even worse in 2022 because it is ranked 145th of 146 countries⁸. The representation of the issues of shame killings through mass media also affects the mindset of people regarding such killings.⁹ The study is significant in finding the portrayal of honour killings in Pakistan, exploring the themes and objectives of honour killings and investigating the role of media while portraying such cases of honour or shame killings. The topic is delimited explicitly to the thematic investigation of four (4) editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper from June 10, 2016, to July 25, 2016.

Literature Review

This section gives an insight into the explanation of critical terminologies of the research and deals with the information from previous works conducted in the field. The literature review of this research is narrowed down to the explanation of key ideas and the core literature related to this research. Therefore, the literature review consists of two (2) sections: Conceptual literature and research literature. The former deals with explaining key terms, while the latter deals with reviewing related literature from previous studies specific to honour killings. Both these portions were essential in finding the research gaps of the study. The research gap is discussed at the end of the research literature.

The act of honour killing or shame killing is a voluntary massacre of the kin under the belief that the individual is disgraceful for disobeying religious, societal or cultural values.¹⁰ The Latin word “Discurses” is the root of the word ‘Discourse’, meaning ‘language in use’.¹¹ Thematic analysis is a complicated process because it refers to a method of research that

emphasises the use of vocabulary and language in social structures. It concerns how authority is wielded and how social relationships, awareness, and culture are maintained. This technique is focused on critical linguistics and post-structuralist philosophy. The thematic analysis concerns spoken and written language and verbal and non-verbal facets of life.¹²

In Iraq, the history of honour killing dates back to 1780 BCE. King Hammurabi established a commandment that every female belonged to her spouse until death. If she is found betrayed, she and her lover would be thrown into the sea until the assassination. In 17 BCE, Augustus, the Roman Imperial Dictator, declared that females should be murdered by the dominant male of their household if captured in a sexual encounter, according to Julian Law. Attempts at honour killings have long been associated with “chivalry” and “nobility.” These ideas are still popular today, and the same connotations are still associated with them. In Pakistan, the Talpur tribe of Sindh pioneered the tradition of honour killings that later spread to other areas of the region.¹³

In the press, honour killing is depicted as a case of using “language as a medium of control.” It is not considered an offence. The truth of honour killings is very different, and the media portrays it quite differently. Many incidents of honour killings, for example, go under-reported in Pakistan, and no judicial charges are brought. Since the scheme is inadequate and convicted individuals are not prosecuted, honour killings are increasing daily. Due to Pakistan’s harsh feudal environment, many violent criminals are free to move about and believe it to be the correct thing to do.¹⁴ *The Dawn* has liberal and open-minded nature and presents left-wing ideology by giving importance to local bodies and organisations for societal concerns.¹⁵

Text is a discourse, illustration, or description of verbal or written language, media or audio recordings. The text refers to everything that has significance. The thematic analysis focuses on using text styles to illuminate particular meanings and correlates them with occurrences, defining the relation between language text, its context, and culture. Editorials report on domestic and world affairs, political figures, policymakers, and influential lawmakers’ decisions. The textual analysis is critical for exposing a discourse’s underlying philosophy.¹⁶

The research gap in the previous studies was that they were limited to the incidents of honour killings and not their portrayal in the Mass Media. Therefore, the former studies have not discussed the reasons, objectives and themes of honour killings in detail. This research also covers the gap in Pakistan because people consider this issue taboo. This research gap has

provided the methodological background for the research. To fill the research gap, an operational research model is followed to investigate themes of honour killings.

Research Methodology

Newspapers reflect and represent the norms and customs of society.¹⁷ The canvas to society is the language. In particular, the language used in the newspaper editorials reflects the control, culture, norms, ideologies and power.¹⁸ The analysis of editorials can reveal the hidden ideologies propagated through them.¹⁹ It is observed that even the accidental syntactic mistakes have innate ideologies hidden within their pragmatic discourse, and these words express emotions.²⁰ This research is an introductory descriptive qualitative research approach. This portion gives an insight into the research procedures, methods, design, and sampling.

This study applied an operational model that combined the postulates of two (2) theories to fulfil the research objectives. First, the thematic analysis of the research is carried out in light of the postulate of Kardam's Dynamics of Honour Killings Model. The model states, "Although people's attitudes and behaviour toward honour are based on their religious views, the circumstance is generally inconsistent. The concentration on economic and social circumstances, as well as social strain, as motives for honour killings, can inadvertently contribute to a lack of focus on perpetrators' guilt, or at the very least encourage people to treat perpetrators with more tolerance".²¹

Second, the theory of Frame Analysis is applied to newspaper editorials. Goffman proposed Frame Analysis. He claims that people understand what is going on in their surroundings using their fundamental framework. This approach has been considered fundamental because the client assumes it. Its utility as a framework is not contingent on the existence of other paradigms. Within successful managers, according to Goffman, there are detangle: natural as well as social. Both contribute to assisting people in interpreting data to understand their perspectives in a broader societal perspective. The distinction between the two is highly dynamic.²²

Natural frameworks describe events as natural happenings, interpreting natural quotations seriously and not assigning the causality of occurrences to any social factors. Due to other social actors' desires, ambitions, and manoeuvres, social frames perceive happenings as socially-oriented happenings (people). Natural frameworks serve as the foundation for social frameworks. Social frames and the framing they construct in our interaction significantly impact

how information is received, handled, and presented. Goffman's basic assumption is that people can use these concepts effectively daily, consciously or unconsciously.

Although the target population for the current study encompasses all honour killing-related editorials reported in Pakistani Newspaper articles. It has been whittled down only for excerpts from one of the major English newspapers of Pakistan, *The Dawn*. This convenient sampling was obtained from four (4) newspaper articles from June 10, 2016, to July 25, 2016. The convenient sampling of the research is synchronic to when the famous incident of the honour killing of a famous Pakistani model Qandeel Baloch happened. The murder of Qandeel Baloch was a topic of great concern in society and mainstream media. This research comes under the discipline of applied linguistics. This study focuses on the thematic analysis of the editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper. The current study has utilised qualitative method analysis, where thematic analysis deals with the qualitative findings.

Findings and Discussions

The results of the investigation are presented in the findings and discussion section of the manuscript. The data gathered will be used to provide answers to the study questions. Your explanation should explain and contextualise the results in the context of what is currently understood about the proposed study. When the results are considered, it provides any new knowledge or task of discovering the issue. All research questions and previously studied material must relate to the introduction in some manner throughout the discussion. Its purpose is to provide a rationale for your final assessment by describing and critiquing your findings, relating them to the literature review, and presenting an argument favouring the conclusion.

In Editorial (a), the brutal face of society is shown. Society's sexist values are shown brutally in the case of 18-year-old Zeenat Rafiq, who was murdered by burning by her mother for getting married to the husband of her preference. Her mother never showed any regret for rationalising Zeenat's assassination as penance for 'dishonouring' the family; her siblings flat-out refused to bury her. The writer called it an instance of a "**misogynistic societal attitude**" leading to the girl's death. There is a clear instance of Kardam's Honour Killing Dynamics because the girl was burnt because of societal norms. In the same way, the social frames were responsible for the event. The family blamed the girl, and the norms of society forced the mother and siblings to do the acts.²³

Fouzia Azeem, known as Qandeel Baloch, was Pakistan's first social media celebrity allegedly assassinated in the name of 'honour' by her brother.²⁴ Her brother Waseem Azeem

confessed that he killed the actress because she was causing a 'disrepute' to the family's honour. Honour killings are increasing day by day in our society. Whenever a woman does any unethical act, people mock that particular girl and disrespect the entire family. The same is the case for Qandeel Baloch. Her brother killed her and admitted it publicly, considering it heroic and worthwhile. It was not only the conception of Waseem Azeem; somewhere, the public had some societal, cultural, religious or moral reasons to justify the murder. It is not only confined to Qandeel Baloch's case, but this trend is often seen prevailing in every patriarchal society worldwide.²⁵

The murder of Qandeel Baloch was a societal flaw that encouraged her brother to take her. In Editorial (b), the author believes that the state's track record in prosecuting crimes is poor, and many male perpetrators of violence against women walk free. When they murder **"disobedient"** women in their families, they are pardoned and often even backed by retrograde patriarchal systems, increasing their sense of impunity. It is why the law should not provide compoundability or penalty exemptions. The women get killed, and the state cannot do anything in this regard because of the family and society back these events. There is an increasing rate of these killings because the law cannot do justice to women, and the family supports the killers as the women are disobedient and bring shame to the family. On the contrary, the perpetrators get an easy escape because they bring an exemption from this so-called shames.²⁶

Because her brothers were involved, the assassination of Qandeel Baloch has been labelled an "honour" killing. In this context, her **"bayghairat"** behaviour becomes an easy excuse for her murderer. Multiple users expressed their approval of her execution, with many saying she was a national embarrassment for Pakistan. She has been the target of death threats throughout her life, particularly in the comments sections of her social media postings. She also reached out to the police to request protection.²⁷ The author of the article mentioned that **"murder has been termed an 'honour' killing,"** and it also says that the killing is **"framed as such"** to justify the stance of her brother. Goffman highlights that in the instances of shame killing, the killers get an easy escape because of the people and society. Society justifies the killing in the name of bringing shame to the family. Kardam also agrees that society is the fundamental reason behind such killings.

As punishment for marrying the guy she loved, Zeenat Bibi's mother in Lahore set fire to her. Sharif described her murder as **"un-Islamic"** when she was killed and immediately demanded an inquiry into the matter. Because of her obscurity and situation, the prime minister

had no problem speaking out in support of Zeenat Bibi. Sharif's consistency would be on display if he defended Qandeel Baloch, who was daring, sensuous, and liable for snapping pictures incriminating enough to have Mufti Abdul Qavi. Editorial (c) writer also asked, **“why must we deploy a religious lens to comment on such killings?”** Society is more responsible for carrying out such killings. After these killings, the killers get the words of religion to prove themselves innocent. They frame their actions in the light of religion, which has to do nothing in the case of Islam.

The cases of honour killing are not only confined to the murder of a person, but this trend is so severe that the accused get sympathy rather than the victims. As found in Editorial (d), where Supreme Court Bar Association was apt of the view about the case of 19 years old Maria Sadaqat that the **“accused finds much sympathy ... in the criminal justice system.”** It gives the criminals such confidence and support that they sometimes kill someone owing to different social or personal grudges and label it an honour killing. Murderers know that the label of honour killing would save them from societal condemnation. However, there are more likely chances that the victim's family would tend to dismiss the case and not publicise the accused. Therefore, honour killing acts as a safe and justified way of murder, and society accepts this kind of honour killing.²⁸

The basic theme behind killing Qandeel Baloch was social and economic issues related to **“her risqué videos”** and her **“outspoken and fearless”** nature. She casually stretched the limits of what was deemed **“acceptable”** conduct by women in Pakistan during her fleeting moment of fame. Her assassination showed the dangers that such a course encompasses. In addition to being public, her family also had issues with her public interaction, bold photoshoots, arguments with religious people and blunt statements. She was also highly criticised when she started speaking for women's rights and named Sunny Leone and Rakhi Sawant as her inspiration. Dawn Editorial (b) called her **“outspoken and fearless”**. However, it was Qandeel Baloch's provocative persona, which many found **“controversial”** and which she showcased in **“her risqué videos”**, that understood the gist that women have the freedom to be themselves, even though it offends traditional expectations.²⁹

Her brother supported her until she was providing him with financial services. However, as soon as she got into controversies with her brother, her brother killed her, labelling her as an honour killing, bearing in mind that her family and the state would forgive it as it happens in most cases. The assassination of Qandeel Baloch delivers a disturbing message that women will

be kept under men's control at all costs; they will be assassinated if they dare to dream of breaking the stereotypes. As a result of her death, politicians should revive demands for reforms to defend women who are killed because of erroneous notions of **“honour”**. Women are killed at any cost if they try to break social norms.³⁰ The perpetrators' guilt is forgotten as the criminal justice system is incapable of treating criminals as criminals in the case of honour killings.³¹

The thematic analysis revealed that the issue of honour killings is socially constructed compared to other factors; however, it is supported by religious authorities and cultural values, as evident in the case of Qandeel Baloch. The thematic analysis revealed that the suspect in the case of honour killings gets more advantage because of cultural and religious entities in Pakistan³²; however, Islam does not advocate such murders by the hand of family above the judicial system. It happens because religious entities support social and economic entities.³³ The entities mean the orthodox advocates of the particular domain. Therefore, the suspects in Pakistan get many advantages because of social and cultural frames, which get wrongly associated with it because of the entities who advocate such issues.

Conclusion

The Dawn newspaper seems to align with the left-wing ideology. The liberal left-wing *The Dawn* newspaper discusses that society frames honour killings in favour of the killers. The killers get an easy escape owing to the family and society. On the other hand, the law is bound in these cases. The institutions concerning the aboriginal problem of honour killings remain unresolved. Using language associated with honour and people, the author expresses his strong opposition to honour killing. The thematic structure in the article has favoured women by vigorously condemning the misogynistic practices of honour killings. Their families do not support many of the women affected by honour killings. In contrast, the family encourages the killers to bring an end to **“bayghairat”** women. Although such acts are un-Islamic, the killers try to take shelter in religion.

Authorities should condemn Honour killings, and such studies will significantly increase women's consciousness of their status. The patriarchal mentality of honour killings will be changed if women begin to struggle for their rights and men cease their patriarchal mischief. Media should promote the interest of women. Universities should host conferences to educate men about their spiritual responsibilities. The students should be taught about honour killings in gender studies classes all over the globe. Honour killing, blasphemy, and other taboo subjects should be welcomed among students. The research can be extended to different newspapers,

news channels, and media reports of different years. This study would further help the students of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mass Media, Women's Literature, and Gender Studies in their research by providing a new angle to observe editorials.

Notes

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- ¹ Amir H. Jafri, *Honour Killing: Dilemma, Ritual, Understanding* (2008)
 - ² Nafisa Shah, *Honour and Violence: Gender, Power and Law in Southern Pakistan* (2016)
 - ³ Negin Vatandoost, "The News Coverage of Honour Killings in Canadian Newspapers," (master's thesis, Ontario Tech University, 2012)
 - ⁴ Kofi Annan, "Secretary-general, in address to "Women 2000" special session, says future of planet depends upon women | UN Press," United Nations, June 5, 2000
 - ⁵ Robert P. Churchill, "The cultural evolution of honor killing," in *Women in the Crossfire: Understanding and Ending Honor Killing* (2018)
 - ⁶ Nazand Begikhani and Aisha K. Gill, *Honour-Based Violence: Experiences and Counter-Strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish Diaspora* (2016)
 - ⁷ World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," The World Economic Forum, March 31, 2021
 - ⁸ World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2022," World Economic Forum, July 13, 2022
 - ⁹ Marjorie Agosin, *Women, Gender, and Human Rights: A Global Perspective* (2001)
 - ¹⁰ Stephen B. Adjei, "Discourse analysis: Examining language use in context," *The Qualitative Report* 18, no. 25 (June 2013)
 - ¹¹ Oxford Languages, "Oxford Languages and Google - English," Oxford Languages | The Home of Language Data, May 20, 2020
 - ¹² Wendy Cukier et al., "A critical analysis of media discourse on information technology: Preliminary results of a proposed method for critical discourse analysis," *Information Systems Journal* 19, no. 2 (March 2009)
 - ¹³ Herald, "The Evolution of Honour Killing," Herald Magazine, July 25, 2016
 - ¹⁴ Shahrzad Mojab and Nahla Abdo-Zubi, *Violence in the Name of Honour: Theoretical and Political Challenges* (2022)
 - ¹⁵ Hafiz A. Bilal et al., "Editorials of Pakistani English Print Media: Application of CDA," *International Journal of Linguistics* 4, no. 3 (2012)
 - ¹⁶ Muhammad T. Ayoub, Abdul G. Awan, and Ghulam Abbas, "Textual analysis of print media text discourse," *New Media and Mass Communication* 50, no. 50 (2016)
 - ¹⁷ Habiba Chafai, "Gender and the Language of Advertising. A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Women's Representation in British and Moroccan Magazine Advertisements," (2007)
 - ¹⁸ Roger Fowler et al., *Language and Control* (London: Routledge, 2018)
 - ¹⁹ John E. Joseph and Talbot J. Taylor, *Ideologies of Language* (2014)
 - ²⁰ Gabriele Beissel-Durrant, "A typology of research methods within the social sciences," *NCRM Working Paper*, November 2004

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- ²¹ Filiz Kardam, *The dynamics of honor killings in Turkey: Prospects for action*, (2005)
- ²² Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1986)
- ²³ Editorial (a), "Killing Women," *The Dawn*, last modified June 11, 2016
- ²⁴ Editorial (b), "Qandeel's Murder," *The Dawn*, last modified July 17, 2016
- ²⁵ Editorial (c), "The Real Shame," *The Dawn*, last modified July 18, 2016
- ²⁶ Editorial (b), "Qandeel's Murder," *The Dawn*, July 17, 2016
- ²⁷ Editorial (c), "The Real Shame," *The Dawn*, last modified July 18, 2016
- ²⁸ Editorial (d), "Pro-women Legislation," *The Dawn*, July 22, 2016
- ²⁹ Editorial (b), "Qandeel's Murder," *The Dawn*, July 17, 2016
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Editorial (d), "Pro-women Legislation," *The Dawn*, July 22, 2016
- ³² Baseer Naveed, "Violence against women in Pakistan," Asian Human Rights Commission - AHRC, March 2019
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Appendixes

Appendix-A) Killing Women (June 11, 2016)

THE fate suffered by 18-year-old Zeenat Rafiq burnt to death by her own mother for marrying a man of her choice is starkly reflective of our misogynistic societal attitudes.

Without the slightest remorse, her mother justified Zeenat's murder as punishment for 'dishonouring' the family, her siblings even refusing her body for burial.

On Thursday, PPP senators taking note of the killing – the third reported case of a young woman burnt to death in the past three months – urgently demanded that the government fast-track amendments to the Anti-Honour Killings Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2014, to make 'honour' crimes non-compoundable offences.

It was in the Senate that the anti-honour killings bill had been tabled by former PPP senator Sughra Imam in March 2015.

Then unanimously passed, JUI-F members had shown support. But the bill lapsed before the National Assembly could pass it.

In March 2016, ironically, the same JUI-F representatives rejected the amended bill demanding that clauses allowing aggrieved parties to forgive perpetrators be retained.

In its current form, the bill allows impunity for killers – family members often forgive perpetrators, even forcing prosecutors to drop the most watertight case.

The PML-N government must stop burying its head in the sand and push through an amended bill in a joint parliamentary session.

In February, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif took on the mantle of rights champion, pledging amendments to address loopholes. He must be told that the latest killing is a reminder that delays can prove fatal.

It is unacceptable when women's rights are bartered for political complacency – several pro-women bills are put into cold storage at the behest of religious parties.

When parliamentary consensus is at the cost of regressive 'advice' from anti-women lobbies such as the Council of Islamic Ideology, the government should resist attempts at outmanoeuvring.

It does not need to be fearful of displeasing the religious lobby; the government does not require their numbers to pass an amended bill through a joint session.

And if incapable of instituting legislative and protective mechanisms, the government should finance the women's ministry and the National Commission on the Status of Women and task them with drawing up mechanisms on gender equality.

Surely NCSW recommendations would be more women-friendly and useful than unsolicited pronouncements by the CII that is armed with Rs100m for its anti-women project.

Like it or not, democratic progress depends on how the state empowers its women.

Appendix-B) Qandeel's Murder (July 17, 2016)

THE shocking 'honour' killing of popular social media celebrity, Qandeel Baloch, must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

In her brief moment in the spotlight, she breezily pushed the boundaries of what in Pakistan is considered 'acceptable' behaviour by women, and her death highlights the perils that such a path entails.

Outspoken and fearless, she chose to live life on her own terms – as a woman whose antics unnerved her many moralistic critics, most of whom were both enthralled and repelled by her.

That in itself was an act of courage. In fact, in a sense it was the very exaggerated nature of her persona – that many saw as controversial and that she flaunted in her risqué videos – which got the message across: women have a right to be themselves even if they offend conventional sensibilities.

And the state's response must unequivocally demonstrate that they do not deserve to be murdered for it. For this reason too, her murder must be immediately investigated and the perpetrators – allegedly her brothers – apprehended and punished.

It is regrettable though that the state has a weak record when it comes to prosecutions because quite often the murderers of women go scot-free.

They are forgiven and even supported by regressive patriarchies after killing 'disobedient' female family members increasing the impunity factor – this is reason enough for removing punishment waivers and compoundability provisions from the law.

And although filmmakers, activists and legislators have lobbied for revised laws, there has been zero headway.

Why the lethargy?

When will parliament be jolted out of its stupor to pass the anti-honour killing bill?

Now that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is back, he must deliver on his pledge to amend the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004, by removing the clauses that make such murder a private offence instead of a crime against state and society.

Furthermore, when a citizen asks for protection it must be provided by the state. In this case, the interior ministry was gravely at fault to have ignored the young celebrity's request for security.

The death of Qandeel Baloch conveys an insidious message: that women will be kept back at all cost; murdered, if they dare nurture ambitions to break the glass ceiling.

Her murder, therefore, must serve as an impetus for legislators to renew demands for legislation to protect women who are threatened under false notions of 'honour'.

Appendix-C) The Real Shame (July 18, 2016)

When the rock band Bumbu Sauce wrote an anthem to Qandeel Baloch, its members probably did not think it would soon be a lament. In a recent interview with the BBC, band

frontman Masterjee Bumbu explained the Qandeel Baloch phenomenon, saying that she's a "badly behaved woman" who uses the internet to communicate; "those are two things Pakistan does not deal well with as a society: the internet and badly behaved women". His words were prescient. Pakistan's inability to deal with Qandeel Baloch's behaviour drove, allegedly, her brothers to murder her last week.

Owing to her brothers' involvement, Qandeel Baloch's murder has been termed an 'honour' killing. Framed as such, people feel comfortable pointing to her 'bayghairat' behaviour to justify her brothers' heinous action. Many tweeted in support of her killing, describing her as a disgrace to Pakistan. She had received death threats during her lifetime, and comments under her social media posts frequently called for her murder. Three weeks ago, she contacted the authorities to ask for security.

Few will be surprised, then, that her death has not met with the universal outpouring of shock and horror that we saw a few weeks ago for Amjad Sabri, who was shot dead for essentially the same reason – a perceived transgression. The fact is, we rarely see any public dismay each time a woman is killed for allegedly speaking to the wrong man, choosing who to marry or otherwise acting against her family's wishes. How could we? There are around a thousand such murders reported in Pakistan each year, and our society is already too brutalised to mourn each one. Moreover, because such murders are categorised as 'honour' killings, there is a sense that the tragedy is somehow different, explicable and thus palatable.

At the time of writing on Saturday evening, Nawaz Sharif had not reacted to news of Qandeel Baloch's murder. I looked for his public statement because in February he announced that his government would amend laws that allow murderers who kill in the name of honour to escape punishment. No fresh legislation has been passed since then.

In June, Zeenat Bibi from Lahore was burned alive by her mother for marrying a man of her choice. After her death, Sharif ordered an investigation into her killing, describing it as 'un-Islamic'. The prime minister was happy to speak in defence of Zeenat Bibi, whose anonymity and circumstances together evoked a perception of vulnerability and oppression. It would indicate an admirable level of consistency if Sharif rose to the defence of Qandeel Baloch, who was provocative, sensual, and responsible for taking selfies damning enough to get Mufti Abdul Qavi suspended from the Ruet-i-Hilal Committee. After all, isn't her murder equally un-Islamic?

More importantly, why must we deploy a religious lens to comment on such killings? Qandeel Baloch and Zeenat Bibi were murdered. We should term and condemn their killings as such and punish the perpetrators accordingly.

Sadly, when women are murdered, the authorities and public at large tend to make sense of the violence – and thus mitigate its horror – by pointing to some aspect of the women's behaviour that warranted attack. Qandeel flouted social mores and took suggestive selfies; Sabeen Mahmud organised events on Balochistan and promoted tolerance; Perween Rahman asked too many questions about land ownership in Karachi. With these caveats, we imply that there are certain things women should not do, certain boundaries beyond which they should not transgress.

With each murder, new parameters are defined, and the space for women shrinks. Much worse, cold-blooded is recast as a punitive act, making it acceptable when it should, instead, be

deemed far more offensive to human decency and our values than anything the women could have done in the first place.

Qandeel Baloch's murder is the latest reminder that we live in an era of selective feminism. When it is convenient, people are happy to promote women's rights: female entrepreneurship, which contributes to the economy; girls' education, which keeps international aid money flowing to state coffers; the election of female parliamentarians, who toe the party line and help boost Pakistan in gender equality indexes.

But there is little progress on issues that pertain to the security and sanctity of women themselves, from domestic violence to reproductive rights. Why hasn't the government kept its promise of reviewing legislation that lets murderers who invoke 'honour' go free? Why did it take a documentary that won international acclaim to prod the prime minister's conscience on this matter? Aren't the hundreds of corpses each year enough?

Qandeel Baloch's father has mourned the loss of his 'brave' daughter and named his sons, who may not go scot-free, in the FIR. One hopes we all realise that the son's violent act – and not the daughter's suggestive selfies – is Pakistan's true shame.

Appendix-D) Pro-women Legislation (July 22, 2016)

Yesterday's developments offer a sliver of hope where preventing violence against women is concerned.

A parliamentary committee reached a consensus on the long-pending anti-honour killing and anti-rape bills that will shortly be submitted to a joint session of parliament for voting.

The renewed prospect of such legislation being enacted, mentioned by Maryam Nawaz in an interview less than a week after the shocking murder of Qandeel Baloch, is a welcome step.

The PML-N faces mounting pressure – both domestic and international – to address the lacunae in the law pertaining to honour killing that makes it difficult for perpetrators to be punished.

In fact, with activists, legislators and the media relentlessly highlighting atrocities against women and demanding justice for the hundreds of women and girls who die at the hands of family members every year in Pakistan, it is surprising the ruling party has waited so long to reform the law.

Perhaps Qandeel's death has proven to be the catalyst for the government to act.

It was March when the prime minister had pledged amendments to the law so that perpetrators of honour killings could no longer be 'forgiven' by family members, thereby making the offence a non-compoundable one.

However, when the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill and the Anti-Rape Laws (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill – tabled by a PPP senator in 2014 and passed by the Senate in 2015 – were presented in a joint parliamentary session that same month, elements from the religious lobby objected, saying they were contrary to Islamic injunctions.

Since then there has been no headway, at least until this point. Pandering to the right-wing over an issue of utmost gravity must now end and the impunity associated with the crime done away with.

When more than 500 women are killed each year by family members over perceived transgressions of 'honour', the state must urgently send the message that those who are guilty of such murders merit the severest punishment and lengthy jail terms.

As the Supreme Court Bar Association fact-finding mission investigating the suspicious death in June of 19-year-old Maria Sadaqat stated, "the accused finds much sympathy ... in the criminal justice system."

The legislature must not only pass both draft bills on schedule but closely monitor their implementation, including ensuring watertight investigation of crimes against women so that justice is done.

The criminal justice system must dispense punishment that is commensurate with the crime.